

JOHN GALT

THE PROVOST

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INTRODUCTION

During a recent visit to the West Country, among other old friends we paid our respects to Mrs Pawkie, the relict of the Provost of that name, who three several times enjoyed the honour of being chief magistrate in Gudetown. Since the death of her worthy husband, and the comfortable settlement in life of her youngest daughter, Miss Jenny, who was married last year to Mr Caption, writer to the signet, she has been, as she told us herself, “beeking in the lown o’ the conquest which the gudeman had, wi’ sic an ettling o’ pains and industry, gathered for his family.”

Our conversation naturally diverged into various topics, and, among others, we discoursed at large on the manifold improvements which had taken place, both in town and country, since we had visited the Royal Burgh. This led the widow, in a complimentary way, to advert to the hand which, it is alleged, we have had in the editing of that most excellent work, entitled, “Annals of the Parish of Dalmailing,” intimating, that she had a book in the handwriting of her deceased husband, the Provost, filled with a variety of most curious matter; in her opinion, of far more consequence to the world than any book that we had ever been concerned in putting out.

Considering the veneration in which Mr Pawkie had been through life regarded by his helpmate, we must confess that her eulogium on the merits of his work did not impress us with the most profound persuasion that it was really deserving of much attention. Politeness, however, obliged us to express an earnest desire to see the volume, which, after some little hesitation, was produced. Judge, then, of the nature of our emotions, when, in cursorily turning over a few of the well-penned pages, we found that it far surpassed every thing the lady had said in its praise. Such, indeed was our surprise, that we could not refrain from openly and at once assuring her, that the delight and satisfaction which it was calculated to afford, rendered it a duty on her part to lose no time in submitting it to the public; and, after lavishing a panegyric on the singular and excellent qualities of the author, which was all most delicious to his widow, we concluded with a delicate insinuation of the pleasure we should enjoy, in being made the humble instrument of introducing to the knowledge of mankind a volume so replete and enriched with the fruits of his practical wisdom. Thus, partly by a judicious administration of flattery, and partly also by solicitation, backed by an indirect proposal to share the profits, we succeeded in persuading Mrs Pawkie to allow us to take the valuable manuscript to Edinburgh, in order to prepare it for publication.

Having obtained possession of the volume, we lost no time till we had made ourselves master of its contents. It appeared to consist of a series of detached notes, which, together, formed something analogous to an historical view of the different important and interesting scenes and affairs the Provost had been personally engaged in during his long magisterial life. We found, however that the concatenation of the memoranda which he had made of public transactions, was in several places interrupted by the insertion of matter not in the least degree interesting to the nation at large; and that, in arranging the work for the press, it would be requisite and proper to omit many of the notes and much of the record, in order to preserve the historical coherency of the narrative. But in doing this, the text has been retained inviolate, in so much that while we congratulate the world on the addition we are thus enabled to make to the stock of public knowledge, we cannot but felicitate ourselves on the complete and consistent form into which we have so successfully reduced our precious materials; the separation of which, from the dross of personal and private anecdote, was a task of no small difficulty; such, indeed, as the editors only of the autographic memoirs of other great men can duly appreciate.

CHAPTER I – THE FORECAST

It must be allowed in the world, that a man who has thrice reached the highest station of life in his line, has a good right to set forth the particulars of the discretion and prudence by which he lifted himself so far above the ordinaries of his day and generation; indeed, the generality of mankind may claim this as a duty; for the conduct of public men, as it has been often wisely said, is a species of public property, and their rules and observances have in all ages been considered things of a national concernment. I have therefore well weighed the importance it may be of to posterity, to know by what means I have thrice been made an instrument to represent the supreme power and authority of Majesty in the royal burgh of Gudetown, and how I deported myself in that honour and dignity, so much to the satisfaction of my superiors in the state and commonwealth of the land, to say little of the great respect in which I was held by the townsfolk, and far less of the terror that I was to evil-doers. But not to be over circumstantial, I propose to confine this history of my life to the public portion thereof, on the which account I will take up the beginning at the crisis when I first entered into business, after having served more than a year above my time, with the late Mr Thomas Remnant, than whom there was not a more creditable man in the burgh; and he died in the possession of the functionaries and faculties of town-treasurer, much respected by all acquainted with his orderly and discreet qualities.

Mr Remnant was, in his younger years, when the growth of luxury and prosperity had not come to such a head as it has done since, a tailor that went out to the houses of the adjacent lairds and country gentry, whereby he got an inkling of the policy of the world, that could not have been gathered in any other way by a man of his station and degree of life. In process of time he came to be in a settled way, and when I was bound 'prentice to him, he had three regular journeymen and a cloth shop. It was therefore not so much for learning the tailoring, as to get an insight in the conformity between the traffic of the shop and the board that I was bound to him, being destined by my parents for the profession appertaining to the former, and to conjoin thereto something of the mercery and haberdashery: my uncle, that had been a sutler in the army along with General Wolfe, who made a conquest of Quebec, having left me a legacy of three hundred pounds because I was called after him, the which legacy was a consideration for to set me up in due season in some genteel business.

Accordingly, as I have narrated, when I had passed a year over my 'prenticeship with Mr Remnant, I took up the corner shop at the Cross, facing the Tolbooth; and having had it adorned in a befitting manner, about a month before the summer fair thereafter, I opened it on that day, with an excellent assortment of goods, the best, both for taste and variety, that had ever been seen in the burgh of Gudetown; and the winter following, finding by my books that I was in a way to do so, I married my wife: she was daughter to Mrs Broderip, who kept the head inn in Irville, and by whose death, in the fall of the next year, we got a nest egg, that, without a vain pretension, I may say we have not failed to lay upon, and clock to some purpose.

Being thus settled in a shop and in life, I soon found that I had a part to perform in the public world; but I looked warily about me before casting my nets, and therefore I laid myself out rather to be entreated than to ask; for I had often heard Mr Remnant observe, that the nature of man could not abide to see a neighbour taking place and preferment of his own accord. I therefore assumed a coothy and obliging demeanour towards my customers and the community in general; and sometimes even with the very beggars I found a jocose saying as well received as a bawbee, although naturally I dinna think I was ever what could be called a funny man, but only just as ye would say a thought ajee in that way. Howsoever, I soon became, both by habit and repute, a man of popularity in the town, in so much that it was a shrewd saying of old James Alpha, the bookseller, that "mair gude jokes were cracked ilka day in James Pawkie's shop, than in Thomas Curl, the barber's, on a Saturday night."

CHAPTER II – A KITHING

I could plainly discern that the prudent conduct which I had adopted towards the public was gradually growing into effect. Disputative neighbours made me their referee, and I became, as it were, an oracle that was better than the law, in so much that I settled their controversies without the expense that attends the same. But what convinced me more than any other thing that the line I pursued was verging towards a satisfactory result, was, that the elderly folk that came into the shop to talk over the news of the day, and to rehearse the diverse uncos, both of a national and a domestic nature, used to call me bailie and my lord; the which jocular derision was as a symptom and foretaste within their spirits of what I was ordained to be. Thus was I encouraged, by little and little, together with a sharp remarking of the inclination and bent of men's minds, to entertain the hope and assurance of rising to the top of all the town, as this book maketh manifest, and the incidents thereof will certificate.

Nothing particular, however, came to pass, till my wife lay in of her second bairn, our daughter Sarah; at the christening of whom, among divers friends and relations, forbye the minister, we had my father's cousin, Mr Alexander Clues, that was then deacon convener, and a man of great potency in his way, and possessed of an influence in the town-council of which he was well worthy, being a person of good discernment, and well versed in matters appertaining to the guildry. Mr Clues, as we were mellowing over the toddy bowl, said, that by and by the council would be looking to me to fill up the first gap that might happen therein; and Dr Swapkirk, the then minister, who had officiated on the occasion, observed, that it was a thing that, in the course of nature, could not miss to be, for I had all the douce demeanour and sagacity which it behoved a magistrate to possess. But I cannily replied, though I was right contented to hear this, that I had no time for governing, and it would be more for the advantage of the commonwealth to look for the counselling of an older head than mine, happen when a vacancy might in the town-council.

In this conjuncture of our discoursing, Mrs Pawkie, my wife, who was sitting by the fireside in her easy chair, with a cod at her head, for she had what was called a sore time o't, said: —

“Na, na, gudeman, ye need na be sae mim; every body kens, and I ken too, that ye're ettling at the magistracy. It's as plain as a pikestaff, gudeman, and I'll no let ye rest if ye dinna mak me a bailie's wife or a' be done” —

I was not ill pleased to hear Mrs Pawkie so spiritfule; but I replied,

“Dinna try to stretch your arm, gude-wife, further than your sleeve will let you; we maun ca'canny mony a day yet before we think of dignities.”

The which speech, in a way of implication, made Deacon Clues to understand that I would not absolutely refuse an honour thrust upon me, while it maintained an outward show of humility and moderation.

There was, however, a gleg old carlin among the gossips then present, one Mrs Sprowl, the widow of a deceased magistrate, and she cried out aloud: —

“Deacon Clues, Deacon Clues, I redd you no to believe a word that Mr Pawkie's saying, for that was the very way my friend that's no more laid himself out to be fleeced to tak what he was greenan for; so get him intill the council when ye can: we a' ken he'll be a credit to the place,” and “so here's to the health of Bailie Pawkie that is to be,” cried Mrs Sprowl. All present pledged her in the toast, by which we had a wonderful share of diversion. Nothing, however, immediately rose out of this, but it set men's minds a-barming and working; so that, before there was any vacancy in the council, I was considered in a manner as the natural successor to the first of the counsellors that might happen to depart this life.

CHAPTER III – A DIRGIE

In the course of the summer following the baptism, of which I have rehearsed the particulars in the foregoing chapter, Bailie Mucklehose happened to die, and as he was a man long and well respected, he had a great funeral. All the rooms in his house were filled with company; and it so fell out that, in the confusion, there was neither minister nor elder to give the blessing sent into that wherein I was, by which, when Mr Shavings the wright, with his men, came in with the service of bread and wine as usual, there was a demur, and one after another of those present was asked to say grace; but none of them being exercised in public prayer, all declined, when Mr Shavings said to me, “Mr Pawkie, I hope ye’ll no refuse.”

I had seen in the process, that not a few of the declinations were more out of the awkward shame of blateness, than any inherent modesty of nature, or diffidence of talent; so, without making a phrase about the matter, I said the grace, and in such a manner that I could see it made an impression. Mr Shavings was at that time deacon of the wrights, and being well pleased with my conduct on this occasion, when he, the same night, met the craft, he spoke of it in a commendable manner; and as I understood thereafter, it was thought by them that the council could not do better than make choice of me to the vacancy. In short, not to spin out the thread of my narration beyond necessity, let it here suffice to be known, that I was chosen into the council, partly by the strong handling of Deacon Shavings, and the instrumentality of other friends and well-wishers, and not a little by the moderation and prudence with which I had been secretly etting at the honour.

Having thus reached to a seat in the council, I discerned that it behoved me to act with circumspection, in order to gain a discreet dominion over the same, and to rule without being felt, which is the great mystery of policy. With this intent, I, for some time, took no active part in the deliberations, but listened, with the doors of my understanding set wide to the wall, and the windows of my foresight all open; so that, in process of time, I became acquainted with the inner man of the counsellors, and could make a guess, no far short of the probability, as to what they would be at, when they were jooking and wising in a round-about manner to accomplish their own several wills and purposes. I soon thereby discovered, that although it was the custom to deduce reasons from out the interests of the community, for the divers means and measures that they wanted to bring to a bearing for their own particular behoof, yet this was not often very cleverly done, and the cloven foot of self-interest was now and then to be seen aneath the robe of public principle. I had, therefore, but a straightforward course to pursue, in order to overcome all their wiles and devices, the which was to make the interests of the community, in truth and sincerity, the end and object of my study, and never to step aside from it for any immediate speciality of profit to myself. Upon this, I have endeavoured to walk with a constancy of sobriety; and although I have, to a certainty, reaped advantage both in my own person and that of my family, no man living can accuse me of having bent any single thing pertaining to the town and public, from the natural uprightness of its integrity, in order to serve my own private ends.

It was, however, sometime before an occasion came to pass, wherein I could bring my knowledge and observations to operate in any effectual manner towards a reformation in the management of the burgh; indeed, I saw that no good could be done until I had subdued the two great factions, into which it may be said the council was then divided; the one party being strong for those of the king’s government of ministers, and the other no less vehement on the side of their adversaries. I, therefore, without saying a syllable to any body anent the same, girded myself for the undertaking, and with an earnest spirit put my shoulder to the wheel, and never desisted in my endeavours, till I had got the cart up the brae, and the whole council reduced into a proper state of subjection to the will and pleasure of his majesty, whose deputies and agents I have ever considered all inferior magistrates to be, administering and exercising, as they do, their power and authority in his royal name.

The ways and means, however, by which this was brought to pass, supply matter for another chapter; and after this, it is not my intent to say any thing more concerning my principles and opinions, but only to show forth the course and current of things proceeding out of the affairs, in which I was so called to form a part requiring no small endeavour and diligence.

CHAPTER IV – THE GUILDRY

When, as is related in the foregoing chapter, I had nourished my knowledge of the council into maturity, I began to cast about for the means of exercising the same towards a satisfactory issue. But in this I found a great difficulty, arising from the policy and conduct of Mr Andrew M'Lucre, who had a sort of infetment, as may be said, of the office of dean of guild, having for many years been allowed to intromit and manage the same; by which, as was insinuated by his adversaries, no little grist came to his mill. For it had happened from a very ancient date, as far back, I have heard, as the time of Queen Anne, when the union of the kingdoms was brought to a bearing, that the dean of guild among us, for some reason or another, had the upper hand in the setting and granting of tacks of the town lands, in the doing of which it was jealoused that the predecessors of Mr M'Lucre, no to say an ill word of him, honest man, got their loofs creeshed with something that might be called agrassum, or rather, a gratis gift. It therefore seemed to me that there was a necessity for some reformation in the office, and I foresaw that the same would never be accomplished, unless I could get Mr M'Lucre wised out of it, and myself appointed his successor. But in this lay the obstacle; for every thing anent the office was, as it were, in his custody, and it was well known that he had an interest in keeping by that which, in vulgar parlance, is called nine points of the law. However, both for the public good and a convenience to myself, I was resolved to get a finger in the dean of guild's fat pie, especially as I foresaw that, in the course of three or four years, some of the best tacks would run out, and it would be a great thing to the magistrate that might have the disposal of the new ones. Therefore, without seeming to have any foresight concerning the lands that were coming on to be out of lease, I set myself to constrain Mr M'Lucre to give up the guildry, as it were, of his own free-will; and what helped me well to this, was a rumour that came down from London, that there was to be a dissolution of the parliament.

The same day that this news reached the town, I was standing at my shop-door, between dinner and tea-time. It was a fine sunny summer afternoon. Standing under the blessed influence of the time by myself at my shop-door, who should I see passing along the crown of the causey, but Mr M'Lucre himself and with a countenance knotted with care, little in unison with the sultry indolence of that sunny day.

“Whar awa sae fast, dean o' guild?” quo' I to him; and he stopped his wide stepping, for he was a long spare man, and looting in his gait.

“I'm just,” said he, “taking a step to the provost's, to learn the particulars of thir great news – for, as we are to hae the casting vote in the next election, there's no saying the good it may bring to us all gin we manage it wi' discretion.”

I reflected the while of a minute before I made any reply, and then I said —

“It would hae nae doubt of the matter, Mr M'Lucre, could it be brought about to get you chosen for the delegate; but I fear, as ye are only dean of guild this year, that's no to be accomplished; and really, without the like of you, our borough, in the contest, may be driven to the wall.”

“Contest!” cried the dean of guild, with great eagerness; “wha told you that we are to be contested?”

Nobody had told me, nor at the moment was I sensible of the force of what I said; but, seeing the effect it had on Mr M'Lucre, I replied, —

“It does not, perhaps, just now do for me to be more particular, and I hope what I have said to you will gang no further; but it's a great pity that ye're no even a bailie this year, far less the provost, otherwise I would have great confidence.”

“Then,” said the dean of guild, “you have reason to believe that there is to be a dissolution, and that we are to be contested?”

“Mr M’Lucre, dinna speer any questions,” was my answer, “but look at that and say nothing;” so I pulled out of my pocket a letter that had been franked to me by the earl. The letter was from James Portoport, his lordship’s butler, who had been a waiter with Mrs Pawkie’s mother, and he was inclosing to me a five-pound note to be given to an auld aunty that was in need. But the dean of guild knew nothing of our correspondence, nor was it required that he should. However, when he saw my lord’s franking, he said, “Are the boroughs, then, really and truly to be contested?”

“Come into the shop, Mr M’Lucre,” said I sedately; “come in, and hear what I have to say.”

And he came in, and I shut and barred the half-door, in order that we might not be suddenly interrupted.

“You are a man of experience, Mr M’Lucre,” said I, “and have a knowledge of the world, that a young man, like me, would be a fool to pretend to. But I have shown you enough to convince you that I would not be worthy of a trust, were I to answer any improper questions. Ye maun, therefore, gie me some small credit for a little discretion in this matter, while I put a question to yourself. ‘Is there no a possibility of getting you made the provost at Michaelmas, or, at the very least, a bailie, to the end that ye might be chosen delegate, it being an unusual thing for anybody under the degree of a bailie to be chosen thereto?’”

“I have been so long in the guildry,” was his thoughtful reply, “that I fear it canna be very well managed without me.”

“Mr M’Lucre,” said I, and I took him cordially by the hand, “a thought has just entered my head. Couldna we manage this matter between us? It’s true I’m but a novice in public affairs, and with the mystery of the guildry quite unacquaint – if, however, you could be persuaded to allow yourself to be made a bailie, I would, subject to your directions, undertake the office of dean of guild, and all this might be so concerted between us, that nobody would ken the nature of our paction – for, to be plain with you, it’s no to be hoped that such a young counsellor as myself can reasonably expect to be raised, so soon as next Michaelmas, to the magistracy, and there is not another in the council that I would like to see chosen delegate at the election but yourself.”

Mr M’Lucre swithered a little at this, fearing to part with the bird he had in hand; but, in the end, he said, that he thought what was proposed no out of the way, and that he would have no objection to be a bailie for the next year, on condition that I would, in the following, let him again be dean of guild, even though he should be called a Michaelmas mare, for it did not so well suit him to be a bailie as to be dean of guild, in which capacity he had been long used.

I guessed in this that he had a vista in view of the tacks and leases that were belyve to fall in, and I said —

“Nothing can be more reasonable, Mr M’Lucre; for the office of dean of guild must be a very fashious one, to folks like me, no skilled in its particularities; and I’m sure I’ll be right glad and willing to give it up, when we hae got our present turn served. – But to keep a’ things quiet between us, let us no appear till after the election overly thick; indeed, for a season, we maun fight, as it were, under different colours.”

Thus was the seed sown of a great reformation in the burgh, the sprouting whereof I purpose to describe in due season.

CHAPTER V – THE FIRST CONTESTED ELECTION

The sough of the dissolution of parliament, during the whole of the summer, grew stronger and stronger, and Mr M'Lucre and me were seemingly pulling at opposite ends of the rope. There was nothing that he proposed in the council but what I set myself against with such bir and vigour, that sometimes he could scarcely keep his temper, even while he was laughing in his sleeve to see how the other members of the corporation were beglammered. At length Michaelmas drew near, when I, to show, as it were, that no ill blood had been bred on my part, notwithstanding our bickerings, proposed in the council that Mr M'Lucre should be the new bailie; and he on his part, to manifest, in return, that there was as little heart-burning on his, said "he would have no objections; but then he insisted that I should consent to be dean of guild in his stead."

"It's true," said he in the council on that occasion, "that Mr Pawkie is as yet but a greenhorn in the concerns of the burgh: however, he'll never learn younger, and if he'll agree to this, I'll gie him all the help and insight that my experience enables me to afford."

At the first, I pretended that really, as was the truth, I had no knowledge of what were the duties of dean of guild; but after some fleeching from the other councillors, I consented to have the office, as it were, forced upon me; so I was made dean of guild, and Mr M'Lucre the new bailie.

By and by, when the harvest in England was over, the parliament was dissolved, but no candidate started on my lord's interest, as was expected by Mr M'Lucre, and he began to fret and be dissatisfied that he had ever consented to allow himself to be hoodwinked out of the guildry. However, just three days before the election, and at the dead hour of the night, the sound of chariot wheels and of horsemen was heard in our streets; and this was Mr Galore, the great Indian nabob, that had bought the Beerland estates, and built the grand place that is called Lucknoo House, coming from London, with the influence of the crown on his side, to oppose the old member. He drove straight to Provost Picklan's house, having, as we afterwards found out, been in a secret correspondence with him through the medium of Mrs Picklan, who was conjunct in the business with Miss Nelly, the nabob's maiden sister. Mr M'Lucre was not a little confounded at this, for he had imagined that I was the agent on behalf of my lord, who was of the government side, so he wist not what to do, in the morning when he came to me, till I said to him briskly —

"Ye ken, bailie, that ye're trysted to me, and it's our duty to support the nabob, who is both able and willing, as I have good reason to think, to requite our services in a very grateful manner." This was a cordial to his spirit, and, without more ado, we both of us set to work to get the bailie made the delegate. In this I had nothing in view but the good of my country by pleasuring, as it was my duty, his majesty's government, for I was satisfied with my situation as dean of guild. But the handling required no small slight of skill.

The first thing was, to persuade those that were on the side of the old member to elect Mr M'Lucre for delegate, he being, as we had concerted, openly declared for that interest, and the benefit to be gotten thereby having, by use and wont, been at an established and regular rate. The next thing was to get some of those that were with me on my lord's side, kept out of the way on the day of choosing the delegate; for we were the strongest, and could easily have returned the provost, but I had no clear notion how it would advantage me to make the provost delegate, as was proposed. I therefore, on the morning of the business, invited three of the council to take their breakfast with me, for the ostensible purpose of going in a body to the council chamber to choose the provost delegate; but when we were at breakfast, John Snakers, my lad in the shop, by my suggestion, warily got a bale of broad cloth so tumbled, as it were by accident, at the door, that it could not be opened; for it bent the key in such a manner in the lock, and crooket the sneck, that without a smith there was no egress, and sorrow a smith was to be had. All were out and around the tolbooth waiting for the upshot of the choosing the delegate. Those that saw me in the mean time, would have thought I had

gone demented. I ranted and I stamped; I bellowed and I bellowed like desperation. My companions, no a bit better, flew fluttering to the windows, like wild birds to the wires of their cage. However, to make a long tale short, Bailie M'Lucre was, by means of this device, chosen delegate, seemingly against my side. But oh! he was a sly tod, for no sooner was he so chosen, than he began to act for his own behoof; and that very afternoon, while both parties were holding their public dinner he sent round the bell to tell that the potato crop on his back rig was to be sold by way of public roup the same day. There wasna one in the town that had reached the years of discretion, but kent what na sort of potatoes he was going to sell; and I was so disturbed by this open corruption, that I went to him, and expressed my great surprise. Hot words ensued between us; and I told him very plainly that I would have nothing further to say to him or his political profligacy. However, his potatoes were sold, and brought upwards of three guineas the peck, the nabob being the purchaser, who, to show his contentment with the bargain, made Mrs M'Lucre, and the bailie's three daughters, presents of new gowns and princods, that were not stuffed with wool.

In the end, as a natural consequence, Bailie M'Lucre, as delegate, voted for the Nabob, and the old member was thereby thrown out. But although the government candidate in this manner won the day, yet I was so displeased by the jockeying of the bailie, and the selfish manner by which he had himself reaped all the advantage of the election in the sale of his potatoes, that we had no correspondence on public affairs till long after; so that he never had the face to ask me to give up the guildry, till I resigned it of my own accord after the renewal of the tacks to which I have alluded, by the which renewals, a great increase was effected in the income of the town.

CHAPTER VI – THE FAILURE OF BAILIE M’LUCRE

Bailie M’Lucre, as I have already intimated, was naturally a greedy body, and not being content with the profits of his potatoe rig, soon after the election he set up as an o’er-sea merchant, buying beef and corn by agency in Ireland, and having the same sent to the Glasgow market. For some time, this traffic yielded him a surprising advantage; but the summer does not endure the whole year round, nor was his prosperity ordained to be of a continuance. One mishap befell him after another; cargoes of his corn heated in the vessels, because he would not sell at a losing price, and so entirely perished; and merchants broke, that were in his debt large sums for his beef and provisions. In short, in the course of the third year from the time of the election, he was rookit of every plack he had in the world, and was obligated to take the benefit of the divor’s bill, soon after which he went suddenly away from the town, on the pretence of going into Edinburgh, on some business of legality with his wife’s brother, with whom he had entered into a plea concerning the moiety of a steading at the town-head. But he did not stop on any such concern there; on the contrary, he was off, and up to London in a trader from Leith, to try if he could get a post in the government by the aid of the nabob, our member; who, by all accounts, was hand and glove with the king’s ministers. The upshot of this journey to London was very comical; and when the bailie afterwards came back, and him and me were again on terms of visitation, many a jocose night we spent over the story of the same; for the bailie was a kittle hand at a bowl of toddy; and his adventure was so droll, especially in the way he was wont to rehearse the particulars, that it cannot fail to be an edification to posterity, to read and hear how it happened, and all about it. I may therefore take leave to digress into the circumstantial, by way of lightening for a time the seriousness of the sober and important matter, whereof it is my intent that this book shall be a register and record to future times.

CHAPTER VII – THE BRIBE

Mr M'Lucre, going to London, as I have intimated in the foregoing chapter, remained there, absent from us altogether about the space of six weeks; and when he came home, he was plainly an altered man, being sometimes very jocose, and at other times looking about him as if he had been haunted by some ill thing. Moreover, Mrs Spell, that had the post-office from the decease of her husband, Deacon Spell, told among her kimmers, that surely the bailie had a great correspondence with the king and government, for that scarce a week passed without a letter from him to our member, or a letter from the member to him. This bred no small consideration among us; and I was somehow a thought uneasy thereat, not knowing what the bailie, now that he was out of the guildry, might be saying anent the use and wont that had been practised therein, and never more than in his own time. At length, the babe was born.

One evening, as I was sitting at home, after closing the shop for the night, and conversing concerning the augmentation of our worldly affairs with Mrs Pawkie and the bairns – it was a damp raw night; I mind it just as well as if it had been only yestreen – who should make his appearance at the room door but the bailie himself, and a blithe face he had?

“It’s a’ settled now,” cried he, as he entered with a triumphant voice; “the siller’s my ain, and I can keep it in spite of them; I don’t value them now a cutty-spoon; no, not a doit; no the worth of that; nor a’ their sprose about Newgate and the pillory;” – and he snapped his fingers with an aspect of great courage.

“Hooly, hooly, bailie,” said I; “what’s a’ this for?” and then he replied, taking his seat beside me at the fireside – “The plea with the custom-house folk at London is settled, or rather, there canna be a plea at a’, so firm and true is the laws of England on my side, and the liberty of the subject.”

All this was Greek and Hebrew to me; but it was plain that the bailie, in his jaunt, had been guilty of some notour thing, wherein the custom-house was concerned, and that he thought all the world was acquaint with the same. However, no to balk him in any communication he might be disposed to make me, I said: —

“What ye say, bailie, is great news, and I wish you meikle joy, for I have had my fears about your situation for some time; but now that the business is brought to such a happy end, I would like to hear all the true particulars of the case; and that your tale and tidings sha’na lack slackening, I’ll get in the toddy bowl and the gardevin; and with that, I winket to the mistress to take the bairns to their bed, and bade Jenny Hachle, that was then our fee’d servant lass, to gar the kettle boil. Poor Jenny has long since fallen into a great decay of circumstances, for she was not overly snod and cleanly in her service; and so, in time, wore out the endurance of all the houses and families that fee’d her, till nobody would take her; by which she was in a manner cast on Mrs Pawkie’s hands; who, on account of her kindness towards the bairns in their childhood, has given her a howf among us. But, to go on with what I was rehearsing; the toddy being ordered, and all things on the table, the bailie, when we were quiet by ourselves, began to say —

“Ye ken weel, Mr Pawkie, what I did at the ’lection for the member and how angry ye were yoursel about it, and a’ that. But ye were greatly mista’en in thinking that I got ony effectual fee at the time, over and above the honest price of my potatoes; which ye were as free to bid for, had ye liket, as either o’ the candidates. I’ll no deny, however, that the nabob, before he left the town, made some small presents to my wife and dochter; but that was no fault o’ mine. Howsever, when a’ was o’er, and I could discern that ye were mindet to keep the guildry, I thought, after the wreck o’ my provision concern, I might throw mair bread on the water and not find it, than by a bit jaunt to London to see how my honourable friend, the nabob, was coming on in his place in parliament, as I saw none of his speches in the newspaper.

“Well, ye see, Mr Pawkie, I gae’d up to London in a trader from Leith; and by the use of a gude Scotch tongue, the whilk was the main substance o’ a’ the bairns’ part o’ gear that I inherited from my parents, I found out the nabob’s dwelling, in the west end o’ the town of London; and finding out the nabob’s dwelling, I went and rappit at the door, which a bardy flunkie opened, and speer’t what I want it, as if I was a thing no fit to be lifted off a midden with a pair of iron tongs. Like master, like man, thought I to myself; and thereupon, taking heart no to be put out, I replied to the whipper-snapper – ‘I’m Bailie M’Lucre o’ Gudetown, and maun hae a word wi’ his honour.’

“The cur lowered his birsses at this, and replied, in a mair ceeveleezed style of language, ‘Master is not at home.’ But I kent what not at home means in the morning at a gentleman’s door in London; so I said, ‘Very weel, as I hae had a long walk, I’ll e’en rest myself and wait till he come;’ and with that, I plumpit down on one of the mahogany chairs in the trance. The lad, seeing that I was na to be jookit, upon this answered me, by saying, he would go and enquire if his master would be at home to me; and the short and the long o’t was, that I got at last an audience o’ my honourable friend.

“‘Well, bailie,’ said he, ‘I’m glad to see you in London,’ and a hantle o’ ither courtly glammer that’s no worth a repetition; and, from less to mair, we proceeded to sift into the matter and end of my coming to ask the help o’ his hand to get me a post in the government. But I soon saw, that wi’ a’ the phraseology that lay at his tongue end during the election, about his power and will to serve us, his ain turn ser’t, he cared so little for me. Howsever after tarrying some time, and going to him every day, at long and last he got me a tide-waiter’s place at the custom-house; a poor hungry situation, no worth the grassum at a new tack of the warst land in the town’s aught. But minnows are better than nae fish, and a tide-waiter’s place was a step towards a better, if I could have waited. Luckily, however, for me, a flock of fleets and ships frae the East and West Indies came in a’ thegither; and there was sic a stress for tide-waiters, that before I was sworn in and tested, I was sent down to a grand ship in the Malabar trade frae China, loaded with tea and other rich commodities; the captain whereof, a discreet man, took me down to the cabin, and gave me a dram of wine, and, when we were by oursel, he said to me —

“‘Mr M’Lucre, what will you take to shut your eyes for an hour?’

“‘I’ll no take a hundred pounds,’ was my answer.

“‘I’ll make it guineas,’ quoth he.

“‘Surely, thought I, my eyne maun be worth pearls and diamonds to the East India Company; so I answered and said —

“‘Captain, no to argol-bargol about the matter,’ (for a’ the time, I thought upon how I had not been sworn in;) – ‘what will ye gie me, if I take away my eyne out of the vessel?’

“‘A thousand pounds,’ cried he.

“‘A bargain be’t,’ said I. I think, however, had I stood out I might hae got mair. But it doesna rain thousands of pounds every day; so, to make a long tale short, I got a note of hand on the Bank of England for the sum, and, packing up my ends and my awls, left the ship.

“‘It was my intent to have come immediately home to Scotland; but the same afternoon, I was summoned by the Board at the Custom-house for deserting my post; and the moment I went before them, they opened upon me like my lord’s pack of hounds, and said they would send me to Newgate. ‘Cry a’ at ance,’ quoth I; ‘but I’ll no gang.’ I then told them how I was na sworn, and under no obligation to serve or obey them mair than pleased mysel’; which set them a’ again a barking worse than before; whereupon, seeing no likelihood of an end to their stramash, I turned mysel’ round, and, taking the door on my back, left them, and the same night came off on the Fly to Edinburgh. Since syne they have been trying every grip and wile o’ the law to punish me as they threatened; but the laws of England are a great protection to the people against arbitrary power; and the letter that I have got to-day frae the nabob, tells me that the commissioners hae abandoned the plea.”

Such was the account and narration that the bailie gave to me of the particulars o’ his journey to London; and when he was done, I could not but make a moral reflection or two, on the policy

of gentlemen putting themselves on the leet to be members of Parliament; it being a clear and plain thing, that as they are sent up to London for the benefit of the people by whom they are chosen, the people should always take care to get some of that benefit in hand paid down, otherwise they run a great risk of seeing their representatives neglecting their special interests, and treating them as entitled to no particular consideration.

CHAPTER VIII – ON THE CHOOSING OF A MINISTER

The next great handling that we had in the council after the general election, was anent the choice of a minister for the parish. The Rev. Dr Swapkirk having had an apoplexy, the magistrates were obligated to get Mr Pittle to be his helper. Whether it was that, by our being used to Mr Pittle, we had ceased to have a right respect for his parts and talents, or that in reality he was but a weak brother, I cannot in conscience take it on me to say; but the certainty is, that when the Doctor departed this life, there was hardly one of the hearers who thought Mr Pittle would ever be their placed minister, and it was as far at first from the unanimous mind of the magistrates, who are the patrons of the parish, as any thing could well be, for he was a man of no smeddum in discourse. In verity, as Mrs Pawkie, my wife, said, his sermons in the warm summer afternoons were just a perfect hushabaa, that no mortal could hearken to without sleeping. Moreover, he had a sorning way with him, that the genteeler sort could na abide, for he was for ever going from house to house about tea-time, to save his ain canister. As for the young ladies, they could na endure him at all, for he had aye the sough and sound of love in his mouth, and a round-about ceremonial of joking concerning the same, that was just a fasherie to them to hear. The commonality, however, were his greatest adversaries; for he was, notwithstanding the spareness of his abilities, a prideful creature, taking no interest in their hamely affairs, and seldom visiting the aged or the sick among them. Shortly, however, before the death of the doctor, Mr Pittle had been very attentive to my wife's full cousin, Miss Lizy Pinkie, I'll no say on account of the legacy of seven hundred pounds left her by an uncle that made his money in foreign parts, and died at Portsmouth of the liver complaint, when he was coming home to enjoy himself; and Mrs Pawkie told me, that as soon as Mr Pittle could get a kirk, I needna be surprised if I heard o' a marriage between him and Miss Lizy.

Had I been a sordid and interested man, this news could never have given me the satisfaction it did, for Miss Lizy was very fond of my bairns, and it was thought that Peter would have been her heir; but so far from being concerned at what I heard, I rejoiced thereat, and resolved in secret thought, whenever a vacancy happened, Dr Swapkirk being then fast wearing away, to exert the best of my ability to get the kirk for Mr Pittle, not, however, unless he was previously married to Miss Lizy; for, to speak out, she was beginning to stand in need of a protector, and both me and Mrs Pawkie had our fears that she might outlive her income, and in her old age become a cress upon us. And it couldna be said that this was any groundless fear; for Miss Lizy, living a lonely maiden life by herself, with only a bit lassie to run her errands, and no being naturally of an active or eydent turn, aften wearied, and to keep up her spirits gaed may be, now and then, oftener to the gardevin than was just necessar, by which, as we thought, she had a taver look. Howsever, as Mr Pittle had taken a notion of her, and she pleased his fancy, it was far from our hand to misliken one that was sib to us; on the contrary, it was a duty laid on me by the ties of blood and relationship, to do all in my power to further their mutual affection into matrimonial fruition; and what I did towards that end, is the burden of this current chapter.

Dr Swapkirk, in whom the spark of life was long fading, closed his eyes, and it went utterly out, as to this world, on a Saturday night, between the hours of eleven and twelve. We had that afternoon got an inkling that he was drawing near to his end. At the latest, Mrs Pawkie herself went over to the manse, and stayed till she saw him die. "It was a pleasant end," she said, for he was a godly, patient man; and we were both sorely grieved, though it was a thing for which we had been long prepared; and indeed, to his family and connexions, except for the loss of the stipend, it was a very gentle dispensation, for he had been long a heavy handful, having been for years but, as it were, a breathing lump of mortality, groosy, and oozy, and doozy, his faculties being shut up and locked in by a dumb palsy.

Having had this early intimation of the doctor's removal to a better world, on the Sabbath morning when I went to join the magistrates in the council-chamber, as the usage is to go to the laft, with the town-officers carrying their halberts before us, according to the ancient custom of all royal burghs, my mind was in a degree prepared to speak to them anent the successor. Little, however, passed at that time, and it so happened that, by some wonder of inspiration, (there were, however, folk that said it was taken out of a book of sermons, by one Barrow an English Divine,) Mr Pittle that forenoon preached a discourse that made an impression, in so much, that on our way back to the council-chamber I said to Provost Vintner, that then was —

“Really Mr Pittle seems, if he would exert himself, to have a nerve. I could not have thought it was in the power of his capacity to have given us such a sermon.”

The provost thought as I did, so I replied — “We canna, I think, do better than keep him among us. It would, indeed, provost, no be doing justice to the young man to pass another over his head.”

I could see that the provost wasna quite sure of what I had been saying; for he replied, that it was a matter that needed consideration.

When we separated at the council-chamber, I threw myself in the way of Bailie Weezle, and walked home with him, our talk being on the subject of vacancy; and I rehearsed to him what had passed between me and the provost, saying, that the provost had made no objection to prefer Mr Pittle, which was the truth.

Bailie Weezle was a man no overladen with worldly wisdom, and had been chosen into the council principally on account of being easily managed. In his business, he was originally by trade a baker in Glasgow, where he made a little money, and came to settle among us with his wife, who was a native of the town, and had her relations here. Being therefore an idle man, living on his money, and of a soft and quiet nature, he was for the reason aforesaid chosen into the council, where he always voted on the provost's side; for in controverted questions every one is beholden to take a part, and he thought it was his duty to side with the chief magistrate.

Having convinced the bailie that Mr Pittle had already, as it were, a sort of infeoffment in the kirk, I called in the evening on my old predecessor in the guildry, Bailie M'Lucre, who was not a hand to be so easily dealt with; but I knew his inclinations, and therefore I resolved to go roundly to work with him. So I asked him out to take a walk, and I led him towards the town-moor, conversing loosely about one thing and another, and touching softly here and there on the vacancy.

When we were well on into the middle of the moor, I stopped, and, looking round me, said, “Bailie, surely it's a great neglec of the magistrates and council to let this braw broad piece of land, so near the town, lie in a state o' nature, and giving pasturage to only twa-three of the poor folk's cows. I wonder you, that's now a rich man, and with eyne worth pearls and diamonds, that ye dinna think of asking a tack of this land; ye might make a great thing o't.”

The fish nibbled, and told me that he had for some time entertained a thought on the subject; but he was afraid that I would be overly extortionate.

“I wonder to hear you, bailie,” said I; “I trust and hope no one will ever find me out of the way of justice; and to convince you that I can do a friendly turn, I'll no objec to gie you a' my influence free gratis, if ye'll gie Mr Pittle a lift into the kirk; for, to be plain with you, the worthy young man, who, as ye heard to-day, is no without an ability, has long been fond of Mrs Pawkie's cousin, Miss Lizy Pinky; and I would fain do all that lies in my power to help on the match.”

The bailie was well pleased with my frankness, and before returning home we came to a satisfactory understanding; so that the next thing I had to do, was to see Mr Pittle himself on the subject. Accordingly, in the gloaming, I went over to where he stayed: it was with Miss Jenny Killfuddy, an elderly maiden lady, whose father was the minister of Braehill, and the same that is spoken of in the chronicle of Dalmailing, as having had his eye almost put out by a clash of glaur, at the stormy placing of Mr Balwhidder.

“Mr Pittle,” said I, as soon as I was in and the door closed. “I’m come to you as a friend; both Mrs Pawkie and me have long discerned that ye have had a look more than common towards our friend, Miss Lizy, and we think it our duty to enquire your intents, before matters gang to greater length.”

He looked a little dumfounded at this salutation, and was at a loss for an answer, so I continued

—
“If your designs be honourable, and no doubt they are, now’s your time; strike while the iron’s hot. By the death of the doctor, the kirk’s vacant, the town-council have the patronage; and, if ye marry Miss Lizy, my interest and influence shall not be slack in helping you into the poopit.” In short, out of what passed that night, on the Monday following Mr Pittle and Miss Lizy were married; and by my dexterity, together with the able help I had in Bailie M’Lucre, he was in due season placed and settled in the parish; and the next year more than fifty acres of the town-moor were inclosed on a nine hundred and ninety-nine years’ tack at an easy rate between me and the bailie, he paying the half of the expense of the ditching and rooting out of the whins; and it was acknowledged by every one that saw it, that there had not been a greater improvement for many years in all the country side. But to the best actions there will be adverse and discontented spirits; and, on this occasion, there were not wanting persons naturally of a disloyal opposition temper, who complained of the inclosure as a usurpation of the rights and property of the poorer burghers. Such revilings, however, are what all persons in authority must suffer; and they had only the effect of making me button my coat, and look out the crooser to the blast.

CHAPTER IX – AN EXECUTION

The attainment of honours and dignities is not enjoyed without a portion of trouble and care, which, like a shadow, follows all temporalities. On the very evening of the same day that I was first chosen to be a bailie, a sore affair came to light, in the discovery that Jean Gaisling had murdered her bastard bairn. She was the daughter of a donsie mother, that could gie no name to her gets, of which she had two laddies, besides Jean. The one of them had gone off with the soldiers some time before; the other, a douce well-behaved callan, was in my lord's servitude, as a stable boy at the castle. Jeanie herself was the bonniest lassie in the whole town, but light-headed, and fonder of outgait and blether in the causey than was discreet of one of her uncertain parentage. She was, at the time when she met with her misfortune, in the service of Mrs Dalrymple, a colonel's widow, that came out of the army and settled among us on her jointure.

This Mrs Dalrymple, having been long used to the loose morals of camps and regiments, did not keep that strict hand over poor Jeanie, and her other serving lass, that she ought to have done, and so the poor guileless creature fell into the snare of some of the ne'er-do-weel gentlemen that used to play cards at night with Mrs Dalrymple. The truths of the story were never well known, nor who was the father, for the tragical issue barred all enquiry; but it came out that poor Jeanie was left to herself, and, being instigated by the Enemy, after she had been delivered, did, while the midwife's back was turned, strangle the baby with a napkin. She was discovered in the very fact, with the bairn black in the face in the bed beside her.

The heinousness of the crime can by no possibility be lessened; but the beauty of the mother, her tender years, and her light-headedness, had won many favourers; and there was a great leaning in the hearts of all the town to compassionate her, especially when they thought of the ill example that had been set to her in the walk and conversation of her mother. It was not, however, within the power of the magistrates to overlook the accusation; so we were obligated to cause a precognition to be taken, and the search left no doubt of the wilfulness of the murder. Jeanie was in consequence removed to the tolbooth, where she lay till the lords were coming to Ayr, when she was sent thither to stand her trial before them; but, from the hour she did the deed, she never spoke.

Her trial was a short procedure, and she was cast to be hanged – and not only to be hanged, but ordered to be executed in our town, and her body given to the doctors to make an atomy. The execution of Jeanie was what all expected would happen; but when the news reached the town of the other parts of the sentence, the wail was as the sough of a pestilence, and fain would the council have got it dispensed with. But the Lord Advocate was just wud at the crime, both because there had been no previous concealment, so as to have been an extenuation for the shame of the birth, and because Jeanie would neither divulge the name of the father, nor make answer to all the interrogatories that were put to her – standing at the bar like a dumbie, and looking round her, and at the judges, like a demented creature, and beautiful as a Flanders' baby. It was thought by many, that her advocate might have made great use of her visible consternation, and pled that she was by herself; for in truth she had every appearance of being so. He was, however, a dure man, no doubt well enough versed in the particulars and punctualities of the law for an ordinary plea; but no of the right sort of knowledge and talent to take up the case of a forlorn lassie, misled by ill example and a winsome nature, and clothed in the allurements of loveliness, as the judge himself said to the jury.

On the night before the day of execution, she was brought over in a chaise from Ayr between two town-officers, and placed again in our hands, and still she never spoke.

Nothing could exceed the compassion that every one had for poor Jeanie, so she wasna committed to a common cell, but laid in the council-room, where the ladies of the town made up a comfortable bed for her, and some of them sat up all night and prayed for her; but her thoughts were gone, and she sat silent.

In the morning, by break of day, her wanton mother, that had been trolloping in Glasgow, came to the tolbooth door, and made a dreadful wally-waeing, and the ladies were obligated, for the sake of peace, to bid her be let in. But Jeanie noticed her not, still sitting with her eyes cast down, waiting the coming on of the hour of her doom. The wicked mother first tried to rouse her by weeping and distraction, and then she took to upbraiding; but Jeanie seemed to heed her not, save only once, and then she but looked at the misleart tinkler, and shook her head. I happened to come into the room at this time, and seeing all the charitable ladies weeping around, and the randy mother talking to the poor lassie as loudly and vehement as if she had been both deaf and sullen, I commanded the officers, with a voice of authority, to remove the mother, by which we had for a season peace, till the hour came.

There had not been an execution in the town in the memory of the oldest person then living; the last that suffered was one of the martyrs in the time of the persecution, so that we were not skilled in the business, and had besides no hangman, but were necessitated to borrow the Ayr one. Indeed, I being the youngest bailie, was in terror that the obligation might have fallen to me.

A scaffold was erected at the Tron, just under the tolbooth windows, by Thomas Gimblet, the master-of-work, who had a good penny of profit by the job, for he contracted with the town-council, and had the boards after the business was done to the bargain; but Thomas was then deacon of the wrights, and himself a member of our body.

At the hour appointed, Jeanie, dressed in white, was led out by the town-officers, and in the midst of the magistrates from among the ladies, with her hands tied behind her with a black riband. At the first sight of her at the tolbooth stairhead, a universal sob rose from all the multitude, and the sternest e'e couldna refrain from shedding a tear. We marched slowly down the stair, and on to the foot of the scaffold, where her younger brother, Willy, that was stable-boy at my lord's, was standing by himself, in an open ring made round him in the crowd; every one compassionating the dejected laddie, for he was a fine youth, and of an orderly spirit.

As his sister came towards the foot of the ladder, he ran towards her, and embraced her with a wail of sorrow that melted every heart, and made us all stop in the middle of our solemnity. Jeanie looked at him, (for her hands were tied,) and a silent tear was seen to drop from her cheek. But in the course of little more than a minute, all was quiet, and we proceeded to ascend the scaffold. Willy, who had by this time dried his eyes, went up with us, and when Mr Pittle had said the prayer, and sung the psalm, in which the whole multitude joined, as it were with the contrition of sorrow, the hangman stepped forward to put on the fatal cap, but Willy took it out of his hand, and placed it on his sister himself, and then kneeling down, with his back towards her closing his eyes and shutting his ears with his hands, he saw not nor heard when she was launched into eternity.

When the awful act was over, and the stir was for the magistrates to return, and the body to be cut down, poor Willy rose, and without looking round, went down the steps of the scaffold; the multitude made a lane for him to pass, and he went on through them hiding his face, and gaed straight out of the town. As for the mother, we were obligated, in the course of the same year, to drum her out of the town, for stealing thirteen choppin bottles from William Gallon's, the vintner's, and selling them for whisky to Maggie Picken, that was tried at the same time for the reset.

CHAPTER X – A RIOT

Nothing very material, after Jeanie Gaisling's affair, happened in the town till the time of my first provostry, when an event arose with an aspect of exceeding danger to the lives and properties of the whole town. I cannot indeed think of it at this day, though age has cooled me down in all concerns to a spirit of composure, without feeling the blood boil in my veins; so greatly, in the matter alluded to, was the king's dignity and the rightful government, by law and magistracy, insulted in my person.

From time out of mind, it had been an ancient and commendable custom in the burgh, to have, on the king's birth-day, a large bowl of punch made in the council-chamber, in order and to the end and effect of drinking his majesty's health at the cross; and for pleasance to the commonality, the magistrates were wont, on the same occasion, to allow a cart of coals for a bonfire. I do not now, at this distance of time, remember the cause how it came to pass, but come to pass it did, that the council resolved for time coming to refrain from giving the coals for the bonfire; and it so fell out that the first administration of this economy was carried into effect during my provostry, and the wyte of it was laid at my door by the trades' lads, and others, that took on them the lead in hobleshows at the fairs, and such like public doings. Now I come to the issue and particulars.

The birth-day, in progress of time, came round, and the morning was ushered in with the ringing of bells, and the windows of the houses adorned with green boughs and garlands. It was a fine bright day, and nothing could exceed the glee and joviality of all faces till the afternoon, when I went up to the council-chamber in the tolbooth, to meet the other magistrates and respectable characters of the town, in order to drink the king's health. In going thither, I was joined, just as I was stepping out of my shop, by Mr Stoup, the excise gauger, and Mr Firilot, the meal-monger, who had made a power of money a short time before, by a cargo of corn that he had brought from Belfast, the ports being then open, for which he was envied by some, and by the common sort was considered and reviled as a wicked hard-hearted forestaller. As for Mr Stoup, although he was a very creditable man, he had the repute of being overly austere in his vocation, for which he was not liked over and above the dislike that the commonality cherish against all of his calling; so that it was not possible that any magistrate, such as I endeavoured to be, adverse to ill-doers, and to vice and immorality of every kind, could have met at such a time and juncture, a greater misfortune than those two men, especially when it is considered, that the abolition of the bonfire was regarded as a heinous trespass on the liberties and privileges of the people. However, having left the shop, and being joined, as I have narrated, by Mr Stoup and Mr Firilot, we walked together at a sedate pace towards the tolbooth, before which, and at the cross, a great assemblage of people were convened; trades' lads, weavers with coats out at the elbow, the callans of the school; in short, the utmost gathering and congregation of the clan-jamphry, who the moment they saw me coming, set up a great shout and howl, crying like desperation, "Provost, 'whar's the bonfire? Hae ye sent the coals, provost, hame to yersel, or selt them, provost, for meal to the forestaller?" with other such misleart phraseology that was most contemptuous, bearing every symptom of the rebellion and insurrection that they were then meditating. But I kept my temper, and went into the council-chamber, where others of the respectable inhabitants were met with the magistrates and town-council assembled.

"What's the matter, provost?" said several of them as I came in; "are ye ill; or what has fashed you?" But I only replied, that the mob without was very unruly for being deprived of their bonfire. Upon this, some of those present proposed to gratify them, by ordering a cart of coals, as usual; but I set my face against this, saying, that it would look like intimidation were we now to comply, and that all veneration for law and authority would be at an end by such weakness on the part of those entrusted with the exercise of power. There the debate, for a season, ended; and the punch being ready, the table was taken out of the council-chamber and carried to the cross, and placed there, and then the bowl and glasses – the magistrates following, and the rest of the company.

Seeing us surrounded by the town-officers with their halberts, the multitude made way, seemingly with their wonted civility, and, when his majesty's health was drank, they shouted with us, seemingly, too, as loyally as ever; but that was a traitorous device to throw us off our guard, as, in the upshot, was manifested; for no sooner had we filled the glasses again, than some of the most audacious of the rioters began to insult us, crying, "The bonfire! the bonfire! – No fire, no bowl! – Gentle and simple should share and share alike." In short, there was a moving backwards and forwards, and a confusion among the mob, with snatches of huzzas and laughter, that boded great mischief; and some of my friends near me said to me not to be alarmed, which only alarmed me the more, as I thought they surely had heard something. However, we drank our second glass without any actual molestation; but when we gave the three cheers, as the custom was, after the same, instead of being answered joyfully, the mob set up a frightful yell, and, rolling like the waves of the sea, came on us with such a shock, that the table, and punch-bowl, and glasses, were couped and broken. Bailie Weezle, who was standing on the opposite side, got his shins so ruffled by the falling of the table, that he was for many a day after confined to the house with two sore legs; and it was feared he would have been a lameter for life.

The dinging down of the table was the signal of the rebellious ring leaders for open war. Immediately there was an outcry and a roaring, that was a terrification to hear; and I know not how it was, but before we kent where we were, I found myself with many of those who had been drinking the king's health, once more in the council-chamber, where it was proposed that we should read the riot act from the windows; and this awful duty, by the nature of my office as provost, it behoved me to perform. Nor did I shrink from it; for by this time my corruption was raised, and I was determined not to let the royal authority be set at nought in my hands.

Accordingly, Mr Keelivine, the town clerk, having searched out among his law books for the riot act, one of the windows of the council-chamber was opened, and the bell man having, with a loud voice, proclaimed the "O yes!" three times, I stepped forward with the book in my hands. At the sight of me, the rioters, in the most audacious manner, set up a blasphemous laugh; but, instead of finding me daunted thereat, they were surprised at my fortitude; and, when I began to read, they listened in silence. But this was a concerted stratagem; for the moment that I had ended, a dead cat came whizzing through the air like a comet, and gave me such a clash in the face that I was knocked down to the floor, in the middle of the very council-chamber. What ensued is neither to be told nor described; some were for beating the fire-drum; others were for arming ourselves with what weapons were in the tolbooth; but I deemed it more congenial to the nature of the catastrophe, to send off an express to Ayr for the regiment of soldiers that was quartered there – the roar of the rioters without, being all the time like a raging flood.

Major Target, however, who had seen service in foreign wars, was among us, and he having tried in vain to get us to listen to him, went out of his own accord to the rioters, and was received by them with three cheers. He then spoke to them in an exhorting manner, and represented to them the imprudence of their behaviour; upon which they gave him three other cheers, and immediately dispersed and went home. The major was a vain body, and took great credit to himself, as I heard, for this; but, considering the temper of mind the mob was at one time in, it is quite evident that it was no so much the major's speech and exhortation that sent them off, as their dread and terror of the soldiers that I had sent for.

All that night the magistrates, with other gentlemen of the town, sat in the council-chamber, and sent out, from time to time, to see that every thing was quiet; and by this judicious proceeding, of which we drew up and transmitted a full account to the king and government in London, by whom the whole of our conduct was highly applauded, peace was maintained till the next day at noon, when a detachment, as it was called, of four companies came from the regiment in Ayr, and took upon them the preservation of order and regularity. I may here notice, that this was the first time any soldiers had been quartered in the town since the forty-five; and a woeful warning it was of the consequences

that follow rebellion and treasonable practices; for, to the present day, we have always had a portion of every regiment, sent to Ayr, quartered upon us.

CHAPTER XI – POLICY

Just about the end of my first provostry, I began to make a discovery. Whether it was that I was a little inordinately lifted up by reason of the dignity, and did not comport myself with a sufficient condescension and conciliation of manner to the rest of the town-council, it would be hard to say. I could, however, discern that a general ceremonious insincerity was performed by the members towards me, especially on the part of those who were in league and conjunct with the town-clerk, who comported himself, by reason of his knowledge of the law, as if he was in verity the true and effectual chief magistrate of the burgh; and the effect of this discovery, was a consideration and digesting within me how I should demean myself, so as to regain the vantage I had lost; taking little heed as to how the loss had come, whether from an ill-judged pride and pretending in myself, or from the natural spirit of envy, that darkens the good-will of all mankind towards those who get sudden promotion, as it was commonly thought I had obtained, in being so soon exalted to the provostry.

Before the Michaelmas I was, in consequence of this deliberation and counselling with my own mind, fully prepared to achieve a great stroke of policy for the future government of the town. I saw that it would not do for me for a time to stand overly eminent forward, and that it was a better thing, in the world, to have power and influence, than to show the possession of either. Accordingly, after casting about from one thing to another, I bethought with myself, that it would be a great advantage if the council could be worked with, so as to nominate and appoint My Lord the next provost after me. In the proposing of this, I could see there would be no difficulty; but the hazard was, that his lordship might only be made a tool of instrumentality to our shrewd and sly town-clerk, Mr Keelivine, while it was of great importance that I should keep the management of my lord in my own hands. In this strait, however, a thing came to pass, which strongly confirms me in the opinion, that good-luck has really a great deal to say with the prosperity of men. The earl, who had not for years been in the country, came down in the summer from London, and I, together with the other magistrates and council, received an invitation to dine with him at the castle. We all of course went, “with our best breeding,” as the old proverb says, “helped by our brawest cleeding;” but I soon saw that it was only a *pro forma*

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