

The Fenwick Improvement of Knowledge Society

‘Knowledge is the treasure of the soul’

1834-1842

THE Editor of the *Scottish Historical Review* has to thank Mr. Hugh Fulton, Pollokshields, Glasgow, for the opportunity to print the following crisp, concise and racy record of winter-night debates in the village of Fenwick, in Ayrshire, in the years between the Reform Act and the repeal of the Corn Laws. The minute book of the little debating Society of young men in Fenwick belongs to Mr. Fulton, and its significance was indicated to the writer of this note by Mr. William Gemmill, Writer, Glasgow, who shares with Mr. Fulton a keen ancestral interest in Fenwick and its Reform debates. Accordingly there is now printed *verbatim et literatim* the text of the curious little minute book. It is six inches by four inches, in several hand-writings, often ill spelt, and worse punctuated, but always brisk and entertaining, instructively disclosing a decisive and robust mentality among the young artisans of the Ayrshire village, situated about four miles from Kilmarnock. The parish, eight miles in extreme length, and from two to five miles broad, had, in 1831, a population of 2018. The almost coterminous villages of Fenwick and Low Fenwick, best known as Laigh Fenwick from which probably the membership of ‘The Fenwick Improvement of Knowledge Society’ was mainly recruited, can hardly have contained more than 500 inhabitants, whose prevalent industry was weaving.

It is perhaps not surprising that, in the generation which followed Burns, we should find in an Ayrshire village, sympathy alike with liberty and literature, yet the intensity of feeling manifest throughout, argues the existence of dominating inspirations in the minds of the leaders of the coterie which,

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from 1834 until 1842, discuss so many attractive and important themes. The minutes are a remarkable interpretation of their time, and could hardly have better conveyed than they have done, what these village politicians and social critics thought and said and sang.

GEO. NEILSON.

THE following persons meet in the house of Hugh Thomson on the 16th Decr 1834 and agreed to form themselves into a Society to be called the Fenwick Improvement of Knowledge Society, when they agreed to the following articles

Andrew Gemmell	Robert Howit
John Kirkland	Alexander Armour
James Taylor	Alexander Fulton
John Gemmell	William Morton
Daniel Love	John Fowlds
John Anderson	

Article 1st. The Club shall meet at Fenwick every second Friday night when a Question on any subject shall be proposed (Doctrines of Religion excepted) which Question is to be discussed in the Club each member taking whatever side he thinks proper.

2nd. The Society being meet the one who presides being chosen the night previous opens the meeting by stating the subject formerly given out for discussion, those haveing written Essays shall have the precedance.

3d. When the President reads from the Society's Book the Question to be discussed the Member next the preses on the right hand shall speak first then the Member next on the other side shall reply and so on till all the Members shall have given there opinions and when a smaller number shall be on one side than another the first speaker on the last side shall be allowed to reply and so on untill all the opposite side shall have spoken and are answered no person allowed to speak out of his order without leave from the precess.

4th. In the time of a debate one only shall be heard at once and not above fiveteen minutes at a time when he shall give place to another and so on untill it is finished¹ any majority shall determine what side has the merit of the Question.

5th. When the discussions of the Meeting are finished for night the business of the meeting shall be to choose a President for next meeting when the President or any other Member shall

¹ See Supplement.

be at liberty to propose any member he thinks fit : if more than one is proposed the one who has the majority of votes will be considered elected.

6th. That all private conversation during the debate shall be strictly prohibited—and all profane and obscene & abusive language shall be reprov'd by the president and if persevered in shall exclude the offender from the Membership of the Society.

7th. That no person shall be allowed to make known any of the Society's debates for the purpose of ridicule or jest out of the Society on pain of exclusion.

8th. Any person applying for Membership will be admitted only by consent only of three fourths of the Society : those having objections to admittance of any individual as a member are not required to give his reasons for so doing.

9th. Every person alternately may propose any subject he chooses for the next discussion, which shall be adopted provided his motion meet the approbation of the meeting.

10th. Any Member absenting himself from the Meeting for one night forfeits one halfpenny ; for two nights, one penny ; for three nights, two pence ; four nights, exclusion from the Society without giving a reasonable excuse.

Abrogated.

11th. That at the close of the debate if any Member have anything valueable to communicate connected with the object of the Society will be at liberty so to do.

12th. No Member who has an Essay the property of the Society for perusal shall be at liberty to give it in loan or otherwise shew it to any person who is not a member of the Society.

13th. That no fundamentall article of the Society can be altered or abrogated, nor any of the Society's funds disposed of for any purpose whatever, without a majority of votes agreeing thereto and passed for two successive nights of regular meeting, nor any new article adopted.

SUPPLEMENTARY ARTICLES.

Supp. to Art. 4. Number of votes on each side of any question to be entered in the minute of meeting and no decision to be given when they are on a par.

Supp. to Art. 5th. The President shall have a vote along with the other members, and on a par shall have the casting vote : this applies to all cases except what comes under Article 4th.

A STATEMENT OF THE SUBJECTS DISCUSSED BY
THE SOCIETY.

- 1st. The Utility of Societys for the Improvement of Knowledge.
- 2nd. That whither the greatest amount of happiness flows from Implicit belief or rational and enlightened Conviction.
- 3d. Whither Riches or genius are most desirable.
- 4th. Whither Religion supported by voluntary means or by a civil Establishment is best fitted to promote true Religion.
- This last subject was debated three successive Nights: decided in favour of voluntary means.
- 5th. Whither the death of Archbishop Sharp was Murder or Patriotism.
- Decided in favour of Patriotism.
- 6th. Whither Celibacy or a Conjugal life is best fitted to promote individual happiness.
- 7th. Whether Monarchial or Republican forms of Civil Government are best fitted for the People's Welfare.
- Decided in favour of Republicanism after two Nights Debate.
- 8th. What is the best method of Replacing Monarchial Governments by Republican and Whither by Moral or physical means.
- Decided in favor of moral means.
- 9th. On general Literature.
- 10th. Whither Open Voting or By Ballot gives the Purest Elections.
- After two nights debate decided in favour of Open Elections.
- 11th. A Contrast between America and Britain.
- 12th. Whither Abstinence or a Temperate use of Ardent Spirits is most productive of good.
- Decided in favor of Abstinence.
- 13th. Whither human Friendship or Love is most permant.
- Decided in favor of Love.
- 14th. Whither Improvement in Machinery would tend to promote the benefit of Mankind.
- Decided in favor of the Improvement of Machinery.
- 15th. The best Method of turning the Benefits of Machinery to the Interests of the Working Classes.
- Decided in favor of the Restrictive Laws being Repealed and Equality of Priviledge given to all.
- 16th. Octr 19th. On the motion of Jas Taylor Whither fictitious Writings has been beneficial or not in general.
- Decided that they have not.

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17th. Nov 2nd 1835. On the Motion of Wm Morton Whither is a Town or Country Life Productive of Most Happiness. Decided in favour of a Towns Life.

18th. Novr 16th 1835. On the Motion of John Kirkland it was Agreed to hold a General Conversation on the State of Society. Thomas Fulton President.

19th. Nov 16th 1835. On the motion of Robert Howat that the Subject for discussion be for the 30th Novr That Whither Real or Imaginary Pleasure in Love and amusement affords most satisfaction, was agreed to.

Thomas Fulton reelected President for 30th Novr next night.

20th. 30th Novr Agreed by the Society that John Kirkland's motion relative to the preasant state of society be resumed on the 14th Dec. Thomas Fulton President.

21st. 14th December. On the motion of William Morton it was agreed that the subject of debate be Whether the Drunkard or the Miser is most miserable.

28th Dec. Alex Fulton President.

Decided that the Drunkard is Most Miserable.

22nd. 28th Decr 1835. On the Motion of James Taylor, agreed to take a Retrospective View of 1835, for Janr 11th 1836. Alex Fulton, President.

23rd. 11th Janr 1836. On the Motion of John Kirkland agreed that it be debated on the 25th of Janr Whether the once popular Doctrine of Ghosts and Witches have any claims on the beleif of Mankind.

Robt. Orr President.

Decided that they have none.

24th. 25th Janr 1836. On the Motion of John Kirkland agreed that it be debated on the 8th Febr Whether Poetry or Music has the strongest effect on the passions. Robt Orr President.

Decided that Poetry has the strongest effect.

25th. 8th Febr 1836. On the Motion of William Morton, agreed that the utility of Abstinent Societies from all ardent spirits be discused on the 22nd Febr. Alex Armour President.

Decided to be of great utility.

26th. 22nd Febr 1836. On the Motion of James Taylor agreed that it be debated on the 7th March whether Tobacco so extensively used as at preasant be beneficial to the Community. Alex Fulton President.

Decided that it is highly prejudicial.

27th. 7th March 1836 On the Motion of John Brown agreed that it be debated on the 21st March What denomination of Christians is most scriptural and best suited for the benefit of mankind in government and discipline. Alex Fulton President.

Decided in favour of Presbyterianism.

28th. 21st March 1836. On the Motion of William Morton agreed that it be debated on the 4th April Whether a public speaker possessed of great oratorical powers with common talents or one possessed of great talents but destitute of oratory is most beneficial to his hearers. John Brown President.

Decided in favour of the one possessed of great talent.

29th. 4th April. On the Motion of James Taylor agreed that it be debated on the 18th April Whether is generally the most successfull in Life the Modest or the Impudent Man.

John Brown President.

Decided in favour of Modesty.

29th. 18th April. On the Motion of John Brown, Agreed that it be debated on the 2d of May 1836 Would it be Beneficial to Britian to extend the Franchise and to what extent.

John Kirkland President.

Decided that household Suffrage in present exigences is most expedient but universal every man's right and most Beneficial.

30th. 2d May. On the Motion of Robt Howat 2nd May agreed that it be debated on the 16th May 1836 Whether the loss of love or the loss of Riches is the worst to bear.

James Taylor President.

Decided that the loss of Love is worst to bear.

31st. On the Motion of James Taylor 16th May, agreed that it be debated on the 30th May 1836 How does missfortune generally operate upon Mankind? whether does it increase or diminish the energy of the soul?

Thomas Fulton President.

Decided that it generally diminishes the energy of the soul.

32nd. 30th May. On the Motion of John Gemmell agreed that it be debated on the 13th June 1836 Whether the feeling that the cultivation of natural science is inimicall to the interests of religion be a prejudice or a well-founded opinion?

Alexr Armour President.

Decided that it is a prejudice.

33d. 13th June. On the Motion of John Kirkland agreed that it be debated on the 27th June 1836 Whether the brightness of the rising morn or the calm serenity of closing day are

best calculated to awake contemplation and excite the finest and most pleasing sensations and enjoyments.

Alexr Armour President.

Division Equall.

34th. 27th June 1836. On the motion of Danniell Love agreed that it be debated on the 11th July Whether generall Sociality or general Solitude is productive of most happiness to Man. Decided in favour of general Solitude.

35th. 11th July. On the Motion of Wm Morton agreed that it be debated on the 25th July 1836 Whether trades Unions as at present existing in this Country be advantages or inimicall to the Interests of trade. Alexr Armour President.

Decided that they are inimicall.

36th. 25th July 1836. On the Motion of Andrew Gemmell, agreed that it be debated on the 8th Agust Whether Marriage ought to be a Lay or a Clericall ceremony.

Alex Fulton President.

This subject postponed till the 22nd Agust was decided to be a civil Ceremony.

37th. 22nd Agust 1836. On the Motion of William Morton agreed that it be debated on the 5th Sept Whether Mankind will use the greatest exertions to obtain good or avoid evil. Alexr Armour President.

Not Decided.

38th. 5th Sept. On the Motion of James Taylor Agreed that it be discussed on the 19th Sept 1836 Whether War or Intemperence has been most hurtful to the Human Race for the last hundred years. Alexander Armour President.

This discussion was left over till the 3d of October.

Decided that Intemperance has been most hurtfull to the human race for 100 years past.

Octr 3. Oweing to want of accomodation the Society agreed to postpone all Discussion untill proper accomodation is secured.

39th. 31st Octr. On the Motion of James Taylor Agreed that it be debated on the 14th Novr Whether Superstition or Enthusiasm are most to be dreaded in Society.

Robert Howat President.

Decided that Superstition is most to be dreaded.

40th. Nov. 14th. On the Motion of James Taylor to be debated Whether it would be most beneficial to Britian to dispense with the house of Peers or with Ireland, on the 28th of Nov. William Fulton Chairman.

Novr 28th. Discussion postponed till Decr 12.

Decr 12th. Further postponement till the 26th.

41. Dec 26th. The Society took into consideration their present languishing condition when after hearing various suggestions for a revival it was agreed to resume the subject on Janry 9 1837 Janry 9.

42. Janry 9. In pursuance of the recomendation of last meeting the society again took up the subject of a revival, when it was decided that in future each member should have a particular department of science or literature on which he should speak or write as convenience might dictate.

43. Janry 23rd. The society met when an essay on the seasons was read by James Taylor.

Robert Orr President.

44. February 6. The society met when an essay on the effects of litterature on society was read by Andw Gemmell William Morton President.

45. February 20. The motion of John Kirkland that the society resume the practice of having a specific subject of discussion was carried for a first time.

46. Also on the motion of James Taylor agreed that on March 6 it be discussed what is the best method of dealing with opinions based only on prejudice.

Robert Howat President.

Decided in favour of sound argument properly expressed.

47. March 6th. The society met and finally carried John Kirklands motion, at the same time resolving to hear any essays though not connected with the subject of discussion.

On the motion of William Morton agreed that on the 20th March the lawfulness and propriety of blood-eating be discussed.

Robert Orr President.

Decided that as far as the subject is at present understood, it is lawful.

48. March 20th. Agreed that on April 3 the society shall hear whatever miscellaneous essays may be brought forward. James Taylor President.

William Fulton to be next President.

49. April 3rd. The society heard an extract from an essay on the moral state of London, read by Willian Morton. Also a discourse on Astronomy by Thomas Fulton and agreed that he resume the subject on April 17 William Fulton President.

Robert Howat to be next President.

50. April 17th. Thomas Fultons discourse postponed and an essay read by Andw Gemmell on the influence of litterature in the formation of character.

On the motion of John Gemmell agreed to discuss on May 1st the comparative advantages of a metallic or a paper currency. William Fulton to be President.

51. May 1st. Decided in favour of a paper currency, so regulated, that the fabrication and issue would be confined to the government.

Agreed that on May 15th Thos Fulton resume his discourse on Astronomy William Fulton to be Presid.

May 15. No meeting.

52. May 29. Heard an essay by Andw Gemmell on the influence of early habits and associations in the formation of character.

Agreed to hear on June 12th specimens of poetry from any or all of the tory poets read by Jas Taylor with an equal number of equal merit from L——d Byron alone to be read by Andw Gemmell. Willm Clark to be President.

53. June 12. After hearing extracts from Coleridge on the part of the tories decided in favour of L——d Byron.

On the motion of Alexr Fulton agreed to discuss on June 26th the propriety of legislation for the Sabbath. Willm Clark to be Presid.

54. June 26th. Decided that all civil interference with the sabbath is improper, but unanimously reject the absurd notion that there is no moral obligation for its observance.

On the motion of John Kirkland agreed to discuss on July 10th whether love is productive of most pain or pleasure John Kirkland to be President.

55. July 10th. No decision numbers being equal.

On the motion of John Kirkland agreed to discuss on July 24th the utility of having all the land public property. Matthew Fulton to be President.

56. July 24th. No decision but adjourned the discussion till August 21st.

On the motion of Willm Morton agreed to discuss on August 7th whether the fashionable amusements of the present day are entitled to the appellation of innocent and whether they are strictly moral in their nature and tendencies and how far they are so.

John Gemmell Junr to be President.

57. August 7th. Unanimously adopted the following resolution : That some amusements are not entitled to the appellation

of either innocent or moral but that many are so, in so far as they are conducive to mental or physical health and do not encroach upon the time which should be devoted to religion ; or business.

Agreed in pursuance of the adjournment from July 24th to resume the subject of that night's discussion on August 21st Robert Howat to be President.

58. August 21. Decided for the negative by 4 against 2, one not voting present 7.

On the motion of Robert Howat agreed to discuss whether the greatest amount of pleasure is afforded by the eye or the ear William Fulton to be President.

This discussion to be on Sept 4.

59. Unanimous that the eye affords most pleasure ; present 8.

September 4. On the motion of John Gemmell Senr agreed to discuss on Sept 18 whether (with religion excepted) the European discovery of America has been beneficial or prejudicial to be the aborigenes of that continent. John Gemmell Junr to be President.

60. Sept 18 : 7 voted that it has been prejudicial ; 2 did not vote ; present 9.

On the motion of John Kirkland agreed to discuss on Oct. 2 what effect the present embarrassments in Britain may have upon the peoples morals. John Kirkland to be President.

61. Oct. 2. Decided unanimously that temporary embarrassment may have a good tendency, but if long continued will invariably produce immorality.

On the motion of Willm Morton agreed to discuss on Oct 16 that subject formerly treated No 3 whether riches or genius are most desirable Robert Howat to be President.

62. Oct. 16. Unanimous in favour of genius.

On the motion of Alexr Fulton agreed that the subject of discussion for Oct. 30 be Who has the right to determine when a people are fitted for the full possession of their political rights. Thomas Fulton to be President.

63. Oct. 30. Unanimous that the people themselves are the only judges.

On the motion of James Taylor agreed to discuss on Nov 13 whether Worth—Beauty—or Riches is most likely to be an inducement to the mass of mankind in choosing a partner for life John Gemmell Junr to be President.

64. Nov. 13. Beauty 5, Riches 1, Worth 0 ! present 6.

On the motion of John Kirkland agreed that Nov 27 be devoted to literary conversation Willm Fulton to be President.

65. Nov 27. After hearing several pieces in prose and verse, and discussing their merits; agreed on the motion of John Kirkland that the question for Decr 11 be what has been the moral effect of the poetry of the last 100 years Willm Fulton to be President.

66. Decr 11. Agreed that the subject be resumed on Decr 25 Willm Fulton to be President.

67. Decr 25. Decided that the moral effect of Poetry during the period specified has been upon the whole good.

No subject of discussion appointed for next meeting on Janry 8 1838.

1838

Janry 1st. The society in conjunction with the Fenwick vocal club met in John Kirkland's house and sat down to an excellent supper after which the following toasts were given and duly honoured.

From the chair: The sovereignty of the people. John Kirkland then gave The new year, prefaced by a talented original poem commemorative of the events of the past year and anticipating those of the ensuing, in a most graphic and poetical style, after which the Club sung the New Year: the chairman next called on John Kirkland to read an original poem on the late elections.

John Gemmell then gave universal suffrage prefaced by an essay intended to prove the peoples right to that privilege: the Club then sung an anthem on the 23rd psal.

William Taylor then sung the lass of Gowrie in fine style. James Taylor then read an essay on the question whether Worth, Beauty, or Riches is most likely to influence mankind in making matrimonial treatys. The Croupier then gave The speedy separation of Church and State.

The club next sung Fair Flora decks, &c Robert Howat then sung, How sair's my heart nae man shall ken.

An anthem from the 7th chap of Job was next sung by the Club.

James Taylor then gave success to the Canadians in their patriotic struggle for independence which he accompanied with a speech detailing their wrongs and proving their right to self-government. An essay was then read by Robert Howat drawing a paralel between the pleasures derived from the eye and the ear.

John Gemmell then gave the memory of Sir William Wallace the immortal defender of Scotland's independence accompanied by some remarks animadverting on the ungrateful conduct of Scotsmen in too much neglecting the memory of one, from whose patriotic sacrifices they derive all the political privileges they enjoy.

Alex Dunlop then sung in fine style Wallace's lament after the battle of Falkirk.

Willm Taylor then sung John Anderson my Jo, John.

Jas Taylor then read an essay from the pen of Willm Morton.

The Club next sung Conquest.

Willm Taylor then gave the health of Dr. Bowring, prefaced by a speech detailing the many services rendered to the country by that patriotic gentleman.

John Kirkland Senr being called on for a toast gave Health, Wealth, and Freedom, a freind at hand but seldom need him.

Alex Fulton then after an eloquent speech gave the health of R. Wallace Esqr M.P. for Greenock and Post office reform, followed by the song, the Greenock post in splendid style by Alexr Dunlop.

John Kirkland read an original poem on winter, which was received with enthusiastic applause.

Ayrshire lasses was next given by William Fulton, prefaced by an elegant speech every way worthy of the toast, followed by the song she says she loe's me best O' a' by Alexr Dunlop. In the absence of the fair sex R Howat made a most humourous, and at the same time most appropriate reply.

John Hamilton then proposed the health of Baillie H Craig Kilmarnock.

James Taylor proposed the healths of the Drs Black and Baillie Willm Craig of Glasgow.

James Kirkland proposed the health of Mr Robertson Writer Kilmarnock.

Alexr Dunlop then proposed the memories of the last Scottish martyrs for liberty Baird, Hardie, and Wilson.

Matth Fulton gave the memories of the Scottish reformers of 1793 and 4.

The healths of Mr Hume and the other radicals of the house of Commons was then given by Alexr Fulton.

Honest men and bonny lasses was then given from the chair.

James Taylor then gave the speedy adoption of republican principles throughout the world.

Robett Howat then proposed the health of the chairman and James Taylor that of the Croupier.

Thomas Fulton Chairman

Robert Orr Croupier

Robert Howat

Alexr Fulton

James Kirkland

John Hamilton

William Taylor

Matth. Fulton

Alexr Dunlop

John Kirkland Senr

John Kirkland Junr

John Gemmell

William Fulton

James Taylor

Andrew Fulton

1838

68th. January 8th. There being no subject for discussion Hazlett's Essay on the conversation of authors was read and highly approved.

On the motion of James Taylor agreed to discuss on Janry 22nd Whether man will sacrifice more for his country, or the object of his fondest affection.

William Fulton to be President.

69th. Janry 22. From the annual business of the society taking more time than was expected, the subject for discussion was postponed till Feb 5.

William Fulton to be President.

70th. Feb. 5th. The subject postponed from January 22 was taken up, when the numbers were, for the influence of Love being strongest 6, for Patriotism 3, present 9.

On the motion of John Kirkland agreed that on Feb 19 the question for discussion be Whether selfishness in the rulers; or ignorance in the people has most retarded the progress of liberty.

John Anderson to be President

71st. Feb 19. For attaching blame to rulers 5, ignorance of the people 3, Neutral 1, present 9.

Agreed on the motion of William Morton that on March 5th the question for discussion be What is the * sphere which the female sex ought to occupy in society—Do they at present occupy it—And if not what will be the result upon the destinies of mankind when they shall do so. John Anderson to be President.

72. March 5th. That they enjoy all the political privileges to which they are entitled 5, that they do not 3, neutral 1, present 9.

* Word 'proper' has here been erased but is still legible.

Agreed that the meeting on March 19 be occupied by reading a portion of Hazlett's Plain Speaker. John Gemmell Junr to be President.

73. March 19. Read the 4th and 5th essays of the fore-mentioned work.

On the motion of John Kirkland agreed to discuss on April 2nd whether in such times as the present; passive obedience or active resistance; is most a people's duty.

Matthew Fulton to be President.

74. April 2. Unanimous that the existing greivances of Great Britain fully justifies active resistance.

On the motion of John Gemmell Senr agreed to discuss on April 16th whether the works of Dr Smollett or those of Sir Walter Scott are most likely to raise a spirit of rational enterprise in the mind of reader. John Gemmell Junr to be President.

April 16th. Meeting postponed to the 30th.

75. April 30th. In consequence of other business regular discussion not entered into.

76. May 14th. No discussion. Agreed to present James Kirkland with a copy of the life and poems of Michael Bruce (by McKelvie) as a small token of gratitude for the accomodation he has given the society during the past year.

77. May 28th. The committee appointed to purchase the foresaid book reported their having done so and were reappointed to have it suitably inscribed and forwarded to its destination.

June 11th. No meeting.

78. June 25th. Discussed the question standing over since April 16th see minute of 74 meeting.

No decision.

Agreed on the motion of R. Howat that the question for discussion on July 9th be Whether the works of nature or art are best calculated to produce admiration. William Fulton to be Presid.

79. July 9th. After hearing one of Foster's essays, adjourned the discussion till July 23rd. Willm Fulton to be President.

80. July 23rd. Decided that the works of nature are best calculated to produce admiration, by 5, against 2, present 7.

On the motion of John Gemmell Senr agreed that on August 6th Howit's essay on the radical tendency of almost all the modern poetry of Great Britain, be read. John Gemmell Senr to be President.

August 6th. No meeting.

81. August 20th. Read the essay ordered by 80th meeting and unanimously found it to prove the position assumed.

On the motion of John Kirkland agreed to discuss on Sept. 3rd whether a high toned morality is most likely to be preserved in an agricultural ; or a manufacturing and commercial ; community. Willm Fulton to be President.

Sept 3rd. No meeting.

82. Sept 17. Discussed the subject ordered by 81st meeting and concluded that in a community where justice is done to all classes there will be very little difference.

Agreed that Octr 1st be devoted to a geological conversation and that all members bring forward whatever specimens of petrifications or other mineral productions they can procure as illustrative of the opinions they may propound (James Taylor to be Chairman).

83. Oct 1st. The society met for the geological discussion, when there was a splendid exhibition of petrifications, chiefly from the channel of the Fenwick rivulet with some very fine pebbles from various parts of Scotland. From want of time to read several scientific articles, it was agreed to resume the subject October 15th. James Taylor to Preside.

Oct 15th. No Meeting.

84. Oct 29th. The society met when an essay was read (from 'Chambers Journal' No 336 of date July 7th 1838) on travelled stones, or the probable means by which large fragments of rock were moved to places far remote from their original site, and became what are called boulders. There was also read extracts from the Edinburgh Journal of Natural History on the formation of sandstone.

Agreed that the subject be resumed November 12th. James Taylor to be President.

85. Nov 12th. The society met when the members in turn gave their opinion on several facts brought under notice in the Geological articles lately read in the meetings.

Agreed that on November 26th the Resolution of Oct 29th be brought into operation viz That every member bring forward, and read to the meeting some written article either original or copied. Peter Gemmell to be Chairman.

86. Nov 26. In consequence of the resolution referred to in minute of last meeting there was forward 9 papers, 8 copied, 1 original, attendance 9.

Agreed to discuss on Decr 10th the advantages likely to result

from frequent exercise in writing and original composition John Fulton to be Chairman.

87. Decr 10th. After hearing a good deal in favour of writing the members were unanimous in opinion that besides advantages too numerous to be specified it improved the style, promoted the concentration of ideas and altogether enabled an individual to reduce more readily to a system of principles, whatever knowledge he may have an opportunity of acquiring.

Agreed that on Decr 24th each member bring forward a piece of writing either original or copied John Blundell to be Chairman.

88. Decr 24th. Forward 9: papers, copied; attendance 11.

Made arrangements for a social meeting with a few friends, not members of the society on the night of Janry 1st.

1839

In conformity with the practice introduced at the commencement of 1838 of having an annual social meeting at the beginning of each year the Society along with a few friends met in the house of John Taylor Lower Fenwick when after an elegant supper the following toasts were given and duly honoured

From the chair, The sovereignty of the people, prefaced by a speech on the bad effects of governments being founded on any other basis.

Robert Howat then gave, The speedy adoption of a general and reformed system of National Education. Accompanied by a speech drawing a paralel between our present parochial system and that adopted by some of the continental states greatly to the advantage of the latter.

John Kirkland gave, The Messrs Chambers and their cheap publications, prefaced by a speech contrasting the advantages enjoyed by the mass of the people in the present time with those of the commonly called Augustan age of Addison, Swift, and Steele.

Recitation Eliza, by William Morton.

John Fulton Junr gave, The speedy diffusion of Scientific Knowledge among the body of the people. Introduced by a speech shewing the advantageous Revolution, moral, mental, and physical, to be expected from such diffusion.

Alexr Dunlop then gave, Elliot and the other living British Poets. Accompanied by a speech in which he shewed that though civilization has derived signal advantages from the cultivation of

poetry in every age, yet the poets of the present day are pre-eminent for a spirit of genuine liberty and pure morality and the great Elliot,—unlike many who have ‘heaped the shrine of luxury and pride with incense kindled at the muses flame’—has taken the sacred fire to blast and destroy those institutions which have been the means of holding in slavish subjection the major part of mankind to a domineering minority.

A song, by William Taylor.

Willm Morton gave the speedy triumph of the National movement, prefaced by a speech of which the following resolution is an epitome. Moved by W Morton, and carried unanimously to be entered in the societys book

Resolved, That we as a society formed for the improvement of knowledge hail with the most intense feelings of approbation, satisfaction, and delight the present movement characterised as the national movement, for universal suffrage &c which we believe to be founded upon the immutable principles of truth and Justice, calculated to promote—to an untold of extent, and in the most emphatic sense of the words—the improvement of knowledge, and destined to raise man to that state of freedom and dignity which his nature bespeaks him entitled to occupy.

A Song of Liberty by Alexr Dunlop.

Andrew Gemmell then gave the memory of Milton with the speedy adoption of Republican principles, accompanied by a luminous speech depicting the character of that great man and shewing him worthy of being the glory and boast of England; whether viewed as Poet, Prosaic author, Patriot, or Statesman, as also the good effects likely to ensue from the universal adoption of that form of government which is identified with his great name.

Song, Bruces address, by Alexr Dunlop.

John Gemmell Senr then gave, the memory of Sir William Wallace and the other martyrs for British liberty. Prefaced by a speech shewing that the benefits secured by this Prince of political martyrs extend to the most remote age and country, and that by him were the British islands freed from the chains then forging for them by the subversion of Scottish independence, nay even Europe, & America are in no very remote degree indebted to his splendid sacrifices for what liberty they possess. An attempt was also made to free the Revd Jas Renwick from the charge lately preferred by a popular writer of being rather a martyr to his own bigotry than to the cause of religious liberty.

Song, Wallace's lament, by Alexr Dunlop.

James Taylor gave, The speedy success of the Canadian struggle for emancipation from British thralldom, Introduced by a speech shewing the evil effect at all times of a people being subject to a foreign power and the governors no way responsible to the governed, but particularly when that power is directed by a faction who have trampled on every principle of Justice at home, and sent out such bloodhounds as Sir George Arthur & Sir John Colborne to subdue and govern what they are pleased to call an insurgent colony. After giving a vivid picture of the distresses of the people under such management he sat down, and the toast was most enthusiastically honoured.

Song The Tyrólese song of liberty, by A Dunlop.

Alexander Fulton gave Mr John R. Robertson of the Ayrshire Examiner, and the liberal press. Prefaced by a speech, shewing that writers on national affairs have had an influence over them at all times either malignant or benign, as they happened to be the friends or foes of rational liberty, but particularly since the invention of printing, the press has become a most powerful engine in leading a people either to the dungeons of despotism or the fresh green fields of freedom. And particularly the Ayrshire Examiner, deserved our warmest support from its adaptation for exposing tyranny and fraud in our own locality.

An original Poem, recited by John Kirkland.

¹ Andrew Gemmell gave the memory of Robert Burns, the Ayrshire Poet.

Prefaced by a speech, in which the tory claim lately put forth by Dr Memes (that the republican bard was a tory) had its absurd fallacy exposed and ridiculed.

Song Bruce's address, by Alexr Dunlop.

James Kirkland gave the memory of

Lord Byron

In doing which, he took the opportunity to make some remarks on the nature and tendency of his writings, in which he shewed that though some parts were objectionable, yet taken, all in all, they were highly calculated to improve human nature, morally, intellectually, and physically.

Song The Arabian Maid, by Willm Taylor.

William Fulton Senr gave the speedy repeal of the Corn-laws.

In doing which he remarked, that besides the evils moral, and physical, entailed upon the country by our commercial system, it

¹ Andrew Gemmell proposed Byron & James Kirkland, Burns.

was very impolitic, as in the sacrifice of all other interests for the good of one, it also would fall.

Recitation by Andw Gemmell.

John Gemmell Junr gave The Revd Patrick Brewster and the other clergymen who have taken a part in the present movement In doing which he shewed that this little band deserved our esteem, from having come forward in the cause of liberty, when most of their order stood aloof, and that the gentleman named was the only endowed clergyman, that we were aware of, taking any part in the peoples cause.

William Taylor gave William Howat, and the downfal of Priestcraft ;

Introduced by a speech shewing the enormous evils inflicted on mankind in all ages by priestcraft, and the consequent obligation we lie under to the man, who having rent the veil of superstitious veneration, that enshrouded them, has laid bare their enormities and made it the peoples own fault ; if they are longer imposed on, by them.

Peter Gemmell gave, Dr Bowring and Universal philanthropy.

Prefaced by a speech, shewing what a paradise this world would become, were such a principle the prevailing motive of action, and proving from his services that the distinguished individual named has a claim to be ranked among the greatest pioneers in clearing away the barriers that oppose the introduction of such a felicitous era.

John Blundell gave, The prevalence of Harmony and Peace, throughout the world.

Prefaced by some pertinent remarks on the evils of War, and consequent happiness attending a state of universal peace.

James Taylor gave the memory of
Shakespeare.

Introduced by some critical remarks on the liberal tendency of his writings, for though he lived in a semi-barbarous age patronised by an imperious queen and in consequence had to be a flatterer of royalty, he has also been its satirist, shewing most of its representatives whom he has brought upon the stage as weak, foolish, or wicked ; and thus considering time and circumstances, deserves to stand in the same niche, with Milton, as a great and glorious emancipator of the human mind.

Matthew Fulton gave The health of Hugh Craig esqr the county delegate to the National Convention. Which he introduced by a speech shewing the importance of the present movement,

and the Convention to which it has given rise, with some remarks on the wisdom of the people of Ayrshire in choosing for their representative a man ever ready to promote not only this, but every movement likely to benefit the working classes.

The old man's address to the moon, recited by John Kirkland, Its Author.

Robert Howat gave the speedy elevation of the fair sex to their proper place in society.

Introduced by a speech depicting the evils resulting from female depression as exhibited in the savage state, and though they have not yet attained their proper place in civilised Christian society, yet what they have gained and the happy effects resulting therefrom prove that both christianity and civilization are in their favour, which certainly would with this society be decisive proof, that woman should be no longer held as inferior to her bearded compeer.

Recitation, The mothers address to her son on enlisting for a soldier by Andrew Gemmell.

John Taylor, John Fulton Senr, Andrew Fulton and Matthew Dunlop, who favoured the meeting with their company, gave each a toast but not being in the previous arrangement they cannot be got for insertion.

Thomas Fulton Chairman John Fulton Senr Croupier

It is thought unnecessary to add a list of the names as they are to be found in the report.

(To be continued.)