

I.

A FEW NOTICES OF MANNERS FROM THE OLDER COUNCIL-BOOKS OF
DUNDEE. By COSMO INNES, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

I have lately had occasion to examine the records of the burgh of Dundee, and was glad to find that the report of their having been destroyed in the siege or sack of the town during the civil wars was quite fabulous. They are in tolerable preservation, and, though neither so old nor so well kept as those of Aberdeen, reach to a much earlier period than Monk's siege; and I have no doubt, from the hasty glance I was able to bestow, that if Dundee had antiquaries as industrious as Aberdeen, they would find in these records materials for illustrating the history of the burgh and neighbouring territory, which have many points of great interest to the charter-scholar, and which would throw light on the manner of life among our old burghers—not the least interesting class of the population—from the 15th to the 17th century.

I must not stay to tell you of the good Earl David's return from the Crusades, and landing at Dundee, and how he bestowed the church and whole parish upon his monastery of Lindores in pure alms, in gratitude for his escape from the danger of the sea. The place throve under the monks; and the parish church numbered chapelries and altars richly endowed, and in great multitude. Let me read you a few of their names. [List of Chapels and Altarages omitted.] It helps to show us how those vast edifices, our older churches—too large for mere preaching use—were occupied. You can imagine the mighty nave of the Cathedral of Glasgow, or our own St Giles's, while still undivided, studded with such altars and chapels, with tapers burning, and priests chanting, and round each the little crowd of suppliants invoking each his patron Saint.

I have not yet unravelled the puzzle of the patron Saint of the burgh and his church. Dundee is generally said to have been under the guardianship of St Clement, and I have no doubt correctly; yet the parish church was dedicated to the Virgin, and its tithes were a very valuable possession of the Convent of Lindores.

It is worthy of remark, what a crowd of clergy there were under the old church in comparison with the five ministers of the Establishment who now divide the cure of souls of the burgh and parish.

The council-books of the burgh extend back to the year 1553. I have not noted the first dates of the Treasurer's books, but one of the earliest entries, and which I have marked as about 1530, is a list of theatrical properties, which may at first appear a singular sort of burgal possession; but we shall find it not unusual among our neighbours, north and south. Throughout Christendom, indeed, long before other theatrical representations had come into fashion, the Church had first encouraged, and at last tolerated, those rude representations of the scenes of the Old and New Testament, which, if they were at one time instructive to the ignorant, became in later ages nothing but gross caricatures and harlequinades, the more offensive for their constant use of sacred names, and their familiar representation of the most solemn scenes and persons. Aberdeen was rich in such pageants; and so early as 1442 the Town-Council thought it fit to prescribe the parts to be filled, and the expense to be borne, by the several trades of the burgh. Edinburgh, it appears, followed later; but perhaps only because our city has had no one to collect those relics of a by-gone age with such care as the author of the book of "Bon Accord," and the editor of the "Extracts from the Burgh Records of Aberdeen."

The chief of those scenic festivities was that celebrated on Corpus Christi day; and we have numerous allusions in old records and writers to the "Corpus

Christi plays," which were then celebrated in the churches and streets of all our greater towns, and the dramas so represented form one of the most curious classes of early English literature.

The entry I have noted from the Treasurer's books of Dundee runs thus—

"The grayth of the possession of Corpus Christi deliverit Sir Thomas Barbour. Imprimis iiii score of crownis. vi. pair of angel vennis (wings). iiii. myteris. Cristis cott of lethyr with the hoss and glufis. Cristis hed. xxxi. suerdis. Thre lang cofferis of tre. Sanct Thomas sper. A cros til sant blasis. Sanct Johnis cott. A credel and thre barnis maid of claith. xx. hedis of hayr. The four Evangellistis. Sanct Katrins quheil. Sanct Androwis cros. A saw. A aix. A rassour. A guly knyff. A worm of tre. The haly laan of tre. Sanc batbill castel. Abraamis hat and thre hedis of hayr."

The next extracts are from the common secular expenses of the burgh, found in the Treasurer's books, Anno 1536,—

To the trumpeters and sueschers at the last vapneschawin for thair panis,
26s. 8d.

For tows, tar-barrelis, coilis, and uthir furnishing to the burning of the viche
4l., 6s. 10d.

To the messons that biggit the Murregait port.

And so for the Uvergait port.

The Wollgait port.

The Nethergait port.

The Seigait.

To the messons that biggit the cokstuil.

Anno 1537.

To ane boy that geid to Brechin to espy what way the number off Hilland men
gead, 13s. 4d.

Given to the pyper and the clarsoman whan thai playit in Peiter Vedderburnes
to Harie Stwarte and Captain Mastertun, 40s.

For beren down to the schor the Lyones cast pieces, 3s.

To a creelful of coilis, and the beiring of them to the stepil in tyme of the
vache, 10s. 8d.

The boitis frauche of ane hundred speiris, and the beiring of tham, 21s.

For paper and threed to maik cartages to the pissis in the stipil heid, 1s. 8d.

For keping of the 5 ports, 5 lb.

To ane tow to scourge Makfarlane with, 6d.