

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

Then came the momentous year of the universal strike, when, in the autumn of 1842, colliers, cobblers, masons, weavers, joiners, tailors, and all others of the working-classes, determined to paralyse the Government of the day, come out on strike, and bring (or try to bring) the world of industry to a deadlock. In Dunfermline, the most valiant leader in that crusade against privilege and political iniquity was Thomas Morrison, afterwards bailie and treasurer of the burgh. His speeches at the shore, Kirkcaldy, and at Dunfermline and Torryburn, were at once wise, daring, and defiant, and yet strictly within the law.

Before the march on Torryburn, however, as great distress existed from want of work, wages, and food, as at any time in the town's history. Public meetings had been frequently held during the summer, to devise means of employing the idle, and of feeding the destitute. In June, over £500 had been expended in relieving the wants of the starving poor. In July, things were no better. Trade seemed to have completely collapsed, and the outlook was gloomy in the extreme. In August, rioting broke out (on the 9th), and life and property were again in danger. Again we had an invasion of Jock's Lodge dragoons, with a company of foot. On the 10th, the High Street was choked with the crowds. The sheriff and the provost, and Mr. Morrison too, addressed the swaying multitudes, and advised them to disperse; but as no advice in peaceful form could be taken, the dragoons and constables enforced the law by driving the rioters from the thoroughfares.

The miners to the west and east were now "out," and crowded meetings had been held at Carnock. A mass meeting was advertised for Dunfermline, but the restraining influence of the military held the Chartists at bay. The meeting at Torryburn was held on 27th August. It was broken up by the military, accompanied by the authorities; but, on the advice of Mr. Morrison, the meeting crossed the stream of Torry, and finding themselves then in Perthshire, they made their speeches, passed their resolutions, and adjourned proceedings. "Keep within the limits of the law," said Mr. Morrison, "and you will always be able to find a bridge by which to reach your purpose."

Morrison and Henderson (president of the workmen's association) were apprehended, but soon after liberated, and the strike crisis blew over. But the distress did not cease. On 3rd November, a census of the destitute was taken, when it was found that six hundred and ninety-six individuals, having eight hundred and eighty-four dependents, were without means of support. Street improvements were again engaged in. Trenching the wilderness at Townhill, breaking stones by the wayside at Broomhead, and other spade and shovel work, furnished

employment and starvation wages to the shivering, half-fed, poorly-clad, ill-provided weavers.

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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 hurrahed! 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,

initiated a strike, and now the trade was falling off. They were suffering from want, and disease was carrying off their little ones. They had sold their properties, divided the proceeds, and were "freemen" in a sense never meant in the ancient formulas of the craft. They were sorely tried; they were utterly wretched. They ceased in this year to record their proceedings, and they tell us nothing of the great Queen's coronation.

But the Charter was now in demand, and the Chartists were on every platform and at every street corner. The "five points" were grown familiar to every child, and were fought over in every school ground, as well as in every workshop in the kingdom. The bad harvests of 1837 and 1838, with the influence of the Corn Laws to help, had again raised the prices of food stuffs to famine rates. The political agencies, operating in conjunction with failing trade, low wages, disease, and soup kitchens, had roused the people to a frenzy of discontent and opposition to the Government. Lovett, Collins, Vincent, O'Brien, Cooper, and others, leaders in the widespread agitation, were thrown into prison, immured in filthy dungeons, fined, and treated as felons, because they taught the people to be "discontented" with a Government that first denied them any voice in its administration and then taxed them down to starvation point.

Fergus O'Connor's land scheme, its universal discussion and wide acceptance, distracted the calmer Chartists, and mixed a discordant issue in the general political acclaim. Meetings were being held in Rankine's hall, in the mason lodges, and in the open air at the Pends and Milton Green, to discuss and "resolve" on the new scheme. Fergus himself came here, and at the last-mentioned place, in 1841, enforced the consistency of his scheme, against the quiet, yet cogent, arguments of Dr. Brewster of Paisley.

John Collins of Birmingham was here in 1838, gathered the weavers under the shadow of the monastery wall, and expounded with burning eloquence the principles and features of "The People's Charter." Thomas Morrison, one of our best known local lights and leaders, came arm in arm with Adam Stewart—one of three brothers,

all alike, men of eminent abilities and sterling character. Stewart presided, and, in a few sensible remarks, introduced the celebrated expounder of the Charter. Mr. Collins spoke for nearly an hour, with a clear, ringing voice, and in rich, racy, choicest English. The audience were greatly excited during the delivery of the speech, and at the close broke out into long-continued applause. It says much for the moderation and caution of our local leaders that, as soon as Collins sat down, the chairman arose, commented on the splendid address to which they had listened, and then drew attention to the position of those who advocated the Charter, asked them to think over what they had heard, to retire quietly from the meeting, and to keep the peace. Mr. Morrison followed in the same strain, expressing at the same time a firm belief that the fiscal burdens by which they were then oppressed, and the political injustice by which they were daily visited, would early come to an end, and a brighter day, a more beneficent era, dawn upon the working-classes.

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Trade improved in 1843, but became bad as ever in 1845. The experiences of 1842 were repeated. The famine period was on us once more, and the wretched weavers and their children were again being fed from the steamy purlous of the soup kitchen. Oh! my readers! if you have ever known the horror of being obliged to haunt the doors, and wait in the atmosphere and surroundings of a charity

kitchen, you can never after banish its image from your minds. It is a cloud on the soul while life endures.

We cannot detail the shame and disasters of this year. The riots of August, the plundering of shops, the wrecking of warehouses and factories, the assault on Provost Ronaldson, the visitation of the dragoons, the march on Balmule, the lawless proceedings there, the trial of the three victims in November at the High Court of Justiciary, their sentences of transportation and imprisonment—all come back to our mind as a hideous nightmare.

But now comes the benign year of 1846, when the long, lingering curse of the Corn Laws was removed. I see the triumphal arches, I hear the music of the bands as they play through the wet and soaked streets, and all sounds and signs are of joy that this curse of monopoly is no more. The rain floods that came upon us the night before and on the memorable day itself, could not damp the ardour of the processionists nor dull the universal joy.

But other sights and scenes crowd the mind. The factory system develops upon and supersedes the healthier but less convenient, and now non-economical, scatter of weaving shops. In very ancient times, when "art and industry set light and song on every Grecian farm," the weaver was found in every mansion, on every holding. The same fashion seems to have prevailed in Scotland, and up to the nineteenth century hundreds of farms in the north and the midlands could boast their sheet- and towel-weaving loom. This system, if system it could be called, was gradually found to fall out with the needs of the time. Fatefully and steadily, the weavers and looms were aggregated in villages and towns, and the farm-weaver died out. In similar fashion, and in obedience to similar laws, the disconnected weaving-shops—by which the work of one manufacturer might be found scattered over miles of space—were in time found but ill-adapted to the needs and methods of the big business manufactures. To earn the full advantage, to reach the highest form of control and the nicest execution of orders, the manufacturer must have his workmen and work-looms within immediate reach. Hence arose the factory system,

which, whatever its drawbacks may be—and they are neither few nor unimportant—had become a necessity of the changed condition of things.

When the Messrs. Dewar erected in Woodhead Street their comparatively small weaving factory in 1834, the weavers thought that a kindly Providence might send a wind strong enough to swing it over



House where Web-beaming Machine was first started, 1840 :
also birthplace of Dr. A. Carnegie, Moodie Street.

into the back burn. The same strong wishes were breathed when the Baldrige Works were being built in 1839, and when Mr. Darling's Glen Factory was built in 1840. Similar thinkings, however, came down to dry, unimpassioned discussion, as the weavers came more and more to see the necessity, in the demands of modern trade, for something more regular and more reliable than a community of weavers on the free-and-easy system of working when they chose and leaving off

when they wanted. They might sigh for the loss of independence and freedom, but they came to see that if orders were to come to the town they must, in the growing exactions of trade, be executed with attention to detail and to time.

For like reasons, the power-loom succeeded the hand-loom, and female labour largely took the part of the craftsmen of old. And now the hand-loom, alike in shops and factories, is a thing of the past, and the "remanent brethren" of the weavers' once proud incorporation are now only occasionally to be met with—pale, weary of eye, and worn, "hingin' twafauld o'er a rung."

Radical and restless the weavers have always been; and even in their years of decay, they eagerly listened to news of political or dynastic changes. Thus, when the year of revolutions (1848) came round—when it was impossible for each man to provide himself with a newspaper—they crowded the old Relief Church to hear the *Scotsman* and other papers read nightly by Thomas Morrison and Andrew Fleming. The writer hereof can still recall the strident and somewhat raucous tones of Mr. Fleming, and the softer yet seemingly ill-to-manage voice of Mr. Morrison. The prominent features, and cold, pale aspect of the one, formed a striking contrast to the glowing cheeks, scintillating eyes, and enthusiastic manner of the other.

As the revolutionary era calmed down, the industrial arose, and with its wondrous world-show in Hyde Park, London, in 1851, bade welcome to a halcyon time of peace. Dunfermline made a brave figure there: and the ancient weavers' craft, ashamed of their morbid condition, drew together again, and, after fifteen years' silence, appoint their penman, and resumed the writing of their records. The revival, however, came too late—the craft was out of date. It lingered on for a few years more, then sank for ever out of sight.

The meetings during the fifties were held in the house of James Bruce, Guildhall Street, during which time the late Mr. Andrew Boag, manufacturer, was their constant deacon. In 1862, the penultimate meeting of the craft was held in the house of Alexander Turnbull, Douglas Street, when the once well-known John

Muckersey, was appointed boxmaster. He was, however, first made a freeman of the craft, with all the honours ; and the deacon announced to the new comer that he was entitled to "all the rights, liberties, privileges and immunities pertaining to the members from of old, to exhibit, claim, and use as freely as any other member ever did, or could use, said privileges and rights." To this the indomitable Muckersey made a magnificent and magniloquent reply.

The final meeting—a mere ghost of former gatherings—was held in the house of Mr. Turnbull, when the new boxmaster acted as host, hailed the members, paid their "caus," and pronounced the following words from Byron's "Giaur":—

"He who hath bent him o'er the dead,
Ere the first day of death is fled,
The first dark day of nothingness,
The last of danger and distress,
Before decay's effacing fingers
Have swept the lines where beauty lingers.
He feels such anguish, dread, and pain,
His heart can never know again ;
To him, the sudden, rending grief,
Bursts o'er the soul ——"

He got no further.

The company applauded the boxmaster's impromptu, and waited for more. The repertoire of Shakespearean extracts, and of song, story, and blank verse speech, which John Muckersey had always in fresh and suiting order, was drawn on to the full. Others told tales of ancient days and bygone times, as when, in 1822, the trade turned out to walk in procession in the funeral cortege of Provost David Wilson ; and how each of them had assisted that warlike provost's ardent wishes by ringing the bells on each recurring victory over the French. How, when the Townhouse, in September, 1831, was about to be lighted with gas, the craft subscribed a guinea of the plumber's charges, and turned out in mass to see the wonderful new light. William Templeman was then deacon of the weavers. He could not

contain himself on the occasion, but broke away into a speech which rippled out so fast, and in so dishevelled a style, that half of it was not understood, and the other half so common place and humorous, that everybody was pleased, and cheered the kind-hearted deacon.

The subject of Parliamentary reform was turned on, and nearly all got their spoons in, as Muckersey phrased it. The fierce agitation of the time, the almost nightly meetings of the inhabitants, the apathetic bearing of the council, and the influences they played off against the reformers. Some of the speakers could remember that, both in 1830 and 1831, the craft had pressed the subject, and petitioned Parliament in favour of clamant changes.

The technical merits of full harness weaving, as opposed to the common, or back harness style, was roughly and familiarly handled. Its introduction in 1836 was made in the face of strong opposition, for though the weavers were alive to its merits, as well as its defects, they were like most other human beings, instinctively opposed to anything new. The "double jig" and the "shifting box" were no less dissected—the boxmaster enlivening every remark with sceptical enquiry, illuminating quotation, or fitting innuendo.

The company were not hurried, either from inclination or by the landlord; so they sat on, the very picture of the forlorn hope of some once great and gallant corps. This thought seemed to impress and to oppress every one present. The seriousness, if not the gloom of sadness, settled down on the "little when" as the hours sped on—the heaviest reflection being that all of the past they could recall in memory could never again be realised in actual life. The hand-loom was but a shadowy memory of bygone times. The giant power-loom, ingenious, capable, intricate, and wonderful, could do all the hand-loom weaver ever could accomplish, so far as delicacy and finish was concerned, and a hundred times more in the turn out of quantity.

"The bygone experiences of the hand-loom weaver," said the deacon, "have no hope of a resurrection. I thought so this morning as I stood in Willie Wanless's loom-shop. The four looms, once so active, were moveless and silent. The tillie pin lay rusting on the

sole, the cloth beam was empty, the breast beam was bare. The thrum hung loose between the reed and the harness, while the heddles were dishevelled and broken. Up above the bearers, the cards and the machine were festooned with spider webs, and the space below and inside the yarn beam was filled in with the twister's chair, and the odds and ends of the kitchen. I turned away and locked the door—and I felt as I did so, that I was shutting out of my heart and memory a pleasant and joyous, if sometimes a suffering and a trying past."

"Give us a song, Muckersey," said John Allester, the key keeper, "and let us go. We can do naething here—the game's up."

The boxmaster rose to his feet more serious than was his wont, and humming the air, "Good nicht and joy be wi' ye a'," he sung out in strong baritone strains—

"Adieu ! a heart warm, fond adieu !
 Dear brothers of the mystic tie !
 Ye favour'd, ye enlighten'd few,
 Companions of my social joy.
 Though I to foreign lands must hie,
 Pursuing fortune's sliddery ba',
 Wi' melting heart and brimful eye,
 I'll mind you still, though far awa'."

One stanza more he sang, hush'd his voice, and moved from the little festive board. The rest of the company followed his example. The landlord closed the door behind his guests, and these for a moment, standing in the moonlight, turned, shook hands, and parted—never to meet again.

"Out of ye olde fields, as men saith,
 Cometh the new corne from year to year ;
 And out of olde books in goodly faith,
 Cometh the new sciences that men do lere.

"When time, who steals your years away,
 Has stolen your pleasures too,
 The records of the past will stay,
 And half your joys renew."

LIST OF MANUFACTURERS, 1820-21.

- JAMES ALEXANDER, Canmore Street.
 ROBT. BALFOUR, Woodhead Street.
 BEVERIDGE & BOGIE, St. Margaret Street.
 J. & A. BENGIO, High Street.
 R. & G. BIRRELL, St. Margaret Street.
 BISSET & MORRIS, Abbey Street.
 JAMES BLACKWOOD, East Port Street.
 W. & A. BOWIE, Moodie Street.
 GEORGE BURT & SONS, Back o' the Dam.
 AND. LINDSAY & Co., Pittencrieff Street.
 D. DEWAR & Co., James Street.
 JOHN SWAN, Pittencrieff Street.
 DAVID GARDINER, „
 JOSEPH GOWANS, Moodie Street.
 ALEXR. HARLEY, Woodhead Street.
 D. & W. HENDERSON, Back o' the Dam.
 JOHN HORN, High Street.
 W. HUNT & SONS, High Street.
 GEORGE INGLIS & SON, Newrow.
 JAMES INGLIS, James Street.
 R. & J. KERR, Collier Row.
 WILLIAM KINNIS, Canmore Street.
 JAMES KIRKLAND, Senr., Newrow.
 JAMES KIRKLAND, Junr., Moodie Street.
 JAMES MILLER, Bridge Street.
 AND. PEEBLES, Guildhall Street.
 WM. PEEBLES, High Street.
 JAS. PHILP, Woodhead Street.
 PHILP & SON, Woodhead Street.
 JOHN REID, Knabbie Row.
 ALEXR. ROBERTSON, Bridge Street.
 J. & T. RUSSEL, High Street.
 JS. SOMERVILLE, Woodhead Street.
 JN. SUTHERLAND, „

W. & J. SWAN, Queen Ann Street.

JOHN WARDLAW, Nethertown.

WM. WILKIE, Gibb Street.

J. WILSON & SON, Newrow.

S. WILSON, Senr., Bridge Street.

S. WILSON, Junr., ,,

—Pigot's *Directory for Scotland*, 1820-21.

Thus we find, in 1820, there were forty-nine manufacturers in the town. Now (1902), with a turn-out at least one hundred times more goods, we have only something like ten firms. It is true that many of those named in 1820 were in a very small way, but even allowing for that, the tendency to concentration is very marked.

MANUFACTURERS IN DUNFERMLINE, 1825-26.

J. & T. ALEXANDER, Canmore Street.

ROBT. BALFOUR, Woodhead Street.

DD. BEVERIDGE, Guildhall Street.

JS. BLACKWOOD, East Port Street.

A. & W. BOWIE, Moodie Street.

G. BURT & SONS, Back o' the Dam.

DD. DEWAR, James Street.

JOSEPH GOWANS, Moodie Street.

ALEXR HARLEY, Woodhead Street.

DD. HENDERSON, Back o' the Dam.

JOHN HORN, Guildhall Street.

R. & J. KERR, Collier Row.

WM. KINNES, Canmore Street.

JN. KIRKLAND, Moodie Street.

JAS. MILLER, Bridge Street.

R. MORRIS, Gardner's Land.

PHILP & SON, Woodhead Street.

A. ROBERTSON, St. Margaret Street.

J. & G. SPENCE, St. Catherine's Wynd.

JN. WARDLAW, Senr., Newrow.
 JN. WARDLAW, Junr., Nethertown.
 WM. WALKER.
 JAS. WILSON & SON, Newrow.
 J. & A. BENGIO, High Street.
 R. & G. BIRREL, St. Margaret Street.
 ALEXR. BOGIE.
 DD. BRODIE, Priory Lane.
 JN. COUPER, Pittencrieff Street.
 DD. GARDINER, ,,
 JAS. HALL & COY., Moodie Street.
 HAY & COY., Pittencrieff Street.
 DD. HOGG, Newrow.
 JOHN KERR, Bothwell Street.
 JOHN KINNELL, Coal Road.
 JAS. KIRKLAND, Knabbie Street.
 COLIN LENNOX, Pittencrieff Street.
 LAWRENCE MORGAN, ,,
 AND. PEEBLES, Guildhall Street.
 JAS. PHILP, Woodhead Street.
 JN. & JAS. RUSSEL, Maygate.
 T. & J. SPENCK, St. Catherine's Wynd.
 W. & J. SWAN, Queen Ann Street.
 DD. WILLIAMSON, Newrow.

—Pigot's *Directory for Scotland*, 1825-26.

Thus, in 1825-26, we find there are forty-three manufacturers in Dunfermline—being six less than in 1820-21.

MANUFACTURERS IN DUNFERMLINE, 1835-36.

J. & T. ALEXANDER, Canmore Street.
 ROBT. BALFOUR, Woodhead Street.
 GEO. BURT & SONS, Back o' the Dam.
 DD. DEWAR, James Street.

ALEXR. ROY, James Street.
 WALKER & BRUCE, Reid Street.
 T. WILSON & SON, Newrow.
 THOS. AITKEN, James Street.
 DD. ANDERSON, High Street.
 THOS. BENNET, Junr., St. Margaret Street.
 E. & R. BEVERIDGE, Priory Lane.
 GEO. BURT & SONS, Cousin's Lane.
 GEO. ELDER, Newrow.
 HUGH ELDER, Inglis Street.
 DAVID KESSON, Newrow.
 DAVID ANDERSON, Newrow.

—Pigot's *Directory for Scotland*, 1835-36.

In this list are fifty-two manufacturers. Trade at this time being exceptionally good.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Half-Gangs—Thrums.

HALF-GANGS.

CASIN' OOT.—At the meeting of the weavers in the Auld Kirk session-house on 5th of February, 1734, the “incorporation, being greatly troubled by apprentices and their masters disagreeing,” they statute and ordain that, in all time coming, no complaint of this kind shall be received without the complainer paying down £1 10s. Scots money, “to be disposed of by the deacon and the quorum called upon to judge the affair.” If the apprentice break his indenture and leave the trade, “he must give security by bond that he shall not work at