

# GLASGOW

PAST AND PRESENT

ILLUSTRATED IN

DEAN OF GUILD COURT REPORTS  
AND IN THE REMINISCENCES AND COMMUNICATIONS  
OF SENEX, ALIQUIS, J. B., ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES*

VOLUME I.

GLASGOW

DAVID ROBERTSON AND CO.

MDCCCLXXXIV



back their money, and threatening to have the whole company of actors taken before the Magistrates, as a parcel of sturdy vagabonds and swindlers. In this state of matters we were all frightened out of our wits. Robinson Crusoe took up his guns and pistols and ran out at the door, and down stairs (sheep-skin dress and all) as fast as his heels could carry him; and we all followed his example, almost overturning one another in our haste to get away—the savages having only time to seize their usual dresses before decamping. In the meantime, the audience had fairly broken loose in our theatre—some of them had taken possession of our stage—while others of them seized the two porters at the door, and insisted upon getting back their money. None of us, however, again ventured to show our faces that night, but left the porters to battle it out with the audience. The next day, however, we called upon the porters to account to us for the money which they had received at the door of our theatre: but they swore that they had been obliged to pay back to the enraged audience every sixpence of it. As for the rent of the room, and for damages done to it by the audience, the landlord seized uncle's green crumbcloth, mother's brass jelly pan, the thunder girdle, and the whole of our scenery. And so ended our theatrical attempt.

(1849.)

ROBERT M'NAIR—JAMES WARDROP—THE HUNCHBACKS.

In your paper of the 6th of July you mention that the directors of the Buchanan's Society have applied to the Dean of Guild Court "for leave to take down and rebuild the land of houses situated at the corner of King Street and Trongate." Now, the land next to this property, situated in King Street, was built by a Mr. Robert M'Nair, a grocer and general dealer. The stones of this building were got from the Black Quarry, regarding the present state of which there has been so much ado of late before the Dean of Guild Court.<sup>1</sup> Mr. M'Nair was a man of abilities,

<sup>1</sup> The Black Quarry at this time contained a deep pool of stagnant water, and was



but of very eccentric manners. Amongst his other whims, he ordered the key-stones of the arches above the shops in this building to be cut so as to represent ludicrous human faces, and each one to be different from another. It was a source of amusement to him, on market days, to join the crowds of country folks who were gazing upon these heads, and to hear their remarks upon them. At present most of these figures are covered by the signboards of the present occupants of the shops, but some of them are still to be seen peeping out.

Many amusing anecdotes are told of Mr. M'Nair. At the time in question there were few individuals in Glasgow possessed of large capital; in consequence of which, all extensive undertakings were carried on there by joint-stock companies, having several partners, perhaps six or eight, who each respectively furnished his quota of capital. Such were our east and west Sugarhouse Companies, Tanwork Company, Soapwork Company, Deltfield Company, Inklefactory Company, Ropework Company, Bottleneck Company, Smithfield Nailree Company, and many others. Mr. M'Nair was resolved not to be behind these companies, and accordingly assumed his wife as a partner, and had his firm painted above his shop door, "Robert M'Nair, Jean Holmes, & Co." There happened one season to be rather a scarcity of oranges in Glasgow, and, unfortunately for Mr. M'Nair, his stock of them was very small, while a neighbouring grocer held nearly the whole stock of oranges in Glasgow. Mr. M'Nair, however, told all his customers that he had a large cargo of oranges, which he expected to arrive every hour. In the meantime, he made up apparently a barrow-load of oranges with his small stock, and employed a porter to wheel them past his neighbour grocer's shop, and to deliver them to his own shop (as if he was getting delivery of a cargo), but immediately afterwards he privately sent away the porter, with his load well covered, by a back door, and through cross streets, and made him again wheel the same barrowful of oranges (openly exposed) past his opponent's shop; and so the porter continued employed for many hours. Having thus appeared as the receptacle of the rubbish and carrion of the district. Some persons who were intoxicated, or had lost their way in the dark, and children who had been playing in the neighbourhood, were drowned, from time to time, in this hole.



but of very eccentric manners. Amongst his other whims, he ordered the key-stones of the arches above the shops in this building to be cut so as to represent ludicrous human faces, and each one to be different from another. It was a source of amusement to him, on market days, to join the crowds of country folks who were gazing upon these heads, and to hear their remarks upon them. At present most of these figures are covered by the signboards of the present occupants of the shops, but some of them are still to be seen peeping out.

Many amusing anecdotes are told of Mr. M'Nair. At the time in question there were few individuals in Glasgow possessed of large capital; in consequence of which, all extensive undertakings were carried on there by joint-stock companies, having several partners, perhaps six or eight, who each respectively furnished his quota of capital. Such were our east and west Sugarhouse Companies, Tanwork Company, Soapwork Company, Deltfield Company, Inklefactory Company, Ropework Company, Bottleneck Company, Smithfield Nailree Company, and many others. Mr. M'Nair was resolved not to be behind these companies, and accordingly assumed his wife as a partner, and had his firm painted above his shop door, "Robert M'Nair, Jean Holmes, & Co." There happened one season to be rather a scarcity of oranges in Glasgow, and, unfortunately for Mr. M'Nair, his stock of them was very small, while a neighbouring grocer held nearly the whole stock of oranges in Glasgow. Mr. M'Nair, however, told all his customers that he had a large cargo of oranges, which he expected to arrive every hour. In the meantime, he made up apparently a barrow-load of oranges with his small stock, and employed a porter to wheel them past his neighbour grocer's shop, and to deliver them to his own shop (as if he was getting delivery of a cargo), but immediately afterwards he privately sent away the porter, with his load well covered, by a back door, and through cross streets, and made him again wheel the same barrowful of oranges (openly exposed) past his opponent's shop; and so the porter continued employed for many hours. Having thus appeared as the receptacle of the rubbish and carrion of the district. Some persons who were intoxicated, or had lost their way in the dark, and children who had been playing in the neighbourhood, were drowned, from time to time, in this hole.



rently laid in a large stock of oranges, he engaged a person to call upon his neighbour grocer, and to buy his whole stock, which his friend did on very moderate terms, the grocer believing that Mr. M'Nair had received a large supply, and that certainly oranges would fall in value.

Mr. M'Nair kept his phaeton, and had his town and country house. The latter was situated on the Camlachie road, and he named this property "Jeanfield," after his wife, Jean Holmes. The house stood upon an eminence in the middle of a park of considerable extent, and it now forms the Eastern Cemetery. At this period Government laid on a tax upon two-wheeled carriages, to the great annoyance of Mr. M'Nair, who was determined to resist payment of this obnoxious tax, and therefore he took off the wheels from his phaeton, and placed the body of it upon two long wooden trams, on which machine he continued to visit his country house, and to carry Jean Holmes and his daughters to church. The public of Scotland is indebted to Mr. M'Nair for obtaining the abolition of a shameful custom, which then existed in our Exchequer Court. It was at that time the practice, in all Exchequer trials, for the Crown, when successful, to pay each jurymen one guinea, and to give the whole of them their supper. It happened that Mr. M'Nair had got into some scrape with the Excise and an action was raised against him in the Exchequer Court at Edinburgh. When the case came to be called, the Crown Advocate, after narrating all the facts and commenting on them, concluded his address to the jury by reminding them, that if they brought in a verdict for the Crown, they would receive a guinea each, and their supper. Upon hearing which, Mr. M'Nair rose up, and asked the Judges if he might be allowed the liberty of speaking one word to the jury. To which request the Judges readily assented. Mr. M'Nair then turned round to the jury and thus addressed them:—"Gentlemen of the Jury, you have heard what the learned Advocate for the Crown has said, namely—'that he will give you a guinea each, and your supper, if you bring in a verdict in favour of the Crown.' Now, here am I, Robert M'Nair, merchant in Glasgow, standing before you, and I promise you two guineas each, and your dinner to boot, with as much wine as you



can drink, if you bring in a verdict in my favour ;" and here Mr. M'Nair sat down. The trial went on, and Mr. M'Nair obtained a verdict in his favour. After this trial the Crown never made any attempt at influencing the jury by this species of bribery. Mr. M'Nair had two daughters, buxom lasses, and, as he was known to be wealthy, these ladies had abundance of wooers ; but Mr. M'Nair became afraid that they might make foolish marriages with some penniless young fellows ; to prevent which, he inserted an advertisement in the newspapers, giving notice to all young men who might come a courting of his daughters that, unless his daughters married with his express consent and approbation, he would not give them one shilling of his property ; and he requested all young men who might be looking after his daughters to attend to this notice.

It happened at one time that Mr. M'Nair required a quantity of copperas for his business, and accordingly he wrote to his agents in London to send him 2 cwts. of that article ; but Mr. M'Nair was not very expert at either writing or spelling, and, in the letter ordering the copperas, he spelled the words "2 cwt. of capres"! The agents in London, however, read these words "2 cwt. of capers," and it was with much difficulty that they could make up the order for such a large quantity. Upon the capers arriving in Glasgow, Mr. M'Nair was quite astonished, and immediately wrote back to his agents, saying that he ordered them to send him "2 cwt. of capres," instead of which they had sent him a large quantity of "sour peas," which nobody in Glasgow would look at ; therefore he was going to return them. The mistake, however, turned out better than Robert expected, for capers in London (in consequence of the market being cleared), suddenly rose greatly in price, so that Mr. M'Nair re-sold his "sour peas" again to great profit. Several of the descendants of Mr. M'Nair were eminent merchants in Glasgow, and were much esteemed for their abilities and integrity.<sup>1</sup>

As I have entered upon the subject of an eccentric character

<sup>1</sup> These were his grandsons ; first, Robert M'Nair, Bailie and Dean of Guild ; second, John M'Nair, manufacturer, who married a daughter of Provost French ; third, James M'Nair, who built the large sugar-house which stood at the corner of Ingram Street and Queen Street, being the opposite corner to the present British Linen Company's Bank.



in Glasgow of olden times, I may take notice of another gentleman of a like description ; this was a merchant of the name of James Wardrop, commonly called "Jemmy Wardrop." He was a man of wit, of engaging manners, a jovial companion, and possessed of much humour ; with these qualities, it is unnecessary to say that he was often invited to the tables of the first families in Glasgow, and he of course had to make returns. On one of these occasions, when he was giving a dinner, he took a whim that every one of his company should be hunchbacked, and accordingly, without any distinction of rank, he invited every hunchback in Glasgow that he could find out. I recollect only three of this number. The first, and most important, was Walter Stirling, Esquire, the founder of Stirling's Library, whose dwelling-house was in Miller Street, and who associated principally with the aristocratical portion of our merchants. The next was a Mr. Hall, a teacher, a man of learning and abilities, commonly called "Humphy Ha'." Some of the scholars of this gentleman are still alive, and amongst them is Mr. John Pollok, of the firm of Pollok, Gilmour, and Company. The third was a man singularly deformed in person, and in an inferior station of life. His name was Pollok, a wig-maker and hairdresser. He was universally known in Glasgow as "Poke the Barber." He was daily to be seen bustling through the streets of the city, attending his customers, all besmeared with hair powder, and a hump on his back like a mountain covered with snow. At this dinner there were seven or eight guests present—Mr. Stirling was the last to arrive. Immediately upon his coming in to the drawing-room, and looking around him, he saw at once the object which Mr. Wardrop had in view in inviting him, and he turned sharply round to Mr. Wardrop, and thus addressed him : "Sir, happily for yourself, you are exempted from the misfortune which has overtaken your guests, and *you* may think that this is a proper occasion to pass your jokes upon them, and to hold up their infirmities to ridicule ; but, sir, I consider your conduct as a gross insult, and that I would demean myself to sit down at the table of a man so destitute of proper feelings and of common good manners,"—so saying, Mr. Stirling directly left the room, and walked away. Mr. Wardrop saw the impropriety of what he had



done, and made every sort of apology to his remaining guests, declaring that he never meant to insult them, or to treat their misfortunes with ridicule. Being a man of very insinuating manners, he contrived to detain his other guests to dinner, and having exerted himself to entertain them, they all left his table, at a late hour, and in good humour ; but the public of Glasgow took up Mr. Stirling's view of the matter, and blamed Mr. Wardrop most excessively for his unfeeling conduct, so that he never again recovered his popularity in the city. Some years afterwards Mr. Wardrop took a religious turn of mind, and endeavoured to form a congregation of his own, by hiring a room at the head of the New Wynd, and becoming a preacher ; but his doctrines were so *outré* that nobody could understand them ; and after people's first curiosity was satisfied by going to hear "Jemmy Wardrop preach," his congregation dwindled away, and at last he died, almost forgotten by the public of Glasgow.

(1849.)

THE OLD GRAMMAR SCHOOL WYND—CURIOUS  
CRIMINAL CASES.

In "Stuart's Views of Glasgow in Former Times," there is a lithographic sketch (at page 67) of an ancient back building, entering by No. 157 High Street. Mr. Stuart (at page 74) says, "We have been informed that this house was at one time occupied as an inn." This may be true, if it refers to a period subsequent to the Reformation ; but at the date when this building was erected Glasgow could not have supported so extensive an inn ; for if the map of Glasgow, dated 1783 (at page 113 of Mr. Stuart's book) be examined, it will be seen that the existing erection is not the entire of the original building ; for this map shows it to have had a front to the Grammar School Wynd. For the reasons I am about to give, I feel inclined to think that this building was connected with the convent of the Dominican or Blackfriar preachers ; and I would be glad if some of your readers who are more versant