

Glasgow Toryism in 1797.

CAMPERDOWN CLUB.

ANY person who can still remember the fearful anxiety which prevailed over the length and breadth of this land, when the fatal news of the mutiny at the Nore struck the boldest hearts with dismay, must also recollect the universal joy which was felt when the intelligence of Duncan's glorious victory, over the Dutch fleet at Camperdown, was celebrated in every city and hamlet of Britain. Amid the fame of our naval triumph, the momentary delusion of our British tars was soon forgotten ; while, in the capture of De Winter and the elevation of Duncan to the peerage, the country exhibited at once its glory and its gratitude. It has been the fate of most heroes to obtain, in addition to the usual higher species of adulation bestowed on them by their countrymen, the lesser kindness of having their effigies made the loadstar to houses of public entertainment, and even to those smaller temples of pastime especially dedicated to jollification and merriment. How many countenances of our naval and military commanders have, in their day and generation, been seen swinging in front of our famous hostelrys or most comfortable taverns, even from the modern days of Marlborough to the yesterday of Wellington ! And, alas ! how many a time and oft has the scarlet coat of the long-departed soldier been metamorphosed into the blue jacket of the successively ascendant sailor. In our own day, for example, we have seen the portraiture of Wolfe changed by the pencil of some cunning limner into that of Rodney, and even the countenance of Nelson altered into that of Moore ! *Sic transit gloria mundi !* If it be so with signboards, those best emblems of popularity, so is it also with Clubs. The world-acknowledged but passing name, which has formed so many powerful links of companionship, loses in a few short years its charm. The flag

under which the past and passing generation occasionally have *fallen*, is at length struck, and younger men assemble under another banner. So has it been with many a fraternity, and so it now is with the CAMPERDOWN CLUB.

It was amid the rejoicings which followed the victory of the 11th October, 1797,* that a choice band of patriotic citizens first assembled to congratulate each other on the glorious result of British valour, and resolved that they should henceforth choose—as the symbol of the brotherhood which was that night established—the ever memorable epithet of Camperdown. The first meeting of this famous fraternity was held in a tavern in Trongate, at that time kept by the well-known Jane Hunter; and so numerous and respectable did the Club soon become, that the landlady saw it her interest to enlarge the Club-room, in order to retain the fast-increasing brotherhood. The members who founded this Club might be regarded as the very embodiment of the now almost forgotten *ism*—Toryism—in its most palmy days. They were, in fact, in sentiment very much like the great majority of their fellow-citizens who belonged to the higher and middle classes. They detested the French, without knowing much about them, and swore against democrats and democracy as most pestilential to the well-being of the social system. They were hence aristocrats in their own way, and in imitation of their idols, the great *fruges consumere nati*, they held that there was no wisdom to be relied on, save the wisdom of their ancestors. Unlike the wavering politicians of the present day, their creed was fixed and determined; and, as a proof of their faith, any man would have been deemed a fool or a foe to his country, who could imagine that any other individual could steer the

* On 21st November, 1797, the Corporation of Glasgow presented Lord Duncan with the freedom of the City, in a handsome gold box, “in testimony of the high sense which the Magistrates and Council entertain of the services performed by him to his country in his professional line, and in particular by the brilliant and important victory which he ob-

tained upon the 11th of October last, with the British fleet under his command, over the navy of Holland, in which the good conduct and bravery of the gallant admiral, and the officers and the crew of his fleet, were equally conspicuous, and objects of admiration.”

bark of the State save "the Pilot who weathered the storm." The points of the charter held by the original members of the Camperdown Club were—a firm belief in the divine right of kings, in the glorious and undivided union of Church and State, in the infallibility of Pitt, and in a sovereign contempt for all new-fangled doctrines about parliamentary reform or religious liberty. With such men and such sentiments, it is easy to conceive how every victory, whether naval or parliamentary, was individually and collectively hailed with satisfaction, and that the capture of every French lugger, or the sinking of every Spanish ship, proved a theme of universal jubilation; and as such events were not rare, but occurring almost every day about the close of last century, it is plain that there was no want either of stimulants to add to their jollification, or of subjects suitable for the Club sederunts.

Among the founders of this notable fraternity, whose eight o'clock evening meetings were frequent—the four o'clock one being confined to the anniversary dinner—it is perhaps necessary to mention one individual as an index to the others, for in this case it might truly be said that, *ex uno disce omnes*. The gentleman we allude to, was the late highly respected Mr Walter Graham, better known in the City, or rather in the coffee-room, by the sobriquet of the *General*. Of this notable personage, it may perhaps be safely affirmed, that during a long life, he was never known to change an opinion which he had once fairly adopted, either on religion or politics. He detested changes, and declaimed against every innovation even in that most mutable of mundane things—fashion; for, it is well known, that when all his contemporaries were ready to follow the suggestions of Messrs Millar & Ewing, or any other of the authorities on outward habiliments, he showed his contempt for such vagaries, by sticking to breeches and white worsted stockings, long after the oldest man in the City had discarded them. At the origin of the Camperdown Club, Mr Graham may be said to have been in the heyday of manhood, and a very fine specimen of humanity he was. Tall, erect, and with a lordly bearing, he strutted along the Trongate, cane in hand, with the

air of the wealthiest of the sugar aristocracy—a class of Glasgow society, which, in those days and for some time after, was in the ascendant, and with which interest he was in some way partially connected. He was the steady advocate of high discriminating duties in favour of Colonial produce, and was ever found to patronise rum rather than the choicest Glenlivet, although the latter belonged to our own native industry. The Club beverage, at the close of the century, and for many years thereafter, was for the most part limited to rum punch and rum toddy; and when it is recollected that every importer of sugar or molasses usually received, by each arrival from the West Indies, his half-dozen barrels of delicious limes, to present to his friends and companions, it is plain that there was no lack of that important ingredient to form the mixture, which, according to Glasgowian taste at least, was long accounted the nearest approximation to the nectar of the gods. On ordinary Club nights, each member sipped his tumbler of punch or toddy, according to his humour; but on anniversary occasions, every glass of punch was accompanied by a toast,—not, however, as in the present day, with the accessory of that foe to all hilarity—a regular set speech. The toast was given simply with “Here goes!”—and with “Here goes again!” it was swallowed. After the president had given the “King and Constitution,” and the “Hero of Camperdown,” each member in succession was left to give his own *say*; and although there were frequently above a score at the board, it rarely happened that the brotherhood separated before at least half a dozen rounds of healths and sentiments had been proposed by each, and swallowed by the whole.*

* At that period of Glasgow history, there were very few public dinners, and far fewer persons who could make speeches, than at the present moment, so particularly remarkable for solemn and distressing *claver-ing*—a passion which has, however, necessarily been on the increase since the passing of the Reform Act, which opened up the public platforms to all forward and wordy politicians. The practice is becoming every day more

and more a crying nuisance, and is calculated to banish, ere long, sensible men from scenes redolent of such senseless mouthing and servile drivelling. Would that some of our modern after-dinner speechifiers were possessed of the temperament of the great Lord Nelson, who, it is said, was only once afraid in his life, and that was when he was invited to a Lord Mayor's banquet, and was expected to make a speech!

Although the fame of Camperdown was soon somewhat dimmed by that of the Nile* and Copenhagen, and was almost lost in the blaze of Trafalgar, still the members did not forget their first love, but continued long to assemble under Duncan's banner. As years moved on, members necessarily moved off; and with them, some of the opinions and prejudices of the former age were cast off too. The Club was gradually weeded of its extreme opinions, and, a few years after the beginning of the new century, men were admitted to the brotherhood who could advocate the policy of Charles James Fox without running the risk of being tossed out of the window. When the humble annalist of the Camperdown Club was first permitted to join the circle at the annual dinner table of the 11th October—which was at that period laid out in the house of honest John Neilson, of London porter notoriety, and which, like all tavern dinner tables of the time, groaned under the weight of everything but a French repast—the aspect of the fraternity had much changed. For although rampant Toryism might still be seen represented by the honest "General," there was at least one worthy *Crum* of Whiggery to maintain the balance of power! The fact is, the Club was then composed of men of all shades of opinion; and although, from this circumstance, a sufficiently animated discussion was frequently heard, particularly at the period immediately preceding the Reform agitation, still there was never one word uttered that created more discord than was at once easily modulated into perfect harmony by a bumper or two of punch or toddy.

The last anniversary dinner of the Camperdown Club took place in the year 1829. It is associated in our recollection chiefly with the melancholy fact, that scarcely one person who was present that day is now in this vale of tears. The highest and the happiest of those whose tongues that night wagged so glibly are now silent and at rest; while the spirited verbal *passage des armes*, between the worthy and warm-hearted Doctor

* The *Glasgow Courier*, of 9th October, 1798, states that "the illuminations in and about the City were so brilliant, that the people who saw them from Mauldsie Law, near

Carluke (eighteen miles off), thought Glasgow must have been in flames." There was also an illumination in Glasgow, on the 20th April, 1801, for the victory at Copenhagen.

MacArthur and his bosom friend and constant companion, Mr James Crum, which that evening afforded so much fun and merriment to all, is now felt as one of those bright visions or conflicts that can never be repeated. Many happy hours have we spent with these two joyous beings. They quitted the scene of their constant companionship within a few days of each other, and like many others who knew them, the expression of our inmost heart was—"pax vobiscum!" The last Camperdown dinner, also, is associated in our recollection with a less grave, or rather, we should say, with a somewhat curious topic, which for some time occupied the attention of the Club. The subject was anent the posthumous celebrity which the half-mad and odd characters of a city or parish invariably obtain over their wiser contemporaries. The assertion was a startling one, yet, on thinking over it, every one had successively something to offer in support of its truth. The half-witted *natural*, who is found strolling through the nettled pathway of the country church-yard, is generally far better remembered than the departed pastor of the parish; and the fitful fancies of the one are often repeated, when the solemn warnings of the other are altogether forgotten. And so is it with the City oddity; for, even among the Provosts who sported chains about the middle of last century, who is so memorable as Dougal Graham who rung the skellat bell?* or who does not remember more of the traditionary tales about Bell Geordie, and of the wit that gained him his appointment, than of the important Bailie's ire that occasioned the poor bellman's dismissal? In addition to the stories repeated about those City characters, one told a tale about *Dall*,† the porter of the Mail Coach-office,

* Among the many stories which have floated down the stream of time connected with the hump-backed Dougal Graham, the following little anecdote may be noted:—Walking one morning along the Trongate, the bellman was accosted by an officer who had just returned from the American war, who, laying his hand on Dougal's hump, jeeringly asked what it was that he was carrying on his back? to which the witty

bellman at once replied, "It's Bunkerhill. Do you smell the gunpowder?"

† The following short extract is taken from a long and rather graphic picture of this singular looking personage, which appeared in the *Reformer's Gazette* newspaper:—

"The curious go to a menagerie, at feeding-time, and pay a shilling extra to see the wild beasts at supper. But that was nothing, compared with Dall's devouring a penny pie,

whose mouth, for size and capacity, would have shamed any of the largest specimens that ever graced the pannel of a Lad-lane stage-coach. Another hinted at the doings of *Wee Johnnie Robertson*, alias *Cuckoo*; another described the dancing talents of *Johnnie Hill*, the delight of the female frequenters of the public Washing-house; another the oratorical ravings and half-penny gatherings of *John Aitken*, the street preacher;* and, in fine, a fifth praised and repeated the glorious couplets of *Blin' Alick*,

or a triangular scone. One grand bite, and all was over. Down the whole concern went at a bound. The nose shook, the lip soaked in grease, or powdered with scone-flour, paused, while the tremendous cavern underneath gaped wide for more. Dall's raiment consisted of a queerish coat, corduroy knee'd breeks, rig-and-fur stockings, quarter-boots well dozed with tackets, and laced with leather whangs, a red comforter, the whole surmounted by a hat, generally a good deal bashed, from concussions caught in the course of his profession with trunks and other luggage of the mail-coach travellers. He belonged to the ancient fraternity of carriers, or bearers of burdens, now commonly called porters, but was more particularly a sort of hanger-on at, or *attaché* to, the old Mail Coach-office, which then faced the Tron steeple. The best place to see him, was either there or between King William and the French-horn close. When the coach was away, and time hung rather heavy on his hands, Dall might be seen with the boys, trying his powers at leap-frog, over the well-known row of old 24-pounder cannons that stood on end, along the edge of the 'plain-stanes,' opposite the Tontine, a feat that required considerable agility."

* A few humorous sketches, written by Mr G. Niel, of the eccentric characters who had flourished in Glasgow, were published by John Smith, bookseller, near the Post-office, Albion Street, about the year 1826; accompanied each by an engraved figure, and sold by him at a penny each. Among them were *John Aitken* the preacher, and "*Nosey*," a famous Saltmarket shopkeeper, who gained his nickname from having a large indentation

or hollow, extending below his brow, occasioned by an accident he met with ascending the Cross Steeple stairs to hear the music bells perform more powerfully. He changed the articles of his trade every now and then, from hats to hardware, &c., and became at last a kind of "*Patie a' things*," or what is now called a "broker," a term which at that time was scarcely known; in short, his life well accorded with the couplet which was placed before his comical looking portrait—

All trades he tried, but none could find,
To yield a profit to his mind.

About the period that these sketches were published, there were also living two rather eccentric poets, who at least gained somewhat of a Glasgow reputation. The one was William Riddell, by trade a baker. He was a broad, brawny, stout-built man, a good pugilist and wrestler. He composed some rather touching and tender letters, which I believe were printed in a small pamphlet form. These effusions, however, were nothing to what he himself styled his "cursing and swearing epitaphs," composed on Glasgow characters, which he used to recite with infinite gusto. The other small poet was James M'Indoe, a weaver, who issued a small publication, including a rather clever poem between two weavers, who, after drinking heartily, went to rectify the north-east inclination of the Cathedral spire. In a prize poem which was issued for the best inscription to be put upon Nelson's Monument after it was struck with lightning, it was supposed that his verses were the best. The concluding line, the only one remembered, was—
"Even gods are envious of a Nelson's fame!"

alias the *Glasgow Homer*—not forgetting the important fact, that this peripatetic minstrel was perhaps the first who circulated, among the *street* public, the news of that victory which had given the name to the Camperdown Club—news which he poured forth in the following never-to-be-forgotten stanza :—

“ Good news I have got, my lads,
For country and for town ;
We have gain'd a mighty fight,
On the sea at Camperdown !
Our cannon they did rattle, lads,
And we knock'd their top-masts down—
But the particulars you will hear
By the post, in the *afternoon* !”

The conversation of the last meeting of the Camperdown Club suggested the idea of our writing the history of the Club laureate ; and so we did, immediately after the wandering minstrel and patriotic improvisatore had bade adieu to this ungrateful and unpoetical world,—his death having occurred on the 9th February, 1830.*

* The Life of Blind Alick was printed in the *Scots Times*, on the 6th March, 1830, and afterwards reprinted, to a very limited extent, in a neat 8vo form, and privately circulated among a few bibliomaniacal acquaintances. Since that period, this *brochure* has been the quarry from which several

modern writers have drawn garbled extracts without any acknowledgment. In the APPENDIX to this volume, it is again printed as it first appeared when it received the approval of Sir Walter Scott, Mr John G. Lockhart, and other literary authorities of the day.