

## The Scottish Craft Gild as a Religious Fraternity

ON 27th February 1558-9 the Provost, Bailies and Council of Glasgow granted a charter of erection to the Cordiners and Barkers, indwellers of the city, burgesses and freemen of the same.

It proceeds to narrate the petition to the council of fifteen cordiners for themselves and the remanent freemen of that occupation in the following terms: Wherefore the loving of Almighty God, the honour of holy kirk, worship and common weal of this good town and for the profit of all and sundry our sovereign Lord and Lady's the King and Queen's grace's lieges and others repairing thereto and for augmentation of divine service at the Altar of St. Ninian situate in the metropolitan kirk of Glasgow, the honour of the Saints Crispin and Crispinian our patrons, we desire that we may have these statutes, articles and rules following granted and given to us by your authority, where-through good rule and guiding may be had among us and our successors of the said craft both masters and servants in time coming.

The articles which were their 'reasonable desires' were as follows: (1) That the most able and worthy craftsmen shall have power yearly to choose a deacon and kirkmaster who shall be defended by the provost and bailies in all their lawful acts and statutes. (2) That every man of the craft pretending to set up booth in this good town, shall be made first freeman with the town and pay to the upholding and reparation of the said altar the sum of three pounds, six shillings and eight pennies for his upset. (3) That all freemen's sons in the upsetting of their booths of new shall pay allenary for their upset to the reparation of the said altar six shillings and eight pence money and every apprentice at his entry, twenty shillings for the same purpose. (4) That every master of the said craft shall pay weekly to the

reparation of the said altar one penny scots and for every servant (apprentices being excepted) shall pay in like manner weekly one half-penny to those who happen to be depute to the gathering of the same, and also that every man of the said occupation both free and unfree that presents to the market any worked or barked leather to sell shall pay each time they present the work one penny to the upholding of the suffrage of the altar, and (5) That all those who are absent from the four quarter accounts being duly warned and required by the officer of the craft shall pay to the altar four shillings.

Then follow articles more particularly relating to the regulation of the trade. These need not be described, but each rule is fenced with penalties varying in kind; some are payable in wax, some in money, and in certain cases pecuniary penalties are to be shared between the town and the guild. The deacon has power conferred upon him to poind and distrain for dues and penalties, and in default of payment to close the booth and window of the defaulter until full payment be made. Finally, the deacon with the advice of the best and worthiest of the craftsmen has power conferred upon him to make statutes for their own craft for the common weal and profit of the said burgh and city and for upholding the said altar and suffrage to be done thereat in all time coming, 'as efferis ane deacon to do.' Glasgow was not yet a royal burgh. Originally created a burgh of barony it was then a burgh of regality, but the provost and bailies were still appointed by the Archbishop and all their official acts were subject to his confirmation. In witness and verification, therefore, of the consent, approbation and ratification of 'ane maist Rev. fadir James be the mercie of God Archbishop of Glasgow' his seal was appended together with the common seal of the town.

This document, commonly called a Charter of Erection or Letter of Deaconhead but more usually a Seal of Cause, from the name of the official seal appended to it, is framed in a style common to all such deeds in Scotland. Its legal effect was formally to erect the petitioners and their successors in the trade into a corporate body with a separate legal existence apart from the individual members, and it included or attempted to include as corporators the whole individual householders following the tanning and shoe-making trades in the city.

It is plain this Charter has two aspects: a religious purpose and the regulation of the industry; yet the first is so much the main purpose that the whole tenor of the document is moulded

by it. Its object appears to be to obtain authority to enforce payment of contributions and penalties not so much for a trade or economic purpose as for the support of religious rites and observances. The provision for sharing certain penalties with the town was the consideration they derived from the grant, and did no more than enlist their interest and good will.

It is this purpose of the pre-Reformation craft guilds—the promotion of religious duties and services at the altars of their patron saints—that is the subject of this paper.

The argument is that all the Scottish craft guilds of pre-Reformation times were religious fraternities, that the incorporated guilds which we find in Scottish record in full economic and social activity at the end of the fifteenth and during the sixteenth centuries developed out of such associations formed by men of the same occupation, and that a religious, and not merely an industrial motive, was the effective cause in their organisation whether they were ultimately incorporated or continued to exist as private associations, and impressed upon them a character which their survivals down to our own times still display.

There is not a hint from the Charter I have briefly resumed or the extant records of the city to show that before this date the Cordiners of Glasgow were associated together either as a religious fraternity or a secular gild. Considering the times, one might very well doubt their sincerity. The Reformation in Scotland was approaching a crisis. That very year 1559 the interior and windows of Glasgow Cathedral were wrecked and the altars destroyed. It was the days of the Good and Godlie Ballatis, biting satires in literature, burnings of heretics and churches, and murders of churchmen throughout the country. The supreme power was then in the hands of Knox and the Lords of the Congregation. The Queen Regent was supported by French Forces and an English army had invaded the country. The old church had expended its last breath in passing a series of resolutions for reform, and then sank exhausted and unresisting in the storm. It must have been one of the last official acts of Archbishop Beaton to fix his seal to the Cordiners' Charter before packing up with the muniments of the See and the University and leaving Scotland with the French troops in the summer of the next year.

The place and development of the craft gild in the history of industry in Western Europe is now well ascertained, and there is nothing peculiar about the development in Scotland except that it followed that in England by about from 100 to 150 years, just as

England was behind the Continent ; and when the guilds began to obtain recognition from the towns in the form of Charters of Erection they followed the continental models provided by the similar guilds in the low countries rather than the English and particularly the London companies. The universal obligation to produce an essay or master-stick before admission to the guild, which is rare in England but is common both on the Continent and Scotland, the frequent references to the practices of Bruges and the towns of France and Flanders in these charters and similar trade records, the expression Seal of Cause—itself a continental term—as applied to such charters, and the ascertained fact that many Flemings and other foreigners were members of the Edinburgh trades, are all evidence of this connection between the Continent and Scotland.

The general body of craftsmen arose between the agricultural population of the country and the trading class in the towns, who were already organised in their merchant guilds, and as the craftsmen grew in numbers and wealth they gradually built up an industrial class as opposed to a trading class. During the fifteenth century in Scotland this industrial class first challenged the control which the merchants had gained over the government of the towns, and in the following century established their position on something like an equality of influence.

In the later Middle Ages the immense town populations of the present day, dependent on steam power and foreign bread and meat, could not and did not exist. The country was wholly, and many of the towns themselves largely, agricultural in character. International markets with a world price fixed by the demands and supplies of all countries did not exist, nor was there even a national market, but prices and supplies were entirely local in character. Communications were bad, and consisted of riding tracks, and times of rude plenty alternated with periods of dearth and pestilence. The populations of great towns were those of villages to-day, Edinburgh, the largest, had at the Reformation possibly 3000 families. Glasgow had perhaps a total population of 5000 persons, many of whom were churchmen, and probably there were not 1000 families in the town. In these circumstances demand was steady, supplies were local and known, and prices were comparatively easy to fix. The town councils regulated the prices of food and drink and the common articles of daily use to yield the customary profit which would maintain the recognised classes of the community in their accustomed standard of comfort.

Forestalling of the market or engrossment of supplies was a crime, and such crimes were said by Adam Smith some centuries later, when conditions, however, had wholly changed, to be as imaginary as witchcraft.

There was no such freedom of opinion or of association as we are accustomed to. Objection to the person or disagreement with the policy of a prince was treason, and, later, an association for what would now be called political purposes was considered as sedition or unlawful conspiracy. If one's opinions differed from the dogmas of the Church they must be kept to oneself on pain of excommunication for heresy. All the immense and widespread activities, social, charitable and benevolent, which characterise modern society, and are only now being taken over by the State piecemeal and at intervals, were enjoined and promoted by the Church as an exercise of religion, and the instrument by which this was effected was the association for those, or some of those purposes, in the form of a gild. These gilds, under the protection and authority of the Church, were constituted in the name of some patron saint whose altar was founded in the parish or some other favourite church. In the capitularies of Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims, in 858, it is laid down that the brethren and sisters of the gild shall unite in every exercise of religion.<sup>1</sup>

This *obsequium religionis* included not only devotions and prayers, but every exercise of Christian charity. In general, it involved mutual assistance of the gild brethren in every exigency, especially in old age, sickness and cases of impoverishment, if not brought about by one's own crime or folly. Gilds provided for loans to members, provision of work, setting up of sons of deceased members in trade and finding their daughters in a dowry. The gild also provided for the burial and masses for the souls of deceased members. There are provisions extant providing that persons leaving legacies for the objects of the gild should be received as members, and the safety of their souls be provided for at the cost of the gild. Many gilds made provision for schools and schoolmasters, education in the Middle Ages being supplied by or at the instance of the Church, and some provided aid for the maintenance of poor scholars. There were gilds for the repair of bridges and highways, and the building and repair of churches. Of this last there is an instance in connection with the rebuilding of Glasgow Cathedral after its demolition by fire, when Bishop Jocelyn founded a fraternity, which was approved by

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Brentano, *Introd. English Guilds*, 1870. [E.E.T.S.]

King William the Lion about 1189-92, to collect subscriptions throughout Scotland.<sup>1</sup> Guilds were also founded and encouraged by the Church for the express purpose of the representation of religious plays, and to bear the expenses of the public processions on *Corpus Christi* day and other Church festivals, when all sections of the community—with their banners and in the livery or with the badges of their trades on their breasts—went in procession through the town in great splendour and magnificence before assembling at the church for service. After attending mass, the members generally met again to banquet together. These processions, in which the crafts were ranked in groups, such as the metal workers, cloth workers, leather, wood, and other trades, had much to do with the union of several cognate trades in one craft gild. The Hammermen is the best example of those composite bodies. No one gild pursued all these objects, but both the merchant guilds and, later, the craft guilds performed many of them, and it was these activities involving great expense which necessitated the collection of contributions from members, and fines and penalties for their neglect.

There is curiously little mention of these religious fraternities in surviving Scottish record, but their more domestic and general purposes are well illustrated by the *Statuta Gilde*<sup>2</sup> of the merchant gild of Berwick, the earlier statutes of which, dated about 1429, begin with an invocation in the name of the Holy Undivided Trinity and of the Blessed Mary the Virgin. The brethren met in the hall of the Friars of the Holy Trinity at Berwick, and although there is no mention of a priest or fines of wax in the Scottish Record Edition (the fines being chiefly casks of wine, which illustrates the social side of such guilds), nevertheless several of the English merchant guilds were incorporated in the name of the Holy Trinity and were undoubtedly religious fraternities. There was no general merchant gild in London; but that was not necessary there, because most of the early London companies were themselves trading or commercial guilds, such as the Fishmongers' Company, the members of which owned fishing boats and traded in fish; the Merchant Tailors' Company, whose members dealt in cloth; the Goldsmiths, some of whom were farmers of the royal taxes and financial advisers to the Government; and the Grocers, who dealt as merchants in all classes of foreign spices

<sup>1</sup> Reg. Episc. Glasguen. vol. i. No. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Acts. Pt. Scot. Rec. Ed. vol. i. p. 431.

and other articles of imported luxury. In connection with every one of them a religious fraternity has been found.

There was an ancient merchant gild at Edinburgh, as in most other Scottish burghs, and in 1518 the magistrates, on the petition of the haill merchants and gild brethren, gave to them the aisle and altar in honour of the Holy Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ founded in St. Giles', with power to them to honour and repair the same honourably as they think most expedient to the honour of God and the Holy Blood, to be patrons of the said aisle and altar and to make the Holy Blood to be their patron, . . . and the gift disposition and removing of the chaplains to be founded or instituted by them at the said altar to be at the election and disposition of their master of faculty, councillors and officers of their faculty for the time.<sup>1</sup>

The merchant gild of Stirling still survives, and prior to the Reformation frequent references are made to payments of wax as well as wine on entry to that gild. There are also references, at the same time as in Edinburgh, to the Brethir and Fraternity of the Holy Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, indeed the very words—A Faculty of Brethren—are used. They received fines levied by the town council, consented to payment of chaplains, and in one instance undertook to indemnify the council of the stipend of the priest of that altar; and many donations were made to them for obits. I suggest that the Brethren and Fraternity of the Holy Blood at Stirling, hitherto unidentified, was really the name by which the Stirling merchant gild was known in pre-Reformation times.<sup>2</sup> Each craft gild, Hammermen, Weavers, Cordiners, and others, all over the country had the same patron saint, and it may possibly be established that the tutelar patron of the Scottish Merchants was the Holy Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These religious fraternities were governed by officers elected by themselves, the principal being the Dean, a name borrowed from the presiding officer of the Chapter, or Deacon, the name of the lowest order in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. An oath was taken on entrance not to reveal the secrets of the community, and its breach involved severe punishment. Members who on election refused to accept office were fined. Contributions were collected every quarter at meetings held either in the hall or chapel, if the fraternity owned one, or in the tolbooth, or in the parish church

<sup>1</sup> Extracts Edin. Counc. Rec. [Burgh Rec. Soc.] vol. i. p. 186: Reg. Mag. Sig. 1513-46 No. 2600.

<sup>2</sup> Extracts Stirling Rec. [B.R.S.] vol. i. pp. 13, 19, 58, 70, and 266.

at which they worshipped. Absence from these quarterly meetings at which the quarterly wage or payment was collected, was visited by fine, and so were absences from the services on the Saint's Day, the festivals of the Church, and the dirges and funerals of members, and the fines were applied to the various purposes of the gild. The funds, the banners, missals, charters, and other valuables were kept in a shrine or common box in the custody of the dean or deacon, and keys to its several locks were kept by the worthiest members. The members often wore a livery, although there is no evidence of this in Scotland. Disputes among members were to be settled by the officers of the gild, and resort was not to be made to the courts. Persons of ill-fame were not accepted as members, and those guilty of aspersing the deacon were fined, and if recalcitrant, were expelled. The chaplain of the gild was maintained in rotation by the more wealthy members, besides having, when in the service of a richer fellowship, a fixed annual fee and special fees on the occasions of baptism, marriage, and death. In later times, when the fraternities proceeded to record their transactions, he invariably acted as their clerk.

In the later Middle Ages it became increasingly common for wealthy merchants and craftsmen, in imitation of princes and great magnates who founded abbeys and endowed colleges, to found chaplainries for a priest to sing for ever for the weal of their souls and the souls of their near relatives at the altar of some favourite saint. This practice was followed in Scotland, as well as in England and on the Continent, by groups of men of the same occupation, who founded 'co-operative chantries,' supported by the voluntary contributions of the members. Besides fulfilling the function of a modern benefit society, sick club and burial society, the chief concern of the craft chantries was the welfare of the souls of deceased members. Every year requiem was sung for all departed gild brothers, who were all mentioned by name. On the death of any member services were held for the weal of his soul and a trentall of masses was paid for. Special services were held on the feast day of the patron saint and on all the festivals of the Church, especially at Christmas and midsummer.

In London it has been ascertained by the publication of records that there was a fraternity—sometimes several—in connection with each city gild. These fraternities arose among the members of a particular trade and ultimately absorbed all practising that

trade. They provided not only the financial resources, but also the protection of the Church, which enabled the London Companies, for example, at the beginning of the fifteenth century to capture and control the government of London.

I do not propose to follow the long drawn-out contest of the Scottish craftsmen with the merchants for a share in the government of the towns in any detail, except to indicate from the Acts of the Scottish Parliament the general course of legislation. We first hear of craftsmen in Scottish record in a grant<sup>1</sup> by King Malcolm IV. to the Abbot of Scone about 1164, when he allowed the monastery to have a smith, a skinner and a shoemaker for the service of the abbey with all the privileges such tradesmen enjoyed in the town of Perth. This is an instance of the 'family' or household system existing contemporaneously with the gild system in a neighbouring town. The merchant gilds rigorously excluded craftsmen from their membership; and the condition that the craftsman must first renounce his trade was embodied in the royal letters patent to the towns of the time. These merchant gilds became in many instances, such as Edinburgh, Leith and Stirling, almost indistinguishable from the town courts or councils. In the statutes of the merchant gild of Berwick, already referred to, many regulations of the more common handicrafts are found. For example, to take only one relating to shoe-makers who tan their own hides, 'that no shoe-maker ought to tan any hides but such as have the horns and ears of equal length.'<sup>2</sup> That is a distinction between the trades of tanner and skinner continued through all subsequent legislation and recognised in the leather trades and industries of to-day. It draws the line of demarcation between workers in the heavier hides of cattle and in the lighter skins of other animals, hornless or horned, such as sheep and goats, the horns of which are obviously longer than the ears. In later times the Great Chamberlain of Scotland made inquiry as to offences against the burgh laws committed by the different craftsmen, such as saddlers, malt-makers, weavers, tailors, skinners and shoe-makers. He was to inquire whether shoe-makers bark and make shone otherwise than the law allows, whether they make shone, boots and other graith of the leather or it be barkit. Whether they sew with false and rotten thread, through the whilk the shone are tynt or they be half worn. Whether, where they should give their leather good oil and tallow, they give it but

<sup>1</sup> *Liber Eccles. de Scon.* Nos. 5 and 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Statuta Gilde*, No. 24.

water and salt, and whether they work it or it be courait in great hinder and scaith of the king's lieges.<sup>1</sup>

There is no indication in such provisions of the craftsmen being treated otherwise than as individual delinquents, and no principle of association appears.

In the fifteenth century, however, in the reign of James I., this early system of regulation must have broken down, and Parliament in the statute of 12th March, 1424, which contains the first instance in legislation of the word 'deacon,' enacted that: 'In each town of the realm in each sundry craft used therein there be chosen a wise man of their craft by the layff of that craft and by the council of the officers of the town who shall be held deacon or maister man over the layff for the time till him assigned to assay and govern all works that is made by the workmen of his craft so that the King's lieges be not defrauded and scathed in time to come as they have been in time bygone through untrue men of crafts.'<sup>2</sup>

This statute shows that it had occurred to the legislature of the day that the best method of regulation was to select the deacon or head of the fraternity to act as an officer of what would now be called the local government. But the deacons so appointed probably exceeded their powers, for by the next statute on the subject, dated 30th September, 1426, it was enacted: 'The King of deliverance of parliament has ordained that . . . the Deacon of ilk craft shall have no correction of the craft nor of the layff of the men of that craft but allenary see that the workmen be cunning and the work sufficient which he shall assay and examine once every fifteen days.'<sup>3</sup> In the same year Parliament enacted that the town councils should price the goods of each craft, taking into account the costs and travail of the workmen, and fix the price for working up other men's materials.<sup>4</sup> Then a statute of the following year, dated 1st July, 1427, wholly repeals the two preceding statutes as to the appointing of deacons of crafts. It is in Latin and enacts that 'for the future no such deacons be elected among the craftsmen in any burghs of the realm and that those already elected shall no longer exercise the functions of deacons nor hold their usual assemblies which are considered to savour of conspiracies.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Iter Camerarii*, No. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *A.P.S.* vol. ii. c. 21, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *A.P.S.* vol. ii. c. 2, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *A.P.S.* vol. ii. c. 3, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *A.P.S.* vol. ii. c. 4, p. 14.

Apart from the use of the word 'deacon' in these statutes, it is the last words, giving the reason for the abolition of the office, *suas congregaciones consuetas*, which savour of conspiracy, that gives the clearest hint of the character the bodies of craftsmen had taken. Two annual meetings since 1425 can hardly be called accustomed or usual. They are more likely to have been the quarterly meetings of the brotherhood. In medieval Latin the word *congregatio* meant primarily a religious assembly or meeting for a religious purpose, a meaning which it still has in our word 'congregation.' The word has the same religious signification in France, where *congrégations* is used of those religious orders and houses whose dissolution, disendowment and dispersion was until lately so prominent a policy of the French legislature.

But although deacons elected by the trade were abolished, some efficient method of supervision was still necessary, and at the end of the same year Parliament enacted in the statute of 1st March, 1427, that 'it is sene spedfull, ande the King withe the hail consal has ordanit for a yere that of euery craft there salbe chosyn a wardane be the consal of the burghe, the whilk wardane with consale of uthir discret men unsuspect, assignyt till hym be the said consal, sal examyn ande pryse the mater ande the werkman-schip of ilk craft and sett it to a certane price.'<sup>1</sup> These statutes mark the beginning of the prolonged contest between the craftsmen and the merchants for a share in the government of the towns.

No further statutes are recorded until 1457, when it was enacted that for the reformacion of gold and silver wrought by goldsmiths there shall be in each burgh where goldsmiths work 'ane understandande and cunnande man of gude conscience, whilk sall be dene of the craft.'<sup>2</sup>

In the interval of thirty years between 1427 and 1457, the craftsmen of the burghs grew in wealth and numbers, and apparently continued to elect the kirk-masters of their fraternities, although they had no rights of supervision. Many of them traded in the raw materials of their business, and so came into conflict with the exclusive privileges of the merchants to deal in merchandise. There were disputes as to entry money to the gilds diminishing the dues on burgesses entering as townmen. At yet another point—the control and alienation by long lease, or feu of the burgh acres—they protested against the administration of the town councils composed wholly of merchants, and there continued

<sup>1</sup> *A.P.S.* vol. ii. c. 3, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *A.P.S.* vol. ii. c. 8, p. 48.

the galling supervision by wardens in whose appointment they had no choice and who were not necessarily members of their trade. The craftsmen were excluded from the gild merchant unless they renounced their craft, and the gild merchant controlled the town councils. It would not be surprising if the activities of societies among the craftsmen were driven underground. By the town councils and the Parliament of which merchants were members and craftsmen were not, their associations were regarded as seditious conspiracies, and it is in this period that the first Act against bands and leagues in burghs was passed in 1457.<sup>1</sup> Protected by the Church as religious fraternities, their proceedings fenced by an oath of secrecy, and provided by the contributions of their members with what funds might be required, they exerted very considerable political influence. A similar situation had already in London produced very much the same effect. The founding of religious fraternities among the unorganised craftsmen there received an immense stimulus on the eve of the contest which at the beginning of the fifteenth century resulted in the capture and control of the London municipality by the city companies. A deacon was the lowest order in the priesthood; and though I know of no similar instance in Scotland, yet in London Hamo de Chigwell, the Master of the Fishmongers' Company and a Lord Mayor, was at a perilous moment fortunately for himself conveniently discovered to be in holy orders and so beyond the reach of his enemies.

In 1469 the Scots Parliament enacted anent the election of aldermen, bailies and other officers in burghs, because of the great trouble and contention yearly in choosing the same through multitude and clamour of common simple persons, that no officers nor councillors be continued in office for longer than a year; and, among other provisions, that 'ilka craft shall cheise a person of the samyn craft that sal have voce in the town electioun of the officiaris for that tyme in like wise yeir.'<sup>2</sup>

The crafts had now obtained a status and a footing which no doubt they used to the full. The consent of the deacons soon becomes necessary to make acts of the town councils, and they act as auditors of the burgh accounts. But it was not till towards the end of the next century that craftsmen became eligible as members of the town councils. A further statute in 1473 in favour of the goldsmiths, to the effect that 'thare be deput and ordanit a wardane and a decanne of the craft that salbe sworne

<sup>1</sup> *A.P.S.* vol. ii. c. 24, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> *A.P.S.* vol. ii. c. 5, p. 95.

thairto and examyne al the werkmanship that cummis fra thare handis,'<sup>1</sup> showed that the government had been convinced that in that trade, at least, regulation under the town councils by the trade itself offered the best method of control.

The legislation, however, in favour of merchants and repressive of the class of handicraftsmen still continued. In 1491<sup>2</sup> an Act was passed against leagues and bands and convocations in burghs; a second Act<sup>3</sup> stigmatised the Cordiners, especially, as oppressors of the King's lieges in levying a penny of each cordiner who sold shoes in the market, thereby enhancing the price; and a third Act,<sup>4</sup> on the narrative that the using of deacons in burghs is 'rycht dangerous' and as they use the same may be the cause of great trouble and convocation and rising of the King's lieges by statutes made contrary to the common profit and for their singular profit and avail . . ., ordained that all such deacons shall cease for a year and have no other power but only to examine the finish of the stuff and work that is wrought by the remanent of his craft. The crafts, however, proceeded on their course and continued to elect their deacons. After an Act<sup>5</sup> in 1551 anent the exorbitant prices 'rasit be craftsmen,' a final attempt to suppress the powers of deacons was made. In 1555, during the minority of Mary, a statute<sup>6</sup> was passed 'because it hes bene clairlie understand to the Quenis grace Regent and the thre estatis that the chesing of dekinnis and men of craft within burgh hes bene rycht dangerous, and as they have usit thameselfis in tymes bygane hes causit greit troubill in burrowis, commotioun and rysing of the Quenis lieges in divers partis, and be making of liggis and bandis amangis themselfis, and betuix burgh and burgh quhilk deservis greit punischment,' therefore it was statute and ordained that 'thair be na dekinnis chosin in tymes cumming within burgh,' but visitors of the crafts were to be chosen by the town councils.

But the guilds were now too strong. The craftsmen throughout Scotland immediately formed the most famous league and band in their history. They interviewed the Queen Regent and procured a repeal of the most obnoxious sections of the statute under the Great Seal in January, 1556, which, as the Edinburgh Hammermen who had taken a leading part in the matter record in their

<sup>1</sup> *A.P.S.* vol. ii. c. 17, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> *A.P.S.* vol. ii. c. 17, p. 226.

<sup>3</sup> *A.P.S.* 1493, c. 13, p. 234.

<sup>4</sup> *A.P.S.* 1493, c. 14, p. 234.

<sup>5</sup> *A.P.S.* vol. ii. c. 18, p. 487.

<sup>6</sup> *A.P.S.* vol. ii. c. 26, p. 497.

minutes, was 'ryte honest and pleasant to all the craftsmen.' On the young Queen attaining her majority in 1564 the repeal was confirmed, and before the end of the century the craftsmen were able to win half the representation of the town councils (though Glasgow did not follow till 1605), and the constitution of the burghs thus set remained until the Burgh Reform Act of 1833.<sup>1</sup>

The statutes in favour of the goldsmiths in 1457 and 1473<sup>2</sup> permitting the election of a deacon had made a precedent. It became impossible to prevent its extension to other trades. There followed rapidly charters of incorporation of the hitherto voluntary societies and fraternities of craftsmen primarily organised for religious purposes, with power now freely to elect their deacons and kirk-masters, and with power also, increasingly as time went on, to regulate their own industry. This movement was extended, and often promoted by the town councils, during the next century and a half over the whole industrial field in every burgh in Scotland where a separate trade could be said to exist. The co-operative chantry forming the nucleus of organisation of the trade and absorbing all the members exercising that trade, became the incorporated craft gild and a recognised organ of local government. This great change took place at the close of the period of forty-five years which elapsed between 1427 and 1473.

St. Giles was the parish church of Edinburgh till 1466, when by virtue of a grant from King James III. it was established as a collegiate church on the foundation of the old altarages and chaplainries. These were then at least thirty-four in number and included altars to most of the saints who are later found as the patron saints of the craft gilds.

The first Charter was to the Edinburgh Skinners in 1474, their patron Saint, St. Christopher; the next to the Masons and Wrights in 1475, patron St. John the Evangelist, and the town council conveyed to them their whole right in the aisle and chapel of St. John in the collegiate Church of St. Giles; in 1476 the Weavers, their patron St. Severane; in 1483 the Hammermen, patron St. Eloi; in 1488 the Fleshers, patron St. Cuthbert; in 1489 the Coopers, patron St. John; in 1500 the Walkers and shearers of cloth, patron Saints Mark, Philip and Jacob; also in 1500 the Tailors, matron St. Ann, the mother of the Virgin. At the beginning of the next century, in 1505, the Surgeons and Barbers, out of which arose the Royal College of Surgeons of

<sup>1</sup> Royal Burghs (Scotland) Act 1833.

<sup>2</sup> *A.P.S.* vol. ii. 1457, c. 8, p. 48; and 1473, c. 17, p. 105.

Edinburgh, patron St. Kentigern; in 1510 the Cordiners, patron Saints Crispin and Crispiane the martyrs; in 1520 the Bonnet-makers combined with the Walkers and Shearers, their patron St. Mark; and the Bonnetmakers stipulated that as often as the chaplainry of the said altar should fall vacant they should have an equal right with the Walkers and shearmen in choosing a chaplain to fill the vacancy. In 1523 the Baxters were incorporated as a gild, their patron St. Hubert.

In Glasgow the same development took place somewhat later. There were seven pre-Reformation gilds. The first Charter was to the Skinners and Furriers in 1516, the regulations in which are on entirely a religious account. They had an altar to St. Christopher their patron in the Cathedral, and members were bound to pay each his weekly penny to the reparation and adornment of the altar and sustain the priest's meat thereof as it comes about, that is, in rotation. Fines were half a pound of candle of wax to the altar, and they asked leave to hold the solemnity of the feast of their altar on the Sunday next after St. James' Day. They besought their lordships the town council 'sen we ar tua craftis and unyte ourself in charite togidder to ye uphald of goddis service' to grant their reasonable desires, which was done with the approval of the Archbishop. The Weavers followed in 1518, but their charter is lost, and although it was confirmed by the Scots Parliament in 1681 from a notarial copy the Saint's name is amissing. It was without doubt St. Severane as in other weaver gilds throughout Scotland. The Bakers' charter is wholly lost, but was probably of the same character and their patron St. Hubert. The Hammermen were incorporated in 1536, patron St. Eloi or Eligius; the Tailors in 1546, matron St. Ann; the Masons, Slaters, Sawyers and Quarriers incorporated as one gild in 1551, patron St. Thomas, and the Cordiners and Barkers in 1558-9. There were other crafts, which however only obtained charters in post-Reformation times.

The same process is observed in Aberdeen, Stirling, Perth, and all the other towns of which early records have been published; all exhibit the religious character of the gild, and that sanction was sought to bring compulsion on all those of the trade to contribute in their varying degrees to the expenses of the altar and religious observances.

In Aberdeen certain Cordiners, 'in honour of God Almichtie, the blissit virgine Mary, Sancts Crispin and Crispian and al Sanctis,' had chosen a chaplain to make ministration of divine service at

their altar as effeirs and had bound themselves 'to sustene the said chaplane honestlie as effeirs in meytis, drinkis and sustentatione circualie, be sevin of ye best and worthaist of the said craftismene, ilk ane day in ye oulk; ande payand to him xls. usual monie of Scotland yeirlye for his fie,' by the other members. They failed to do so, and were sued before the Bailies upon the contract, which was recorded in a notarial instrument. The Chaplain won his case, and the deacons and masters of the craft were ordained to compel and distrain their neighbour craftsmen and cordiners to maintain him after the tenor of his evident.<sup>1</sup>

This was in 1495. It was not till 1520 that this voluntary group of craftsmen framed anything like the formal constitution of an incorporated gild. On 13th June of that year, eleven cordiners met in the principal chamber of their deacon, John Wishart, for the purpose of electing new deacons and office-bearers, and of rectifying and amending all and sundry defects existing at the time in that craft. They then proceeded to elect deacons and a beadle; they determined to establish a common box into which to collect every week a penny from each master and a halfpenny from each servant, apprentice and domestic for payment of the stipend of their chaplain, and if the craft should prosper the chaplain's stipend was to be increased nearly to the amount of the contributions, and the balance was to accumulate in the box for the repairs of the altar and its furniture. Thereupon Thomas Brodie, one of those present, paid over thirty pence which he had received nearly two years before from delinquent servants which he was bound to pay over in wax to the altar, and the meeting immediately devoted the money to the repair of the base of their chalice.<sup>2</sup>

But Edinburgh, the mother city of the affiliation of Scottish burghs, affords the clearest instances. The earliest is that of the Edinburgh Skinners, who are first met with as a religious fraternity. On 12th January 1451, a time when deacons were still suppressed and associations of craftsmen were still regarded as conspiracies, seventeen men of that trade asked a notary to record statutes they had agreed upon for the maintenance of the altar of Saint Christopher lately founded by them in the parish church of St. Giles. This instrument narrates that they had bound themselves to lend a helping hand during their lives and according to their means towards the service and support of a chaplain to

<sup>1</sup> Bain : Hist. Aberdeen Incorporated Trades, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Bain : op. cit. p. 266.

celebrate at the altar and the repair of its ornaments. Each member receiving an apprentice agreed to pay five shillings towards the repairs, and apprentices on joining were to become bound in the same obligations.<sup>1</sup> In their first charter of 1474, twenty-three years later, the contribution according to means becomes a fixed payment of one penny per week, and in their second charter in 1533 they obtain power to pound for it, and are to 'sustene the preistis meit thairof as it cumis about.' That the Edinburgh Skinners regarded themselves as a religious fellowship appears from their minute book beginning in 1549, in which they describe themselves as the 'freternite and craft of Sanct Christopheir.'

It is, however, the published minute book of the Edinburgh Hammermen, dating from 1494 and coming down to the Reformation, which gives the most vivid picture of one of these guilds in its daily life and activity.<sup>2</sup> Every item of expenditure on the altar of St. Eloi, the image and vestments of the saint, the adornments of the altar, the masses and services, pageants and processions, is given in minute and exact detail. There is hardly an enactment recorded in the whole sixty years of a trade or economic character. There are a few records of disputes amicably settled, and a very few instances of a shilling or two, sometimes only some pence, given to a poor member or his widow. But large sums were paid for masses for their souls. Either the Edinburgh Hammermen were exceptionally prosperous or the poor of the craft were maintained in their almshouse. Monetary assistance, like private charity, was regarded as an alms; no decayed member had any right to demand it, and organised charitable aid by the guilds only became prominent in their expenditure after the Reformation. The charity of the guilds, however, never became a benefit to be claimed in return for entry money paid, and to this day it retains its eleemosynary character.

The early minute book of the Glasgow Cordiners does not record their expenditure, and for that reason may lack some of the interest of the Perth and Edinburgh Hammermen's books. It begins in 1550, when, on Michaelmas day, the Cordiners and Barkaris met in the Tolbooth and elected their deacon or kirk-master according to 'auld use and consuetude.' It discloses a fully organised guild with a court of assisters, searchers of the

<sup>1</sup> Ext. Edin. Counc. Rec. [B.R.S.] vol. i. pp. 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> Smith's *Edinburgh Hammermen*.

market, an officer, and a clerk. The latter was Sir David McKeown, a well-known priest and notary of the day, and clerk to the chapter of the Collegiate Church of St. Mary and St. Anne on the south side of the Trongate. Apprentices with the different masters are duly booked, and the dues are entered indifferently as prentice silver or altar silver. The weekly penny from sellers in the market is collected in a box called the market box. The Edinburgh Hammermen as well as the Glasgow Hammermen called these weekly pennies St. Loye's brod, from the wooden platters or bowls in which they were collected. These old Cordiners every year set up their market box to auction among their members, and secured a certain sum in advance, leaving the risk and trouble of the weekly collection to the successful bidder. Every year they carefully recorded the delivery of the common box containing their charter, banner, bonds and evidents, with the money on hand, to the new deacon. In the first year recorded there were thirty men paying the twelve pence a quarter on the four quarterly account days, making from that source alone an income of £6 per annum. The entry moneys or upsets, of which many are recorded, were no doubt treated as income and applied in meeting the annual expenditure, which, if we only knew it, was probably of the same character as that of the Edinburgh Hammermen. In addition, the new member had to give a dinner to the masters of the craft. These quarterly meetings were distinct from the annual meeting at or about Michaelmas, when the election of the deacons and other office-bearers of the crafts took place, an arrangement among all the incorporated trades which still continues. The membership gradually grows until in 1581 there are 106 members given on a list of which 36 are deleted, leaving 70. The book ends in 1612.

In 1550 the Cordiners appear to have contemplated applying for a charter. In the interval between that date and 1559 they proceeded to record in their book, one by one, the more strictly trade regulations which I have referred to as also included in their first charter. The rules as to religious rites and observances, aliment and others, were recorded, if recorded at all, in some earlier book, or, more probably, were matter of use and wont. It seems impossible to credit the view that the Glasgow Cordiners were not also a religious fraternity like other craft gilds throughout the country long before 1550, or that they were associated together for the first time either by their charter in

1559 or at the meeting recorded in their surviving minute book in 1550.

The early Glasgow records are unfortunately rather imperfect. The town council minutes only begin in 1573, thirteen years after the Reformation, and I know of no other continuous pre-Reformation minute book connected with Glasgow. Like most records of the kind it omits all mention of public events, or only refers to them inferentially. Its great interest and value—when read along with their pre-Reformation charter of 1559 and post-Reformation charter of 1569—is to show at the moment of a great change how the gild of an important trade was affected; and how, while they became more specifically an industrial unit, they developed in other and more practical directions their religious and benevolent activities.

The Glasgow Cordiners had no altar of their own. That was common enough. Many of the crafts appropriated or had allotted to them an old altar imperfectly endowed, and set up the image of their own saint upon it. There is very little known of the altar of St. Ninian in Glasgow Cathedral. Hardly any reference to annual rents payable in support of the prebendary is found in any of the published records relating to Glasgow, and it appears to have been very scantily endowed. Its site has been forgotten and probably cannot now be determined, unless a trough stane with the craft emblem of a cutting knife hewn upon it should be found under the floor of the Cathedral.

The Cordiners of the Canongate, a small craft gild in the Abbot's burgh of Holyrood, received from the commendator permission to build an altar in honour of their patron Saints in the Abbey and were given seven years to complete the work. The document<sup>1</sup> recording the grant reads like a bargain. They obtain power to levy dues upon other cordiners in the Abbot's barony of Broughton and royalty of Leith on condition of completing the altar within the time. This grant is dated in 1554, very near the Reformation.

Archbishop Spottiswood's picturesque story of how the devoted craftsmen saved Glasgow Cathedral from destruction has often been exposed, but they probably saved some of their own property. Although their altars were destroyed and the images of the saints were thrown down, the Edinburgh gilds saved most of their property. The Hammermen saved their chalice and so did some of the Stirling gilds. The Edinburgh Skinners received

<sup>1</sup> *Liber Cart. Sancte Crucis.* App. II. No. 39.

£5 for the remains of their altar and prosaically roused off their 'kyrk geir,' for which they obtained £65, a large sum of money. In Aberdeen things did not go so smoothly, and a petition was made to the Privy Council for recovery of their property by the crafts from the magistrates, into whose hands they alleged it had unlawfully come, but no decision is recorded. The Scottish craft guilds were little affected by the dissolution of the chantries and chapels. There was no confiscation of their funds for secular purposes. It was only the funded endowments of chantries and chapels in the form of annual rents which were affected by the legislation of 1567; the craft guilds simply ceased their voluntary expenditure.

After the Reformation the regulations as to attendance on Sabbath at church and at funerals became if possible stricter than ever. They still continued to collect their quarter accounts, exact a weekly penny and dues on entry; but the money now went in considerable sums to repair at intervals the decay of cathedrals and churches, to support ministers, and to a growing extent to maintain the poor of the trade. Not only was the membership growing, but a labouring class as distinct from the master craftsmen was now becoming visible. Various causes, the growth of population, wars, changes in agriculture and the break up generally of the medieval order of things, were producing a social question not confined by any means to Scotland alone. The maintenance of the decent and unfortunate poor—the cruikit folk, the seik folk and waik folk—has never been a problem of much difficulty. It is the sornor and beggar, the idle rascal and vagrant who cause the trouble. These classes were fed and increased not only by the indiscriminate charity of religious houses and old foundations badly administered, but by almsgiving for the soul's sake of the giver. Legislation had been chiefly of a repressive character by branding, lopping of ears, and banishing the town. Even hanging had proved a failure.

It was Ypres whose reforms early in the sixteenth century in the treatment of this problem pointed the way to success. The reforms of Ypres depended on a classification of the poor. Those that belonged elsewhere were to be sent to their own place. The town poor were absolutely prohibited from begging. The sick and aged were to be maintained in almshouses and hospitals; the strong and idle were to be set to work, and work was to be found for them. If they did not work they should not eat. The honest poor were to be maintained in their own houses. The

administration was placed under superintendents assisted in each parish by persons specially charged with the duty, and the cost was to be provided by the reformation of endowments, by bequests, by collections in churches, and the money to be saved from expenditure on festivities. These reforms were discussed all over Europe and gradually found their way into legislation.<sup>1</sup> The great Act of 1574 in the reign of James VI. in Scotland is the foundation of the poor law to-day.

The craft gilds, like the town councils and the Government, were affected by this great movement, and after the abolition of altar worship had set free their funds, they are seen everywhere founding or enlarging almshouses, either alone or in co-operation with others, and undertaking the regular maintenance of the poor of their trade. Projects of all kinds begin to be found in the minutes of town councils. After the constitution of the Glasgow Gildry in 1605 the Merchants and the Convenery of Crafts both founded hospitals for their poor. The Cordiners' minute book shows the same movement in many entries, but the earliest instance of its effect on their declared purposes appears clearly from their second charter in 1569, when they petitioned the town council for an amended grant to obtain power to exact increased entry money to support their 'puire dekeyit brethir.'

The Glasgow Cordiners still flourish. With many of the surviving craft gilds throughout Scotland they have never forgotten the exercise of religion. Since their exclusive privileges of trading, long impossible of maintenance in practice, were formally abolished in 1846, these gilds have devoted their funds to the relief of decently nurtured middle-class people. Much also was spent on education until the State took over that service in 1872; and now, not forgetful that the notion of apprenticeship implies that of education, many are preparing, in addition to their other activities, to promote technical skill and scientific research in connection with their industry.

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<sup>1</sup> Ashley, *Econ. Hist.* vol. i. pt. ii. p. 347.