

III.

BELL IN THE TOWN HOUSE AT BURNTISLAND. BY REV. DONALD
MACRAE, B.D., F.S.A. SCOT.

The following is a quotation from a little book *History of Burntisland*, by Andrew Young (Kirkcaldy, 1913):—

Pp. 89-90—"I have not discovered when the bell was first obtained, but fortunately chanced on entries in the records of 1677, when having got cracked it was sent abroad to be mended. The expense was met by public subscription. This date corresponds with one on the bell. This beautiful and interesting bell, now resting in the lobby of the Town Hall, is said to have been purchased from Berwick, where it hung in the tower of the Castle. The following inscription makes a circuit of the shoulder, but it is not clear whether I·EN·LAN· is the beginning or end. It may be 'First, in the Year' 1595. I am told there is an estate near Berwick called Claster:—

I·EN·LAN·1595·SOVPLIF·SVIS·NONSIFE·PARLES·HABITANS·DE·
CLASTRE·1677·BEN·YCK·WER·HER·GORTEN·DOR·G·H·S·

"The authorities of the Scottish Museum could make nothing of this. On the side of the bell is a fine relief of an antique ship."

Happening to be at Burntisland for a day, my attention was called to the above extract, but not in time to admit of my going to examine the bell itself. However, by the kindness of the Rev. John Ruggan, M.A., the minister of Burntisland, I was recently supplied with a rubbing which shows both the inscription and part of the ornamentation of the bell. From this I was able to see that Mr Young had given in his *History* an accurate transcript of the inscription. The ornamentation, which consists of grapes and vine leaves, is of a kind not uncommon on bells made in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century.

The inscription, as it stands, looks unintelligible enough at first sight, but closer inspection leads to the following conclusions:—

(1) The bell was one that had been recast, and the date 1677 is the date of the *whole* inscription in its present form.

(2) When the bell was sent to be recast at that date (1677) it had on it a French inscription of date 1595. Some one who knew French took a copy of the latter inscription so as to reproduce it on the recast bell.

(3) The founder was evidently not well acquainted with French, and copied this transcript rather badly, but not so badly as to be beyond restoration. His chief faults were in the division of some of the words

and in mistaking a few of the letters. He added a few words in his own tongue (Dutch) telling when the recasting took place.

(4) The French part of the inscription should evidently read—

EN · L'AN · 1595 — — JE · SVIS · MONTÉE · PAR · LES ·
HABITANS · DE · CLASTRE.

“In the year 1595, I was set up by the inhabitants of Clastre” (? Chastre).

(5) The Dutch part—

1677 · BEN · YCK · WER · HERGORTEN · DOR · G · H · S · I.

“1677. I was remoulded by G. H. S. I.”

This latter part of the inscription I submitted to a Dutch lady, Miss Thérèse Ansingt, who says it is quite good Dutch, but should properly read—

“1677 · BEN · YCK · WEER · HERGOTEN · DOOR · G · H · S · I.”

(6) After the date 1595 there are five letters SOVPL, which obviously should be SOVS L, *i.e.* *Under L*. This was a memorandum by the transcriber to indicate the position of the date in the original inscription, thus—

EN L'AN
1595
JE SVIS MONTÉE, ETC.

The words SOVS L were probably written in brackets, but the founder incorporated them, under the impression that they formed part of the inscription.

I do not know how much value may be attached to the tradition that the bell was purchased from Berwick, and that it once hung in the tower of the Castle. There may be something in it, but one would be inclined to suspect that faulty deciphering by someone of BEN · YCK and CLASTRE may have given rise to the story. Mr Young mentions that he is told there is a Claster near Berwick. It would be interesting to find a bell with a French inscription having been set up by the inhabitants of that estate, and such a thing is not impossible. However, I would be inclined to look somewhere in Belgium where French is much spoken. There is a small place to the south of Brussels called *Chastre* which may more probably be the original home of the bell, and, if so, there probably lies a story behind it. After the upturn in Belgium will it be possible to trace it?