

### III.

PROPOSALS FOR CLEANING AND LIGHTING THE CITY OF EDINBURGH (WITH ORIGINAL SIGNATURES OF A NUMBER OF THE PRINCIPAL INHABITANTS), IN THE YEAR 1735. WITH EXPLANATORY REMARKS: By DAVID LAING, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

The manuscript volume presented by our associate Dr David H. Robertson, the illustrator of "The Antiquities of Leith," was put into my hands to lay before the Society, with such remarks or explanations as might seem to be requisite. It contains Proposals for cleaning our metropolis, drawn up in the year 1735. I half regret having undertaken to do so, as

<sup>1</sup> Riddell's Peerage and Consist. Law, vol. i. pp. 87-92.

the subject, it must be confessed, is somewhat unsavoury. Yet it is a subject which seems to have been carefully avoided by all the historians of Edinburgh, as well as by the authors of our local traditions, reminiscences, and other works, probably thinking it tended to the discredit of our "gude town." I have no intention, indeed, to treat the subject in full detail, or, as the donor of the manuscript, in his jocular manner, might say, its foul details, by raking up all the filth that appears on the pages of our public records, or in the satirical remarks of travellers in their descriptions, but will confine myself to a few general notices or remarks, as the subject is not unimportant, having reference to the sanitary state of a large town. The subject is indeed not new: an anonymous author, nearly a century ago, in 1761, published "The Cloaciniad, a Poem;" and in the exordium he says,

The dangers which the wretched mortal meets,  
Who dares at ten to tread Edina's streets,  
(and so on)—I strive to sing.

So early as the reign of James the Fourth, Dunbar the Scottish poet addressed a remonstrance to the merchants of Edinburgh on the filthiness of the streets, tending so much to the hurt and slander of their good name. In particular, he makes mention of the "Stinking Style," a covered passage leading from the north side of St Giles's Church to the opposite side of the High Street, known as the Luckenbooths. It existed and retained its name for at least three centuries, in the very heart of the city, and was a noted place for filth, assaults, and robberies. So early as July 1505, the Magistrates and Council made an arrangement with the Bellman for cleansing the streets, he engaging to "haif a horse with a close cairt and twa servandis daylie, quhen neid is, for purging and clenging of the Hie Street, betwix the Castell and Saint Mary Wynd."<sup>1</sup> On the 10th of July 1530, the Provost, Bailies, and Council granted to the Provost of St Giles a small piece of waste land adjoining the lower churchyard of St Giles, the reason assigned being, "because it was before ane midding *and common sege* (seat) *till all personis*." Had the Council thought of converting it into a place of accommodation for the inhabitants, it might have saved many subsequent regulations, with the

<sup>1</sup> Extracts from Council Records (MS. Advocates' Library), fol. 181, 182.

necessity of appointing persons to keep the entrance to the church itself, as well as the churchyard, free from filth. A century later, on the 26th of February 1629, the Lords of Privy Council issued a warrant for building up the east style of Holyroodhouse kirkyard, because, as the minutes express it, "the people repairing to the burgh of Edinburgh from Musselburgh, Fisherrow, and other parts in East Lothian, hes maid thair ordinare passage throu the kirkyaird of Halyruidhouse, whilk they defyle with filth and otherwayis, especiallie at the verie syde of the kirk, and direct under the windowes of his Majestie's galrie of Halyruidhouse, whilk (it was remarked) *will be verie unseemlie* to be sene to strangers the time of his Majestie's heere being;" Charles the First intending at this time to have visited Scotland for his coronation, but this purpose was deferred till the year 1633. It was usual on all public occasions, such as the triumphal entry of James the Sixth in 1579—his reception with his Queen, Anna of Denmark, in 1590—his revisiting his native kingdom in 1617—for the magistrates to bestir themselves, by proclamations, with threats of fines, imprisonment, and other penalties, to have the high streets and common vennels of Edinburgh cleansed by removing the cruives for swine, middings (or dunghills), and fulzie collected. Still more precise directions on the subject were issued by the Provost, Bailies, &c., convened in Council, on the 5th of April 1633, upon their "finding the Hie streets and public vennels of this burgh to abound with all kynd of filth, to the reprotche of the toun when strangers doe repair to the same." The services of scavengers were often aided by heavy rains, as on the 18th of May 1593, "ane sudden shower of raine and haill the said day (says Birrell in his Diary), being Monday, the chapmanis standis and stuillis came swening doune the street of Edinburgh like as they had been sailing doune the watter" (p. 30). But these drenching showers, while sweeping down the steep closes all sorts of impurities, only deposited the filth outside of the town, in the North Loch on the one side, or formed the River Tumble on the other.

The first direct measure for effectually cleansing the streets was the Act of Parliament, James VII. 1st Parl. 8th June 1686 (vol. viii. p. 595), entitled, "Act for Cleansing the Streets of Edinburgh," occasioned by "the many complaints of the nastiness of the streets, wynds, closes, and other places of the city of Edinburgh, which is the Capital City of the Nation,

where the chief Judicatories reside, and to which His Majesty's lieges must necessarily resort and attend." By this Act the Magistrates were ordained "to prescribe some effectual mode for preserving the cleanliness of said town of Edinburgh, Canongate, and suburbs thereof," under the pain of 1000 merks yearly; and it was further ordained, that the Lords of Council and Session shall receive "all rationall proposals for purging and cleansing the said town," &c. The Lords of Council and Session (acting as Police Commissioners) having met several times on the subject with the Provost and Magistrates, by an Act of Sederunt, January 25, 1687, their Lordships, conform to the power granted them by the said Act of Parliament, imposed a stent of five hundred pounds sterling yearly, for the space of three years, upon all the inhabitants, burgesses, and others within the town, Canongate, and suburbs thereof, the members of the College having freely offered to bear their proportion of this assessment. In the manuscript Proposals of 1735, after referring to these Acts, it is stated, that the money was paid "for removing the said dung, which was then *lying on the streets* of the city and suburbs *like mountains*, and roads were cut through them to the closess or shops before whom [which] those *great heaps* or middens lay; and this care and pains of the magistrates had its designed effect, in so far that the streets have never been in that state and condition since." Is it to be wondered, under such circumstances, considering the confined state of our towns and villages, that pestilence should have so frequently prevailed in Edinburgh, Leith, and other places? It was not, indeed, the fault of the magistrates that the common practice "of throwing over every kind of filth, ashes, and foul water, at shots, windows, or doors in the High Street, or in closes, wynds, or passages of the city," was not stopped; but all their regulations and fines were disregarded, and many proclamations and edicts were issued and renewed from time to time, with threats of fines, imprisonment, standing in the pillory, whipping by the hand of the hangman, and banishing the city, with apparently no effect. But the scavengers at an early hour were at work, and rendered our metropolis much less offensive in day-time than many other European cities even within one's own recollection. In the manuscript Proposals of 1735, above mentioned, it is expressly asserted, "Also there is a very evil practice to be observed, that some mistresses, and those not

of the lowest order, do agree and paction with their servants for lower wages on this very account; that they tell them they shall be allowed [permitted] to cast all their nastiness over the windows, show them how to do it, and encourage them therein." The title of the manuscript now laid before the Society sufficiently explains the nature of the Proposals without entering upon further details, viz. :—

"*EDINBURGH CLEAN'D* and the Country Improven, or PROPOSALS for Putting an Effectuall Stop to that Pernitious Practice of throwing over the Windows all sorts of filth, foul water, ashes, &c. And for keeping the Streets, Winds, Closses, &c., of the City neat and clean By a voluntary subscription of the Possessors and Proprietors therein for paying amongst them the Charges of Carying doun Stairs all those things that uses to be thrown over the Windows, By two Men Scaffingers serving as many Houses as amounts to 800£ of yearly valued Rent per the City Stent-Books. The Tennants paying the men's wages (wh<sup>h</sup> is half a Scots merk a day each) at the proportion of sixpence a pound of y<sup>r</sup> Valued Rent in the year. So that a 10£ Rent pays 5 shillings and a 15£ Rent 7 sh<sup>s</sup>. 6 pence pr An<sup>m</sup>. And the Landlords pays at the Beginning for the vessels and utensils necessary for the work, which vessels are to belong to and Remain in the House in all time Coming whoever may be the Tennant.

Printed by (blank) 1735."

It was evidently intended for publication, and for this purpose it appears to have been carefully revised and corrected, with numerous additions by different hands. Subjoined are the two following testimonials. The first is by Mr Adam, the celebrated architect:—

"I have read over the whole of this scheme, and very much approve of it."

(Signed)



The next is that of the distinguished Professor Colin Maclaurin:—

"I have read over the Proposals, and wish success to the scheme

which may be improved afterwards from experience. I subscribe for my own house in Smith's Land, Niddry's Wynd, fourth story, while my family is in town, providing the neighbours in the land agree to the same."

"Edr. Decr. 27. 1737." (Signed) *Colin Mac Leuzin*<sup>26</sup>

The author of the Proposals is not named. There is however no doubt he was ROBERT MEIN, who signs an agreement on a blank page at the end, dated August 15, 1751, by which Mr James Honeyman, ship-master in Newcastle, engaged to take "all the brockin glass I can furnish him with at 26s. per ton, delivered in Edinburgh."

(Signed) *Robert Mein*<sup>27</sup>

When the Royal Exchange and the adjoining buildings in Edinburgh were in contemplation, Sir Gilbert Elliot of Minto, in 1752, published "Proposals for carrying on certain Public Works," which drew forth from Sir David Dalrymple, afterwards Lord Hailes, a humorous reply, suggesting the necessity of "Carrying on a certain Public Work in the city of Edinburgh." It is to be remembered that Edinburgh, at this time, was confined within the city walls; the flats in the closes and principal streets were occupied by separate families, including persons of rank. The town, of course, was not then lighted with gas, and the lamps, if I mistake not, were usually extinguished by nine o'clock. "Hark," says the author of the "Cloaciniad,"

" . . . . the clock strikes ten.

Now from a thousand windows cat'racts flow,  
Which make a deluge in the streets below."

Ferguson also, in his poem "Auld Reekie," describes the disasters happening to persons in a state of drunkenness, returning from their clubs and other convivial meetings, tumbling into the gutters; and he also refers to the hour—

" . . . . while noisy ten-hours' drum  
Gars a' your trades gae dandering hame."

He elsewhere speaks of the lanterns usually carried,

“To guide them through the dangers of the night.”

It would, in fact, seem as if a tacit agreement existed, that so soon as St Giles' clock struck ten, the windows were simultaneously opened for a general discharge (which, in 1745, must have rather alarmed Prince Charles' followers, when they had possession of the town), and the streets and closes resounded with one universal cry, *Gardyloo!* Dr Jamieson, in his Dictionary, gives the word as *Jordeloo*: I doubt if any such word was ever used; but in his Supplement the learned Doctor properly assigns it to the original French phrase, *Gare de l'eau*—Beware the water—and quotes Smollett's immortal “Humphrey Clinker” for the usual word, *Gardyloo*. Before dismissing the subject, I may also quote part of the same passage, in which Mrs Winifred Jenkins, announcing their arrival “at Haddingborough, among the Scots,” says, with great indignation, “They should not go for to impose upon foreigners; for the bills in their houses say, they have different easements to let; and, behold, there is nurro yeaks in the whole kingdom, nor anything for pore servants but a barrel with a pair of tongs thrown across; and all the chairs in the family are emptied into this here barrel once a day, and at ten o'clock at night the whole cargo is flung out at a back window, that looks into some street or lane, and the maid calls *gardy loo* to the passengers, which signifies, ‘Lord, have mercy upon you!’ and this is done every night in every house in Haddingborough; so you may guess, Mary Jones, what a sweet savour comes from such a number of perfuming pans. But they say it is wholesome, and truly I believe it is; for being in the vapours, and thinking of Isabel and Mr Clinker, I was going into a fit of asteriks, when this siff, saving your presence, took me by the nose so powerfully, that I sneezed three times, and found myself wonderfully refreshed; and this, to be sure, is the raisin why there are no fits in Haddingborough.”

In contrast, however, to this episode, I may quote the words of an English visitor of the same time, Captain Topham, who, in his “Letters from Edinburgh, written in the years 1774 and 1775,<sup>1</sup>” says of Edinburgh:—“This town has long been reproached with many uncleanly

<sup>1</sup> Lond. 1776, 8vo, p. 14.

customs. A gentleman, who lately published his travels through Spain, says, 'that Madrid, some years ago, might have vied with Edinburgh in filthiness.'<sup>1</sup> It may probably be some pleasure to this author, and to those who read him, to learn that his remarks are now very erroneous. But if a stranger may be allowed to complain, it would be, that in these wynds, which are very numerous, the dirt is sometimes suffered to remain two or three days without removal, and becomes offensive to more senses than one. The magistrates, by imposing fines and other punishments, have long put a stop to the throwing anything from the windows into the open street; but as these allies [alleys] are unlighted, narrow, and removed from public view, they still continue these practices with impunity. Many an elegant suit of clothes has been spoiled; many a powdered, well-dressed maccaroni sent home for the evening; and, to conclude this period in Dr Johnson's own simple words, 'many a full-flowing periwig moistened into flaccidity.'"<sup>2</sup>

A still higher authority may be quoted. "Hitherto," says Sir Walter Scott, in reference to the extension of the city, "family resided above family, each habitation occupying one storey of the tall mansion, or land. The whole was accessible by one stair, which, common to all the inhabitants, was rarely cleaned and imperfectly lighted; the windows were the only means of ridding nuisances, and the tardy cry of *Gardez l'eau* was sometimes, like the shriek of the water-kelpie, rather the elegy than the warning of the overwhelmed passenger."<sup>3</sup>

The Old Citizen deserves to be remembered for his endeavours to put an end to such a custom. The magistrates, also, for prosecuting "so good a work," commenced to set several tacks of the muck and fulzie of the city to the respective tacksmen, who were bound to carry the same away timeously before six of the clock "in the morning." Even at the present day, with all the advantage of improved sewerage, much remains to be effected for the improvement of our city. But perhaps the most interesting portion of the MS. Proposals of 1735 consists in the names of the tenants, residenters, and proprietors of houses, who agreed "to performe the terms of the foregoing Proposal; mentioning their residences and the rents of their houses." In this respect, it might be very serviceable to

<sup>1</sup> This refers to a passage in Twisse's Travels, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> Vide Johnson's Idler.

<sup>3</sup> Provincial Antiquities.



Mr Chambers should he amuse himself in any vacant hours by revising and enlarging his "Traditions of Edinburgh," and his "Reekiana." The first approver is a lady, "Jean Gartshore, for my house in Morocks Close, which is 15 pounds St. rent." The number of subscribers is very considerable. Others sign the Proposal without giving their assent to all the details of the scheme, and agree to pay half-a-crown a quarter. Some of the lower classes limited their engagement to a halfpenny weekly; but the greater number agree to pay a penny, others three halfpence a week, while a few allowed twopence. The Countess of Haddington, "for the lodgings she possessed in Bank Close, Lawnmarket, valued rent L.20," was to pay twopence-halfpenny per week, which is tenpence per month. But even this apparently liberal offer was only one halfpenny per month for each pound sterling, which other tenants had consented to pay. Some of the subscribers agreed conditionally, if their neighbours should consent; but one lady, in particular, said most resolutely, "Mrs Black refuses to agree, and acknowledges she throws over: as also the house above refuses, and confesses their throwing over at Night."

In the year 1760, ROBERT MEIN reissued his Proposals, in the form of a printed tract, under the same title, "The City Cleaned and Improven. By following out this proposed method, for paying only one penny per week for an £8 rent, &c. Edinburgh: 1760," small 8vo, pp. 16. The original MS., with very rude drawings (partly copied as a woodcut border for the title-page of this tract), was sold at George Paton's sale, in 1809, but has been lost. This worthy old citizen exerted himself for the improvement of his native city by another tract, entitled, "The Edinburgh Paradise Regain'd, or the City set at Liberty, to Propagate and Improve her Trade and Commerce, &c. By a Merchant-Citizen, long acquainted with the City's Account of Profit and Loss, both before and since the Incorporate Union. 1764." Small 8vo, pp. 29, and Plan. With this object he urges the necessity of extending the city, removing the ports and walls, which obstruct commerce, opening up an easy access to the higher grounds, and forming a navigable canal between Edinburgh and Leith. In a previous tract, called "The Cross Removed, Prelacy and Patronage Disproved," &c., Edinburgh, 1756, 12mo, dedicated to the Lord Provost and Magistrates of Edinburgh, the author states "that he was great-grandson to the worthy Barbara Hamilton, spouse to John

Mein, merchant and postmaster in Edinburgh, who, in the year 1637, spoke openly in the church at Edinburgh against Archbishop Laud's new Service Book, at its first reading there, which stopped their proceedings, and dismissed their meeting; so that it never obtained in our Church to this day."

Robert Mein died at Edinburgh, on the 25th July 1776, aged 93. In the obituary notice in the "Weekly Magazine," vol. xxxix. pp. 192, 224, and repeated in the "Scots Magazine," vol. xxxviii. p. 395, his great-grandmother, BARBARA HAMILTON, it is said, was descended from the family of Barduie, but was better known in our history by the name of JENNY GEDDES, though called so erroneously. She is famous on account of the method she took to express her indignation at the introduction of the Church of England Service into Scotland, by Bishop Laud, in the [year] 1637; for she not only spoke openly against it in the church on the Sunday when it was first attempted to be read, *but boldly threw her stool at the Dean.*" These notices may perhaps explain the apparent anomaly of the statement that Jenny Geddes, upon the restoration of Charles the Second, burned her stool in the bonfires at the Cross; and it may therefore be suggested, whether the venerable relic in our museum, so called, may not have actually been Barbara Hamilton's, to avoid encountering which it was fortunate the Very Reverend the Dean had practised *jouking*, or bowing down his head, as this, says a contemporary authority, "proved his safeguard."