

The Radical War.

WATERLOO CLUB AND THE WET WEDNESDAY OF THE WEST.

IMMEDIATELY after the victory of Waterloo had procured the pacification of Europe and sealed the destiny of Napoleon Bonaparte, a set of jovial-hearted fellows, who always preferred punch to water-gruel and Momus to melancholy, united themselves into a Club that met in a house which, though now not so celebrated as at that period, bore the sign of Britain's most memorable conflict. The members of the fraternity were at first limited to five-and-twenty; but its glory, spreading like the fame of Waterloo, which had been chosen as the nominal link of the union, produced a large addition to both ordinary and honorary members of the brotherhood. Honours and titles being the fashion of the period, it was not likely that the members of this Club would withstand the infection: the truth was, that all of them did feel an anxiety about distinction; and, in imitation of the extended Order of the Bath, the Waterloo Club order of knighthood was established. The original twenty-five members assumed the title of "Knights Grand Cross," and added to their signatures G.C.W. The ordinary members that of "Knights Commanders," with K.C.W. The honorary members were simply designated "Companions." Every night, for some years, did this worthy order meet in deep divan, to swill each his best-loved stomach elixir, and to raise the *devil* about ten from the kitchen of the Waterloo; and when his august and satanic majesty did arrive, in all his hot and mouth-burning honours, the knights, whose appetites and teeth never refused to do their office, were not long in making a *devil* of him!

As a key to this once famous knot of congenial spirits, we may mention the following story, told of one of the knights grand cross—a well-known gentleman who, for many years, had been in the habit of raising the devil, not only by the magic of the cook in the Waterloo, but elsewhere by the mysterious Masonic sounds of *one, two, three*, and thereafter laying him pretty deep, not in the *Red Sea* of generous Port, but in the muddy ocean of cream-of-tartar punch! Being at one time called to serve as a jurymen, and being determined, when life and death were at issue, to give a clear opinion, he resolved most judiciously that the conglomeratory atmosphere of the Waterloo should be avoided by him during the continuance of the Circuit Court of Justiciary, to which he had been summoned. Often, as he returned from the close and ill-ventilated court at night, did the Club and its refreshments shoot athwart his recollection; thirst and inclination urged him to a midnight beaker, but prudence and propriety made him keep his resolution. To the valiant knight, a week without a visit to the Waterloo seemed interminable; but the worst of evils will come to an end, and so did that of the Circuit. Relieved on Saturday evening from his arduous duties, and happy in the approbation of the Court for his attention and services to his country, the ex-jurymen hastily bent his steps towards the Club-room, and was there hailed by the joyous acclamations of the brotherhood. What a glorious night ensued! Story followed story, the roof rang with laughter and merriment; and not a few talked till the tongue refused to do its office. The witching hour of midnight—that foe to fun and good company—arrived, bringing along with it the remembrance of home. The Club closed, and the ex-jurymen, “happy and glorious,” staggered to his bed-room. Sleep soon sealed his eyelids, and seemed determined to hold the bachelor longer than usual in his leaden grasp. The morning sun arose; the Sabbath bells rattled loud and long; the dinner hour passed; and twilight again began to encompass the City;—and yet neither of these had the power of breaking the death-like slumber of the member of the Waterloo. Alarmed for her master’s health, the servant maid knocked, about six o’clock, at the door of his apartment, opened it,

and demanded, in a trembling tone, if he was unwell? The ex-juryman, who had been dreaming of indictments, judges, and panels, started, at the well-known voice, from his long-pressed pillow; and, as if still in a trance, and hearing the tinkling of the Laigh Kirk bell for evening service, exclaimed, in the greatest trepidation, "Good God! are the Lords come back again?" *

For many years did the knights and knights grand cross of the Waterloo Club meet under the canopy of the well-known tavern which bore the name of Britain's greatest victory; and many times and oft was the health of the hero of that successful struggle there drank, amid loud and reiterated hurrahs. The members were chiefly of the good old Tory school, being imbued with sentiments of the most unbounded loyalty to the sovereign and to all other constituted authorities. It will consequently appear by no means strange, that when the threatened outbreak of Radicalism occurred in 1819, not a few of those knights at once joined the citizen corps of Sharpshooters; and, from some of them having been connected with the previous Rifle regiment, commanded by the brave Colonel Corbet, they at once obtained leading posts in the new body commanded by the equally brave Colonel Samuel Hunter. Never, perhaps, during the existence of the Waterloo Club, were the nightly meetings of this brotherhood better attended than during the winter and spring of 1819-20; and although the *sederunts*, from the necessity of being present at the early morning drills, rarely went beyond the hour of ten, yet, during the period of their sittings, the members generally contrived to render themselves tolerably comfortable for the night. It was, in particular, during the eventful April week of 1820, when the fearful incubus of threatened dangers, like many other imagined evils, or rather political nightmares, weighed on the minds of the denizens of Glasgow, that the Club was most crowded; and it was from the pen of one of those who then attended these nightly orgies, that the following chronicle of that exciting time has been preserved for the pecu-

* In those days, as at present, the City bells were rung at the hour when the Circuit Judges came to Glasgow.

liar delectation of an ever-recurring posterity, and which is now presented under the too true title of

The Wet Wednesday of the West.

There is no town in Scotland, Greenock always excepted, which, right or wrong, has gained for itself the unenvied distinction of being blessed with so much rain as Glasgow; and, perhaps, on this account, some might think that its titular saint should have been St Swithin rather than St Mungo. Be that as it may, it may at least be safely affirmed, that few cities exist where umbrella-makers and menders have so good a chance of making a fortune, and in which, had it been as in the Catholic times of old, our lamented townsman, Mr Macintosh, would most likely have arrived at canonization. If the rainbow, that sign of comfort and hope to all flood-fearing people, be looked upon with satisfaction in countries often burned up with drought, it can easily be imagined how much more its prismatic colours must be regarded with delight by the denizens of the watery western metropolis. While the citizens of Glasgow have been, from this peculiarity of climate, necessarily deprived but too frequently of the advantages of outdoor amusements, and while, also, it may be inferred, that there is not sufficient sunshine to render the streets, like those of Paris, the successful scene of constant turmoil and revolution, they have, on the other hand, experienced the countervailing blessings which heavy outpourings of rain can produce, by dispersing monster meetings of malcontents, and putting to the route an inflamed and turbulent mob of the unwashed. On no occasion, perhaps, was this better exemplified than in the spring of 1820, and on the day, too, which has since been happily known by the epithet of "the wet Radical Wednesday of the west."

To those who have only entered into this breathing world since the passing of the Reform Bill, it is almost impossible to conceive the under current of dissatisfaction which flowed throughout the social body, not only in England but in Scotland, for at least a year or two before the famous trial of Queen Caroline, and the never-to-be-forgotten *non mi*

recordo evidence of Majocchi. An immoral Court, a venal Aristocracy, and a rotten borough Parliament had done much to sap the well-known loyalty of the middle classes; while bad trade, want of employment, and dear food afforded abundant pabulum for noisy demagogues to irritate and excite an idle, ill-requited, and starving populace. And when, in particular, it is recollected that to these causes were superadded the encouraging efforts of the hired spy, it is easy, at least for those who lived during the period in question, to arrive at the result which followed, while it is impossible to look back without sorrow and disgust at the consequences. While a spirit of hostility to all constituted authority was fermenting in the minds of the working-classes, and when, through trickery and espionage, men were roused to revenge their supposed oppressions and imagined wrongs, by displays of physical force and agrarian threatenings, a feeling of fear and of spoliation was necessarily engendered in the minds of the timid who had anything to lose. Class was, in fact, attempted to be set against class, the servant against his master, and the manufacturer against his workman. Society was disorganised and out of joint; and, woe to the memory of those men, then in high places, who, it is feared, did all in their power to encourage and perpetuate this antagonistic game of politics. The people were goaded into a fever, which ended in political madness; and, what was worse, the result was judicial murder!

As a key to the extraordinary excitement that prevailed in Glasgow about the period to which we allude, it may be mentioned that, in addition to many out-door meetings of the working-classes, called for the ostensible object of ameliorating their condition, and at which the orators showed to starving men, that the only panacea for all their calamities was to be found in Universal Suffrage, Annual Parliaments, and Vote by Ballot, scarcely a night passed, during the autumn and winter of 1819, on which the streets of Glasgow were not crowded with an idle populace, ready for tumult, or the Magistrates reading the Riot Act, and the King's cavalry clearing the thoroughfares. The feeling reached such a pitch that respect was refused even to the authorities of the City; and, on one occasion, the

Chief Magistrate himself was obliged, in order to support the dignity of his office, to check the apparent contempt of a Town-hall assemblage, by bawling out "Off hats to the Lord Provost!"—But to our tale.

For several mornings during the end of March and beginning of April, 1820, might be seen many hundreds of young men, dressed in dark green uniforms, and armed with rifles, hurrying through the streets at least an hour before the City bells summoned the labourer to his work, in all the eagerness of feverish anxiety, towards George-square—at that moment the central rendezvous of the "Glasgow Sharpshooters." The object of this early hurry-scurry was, to await there the arrival of the London mail, with the view of meeting any emergency which might arise in Glasgow, from any threatened or rumoured rising in the manufacturing districts of England. What wondrous courage was it, in men accustomed to feather beds and late hours, to leave them so early, and to sally forth amid mist and murkiness, as well as to be subjected to cold and contumely! In the face of all these difficulties, however, it is a stubborn fact that for many days eight hundred good men and true assembled in front of the statue of Sir John Moore, ready to sacrifice the foe or themselves. In the hour of supposed peril, the youthful members of this truly national guard had enrolled themselves; and, about six months previous to the time we would now illustrate, they had received at the Barracks their implements of war. And although the period for their drill was the depth of winter, they—fearless of catarrh and rheumatism—boldly turned out in grey daylight within the precincts of the College Garden, even when that park was a foot deep with snow, to fit themselves to be a safeguard to their fellow-citizens against the agrarian excitement, which had been in great measure instigated and brought to a head by the hired spy and other paid incendiaries. During the winter, too, a company of these citizen soldiers had met nightly in the Laigh Kirk Session-house as a City guard-house, and there remained, on watch and ward, till the sun's rising gave bright light and renewed confidence to their terrified fellow-citizens. Many times and oft, during this inclement winter, had detachments from this

central body perambulated Calton, Bridgeton, and Gorbals, with loaded rifles and fixed bayonets, to spy out the body of Radicals who bulked so largely in the brain of certain alarmist newspaper editors. But although this military display was rather calculated to cause than to prevent attack, it is only fair to state that, in spite of all the ill-conditioned, irritable, and starving workmen who were nightly afloat, not a single party of malcontents were ever hostilely encountered during these nocturnal wanderings. As a sort of recompense for this risking of health and life, from exposure to the winter's cold and the Radical's pike or *cleg*,* the citizen soldiers never failed to be regaled, at their own cost, with pies and porter in the Session-house; and not unfrequently, on the very table where, in the forenoon, stern Presbyterian ministers tabled motions against the immoralities of the age, might be seen piles of silver staked to meet the result of a round game at loo, or what was then better known by the title of "the lively"—a pastime which was greedily adopted by those volunteers to while away the watches of the night.

For many days previous to the famous *wet Wednesday* was the town kept in hot water by the most threatening reports of approaching riot and rebellion; and, from Sunday morning, when the famous or rather infamous inflammatory placard was posted at the corner of the streets, all the public works and factories were closed, while the miners in and around Glasgow struck work, and wandered through the City in idle crowds, or collected in gloomy groups about the corners of the leading thoroughfares. As a safeguard and protection against lawless aggression, troops were being called in from every quarter to meet the now imagined rising. The Glasgow garrison, which at the present hour (1855) can scarcely boast of being able to turn out one hundred men, consisted, on the morning of the day which we are about to illustrate, of two regiments of Hussars, with the

* The *cleg* or *horsefly* was an instrument somewhat of the nature of a shuttlecock, having a steel point three inches long, loaded at the head with lead, and dressed with

feathers so as to guide it when thrown. It got its name from being intended to be used principally against cavalry.

addition of the Dumbartonshire and Ayrshire regiments of Yeomanry Cavalry, and the Glasgow Light Horse; three regiments of Infantry; the Sharpshooters; and two field-pieces; while the whole was commanded by General Bradford, assisted by an efficient staff. With such a disciplined and well-affected force, at once ready to act on any emergency, there was no fear felt on the part of any one who could coolly reflect. But so unhappily was the public mind imbued with imaginary dangers, and instigated by marvellous stories regarding the wide-spread disaffection of the people, that many timid persons left the town or kept themselves steadily within their own habitations. The proclamations of the Magistracy, too, ordering all the shops to be shut at six, and all the inhabitants to be indoors at seven, instead of tending to inspire courage created fear; while flying rumours, from the neighbouring manufacturing towns and villages, of mustering hordes of rebels, increased the general alarm.

Such was the precise state of matters when, on the morning of the 5th April, 1820, as one of the Glasgow Sharpshooters, I leaped at five o'clock from my bed, at the reveillé sound of the bugle, and hastened to the rendezvous of the regiment. When I reached the square, it was evident, from the number of green-coated individuals pouring in from every side, that, as the danger increased, the determination to meet it was more decided. Before six o'clock, raw and murky though the morning was, I found myself among 800 bayonets, drawn up in a column of companies, ready to act at a moment's notice. For the honour of the corps, the muster-roll on being called showed few absentees, while several individuals answered to their names who were rarely seen on other more showy occasions. The gallant Colonel Hunter stood, as he said himself, "on his own Galloway feet," at the head of the column, having for some time dispensed with his Bucephalus, whose amblings under fire were rather calculated to dissolve the copartnery of horse and rider; and, after having with a stentorian voice called "Attention," commanded an instant examination to be made as to the contents of each soldier's cartouch-box, to discover whether it was that morning filled with the due number of

ball-cartridges that had been formerly issued, and whether the flints of the rifles were fitted for producing immediate ignition. This duty over, the command to "Fix bayonets" was next given; and when "Shoulder arms" was added, there were in an instant as many bristling points thrown up as might have wooed down the fiercest thunderbolt from heaven without injury to mother earth! The corps never appeared in greater spirits, nor more ready to rush, if need be, against the whole Radical pikes that might muster; although it must in justice be added, that there was as yet no semblance of a single hostile pike to put that courage to the test. In silence and suspense the Sharpshooters thus stood, till at length a messenger arrived declaring that the London mail had reached the Cross, and that as yet all was quiet in England. The arms were instantly grounded, the bayonets unfixed and returned to their scabbards, and the order for dismissal was given, with a *caveat*, however, that the green *continuations* of the uniform should not be doffed, as was customary after the morning's parade, but should be worn during the whole day, to meet any sudden emergency that might arise. And Heaven knows that not a few occurred on that eventful Wednesday, before the City clocks had chimed midnight.

With an appetite, which the cold sharp air of an April morning certainly did not appease, I hurried home, and sat down to a breakfast, to which, like another Dugald Dalgetty, I did ample justice, not knowing, in those ticklish times, when I might get another. During the breaking of eggs, the bolting of ham, and the swallowing of tea and toast, I was beset with a thousand queries as to the threatened dangers, which no doubt were considered to be imminent, especially when the *Glasgow Courier* was referred to, and which the evening before gravely put forth the following paragraph:—"That a general attack is intended to be made by the Radicals in this City on Wednesday is now beyond doubt. Cathkin braes is the site chosen for the encampment!" Notwithstanding this astounding announcement, I endeavoured to soothe all fears, on the ground of the strong military force of regulars in the City, and particularly on the determined attitude which had been taken by the Sharpshooters and

the Yeomanry Cavalry to assist in maintaining order and suppressing riot.

On sallying forth to the streets which, during the forenoon, were filled with crowds of ill-conditioned individuals, it was plain that a crisis was approaching, and if an outbreak had begun, it seemed quite plain, from the inflammable materials which abounded on every hand, that it would not, under the most favourable circumstances, have been suppressed without bloodshed. The civic authorities, alarmed for the safety of the City, sat in solemn conclave during the whole day in the Buck's Head Hotel, while the military chiefs held their council of war within the same place. Pickets of dragoons rode out on all the roads leading to and from the town, to bring in every information they could collect, and especially to announce the approach of any body of Radicals that might be marching towards the City. One trooper after another arrived and departed, but still there was no cry heard of any coming combatants. At length, just as the clock struck three, a rumour flew like lightning through the town that thousands were on the road from Paisley, and would ere long enter the City. The very whisper of such intelligence created a universal panic. Shopkeepers at once put on their shutters, locked their shops, and hurried home. The principal streets presented the image of a siege. In a few minutes the Horse Artillery rattled along the causeway, and took up a position at each end of the bridge across the Clyde; while strong bodies of both Cavalry and Infantry hurried down at double quick pace to support this important position. The buglers of the Sharpshooters blew the assembly-call, and hundreds of the green-coated soldiers might be seen hastening to George-square. The whole day was gloomy and showery; but, at this moment, the windows of heaven opened and poured down such a torrent of rain as fairly cleared the streets of all loiterers, and left scarcely a soul thereon save the military, who, if they then encountered neither gun, pike, sabre, nor horse-fly, met with as severe a ducking as ever fell to the lot of any one who ever wore a uniform. The watery Saint had, in fact, taken forcible possession of the skies, and seemed determined to use his powers

as long as he could, and so effectually did he use them, that, by four o'clock, the redoubtable Falstaffian army of Paisley malcontents had dispersed into thin air, while the military had returned to quarters, and the Sharpshooters to their homes, without any immediate casualties being gazetted on either side, but, no doubt, with many *in futurum* from the cold and the rain to which they had been so mercilessly subjected.

Thinking that the day which had commenced so early and had been so bustling up to five o'clock might now "cease its funning"—drenched with rain, and not a little wearied—I hastened, like some of my campaigning brethren, to the shelter of my own fireside; while others, dreaming also that the day's military duties must now be over, retired to solace themselves with somewhat at *John Haggart's*, in Prince's-street, at that time the great rendezvous of bachelor Sharpshooters, in search either of a dinner at four or a rabbit at nine. On my arrival at my own house, where I found a group of anxious faces ready to welcome me, I soon doffed my dripping uniform, which I ordered to be placed before a blazing kitchen fire, and having donned my usual attire, sat down to a comfortable repast, in the hope of having nothing afterwards to do but go to bed, of which, from having caught a bad cold and sore throat, I was in some need. Under this comfortable belief, I scarcely allowed the City clocks to strike nine, before I consented to put my feet in hot water, swallow a gruel, and place my wearied limbs under the blankets. Forgetful of the past and of the future, I soon began to slumber, if not to sleep, when, just as I had arrived at a state of seeming unconsciousness, methought I had heard the echo of a bugle call. Was it a dream or was it reality? It was impossible for some minutes to tell. But, alas! another fell blast resounded on my ear, and I at once woke to the certainty that I must, in spite of sore throat and all other ills, again leave my comfortable and health-restoring resting-place, and prepare for another threatening conflict. I rang instantly for a light, which was at once brought, and, on its arrival, I espied my dried regimentals gaping to receive the limbs of the already exhausted feather-bed soldier. I at once leaped into my

Lincoln-green attire, buckled on my accoutrements, and seizing my rifle, which always stood by my bedside, sallied forth to the street, where, meeting a knot of those resident in the same locality, we fixed our bayonets, and hurried on, fearless of danger, towards the monument of the hero of Corunna.

The night, like the afternoon, was dark and dismal. The wind blew, and the rain rattled on the house-tops. The gutters gushed like rivulets, and scarce a lamp was able to withstand the extinguishing blast. To use the words of Burns—

“That night a child might understand,
The deil had business on his hand.”

And so it appeared to some of us, that the deil, if he had nothing worse to do, had at least been amusing himself with the bugle-horn of the Sharpshooters. On reaching the square, which we had now done for the third time that day, we were told that, in order to save us from the pitiless pelting of the storm, the quarter-master had got the neighbouring church of St George's open for our reception; and right glad were we to learn that we had so near a prospect of sacred shelter.

The scene which met the eye within this ecclesiastical edifice was perhaps one of the most striking that could well be imagined. Each pew was crowded with men fully equipped and ready for battle, each with his bayoneted rifle in his hand, eager to know and ready to execute his coming duty. A few glimmering candles, which had been hurriedly stuck up and down the church, tended to throw an air of gloomy grandeur over the silent and gaping corps. The whole scene and circumstances recalled Salvator Rosa's patriotic group of heroes assembled within the *Torrione del Carmine*, on the night when Massaniello sat in council deliberating on the liberty of Naples!

In the midst of this breathless silence, Colonel Hunter ascended the stairs of the pulpit, with certainly a heavier step than he often, no doubt, in boyhood had done when his father ministered to his Galloway flock, and

from that sacred spot delivered perhaps a more laconic and more telling discourse than ever fell from the lips of any one who had as yet *wagged his pow* therein! He told his patriotic followers that a few minutes before the bugle had last sounded, a rising had actually taken place in the east quarter of the City; that a Radical reveillé rattle had been beat; and that a knot of men had been seen marching in arms against the King! In such a state of matters it was necessary that the corps should remain all prepared, in case their services should be required. What varied thoughts swept athwart each listener's mind when these words were uttered must ever remain a secret; but from the universal cheer which followed, it was plain that the Sharpshooters were ready for every emergency. And long and patiently they waited, listening for the coming foe, but hearing nothing except the pelting storm, which, however, of itself, was sufficient to have put the most enthusiastic Radical *hors de combat*. And this, indeed, it is believed it accomplished; for the night passed slowly and silently on, till, at length, the Colonel finding that his corps was not called upon to act, wisely decided upon sending all home, except a company, which, under the command of Captain William Smith, was marched to Queen-street to guard the Royal Bank from Radical spoliation, which they certainly succeeded in doing, without any loss, except that of being deprived of so early a breakfast as was enjoyed by their fellow-soldiers, and of allaying, by their presence at home, the deep anxiety which reigned in the bosoms of mothers, wives, and sisters!

Many curious stories have been told of the expedients resorted to by wives, mothers, and sisters, to retain the gallant Sharpshooters within doors on this critical night. One had his rifle hid; another could not find his uniform; and another, who had just been married, was urged to remain at home, on the very prudent plea that "on such a night powder would not burn;" while others were very slyly told "that they might fecht any nicht but this!" It is believed, however, that in spite of the best efforts used to retain many from the rendezvous, there was scarcely a single individual who did not answer to his name, and who did not that night parade

within the hallowed precincts of St George's Church; and once there, it may easily be conceived that none could well steal away, when it is recollected that our redoubted friend, Mr William Black, then of Balgray, acted as sergeant of the door guard, with orders to let no one pass without due leave being granted.

Thus commenced and thus ended this famous day in Glasgow history—a day big with the threatenings of riot and rebellion—full of alarm and trepidation to many of her timid inhabitants—replete with the foolish fears of those who ought to have known better things—and marked by a military ardour on the part of the citizen soldiers, worthy of a better cause and a more dangerous enterprise; a day in which the elements conspired to cool excited imaginations, and to disperse the handful of miserable malcontents which nought but imbecility and madness could have roused to a threatening attitude; a day far more indebted to the outpourings of St Swithin's bounty than to the grave counsels of the civil and military governors of the City; in short, a day which proved that rain and Radicalism cannot co-exist, and that in the event of any similar turmoil being got up, as this certainly was most shamefully done, the fire-engine and a gravitation water-pipe would prove a far better means of quelling it than the six-pounder and the rifle! May we hope that we shall never again see another wet Radical Wednesday of the west; nor, what was worse, the shameless and disgusting consequences which followed in its wake?*

* We allude to the execution of the weak-minded poacher of Strathaven, James Wilson, who was hanged and beheaded at Glasgow, on the 30th August, 1820, as a party engaged in the absurd though treasonable outbreak which ended in the encounter at Bonnymuir. Although sentenced to death, little doubt was entertained that he would be ultimately pardoned. The jury had unanimsly recommended him to mercy. But, whatever may have been the reasons which induced his Majesty's Ministers to reject the solicitations of those who were anxious that Wil-

son's life might be spared, it is certain that they were egregiously mistaken in supposing that his execution would produce any good effect. The public sympathy was all on the side of the prisoner—a feeling, that he was unnecessarily sacrificed, seemed to pervade the immense mass of spectators assembled to witness his execution; and shouts of "Murder," intermingled with cries of "He died for his country," were incessantly repeated. Unfortunately for the Ministers, the better classes were very generally imbued with the same sentiments.

The Waterloo Club and its order of knighthood are now both defunct ; but, although the Grand Crosses, who are still alive, have all long since laid down their titles, we are certain, that should any of them ever, by accident, meet as *nightly* bottle companions, they can never forget the well known story of their vermilion-faced juryman brother, nor that of the many hairbreadth escapes from fire and flood which befell so many of the fraternity on the wet Radical Wednesday of the west !
