

II.

NOTICE OF THE SHINGLED ROOF OF THE TOWER OF THE CANONGATE TOLBOOTH, EDINBURGH. BY JOHN ALEXANDER SMITH, M.D. V.P.S.A. Scot.

Some years ago, when walking with a friend down the Canongate, on a bright sunny day, I made a discovery which rather astonished me; the sun was shining brightly, as we passed, on the picturesque roofs of the turrets and tower of the Old Tolbooth, and from its rich brown colour and general appearance, I saw that it was not covered with slates, but with wooden shingles; and my friend, who was familiar with shingled roofed church towers in Berkshire, agreed with me in this opinion. The fact was a new one to me, though it may have been known to others, and must have been well known at least to the workmen who from time to time would require to repair the roof. I looked into the various published works which gave details of the antiquities of the city of Edinburgh, and of the adjoining burgh of the Canongate; but though some gave short, and others longer accounts of the Tolbooth, none that I could discover made the slightest reference to the fact of its shingled roof.

In the course of this winter, I happened to notice various planks and scaffolding projecting around the eaves of the old building, and on making lately a closer inspection, I found that it had apparently been undergoing a thorough repair; but I was startled to find the shingled roof had altogether disappeared, and that it was now newly covered with small blue slates. I learned, on making inquiry, the repair was a very necessary one, and that the work had been done under the superintendence of Mr Andrew Slater; and I soon discovered that he had in his possession a number of the old oak shingles. At my request he sought out various good specimens of the original, or at least the oldest shingles, which are all of oak, and fixed them in order on a board, sending me also several separate ones; these I have now much pleasure in presenting, in Mr Slater's name, to the Museum. The shingles measure about one foot in length, by three to five inches in breadth, and scarcely half an inch in thickness; and the ribbed and furrowed appearance of the exposed or lower extremity of each, shows the long period of time during

which they have borne the varying weather of our northern climate. This picturesque turreted roof is the only one in Edinburgh or the neighbourhood that has been covered with shingles, at least in our day.

I need not remind you, that in early times all the buildings in our country were made of wood; the larger buildings or churches, it is supposed, of cut timber, probably on foundations of stone, and roofed with reeds or wood; the smaller buildings of branches or wattles and mud, and roofed with reeds, rushes, &c. The same custom prevailed among the Scots, Britons, and Saxons,—the newer mode of building with squared stones after the Roman fashion, as it was designated, coming into occasional use for churches, in some instances, as early as the seventh century, at least in England. Dr John Stuart has entered fully into this subject, in a chapter on the “Opus Scoticum,”—the Scots Style—the Wooden Buildings—in his important preface to the “Book of Deer,” at page cliii. of this preface, where, referring to the use of wooden materials for buildings, as common also among the Saxons, he makes a quotation of much interest, telling us that “in King Edgar’s charter to the Abbey of Malmesbury, dated A.D. 974, he describes the state of the monasteries in his kingdom,—“*quæ velut muscivis scindulis cariosisque tabulis tigno tenuis visibiliter diruta.*” (*Gesta Regum Anglorum*, lib. ii., § 153; vol. ii., p. 247. (Eng. Hist. Soc.). This passage may be translated—these monasteries—“which, as it were, are visibly in ruins up to the very rafters or roof, with its moss-covered shingles and rotten boards.” Here, then, we have an early date, A.D. 974, when wooden shingles were undoubtedly used, though, where wood was abundant, they probably were in use from a much earlier period; and they have continued to exist in different parts of the country until our own day, as in this instance of our Canongate Tolbooth. I am not aware to what extent shingles still remain on the towers or roofs of the older buildings in Scotland, but they are still to be found in abundance on the roofs of various church towers and spires in the southern counties of England. In France and Germany, &c., we see old buildings, churches, houses, &c., still covered with shingled roofs; and in the northern countries of Europe, where suitable wood was abundant, shingles have been also used for a very lengthened period of time, many of the wooden churches of Norway, with their shingled roofs, dating from a very early period. In later times, the fashion has crossed

the Atlantic Ocean,—and America, with its abundant forests, is now the country where in all probability shingles are most extensively used.

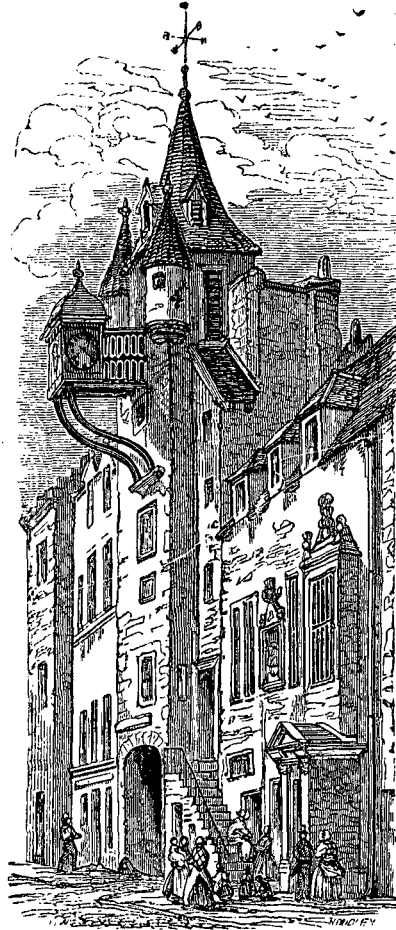
In many fabric rolls and bills for building in old times, you constantly find the cost of *Scindulæ* shingles, and of shingle nails for attaching them. In the recent *Impérial Dictionary* of John Ogilvie, LL.D., we find the word “Shingle” thus explained. “[German, Schindel; Greek, *σχινδαλμος*; Latin, *Scindula*, from *Scindo* to Divide; Gothic, *Scheiden*.] A wooden tile: shingles are small pieces of thin wood, used like slates for covering a roof or building. They are from 8 to 12 inches long, and about 4 inches broad, thicker on one edge than the other.” In our first English Latin Dictionary, the *PROMPTORIUM PARVULORUM*, A.D. 1440, occurs the word “Schyngyl,” and “Chyngyl or Chyngle; bordys for helyngys of howsys—*Scindula*.” The word is sometimes written “shindles” (Holland’s *Pliny*, b. xvi., c. 10.) Piers Ploughman terms Noah’s ark a “shynglede shup.” They were used, as I have shown, in Anglo-Saxon times, and have never since been wholly laid aside, being more easily obtained, where wood was plentiful, than tiles or slates, and also lighter, which would cause an advantage in the cost of the timber framing. It is not easy, however, to make them water-tight, and hence they answer best on any vertical surface, or the steep incline of a spire, where they throw off the rain effectually. I am indebted for these last notes from the *Promptorium* and *Piers Ploughman*, &c., to the abounding knowledge of Mr Albert Way, A.M., F.S.A., and Hon. Mem. S.A. Scot.

To return, however, to our Canongate Tolbooth, I may quote the detailed description of this picturesque building, given in the interesting work, “*The Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time*, by Dr Daniel Wilson,” vol. ii., 1848, p. 72; and I am able, through the politeness of the publishers of the work, Messrs Hugh Paton & Sons, also to add the woodcut referred to in the opening paragraph.

“The Canongate Tolbooth—(a view of which is annexed)—has long been a favourite subject for the artist’s pencil, as one of the most picturesque edifices of the Old Town. It forms the court-house and jail of the burgh; it was erected in the reign of James VI., soon after the abolition of religious houses had left this ancient dependency of the Abbey free to govern itself. Even then, however, Adam Bothwell, the Protestant commendator of Holyrood, retained some portion of the ancient

rights of his mitred predecessors over the burgh. The present structure is the successor of a much earlier building, probably on the same site. The date on the tower is 1591; and preparations for its erection appear in the Burgh Register seven years before this, where it is enacted, that no remission of fees shall be granted to any one, 'unto the tyme the Tolbuith of this burch be edefeit and biggit.' (Canongate Burgh Register, 13th October 1584; *ibid.*, p. 353.) Nevertheless, we find by the Burgh Registers for 1561, 'Curia capitalis burgi vici canonicorum Monasterii Sancte Crucis prope Edinburgh; *tenta in pretorio ejusdem*,' and frequent references occur to the *Tolbuith*, both as a court-house and prison, in the Registers and in the Treasurer's accounts, *e.g.* 1574, 'To sax pynouris att the bailleis command for taking down of the lintall stane of the auld tolbuith windo, iijjs. vjd.' The very next entry is a fee 'to ane new pyper,' an official of the burgh, of whom various notices are found at this very early period.

"The *Hotel de Ville* of this ancient burgh is surmounted by a tower and spire, flanked by two turrets in front, from between which



The Canongate Tolbooth, Edinburgh.

a clock of large dimensions projects into the street. This formerly rested on curiously carved oaken beams, which appear in *Storer's Views*, published in 1818, but they have since been replaced by plain cast-iron supports. The building is otherwise adorned with a variety of mottoes and sculptured devices, in the style that prevailed at the date of its erection. Between the windows of the first and second floor of the tower, an ornamental sun-dial appears, and underneath the lower window a carved tablet bears the following inscription:—

 S. L. B.

PATRIÆ ET POSTERIS, 1591.

“There are two bells in the tower, the oldest of which has this favourite motto, with the date cast on it, SOLI DEO. HONOR ET GLORIA, 1608. The larger bell, as appears from its inscription, was cast in 1796. Over the inner door-way, which leads both to the court-house and the prison, are these appropriate words, ESTO FIDUS; and on the most conspicuous part of the edifice, between the windows of the council hall, a highly ornamental panel, surmounted by a pediment, adorned with a large thistle, bears the following legend:—J. R. 6. JUSTICIA ET PIETAS VALIDE SUNT PRINCIPIS ARCES. Within the panel the burgh arms are emblazoned, viz., a stag's head with a cross between the tynes, in commemoration of the monastic legend, to which the origin of St David's Abbey and its burgh is referred; and underneath, the motto SIC ITUR AD ASTRA; an un-failing subject of mirth to the profane wits of the capital, as an avowal by the old vassals of the church, that they now seek the way to heaven through the burgh jail.

“The independence of the burgh of Canongate was of brief duration, the magistrates of Edinburgh having purchased the superiority of it from the Earl of Roxburgh, and procured a charter of confirmation from Charles I., in 1636.”

The Canongate ceased to be a separate burgh in 1856, and the use of the Tolbooth for a court-house and jail has now also come to an end. The only inscription which seems to require explanation, Dr Wilson does not explain; it is that just referred to on the front of the tower, with a hand pointing it out, and consists of the three initials, S. L. B., followed by the words PATRIÆ ET POSTERIS, and the date 1591. I have

not seen any attempted explanation of these initials. A local authority suggested to me, that in his opinion, and for want of better information, these initial letters must mean *Secure Lodging and Board*; and he doubts not that many of the former inmates of the jail have felt to the full what it all implied. The only reading that occurs to me, though perhaps as far from the truth as the other, is, SENATUS LOCUS BURGHI, PATRIÆ ET POSTERIS, 1591—The Senate House (or Court-House) of the Burgh, dedicated to the Country, and to Posterity, 1591.