

Extract from Chapter XXX "The Weavers' Craft" by Daniel Thomson, 1903. Transcribed for clarity.

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the election, had a dram, and then adjourned to the house of the old chancellor and had another dram, then to each of their own houses, and so on, till member after member became *hors de combat*, or, as it was called, "mortal," and the watchmen carried home the "remanent brethren."

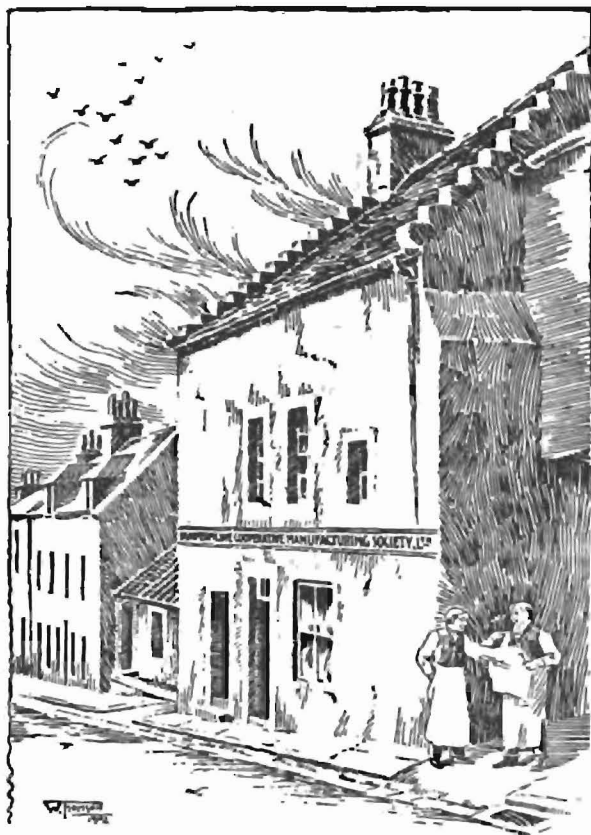
CHAPTER XXX.

*The Incorporation breaking up—The proposals—Dependent members—
Letters from weavers—The last meeting—The farewell.*

BUT now the incorporation is approaching dissolution—it may almost be said the death rattle has already been heard. A special requisition has been framed by William Stewart, David Peacock, John Rennie, James Chalmers, Laurence Miller, Thomas Bisset, John Drysdale, John Ferguson, William Allester, and John Donaldson, and presented to the deacon of the craft, asking him to call a special meeting of the members to consider the propositions to be submitted by the above gentlemen.

A meeting was duly called by deacon John Scotland, and held within his own house, East Port, on 15th July, 1836. Being duly constituted, the chair taken, and minutes read, the clerk read over the propositions of the ten requisitionists. These were generally—we repeat them here for the sake of continuity—“(1) To dissolve the association, or to take means to carry out its purpose. (2) As there is a Bill pending before Parliament to break up all corporate bodies in Scotland, we think it more prudent to dissolve of our own free will. (3) As there are a great number of old men belonging to the incorporation, and no provision made for old age, we think it most proper that whatever share should belong to them, they are justly entitled to

it for present support. (4) Owing to the present flourishing state of our trade in Dunfermline, we look forward to our getting a better price for our properties than we could realise at a future period."



Old House, Newrow, belonging to the Weavers' Craft.

These proposals were moved by Thomas Bisset, who also moved— (1) "That the heritable property belonging to the incorporation be immediately disposed of." (2) That the just and lawful debts due by the incorporation be paid; and (3) "That the balance, after payment

of these debts, be divided equally among the members alive at the date of division." These motions were seconded by William Stewart, and when put to the meeting, the first and second were carried with only one dissentient. On the third being submitted, Adam Stewart moved "That the widows of members alive at the date of division receive such sum, along with the members, as may be agreed on." This was seconded by Andrew Philp. The motion in its original form was carried by forty-seven to eleven votes, when John Morris moved, seconded by John Allester, that the properties be exposed by public roup within one month from this date. This last was carried unanimously—James Morris protesting against the proceedings. James Inglis, George Birrell, Thomas Bisset, and Adam Stewart were appointed to carry out the decisions of the meeting. Efforts were made at a subsequent meeting, held on 23rd September, to postpone, for six months, the sale of the property; but it was again decided by a majority to adhere to the former agreement. Several other attempts were made by requisition and otherwise to stave off the evil day, but in the end all failed to break the first resolution. The property sale was advertised in the newspapers and by handbills. The first upset price is set down in the minutes as £500. This was modified to £450, and again to £400; but the records give no information as to the purchaser or the amount realised by the sale; neither have we any minuted information as to the ultimate division of the funds, about which the various motions for sale raged and wrangled—though £2 10s. is set down on a dateless page as given to each of one hundred and fifty members.

That a considerable number of the members were, at this time, dependent upon charity and claiming alimnt from the incorporation, may be judged of by the number of members in the association, and by the obligations which the craft admit, as constant liabilities in their monthly accounts, to assist, if not to maintain, their decayed freemen. One letter now before me, dated from Edinburgh, 11th May, 1827, pleads piteously with the boxmaster for some assistance. "It is great needdcessity," the writer says, "that causes me to mak this

application, as I am quite worn out with auld edge and frailty. So I hope, sir, you will be so good as send an anser to this with what you can spare. Send it with Andrew Cranston, the carrier, on Thursday, and in so doing you will, dear sir, oblige your humble servant, Matthew Neilson, Forrester's Wynd."

The other is from Bellshill, near Glasgow, and is long and diffuse. The date is 21st November, 1827, and is sent at this time so as to suit the annual election and annual division of the surplus funds. The writer desires the deacon to inform him what the "old and new quorum" had decided to give him, and insists upon having his "six months' aliment" sent on to him at Bellshill. In conclusion, he says:—"Now, deacon, this is the seventh time I have sent from Bellshill to Glasgow for ane answer from you, and as yet have got none. Now, the distance from Bellshill to Glasgow, taken seven times back and fore, is ane hunder and twenty-six miles; and had it not been dire needcessity, I would not have put you to so much trouble, and myself to so much expense. So your answer will much oblige, yours truly, David Stewart."

Such appeals as these, we have no doubt, would be made for years after the sale of the property, and until all hope of further help had vanished. But the weaving craft as an association had now "gone out of business," and whatever the weavers may have done, or how they comported themselves, is without record for the next fifteen years, and we have no further notes in weavers' black and white till the year of grace, 1851.

It is much to be regretted that the minutes of the weaving craft were not maintained after 1836, nor during the fifteen years that succeeded. This is all the more to be deplored because these years were perhaps the most momentous, in changes and issues, known in the history of the Dunfermline weaving trade. As we have already seen by the terms of the motions made at the annual meeting of the craft in 1836, the trade of weaving and its collateral industries were then in a most healthy and prosperous condition.

In that year we had no less than eight spinning mills at full work

in the town and district. It may be worth while giving the names :— Meldrums Mill, on Balmule estate ; Pitliver Mill, on Pitliver estate ; Mid Mill, near Charlestown ; Milton Green, at West Nethertown Street ; Harrie Brae, in Mill Street ; Millport, in Collier Row ; Golf-drum and Knabbie Row Mills in their respective streets. “Owing to the flourishing state of our trade just now, we ought to sell our property and so realise the best price for it,” said the requisitionists in 1836—evidently with a premonition that a disastrous change was about to take place. And it came !

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beam the new ones. Trade orders in consequence fell rapidly away, the resolution of the weavers became absolutely useless, and hundreds would soon gladly have taken webs on any conditions, but these were not now to be had. The defiant weavers became despondent instead, and the direst possible distress set in (1837) among the community.



The Lancastrian School, Rolland Street.

Subscriptions were raised on all hands, soup kitchens opened, and street improvements started—to feed and employ the starving, idle men.

It was then that the “hirst” in North Chapel Street was levelled down, and North Inglis Street levelled up; the ascent at Shadows Wynd moderated by the cutting at the top of South Inglis Street; Abbey Park Place was levelled and metalled; Moodie Street and Gibb Street were similarly treated; Reid Street was opened into Nether-

town and the Nethertown "hirsels" cut down on the north side, from Reid Street eastward, and Rolland Street carried into Reid Street. These relief works cost between £500 and £600 besides numerous private sums paid for special bits of cutting or levelling work. These works were managed by the magistrates and a committee of the manufacturers and others. George Birrel was provost, James Morris, bailie, and John Ker, James Bryce, John Fergusson, Robert Somerville, Ralph Walker, were assistants and advisers in the work of providing employment and distributing food.

The Strike Committee—who by and by forgot the strike in the face of a worse calamity—who worked with the magistrates and others, deserve to have their names preserved for the work they achieved and for the splendid spirit they showed. Here they are:—

ALEXANDER HARLEY, Woodhead Street.

ALEXANDER STENHOUSE, Woodhead Street.

GEORGE HARLEY, Golfdrun Street.

WILLIAM CARNEGIE, Nethertown Street.

ROBERT SYME, Priory Lane.

ROBERT BEVERIDGE, Moodie Street.

RICHARD HENDERSON, Reid Street.

ROBERT CARMICHAEL, James Street.

JOHN MEIKLEJOHN, Martyrs' Place.

RICHARD MELDRUM, Bothwell Street.

DAVID DURIE, Baldrigeburn Street.

JOHN ANDERSON, Beveridgewell Street.

PETER SMART, Newrow Street.

GARDINER CAMPBELL, Knabbie Street.

ROBERT LIVINGSTON, Damside Street.

WILLIAM MELDRUM, Nethertown.

To increase the distress and to agonise the situation, diseases in the form of influenza, typhus fever and measles now set in, and swept away scores of victims. During this year of 1837, 493 interments took place in the churchyard, being 182 over those of 1836. It was

indeed a direful year in Dunfermline. Many a tale could be told of the sufferings endured, of the generosity displayed, of kindness, wisdom and love, as well as of erring and of short-sighted obstinacy, in the year 1837.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Queen's Proclamation—Public dinings—The Charter—The universal strike—Torryburn—John Collins—Riots of 1844—The Exhibition of 1851—Decline and fall.

THIS year of 1837 was also the year of Queen Victoria's proclamation. That proclamation was read aloud at the Townhouse, thundered out at the Cross, and made known at the East Port. Provost Birrel was the central figure, and he was accompanied by the Town Council, Police Commissioners, Sheriff Colville, Mr. Hunt of Pittencrieff, a *posse* of J.P.'s, and a long procession of influentials. What a crowd was there! How the streets were crammed! How the people shouted and hurraed! At the cake and wine banquet, speeches were made, toasts were drunk, and many a gallant sentiment uttered. The three long tables in the Townhouse were crowded by the "respectable inhabitants." All the medical and legal professions were present, and all the clergy, except Mr. Law of St. Margaret's U.P., who would not come because the wrong man was to say grace, a reason which also kept away Bailie James Morris.

Were the weavers represented here? And if so, how did they appear? What did they say; and how did they respond to the dulcet invitation of the chairman to the banquet in the Townhouse? We know not. A compound cause of suffering was then bearing down upon the members of the craft. They had, with mistaken foresight,