

Glasgow from 1777 to 1783.

MORNING AND EVENING CLUB.

PREVIOUS to the opening of the Glasgow Coffee-room, or News-room, at the Cross—which took place about the year 1782—there was no regular rendezvous for quidnuncs,—no public place where the citizens could assemble to peruse the English or Scotch newspapers, and discuss their contents. It was then needful for the *gobemouche*, thirsting for news, to hurry to some well-frequented tavern where, for the accommodation of regular visitors, there was always kept in readiness the necessary political pabulum to satisfy his cravings. The period to which we refer was one of great interest and excitement; but it was one, also, when locomotion was in its infancy. About that time the communication with the metropolis, either of Scotland or of England, was most tedious—so much so, that a London newspaper of nearly a week old was looked upon as a novelty. To remedy in some measure this great inconvenience, Provost Buchanan was sent to London, in 1778, to endeavour to obtain a more speedy communication, by post, between the two cities—the intercourse being then only thrice a-week through Edinburgh. But it may be argued, from a subsequent entry which appears in the Council Records, dated 28th September, 1781, that although something, consequent on the chief magistrate's visit, had, in the interval, been done to better matters in this respect, still the Corporation and the citizens seem to have remained far from being satisfied with the Post-office authorities of the day, and to have been loud in their demands for improvement; nor, considering the eventful times in which these individuals lived, is this to be

wondered at.* It was then that the unfortunate quarrel with America, and its baneful consequences, kept the whole nation on tenter-hooks; while the domestic turmoil occasioned by the Popish bill introduced by the then Government, and ending in Lord George Gordon's riots in the metropolis, awakened the most intense anxiety among the Protestant community.† Both subjects peculiarly interested Glasgow,—the one from the long and successful intercourse which its leading merchants had held with Virginia, and the other from a long-cherished affection for the severest Presbyterianism, and from a deep-rooted hatred of Popery. Perhaps no subjects, therefore, at any one period of Glasgow's history, awakened more anxiety in all classes of the inhabitants than these two, more particularly the Popish bill, by which it was intended to repeal the penal statutes against Roman Catholics, and put them on the same footing as the other sectarians in the land. Not forgetful of the sufferings which many of their fathers had endured at the hands of the Popish party when in the ascendant, or even of the exactions to which the City had been subjected during the last struggle of the Stuarts in Scotland, the citizens of Glasgow almost unanimously declared their hostility to the measure, while, at the same time, they banded themselves together to oppose this attempted attack on their high principles of Protestantism. Thus, no fewer than eighty-five separate societies were formed to oppose the bill; while, through the pulpit and the press—powerless though that press comparatively was at that time—the minds of the working-classes were so inflamed as to render them capable of any outrage against the abettors of the Catholic faith. Unlike the present day, Glasgow was totally destitute of those hordes of Milesian helots

* “The Council appoint a Committee to consider what steps are proper to be taken for bringing the posts from London (*via* Carlisle, Moffat, &c.) to arrive at Glasgow as early as they arrive at Edinburgh; and to have six posts from London weekly, as Carlisle and Dumfries now have.”—*28th September, 1781.*

† On the 9th September, 1778, the Town Council of Glasgow resolved to send twelve cannon to Greenock, under the belief that there might be an attempted invasion of the west coast. This was never carried into execution.

which have since so materially added to the population of the western commercial mart, and so seriously altered the creed of many of its breathing inhabitants. One obscure mass-house, situated in the High-street, was then the only consecrated temple of Popery within the Covenanting borders of Glasgow; and book and bell were there used in a manner somewhat stealthily.* While we speak thus of the Presbyterianism which so generally pervaded the people, it must not, at the same time, be denied that there were some whose early habits and education inclined them to the worship of the Virgin. It should not be forgotten that a goodly sprinkling of the old Celtic Jacobite race, drawn from the Highlands, then did the work which is now generally assigned to the modern patlanders; and Popery, therefore, was not altogether unsympathised with by certain persons of the community. Among those, there appears to have been a person named Robert Bagnall, who, being a native of France, still religiously and regularly worshipped at least every Sunday within the walls of the High-street mass-house. This personage was a potter by trade, having his shop in King-street, and his manufactory and house at the east end of the Gallowgate. At that polemical period, the Popish peculiarities of this, we believe, industrious and respectable citizen, unfortunately excited the wrath of the populace, who, not content with destroying, *à la* John Knox or his abettors, the pictured saints which decorated the high altar of the High-street chapel, of which Mr Bagnall was a notable member—and that, too, during the time of divine service—again, on the evening of the 9th February, 1779, assembled by some as yet occult power, at once attacked his house, situated where Tureen-street now stands, and burned it

* In 1778 there were only about 30 ostensible Roman Catholics in Glasgow. In 1785, when Bishop Hay came from Edinburgh to celebrate mass, he met the Catholics in a back room of a house in Blackstock's-close, foot of Saltmarket. In 1792 the Tennis-court in Mitchell-street was fitted up as a temporary Catholic chapel. In 1797 a small chapel was built in Gallowgate; and in 1815 the

handsome Gothic structure in Clyde-street was erected. Since that time several very large and elegant churches connected with the Roman Catholic worship have been built in various parts of the City. In 1819 the number of Roman Catholics in Glasgow was only 8,245, whereas in 1851 they were estimated to be about 90,000.

and its furniture, before the Magistrates had arrived at the conflagration.* This accomplished, they forthwith proceeded to his shop in King-street, which they gutted of its pottery, in spite of all magisterial and military efforts to save it. It has been stated, as a proof of the almost universal feeling which prevailed against the Catholics and their religion at this time in Glasgow, that although the then great reward of one hundred pounds was offered for the apprehension of any of the ringleaders, no one ever was induced to *peach*.†

No sooner was this religious ferment somewhat quelled, by the abandonment of the Popish bill, than another equally opprobrious measure was introduced into the House of Commons, which again excited much fear and discontent among the inhabitants of Glasgow; we allude to a proposal to repeal the duty on French cambrics. At that time the *corks*, or small manufacturers, of Anderston‡ had done much to improve the manufacture of cambrics, not only by their own ingenuity, but also by the importation of a colony of French women. Fearing competition, and utterly regardless of the principles enunciated by Adam Smith, they were strongly excited against the measure; and a mob of weavers paraded the City with an effigy of the Minister who brought in the measure, holding in one hand a piece of French cambric, and in the other a bill for importing that manufacture. The procession, after marching through the town

* Bagnall took refuge in the house of the Rev. Dr. Porteous, of the Wynd Kirk, who was even alleged to have been in some measure instrumental in exciting the populace against Popery.

† “The Magistrates and Council, on 16th April, 1779, agreed to apply to Parliament for power to assess the inhabitants for the damage done to Robert Bagnall’s property by a mob on the 9th of February last.” The bill was prepared, but abandoned from the opposition given to it.

‡ Among the leading Anderston *corks* about this time were the following:—

Messrs James & John McIlwham.

Mr James Monteith, grandfather of Mr R. Monteith of Carstairs.

Mr John Semple.

Mr James Wright, commonly called “*Cash down*.”

Mr Allan Arthur.

Mr Alexander Glasgow.

Messrs Grant & Fraser, the former one of the family of the famous Grants of Manchester.

Mr Gillespie.

It was the custom for some of the above, and most of the smaller *corks*, to take their “meridian” at *Pinkerton’s*, which was then in the Trongate, opposite to the Laigh Kirk Steeple.

unmolested—as might well have been expected from the universal sympathy felt for their case—ultimately arrived at the Cross, where the effigy was hung up at the public place of execution, and thereafter blown to pieces by the firing of some combustible materials placed in the interior of the figure.*

It was during the fitful alternations of the American conflict, and the equally oscillating policy of our domestic Legislature—which so deeply interested the citizens of Glasgow,—that a Club of well-known quidnuncs and greedy gossipers began to assemble in a rather celebrated tavern, situated in Currie's close, on the east side of the High-street—not after dinner, but long before even the hour of breakfast. At that period the Edinburgh mail—bringing the newspapers of the Scottish metropolis, and with these the latest intelligence from London—reached Glasgow about five o'clock in the morning. On the arrival of the postal messenger, whose appearance was then looked for with more than ordinary anxiety, a gun was regularly fired at the Cross, to announce the great fact to the inhabitants; and in those days, when the City was small, it was easy to do so by such a simple contrivance, as the great majority interested in such matters lived within earshot of the Tolbooth. At this well-known sound the members of the *Morning Club* started from the blankets, dressed themselves in their morning garb, and hastened to the High-street, where the newspapers, which, by that time, had been got from the Post-office, were found ready dried and laid out on the table, waiting the arrival of the eager quidnuncs.†

* The proposed legislative measure was withdrawn, to the great delight of the Glasgow manufacturers and weavers.

† The newspapers then published in and received from Edinburgh were—the *Courant*, the *Caledonian Mercury*, and the *Advertiser*. It is not precisely known when the *Courant* was first begun to be published, but it is certain that in 1710 the celebrated Daniel De Foe got liberty from the then all paramount Town Council to publish the same. It was,

from its start, published thrice a-week. The precise period when the *Caledonian Mercury* was commenced is also unknown; but it was long published by the well-known scholar and antiquary, Thomas Ruddiman, M.A., Mr John Robertson having purchased the copy-right from the Ruddimans in 1772. The *Advertiser* was commenced after 1772 by Mr Alexander Donaldson, whose son and successor in the property of the newspaper left his fortune to found Donaldson's Hospital.

But although the news of the day, stirring as they then were, formed perhaps the chief attraction to those worthies to leave their beds at so early an hour, there were other inducements to enter Currie's close before breakfast. In the comfortable tavern, with its blazing fire, situated in this then fashionable locality, the members were always sure of getting either a tankard of hot herb-ale—whose medicinal qualities were considered no bad antidote to the rather uneasy effects produced by the previous evening's heavy potations—or that beverage which was then well-known by the designation of a "*baurie*," and which consisted of a half-mutchkin of rum, with a due proportion of hot water and sugar, poured out and *skinked* in a quart mug.* With either placed on the board, and with a newspaper in hand, each member felt himself quite in his element. After the perusal of each paragraph, he could take his mouthful of soothing tipple, and was thus fully prepared to meet any intelligence that might too harshly excite his feelings. When the newspapers were duly scanned, which, considering the editorial brevity of that period, took no very long time to accomplish, the members at once encircled the board, and the Club thus constituted commenced discussing, with a gusto peculiarly their own, the various topics of the day. Having thus sat and talked till the Cross clock struck eight, at which hour men in their circumstances breakfasted, the sitting was adjourned—not till the following morning, as might have been anticipated, but only till seven o'clock in the evening, when the Club again regularly met, to talk over, not the news of the country, but the news of the town.

As a sample of the worthies who composed the brotherhood, meeting under the title of the MORNING AND EVENING CLUB, and who for many long years darkened with their forms one of the eastern closes of the

* The practice of drinking hot herb-ale in the morning existed till about the year 1820. At that time there was a peripatetic club, composed of a number of respectable manufacturers, who took their early walk round the Public Green—like the ancient Greeks in

their Arcadia,—and who, on their return, about 8 or 9 o'clock, wound up their morning's pleasure with a tankard of this hot potation, in a famous herb-ale house, nearly opposite the Old Gate, which led into the Green at the north end of the Saltmarket

High Street, we may mention Mr Archibald Givan, writer, whose original character and convivial habits were ever sure to attract around him a knot of congenial spirits, and whose love for his Club was such that he rarely was known to be absent from a sitting.* It was here, especially, that this celebrated clubbist, who may be said to have been an excellent representative of the drinking character of the age, most unreservedly indulged in his own peculiar and favourite species of tippie, but in which, considering the cost of the material whereof it was manufactured, and the quantity which he generally contrived to swallow, he had few followers among the brotherhood. The beverage was no less, *for a beginning*, than a bottle of good port-wine *mulled*, flavoured with large slices of lemon, and poured into a quart mug. This rather odd Club drink was nicknamed "*mahogany*," and, ere long, the sobriquet was conferred on himself. With his legs below the tavern mahogany, and with his own tankard of *mahogany* before him, this worthy worshipper of wine and waggery gossiped on till near midnight, and not unfrequently did not quit his chair till he had impounded the mystical number of *three* bottles in his stomach. At this period of Glasgow's history, tipping at all times of the day, and drinking in the afternoons to excess, were practised both by "gentle and semple." Among the shopkeepers and manufacturers, a *meridian* glass was an almost universal habit, while forenoon *gilling* prevailed through the whole range of the different craftsmen. To transact business of any kind without the bargain being sealed with the stamp of the *stoup*, would have been looked upon as shabby as it would have been unsafe; and so far was the practice carried, that even the most sacred matters were settled in a manner befitting "thirsty souls"—that is to say, the clergy and their flocks were in the habit of discussing the weighty matters of the Church over a tankard of twopenny or a glass of Glenlivet!† About this period, too, when a dinner party

* In Tait's Directory of 1783-84, we find Mr Givan's name among the Faculty of Procurators, and that he lived "opposite Post-office, Gibson's Wynd."

† A story told of the Rev. Dr John Hamilton, and of the celebrated Mungo Naismith, the mason, one of his parishioners, which occurred about this time, will best illustrate this. Hav-

was given—which was, however, a rare occurrence compared with the practice of the present day—the guests, after the somewhat heavy repast, invariably set in for serious drinking. The landlord immediately began to ply his bottles and his bowl; and, in order to prevent any one skulking away before he had drank more than he could well carry, the dining-room door was locked, and the key snugly consigned to the host's pocket. A host, in fact, was looked upon as miserable and mean who did not testify his kindness by sending his guests reeling home, without any recollection of what had occurred during the closing part of the evening; and it was the great glory of many a stalwart diner-out to play, but too frequently, the part assigned to the "Doctor" in the autumn hunt dinner given in "Thomson's Seasons," whose

"Tremendous paunch,
Awful and deep, a black abyss of drink
Ontlives them all; and from his buried flock
Retiring, full of ruminati sad,
Laments the weakness of these latter times.

It was, in fact, an age of deep drinking, both in town and country; but it must be recollected that although the "*bouts*" were long, they were rare. The story of the laird of Garscadden and his compeers, who never thought it reasonable to rise from the table on the same day on which they sat down, may be regarded as no indifferent type of the men of the period!

ing both something important to talk over in the forenoon, they retired, as customary, to a public-house, and called for a gill of spirits and a piece of oat-cake. Both were brought in and laid on the table; but before attempting to partake of either Dr Hamilton asked a blessing, which, closing his eyes, he lengthened out with such a copious infusion of Presbyterian doctrine, that long before its conclusion his friend became tired, and, sip by sip, drank off the spirits placed before him. On arriving at "Amen," the minister stretched out his hand to take hold of the gill stoup, but lo! on raising the lid, he found

the vessel empty. "Ring the bell!" cried he, evidently annoyed either at the supposed neglect or indignity offered to them; adding, "this is really too bad." "Hooly, hooly!" said the parishioner, "it is all right enough. I am to blame for that. If you had been less lengthy in your prayer it would not have happened. But let me give you a hint for the future, that the Scriptures tell us 'to watch as well as pray!'" The Rev. Dr was minister of the High Church or Cathedral, and was father of Provost John, and grandfather of Provost Wm. Hamilton.

They were, in fact, the very counterpart of a celebrated bailie of a neighbouring borough, in more modern times, whose grave-stone declares that

“Here lyes—read it with your hats on—
The bones of Bailie William Watson,
Who was famous for his thinking,
And moderation in his drinking.”*

Of the other regular members of the thirsty fraternity, who spent both their mornings and evenings in the Club-room, it is perhaps unnecessary now to say more than that each and all of them belonged to the then widely disseminated family of the *Sit-lates*, a family which was slowly but steadily declining in numbers long before Forbes M'Kenzie's effort to extinguish it. The *Sit-lates* of the Morning and Evening Club, however, having no fear of any interference with their prolonged enjoyment of good company, continued to sit and drink till they could do so no longer; but that was at least not until their chairman, “Mahogany,” was prevented by death from placing his limbs under the well-garnished mahogany of the High-street hostelry.† Before we close this sketch, we may mention one of the irregular members of the brotherhood, Mr Matthew Gilmour, writer, who to a strong love of the ludicrous, united a propensity to play tricks on his neighbours.‡ On his way one morning to the Club, when

* Scottish “*Gabraviches*,” as these drinking bouts were called, are well known to all acquainted with the “annals of the bottle,” and the one in which *Garscadden* took his last draught has been often told. The scene occurred in the wee clachan of Law, where a considerable number of Kilpatrick lairds had congregated for the ostensible purpose of talking over some parish business. And well they talked, and better drank, when one of them, about the dawn of the morning, fixing his eye on *Garscadden*, remarked that he was “looking unco gash.” Upon which *Kilnardinny* coolly replied, “Deil mean him, since he has been wi' his Maker these twa hours! I saw him step awa, but I didna like to disturb good company!” The following epitaph of that celebrated Bacchanalian plainly indi-

cated he was in no great odour among his neighbours:—

“Beneath this stane lies auld Garscad,
Wha loved a neighbour very bad;
Now how he fends and how he fares
The deil ane kens and as few cares.”

† The sworn boon companions of the president of the Evening and Morning Club were—Dr Whyte, High-street, Deacon Murray, Mr James Stewart, spirit dealer, and others of the same class of forenoon toppers. Meridian drinking about this time was almost universal among the middle classes of Glasgow society.

‡ Of this curious individual, who lived in High-street, in 1793-4, many odd pranks have been told. The following, given on the au-

few were on the street, he discovered a ladder, and ascended the statue of King William, at the Cross, where he seated himself on the horse, immediately behind the hero of the Boyne. The singular position of the member, however, soon attracted the attention of a curious passenger, who at once cried out, "What are you doing there?" "Oh!" exclaimed Mr Gilmour, "I am looking at a most wonderful sight, such as I never saw in all my life before, and, if you will only come up, you may see it too!" The stranger, without thought, took advantage of the ladder, and mounted to the top of the pedestal. "Stop there till I come down, and you will get up;" and so saying the member slipped down, and the stranger ascended to the vacated seat. Mr Gilmour then counselled him to look steadfastly down the Gallowgate; and while he was thus employed, the ladder was removed and Mr Gilmour with it, leaving the poor man on an elevation from which there was no practicable and safe descent!

thority of Mr John Aitchison, may be relied on:—Having observed a pretty conspicuous sign in front of a house in the Bell of the Brae, on which was painted "R. Carrick, shoemaker," Mr Gilmour thought it would be no bad joke to remove it during the night and place it on the Ship Bank; and in the

morning the people were not a little surprised to find that Robert Carrick, the manager, had added to that of his many other occupations the business of a cobbler! These practical jokes were by no means uncommon during the last century.