

Youthful Frolics of Glasgow.

BANDITTI CLUB.

ABOUT the same period in which the Gegg Club was holding its most famous meetings, and when the night Police of the City was in the forlorn state already described, a Club of young, gay, and adventurous spirits assembled, for amusement to themselves, at the expense of their neighbours, more particularly of the old men and Highlanders who, at that time, were the chosen guardians of the town's rest and property. Being all men of rather a *Tom and Jerry* disposition, few nights were passed, on which the Club met, that some prank was not performed which called forth the innate bravery and forwardness of one or other of the brotherhood. Boxing a Charley, or changing a sign-board, was an affair of weekly occurrence; and so sharp were they of scent, and so rapid of pace, that in spite of all their tricks, it never happened to be the fatal lot of any one of them to appear before the then dreaded bars of either the *public* Police-office, or the more *private* "Blackhole of Culcutta" Court-hall, known by the appellation of "the Chaumer."

The CLUB to which we now refer was called the BANDITTI. Startle not, however, gentle reader! We are not going to introduce you to anything akin to the famous "Forty Thieves," whose cavern in the wood was discovered by the eaves-dropping Ali Baba. No, certainly; for although the club of game fellows which we are about to illustrate, had nicknamed themselves *Banditti*, they in truth committed no murder save on their own health, and no robbery save on their own purses. They were a band of ardent spirits, who laughed and quaffed, "sitting late, drinking late,"

as Charles Lamb hath it, with "bosom cronies;" who always felt snug in their own comfortable rendezvous, and when they quitted it, paraded the midnight streets of Glasgow quite safely during the reign of the six-foot monarch Mitchell, while he sat on the throne of the Police-office; and who likewise might have survived even the Banditti-destroying powers of Hardie and Graham, had not the goddess Hygeia and her consort Hymen both interfered, ere many years had passed, to shut the lodge for ever!

It was about the year 1808 that this Club first commenced its sittings, which were held, like those of many other congenial fraternities of the period, in that street of all streets—then famous for dining and supping, for music and masonry, and fun and frolic—called *Gibson's Wynd*, and now better known by the more aristocratic title of Prince's-street.* It was, in fact, under the roof-tree of one of the many contributors to good cheer in this street, known latterly by the name of Gardner, that this brotherhood sometimes dined, but more frequently supped, and still more often met for geggery and gossip, over repeated libations of rum punch and whisky toddy. What a change has taken place in tavern dinners in Glasgow since the days that Gardner or Haggart were the chief purveyors of Club entertainments! There it was that that table literally groaned under the weight which was placed upon it. We ourselves have seen turkeys roasted and turkeys boiled, rounds of beef and roasted sirloin,

* Gibson's-wynd was named after Walter Gibson, once a Provost of Glasgow, who erected the great tenement at the corner of Saltmarket and this wynd, and which, in the days of M'Ure, stood "upon eighteen stately pillars or arches, and adorned with the several orders of architecture, conform to the directions of that great architect Sir William Bruce; the entry consists of four several arches towards the court thereof." In consequence of several alterations being made upon the property to meet the altered demands of the day, a part of one of the walls fell on the 3d March, 1814, and killed Mrs

Bishop, while several other persons were severely wounded. And on Sunday morning, 16th Feb., 1823, the greater part of the tenement fell with a tremendous crash, shattering a portion of a house on the opposite side of the street. On the preceding day, the inhabitants had been warned to quit the house, and only one man was killed; a woman was taken alive out of the ruins. The fall of this house caused many of the houses in Saltmarket to be taken down, which altered altogether the external appearance of the street. It was fatal to the old houses with wooden fronts.

mutton boiled and mutton roasted, with many other *light* articles of this sort paraded all at once, and filling the low-roofed apartment with a flavour so heavy as to be almost sufficient to “choke off” any one at all troubled with dyspepsia. In those days, French cookery was altogether unknown, either in the private dining-room or in the tavern club-room of the City of St. Mungo. Heavy dinners, in fact, ruled paramount everywhere, save in the houses of the mean and stingy; and although it was said that a rather celebrated City divine had a peculiar and specific grace for every sort of dinner over which he was called to offer a benediction, it is certain that when called to do this office either at Gardner’s or Haggart’s, he found it ever to be his bounden duty to commence his “grace before meat,” according to the formula reserved chiefly for the most hospitable houses of his flock, with the well known invocation of “Bountiful Jehovah!”*

But while, as we have already said, these Prince’s-street *restaurants* were long known for good and hunger-appeasing fare, Gardner’s in particular, was also peculiarly celebrated as the mystic temple chosen for introducing to the lofty knowledge of Free-Masonry, many of our more curious citizens. It was, in fact, in a portion of this tavern—well adapted, from its being easily shut off from the observation and ken of the “cowan” world, for carrying on the occult ceremonial no doubt fixed on by the builders of Solomon’s Temple—that the opening the eyes of the blind to the transcendent light of Masonry, and of raising the poor “Apprentice” to the highest degrees of the craft, ever and anon took place; and where, through the traditions of the apostolic successor of the architect of the first Temple in Jerusalem—at that time represented in Glasgow by a learned cobbler—some of our most notable townsmen were transformed, in one night, from mere “Master Masons” to “Knights of the Holy Sepulchre;” and

* The Rev. John McLeod of the Chapel of Ease. He was rather a droll individual, and had a curious arch look on telling a story. His remark was, when Dr Chalmers came to Glasgow, and was in the heyday of popu-

larity, “Weel, I mind mysel’, when I came first to the Chapel o’ Ease, they were payin’ tippence a piece for a seat on the poopit stairs. Every dog has its day!”

it may be easily imagined that, after the hot supper and its adjuncts, which the recipients of this honour were accustomed to give to those who had been instrumental in "raising them," each and all of the new-fledged knights felt equally proud and equal even in rank, with those who, in the days of the Crusades, first won the Holy City from the grasp of the Infidel!

But we are forgetting the Banditti, while we are sketching the comfortable house in which they met. To return, then, to our Club, which we have already said was composed of youthful sparks, for, while in other fraternities there was always a knot of old stagers which served as a board of control over the more forward, there was not a single Bandit among the whole group that was much beyond the age of majority. They could all boast of having young blood in their veins, and, what is more, felt that that blood was by no means stagnant. Hence the evening meetings were characterised by an exuberance of youthful fun and frolic, by every species of badinage, and by the exhibition of the truly French feeling of "vive la bagatelle!" Several of the truly "merry men" sang well, and some of them possessed histrionic powers of no ordinary description; and it so happened that when conversation lagged, which, however, was not frequently the case, there was no lack of music to prevent the walls wearying for want of sound, while now and then the story of "Alonzo the brave and the fair Imogen" was repeated, in a manner that made the listeners almost imagine the "candles burned blue!" It is easy to conceive that such spirits would try many odd street pranks, particularly at a period when the police jurisdiction was so limited, and when, in particular, the watchmen were so dozy and effete; and it is but too true that they did so. To the poor imbeciles of night guardians the Banditti exhibited always a decided hostility, considering them most superfluous appendages to the street lamps, then barely sufficient to make darkness visible—the tell-tale glories of gas being as yet in the womb of futurity; and, consequently, on every good opportunity which offered, the members of that Club never failed practically to shew their enmity towards them. The result was, that to those caricatures of watchmen some of the members of the Banditti

were particularly obnoxious, from the liberties which were frequently taken with the absurd police-boxes at that time awkwardly stuck up on the sides of the streets, whereby box, Charley, and lantern were all rolled over on the pavement. There was one box, among the many elsewhere, which was placed on the kerb-stone at the head of the New-wynd, particularly convenient for receiving a Club compliment, as the midnight members wandered homeward from Prince's-street; and many a hitch that said box got into the street, leaving the occupant to find his way out, with his demolished lantern, as he best could. Some time after this, however, a more vigorous set of men began to be infused into the police force; and even before the renowned John M'Larty took up his station on the north side of the Trongate, an occasional running fight was obliged to be maintained, by all the wayward sparks, till the police boundary was crossed, which at that time was on the west of St Enoch's burn. When John M'Larty, however, entered on the office of calling the hours and wielding the clappers, such pranks as the Banditti indulged in could not well be carried on. He was, in fact, too strong and burly a fellow to be trifled with, and the consequence was, that the members of the Club were obliged to enter into an armistice with him before he had passed a winter on his beat. It was, however, during the earlier period of Glasgow Police history, when the watchmen were almost all old Highlanders and full of superstitious fears; when stories about wandering spirits were, from the newspaper controversy on the subject, in everybody's mouth; and when, in particular, the celebrated "Stamford ghost," played off with so much dexterity, was walking regularly at midnight, inducing, for a length of time, many timid beings to keep closer to their firesides than they otherwise would have done,—that one night a discussion was raised in the Banditti Club, whether or not it would be practicable to get up such a ghost as would frighten the lieges as much as the one at Stamford, and which would afford, especially to the fraternity, amusement in the way they liked the most. Various schemes which the ardent imaginations of the conclave, sharpened by Gardner's punch, suggested, were started and

discussed. At length it was determined that something of the Don Juan spectre kind might be attempted. Considering the dangers and difficulties, however, which might follow the undertaking, it was determined that *one* cavalier would not do; so it was at once resolved that the cabalistic *nine* should be the number of the ghost-like troop, and that an early night should be chosen to carry the hobgoblin freak into execution. There was no difficulty in getting nine of the boldest of the Banditti to volunteer for this strange duty; the great difficulty consisted in finding nine quiet and steady horses to carry them. The idea that Munn, so long known in Ingram-street as a stabler and horse-setter, would not be unwilling to serve them on this occasion, was started, and a deputation was thereupon named to ask his assistance. Munn was a very useful fellow in many respects—having been a sort of purveyor-general to the Club, in all things appertaining to horse flesh; and although it was well known that he ever kept a pretty steady eye on his own interest, he at the same time contrived to be on very happy terms with each member of the Banditti. The proposal for the midnight parade was consequently whispered to the horse-setter, who, at first, threw cold water on it, urging as a reason that, if discovered, the whole party engaged in the freak would be sent to Botany Bay, there to cool their heels for their folly. To carry out the proposal without Munn's assistance was impossible. It was needful, therefore, to support the claim which the individual members of the Club had upon him with every argument they could muster, and particularly with the bold assertion, that they defied any one of all the watchmen even to get within reach of them. This advocacy, coupled with sundry tumblers of toddy, at length softened the heart of the good-natured Munn, and the advocates having promised him their everlasting support—which, alas! it was ere long out of the power of many to give—the preliminaries were agreed to, and the necessary preparations made for carrying the project into execution. The night was accordingly fixed upon, and “the meet,” as the hunting term goes, was arranged to take place at the back of Scarlet-hall, a somewhat retired villa at the eastern extremity of the City, possessed

at that time by a rather crusty old gentleman of the name of Young, who assuredly would not have hesitated to fire off his fowling-piece at any such intruders, as he was wont to do at those who but too frequently stole his apples. Fortunately, however, there was little at that season of the year, either in the garden or grounds, to protect, and the old gentleman, in winter, when he drew on his nightcap, which was generally at an early hour, could not possibly be disturbed by any such midnight marauders as the Banditti Club. It being feared, as well it might, that the light of the glimmering lamps which then lined the streets at respectable intervals would be insufficient for the grand display, the happy thought occurred to one of the members to have the ears of the horses saturated with phosphoric oil, which would no doubt add to the light, and would, besides, heighten the effect of the pantomimic procession, from the lambent smoke which would be thereby emitted. To render the movement of the horses along the street as silent as possible, it was resolved to cover their feet with cork. This was no easy matter to effect without detection, but it was by-and-by got over, together with many other little difficulties; and lo! on a dark night, in the month of December, a little before the Cathedral bell had sounded the witching hour, the Bandits, with their steeds under the guidance of Munn, had assembled at Scarlet-hall. The muster-roll of the *nine* who had volunteered to do duty was called. The ominous number, famous for its cabalistic quantity, from the days of Darius to the more modern days of the Freischutz, answered to their names. The horses' feet were soon shod, or rather tied up, in cork soles; their ears were already glowing with phosphoric light; a white sheet was next cast over the body of each steed; while the nine riders, equipped in white drawers, shirt, and nightcap, leaped on their backs, ready for a start. The appearance which the Bandits had in the eyes of each other was so horrible and ghastly as at once to bespeak for their project the most complete success! and having each swallowed a bumper of Hollands, no doubt to inspire them with *Dutch* courage, they wheeled into Indian file, and commenced their march to the City, while Munn bolted off to his stables to await their arrival.

The mysterious horsemen proceeded onward along the Gallowgate, slow and noiseless, like the hunters amid the floating mists of the Black Forest, in the famous Walpurgis Night, producing in the minds of those who, through the murky gloom, might espy them from the foot pavement, a degree of superstitious awe and fear which may be better imagined than described. Suffice it to say, that the aged guardians of the night, for whose especial benefit the pantomime was got up, were all in the greatest possible agitation and alarm—believing, no doubt, that the sight was supernatural; and, under this feeling, each took to instant flight up the first close which offered shelter. The cavalcade, after producing the necessary terrifying effects upon the few who at that late hour were in the Gallowgate, at length reached the Cross, which was passed in silence. Solemn and slow the horsemen moved onward without a word spoken and without suffering the least molestation, until they reached the head of King-street—when lo! a fellow, inspired with the contents of at least half-a-dozen glasses, which instead of adumbrating his brain, rather opened his eyes to the reality of the cavalcade being not spirits but real flesh and blood, thought fit, under this pretty sound impression, to arrest its progress by falling pell-mell on the second file of the procession. The attack, however, though furious, was instantly met by the brawny arm of the Bandit, who, by one fell blow on his *caput*, left him senseless on the roadway. At this moment an alarm of fire was raised; and by the time the ghostly procession had reached the head of Jamaica-street, the rattles of the terrified watchmen were in motion, and the sound of the fire-engines was borne along. Satisfied with their exploit, and that it would be dangerous to lose much more time, the cavalcade crossed the boundary which cut them off from the power of the police jurisdiction; and thereafter, mending their pace, they entered a field near Willow-bank, unrobed themselves of their habiliments, and, by different routes, got safe to Ingram-street, where the stabler was ready to house the horses, and to give a *deoch-an-doruis* to the Bandits. Of the prank itself, few believed that it had been really accomplished; and the many odd stories that got wind

about the ghostly procession which at midnight had passed through the City, were attributed to the effects of the narrators having dipped too deep in their evening potatoes. Some, however, swore that Old Nick himself led the van of the ghostly cavalcade, and assuredly his representative was by no means a shabby one; and, also, that the number of his attendants far outstripped the weird company at Alloway Kirk.

Such was one of the many, though perhaps the most remarkable, of the freaks in which, during the existence of the Banditti Club, the several members indulged; and it will convey, better than anything else we can adduce, an idea of the character and spirit of the fraternity, which met, for several years at least twice a-week, within the *devil-raising* house of Gardner. It may easily be supposed that a Club, which was so dependent on the extravaganzas of youth, could not long exist. Before advancing years and growing sense, the spirit of the Banditti fell prostrate; the members, in fact, were soon drawn away by other influences from their joyous den; and the fraternity, after fulfilling, in many laughable ways, the nominal link of their union, at length "ceased their funning," and returned into the bosom of general society, not much the worse from having assumed for a season the appellation of Bandits!