

REPORT OF THE FIRST ANNUAL MEETING OF THE OLD EDINBURGH CLUB

THE FIRST ANNUAL MEETING OF THE CLUB was held in the Old Council Room, City Chambers, on the afternoon of Friday, 29th January 1909, at 4 o'clock.

The Right Honourable the EARL OF ROSEBERY, K.G., K.T., Honorary President of the Club, presided. There was a large attendance of ladies and gentlemen.

Apologies were intimated from Professor John Chiene, Hon. Lord Guthrie, Sir Robert Usher, Col. Gordon Gilmour, and Rev. Dr. Glasse.

The Secretary submitted the First Annual Report, which is in the following terms:—

The Council beg to submit to the Club its first Annual Report.

The inaugural meeting of the Club was held in the Old Council Chamber on 29th January 1908. There was a large attendance, and the Chair was occupied by Professor Chiene. The Chairman having explained the objects and aims of the Club, moved that the Club be formed, and that the proposed Constitution, which would be the Rules, be approved. Mr. W. J. Hay seconded, and the motion was unanimously adopted. Office-bearers and Council were appointed, and it was agreed to ask the Lord Provost, Magistrates, and Council of the City to become the Patrons of the Club.

The first general meeting of the Club was held in the Burgh Court Room on the evening of 29th April 1908. The Chair

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was occupied by Mr. John Harrison, Treasurer of the City, and there was a large attendance. Mr. William Cowan delivered a lecture on 'A Walk through Old Edinburgh.' He described a walk from the West Port up the West Bow, down High Street and Canongate to Holyrood, round by Trinity College Church, and back by Leith Wynd, St. Mary's Wynd, and Cowgate to the Grassmarket. The lecture was illustrated with views of places of historical interest passed in the walk. Mr. Cowan expressed regret that interesting old houses had disappeared, and said that something should be done in future to preserve houses of historical interest. A cordial vote of thanks was awarded to Mr. Cowan for his lecture.

On the invitation of the Council of the Edinburgh Photographic Society the members joined the Survey Section of that Society in a walk round the line of the old Walls of Edinburgh under the leadership of Mr. John Geddie. The party met on the Castle Esplanade, where Mr. Geddie made some remarks on the Edinburgh Wall and its extensions. They proceeded down the West Bow, through the Grassmarket and up the Vennel, where a portion of the Wall was seen. They then entered the grounds of Heriot's Hospital, and Dr. Lowe conducted the party through the Council Room, Kitchen, and Dining Room and Chapel of the Hospital. The carved work and grotesque figures ornamenting the building were much admired. After leaving the Hospital the party proceeded through Society, down Chambers Street, to Drummond Street School—at the back of which a portion of the wall is still visible—and down the Pleasance and up St. Mary Street to Jeffrey Street, where Mr. Geddie pointed out the remainder of the line of the Wall.

The most important work undertaken by the Club has been the production of *The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club* on the lines laid down at the first meeting of Council, when it was decided that the initial volume should be of the nature of a Miscellany. From amongst the papers submitted the Editorial

Committee have been fortunate enough to secure the following :—

1. Provisional List of Old Houses remaining in High Street and Canongate of Edinburgh, by Mr. Bruce J. Home.
2. The Embalming of Montrose, by Mr. J. C. Robbie.
3. The Pantheon, an Old Edinburgh Debating Society, by Mr. John A. Fairley.
4. Sculptured Stones of Old Edinburgh, by Mr. John Geddie.
5. The Buildings at the East End of Princes Street and Corner of North Bridge, by Mr. William Cowan.

The information in Mr. Bruce Home's paper, with accompanying key map, will, it is hoped, make it a reference article on the subject for all time coming. Many of the particulars of Mr. Robbie's paper on the Embalming of Montrose, taken from documents in the Register House, are of the nature of a discovery, and have hitherto escaped the vigilance of the biographers of Montrose. New light is thrown on many points, including the fate of the heart of Montrose. Mr. Geddie's paper on the Sculptured Stones of the Nisbet Family affords many interesting side lights on events of history, and on the history of the Nisbets of Dean and their contemporaries and friends. Mr. John A. Fairley, in his paper, gives an interesting account of the constitution and meetings of the Pantheon, an Old Edinburgh Society, and Mr. William Cowan gives correctly, for the first time, the conditions upon which the first houses were erected at the East End of Princes Street.

The Council hope to have the Book delivered to the Members within the next few weeks.

Lord ROSEBURY said : Ladies and Gentlemen, It now falls to me to move the adoption of the report to which you have just listened. This is the first annual meeting of the Old Edinburgh Club, which by a strange accident or a far-seeing design falls exactly on the anniversary of the foundation meeting that was held last year. I think this report and the volume which accompanies it is the best justification for the formation of the club. I think the feeling of most of us with regard to this club must

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be one of surprise that it has not been long ago in existence, and one of strong regret that such has not been the case. So far as I know, we are indebted to Mr. Hay, of John Knox's House, for the first idea of the club, and I think we ought not to lose this opportunity of expressing our indebtedness to him. There are one or two points with regard to the constitution of the club to which I wish to call attention. There are members of the club who receive the annual volume, and associates of the club who do not. I am not sure that the idea of associates of the club seems to be so successful an idea as the other parts of the constitution. Only ten have joined in that category, and I think that in itself shows that the associates are not likely to form a very substantial feature of the club. I should recommend, therefore, the council to consider whether it is worth while to continue that separate sort of membership. As to the 300 members of the club, in a year, without any of the necessary process of advertisement, no less than 175 out of the whole 300 have joined. In connection with that I wish to address a very solemn warning to my friends and acquaintances in Edinburgh with regard to the expediency, I might add the necessity, of their joining this club without delay, unless they mean to be shut out. I remember, when we founded the Scottish History Society some years ago, I, in a similar manner, and perhaps less publicly, warned my friends that they had better lose no time in belonging to it. The result has been that some, like the foolish virgins, neglected my advice, and they, like the foolish virgins, are left lamenting at this moment. Some thirty or forty volumes have been issued by the Scottish History Society, which are of great intrinsic value themselves, and my friends, if low on the candidates' list, have little or no chance of belonging to the society, besides having missed this invaluable adjunct to their libraries. Let that be a warning to those who are thinking of joining the Old Edinburgh Club if they have not yet taken the trouble to do so. Our annual volume will, I may safely predict from the specimen of the volume which lies before me, be of inestimable value to every citizen of Edinburgh who cherishes the traditions of his ancient city. I will not put it in the dismal category of those books which no gentleman's library would be without, for that might cause a coldness instead of an eagerness as regards joining the club; but they will constitute, I am convinced, volumes full of interest almost necessary to those who desire to live in Edinburgh enjoyably—that is to say, enjoyably by enjoying the traditions as well as the climate of our ancient city. There is another very prominent feature connected with the constitution of the club on

which I venture to congratulate it, more especially as we are met in the old City Chamber, and that is, that the ordinary patrons of the club are the Lord Provost, Magistrates, and Town Council of the City of Edinburgh. I think that is not merely an important countenance for the club to receive, but it also indicates something in the nature of a pledge, which in view of the past is not wholly unnecessary, that the Lord Provost, Magistrates, and Town Council of the City of Edinburgh will, so far as lies in their power, always respect the ancient monuments of this city. I pass from that, and I come to the volume of which our obliging secretary supplied me with a rough copy this morning, and although I have not had very much time to read it, I may say I devoured as much of its contents as I could in the time without the slightest difficulty before coming to this chamber. It began with a sentence, the most sinister and most dismal in the whole book, which was—'That it may be safely affirmed that since 1860 two-thirds of the ancient buildings in the Old Town of Edinburgh have been demolished.' That is to say, within the lives of many of us here present, and certainly within my own, two-thirds of the ancient monuments of this city, crumbling old houses which formed so distinguished and historical a feature, have been swept away. Was that necessary? Well, we should have to have a searching commission, which is not likely to sit, to investigate each particular instance, but at least this dismal fact may make us resolve on this, that so far as this club can be efficacious, and so far as our honorary patrons can use their best endeavours, the remaining one-third of the ancient buildings of Edinburgh will receive all the respect that is possible.

The first paper in this volume, from which I quoted that sinister sentence, will amply repay perusal if you get over the sentiments that the opening excites. It is a provisional list of the old houses remaining in the High Street and Canongate of Edinburgh—a paper, I venture to say, which will always be considered a classic essay of reference with regard to this subject, and which is further enriched with a map of the Old Town of Edinburgh and the surviving parts of it, which, I venture to say without contradiction, is worth the whole annual subscription in itself. For that we are indebted to Mr. Bruce Home—and I hereby wish to express the acknowledgments of our association to him for the work which must have given him so much trouble and so much research. Then we come to an article on the embalming of Montrose—a subject in itself not perhaps immediately attractive—which contains new and original matter with regard to what may be called the

last stage of one of our traditional Scottish heroes—historical matter which no biographer of Montrose and no historian of Scotland could venture in the future to disregard. Then we come to a paper on The Pantheon, an Old Edinburgh debating society, which has a peculiar interest to myself, because I think on a former occasion I ventured publicly to urge on Edinburgh the duty of trying to discover the innumerable records of these old clubs which may yet be in existence. The clubs were innumerable, and they usually had records, and if those who possess them would come forward and place them at the disposition of our society, I am quite sure we should be delighted to reprint them and preserve them if only they are sufficiently correct, which I am afraid they are not all, for the purpose of publication. And that leads me to a consideration which is perhaps almost as melancholy as the opening sentence of our volume. These clubs have vanished, and they will not be resuscitated, and why? The reason is simple enough, they were all supper clubs. The great meal of Old Edinburgh was the supper. It was there that the convivial exchange of wit and flow of soul took place of which we read in the memoirs of the period, described with enthusiasm and ecstasy which is hardly possible for our degenerate people to understand. We cannot have those any more because under the municipal regulations we are forbidden to sup. I do not know that this will be the appropriate moment to introduce such an apple of discord as the question of our licensing regulations—I think perhaps it would not—and I see the Town Clerk has his eye fixed on me with some sternness and severity. At any rate, it may be permitted to shed a tear over the period when it was permissible for a citizen of Edinburgh without a special licence—as if he were going to be married in some illicit manner—to enjoy the privilege of supping as his ancestors did.

Then we come to the paper on the sculptured stones of Old Edinburgh, relating chiefly to the village of Dean, of which we used to read that it contained a race quite distinct from the race which inhabited Old Edinburgh, and with which it was hardly able to exchange thoughts, so different was its language. But here at any rate we have a most careful and scholarlike description, interspersed with most admirable illustrations of the sculptured stones that are still to be found in the Dean village. The author is a little reluctant to think of these stones being put into the museum and taken away from the place which they were wont to adorn. I am not quite sure I homologate—that splendid Scottish word we seldom hear out of Edinburgh—this contention. If

we were quite certain that the weather would respect those stones, that the architect would respect those stones, that the unprincipled builder would respect those stones, I would say leave them by all means where they are. We all know many instances to the contrary, and I do hope where any such stone is in peril, when the owner is selling the property containing such a stone to the speculator of dubious conscience, that he will not hesitate to extract the stone and put it here in our municipal museum. Lastly, we come to the paper—which we welcome—on the boundary edge of the whole scope of our club—the buildings at the east end of Princes Street and the corner of the North Bridge. That, of course, is outside Old Edinburgh, but it is becoming Old Edinburgh, and I should be sorry if a pedantry of antiquity made us exclude any such paper as that. The Edinburgh, as it was once called, was rapidly becoming Old Edinburgh, and it would be false modesty on the part of the Old Edinburgh Club if they excluded from our annual volume any paper so interesting as this on the buildings at the east end of Princes Street. Now I do not know that I should detain you any longer, but there are solemn thoughts connected with this subject which could not wholly be disregarded on an occasion of this kind. We have seen so much disappear, even those of us who do not feel ourselves in the last stage of senility. We know very well that the absolutely necessary warrants the sacrifice of antiquity, but we do not always feel that the plea of necessity is proved. It will be the task of the Old Edinburgh Club in season and out of season to bear testimony on behalf of antiquity where it is threatened by an unnecessary development of utility. Necessity was one thing—utilitarianism was another.

We should recollect—I hope we all recollect—that Edinburgh's face is its fortune. I know in the Council Chamber here they have recently been urging claims for converting Edinburgh into a manufacturing city, and at the same time preserving the fortune of its face. These objects are not very easy to combine. Sheffield and Newcastle are built on favoured sites, but their faces are no longer their fortunes, and I think it will be necessary for those who have the trusteeship of Edinburgh for the time being to remember very carefully that the combination which is sought by these projects is not very easy to obtain. Whether manufactures will ever come to Edinburgh, is a much more doubtful point. Manufactures are apt to settle where their own convenience calls, and it does not appear any great call of convenience has yet made them come to Edinburgh. When they strike out new

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ground they go to places where the rates are as low as possible—and likely to continue as low as possible, and they don't seek ancient cities with any such hope or expectation; but whether the benefit even then would be so great as supposed, I am a little sceptical. Manufacturers bring their own population; they will not accept the limited scale of employed population they find already there. They bring a population with them which is almost as liable to unemployment as any other class of the population, and it is not at all impossible that when seeking to remedy the distresses of Edinburgh by converting it into a manufacturing city you may not rather increase them. However, that is not for you or for me to do. I cannot help touching on it in passing—it would be for manufacturers to choose for themselves. At any rate while we are here without them, while we remain our own great historical city, while we are privileged to enjoy it without any unnecessary atmosphere of smoke save that which is used for domestic purposes, let us take care at any rate that as trustees for posterity we preserve the ancient historical metropolis as untouched as possible. You may have a new Edinburgh, but by no conceivable hypothesis will you have an Edinburgh more beautiful.

Mr. H. J. BLANC moved the election of Lord Rosebery as Hon. President, and Lord Provost Gibson, Sir Thomas Gibson Carmichael, Sir James Balfour Paul, and Professor Hume Brown as Hon. Vice-Presidents, which was agreed to. Mr. Walter B. Blaikie was elected President in succession to Professor Chiene, and Mr. J. B. Sutherland, S.S.C., Mr. H. J. Blanc, and Professor Chiene were elected Vice-Presidents, with Mr. Lewis A. MacRitchie as Secretary, and Mr. Hugh Carbarns as Treasurer. MR. BLAIKIE, the new President, in returning thanks, said that Edinburgh always turned for advice and assistance on almost every matter to Lord Rosebery, and he had taught the men of Scotland and particularly the men of Edinburgh, that it was possible to devote one's interest to local affairs without being parochial. Mr. William Cowan, Mr. John Geddie, Mr. William Baird, and Mr. John Hogben were elected Members of Council in room of Mr. Hippolyte J. Blanc, Mr. W. J. Hay, Professor G. Baldwin Brown, and Mr. W. B. Blaikie who retire.

The TREASURER submitted the financial statement, from which it appeared that the balance in hand was £60, 6s. 7d.

On the motion of Mr. THOMAS ROSS a hearty vote of thanks was awarded to the retiring office-bearers and members of council.

SIR JAMES BALFOUR PAUL, seconded by the LORD PROVOST, moved a vote of thanks to Lord Rosebery for presiding.

In reply, LORD ROSEBERY said that Sir James Balfour Paul had said of him that he was almost an Edinburgh man. He would venture to remind them that he was not almost, but quite, an Edinburgh citizen of very ancient standing. There was one practical suggestion he would like to make. He saw that many attractive walks had taken place under competent guidance, under the auspices of the association, over the ancient parts of Edinburgh. He was only speaking for himself, and he suspected he was speaking for others when he said they would gladly have had the opportunity of joining in these perambulations, but he suggested that they issue cards for their meets as foxhounds did, so that they might all assemble and know in what direction the hunt for antiquity would take place. That was a practical suggestion, and he left it as his last contribution to the meeting.