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A Page of Local History

BEING A RECORD OF THE ORIGIN AND PROGRESS
OF GREENOCK MECHANICS' LIBRARY AND INSTITUTION.

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A PAGE OF LOCAL HISTORY

BEING A RECORD OF THE ORIGIN AND PROGRESS
OF GREENOCK MECHANICS' LIBRARY AND INSTITUTION.

By ROBERT MURRAY SMITH.
GREENOCK:

Printed by JOHN MITCHELL POLLOCK. 1904.

THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY
OF THE UNDAUNTED MEN WHO LABOURED AND OVERCAME IN THE
CAUSE OF SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL ENFRANCHISEMENT
THE SAVOUR OF WHOSE LIVES IS ABIDING.

FOREWORD

The Institution of a Public Free Library has probably reminded the citizens of Greenock of services in the name of Education that have long emanated from an unpretentious-looking building in the middle section of the town. When thus in the natural order of things the old is giving place to the new, the point of time is a fitting one for reviewing conditions, characters, and events that have helped to shape the history of a community during- three-quarters of a century.

This task, willingly undertaken by the writer at the request of the Directors of Mechanics' Institution, was yet approached in a spirit of diffidence, and is completed under a sense of shortcomings.

History of Greenock Mechanics' Library and Institution

Inception of the Library

To a handful of single-minded and resolute men belongs almost the full credit of having brought Greenock Mechanics' Institution into being. Records at our disposal, copious and well-preserved, penned by an unbroken line of conscientious clerks, furnish a cohesive narrative beginning in 1830 and going on till now. In addition to their historic importance in relation to the Institution itself, these records flash a vivid kaleidoscopic light upon phases of Greenock life in past generations; and the work, therefore, of rescuing treasures of undoubted worth from their present obscurity cannot fail to meet with a measure of due appreciation.

A National Impulse

There is evidence for believing that in the opening decades of last century, when the common people were becoming; restive in the bonds of political servitude, Greenock was taking a lead in the gropings after the ways of enlightenment and freedom. The philanthropic spirit, quickened by the national impulse, was contriving aids toward raising the untutored mind to a higher plane. From brief allusions in these old manuscripts we learn of a Trades' Library, having its home near the foot of Bank Street, in the premises behind the Mid Church, the outcome probably of a voluntary movement amongst a section of working-men eager on self-improvement. For a series of years this body of pioneers in the field of knowledge waxed and waned, and eventually merged itself in the more vital organisation that succeeded. Greenock Library was by then a soundly-established concern, serving its purpose to a select constituency, but beyond the resources of the artisan. The Arts and Science Lectures Association, born out of the sympathy and goodwill of a few affluent citizens, and nourished by the constant doles of the well-to-do, enjoyed a temporary vogue with the choicer elements of the working population, its meeting-place the Methodist Chapel at the corner of Tobago and Sir Michael Streets, which was eventually added to the original building of Greenock Mechanics Institution. Whether the novelty and zest of benevolence wore to the vanishing point, or whether the toilers, ambitious to shape and control their own destinies, scorned the eleemosynary avenues to learning, it is to-day impossible to do more than guess. In the light of certain after-happenings, as well as of the increasing impatience of all exterior constraints that marked the age, the balance of conjecture leans to the latter probability. The Association closed its active life sometime in 1829. Out of its ashes sprang Greenock Mechanics' Library.

In Travail

The story of this Institution: its inception, expansion, and achievements; its embitterments and long-continuing and heroic struggles against unkindly fate; its wide-extending influence for good upon the mass of intelligent workmen: is for the open mind a story replete with a strong, instructive human interest.

Of worthy Greenock families of that day, the fragrance of whose beneficence is still sweet among us, that of Fairrie must ever be held in reverence and high regard. The three brothers—John, Adam, and Thomas—had undoubtedly been taking a share in the labours of the Arts and Science Association. We find that John became the custodian of the 201 volumes of which its Library consisted, and it was to him a deputation of workmen appealed for a continued use of the books.

The line which marks off Cartsdike from Greenock was in those days more strictly drawn than now, although even yet Cartsdike holds fast to the traditions of a distinct economy the mythical Provostship of which is conferred upon an outstanding citizen known and recognised of all men. Feuds and conflicts of a petty kind were common in the daily routine of labour and of social intercourse. The pride of having first seen the light on this or on the other side of Dellingburn was most keenly enjoyed when most obtruded, and the quality of excellence in any realm of effort conceded to the alien with a grudge. It would seem that in his conferences with those working-men John Fairrie set himself the task of coalescing the contending factions. He freely complied with the request to loan out the books, but stipulated that the guarantee for their preservation should be undertaken by a small joint body of men from the shipyards in the east and in the west ends of the town.

The First Committee

The names of this initial committee, who were selected chiefly from the yards of Messrs. Scott & Sinclair and of the now defunct firm of Messrs. Caird & Co. (of which Caird family Principal and Professor Caird were the most distinguished ornaments), and from whom issued a potency far-reaching into the years, deserve to be embalmed in printed history. They are—Thomas Scott, Robert Sheer, John Houston, Philip Ramsay, David Kilpatrick, Adam Holbrom, Alexander Scott, William Ross, and John Walker. Those men, who added a few others like-minded to assist, with Thomas Scott as president, took control of preliminaries; a considerable stir was occasioned amongst the general body of the working classes; a public meeting, called for explanation of the situation, was numerously attended; and just for the moment, under a fresh rampant impulse, zeal threatened to outrun discretion. There was, to begin, hardly full content with Mr. Fairrie's stated conditions of use. A section sprang the proposal to insist upon absolute proprietary rights in the books, the atmosphere was surcharged with a spirit of daring enterprise, and a whirlwind resolution arrived at to constitute a Library at all hazards, whatever the issue of the further negotiations with Mr. Fairrie. But the negotiations, by a stroke of good fortune for the men, came to a favourable ending. Mr. Fairrie wisely refrained from any expressed resentment at this boggling attitude of mind: he simply informed the deputation that the volumes were at their disposal for at least one year. An access of grace enabled the working-men to apprehend a real intent to constitute the gift a permanent one, hedged with precautions against abuse.

Mr. Fairrie's avowal was made on June 27, 1830, the books were being circulated on July 5, and on August 2 it was resolved by a majority to name the body Greenock Mechanics' Library. This designation, naturally, was distasteful to members resident in Cartside, which enjoyed the distinction of providing a locus in the Infants' School, in later days the site of the Roman Catholic Chapel, now in turn a relic of the past; but Cartside, happening to be in a minority, for the time discreetly submitted.

Early Non-Success

For a little more than two years the constitution remained practically unchanged. A portion of the time was chockfull of stirring events, mainly resulting from the inevitable contentions of the opposing parties. Within a few months of the Library's inception there had already begun the stream of resignations from the executive that flowed on steadily through the years, a vicissitude to be attributed in great degree to the fluctuations in the staple industries which compelled men periodically to seek employment in other districts. This necessitated an almost constant accretion to the managing body, which not infrequently was strengthened by the inclusion of members who took their natural places as leaders in the later stages of the larger movement. Robert Burley—father of the famous war correspondent, Bennett Burleigh—was amongst the earliest of the best type of working men, having entered the committee in December, 1830, and he became a prominent figure in promoting the erection of the Mechanics' Institution, of which he was a trustee; and it is not more than a couple of years since he died at Glasgow at a ripe old age.

No great success followed those initial labours, the Library enjoying but a spasmodic kind of existence, and very soon in the records of its history we are rewarded with illuminating sidelights on the developments of special efforts to fan the feeble flames. In February, 1831, for instance, a sub-committee conferred with professional gentlemen and members of Greenock Harmonic Club, within the business premises of Mr. Neil Dougal, precentor, familiarly alluded to as Dougall, on leaving whose place, the secretary writes, "having settled the business, and "paid at their own expense the debts incurred during the evening, pleased with their success, the members of committee returned to their respective homes." Again, on the 28th of the same month, a select party had recourse to Dougall's, in company as before of the professional gentlemen, the expense of refreshing whom on this occasion being laid on the Library funds, while the "committee settled their own expense, and went off highly gratified." From the benefit concert, in which Mr. Dougall and his son were vocalists and the Greenock Military Band took a part, there accrued the sum of £20.

In March of that year members first came to open blows, metaphorically speaking, on the question of introducing novels. The progressive party sustained a crushing-defeat, the Waverley novels being ruled improper by eighty votes to forty-nine. It may be doubted whether this division represented the actual state of opinion on the morality of reading fiction. We should not find it difficult to believe that the partisan spirit was a factor of some weight in the voting.

Elements of Disintegration

Agitation for a change in the locale, which it could not be concealed even thus early meant literal disruption, took form at the half-yearly meeting in July, 1831, in the Buck Head Hotel; and at an adjourned meeting in the Infants' School the discussion occupied the entire evening. A proposal for removal to more central premises secured an ostensible victory in the appointment of a sites committee, but the moment also marked the discovery of a new weapon for the frustration of all procedure in respect of such inquiries. A system of packing the membership had been conceived and put into effect concurrent with the mooted removal, and while the first spoils of this not over-scrupulous means of warfare fell to Cartside, it must not be readily assumed that Greenock failed through a fastidious aversion from the principle. In August, on the committee reporting on the merits of several sites, it was found that a remarkable accession of new members had taken place prior to the opening of business. An acrimonious wrangle ensued, and at the close the finding, a foregone conclusion, was on the side of Cartside.

This circumstance, together with the untoward display of angry feelings, so deeply incensed certain members of committee, presumably of the Greenock party, that many resignations were handed in.

The half-yearly meeting in December was notable for the introduction of Michael McLarty, a man of singularly strong character, to whom as much as to any other single individual was due the ultimate success of the movement for the erection of a permanent habitation, and who down the years was gratefully spoken of as the Father of the Institution.

There was a brief respite from sectional embroilment. A note of pleased surprise escaped from the secretary that this half-yearly meeting should dismiss in good order. In January, 1832, members were directing their energies to the legitimate concerns of the organisation, and with a view to extending and consolidating its interests a series of literary evenings was projected, the only specified limitation being the exclusion of theology. Mr. Fairrie granted the further use of the Infants' School for the purposes of this new ambition, and at the same time gifted a number of volumes on Natural Theology and on Evidences of Christianity. The Debating Association had a short life, but a profitable one if we may judge from the character of its studies— "The Pleasures and Advantages of Epistolary Correspondence," "Advantages of acquiring an Ease and Facility of Expression," "The Mechanical Powers," &c.

But this was only a lull in the unspent storm. By June the question of removal was once more pressing for solution. A suggestion to cease from packing subscribers for ulterior ends was rejected with derision, and thereupon both sides strained with renewed ardour to overcome by force of adventitious aid. A general meeting held on September 19 hastened a culmination. Cartsdye submitted an innocuous-looking-motion that no more new members should be admitted until volumes and membership tallied in number. The discovery that on the previous evening Cartsdye had enrolled one-hundred-and-eighty-seven partisans was the signal for an immediate uproar, above which arose cries of "A trick! A trick !" and a Greenock man, flourishing a list of five-hundred-and-three from the other side of Dellingburn, threatened to swamp Cartsdye if the motion was insisted upon. A violent altercation took place, and, in the words of the secretary, "the confusion and uproar became so great that the president dissolved the meeting".

Disruption

This violent outbreak was followed by a quiet interregnum of a few days, during which the spirit of conciliation' was working its peaceful way; and then, on September 24, the members were asked to consider whatever "measures might appear advisable for the peace and well-being of the Institution." A sparsely-attended meeting carried by eight to four a resolution to have the Library unalterably fixed on an eligible site between the east-end of Cathcart Street and the west bank of Dellingburn, a compromise which for the moment was hoped would appease both sides. But James Walker, fore-armed with a Sheriff's interdict, intervened, and the resolution became a dead letter. The actual disruption could not longer be delayed, so patent the incompatibility, and at a meeting in the Theatre on September 24 the decision to part company was resolved upon. Cartsdye retained the books gifted by Mr. Fairrie; all others fell to the Greenock party. This, meeting with general approval, "was carried amid deafening cheers." The Greenock section of the Library was removed that very night, and pending developments the books were temporarily placed under the care of the Trades' Society, already spoken of, located in a room belonging to the Corporation near the foot of Bank Street. It was an easy step to the amalgamation of these two, with all their interests in common. The Trades' Library formally agreed to dissolve and join the Mechanics' Library, in order to make "one grand institution of the whole," a proposition "received with rapturous applause."

A Fortuitous Combination

THE second phase in the history of Greenock Mechanics' Library was entered upon on October 12, 1832, under promising auspices. The Trades' Library put into the common property 193 volumes and the sum of £5 2s 3d, the Mechanics' Library £26 5s 11d and 177 books. Mr. Alexander Thomson (of the firm of Messrs. Caird & Co.) was elected president, Mr. Robert Allan secretary, and the committee numbered twenty-one all told. A few crumbs of encouragement from outsiders raised the hopes of the managers that the organisation was touching the sympathies of the general public. Donations of books were received from Mr. John Dunlop and several other local gentlemen, one of these, Mr. Sam. Rodger, having the honour of being made a life member for the gift of "Neilson's Practical Builder." At the outset of the combined venture a judicious overhaul of the Library shelves discovered two volumes (brought from Cartsdye) of an infidel character, and in dread of a damaging effect upon probable donors these were erased from the newly-compiled catalogue. But the committee's anticipations of a rally of help from the purses of wealthier well-wishers were far from being realised. This and subsequent executives, thrown back upon their own resources, constantly exploited their own pleasure-seeking as a means of aid, a round of concerts, balls, and other forms of entertainment bringing in a dribbling flow of money to the exchequer, much too inadequate to the demands of the occasion.

Sparse Public Support

No spontaneous burst of generosity showing, Mr. John Dunlop was requested to advise as to the propriety of soliciting subscriptions, practically from door to door. The reply hardly suited the book of the members. It was to the effect that, in order to mollify public feeling on the Library question, Greenock and Cartsdye, having an equal claim on public support, should agree to hunt in couples. In high dudgeon the committee decided that "the distinct

circumstances of our Institution make it inconvenient for any of our members to go with one from Cartsdye on the mission proposed." So ended for the time the proposal to canvass the town.

The honour and prestige of the Library as a sound moral and religious educator were of unceasing concern. On December 4, by seventeen votes to four, it was resolved that no works of an infidel character or prejudicial to morality or the Christian religion be admitted. But generally the minds of the people were palpably broadening, and the bigoted spirit disappearing, as witness the introduction of the Waverley Novels two days later.

A Floating Location

In the midst of all the arrangements for settling down into a useful activity, an intimation that the Bank Street premises were about to be pulled down forced the directorate to go prospecting for a new home in the middle of the town. The possibility of receiving a corner from the Watt Monument Committee was thought of, but in rather a despairing mood. Inquiries at once dissipated any hope in that direction. Dispossessed while yet unprepared for an orderly removal, the Library was given a temporary shelter in Slater's School, Tobago Street; and in those rooms at the general meeting on April 11, 1833, the encouraging report was submitted that for the ten months the income had amounted to £82 and the expenditure to £77.

Some Help and Patronage

Such noble efforts to surmount the barriers of insistent misfortune could not fail to evoke the attention of enlightened and magnanimous minds. The publication of the state of affairs had undoubtedly awakened a certain amount of public interest, and the committee were much gratified by a request of Mr. Robert Wallace, M.P. for the burgh, for a meeting. The visit took place in November, 1833, when Mr. Wallace was accompanied by Mr. Warburton, M.P., who had in view the formation of a similar institution amongst his constituents in Bridport. It does not emerge with clearness that any other immediate advantage resulted, but that the members experienced a sense of encouragement, if not of future reward, is shown by the fact that catalogues were afterwards sent to Mr. Wallace, Mr. Warburton, Mr. Joseph Hume, and Dr. Bowring, as a mark of respect for the unwearied exertions of those gentlemen in the promotion of sound and useful knowledge. By May 11, Simpson's Rooms, Sir Michael Street, had been rented at £3 10s per annum. The assets were daily growing in value, through purchase and donation the volumes now numbering 849, and on July 16 the property of the Library was insured for £200. In August an appeal was made through Provost Robert Baine to the Town Council, the members of which unanimously voted a sum of £10.

Self-Denying Ordinances

At this period Secretary David McLeod notes with complaint a growing unpunctuality in the attendance of the committee, and nowadays one must regard with an almost incredulous amazement the stern self-sacrificing spirit of men who could resolve to inflict upon themselves the penalty of fine for such a trifling dereliction of voluntary service. In a manner of speech well understood in public works, they were "quartered" by the imposition of one penny when from fifteen to thirty minutes late, and of twopence thereafter. would almost appear as if certain of the members began to take a pride in coming late that they might thus mulct themselves for the benefit of the Institution. But, of course, it was no more than an aberration through excess of zeal, and was of temporary duration. After a time they all with one consent began to make excuse, and finally the rule dropped into complete abeyance.

Widening of the H

WE reach the period at which the ambition to build possessed the minds of the committee. Michael McLarty succeeded John Nelson in the presidentship toward the close of 1834, and it can be gathered that he amongst others fomented the spirit of dissatisfaction with the Library quarters, so that the idea of erecting a building with a large Hall for public meetings, Reading-Room, and Library took root in a good soil. Sir Michael Shaw Stewart was appealed to for a site, and in April, 1835, his brother had a meeting with Michael McLarty, who was requested to inform the committee that they might cast around for a suitable location. A suggested site in West Burn Street did not meet with approval, and the theatre near West Breast was dismissed as impracticable. The Cartsdye section reappeared on the scene, and gave signs of co-operation in the scheme for a Mechanics' Institution and Trades' Hall. A friendly feeling became general. Representatives of each committee conferred, with such success that the full committees were soon deliberating on the subject in the Cartsdye Library Room.

Convention of Trades

At one of those conferences a wise resolution was arrived at to invite a gathering of the trades. Meantime circulars and subscription lists were being prepared. At a later meeting on May 31 more circulars were sent out to trade representatives. On June 7 it was reported that Sir Michael had offered a site east of the new burying-ground, but the committee did not see their way to come to a decision at that stage. A few trade delegates attended at the committee meeting on June 21, when it was announced that £190 11s 6d had been subscribed to date through thirty-six sheets.

Rallying the Public

A public meeting was held in the Mid Parish Church on August 9—Mr. Colin Foster in the chair—and resolutions were passed to the following effect:— (1) “That as ignorance is the cause of a great proportion of the vice and misery of mankind, it is a duty incumbent on all classes to endeavour to remove that ignorance by contributing to the moral, intellectual, and religious improvement of “society”; (2) “That it is not creditable to be without a public edifice appropriate to the arts and sciences.” Amongst the speakers were Rev. Messrs. Wilson and Campbell, and Messrs. Slater and Baine, teachers, these two taking an active part in subsequent proceedings. A committee numbering one hundred, with Mr. John Lamb as president, was appointed to take subscriptions and look out for a site, and to report to a general meeting of subscribers.

Building Scheme Afoot

Thus the movement was set agoing with a flourish. At this point also, it is important to note, there was a diverging of the immediate interest of the Mechanics' Library and this wider scheme. The records of the minute books comprise a history of the project for a Trades' Hall, with Library and Reading-Room as essential adjuncts. The Library for the time retires into the background, doing its work well, no doubt, but overshadowed and in a sense superseded in the affections of the public. The Institution Committee held their meetings in Cummins' School, Bank Street, and entered upon their work in a business-like way by dividing the town into districts for the purpose of collecting subscriptions, two members being specially selected to canvass amongst the higher classes.

John Gait's Guiding Hand

The name of John Gait is mentioned more than once in connection with the movement, and these brief notices confirm what we already well know, that the great novelist was honoured of all classes. In the autograph collection of the Institution we find the following letter :—

“West Black Hall St., 18th Deer., 1834.—Sir,—I return my best thanks for the honour the committee of the Mechanics' Library have done me. I have always regarded correct information as essential alike to business and conduct, and I am sure the friends of the Institution have already seen cause to confide in its influence. I have desired a copy of the 'Statistical Account of Scotland' to be taken to the Library, as the new edition makes it a library book, which I beg the committee to accept. I remain, with much personal respect, and a sincere well-wisher to the Institution, John Gait.— Mr. D. Bain.”

His advice, undoubtedly in terms of encouragement, was received by the committee, formally conveyed through a deputation of their number; and in August of 1835 four names of Gait, John Dunlop, Robert Wallace, and Provost Baine were bracketed in relation to a vote of thanks for services rendered.

Initial Failure

But, the countenance and help of such men notwithstanding, it was very soon discovered that the path to success was not likely to be strewn with roses. At short intervals we come upon such phrases as, “Go and explain to trades not yet come in,” “See the moulders,” “Agitate amongst the joiners,” “The moulders want more speaking to” “Send deputation to the engineers,” “Go to the masons.” The Society of Shoemakers, in the month of September, furnished a praiseworthy example by promising to subscribe £20 in four equal installments, but unfortunately it evoked no emulation amongst kindred bodies.

A report on sites was submitted on October 20, the minutes, however, condescending on no particulars. It became apparent that the collectors needed spurring on, and there was a difficulty in securing persons willing to carry round the sheets. The Society of Medical Practitioners proposed to co-operate if accommodation were provided for their Museum and Library. As they insisted upon a room of the new building becoming their absolute property, the committee naturally declined to entertain the condition, and negotiations were broken off. Courses of lectures were spoken of as a likely source of revenue, Sydney Smith was to be written to for his terms, the aid of phrenology, then causing a sort of stir all over the country, was to be called in, and local clergymen were to be asked to put their shoulders to the wheel. All in vain. Enthusiasm was on the wane, and on December 20, 1836, it went black out for the space of thirteen months. On that date it was resolved to adjourn until some information about probable sites was available, the adjournment lasting till February 13, 1838.

A Fresh Impetus

On a re-assembling, Sir Michael Street site, price £100, had turned up; and at a meeting of subscribers on February 20 a large majority selected it in preference to that in West Burn Street offered by Sir Michael Shaw Stewart; and accordingly a deputation was empowered to purchase. The first trustees of the property were:— Messrs. William Campbell, printer; Duncan McGibbon, tailor; Alex. McAuslan, smith; John McAllister, baker; Matthew Parker, sugar-boiler; John Tench, chainmaker; William Alexander, joiner; William Gaff, joiner; Robert Burley, joiner; John Dryburgh, joiner; and John McLeod, tobacconist. In the consideration of the question as to the best mode of raising subscriptions, both “Libraries—Cartsdye and Greenock Mechanics'—were asked to co-operate, but the minutes do not tell us what response this request met with. Delegates from the various trades were once more called for by circular, and by March these were coming slowly in. A public meeting was held in the Independent Chapel on April 25, at which the old resolutions were re-affirmed, and additions made to an attenuated committee.

Further Discouragements and Delays

Then follows anew a string of plaintive allusions to a pervading default throughout all classes of workmen. A deputation had to be sent to the carpenters, to the Flax Mill, to the Potteries; the proprietors of Sugar Refineries, of the Paper Mill, &c., were waited upon for leave to address the employees; the engineers were appealed to on the propriety of coming forward; and so on. On May 19 it was agreed to issue a bill to stimulate mechanics to subscribe, and to press for payment of arrears, in reply to which Messrs. Scott & Co.'s smiths said they would stick to their money until the building was started. With a dauntless front the committee pushed on, and on June 2 they had plans from Mr. Johnstone, architect. A week thereafter, at a meeting in the Reading-Room of the Mechanics' Library, a suggestion was made to specialise the well-to-do by calling for a list of the higher and "middling" classes who had not subscribed. This list was handed in by Michael McLarty, but as the committee was at that moment suffering from a serious depletion in numbers the labour of canvassing the west-end had to be postponed indefinitely. A renewed endeavour at co-operation was being made by the surgeons of the town, who suggested the propriety of including baths in the new building, but although for a week or two an agreement was in prospect, the negotiations were as fruitless as before.

A public meeting in Wilson's Church on June 14 decided that, should the sum of £800 be promised or subscribed and £400 paid a week before the Fair, the foundation-stone should be laid on the Friday, and a trades' procession organized for the occasion. Mr. Wallace, M.P., did what he could to obtain a grant out of the Government Education Fund, but without avail. Spirit-dealers and other shopkeepers were canvassed, with no substantial result. As at June 23, the sum subscribed amounted to £656 14s 6d, the actual payments £250 0s 6 and half pence. Another public meeting, held in Rev. Mr. Moscript's Auld Licht Chapel, Cartdyke, could arrive at no decision, and on the 28th the committee had to confess defeat for that year. From the higher classes in contributions to that date there had come the sum of £15 15s. A lethargy extending over some months supervened, members of committee absenting themselves from the series of disheartening meetings that were being called oftener than once a week.

Adoption of a Building Scheme

In February, 1839, one more appeal to working-men was agreed upon, and on the 28th of that month it was resolved to lay the foundation-stone in May. The situation was somewhat aggravated by the service of a notice to quit the Masons' Hall, in which the committee meetings had for some time been convened. For months the workers were as wanderers without a resting-place, coming together in the Methodist Chapel, in Mr. Slater's School-room, in the Town Hall, in the Baptist Hall, in the Sheriff Court Hall, or in other premises found convenient. This was a trifling drawback to men imbued with the spirit of stern resolve. The plans of a two-storied building with gallery received a formal approval on May 3, in a month the mason-work was contracted for by Donald McDonald at an estimate of £520, Fair Thursday was fixed for laying the foundation-stone, and committee members were casting about for men of pre-eminence to shed a lustre on the event. John Gait had written to Lord Brougham, who expressed pious opinions on the subject of Mechanics' Institutions and presented the insignia of his approval, but as it was not his intention to visit Scotland at that time he was compelled to decline the honour. Mr. Walter Baine subsequently declined also, and the name of Mr. John Dunlop was suggested.

Falling Out with Freemasons

Just then a pretty dispute arose in this connection. The brethren of St. John's Masonic Lodge, with whom the committee had been in communication on the subject of Masonic honours for the occasion, claimed the sole prerogative in the appointment. To this the committee replied by unanimously deciding that the Lodge had taken advantage of them, and that Mr. Dunlop be asked to perform the ceremony. Thereupon St. John's backed out from having anything to do with the affair, which, it can be guessed, did not suit the wishes of either party. A deputation, headed by Provost Baine, waited upon the Masons, admitted they had erred in point of form, and on placing this confession in black and white the difference was smoothed over.

A Clerical Stickler

That there were sticklers for form in those days; the minutes provide another instructive illustration. At the instance of the committee, the Provost asked Rev. Mr. Smith to officiate as clergyman at the laying of the stone. Mr. Smith declined unless he were asked by the committee at first hand. The matter occasioned a certain amount of concern, for there was a serious discussion over the rev. gentleman's position in relation to the event, and it was not until the secretary had written to the Provost to the effect that he was a fully accredited ambassador that Mr. Smith's feelings were mollified.

Foundation-Stone Laid

These shoals of petty contention safely circumnavigated, the foundation-stone ceremonial was carried through with impressive success on 4th July, 1839, the first day of Greenock Summer Fair. The demonstration of rejoicing was joined by almost every class in the community, the only notable absentee trade being that of the engineers. Massing on the High Gourock Road early in the forenoon, the vast procession, displaying one-hundred-and-twenty-one flags, marched through the principal thoroughfares to the inspiring strains of eighteen bands of music, chief amongst these the band of the 2nd Dragoon Guards. The following was the order of the various groups, headed by the marshall of the day:—Carters on horseback; Total Abstiners' Society; ship carpenters; tailors, painters, and slaters; gardeners; joiners; potters and brewers; sailmakers and sailors; masons; hammermen; coopers; bakers; Society of Odd-fellows; band of 2nd Dragoon Guards; Provost, Magistrates, Town Councillors; Water Trustees,

Harbour Commissioners, and other public bodies; Institution Committee; Masonic bodies. The stone was duly laid by R.W.M. Donald McNicol, St. John's Lodge, No. 175. Thereafter Provost Adam Fairrie addressed, first the Masons and then the Institution Committee. In name of the latter, Mr. John Dunlop thanked the Provost and the Masons, and the proceedings were closed. In a brief notice of the occasion by the *Greenock Advertiser* of 5th July, the reporter makes this reflection:— "What a contrast did this really magnificent procession make to the miserable caricature which was I lately brought out here in support of the 'People's Charter'."

As a proof of the ceaseless labours of the committee to raise subscriptions, we may quote this diverse list as from November, 1838, to July, 1839:—Theatrical performance, £10 16s 2 and a quarter pence; Dr. Murray's lectures, £13 15s; Mr. Barber's lectures, £3 0s 5d; entertainment, £23 19s 3 and a half pence; trades at procession, £34 7s 8d; exhibition during Fair holidays, £39 5s 8d; from excursion steamer, £1 10s 1d.—total, £140 14s 10d.

From this time on to the completion of the building most of the events that were happening, while momentarily of some little importance and interest, did not form a part of serious history. There was, for instance, President John Blue, under a sense of resentment at an interference with his freedom of speech in the conduct of committee business, handing in his resignation. Mr. Blue claimed a right to state his opinion on all subjects as they were brought up for discussion: not an unreasonable claim, as it appears, but a claim that his fellow-members were not altogether willing to concede. Within a few days those members were evidently sorry at their practical expulsion of a good and useful man, and so they made things sweet by asking Mr. Blue to come back, which he did.

Breakers Ahead

The troubles of collecting unpaid subscriptions, of desertion of members, of contractors' disputes and delays, which filled up the months, were taken in the ordinary course, and overcome as part of the day's darg. Underlying the surface ruffles there was an increasing current of disquiet which portended disrupting issues in the close future. A trial of strength was regarded as inevitable on the question of management between the two committees. Library accommodation within the new building had been allotted in December, 1839, but the moment of conflict was not yet. Reports to the detriment of the committee had gone into circulation in trade sections. We are explicitly informed that a false impression prevailed amongst the engineers, with whom a conference was held in hope of a conciliatory ending; but the conference was unsatisfactory in character and result, "the engineers," on the authority of the secretary, "appearing to entertain no good feeling towards the Institution."

The Achievement

By June 27, 1840, the work was so far advanced that the committee could meet in the hall; on July 9 a meeting was held in the Library Room; and the formal opening took place in the fall of the year, when the chair was occupied by President John Blue, and Mr. Robert Wallace, M.P., was the leading speaker of the evening. We may conjecture that the minds of the chief men were much absorbed with the progress of the labours they were anxious to see consummated, yet we have plenty of evidence to show that there was nothing approaching mental obsession to the exclusion of subjects calling for solution in the ordinary course. In a discussion which ensued in relation to the uses and amenities of the Institution, we are sharply reminded of a recent page in the municipal history of our town.

The Principle of Unsectarianism

They were, on the whole, good Sabbatarians in those times, desirous without doubt of breaking away from certain grievous ecclesiastical restrictions, but in no mood for altogether secularising the day. A motion to expunge the words "every day except Sunday" from the rules, and to substitute the vaguer and debatable phrase "every lawful day," had a triumphant issue; so that, to begin with, the new hall was at disposal for six days a week only. For some months the embers of committee were in travail with a constitution, which must have cost them many anxious days and wakeful nights, and which bears in every clause recorded a marked solicitude that the means to be supplied for the advancement of the working-classes should have an unfettered issue. Entire freedom from the spirit of bigotry can hardly be looked for even in the most enlightened times or circumstances, and we are consequently unsurprised at a striking example of intolerance in a purblind age of sixty years ago. A certain Dr. Goyder having engaged the hall to speak adversely on Socialism, the committee were asked to afford the Socialists of the town an opportunity of replying from the same platform. This request was met by a proposal of refusal, made by an official of the Institution, who contended that, notwithstanding the rule that the hall be let "for all useful purposes to all sects and parties," Socialists as a party should be excluded; that "the committee would be violating a sacred trust" by so letting it; and that "any exposition of Socialism by its wily and smooth-tongued adherents is not only useless but pernicious to the mental, moral, physical, and social condition of society." This proposal was defeated, but on taking a second look at these alarming words, and considering their palpable effect upon the listeners' minds, we may well wonder that the victory did not fall to the other side.

Internecine Warfare

Rumblings of the approaching storm were in the ears of the committee towards the close of 1840. It was clear that the impact of contending forces was impending. The offensive party, converging resources for the attack, initiated an agitation having for its aim the admission as members of the Institution every person who had subscribed a sum, no matter how small, towards the erection of the building. As a counter move, the party of defence peremptorily closed the subscription lists until the final settlement of the constitution. This arbitrary step evoked an

immediate protest, a knot of subscribers called for a general meeting, and at this gathering in the Independent Chapel the committee, whose tenure of office had expired, appealed to the sense of their constituents, who rallied round in sufficient numbers to homologate the action and to send the retiring members back to office.

A lucid illustration as to the state of feeling that existed is provided in the Institution minutes of that date. Professor McCombe having-presented a copy of his "Moral Philosophy," it was, one would think, very naturally appropriated by the Library Committee. The act was made the occasion of an outbreak of resentment, the volume had to be restored to the custody of the Institution Committee, who also, in a letter of measured censure, marked their disapprobation at the "un-business-like and uncourteous manner" in which the book had been taken possession of.

The completed constitution was passed on December 15, and on the 21st of that month the designation of Greenock Mechanics' Institution was resolved upon.

Efforts at Coalition

The anomaly of continuing two separate and opposing organisations within the same walls, with the consequent disturbing risks to the usefulness of an institution founded on such noble aims as were now proclaimed to the public, was being viewed with serious apprehension from both camps. The *modus operandi* for the attainment of a salving coalition was the problem that wanted solving. At the beginning of the new year the members of the Library Committee were invited to a conference with the declared object of fusion. The meeting of representatives was held on January 15, but, instead of proceeding to confer, a communication was submitted by the Library secretary which questioned the legality of the committee's position. In reply to the query whether the Library members "considered that the committee was not a proper committee," the answer was given that "they did not recognise it as such, but only as a group of individuals at present in management of the Institution." The committee thereupon refused to continue the conference.

There can be little doubt that the Library Committee had it in their minds that conditions ought to revert to the *status quo* that, in point of fact, having achieved the end for which they had been specifically brought into existence—that is, the erection of a Mechanics' Hall—those gentlemen named by courtesy the Institution Committee should now resign, and allow the original entity—to wit, this same Library Committee—to re-assume the reins of organisation and management. Whether well-founded or otherwise, there was besides a spreading fear that under the reigning government the Institution was in danger of being diverted to the service and command of others than working-men.

The declaration by the Library Committee was therefore but the prelude of a combination for active assault. Within a few days of the abortive attempt at mutual conciliation, a policy of ejection was being developed. A circular signed "Subscriber"—in the opinion of the Library section of a most objectionable character, and filled with the most scandalous and false assertions—was broadcast. There followed an application from the Library for the use of the hall, in which a number of Institution members joined, ostensibly with the view of fomenting the agitation; but the committee declined the request, on the ground that the hall was wanted "for irregular purposes and with the intention of frustrating the carrying on of the Institution."

The Old Regime Restored

THIS refusal was taken as the signal for the bursting of the long pent-up storm, which now crashed about the devoted heads of the Institution Committee, scattering its members to the four quarters, and leaving but vestiges of what they once had been. But the story of the downfall of the so-called usurpers, and of the restitution of the legitimate heirs to their property and estate, is best told in the words of Mr. Alexander Muir, to whom, after the hurly-burly was over, it was deputed to prepare a statement of the facts.

The Story of the Downfall

"The Greenock Mechanics' Institution was projected and brought to its present state mainly by the unwearied exertions of working-men, under the direction of a few of their own class, who, regardless of the sneers and opposition of many from whom better things might have been expected, laboured with untiring zeal to complete a building from which might emanate the pure and ennobling stream of knowledge, to improve the minds of working-men, and diffuse light and comfort over every class of the community.....A party who had often expressed their regret to see the Institution in the hands of working-men took active means to alarm the subscribers, and at the general meeting succeeded in expelling from the committee all whom they suspected of holding anything: "like liberal opinions.

The first act of this (new) committee was to cut off all connection with the Mechanics' Library, although in reality it was the parent of the Institution. The rule for the admission of members was then re-constructed in such a way as, in the opinion of many of the Institution's best friends, would soon cut off the working-portion of the community from having any control over its affairs."

On the refusal of the hall by the Institution Committee, the Provost and Magistrates "most handsomely granted the use of the Town Hall," and at a largely-attended meeting there "the bearing's of the two (opposing) constitutions on

the interests of working-men were fully explained." A meeting of subscribers had been called for February 1 in the old Independent Chapel, and to this meeting; the Library Committee, *cap-a-pie* for the fray, proceeded in a body, taking their seats in front of the bench.

The issue of the conflict was never in doubt from the opening moment. It was a complete rout of the party in power. The propositions of the Library Committee were carried by overwhelming majorities. Little more than a show of opposition was made, and the tenor of an amendment that questioned the competency of the code of laws submitted particularly because that code embraced a plan. of union with the Library affords a clear indication of the temper that prevailed. It was a notable victory too for the cause of free thought, for a motion that the building should not be used for the dissemination of opinions contrary to the principles of the Christian religion was not entertained.

Settling to Earnest Work

The committee in power was formally declared an illegal one, and the following persons were elected as the first managers of a united Institution:—President, Alexander Muir; treasurer, Michael McLarty; secretary, John Macallister; members of committee, William Alexander, David McLeod, John Nelson, John Henry, David Shearer, Adam Hillhouse, Robert Dryburgh, William Galbreath, John Morrison, Charles Stewart, John McLeod, Peter Currie, Joseph Orr, John Crawford, junior, Robert Smith, John Shearer, William Bamborough, and John Symington.

Evidences of a new life stirring the habitués fast accumulated. By September the Reading-Room adjunct was an accomplished fact, educational classes were on the tapis, and a debating-club called for accommodation. The half-yearly meeting in April, 1842, exhibited a sound financial basis: the Institution revenue amounted to £87, the expenditure to £79; of the Library, £49 and £36 respectively; while the total debt was £185 19s 1d. It is noted that an application for aid to the Education Board had the fruitless response that no grants were made to such institutions. The committee entered upon the arduous labours of the winter session with a fresh vigour, and, with a full programme of lectures, classes, and entertainments, they were compelled to deny Isaac Pitman, hot propagandist of phonetics and phonography, the opportunity of delivering himself gratuitously on his hobbies.

Trade Depression

But the trade of the town was in an extraordinarily depressed state, to which was wholly attributable a generally apathetic attitude on the part of the public towards the Institution, so that the committee had the misfortune to look upon their efforts checked and barren. Crowds of unemployed were walking the streets, needing help and encouragement; and it is placed to the credit of the Mechanics' Institution that the hall was at the disposal of those workmen free of charge.

A Museum of Curiosities

A side show in the shape of a museum had been occupying-the minds of a section of the management. There were already in the collection, according; to the secretary, "many rare and curious specimens"—jaws of a shark, Chinese slippers, flooring from Herculaneum, &c.—and these were "fondly looked at as only the embryo of this part of the "Institution." Alas ! the fond hopes. The museum, at no-time exhibiting great vitality, alternately rose and fell for a period, and at length fell to insignificance.

A Pervading Optimism

Despite the temporary discouragements which their more serious undertakings encountered, the committee was tackling with a cheerful optimism the varied questions of a secondary importance which called for judgment. What will the members of orthodox churches of the present day, some of whom have to wink at crooked or questionable ways of acquiring money for the clearance of debt, think of a resolution passed by a body of working-men in the benighted year of 1842 that no part of the building should be let for raffles? Or of the refusal of an application for the use of the hall as a dancing-room during the Fair on the ground that the purpose was regarded as unworthy? We have travelled a long distance since then, but it certainly seems doubtful whether our steps have consistently been in the way of progress.

In another direction the management acted in a most liberal and generous spirit. In order to induce a habit of reading and study amongst young men, it was agreed that in the case of an apprentice certified as unable to afford the annual subscription, the free use of the Library should be allowed.

Then a strain of dolour ran through the annual meeting in April, 1843, albeit the committee professed satisfaction with the labours of the year. Want of funds had hindered a course of practical lectures, and the projected classes had broken down from the like cause; but there had been no fewer than twenty-one miscellaneous and two practical lectures during the winter months. The membership of the Library was two-hundred-and-fifteen, and there were upwards of sixty subscribers to the Reading-Room and Museum. It was admitted that the lectures had failed to draw: there was the pathetic figure of a real New Zealand chief exhibiting himself to an eighteen shilling house. A fresh attempt at a community of interests between the two departments, with the aim of effecting economy in the management, was made in April, 1844, but failed of success.

The name of Robert Hendry appears on the list of persons attending the general meeting on April 26, and it is not unfitting to record here that from that date, in season and out of season, Mr. Hendry was a strenuous labourer on behalf of the Institution.

Baths and Sanitation

About this time the country was deeply concerned in the subject of reform in public and private sanitation. The progressive body with which we are dealing had under all vicissitudes of fortune shown itself to be fully alive to matters affecting the general welfare, and eager to take a leading part in any movement toward amelioration. At once identifying themselves with the agitation, the members declared a willingness to embrace the question of baths within the range of their deliberations. On their initiation, Mr. James Simpson, advocate, Edinburgh, a pioneer in the cause, was requested by eight hundred citizens of Greenock to lecture to a public meeting, and at the same time he was invited to offer an opinion on the proposal for the institution of baths. A week later, on May 14, the Provost was memorialised to convene a meeting to consider what steps should be taken in regard to baths and the sanitation of the town, while at the same moment the committee, impelled by a new-born zeal, were contemplating the proposal for acquiring as a favourable site ground in Tobago Street adjoining the Methodists' Chapel, then in the market at the price of £180.

Institution takes the Burden

On June 18 it was decided to prepare a petition on the subject, the need of reform in sanitation being apparently of a pressing kind. A preliminary meeting of the inhabitants was held in the Town Hall on July 22—Provost Walter Baine presiding—when, probably as a ready means of getting rid of the subject or of getting out of a difficulty, the managers of the Mechanics' Institution were appointed a committee to conduct the movement, and to institute a Baths Department in connection with their premises. The directors of that date appear to have been gifted with a fine strain of simplicity as well as of zeal for the good of their fellows, for they accepted the situation without much demur, and no doubt regarded their appointment in the nature of a compliment.

In July a prospectus was in circulation; in September it was resolved to draw up specifications for four baths; at the half-yearly meeting in October the matter was all-absorbing, and lectures, tracts, &c., were formulated or issued enforcing sobriety and cleanliness, and a subscription list had met with an encouragement exceeding the most sanguine anticipations. The specifications were sent out on November 5, but afterwards the project hung fire for some months. By April, 1845, the sum of £120 had been collected, which was regarded as enough for the original modest plan, but inadequate for any scheme on a more extended scale. Thus the matter stood until a special meeting on August 13, at which it was concluded to make a general appeal, to send out lithographic sketches, and to deputationise public works.

The purchase of the house and ground in Tobago Street was agreed upon on October 15; the lectures by Rev. A. Gilmour were printed for circulation; Mr. Grey, of the Theatre Royal, sold a benefit to the Baths Fund for £ 10s; and a new call was made for subscriptions. In March, 1846, there was a general meeting of subscribers and others friendly to the movement, with no immediate result. It was reported that the scheme adopted would, including the price of the property, entail an outlay of £520. The ground floor of the house purchased, with an additional building on the ground attached, was proposed to be divided into three suites of baths for ladies, and four suites for gentlemen, with waiting-room for each.

State of Suspended Animation

At this point there was a deadlock for lack of funds, and the question was in abeyance for the long period of ten years, a fleeting hope was entertained that Mr. Thomas Fairrie might advance £200, and a deputation appointed there anent. The hope was rudely dispelled by President Robert Hendry, who stated at a later meeting that "it required such a "prodigious amount of impudence that he would not think of being a party to it."

The next reference is in September, 1851, when a sub-committee was appointed; again, in March, 1855, a committee was instructed to prosecute the enterprise with diligence; and by the end of that year a swimming bath and three small private baths had been erected at a cost of £140.

A Graceless Corporation

On this question of providing baths, even until to-day the local authorities stand in discredit. Read what the Mechanics' Institution Committee of 1856 have to say on this same point:—"As a last resource they (the committee) memorialised the Town Council for some little assistance. The Town Council, however, refused. Your committee make no comment on their refusal. They state the simple fact, that the Magistrates and Council of Greenock—a town which has attained the unenviable pre-eminence of being the sickliest and most unhealthy locality in the kingdom, whose high rate of mortality is so marked as to call down special inquiry from the Registrar-General as to its cause—refused to aid in any manner a project so humble, yet calculated to increase to some extent the health and comfort of the community. In pleasing contrast to the above narrow policy," the committee acknowledged handsome subscriptions from Sir Michael R. Shaw Stewart and Lady Octavia, Mr. Alexander Murray Dunlop, M.P., Mr. Thomas Fairrie, Mr. Matthew Brown, and others.

Successive Unaided Efforts

Once established, the enterprise grew upon the hands of the managers, and reached a popularity that enabled it to become for the most part self-supporting. By 1863 there was so clamant a need for increased facilities that a scheme of reconstruction was carried through. To the deep regret of all concerned this involved the closing of the small swimming bath that had proved a real boon as a plunging and paddling pond for boys, but had not contributed substantially to the maintenance of the establishment. The lock-out in the shipbuilding trade during 1866 wrought a marked diminution in the patronage of the baths, but happily this retrogression was of short duration, and for a succeeding number of years-the reports as to their public service were satisfactory in tone. This extension served until 1877, when owing to the prosperity of the club the directors were being forced to consider the question of re-modelling the whole Institution buildings. In the annual report of that year it was stated that, "being desirous of meeting the requirements of the town with regard to Turkish and swimming baths, your committee have had drawn out and discussed plans for the re-modelling of the Institution buildings; but as the outlay would be considerable, their decision has been deferred until the views of the Local Authorities upon the matter of public baths have been fully ascertained." There had been in the course of the year a falling-off in the baths receipts, which about that time amounted to close upon £200 annually, and in the discussion that ensued upon this point at the meeting of members it was noticed that the Police Board were asking borrowing powers in connection with a public baths proposal, and had set aside a sum of £5000 for their erection. It was remarked incidentally by Mr. Alexander Black that "if the Police Board should deem it wise to place a sum at the disposal of the committee of the Mechanics' Institution, he had not the least hesitation in saying that the Institution was fully able to conduct the baths in a much more economical way than it was possible for the Corporation to do."

Hope Deferred

A deputation from the Institution a few days later waited upon Provost Abram Lyle, who had closely identified himself with this subject. The interview took place in the Institution in July of 1877. Mr. Lyle showed his own public baths plans to the sub-committee, and, as the minutes bear, "he expressed himself as satisfied with the plans of the Institution, and also with the committee's endeavour to meet a public requirement, but deprecated the idea of destroying so much valuable property for the sole purpose of procuring a site. He explained that he meant to bring his own plan before the Public Board in due time, but in the event of his or similar plans being rejected he would do his utmost to further those of the committee." The committee passed a resolution of thanks to Mr. Lyle, and felt extremely grateful that the matter was about to receive "the consideration of the Public Boards." Having thus ascertained that the Local Authority was moving in the matter of public baths, the committee decided to take no further action in that direction.

Generations of Dallying Town Councillors

With the prospects of a fully-equipped institution springing up in a year or two, the directors had no intention of setting up as rivals to the Corporation, and therefore meantime prudently refrained from any extraordinary outlay. But the slow action of the authorities, and the sure depreciation of the property that was setting in, wore so roughly upon their eager spirits that some time before the members of the Police Board had discovered their minds the Mechanics' Baths were in imminent danger of being swept out of existence to make room for expansion on other lines. In March of 1879 it was remitted to the department committee to consider the advisability of closing the baths. It was recommended by this committee to continue for a time without the expenditure of money on repairs, and at the annual meeting in April it was decided to go on for six months longer at least, taking into consideration in the interim what probable purpose the ground would be put in the event of the baths being done away with. Wise judgments ruled in the long run, so that instead of shutting up, the baths were included in the scheme of general reconstruction entered upon in 1880, and with excellent results. At a special meeting of the members in June of that year the chairman, Mr. Thomas O. Stewart, said that of the alternatives to close or fit up the baths anew, the committee had taken the latter view. Whether the Bank Street Corporation scheme, on the old prison site, went on or not, the Institution would be doing; its duty to the public. The Bank Street scheme did not go on, we know, nor has any other Corporation scheme up till to-day. From time to-time Town Councillors have toyed with the subject, exciting the hopes of the community at recurring intervals, but showing no more serious intentions of fulfilling their obligations to their constituents in this direction than had their predecessors of sixty years ago. Since 1880 the Mechanics' Baths have been maintained in good condition: on different occasions they have been further renewed and modernised, and are still occupying, and are likely for long to occupy a meritorious place amongst the social amenities of this town.

Extending the Limits of Effort

It is hardly necessary, having in mind the tireless character of those men, to point out that the arduous and more or less thankless prosecution of this section of their labours in no way disaffected them in their performance with strict justice of the duties of other departments. While there were few outstanding circumstances demanding- a detailed comment, the business and interests of the Institution were surely increasing and taking a wider and firmer hold of the community. For a year or two the state of trade was of a fluctuating character, with for many men more idleness than work; yet against such adverse factors the Institution continued in a fairly prosperous condition, the accounts as a rule showing slight credit balances. All through we are impressed by the stress laid upon the value of popular lectures and educational classes, and we are seized with a deep sorrow at the very limited and inadequate response from any section of the public in these connections. The names that were at that time in the mouths of

the people, and are scattered up and down the pages of the minutes, include Kossuth, Dickens, the Duke of Argyle, Alexander Smith, Blackie, Gilfillan, Elihu Burrit, Sir A. Alison, Dr. McCulloch, Dr. Anderson of Glasgow, and others. There was a good deal of talk about securing the leading men of the day, yet in most instances in the end, less eminent lecturers had to suffice.

We hit on another allusion, amongst the last of them, to Cartsdye Library, in a request for the use of the hall, at a reduced charge, for a concert. It is not mentioned anywhere in these pages, that I have been able to find, what particular fate overtook the remnant of the first combination; but we know from contemporaneous records that it dragged on for some time longer, and finally expired from sheer inanition, its estate getting in process to the auction room or the street hawker's barrow.

One for the Corporation

Now and again, the committee in Sir Michael Street were giving some sharp tokens of vitality, treading upon the tender corns of men who themselves went around purposeless but fault-finding, or raising an occasional umbrage in the minds of various town authorities. Provost Fairrie, brother of the original benefactor, and himself a consistent helper of the Institution, had certainly some claim to speak his mind on his orthodoxy being outraged by the use of the hall "for all purposes under the sun", meaning that Socialists, Free-thinkers, *et hoc genus omnes*, found in the directors no deadly enemies to the free course of serious thought on vital subjects. But a *quid pro quo* was ready to hand, for the committee indulged in a mild and righteous wail that "the authorities throw cold water on our disinterested efforts, yet scruple not to appropriate £130 annually for the support of schools for the children of the upper classes"; and, if further proof were needed to show that those men were at the moment suffering from what they believed to be a well-founded resentment, in a succeeding minute we note the secretary's reference to our "unrequited labours."

Reading-Room Facilities

These, however, were but the passions of a day, and were not allowed to run to serious issues, or to distract attention from the programme of real work. At the close of 1845, the Reading-Room was calling for urgent legislation. Hitherto, as in the case of the Library, it had been conducted by its own subscribers, who were liable in a specific payment, and were under a modified supervision. The consequent complication in the matters both of finance and management, and the fact also that the department was of a not too sturdy growth, induced the committee to propose and carry through an amalgamation. Accordingly, in December of that year it was taken under the covering wing of the Institution. There was, on account of additional facilities and advantages, an immediate influx of new members, so that recourse had shortly to be made to a more commodious room.

This is the place to note also that the Reading-Room was open regularly on Sundays, and continued to be so for several years longer, until, in fact, the steady access of Sabbatarian sentiment at length overruled the laxer notions as to the sanctity of the day. From almost every side the religious element was pressing for recognition, and it may be accepted as an evolution of events that the committee felt persuaded to impose upon a sub-committee discretionary powers to let the hall on Sundays for the purposes of religion.

Altruistic Stirrings

The philanthropic sense was impelling men and women to adventure on untraversed lines for the entertainment or instruction of their less favoured neighbours, to one form of which, that of the Penny Club, for the providing of a rational amusement for the poorer classes, the directors gave a willing adhesion. This Club appears to have enjoyed a considerable vogue, and must in some respects have proved a success, for within a couple of years the ladies connected with its conduct initiated a supplementary movement under the title of the Monday Evening Work Club. Had they been but blessed with a full exchequer, or been able to take financial shortenings with the light heart of present-day commercialism, that rare and select group of reformers might, with minds freed of the gross weight of pence and shillings, have gone on to work wonders on the social fabric. A debt of £230 lay heavy on their consciences, chilling endeavour. Their thoughts turned to the ecclesiastical device for raising funds. "While we see small religious bodies sweeping away debts of hundreds in a few hours, have we not reason to think a similar appeal would be successful?" But for the time zeal was at a discount, within and without the limited circle, numbers of the committee failing to show face at the business meetings.

Lack of Funds

A resolution was formed to look into the financial state, to make a general appeal to the public after the well-worn fashion, and to work the trades on the old lines of deputations. As on other and more urgent occasions, they made but little of it, and still their patience was unexhausted. The cabinetmakers, coopers, painters, and joiners were remonstrated with for going elsewhere for meeting-places; the town was divided into wards for the purpose of soliciting help from shopkeepers; and in their straits they pocketed their dignity and asked ex-Provost Walter Baine to advance £300. The sum of £40 was subscribed by the trades, the visit to the shopkeepers was unremunerative, and Mr. Baine had to refuse on account of heavy demands from other quarters. The committee, harbouring no hard thoughts of anybody, but confessing to a sense of discouragement at the degree of coolness, formally extended feelings of sympathy and charity towards the working classes because of the pressure of the times, and straightway instructed the trustees of the building to open an account and draw as required.

The Club in Embryo

Hitherto, so far as can be discovered, the directors had at no time entertained a notion of including within the economy of the Institution a permanent section devoted solely to the objects of mental recreation or amusement. They had permitted enterprising members to originate and carry through modest ventures on the lines of relaxation, with a judicious admixture of instruction, and all their own efforts in this relation had as a guiding motive the desire or gathering of funds. It was not until 1864 that the Club, for so many years now the mainstay and chief attraction of the organisation, blossomed into flower, but to a much earlier date belongs the honour of planting the seed. It was no more than the tiniest of grains, which no one could have guessed was ever likely to come to fruition.

At a meeting on April 26, 1847, "Mr. James Henry suggested that a bagatelle table should be purchased for the Institution, and stated that one might be had for £7. After considerable discussion, it was decided that the finances could not afford so considerable an outlay at present." Mr. McLarty proposed the introduction of chess and one or two backgammon boards. The bagatelle table was given the go by, we see, but the other project was inquired into and reported on. The sum of 15s was reckoned as the cost. This also was too great for the times. The report was ordered to be on the table till a more suitable season.

About the same time, references to an Artisans' Club, to a Crawfurdsburn Mechanics' Library, to a Mutual Improvement Association, and to a Conversational Club indicate the existence of a commendable activity in intellectual pursuits amongst working-men. The members of the Artisans' Club wanted to trade for the privilege of reading the books of the Library. They were offered fifty volumes weekly for 50s half-yearly. The minutes contain no subsequent mention of the subject, so that we are entitled to think the transaction was not closed. The name of the Cartsyke Library is given in connection with the generous gift of Sinclair's Statistical Account of Scotland from this Library.

Delinquent Directors

It was the members of the committee themselves who resolved to form a Mutual Improvement Association, of which the Conversational Club became an offshoot. The immediate cause at the back of this association was a regrettable apathy amongst the directors (many of whom were neglecting their duties), and not, it must be confessed, any increasing eagerness for additional facilities in gathering the fruits of knowledge. This is the manner of declaration adopted on the occasion :—"It must have been remarked by those in the management that since the excitement at getting up this Institution much difficulty has been experienced in getting persons to act with necessary spirit in committee. With a view to obviate this, a movement has been set afoot, etc." The membership was confined to the committee, but with power to invite friends to the privileges of the meetings, and the member who failed to take his turn at furnishing an essay or a subject for debate had to pay the penalty of one penny.

For a year or two business ran in ordinary channels: courses of lectures were arranged intermittently, the baths question recurred at intervals, the usual money-producing entertainments were fostered with fair results, and corollary enterprises were prosecuted with a fluctuating zeal. An exhibition on an extensive scale, in July, 1850, in which the directors had considerable outside aid, was an outstanding feature in the events of that time. In the language of the secretary of the day, it "not only elevated the character of the Institution, but added the handsome sum of £45 to the funds."

An Improving Turn

Things had now taken quite a turn for the better: the Institution was showing progress in every direction, and the Library was in an especially flourishing condition. No doubt, there was much less patronage than could have been wished in connection with the classes and lectures, which suffered greatly from that counter-attraction known as "the blighting influence of the dram-shop." Neither was the Museum giving promise of occupying a more useful place than heretofore. This was, in fact, in the opinion of Mr. Beith, becoming too antiquated for anything, so that he was brought to give notice of motion for "devising the best means of disposing of the unnecessary odds and ends which had accumulated in the Reading-Room." But Mr. Beith's reforming zeal had blown cold by next meeting, and then for a season his name disappears from the list of directors.

Items of Passing Interest

During the interval from the completion of the Baths scheme to the serious essay on the question of a Club-Room—say, for a matter of five or six years—the minutes constitute a kind of quarry heap from which we dig at choice the odds and ends of greatest apparent interest, and present them in a more or less coherent form. On the subject of debt liquidation, it occurred to some members as a happy idea to memorialise the Ferguson Bequest. This was done in February, 1857; in September the secretary of the Bequest made personal and minute inquiry into the constitution, the religious denomination to which each member of the committee belonged, etc., and in November there was a refusal to give any help. It is not improbable that some of the directors of the Institution failed to pass on the religious scrutiny.

The notorious free-thinker Holyoake exercised the minds of the committee for several years, and with an increasing success on each importunate application for the hire of the hall. On the first occasion, in 1853, he was rejected by a

large majority; on the next, in the following winter, the lecturer was proposed to be formally examined before admission, which as a statement is hardly explicit enough for our perfect understanding, and we are left to conjecture that Holyoake must have declined examination of the kind meant, as we hear no more of him for that present; on his third appearance on the scene, in 1857, we are informed that he took the hall, that there was a desire within the committee to disclaim all connection with him and his propaganda, but that it was formally agreed to do nothing.

A sidelight on a financial wreck of the period is afforded through the medium of a recorded claim from the liquidators of the Western Bank for the payment of a debit balance of £260 15s, just about the amount of debt which then burdened the consciences and retarded the efforts of the directors. There was a temporary flutter of apprehension, intensified somewhat by the refusal of Mr. Thompson of the National Bank to advance the money. Mr. Alexander Rodger of the Clydesdale Bank, more complacent and accommodating, took over the debt, but the directors could not refrain from improving the occasion by the drawing up of a resolution which sought to bind that and future committees "to the most economical mode of working the Institution, and that on no account whatever shall any extra expense be incurred." Which shows the wholesome horror folks of long ago had of a little harmless debt.

It is interesting to note that at the same date the Institution was insured under the following heads :—Hall Property, £750; Furniture, £50; Property in Tobago Street, £150; Library (3000 volumes), £150; Baths, £200—total, £1200.

This particular meeting of March 5, 1858, was fruitful of other items of concern and importance. It reveals that a body of men who had designated themselves the Progressive Association were in a bad way for want of members and money, and were evidently having no such career as they had anticipated, for they applied for a reduction of the room rent, their plea being that their meetings were for the public good. We may believe that at no time have the directors of the Institution been proof against such an appeal, and we are not surprised that the Progressive Association had their room at one shilling per night. Doubtless this philanthropic organisation performed some service in the economy of things in their day, which, however, for aught further we are in these pages informed about their doings, was brief and epochless.

Chiding a Director

On the same folio as this paragraph Mr. R. Beith is brought into unenviable prominence by reason of his "habit" of laying on the Reading-Room table certain obnoxious publications, 'The Reasoner and Investigator.'" He was justly reprov'd for the liberty taken, and warned to give up the unwarranted practice.

Sunday Closing

A matter of conscience respecting the Reading-Room developed in various quarters on the endeavour of the directors to tap the public on the old subscription lines. This department continued to be open on Sundays, but on many persons objecting to subscribe while it remained so, the members, on being consulted, showed themselves ripe for a change by rallying round the orthodox, and at the same time helping the directors out of a dilemma by closing the room on Sundays by forty-five votes to three. This public appeal, like some others from the same source, was a comparative failure, resulting in a total of less than £50.

Allusions to Burns

The name of our National Poet occurs twice in the minutes of September, 1859. In the first place, at the request of the Burns Centenary Committee, who engaged the hall but afterwards held their meeting in the New Town Hall, the charge was reduced by one-half; and again, permission was granted to lay in the Reading-Room a subscription sheet on behalf of the relatives of Burns. Other instances of the considerate character of the gentlemen in the management are given in the reduction of fees by one-half on the occasion of Neil Dougall's fifty-fifth annual concert, and in like manner to the Foresters on holding a patriotic concert.

Exhaustless Patience

The intense self-restraint which those men were called upon to exercise, and did exercise, in the face of keen discouragements in those fields of disinterested labour in which they most loved to act, was a never-failing quality of service in the march of generations of directors. We too often read a history of failure: cherished ideas melt into thin air, rose-coloured projects for the general good fade and shrink, and the spirit of response to benevolent aims and motives seems dying out of the public mind. Yet how mild and apologetic the note of complaint ! Witness the half-yearly report in September, 1859, Mr. Robert Hendry president :— "We have received many applications from gentlemen requesting us to engage them as lecturers. Past experience has taught your committee that lectures, however beneficial they might be to the mechanics of Greenock, have not been attended by sufficient numbers to pay the expense necessarily incurred." On this account, they did not consider it "would be right to make any arrangements for a course of lectures in the ensuing winter. This may be a disappointment to many who are friendly to the Institution, yet to none can the disappointment be greater than to your committee, who are anxious to put the Institution to its legitimate use."

Room for Recreation

This was the meeting at which "Mr. Robert Hendry suggested that one room in the Institution might be furnished and set apart for recreation. The furnishings", he thought, might consist of a billiard table, chess boards, backgammon boards, &c., to be taken up at a future meeting, when Mr. Hendry and Mr. W. McIlwraith will report the probable expense of such furnishings." This proved to be another meteoric flash. Two months thereafter the sub-committee named stated that they "were not as yet" prepared to give in their report," and for nearly five years the subject, so far as the minutes enlighten us, was relegated to the silent background. The hands of the directors were full with other matters, and the ever worrying question of ways and means for the reduction of debt blocked the advance.

The dark clouds gave promise of breaking away at the opening of 1861, during the first half of which year there was an abnormal desire after cleanliness which greatly raised the Baths receipts, the Library membership had increased from one-hundred-and-ninety to two-hundred-and-forty-eight, and the directors felt warranted in alluding with pleasure "to the steady progress towards emancipation from debt." A lecture speculation with Rev. Hately Waddell, who was paid £4 a night for three appearances, entailed a loss of £16 17s 7 and a halfpence, but the committee took consolation that "those who were fortunate enough to hear lectures of so high and so intellectual a cast would esteem it a great gain."

A Period of Heart-Searching

Two matters, the one hard on the heels of the other, during 1862 and in the opening of 1863, were the occasions of considerable commotion amongst the members, and the means of fixing the attention of the general public upon the affairs of the Institution. The first concerned the fundamental principles upon which the fabric was based, the second an internal feud over a question of expediency. Both conflicts raged furiously for their terms, the unhappy personal element from which we seek so rarely to escape adding fuel to the fire, and then on the exhaustion of forces the directors, if in a slightly chastened mood, stood justified and strengthened in the public view.

A Clerical Critic

At the forenoon service in his church, on the first Sunday of April, Rev. John Nelson assailed the free platform of the Institution, and warned the public that if the hall were to be used for the delivery of avowedly anti-Christian lectures, "the sooner it was generally known the better, in which case such institutions were no longer entitled to the pecuniary support of a Christian community, nor to the "countenance of our working-men." This was a severe thrust at the very roots of existence, and had to be parried with skill, judgment, patience. An official defence, in which the aims and services of the Institution were laid out clearly, and signed by Robert Hendry, president; J. McCunn, treasurer; and A. Campbell, secretary, was sent to Mr. Nelson and printed in the *Greenock Advertiser*. With regard to the lectures referred to, the directors "had seen the bills with as much regret as yourself," but it was pointed out that according to the constitution the hall was at disposal for all lawful purposes, which way regarded as sufficient explanation of the circumstance. Mr. Nelson replied in a half-apologetic strain, confessing his knowledge that the working-men of Greenock were doing so much for themselves in the matter of intellectual improvement and physical wellbeing; but he held strongly to the contention that the hall should be forbidden to the agents of infidelity. In an explanatory note to the *Advertiser*, the directors quoted rule two of the Institution: "The next object is to provide a public hall which may be "let for all lawful purposes without regard to sect or party." It was no simple matter, in the face of the constitution, to make regulations (as Mr. Nelson had suggested) admitting one party and restricting another. They "administered its affairs honestly and impartially in accordance with its rules. They endeavour to make its great usefulness far more than counterbalance its occasional defects, and in this they have succeeded beyond their anticipations." Mr. Nelson was finally called on to "become a member of the Institution, and endeavour to rectify the evils he complains of, instead of standing aloof and lowering his pulpit to a level with the altar denunciations of the Irish priesthood."

The concluding phrase is perhaps the only lapse of good taste of which the writers of the explanatory note were guilty, and was hardly worthy of or in keeping with the usual high tone of their polemics. In a further letter Mr. Nelson made a passing allusion only to the unchivalrous phrase. Shortly thereafter he became a member of the Institution, and gave notice of the following alteration of the constitution at a general meeting :— "That for the future the public hall of the Mechanics' Institution be not granted for lectures against the Christian religion, such as have been recently delivered." This notice was exhibited for four weeks, the directors were not requisitioned to call a general meeting on the subject, and the affair blew past.

A Second Cleric to the Attack

Yet this did not end the troubles of the committee in this connection. They had, indeed, scarcely quitted themselves of one reverend gentleman before a second came upon the scene, the incident of whose relation to the management of the Institution was no less instructive than the other. Rev. F. L. Robertson, Mid Parish, had in his mind a series of concerts for the working; classes during the Fair Holidays of 1862—a field of effort, we need hardly remind ourselves, in which in past summers the Mechanics' members had performed signal service—and he requested a conference with the committee on the subject. Messrs. Hendry, McCunn, and McIlwraith comprised the deputation who waited upon Mr. Robertson, who took the opportunity to traverse the rules and conduct of the Institution, and to offer advice to the managers.

President Hendry made the report of the conference, and his words are worth transcribing:— “Before entering on the special subject of the meeting, the reverend gentleman made minute inquiries into the constitution of the Institution, and more especially as to the letting of the hall for all lawful purposes. He considered that the weak point in the rules, as Mechanics' Institutions should be exclusively devoted to the cultivation of science and art; that there was a free platform in the Town Hall, and consequently no necessity for one in the Mechanics' Hall. He thought Rev. Mr. Nelson's resolution defective, and would be inclined to move as an amendment that all meetings on theological subjects should be strictly excluded. He strongly urged that by acting on such policy the Institution would retain its popularity; the paltry debt of £200 could be swept off at once, a course of high class lectures established, and classes organised.”

“That the Institution was unpopular at present” was not to be wondered at, “as Mr. Tait of the Ferguson Bequest had “told a gentleman that when examining into the claims of the Institution to a portion of the Bequest the committee had presented him with a printed catalogue of the books in the Library, while they kept out of sight a manuscript catalogue in which were objectionable works.” The deputation indignantly declared this to be unfounded, explaining the list as the usual sheet for the titles of books purchased too late to be included in the printed catalogue. Mr. Robertson went on at some length to explain his “project for the concerts, but he declined to co-operate with the committee of the Institution as a committee, however much he might be inclined to do so with them individually.”

Allegations Unfounded

Mr. Tait was communicated with as to the alleged damaging statement, with quite a favourable result for the Institution. His letter in reply is not given in the minutes, but at a meeting on 16th May the committee found that Mr. Tait's explanation was satisfactory. In the following month it is recorded that Mr. Robertson had intimated to the president that he had “abandoned all thought of bringing forward a motion for altering one of the rules. On consideration, it appeared to him that a hall let for all lawful purposes was necessary for the town, and it was as well for it to be in connection with this Institution as with any other.” The directors might pardonably have sounded a paean at this double triumph; on the contrary, they jogged along on their even course.

A House Divided Against Itself

Yet a severer ordeal was close in store for those men of unshaken heart. Within a few months the house was divided against itself on the proposal to purchase the Methodist Chapel, as well fitted at once to provide accommodation for the spreading of wings and to give a completed aspect to the disjointed-like buildings in Tobago and Sir Michael Streets. Herein perhaps lay the secret of the otherwise inexplicable delay in proceeding with the project of a recreation-room—the utter lack hitherto of adequate facilities; and we may think it more than likely that the strenuous partisans of purchase, throughout all the phases of a determined opposition, had in view the adaptability of those new premises towards the realisation of this scheme.

The conflict was short, sharp, and decisive, lasting for less than three months, but in this brief space stirring events crowded quick and hard. The matter arose in an apparently simple way at a committee meeting on 11th November, 1862, at which Mr. McIlwraith brought up the question of buying. The opponents were to the front with the motion by Mr. Samuel Lang, seconded by Mr. Archibald Macalister, “that, considering the Institution is already £180 in debt, it would not be advisable to purchase the church at the present time.” Mr. James McCunn moved, and Mr. Peter Scott seconded, “That on account of the limited accommodation for baths the committee take steps for the purchase of the Methodist Chapel, now for sale, if it can be got on reasonable terms,” This amendment was adopted by nine votes to two. Two days afterwards it was reported that Dr. Stewart, proprietor, would sell for £360— “not asking any profit for himself, which he could prove by documents in his possession” —and he was willing to bear half the expense of getting the property handed over. As a factor in the matter, he also stated that the Foresters were in communication with him about purchase. Mr. McCunn informed the directors that Mr. Blair, writer, offered £200 or £250 at four-and-half per cent. On the authority of Mr. Hendry, Mr. Allison, Master of Works, strongly urged the committee to close the bargain. It was moved to proceed to purchase, and agreed by nine to three, the opposition, having gathered strength in the interim.

A Strong Opposition

Outside, amongst the members, there was an instant rallying of the opponents, whose ranks were reinforced by the timid and the fearful. The president received a requisition, signed by twenty-one members, asking for a general meeting. The committee were, on November 21, specially convened on the point. Mr. Hendry moved, Mr. Scott seconded, “That we decline calling a meeting- of members to repudiate the purchase of the Methodist Chapel” (as the requisitionists had put it), “inasmuch as the committee had decided on the purchase, and to call a meeting for that object would stultify their former decision.” It was moved by Mr. J. M. Campbell, seconded by Mr. C. Campbell, “That, waiving all objection to the wording of the requisition, the committee, believing the requisitionists are only actuated by a desire to maintain the interests of the Institution, agree to call said meeting.” The opposition was still gathering strength, now evidently at the expense of the other side, for the division showed the motion with a majority of two only—six to four. At this meeting, and prior to the trial of numbers, it was reported that the purchase had been negotiated at £360, and that Mr. Thomas King, writer, holder of the titles of the old building, was willing to give a bond of £350 on the chapel. Almost a month intervened between this and the following meeting, and then

Mr. Crawford "handed in a minute of a meeting of members held on November 6, and also his resignation as member of committee, as he considered the committee illegally elected." This latter phrase had reference to the subsequently elicited fact that, in violation of the constitution, no bills had been issued calling the previous annual meeting of members. The resignation of Mr. Crawford was no sign that the opposition had become an exploded force. In point of fact, it was probably accepted as a gage of combat.

The Impact

The tumult of approaching battle was already in the air, and within a day or two the terms of challenge were in the hands of more than the intimately concerned. A document of such historic importance will bear literal reproduction :— "Mechanics' Institution in Danger! Members to the Rescue!! The Committee of this Institution have without consulting their constituents, the subscribers, and while the Institution is already nearly £200 in debt, taken it upon themselves to purchase the old Methodist Chapel for £350. Twenty-two members who think there is already sufficient debt on the present building, and more than sufficient accommodation to supply present requirements, sent the chairman a requisition asking him to call a special general meeting of the subscribers for the purpose of abandoning such a course of procedure, and the committee, to whom he submitted the requisition, have refused the request. The requisitionists, therefore, in terms of rule 9, hereby call a special general meeting, ...to take into consideration the extraordinary procedure of the committee, and adopt such measures as may be considered necessary for maintaining the stability of the Institution, and preventing it from being saddled with any additional debt till that which already burdens it, crippling its usefulness, is extinguished."

The Purchase Ratified

The meeting was held on November 26, Mr. John Cameron, auctioneer, in the chair, and a motion made to repudiate the purchase, on the grounds of extravagant price, increase of an already too burdensome debt, more than sufficient accommodation in existing premises, and incompetency through failure to ask consent of members. The amendment was in effect that the committee be supported. On the demand of Mr. Hendry, the legality of the committee's position was first disposed of, but in the confusion an erroneous issue was placed before the members, who by a majority of two declared that the committee had been illegally elected through the omission to publish the usual handbills intimating the annual meeting. The amendment for supporting the purchase was adopted by thirty-three votes to twenty-three, and the result was evidently accepted without further demur. A meeting of members was held on January 6, 1863, for certain specific purposes, one of which was to authorize the committee to make all arrangements for the completion of the purchase, which was formally done. A portion of the minutes of the previous specially convened meeting was expunged on the initiative of Mr. Robert Hendry, who insisted that by a majority of two it had been decided not to consider the question of illegal appointment of the committee. There was, of course, an amendment, but Mr. Hendry carried the meeting with him by sixteen to five. A moment later the September election was declared null and void for the reason given above, and thereupon eleven gentlemen, with two exceptions the same as before, were elected to the directorate, with Mr. William McIlwraith president. One of the new men was Mr. James Auld, who proved a worthy successor to the best of the older members.

Mr. Crawford made a final but still futile attempt to hinder the property transaction, by means of a motion to remit the matter for the consideration first of the Baths Committee, and afterwards of a public meeting of all who had subscribed to the Baths movement, together with the members of the Institution. This was defeated by eighteen to seven, and consequent on that vote Messrs. Crawford, Andrew Macallister, and James Henry entered their protest on the grounds already stated.

The circumstances were narrated briefly and judiciously in the next annual report, which intimated that a bond of £500 had been got on chapel, manse, and baths, that £360 had been paid for the chapel, and that the balance had been devoted to the reduction of the debt on the Institution building. The last remnant of the opposition was swept away at this meeting. Messrs. Henry and Macallister, unbeaten while a hope remained, pushed forward a despairing motion to offer the chapel for sale at the upset price of £350. It is almost needless to say that the proposal was negatived.

A Return to Peace

The cavilling spirit all but wholly disappeared, and the body of directors imported their energy into the work of reconstruction and re-adjustment. There was a fine show of promising vitality in the annual report of March, 1864, which stated that the chapel had been converted into two commodious halls, the lower let as an auction room, the higher for soirees, concerts, &c., the income from these sources exceeding the most sanguine expectations; the baths had all been renewed and the rooms increased from five to twelve; a balcony, seated for two hundred, had been erected in the hall; the Library was in a satisfactory condition; and, on the whole, the directors had cause to be gratified and hopeful.

New Trustees

During the term over which the two agitations just detailed extended a few of the minor matters deserve recording. It is not unimportant that on January 6, 1863, the following additional trustees were appointed:—Messrs. Robert Hendry, clothier; Duncan Cook, smith and chain-maker; John Lennox, felt manufacturer; James McCunn, cabinet-

maker; William McIlwraith, hosier; Peter Scott, grocer; John Cameron, auctioneer; Charles Campbell, painter; and James Morrison, stationer.

A City Visit

In view of the proposed enlargement of the Baths, a deputation had a turn round the Glasgow establishments, with a faithfulness which we would rarely think of emulating now. An elaborate report was prepared, occupying nearly six full pages of the minute book, the most pregnant sentence of which is the closing one: — “It being now dark, and the deputation having been seven hours engaged in their investigations, they found the internal pressure too strong to be resisted, and so made a speedy retreat to the centre of the city in search of rest and refreshment.”

A Music-Hall Venture

An attempt by a Glasgow man named W. G. Ross to run a high-class music-hall ended disastrously in the loss of £200 in a few months; and the directors could hardly feel surprised when he wrote them:— “It is with great pain I am compelled to relinquish my endeavour to give cheap concerts to the people of Greenock. When I first thought of coming here, I said in my mind that Greenock is the only town of any magnitude that has not got some amusement nightly without intoxicating drinks, so I tried Greenock with cheap concerts for the people, and have carried them on without any assistance for the last four months, and with, I think, honour to myself and at the same time with great loss.”

The Club

Thus far, it cannot but have impressed the reader, we have been dealing with an organisation struggling for existence. On no side whatever, turn and turn as they might, had the directors been rewarded with a prospect of opulence, or indeed with anything approaching a measure of success proportionate to the expenditure of moral and physical energy. For thirty years and more, the Institution had undoubtedly been the source of benignant influences the power and compass of which are beyond our reckoning, yet is it not also writ large upon the face of this history that the generations of youth had failed to appreciate the import and significance of the privileges brought to their hand through the sweat, literal and figurative, of self-renouncing men !

A Prophetic Sense

New light broke from an unexpected quarter, and the day of better things began. One may wonder whether the sense of prescience had been bestowed upon the minds that pressed and projected the Club that is to-day and has been for so many years the full, warm heart of the Institution. Whether the idea had taken a clear shape, or whether it was yet but an undefined sensation, it was the gregarious instinct asserting itself of man desiring to look upon the face of his fellow.

The ostensible occasion for the formation of a Club was a call for help to an unthriving Reading-Room. The unfolding of events in the slow development which ensued, the disclosure of conflicting views on minor things magnified into essential principles of life and conduct, the struggles and ultimate reluctant yielding of the honest but unreasoning-zealot, these and other phases of the period combine to form a chapter of an absorbing distinction.

Small Beginnings

The start was made in April, 1864, when a sub-committee— consisting of Messrs. Robert Hendry (convener), James McCunn, J. M. McLeod, John Lennox, R. Fleming, and A. Macallister—was appointed to inquire “into the condition of the Reading-Room, and to suggest any means calculated to improve it.” At the annual meeting of members in the same month, the sub-committee reported as follows “on the proposed Institution Club:—That the proposed Club should be started in the Reading-Room, and be open from seven till half-past ten in the evening; that a bagatelle table be procured, and also the material for chess, draughts, dominoes, and other games be laid on the table, so that members may either read or amuse themselves as they may think proper, and that they also be entitled to the privileges of the Library; that the subscription be at the rate of twopence per week, paid monthly in advance; that one halfpenny of the twopence be paid into the Library Fund, and the remaining three halfpence into the Reading-Room Fund; that this be the rule whether members avail themselves of the Library or not; that, previous to opening, your committee recommend the general committee to secure as large a number of members as they can, by personal canvass, so that the project might be established with the funds so realised, or at least with very trifling assistance from the funds of the Institution.” By nine votes to three, this report was sent down to the general committee for their approval, the defeated motion, by Mr. James Auld, being for a delay of six months, conjecturally on account of the expense. Within the following week or two the notion was getting to the concrete.

A Growing Call

An application for accommodation from an embryotic working man's club, “to provide the necessary material for carrying out the same,” threatened a complication, which was successfully averted. It was agreed to grant the use of No.1 Room at £5 per year should such an application be made; but at a later meeting, on the motion of Mr. Hendry, there was a resolution to reconsider this decision, and a sub-committee was appointed to organise the Club in connection with the Reading-Room. The report of this sub-committee, given in June, “ recommended the establishment of a club for two reasons—(1) That the formation of “a club is one of the legitimate objects of the Institution. (2) That it would be successful from a financial point of view.” As to the requisites for such a club, your

committee "consider that about £35 would be sufficient to provide a billiard table, a bagatelle board, chess and draught boards, dominoes, etc. The Reading-Room to be incorporated with the Club, and a payment of eightpence per month, or one shilling and sixpence per quarter, admitting to Reading-Room and Club. The Club to be called Mechanics' Institution Club."

Launched with Unanimous Accord

The scheme became an accomplished fact without a whisper of dissent. A billiard table and a bagatelle table, the latter price; £9, were purchased without delay; a second billiard table was secured on a journey to Largs, at the moderate cost of £13; a scale of prices was drawn up; on a maturer consideration, the upper hall of the chapel was set apart for the purposes of a recreation-room, and the affair floated off auspiciously. A distinctly jubilant note ran through the half-yearly report in September. The Reading-Room membership had already jumped from thirty to one-hundred-and-thirty-five, and the prosperity of the Institution as a whole was stated as unprecedented; and the magistrates made the moment one of unalloyed joy by agreeing, under the new Police Bill, to exempt the Institution from the payment of local assessments. As marking the goodwill of prominent citizens toward the venture, we have a record of donations to the new department from Bailie John Hunter and Mr. Robert Neill. Club members suggested a gymnasium, and a plan with estimates at £95 was on the way, but the idea was in its early stages abandoned as impracticable. A like fate befell the proposal by Mr. Hendry to introduce a curling table.

It becomes quickly evident from the character of the references to the subject that the provision in the Club-Room, to begin with, was of a tentative and experimental kind. That the furniture hurriedly acquired from Largs and elsewhere was not quite in the pink of condition does not surprise us. In point of fact, the billiard tables were shortly found to be in a deplorably dilapidated state, and an expenditure of over £30 had to be incurred to make them passable. Otherwise there appeared no other alternative to shutting up the place.

Initial Blunderings

The directors were naturally somewhat at sea in their legislation for the conduct of members. They were moral reformers first and foremost, there was not the slightest doubt, which is the only interpretation of their refusal to allow smoking in the Club Room. Mr. McLeod did his best to have the prohibitive clause expunged from the regulations, but he was as a voice crying in the wilderness. The idea of providing the comforts and freedom of the fireside had not yet struck home. Prior to the overhaul of the billiard tables, a general dissatisfaction was being felt, and a consequent decrease in the membership. In April, 1866, Mr. D. McIlwraith came up with the novel proposition that the tables be made free to members on an annual subscription of fifteen shillings or twenty shillings, but he had no seconder and made no converts. An impetus towards an improving condition was experienced during 1866. More accommodation was called for. The rules were relaxed in their rigidity—probably a man was now permitted to enjoy his pipe with his draughts or chess—and an exhibition billiard match with good players was arranged in order to afford to novices an insight into the game. The retarding effects of the shipbuilding lock-out of that time were passing off, so that at the general meeting in October the reports showed all the departments in a very favourable condition, and the Institution bade fair "to be one of the most important of its kind in the West of Scotland."

High Ideals

It was with real pain that the high ideals cherished in connection with the mission of the Club in the social economy of the working-classes were one by one allowed to fade from view as quixotic or impracticable. In the minutes of a meeting in December of this year, occupied with the work of revising the constitution, we are privileged in an extended report with an insight into the attitude and ambitions of directors on this very point. Mr. W. McNaught, with a sublimated conception of the Club Committee's duties, urged that they should be granted unlimited powers in regard to improvement and debating classes, with the view of "making it a sort of home"; and he declared that "he would leave the Club at once if he thought it was instituted for no higher purpose than giving facilities for passing the time in billiards and such like games."

Unholy Card-Playing

Mr. McNaught's apostolic fervour availed little against a hard-setting tide in favour of a more liberal policy in recreative amusements; and before long the weaker brethren were being deeply exercised in soul over the great Card-playing Reproach, which constitutes one of the most interesting episodes in the growth of the Club. A first reference is thus made to it in the minute of April 17, 1867 :—"Mr. S. Lang called attention to an irregularity in the Club-Room, that of playing at cards, a game which was not sanctioned by the rules. After some discussion, the matter was remitted to the Club Committee, to put a stop to the practice." In May there was a second complaint that the practice was being continued without permission, and then, in response to a requisition from members, the Club Committee submitted a proposal to sanction the game—Mr. Peter Galt dissenting. The point was regarded as a serious if not a crucial one in the history of the Institution, and not to be disposed of lightly or with undue haste. A special meeting of directors was convened, at which four resolutions were submitted and discussed. Mr. W. McNaught, secretary, moved that "The directors are most willing to cater for and to provide additional, amusements, yet believing as we do that the introduction of this game would not be conducive to the general prosperity of the Institution, delay granting the prayer of the petition until the matter has been laid before a general meeting of the whole members." Mr. J. Ferguson moved the granting of the petition. Mr. R. Hendry moved that the

petition be granted "meantime, provided that it be proved to the satisfaction of the committee that such card playing in a public room is not contrary to law; and, while reluctantly consenting to the introduction of card playing, the committee express the hope that the members will see the propriety of requesting games of a more interesting and less objectionable character." Mr. J. Moir moved simply that it be remitted to the Club Committee to introduce card playing under proper regulations, if found legal. Mr. Hendry carried the day, Mr. McNaught and Mr. Ferguson dissenting. The game was found to be perfectly legal, and in the succeeding minute it is stated that cards were introduced forthwith.

The Gambling Spirit

Very probably the matter gave rise to an intermittent anxiety, although for a number of years there is no specific allusion in the minutes. In the beginning of 1871, however, it came to the knowledge of the committee that the privilege was being abused by a surreptitious practice of gambling amongst a small section, and after an unheeded warning to desist, cards were once more prohibited on a vote by eight to four. This too drastic step of penalising the innocent with the guilty was sharply resented. The exclusion lasted throughout the summer, but the October half-yearly meeting-gave a unanimous vote for restitution of cards under certain restrictions, of which the following are the principal:— No more than two packs to be played with in the Club-Room at any one time; no cards other than those belonging to the Club to be played with; no one party to be allowed night after night, or for a whole night at a time, to retain possession of the cards, to the exclusion of others, but each and all must be accommodating and ready to give way to others. It took some further time to clear the minds of the directors of the prevailing fallacy that card-playing is intrinsically immoral, yet the emancipation was working its sure way, and before many years it was all but universally recognised that no vital ethical question could be involved in the mere limitation of the number of packs of cards to be played with.

There is no reason to believe that the Club-Room has at any period been greatly tainted by the practice of gambling. To the honour and credit of the management it must be said that in this particular the directors have been unceasing in a jealous care for the good name of the Institution. At various periods the head of the serpent has appeared, to be struck at, maimed, and robbed of its venom. In 1897, the more effectively to grapple with the threatening evil, the games of Napoleon, poker, and twenty-fives were wholly debarred. To-day, the habitués engage chiefly in the card games of whist (no solo whist), euchre, and cribbage; in chess, draughts, and dominoes; and in billiards; and it must be accepted as a sound testimony to the wholesome spirit pervading these forms of recreation that there is not the suspicion of gambling in the atmosphere of the room.

A Hesitant Policy

The Reading-Room and Club, to quote the phrase of the report to the next half-yearly meeting, "was now a most bustling and thriving trust," depressed trade notwithstanding. Still, within six months there were constant complaints of a decreasing revenue from the department, and it was being brought home to the management that some essential element in method was yet lacking. We can judge, on reading between the lines, that there was, if not an actual neglect, at least a hesitancy or suspense of mind which hindered a whole-hearted administration on lines the real utility of which was not quite manifest to everyone. This view will partly explain the pottering policy of the ensuing few years, during which, it is evident, the Club Committee did not so assiduously as they might maintain the room or its furnishings at the highest standard. "The present excitement in political matters operated rather unfavourably," the directors ventured to affirm; and, in the hope that the effect from this cause would be temporary, they anew cleaned their billiard tables, re-adjusted their prices, and insisted on a more rigorous application of the regulations. The reaction from a condition of decline was slow in making itself felt, the annual meeting of 1869 arrived with the report that, while the Institution was as a whole in a sound and healthy state, the Club was not flourishing, its income the smallest in any one year, and less than the expenditure by £32 13s 6d. In committee President John Ferguson remarked that "of all the schemes of the Institution this was the one they were least justified in carrying on at a loss," and it was generally admitted that affairs should have the earliest attention.

Abandonment Proposed

At the annual meeting Mr. Peter Scott moved "that, if not meeting expenses by January next, this scheme be abandoned, and the room applied to some other purpose tending more to benefit the Institution." The chairman considered Mr. Scott's motion rather premature. Several other members also spoke, all of them deprecating such a summary mode of treating the Club. Mr. Scott withdrew his motion, and gave notice "that in the event of a deficiency arising in the Club during the ensuing six months, he would at next half-yearly meeting be prepared to move that the Club be dissolved and the apartments devoted to "other purposes." An attempt to reduce the price of billiards during the day to twopence per fifty was defeated, and then the Club Committee was asked to consider the whole question and adopt measures to make the department self-supporting. In October the secretary wrote :—"This once-thriving trust, it is to be regretted, has not realised the hopes expressed in last report of its regaining its old position."

A Visit to Glasgow Clubs

A deputation visited several clubs in Glasgow, and returned with the following recommendations: — "1. That the Club and Reading-Room be made cleaner and more comfortable and attractive, by improving the ventilation, painting and decorating the walls, cushioning the seats, having both rooms better lighted, &c. 2. That monthly

visitors at 9d, and single visitors at 1d, be admitted, and cards of membership to annual, quarterly, and monthly subscribers. 3. That greater publicity be given to the Club and its advantages."

Scheme of General Improvement

These recommendations were estimated to entail an outlay £45 before they could be carried out twenty-one members requisitioned President James Auld to call a special meeting to consider the propriety of getting; a general and comprehensive plan for the improvement of the whole buildings. This meeting adopted the view of the requisitionists by a vote of thirteen to ten, and pending the preparation of this plan the Club-Room and Reading-Room were cleaned and whitewashed. With the best of motives, no doubt, the Club Committee on their own responsibility made the hazardous venture of charging non-members of the Institution double tariff for billiards, over which little excursion into the realms of endeavour Convener D. McIlwraith suffered the loss of his official position. Asked to tell the directors whether this double charge had been imposed, Mr. McIlwraith declined to say anything whatever on the subject, and held to his purpose on the threat of deposition. Mr. John Symington confessed to the ill-conceived resolution, but qualified confession by the statement that the trial had been abandoned after a few days. The Club Committee were somewhat appeased on being requested to deliberate on the subject of extra-charging visitors resident in town, but as they had already discovered the proposal to be unworkable or unprofitable the motion went into the limbo of unexhausted remits.

More Rigorous Regulations

In July, 1871, it was reported that the Club Committee had been "agitating the question of the advisability of closing the Club altogether"; but they were instructed to bring up a report; and in September they stated that, "having taken the evidence of thirteen members as to whether the Club had been fulfilling its objects, and also if it should be carried on,.... they agreed by a majority to recommend that the Club be carried on as at present, that the bye-laws be strictly enforced, and that other games and amusements be introduced, with occasional music, as also short readings, &c." A motion was made to recommend the disposal of the billiard tables, and to carry on the Club in all other respects as above recommended, but without the game of billiards. This, however, was negatived by four to two." A good deal of discussion took place amongst the directors, and three motions were submitted—By Messrs. McLeod and P. R. Crawford, That the Club Committee report as to probable expense of proposed improvements, the financial state of the Club, and the nature of the new games proposed to be "introduced"; by Messrs. R. Hendry and D. McIlwraith, "That we approve of the Club Committee's report, and remit to clean and embellish the Club-Room and carry out the improvements suggested, at a cost of not more than £30 by Messrs. John McNaught and James McCunn," That the Club Committee dispose of the billiard tables, "and introduce other games." Mr. Hendry's resolution was ultimately adopted by eight to four.

An Impromptu Club

The improvements led to a largely increased membership. The April meeting of members was inspired by the prospect of better things, and general approval was given to a suggestion by Mr. Hendry as "to the propriety of making some sort of provision or arrangement to get more intellectual work along with the amusement. It would be a "good plan to set one night in the week apart for consideration or discussion about general or local matters."

Whether the Impromptu Club, as it was named, had much bearing upon the success of the department or not, we are not definitely informed: probably it had a good deal: in any case, the reports assume a more cheerful tone, and clearly indicate a rising tide of prosperity. That of October, 1872, stated: "The Club-Room has undergone a very "extensive alteration in ventilation and general improvement, making it now a place of recreation and amusement "that is unsurpassed in town." By April, 1873, Secretary A. Black was able to write :—"The Club has this year fairly recovered its old elasticity and vigour." There had been seven thousand visits at one penny, and the regular members had been greatly augmented. "There is also," it is added, "an Impromptu Club for those who are desirous of "acquiring a facile and easy style of speaking—a requisite "much to be desired at the present day," At the annual meeting in April, 1874, a distinct call was made for enlarged accommodation, and during the following six months the chess and draughts players were crowded into an adjoining room, two new games (undefined) were introduced, a new j£80 Burroughes & Watt billiard table laid down, the old bagatelle table, representing a decaying form of recreation, was .declared a cumberer of good space; and in April, 1875, the accounts of the Club for the year showed a surplus of £80.

Prosperity and Consequent Extension

The affairs of the Club having now taken a firm hold of the managers' minds, the claims for generous treatment were for a time pressed to the comparative exclusion of other interests. The first word about modernising the old building was spoken at the beginning of 1876 with a view to securing an enlarged area for exploiting the recreation programme; and despairing of such a movement the Club partisans seriously suggested the permanent occupancy of the large hall. For some years the necessity of extension for behoof of other departments as well, notably of the Baths, was becoming more apparent; but it was April, 1879, before a plan was submitted by Mr. John Kirk for the overtaking of the scheme at the most economical computation of £600.

In June, 1880, at a special meeting of members—the president, Mr. William McWhirter—a revised plan was unanimously adopted which gave increased bath accommodation, enlarged the Club-Room from thirty-five feet by

thirty-five feet to its present dimensions of sixty-two feet by thirty-five feet, raised the roof, and greatly improved the Institution entrances, at an estimated cost of £1000. The work of re-construction was done so expeditiously that the new Club premises were opened in December of the same year, the formal ceremony performed by Mr. McWhirter, and the other speakers including Mr. Robert Hendry and Mr. James Auld. With the offering of the augmented facilities and a more careful eye to the general amenities, successive boards of directors have since that period enjoyed the satisfaction of watching the steady growth of the department to a sturdy and prosperous maturity. Within a very few years, on a reconstruction of the lower hall, with the view of providing further necessary accommodation, the Reading-Room was transferred from immediate proximity to the Club and located next door to the Library premises as these are seen to-day.

Undeviating Success

The intervening history of the Club from that date till now can in no very important sense be marked eventful. A movement to introduce a huckstering element was wisely checked by the management committee. The requisition by fifty-six members to allow Clubmaster Mountford to deal in tobacco was not revolutionary on the face of it, and when it emerged from the deliberations of the Club Committee stamped with their unanimous recommendation in favour of cigars and cut tobacco only, but of any kind of pipe, one could hardly have looked for the directors taking upon themselves the onus of refusal. That is exactly what they did, though, by a majority vote, and the decision was so speedily accepted as a judicious one that the spirit of malcontents had neither adequate time nor space to work its will.

In the autumn of this same year, 1884, arose the question of trying the experiment of a general subscription. Without much serious consideration, the committee accepted the suggestion *nem. con.*, and at once adopted the figure of twelve shillings and sixpence as proposed, allocated thus to the respective departments—Club, four shillings; Library, two shillings; Baths, six shillings and sixpence. The novelty was in itself a brief attraction, and the first reports as to the working of the experiment, especially in its relation to the Baths, were not unpromising. Shortly, its effects upon the membership proved beyond all doubt detrimental. Having pursued its course for two years and a half, until facts had converted many of its previously firm advocates, the general subscription scheme was dismissed by a sweeping-majority.

The Problem of the Young

Few matters that have from time to time appealed to the serious consideration of those in charge of the Institution have proved more perplexing than the problem of how to deal with the rising youth. Interspersed throughout the minutes from a very early date in the life of this Club references are met which hint of this dilemma. The age of sixteen was almost invariably fixed upon as the *open sesame* to the social amenities of the Institution, but in the absence of the prerogative to demand an extract birth certificate it has been unavoidable that lads of too tender years on occasions made unchallenged entrance. Twenty-five or thirty years ago the abuse was much more general than in these later days of closer supervision. Several of the present directors were themselves, on their own admission, precociously so inclined while yet at their elementary education; and one of them, at least, takes some delight in the recollection that Clubkeeper Galloway had not seldom to hunt him from the premises. With the discontinuance of evening classes, lectures, concerts, and penny readings—forms of instruction and amusement all of which had been taken over by specially equipped organisations in the various sections of the town—boys had for a period no place in the economy of the Mechanics'. They could certainly, on their mental faculties showing a preternatural awakening, become Library members, and were not likely to be expelled from the Baths; but they were rigidly excluded from social intercourse with their elders while the years of discretion were unattained. This mild and inevitable form of ostracism weighed upon the more philanthropic of succeeding committees. Ideas were not awaiting for the mitigation of the hardship. These were more or less vain or impracticable until 1888, when a proposal to form a Boys' Club took shape and came into effect. The Room known as No.1, on the ground floor of the original building, was scrubbed down and well sawdusted; draughts, chess, cards, dumb-bells, swinging clubs, and a number of books, newspapers, and magazines were provided every week night from seven to ten; and two of the most zealous reformers volunteered to exercise a due oversight. It was a nice little coterie for a month or two, more like a family party in the atmosphere of the nursery than a gathering of units tucked in under the force of rule. One could easily see that the elements of success on any adequate scale were not there. The scheme constituted a short diversion for a score of rough lads of the immediate neighbourhood. Of instruction or benefit or worthy recreation there was none in prospect in the ultimate issue. Whether in the conception or in the after management, or whether in the character and conduct of the boys, there appeared to be a radical defect hindering success. The club gradually lost its charm for most of its members, the number of whom, dropped away until there was no alternative to shutting up.

Youth at Another Point

It is appropriate to mention in this connection that an endeavour springing from similar motives was put forth under the direction of the Library Committee in 1892. In that year it was resolved that the formation of a Boys' Section in the Library would be a fitting- recognition of the undoubted claims which the youth of the working population have upon the potential energies of the Institution. A considerable sum of money was expended in the purchase of judiciously-selected books, treating of biography, travel, adventure, of mechanics, science, and art in their easiest and most popular forms by authors of established reputation and a nominal tariff was fixed as a bait to draw the

fish. The response was so exceedingly limited and discouraging that within a couple of years the volumes of the section were utilised as an incorporated part of the general Library.

Causes of Club Popularity

A judicious reluctance to the imposition of rigid, cast-metal regulations has done much to raise the Club to its present popularity, and to render it unique of its kind in the country. The chief recommendation is that it has appealed to the public not as a place of recreation so much as a social centre pervaded by a wholesome atmosphere, into which a young man may enter without fear of moral taint. To one who has enjoyed an unbroken connection for a quarter of a century it may be allowed to indulge in a vein of enthusiastic eulogy of associations that have proved the source not of pleasure only, but of real help in alleviating¹ and lightening¹ the tasks and burdens of life.

The Club Predominant

Of the schemes that pressed upon the brains of our forerunners for the amelioration of their class, in learning, culture, morals, it is the Club that survives the changes of the years and has become the beating heart of the Institution. Of the original aims and hopes, how much remains unrealised! How futile, it may seem, have all the labours proved in fields that long since were whitening to the harvest! Educational classes, lecture series, improvement associations, penny readings, impromptu clubs, where are they? Yet how vast must be the sum put down in the Book of Life to the credit of those men possessed of a lively faith, taking no thought of personal reward, but looking with a single eye to the good of their fellows! They digged and sowed, often in tears; others are to-day reaping in gladness. It is surely laid upon those who follow to see that the spiritual heritage so bequeathed is not wholly squandered by graceless descendants.

The Library

For period between 1835 and 1841, during the course of the building agitation, and later of its construction, the references in the Institution minutes to the Library are of an incidental character. Probably there were records being taken of the committee's work, which we know went on uninterruptedly at the temporary premises in Sir Michael Street pending the opening of the Institution. Those records have not come down to us, but with the help of the occasional allusions noted the broken threads are easily picked up and pieced together. We have seen in what manner the department had been overshadowed by the newer and more absorbing movement, the immediate effect of which upon the progress of the Library could hardly be otherwise than detrimental. We are led to believe that at first the bulk of the Library members, or at least of the committee, were engaged in the furthering of this scheme for a hall, but that latterly, as it assumed greater proportions and became closely identified with the various trades, the representation from the older organisation was less numerous, and that finally, prior to the consummation of those wider aims, the most of the Library members were paying exclusive attention to their own interests. On the authority of the Institution secretary, the Library was exhibiting strong inherent vitality. The men who were holding on firmly to the original movement, lest mayhap it should altogether be lost sight of, were on their own responsibility appealing; for public support of modest schemes for aiding their exchequer. In one such case the Institution Committee generously postponed an entertainment having a similar object, so as to avoid injuring a sacred concert for the benefit of the Library. When in 1841 the sitting executive received its *coup de grace* and the other committee came into its own again, the minutes began once more to bear frequent references to the Library, whose shelves at the time of the re-adjustment of control held about two thousand five hundred volumes.

Ebb and Flow of Membership

In the years that followed, what with the increasing demands upon the time and energies of the management from the other interests in their care, on the one hand, and on the other an indifferent constituency that needed a continual spurring to yield a scanty resource, the Library fell much short of the position for which its early zealots had marked it out, and to which by virtue of its mission and worth to a community it well deserved to attain. It would almost seem that at the outset of its career it had at once drawn within the circle of its influence the entire available body of live-minded working-men in Greenock, and during several of the decades which followed the ranks of its membership ebbed and flowed with the regularity of the tide. For a long period the total number of readers ran between one hundred and fifty and two hundred. This was only slightly exceeded until the seventies, when there was a growing desire for books amongst the general population, but it was nearly twenty years later before any very sensible increase in the membership began to show. The causes of that increase, which was remarked as rather abnormal, were not far to seek, and could hardly be accepted as a reliable criterion of an improving taste for literature on the part of the public. Novels of a strongly erotic type, sex novels highly spiced, novels with a purpose, novels maudlin and lachrymose, flooded the market for nigh a full decade, taking new readers captive by the thousand throughout the country. Greenock could not hope to escape, and did not. Almost at a single bound, the Library membership went up to double the best previous figure, and at the height of the fever the list of annual subscribers numbered over six hundred. The reaction, which required no great insight to foresee, came more quickly than looked for, thanks in some measure to the intervention of the Carnegie gift. Tiring or sickening with a surfeit of the morbid and the sensuous, readers were fain to lie fallow for a season, while others were dropping off in scores at the mere mention of the opening of a Public Free Library. This process of diminution and decay proceeded steadily till the Corporation project was an accomplished fact. When the membership had reached the

insignificant number of fifty, the directors acknowledged their fate, and the Mechanics' Library ceased to be a public institution.

The Growth of Numbers

A brief resume of the leading circumstances of its long career will show how the department fared at the hands of the citizens. First, with regard to growth in mere number of volumes. The Library opened business in Cartsdyke in 1830 with less than two hundred books obtained from Mr. Fairrie. At the combination of the Greenock section with the Trades' Library in 1832 there was a total of three hundred and seventy volumes to start with anew. Additions to the shelves were for some years made with irregularity consequent on the low state of the exchequer, but it is a strong testimony to the careful nursing and expenditure of resources that by 1845 the property comprised over two thousand books. We notice a complaint in 1850 that three hundred and seventy-nine volumes only had been purchased in ten years, and then in the succeeding eight years the claim for a more liberal sustenance had been answered to such good effect that the catalogue showed a list of three thousand one hundred. Thereafter, in spite of all the adverse conditions arising from time to time, the duty of keeping pace with the literature of the day was consistently recognised by the committee, the Library shelves were fast augmenting to accommodate the steadily increasing number of books, until in recent years there was an aggregate of about eight thousand volumes.

The Even Course of Events

We do not meet with much that is exhilarating in the course of our burrowing for facts affecting the Library. The minutes have a certain amount of sameness that varies little through series of years: the changes themselves, coming and going and recurring, are monotonous in their ebb and flow, so much so that reports divided by a quarter of a century might change pages without great risk of misrepresenting the conditions of the respective times. It is a history of little ups and downs, of hopes and despondencies, now a brief interval of prosperity, anon a spell of mischance. Shortly after the rehabilitation of the original committee, no fewer than eighty volumes of the stock needed replacing, yet despite the outlay consequent on this demand, together with the ordinary expenditure on the purchase of new books, the report on beginning under the combined auspices was that prospects were good and improving. That they did not immediately improve we can lay to the account of the deep trade depressions of 1842-3, toward the close of which the committee once more began to take heart of grace in the cheering indications that were appearing. It was a complaint in the latter year that no new books had been added during a period of six months. An echo of this note was heard in the early months of 1845, when the department was regarded as healthy, but in need of new books, for which, alas, no funds were available. Then in 1846 the number of subscribers reached the highest point it had yet touched, and affairs went smoothly for a time as on well-oiled wheels. Yet not for long, as the directors were in 1848 being charged with a supineness that had allowed the Library to drag "five or six years behind the age" through a sad neglect in the proper ordering of its business. They were directed to give immediate attention to the necessities of the occasion, which they did to such excellent purpose that by the spring of the following year they had placed two hundred new volumes on the shelves.

Incitements to Efficiency

An extract from a report by Mr. James Slater, convener, sets forth vividly if somewhat floridly the state of things at the close of 1847:—"The Library exhibits none of that life and healthy action which characterised the first years of its existence. It is the most important Trust in the Institution, and the origin of all the others. It is the belly, they are the members; it is the heart of the Institution, from which all the other parts derive vitality and vigour; and in proportion as it is cherished or neglected so shall they flourish or decay.." To this appeal to have the Library "re-established in its pristine efficiency," there was an encouraging response, and the frequent references in the minutes to an increased activity in Library affairs clearly show that it produced more than a momentary effect. It was impossible to do a great deal in the way of purchase so long as dull trade reigned, as it had done more or less for a series of years, and, expending the utmost farthing for the filling of their shelves, the committee applied themselves to the less-heroic duty of keeping the older volumes in better condition.

This was not enough for the more enterprising members, who a year or so afterwards were scolding the committee for having increased the catalogue by a paltry three hundred and seventy-nine books in ten years. The warning word was taken heed to, we gather on the best of authority, the report of 1850 showing the number of volumes to be greater than ever, and the number of readers naturally above the average. In the succeeding year, on the first sound of the Free-Library agitation, the directors pushed the claims of the Mechanics' Library on the patronage and support of the inhabitants. "A Library possessed of such advantages is a most powerful and effective auxiliary for educating and elevating the working-classes, for whose benefit it was expressly established; and nothing would give greater satisfaction to your committee than to see such facilities duly appreciated and taken advantage of to the fullest extent." "The present of six months' reading to deserving apprentices, by their employers, would be an appropriate and profitable reward, which might be the means of confirming them in sober habits and intellectual pursuits, causing them to aspire to become useful and honourable members of society, and rendering them proof against those evil influences and temptations of a degrading tendency ever ready to seize upon the ignorant and vacant "mind."

New books were again urgently called for in 1855, and the best was done according to the means; but three years later, a trade depression weighing upon the community, the committee had to acknowledge their inability for the

time being to make any similar response. In the beginning of 1860 the Library contained 4,050 volumes. On a report in October of this year that many books were mysteriously disappearing from the Library, a censure was passed upon the librarian, and two members of the committee were deputed to attend at the room each evening. The result of a careful investigation of the premises was the discovery of most of the lost property, and the remainder came dropping in from delinquent subscribers.

Increasing Facilities

The propriety of enlarging the facilities was considered about this time. Hitherto, three nights per week had been set apart for the ordinary transactions. It was now resolved, owing to the growing usefulness of the department, to open six nights per week, between half-past seven and nine instead of between eight and nine; and within a few months there was a further extension of the hours, which for some years remained fixed at between seven and nine. By 1870 it was found necessary, owing to overcrowding during the limited evening hours, to open during a part of the afternoon. With the exception of an interval of a few years' lapse to the previous hours, this arrangement was maintained up to 1892, when the increasing number of readers forced the directors to open the Library each day continuously from three afternoon till nine evening.

A year or two of comparative well-being was succeeded by a period of unusual hardship, to mitigate which there was in 1865 a proposal to raise subscriptions from the public, but the committee could not be induced to take this lead. It is undeniable that the Library just at this time fell into an inefficient state—that, indeed, is frankly put down in the minutes—and some concern was created in the minds of the Institution members as to the Library failing to be self-supporting, and in consequence becoming a burden upon the other departments. It was an opportunity for the directors to clear away a growing misconception regarding the relation of the Library to the Institution. They insisted that according to the original design of the founders “all the surplus revenue from hall and room letting was bound to be expended on the Library, and on schemes of teaching, lectures, &c.” Mr. S. Lang remarked, *apropos* of this deliverance, that “the Library is a precious jewel, the Institution but the casket in which it is enshrined.”

The Breaking up of Carttsyke Library

This unhappy ending to a moiety of the original organisation happened in 1866. It was taken notice of, with expressions of regret, by the Mechanics' directors, who were not blind to the chances of enriching their own property through the adversity of their neighbour. That they had also wider views of the situation that opened up to them the minutes bear witness. At the annual meeting in April Mr. Robert Hendry “drew attention to the fact that the Carttsyke Mechanics' Library was about to be broken up, and their books disposed of. It had been brought under the notice of the committee whether they should consider the advisability of forming a branch establishment of this Institution in the East-end, and so extend the benefits of the Institution to that part of the town. Carttsyke was a locality where baths, along with a library and hall, might be of real advantage. He (Mr. Hendry) would not, however, have the Institution burdened by any mortgage for the proposed branch, but let it stand or fall by itself.” Other members expressed similar views, and a committee with power was appointed. The discontinuance of the Carttsyke Library was spoken of at the next meeting of committee, and arrangements were made for taking a look at the books with a view to purchase at the auction sale. A number, not many, of the volumes were secured. The extension scheme was apparently still-born, for no further reference is made to it. It was probably felt that where the natives of Carttsyke had failed Greenockians were unlikely to command success.

At its Height, and After

Throughout the last three decades of the past century the Library exhibited signs of a fuller vitality, to the chief causes of which we have already specifically alluded. This term of increasing prosperity was immediately preceded by a spell of inertia and unconcern. The working of the Library was characterised as unsatisfactory, there was a serious loss of books every year, and members of committee were not wholly blameless, inasmuch as they encouraged a deplorable laxity through their habit of taking books “without by your leave.” In 1874 the subscription was increased to one shilling and sixpence per half-year, and this was modified in 1881 by the alternative payment of two shillings and sixpence per annum, while in 1886 the experiment of introducing a family subscription was tried with a show of success. Vigorous efforts for the increase of members were being made in the middle of the seventies, these were maintained with considerable consistency, and were so well rewarded that in 1891 the extension of the Library premises could no longer be postponed. In the re-construction of the lower hall of the chapel buildings in 1883 the Library had been removed to its present premises from the original Institution property, and the Reading-Room from the upper floor to the room adjoining the Library. The further accommodation was secured by the inclusion of an additional apartment large enough to meet the wants of the department for a long time to come. An important change in the principle of dealing with the subscribers was inaugurated in 1896 under the convenership and direction of Mr. Gilbert Moffat, who after careful inquiries and the expenditure of a vast amount of labour perfected the open access system, which during the remaining years of the Library's public usefulness proved an undoubted boon alike to reader and librarian.

The Books Read

As to the character of the reading affected by the patrons of the Library, this underwent a radical change in the course of time. Seventy years ago the men who sat down with book in hand did not read to wile away their leisure, nor had the pioneers engaged in their missionary work as in a pious and benevolent pastime. The members of this

select body were sincere worshippers at the shrine of knowledge, strenuous in their search into the truth of things. The frivolous-minded had to wait long years on recognition, and it took many generations to woo the student mechanic from the paths of science and sound literature to the dissipation of sensational fiction. The motive at the root of the original movement was one of anxiety "to obtain a perusal of the books treating on "mechanical subjects," for the use of which each member had to find security before participating in the privilege. Home libraries, however small, were in those days extremely rare in the experience of the working-classes, whose limited means practically shut them out from the purchase of the dearly-priced literature of the period. Thus, the seekers of the printed word were the men who desired to know, and no book was deemed worthy of study that did not minister to their instruction. Have regard to the first purchase made in building; up the Library—Gibbon's "Rise and Fall," Hume's "History of England," Gillies' "Greece," Byron, Russell's "Modern Europe." The second list is of a similarly substantial complexion—"On Solitude," "Watt on the Mind," "Blackwood," Mitchell's Portable Encyclopedia, "Historical British India," "Palestine and the Holy Land." Then follow at intervals in the opening years books on Political Economy, Astronomy, "The Hundred Wonders of the World," "Economy of Manufactures," and so on.

Neither at this time, nor during the throes of the Disruption question, were the members of the Library apparently much concerned in ecclesiastics. We have seen that they had set up a liberal free-thinking platform, on which men of widely differing opinions regarding things in this and the other world could meet with mutual tolerance. It was not until well on in the forties that the taste for light literature became widespread, concurrent with the growing desire on the part of the mass of the population to enjoy more largely the benefits of an elementary education hitherto too much neglected by the lower section of the working-classes.

Novelists of the Older School

If we glance at the names of the novelists whose works were about that time coming into the market in a form and at a price to meet the circumstances of the neediest purchaser writers of both sexes to read whose fiction is in itself a liberal education, so true to nature are their life pictures and so firm and pervading the genius of their literary quality and touch—we may be pardoned a confession of sympathy with the students of those days who were enticed from a steady pursuit of the rigorous sciences. The full glory of the Victorian era of fiction was not yet come, but the day was big with promise, and to Fielding, Richardson, Smollett, Sterne, Goldsmith, Jane Austen, Scott, and Gait, of the older school, were being added the galaxy of talent that embraced Dickens, Thackeray, Lytton, Kingsley, and George Elliot. It was, as we have seen, much later that the literary rot set in over the field of light literature, and a mass of readers, their appetites swelling as they fed, were weaned from the sane and wholesome, and satiated with a vacuous and enervating pabulum.

A Plea for Fiction Reading

That in these days the great proportion of subscribers to such a Library as that of the Greenock Mechanics' Institution should almost exclusively confine themselves to fiction can hardly excite surprise. A main reason is that nowadays—as indeed has been the case during the past twenty or thirty years—few households are without a certain number of books of solid learning, more or less consulted by all the members of a family, and creating an atmosphere which all must more or less absorb; and as with most persons who are not specialists a little of the merely useful goes a long way, it is for pleasure first, and not for profit, that the shelves of the Library are turned to for the unexacting pages of the storyteller. As years passed in the history of the Institution, the change in the spirit and attitude of many of its members became more and more manifest, until in recent generations the original conception of its relation to the community may be said to have been lost to all but a remnant faithful. From being the seat of a severe erudition, as its founders aimed it to be, it came by the hand of inflexible circumstance to the level and estate of an undistinguished circulating library the bulk of whose readers moved and had their being in a routine that may excite but does not always instruct or elevate.

The Hendry Memorial

The setting up of a Hendry Memorial in 1890 was a step towards the realisation of a technical department within the rooms of the Library. No more fitting monument could be raised to a man who had for close on fifty years spared neither time nor labour in the interests of the Institution. Without a doubt, Mr. Robert Hendry owed not a little of his mental equipment to the shelves of the Mechanics' Library, but that debt was repaid many times over by his valuable and unstinted services in every branch of effort during all the years of his long- connection. An endeavour to enlist the sympathy of the community as a whole in the act of honouring a worthy son in a manner to which he himself would not have withheld his hearty approval resulted in a public subscription amounting to about £30. To this the directors added a donation of £20, and with the £50 the Memorial Section, confined wholly to books suited to the aspiring mechanical student, was inaugurated on December 16, 1890, the case in which the volumes were lodged surmounted by a portrait of Mr. Hendry gifted to the Institution by his widow.

The opening function was presided over by Provost W. W. B. Rodger, who had around him on the occasion a group of leading citizens interested in education, and most of the Institution directors. President Thomas O. Stewart, who expressed the minds of the members, remarked that "the Institution would have failed in its duty if it had not sought in some way more lasting than words to testify its appreciation and keep his memory green." Provost Rodger paid a sincere tribute to the worth of the man, who had carried his enthusiasm in the cause of technical education into the School Board, which was then bestirring itself to provide those facilities which the

Institution had been endeavouring to give to young men. Mr. James Auld ranked Mr. Hendry as one of Greenock's worthiest citizens, a man of unfailing fidelity, of whom he had had the pleasure of being a colleague for a quarter of a century. Mr. A. S. Mories held that few men were more entitled to respect in Greenock. Other gentlemen who spoke in similar strain were Bailie G. A. Ramsay, Mr. Peter Scott, Mr. A. J. Black, Bailie Dugald McInnes, and Bailie William Hair.

It is undoubted that the equipment thus offered to the youth of the town proved invaluable aids to many a struggling lad who by this means was enabled to raise himself to eminence in his calling. The directors had no reason from any point of view to regret the foundation of this special section, to which they added from year to year as their means allowed. Yet the admission must be made that even from those for whom almost solely the facilities had been provided there was not that general or growing response which one might have been tempted to forecast.

A Public Free Library

It is a long cry back to the first incipient movement in the town of Greenock towards the formation of a Public Free Library. We find in the tenth annual report, from the pen of Mr. Robert Hendry, it is remarked that the question "of public libraries is at present occupying some share of "public attention, and it may not be out of place to state the claims this Library has on the patronage and support "of the inhabitants." Mr. Hendry pointed out that the Mechanics' might in fact be called a Public Library, for the charge was at the rate of one halfpenny per week.

The first mention in the records of the question of a Free Library being spoken of in Greenock is met with in 1851. Casual references to the Free Libraries Act of 1854 are subsequently made now and again, and then in April, 1870— at which time the question was once more awakening a general interest in the larger communities throughout the country, and Parliament, through the amendment of this Act of 1854, had evolved an improved permissive legislation relating to it—the subject was exciting the members and committee of the Institution. Mr. W. McIlwraith introduced the matter on the plea that it had a bearing on the interests of the Institution, and on April 14 of the above year, at a special meeting called for the specific purpose of considering "whether or not any expression of opinion should be given "in reference to the Public Library scheme," Mr. McIlwraith moved that "as the Library of the Greenock Mechanics' Institution is to all intents and purposes a free Library the Institution maintains it as hitherto." The president (Mr. James Auld) ruled this motion incompetent, for what reason the secretary has not condescended to state. At the annual re-union of the Institution shortly before, Mr. Auld had spoken somewhat strongly on the point of establishing a Public Free Library, and at the meeting of committee Mr. James McCunn feared that the impression had gone abroad, based on the president's speech, that the Institution was prepared to hand over their own Library. To this Mr. Auld replied that he had "in no way "committed the committee, but simply expressed his own "opinion, an opinion, too, in which several other members of committee concurred." Mr. McCunn had half a mind to move that they issue a denial that any resolution had been come to agreeing to hand over the Library, but in place of this Messrs. Hendry and Auld were appointed to attend the public meeting convened for the week following, and there, in the event of any speaker assuming that the Institution had agreed so to do, utter a flat contradiction. It does not appear that the Institution was in any way compromised at the public meeting, which occasioned a temporary flutter in the community, and in point of fact in the succeeding annual report there is not the slightest allusion to the subject.

The Attitude of Directors

At stated periods from 1870 up till the date of the consummation of our civic hopes on the question, the public mind showed symptoms of a mild agitation regarding a Public Free Library, but it may be said with absolute truth that at no time did the directors of the Mechanics' Institution exhibit any alarmed anxiety at the prospect. The attitude of the membership was a clear and well-defined one. There has never been any dog-in-the-manger spirit with the managers of the Mechanics' Institution. Once assured that work instituted and carried on under their auspices could be better and more profitably accomplished through another agency, they have not only willingly submitted to be superseded, and acknowledged the force and justice of the supersession, but have invariably been quick to hold out the hand of candid welcome. So in the case of a Free Library, whenever it should come, the community would be able to admire the readiness and resignation with which the substitution was accepted. As a matter of fact, the adoption of the Act and the opening of a Free Institution had no more earnest advocates than have been found from time to time amongst the members of committee.

At the jubilee meeting of the Institution, in 1882, President Robert Hendry had these sentences in his speech :—"Our Library should now take a new departure. The old prison in Bank Street should be conquered, and a new and fairer structure raised where the intellectual wealth of the world might find fitting lodgment, where the inhabitants of our good town might enjoy the inestimable benefits of a Free Public Library on ground made memorable by the opening of the Greenock Mechanics' Library in 1832." At the same meeting, Provost Campbell having in the warmth of the occasion placed a somewhat fanciful estimate upon the Institution buildings, Mr. James Auld replied that he might "speak with authority in name of the committee that if Provost Campbell will offer the stated sum of £10,000, the directors will promise—especially if the public authorities take away the present facilities for usefulness that are enjoyed by us by establishing a Free Public Library and the great system of baths we have been looking for so many years—to seek fresh fields and pastures new, and endeavour to find some other means

and appliances by which we may accomplish those objects which throughout these twenty years the committee have had still before them—the mental, moral, physical, and social improvement of all classes of the community.”

Now that the lengthened public service of the Library has come to an inevitable and honourable close, not in the purchase of its property but in the assumption of its functions by consent of the whole community, this note struck well-nigh twenty-two years ago by Mr. Auld sounds *apropos* to-day. The privileges of the Library are now confined to the membership of the Institution, and it is undoubtedly laid upon the directors to maintain the department at a certain degree of efficiency. But beyond and above that consideration, having in view the traditions, written and unwritten, of an association the first principle of whose existence is a recognition of its duty to the general public, for behoof of whom the property and all that it involves are held in trust, there must arise the question of directing unspent energy and financial resources into yet untried channels for the furtherance of the dominating aim of its founders, the intellectual and social advantage of the working classes.

Donations to the Library

It is not unfitting- that this volume should contain, as far as that can be made up, a list of the many donations received on behalf of the Library in the course of its history. For some years the committee acknowledged the kindnesses through the medium of the newspapers, but kept no record in the minute books. To that extent the present compilation must admittedly be incomplete. In later years, however, and especially from 1843 onward, the committee had the donations faithfully published in the annual reports.

1832. Samuel Rodger, several volumes.

1833. John Dunlop, writer, and other citizens conjointly, 129 volumes; various individuals, 25 volumes; Robert Wallace, M.P., several volumes; Greenock Town Council, £10.

1834. John Galt, Sir John Sinclair's Statistical Account of Scotland, 21 volumes; William Leitch, 3 volumes.

1835. Provost Watt, £1 1s.

1840. Combe's Moral Philosophy, author,

1843. J. Morison, 3 volumes; Colonel Thompson, 1 volume; Dr. Burns, 1 volume; Robert Wallace, M.P., Parliamentary documents; James Kerr, 1 volume.

1844. John Dunlop, Encyclopedia Britannica, 20 volumes, Sir John Sinclair's Statistical Account of Scotland, 21 volumes, *Greenock Advertiser* from 1813 to 1823, 4 volumes; Dr. Chalmers, 5 volumes own works; Robert Beith, 2 volumes; William Alexander, 1 volume.

1845. John Denniston, *Athenaeum* for 1836-8, 4 volumes; *The Metropolitan* for 1836-7, 8 volumes; *Blackwoods'* for 1835, 4 volumes, &c.; Misses Ker, 48 volumes from library of late brother, Alan Ker; Robert Wallace, M.P., Parliamentary Papers; William Alexander, 3 volumes.

1846. Robert Wallace, M.P., 128 volumes full set Journal of Lords and Commons; 140 volumes Parliamentary Papers; R. L. Malone, Poems; Allan Park Paton, Poems.

1847. Robert Wallace, M.P., various Papers.

1848. Alex. MacKenzie, *Advertiser*, Newspapers and Periodicals; Allan Park Paton, several volumes own works; George Combe, own work; Robert Wallace, M.P., Parliamentary Papers.

1849. Alexander MacKenzie, 1 volume; James Henry, 1 volume; William Campbell, 1 volume.

1850. Michael McLarty, 7 volumes; James Forrest, A.M., 1 volume.

1851. Isaac Liddell, 7 volumes; Allan Park Paton, 5 volumes; Robert Hendry, 3 volumes; Macadam's Chemistry Applied to Agriculture, author; Francis Alexander, 1 volume; Robert Beith, 1 volume; Stewart Macallister, 2 volumes; Mrs. Peter Aitken, 62 volumes; James Fisher, 18 volumes *Scots Magazine*; White's Glasgow and Manchester, author; John Henderson Park, Glasgow, 5 volumes; Robert Park, 1 volume.

1852. Representatives of late Walter Baine, 300 volumes; J. D. Hogg, 2 volumes; W. Davidson, M.D., 3 volumes; James Wallace, M.D., 1 volume; Adam Weir, teacher, 3 volumes J. Michael McLarty, 3 volumes; Smithsonian Institution, Washington, Owen's Architecture; Isaac Liddell, 1 volume; James Napier, 3 volumes.

1853. John Spiers, M.D., 5 volumes; Joseph P. Robson, Evangelical Alliance, 4 volumes; Michael McLarty, 3 volumes; Allan Fullarton, 47 volumes; Isaac Liddell, 3 volumes; London Society of Arts, 17 volumes.

1854. James McLean, 2 volumes; Robert Beith, 1 volume; Society of Arts, 7 volumes; Representatives of late John McAllister, baker, upwards of 200 volumes.

1855. A. M. Dunlop, M.P., 5 volumes; Martin Harley, 9 volumes; Robert Beith, 3 volumes; a Friend, 13 volumes,

1856. Robert Beith, 2 volumes; Michael McLarty, jun., Russian book picked up at Sebastopol after its capture; John Bourne, C.E., 4 volumes.

1857. Neil McLean, own work; — Simpson, 2 volumes; Rev. A. Gilmour, own work.

1858. Martin Harley, 4 volumes; John Freeman, M.A., 1 volume; Robert Beith, 5 volumes; David McLlwraith, 1 volume; Michael McLarty, 8 volumes.

1859. Gilbert Cameron, Washington, 5 volumes.

1861. Quintin Bone, Poems; R. A. Macfie, Liverpool, 1 volume; William Scott, 1 volume; Greenock Progressive Society, 7 volumes; William Alexander, 2 volumes; R. McCunn, 1 volume;— Peters, Gourrock, 1 volume; Members of Committee, 30 volumes.

1862. Alexander MacKenzie, 21 volumes.

1863. J. D. Hogg, 1 volume; Andrew Macallister, jun., 4 volumes; C. Paul, 1 volume; J. McLeod, 1 volume; Andrew Swan, 2 volumes; James Brown, London, 13 volumes; Peter Christie, 1 volume.

1864. James Stewart of Ardvar, 30 volumes; Misses Rodger, Bagatelle, 12 volumes; Allan Park Paton, 1 volume; Martin Harley, 1 volume; P. McCallum, 3 volumes; James McCunn, 3 volumes; A. Macallister, 4 volumes; Kenneth McLachlan, Poems; Colin Paul, 1 volume.

1865. Rev. Archibald Wilson, *Greenock Advertiser*, 1829-42; Colin Paul, 1 volume; James Henry, 1 volume.

1866. Peel Memorial Fund, 41 volumes; David McLlwraith, 2 volumes; Colin Paul, 1 volume; Robert Dryburgh, 12 volumes.

1867. D. Macdougall, 2 volumes; A. Rodger, 1 volume; Association of Assistant Engineers, 9 volumes; J. Steven, *Greenock Telegraph*, 1864-6; Allan Park Paton, *Atheneum*, 19 volumes; Colin Paul, 1 volume.

1868. George Adam, £1; Thomas Henderson, 2 volumes; Peel Memorial Fund, 4 volumes.

1869. William Alexander, 1 volume; W. D. Christie, 2 volumes.

1870. Kenneth McLachlan, Poems.

1871. James Lang. sen., 1 volume.

1873. Miss Brown, 1 volume; Kenneth McLachlan, Poems.

1874. John C. Hunter, Supplement to Encyclopedia Britannica, 6 volumes, and Bell's Geography, 6 volumes; Colin Rae Brown, Poems; Dr. Begg, 1 volume; Robert Hendry, 1 volume.

1875. William Cameron, 1 volume.

1876. James Auld, 4 volumes.

1878. Peel Memorial Fund, 40 volumes.

1879. James Stewart, M. P., 2 volumes; Graham Brymner, "Memorials of Watt."

1880. Dugald Campbell, Historical Sketches of Town and Harbours; John Duff, Fourth Edition Encyclopedia Britannica; James Hamilton, Coat bridge, Poems by Janet Hamilton.

1881. James Auld, 12 volumes *Temple Bar*; John Cole, Birmingham, Poems; William Hutchison, 1 volume; James Black, 1 volume.

1882. James Reid, 17 volumes *Saturday Review*; George Williamson, "Memorials of James Watt."

1883. William Hair, 1 volume; James Auld, 1 volume; George Williamson, 29 volumes Oliver & Boyd's Almanac; John Hunter, 1 volume.

1885. Robert Morrison, 2 volumes; Lloyd's Register, 1 volume.

1886. James Auld, 3 volumes; Harell, Watson & Viney, London, 1 volume.

1888. James Auld, 12 volumes; William Letham, 1 volume.

1889. James Auld, 9 volumes.

1890. Peel Memorial Fund, £20.

1900. Combe Trust, several volumes; Leigh-Brown Trust, 1 vol.

The Institution of Later Years

It has to be confessed that in respect of several of the functions fulfilled towards the community in its earlier history the Institution of to-day stands in an obviously changed relation. As in the experience of the individual, so also in that of the corporate entity: the advance of years has cooled the ardour and ambitions of youth, has disclosed the inexorable limitations of human will and endowment, and has directed endeavour into less heroic fields of venture. No band of fervent philanthropists ever set out with firmer resolution to put their little disjointed world to rights. What streams of pure good, to the unit and to the mass, have issued from the springs of this Institution ! What incalculable share, from first to last, it has borne in the elevation of a people ! Its influence, and the glory of it, has gone forth to the ends of the earth. Yet, the contrasts that rise unbidden between the distant past and now ! If the truth must be told, the Institution has declined from its former high estate, and is no more a seat of learning.

Nothing is more clearly demonstrated by the facts of history as these are open to us than that the failure of the Institution to maintain the high purposes of its founders was in no part due to the men who took up the work in later years. We have seen how poorly rewarded were the labours of the earlier and middle decades of last century in the domain of education and personal culture, how unremitting were the endeavours in the face of recurring adversity, how absolutely unbroken the spirit and resolve by; black discomfiture. It was the rare exception to experience a season of moderate success in the series of popular lectures or classes for the youth. On occasion the directors arrived at the intolerable point when from mere lack of funds and the sparseness of their patrons they were forced to pause as for a breathing space, yet never until more recent years did they relinquish hope of an adequate and substantial requital.

The Educational Classes

There had been such an interval in the sixties, and then a fresh trial in 1867, in which year the secretary placed it on record that all previous efforts had proved failures. This was not the case with the classes for the two seasons following, in the former of which the venture exceeded expectations, and in the latter the results were satisfactory enough to be designated fair. In the annual report of 1869, however, the committee had to regret the enforced stoppage of the classes; yet, "notwithstanding the drawbacks experienced, they had not lost heart, and hoped that at some future time their efforts would be better appreciated." The very next season saw the directors struggling to command success, with most indifferent results. A lengthy report from the Lectures Committee contained the subjoined facts as to attendance at the classes, and the significant figures are well worth quoting:—Junior elocution, eight; English grammar and composition, six in first quarter, four in second; Latin, six in first quarter, four in second; music, gentlemen twenty-three, ladies seven. Attempts to form senior divisions of the English and Latin

classes “were utterly abortive,” and on an announcement of a chemistry class there was one application. “Of the reasons for the small attendance, the committee cannot speak with certainty. They are inclined to think that the lack of any general taste for intellectual pursuits in the young men of our town is the first of these reasons.” In the succeeding report no reference was made to classes, but it was stated that a small venture in a “course of lectures on chemistry “during” the session involved a considerable loss, and a “short season of penny readings had to be abandoned at an “early stage for the want of support.” Then in 1872 this paragraph appeared in the report:— “An effort was made to establish popular classes for teaching useful branches of education on moderate terms, and though not so successful as could be wished, it was not an entire failure.”

Short Memories

It hardly needs to be emphasised that the public mind is proverbially short. The directors met with not a few instances in the course of a long career, more especially in connection with this very subject of providing lectures and educational classes. At the beginning of 1871 a deputation from a body of men desirous of special terms for the hire of room in starting technical teaching took it upon themselves to say that “a good many of the working classes with whom they had come in contact had said that they were sorry no effort was made by the committee to get up lectures and classes.” The directors naturally were sore hurt to have to listen to such reproof. “It ought,” they replied, “to have been patent to all who paid any attention to the subject that from year to year the committee of the Mechanics' Institution have been striving to get up and maintain classes and lectures, and have met with but indifferent encouragement from the working-classes.” Still smarting, as they must have been, under a sense of undeserved blame, they thereupon declared to the deputation their resolution that a committee should do “what they thought desirable in the way of meeting the views of the delegates in their scheme for the promotion of technical education among the working-classes.” Nothing further was heard from the delegates for the space of eight months, at the lapse of which time a renewed application was made for reduced terms for the use of a room and exceptional facilities in connection with the Library. The directors agreed to a modified room charge, and offered the use of the Library during a specified term for nothing. A month later the parties concerned, who formed a Mutual Improvement Association, had secured rooms elsewhere on the payment of the gas consumed. They thanked the directors, and, of course, gave up all claims upon the Library.”

That was practically the close of the Institution's labours in trying to provide educational facilities that would be of service to young men. Baths, Club-Room, Reading-Room, and the re-construction and modernising of the property, were demanding much attention for a number of years, and the newly-born School Boards were looked to as likely to assume the responsibility of organising evening classes. In point of fact, according to Mr. James Auld in 1881, “things were so arranged in town that classes would be a super-fluity. The School Board provided evening classes in every department that was called for by the community, and they found that even the School Board, helped by gentlemen interested in the matter, had failed, and were unable to carry on two of the classes they started. If they failed now when Greenock had grown to such an extent, he did not think it was to be wondered at if the committee of the Institution had failed ten or twelve years ago.” This was in reply to strictures by a newspaper correspondent, to whom perhaps too much and too serious attention was paid on the occasion of the annual meeting of that year. Mr. Robert Hendry, who with others joined in defence of the Institution, stated his opinion that if the managers had persisted in the course of carrying on classes which brought them into debt there would have been no Institution on that date. “They had to conform to the altered state of the times, and if the correspondent in question had looked at the face of matters he would have considered that they had acted wisely and well.”

Some Tentative Overtures

So recently as 1885 the directors had their sympathies aroused anew on the subject which had for a dozen years at least been causing them little concern. At this period they were induced formally to encourage the prosecution of art classes under their roof, but they were unfortunate enough to have to deal with a teacher who was altogether impossible. This person was given a room rent free to carry on the classes for his own behoof. Failure was stamped on the enterprise from the outset. The teacher thereupon projected the idea of an elementary day school, with the directors standing in on the scheme. They did not happen to see the matter in the proper light, and as a consequence had to bear with some annoyance from the man through the correspondence column of the *Telegraph*.

On the launching of the University Extension Scheme of 1888, from which a great deal more was expected than actually accrued, the directors of the Institution offered to give the use of their hall for the classes and lectures under the direction of the local branch. This accommodation was obtained elsewhere, however, as the chairman, Mr. A. P. Lyle, courteously intimated; and the Institution's subsequent share in the scheme was the appointment of two directors as representatives on the working committee.

This closed the concluding chapter of the Institution's connection with the actual provision of educational classes for the benefit of the community. One of the most improbable of eventualities is that the subject will ever be re-opened. The School Board of to-day is a body of energetic men alive to their vocation as representative citizens, and their desire for the technical education of the youth of the town and district is a growing state of mind from which we may hope for the best results.

The Readings and Concerts

The Penny Readings—which, too, had their brief day, and ceased to be—were popular for a few seasons beginning with 1865-6. A modest programme of four meetings seemed large enough to start the opening winter, but the entertainments were for the moment apparently supplying a felt want, for the attraction grew with the months until the meetings numbered sixteen, and the last of all crowded the Town Hall. The proceeds of the closing entertainment were handed over to the building fund of the Infirmary, which the directors could afford to do, having for their own Institution a balance of £23. In the following season the local Volunteer Brass Band discoursed at the first Reading, and amongst the gentlemen who were asked to take part in the duties of presiding and delivering addresses were Sir Michael R. Shaw Stewart, Sheriff Tennent, and Mr. Allan Park Paton. This was also a successful year; in 1867 there were no fewer than twenty meetings, which were hardly so profitable all over, although the interest was creditably maintained; then in 1868 they were “on the whole very successful, save perhaps in a monetary sense”; while in 1869, with twelve entertainments, and in 1870, with thirteen, accounts very nearly balanced, and in 1871 the scheme had to be abandoned. For the first two or three years the performers were greatly troubled by a persistent disturbing element in the audiences, composed principally of lads who attended for that very enjoyable purpose. From 1868 the entertainments were really Twopenny Readings, the imposition of an extra penny bringing relief from disturbance, but at the same time thinning the audiences to below the paying point. In making up the programme for the winter session of 1872, it was unanimously agreed that “the novelty of that description of entertainment had ceased.”

The Lecture Field

Where evening classes, concerts, and readings had failed to arrest a constancy of adequate interest, the lecturer was hardly likely to command an unwavering enthusiasm. This form of popular instruction, it had long since been discovered, had a very elusive hold upon the public mind, and while, no doubt, the absolute fruits of it were demonstrable to the meanest capacity, the precarious and intermittent character of the support it enjoyed rendered it the least profitable of the Institution's extraordinary schemes as it was financially the most hazardous. Moreover, coteries of reformers in every branch of science, morals, and conduct had for years back been increasingly on the alert to capture each its following of zealous votaries, thus dispersing and to some extent rendering nugatory efforts issuing from a central force such as this Institution, which appealed to and relied alike upon nearly every class of the community.

Some of the Helpers

In the earlier years we have found the names of many well-known citizens who came to the rescue of the directors in this field of their labours. The records of the fifties embrace such gentlemen as Rev. Dr. McCulloch, Rev. John Guthrie, Rev. J. M. Jarvie, A. Murray Dunlop, M.P., Rev. William Laughton, Allan Park Paton, Rev. Mr. Nelson, every one of whom, lecturing gratis on scientific or literary subjects, helped the Institution along while the low state of its finances was crippling and retarding its usefulness. A debt of £210 was in 1860 declared to be “the fetter which has bound the hands of your committee, and prevented them from putting your hall to its legitimate use as a lecture room. ... It has compelled them to decline engaging many eminent lecturers who wished engagements, whose lectures, they are confident, would have been successful from every point of view but a pecuniary one.” The directors were induced to bring Rev. Dr. Hatley Waddell from Glasgow in 1862, but dropped so much money that the Doctor was constrained to return and lecture free of charge in order partially to recoup them.

One more effort, so late as 1871, as barren in effect as any that had gone before, completed the tale of the Institution's disappointments on the lecture platform. A series of addresses on chemistry in that year entailed a considerable loss. The futility of engaging in any similar scheme was taken so deeply to heart that no further serious proposals in that direction have been made since that day until now. A Lectures Committee retains its place among the annual appointments by the directors, but the title and appointment are mere designations of courtesy, and no one would be more surprised than the members of the committee themselves if anything tangible were to result from their selection.

Clubs Mutual and Impromptu

Amongst the supplementary issues that were engaging attention of at least a section of the members for a series of years, the Mutual Improvement Association and the Impromptu Club, while in the height of their little round of life, were the arenas of keen intellectual encounters that rarely ended in personal animus and always in a mutual advantage, which were rightly acknowledged as filling the part of feeders to the Institution. One cannot but feel that of the causes which led to an early decease on the part of both societies some were sure to be found at the door of the management. Being outwith the immediate supervision of the directors, details in connection with the meetings as given in the Institution minutes are of the meagrest description, these in point of fact throwing exceedingly little light on any part of the proceedings. What we do know from living members who took part in the animated scenes is that coming- on for the mid-seventies there was a general slackening down of interest : the young men of some years gone were settling into a more reposeful middle age, with other responsibilities gathering round them; a steady disintegration was in process from the forces of church, social, and trades associations setting up their standards in the various quarters of the town; and the influx of impetuous and aspiring youth was unequal to the task of sustaining the friendly contentions in the field of self-culture. In the case of the Impromptu Club, it had the misfortune to be overshadowed in an exceptionally busy season of Penny Reading's, and the members did not

recover from this temporary diversion to a competing interest. Attempts to blow the dying embers into flame were rewarded with a promising- flare, but the new fuel needed to make a steady blaze being still withheld the fire went out of itself. Thus also the other body. There have never been wanting members of the Institution who longed for a restoration of one of these or the planting of a kindred association. The facilities are still at hand and at disposal, yet no one has been hot enough on the subject to suggest the experiment.

The Institution of To-Day

Thus it is that the Institution of to-day stands bereft of so many of the attributes by means of which it became famous as well as useful. By force of compelling circumstance, its powers and functions as an educational body have been gradually transferred to other and specifically-equipped organisations, until now it is the social element that predominates within its walls, and is a chief claim upon the sympathy and support of the public. The Baths remain a crown of glory in a town whose authorities have not yet learned the lesson that was being taught their predecessors fifty years ago, and no Reading-Room in Greenock is more replete with the essentials to an accurate knowledge of the world's thoughts and events; yet neither directors nor members have reason to feel otherwise than proud to acknowledge that it is the Club which is the ornament and hope of the Institution of to-day. All of the benevolences that for long years its managers dispensed for the sustenance of mind and spirit, ignoring self-seeking and counting their gains in the betterment of their fellows, are now outflowing through a score of channels full and competent to provide, with the least material expenditure on the part of those who wish to share them, facilities for mental, moral, scientific, political, and religious instruction fitted to gratify the appetite and meet the demands of every section of the community.

Whether the directors may come to recognise it as a duty to embark in any fresh undertakings in fulfillment of responsibilities laid upon them by the traditions of their honoured Institution, there is at present no evidence to show. Should the occasion arise, we scarcely doubt but that it will be met and dealt with in the proper spirit. Meantime, the office that is being performed for the public is a high one, worthy of a deeper consideration than is usually granted it. The elements of moral and intellectual growth are never lacking in a free and wholesome social environment. Indeed, as a school of individual culture and of self-discipline, such an association of persons bent on a frank concession to the courtesies of ordinary life is hardly to be excelled by any other form of relation. This view the directors have had constantly before them, constrained by it to regard the tone and atmosphere of a common meeting-place for men to be the objects of their especial solicitude. So long as the amenities of social contact are thus displayed and established as the currency of interchange, so long and no longer will the Greenock Mechanics' Institution, and particularly its Club-Room, have a right to enjoy the favour and goodwill of the citizens.

Trade Society Patronage

The extent to which the various trades of the town have from time to time been in the custom of countenancing the Institution by the use of the hall and rooms for society meeting's is a question which, from the very nature of it, must have occasioned some anxiety to the directors of different periods. One of the main reasons for the erection of the building was that this very accommodation might be provided; and there was at any rate a tacit understanding amongst the respective bodies of working-men that the Institution should in this respect be patronised as far as practicable. Throughout the volume of minutes compiled since the beginning of the agitation there is not a single instance of complaint or remonstrance touching the failure of the working classes to grant the encouragement thus expected of them. It is true that actual unanimity in this regard never did exist, and that one or two organised bodies stood aloof from the movement while it was in progress, and afterwards declined to participate in the advantages of the completed Institution. But a considerable proportion of workmen agreed from the start to recognise the enterprise as essentially belonging to their own class, so that there was no real need for moving appeals to induce a support which was being given more or less spontaneously.

Until within a comparatively recent period the Mechanics' was unquestionably the favourite meeting-place for most trade conferences. With the expansion of several of the leading industries, particularly those of shipbuilding and engineering, the masses of workmen grew to such dimensions that it became impossible to offer adequate facilities of the kind wanted within the walls of the building. The more affluent of those bodies were thus in a manner compelled to secure premises of their own, that they might enjoy the privilege of conducting their particular business under conditions best suited to the circumstances of the times. The Institution is not wholly without patrons from organised sections of working men. Indeed, there are some cases of remarkable loyalty to the old connection, cases of societies whose members meet periodically to transact their routine affairs month after month without a break, and will probably move forward on the well-worn and approved grooves for many generations to come. Yet the bulk of the trades have gone elsewhere to hold their meetings, and left but the attenuated ranks from the lesser industries to remind us of the days of greater things. The halls and rooms are, from necessity, being put to uses of a more heterogeneous character than formerly, which means that the directors do not enjoy the option of exercising the principle of selection to the extent they could wish. There may in this direction be some modification in the state of things to which the members might apply their minds, with a fair prospect of being- able at once to promote the status of the Institution and to confer a public benefaction.

The Close of the Page

This brief history would be incomplete did it not contain the subjoining¹ paragraphs relating to matters which do not fit well into the body of the narrative. In each instance there are points of considerable interest, local and national, and the special references to the leaders in the long; array of good men, almost all of whom are gone to their rest, with the list of office-bearers from 1832, will in many quarters be regarded as not the least important of all the information afforded within the volume.

Designation of Directors

Until the year 1885, the members of the executive body of the Institution were styled the general committee, which was frequently felt to be hardly distinctive enough and somewhat confusing, inasmuch as the sub-divisions in charge of the departments were similarly designated committees. On a revision of the constitution in that year, one of the many things that were effected was the change to the title of directors. Since that date the members of the directorate have had an obvious accession of dignity, and doubtless perform their duties with a deeper sense of their responsibilities.

An Autograph Book

Of all the secretaries who graced their office, perhaps no one was more conscientious, more intense in seeking the advance of the Institution, or exhibited the quality of initiative more strikingly or to greater purpose than John M. Crawford. One of his schemes for bringing distinction to the Mechanics' was the institution of an autograph book, on the opening page of which he had these words inscribed :—

“A collection of autographs such as is here contemplated, if continued by the managers of this Institution, will one day form an interesting and curious book, which will have the advantage over a private collection of being patent to the members and the public. Greenock, 15th July, 1850.”

The collection, which does not extend over many years, is neither very large nor very valuable, but it undoubtedly is, as Mr. Crawford anticipated it would be, both interesting and curious. We make selections from the letters.

R. B. Hardy, lecturer on poetry and the fine arts, sent this undated letter to the secretary of the day:— “I believe I left a ring in the bedroom where I slept last night. Will you be so kind as make enquiries after it ? Let me know the result at your earliest convenience. It is a common, chased, gold ring: it is rather a favourite, as it has been my right hand friend for many years.”

The artist, R. Max Cooper, writes, characteristically of the profession, to some friend unnamed:— “My dear sir, I am regularly stuck”— (pen-and-ink sketch of a miserable-looking mortal, calling out, with hands extended, and a sword through his body). Do me the favour to send the wee balance by to-morrow. I hope it will not inconvenience you, and will be a sop sufficient for my Cerberus, the landlady.”

Michael McLarty, chief originator of the Greenock Mechanics' Institution, deserves space for this, in his own handwriting, from New York, Oct., 1849 :—

“Potatoes here are very inferior, worthless as an article of food, and a meal of good Scotch ones will be quite a treat, so much so that I have no doubt that the gentlemen upon receipt of them will invite their friends to partake of them as a rare feast.”

John Crawford, author of “Doric Lays,” is represented by this pleasant little note, dated January, 1850, to whom addressed it is not stated:— “Lord Jeffrey has, unsolicited, sent me a long and magnificent letter, of which my little ones will be proud long after I am in the 'land o' the leal.' Please remember me to all friends, and wishing: you a happy new year.”

There is the following letter from Sir Robert Peel, addressed to Mathew Parker and John Black :—

“Whitehall, July 30, 1846.—Gentlemen, I am much gratified by this token of the esteem of the tradesmen of Greenock, which you have been deputed to present to me. I shall always regard it with satisfaction as a proof that the measures which I have proposed to Parliament for the relief of trade from restrictions and for the encouragement of enterprise and industry by the stimulus of free competition, were received with cordial approbation by men deeply interested in the commercial prosperity of the country. I request that you will be good enough to convey my acknowledgments to all those on whose behalf you have waited upon me.” That does not sound so very much out of date.

In May, 1850, Sir Michael R. Shaw Stewart wrote from London to Robert Hendry :— “I regret that I cannot send to the committee of the Mechanics' Institution any curiosity for their exhibition to be held in July, but I enclose a cheque for £5 as a donation to the funds of the Institution.”

Lord Melgund, writing from Brodick Castle in October, 1848, gave an interesting deliverance on the question of education:— “Dear Sir,—I am much obliged to you for having sent me the report of the Committee of Town Council on the state of education at Greenock, and the letters published in the *Advertiser* on the same subject. Your views

are in my opinion very sound and well stated, and the publication of them cannot fail to have been useful (if not in its immediate result) in calling attention to a subject which is rarely examined with the object of leading to the reform and amelioration of our institutions. I cannot help hoping that ere long the public will be prepared to adopt enlightened and liberal principles on this question, and that Scotland, whose former educational legislation was creditable and in advance of the times, will not ever prove unworthy of her ancient self. The Government scheme is only good as an expedient, and it will be a great misfortune should it be exalted into a permanent system in the place of something more national. It appears by your report and letters that Greenock offers too good an illustration of the backward state of education in this country. Much, no doubt, may be done by voluntary exertions to convert this state of things, but it is only by bringing the country, through an Act of Parliament, to continue these exertions steadily, that the evil can be permanently eradicated."

Mr. Charles Dickens presents his compliments to Mr. David McIlwraith, and begs to say that he cannot possibly have the pleasure of visiting Greenock on the occasion of his reading gratuitously in Edinburgh. Tavistock House, London, Thirteenth March, 1858."

Alexander Smith, poet and novelist, to Robert Hendry;—"I am afraid it will be out of my power to comply with your request to lecture to the Mechanics' Institution of Greenock, as it is far out of my way, and I shall be chained to Edinburgh for many months to come. College, 14th Oct., 1854."

The detached autographs include those of Allison, the historian; J. Simpson, the advocate; Robert Wallace, the M.P.; Samuel Rodger, the Democrat, "who was long and favourably known as a devotee to the interests of the working-classes of this his native town"; of Sir Michael Shaw Stewart, John Dunlop, Peter Buchan, William Prowling Roberts. John Galt occupies a full page with his letter of 18th December, 1834, as printed *in extenso* at page 23 of this volume. Templeton, the great tenor vocalist, is found in the company of John McLeod, the first treasurer of the Mechanics' Institution; and beneath are the signatures of James J. Grieve, Robert Baine, Chief Magistrate; Thomas Turner, Junior Magistrate; and Adam Fairrie.

Five in a group comprise those of Archibald Crawford, poet, author of "Bonnie Mary Hay," &c.; Alexander Dunlop, advocate; Allan Park Paton, Robert L. Malone, and James Forrest. Amongst the others are Henry Glassford Bell, George Combe, Dr. Chalmers, Robert Chambers (publisher, Edinburgh), Duncan MacMillan (the great Kilmarnock ventriloquist of the middle of the nineteenth century), Joseph Sturge, M.P., Sir D. K. Sandford, Thomas Campbell ("Pleasures of Hope"), John Braham (vocalist), Mons. Jullien (musician), A. J. Scott, Walter Baine, Provost (1838) and M.P. (1846), Rowland Hill, Dr. Charles Mackay, Patrick Park (sculptor), Baron Hume, Professor Nichol, Sheridan Knowles, George Gilfillan, J. Bourne, Dr. William Landels, W. Motherwell (poet), J. J. Grieve, M.P., James Dodds, Rev. Arthur Mursell, Earl of Caithness, H. Campbell, M. P., Gerald Massey, Edmund Wheeler, Rev. George O. Campbell, Rev. J. Cunningham Geikie, W. Graham, M.P., Hugh Stowell Brown, Professor Nathan Sheppard (Chicago), John Goldie (*Renfrewshire Advertiser*), &c.

The Men of Mark

It may look somewhat invidious to single out the men whom we think deserve most recognition for the character or length of their service toward the Institution in its youth and middle age; yet, so strongly do we feel the necessity for conferring some kind of distinction upon those who laboured during the heat and burden of the day that we are prepared to run the risk of an even more serious charge. With common consent, Michael McLarty is placed in the front rank of the heroes of early strife. It is a striking testimony to his worth that throughout all his active connection with the movement he was universally regarded as a man in a thousand; and years after, in 1849, he had gone to settle in the United States his name was kept in reverence by his former comrades. For twenty years prior to his departure he had cheerfully offered the best that was in him that he might improve the condition of the working classes of Greenock, and those men have it put to their account that they did not in his case neglect to pay honour where it was due. His extreme modesty alone prevented a demonstration "for the purpose of giving fitting expression to the appreciation of his fellow-townsmen; and it was thus left to the managers of the Institution, in the formal address that was presented, to state that his leaving Greenock was a matter to be deeply regretted by every friend of human progress in town." He had proved "an example of probity and morality, a zealous advocate of everything tending to elevate the working classes and promote the cause of truth, and a pattern in your domestic relations."

It is excusable also to discriminate from the group of leaders a man such as John M. Crawford, who, like Michael McLarty, held every office in turn, and in each was an example of how much a right-minded, zealous craftsman can accomplish in a good cause. What a list of names can be recalled Robert Burley (father of Bennet Burleigh, war correspondent, now in Japan for the *Glasgow Herald* and *Daily Telegraph*); the Henrys, Joseph, James, John, and James R.; the McLeods, John, Hugh, and David; the McNaughts, Neil, William, and John; the two John Macallisters; the two James McCunns, father and son; Alexander Thomson, William Campbell, John Blue, Alexander Muir, William Alexander, Martin Harley, John Hunter, Andrew Lusk, Alexander McAuslan, William Galbraith, Daniel Shearer, Andrew Downie, P. R. Crawford, James Slater, Robert Sinclair, Robert Hendry, John Lennox, William and David McIlwraith, James Auld; and more whom we might without undue preference enumerate.

The working men of Greenock must not forget that not a little of the success which has attended the Institution so intimately identified with their class ought to be credited to the consistent countenance and support of a steady stream of shopkeepers and tradesmen whose sympathies lay by instinct with those least able to help themselves. It is a feature of the relations subsisting amongst the members and managers at most periods that the homogeneity of sentiment and aim has eclipsed class differences, and that these were not allowed to obtrude to the detriment of the general interest. That is so to this day. Working men of the town, recognising the facts of history, have never been foolish enough to claim any exclusive or prescriptive right in the privileges of the Mechanics' Institution. These are open to every section of the public alike, for whom the property is held in trust. The one essential insisted upon is an absolute equality of standing for all who are members, and on that score there seems little cause for apprehension.

Present Trustees

Trustees were last appointed on February 14, 1881, when the following gentlemen were added to the list:—Messrs. William McWhirter, William Campbell, James Lang, John Kirk, William Caldwell, J. Miller, and Thomas O. Stewart. The Trustees immediately prior to that date were Messrs. William Campbell, Robert Burley, Robert Hendry, John Lennox, James McCunn, William McIlwraith, Peter Scott, and, Charles Campbell. Death has been busy since then amongst that small band of fifteen, of whom only the following six now remain:—Messrs. Peter Scott, William McWhirter, James Lang, William Caldwell, J. Miller, and Thomas O. Stewart. Recently the question of supplementing the number of Trustees was considered, but it was decided that there was no present call to add to the list.

Celebration of Jubilee

This event took place on October 12, 1852, in the hall of the Institution, and was an unqualified success. Robert Hendry was in the chair, and amongst those supporting him were James Stewart, M.P., Provost Dugald Campbell, Rev. J. F. Macpherson, Dr. Marshall, Councillor W. B. McMillan, Commissioners John Service, William Hair, John McNaught, and Robert Cook; James Auld, John Macallister, shipowner, Langbank (one of the original members); John McLeod, John Lennox, Robert Burley, Glasgow (original member); James McCunn, William McWhirter, John Kirk, Robert Kirk, William Campbell (Helensburgh), &c. Apologies were intimated from James J. Grieve, ex-Provost Abram Lyle, Bailies Duff, Leitch, Walker, Shankland, and Smith, ex-Bailie John Hunter, Innellan; and Robert Duncan, Port Glasgow; all of whom regretted their inability to be present. On that occasion, President Robert Hendry delivered a felicitous historical speech, in the course of which he said that the beginning of the Institution was significant in that "it was the revolt of intelligence against ignorance. . . -It triumphed not by external aid, but by its own inherent vitality. In my early youth I have been associated with the originators of the Library and Institution, I mingled among them, and learned to love and respect their high character and intelligence."

Mr. Robert Burley, who attended the lectures of the Institution of Arts and Science some years prior to the founding of the Mechanics' Library, spoke of his pleasant connection with this Institution, and rejoiced that the labour and love of long gone-by days had not been without fruit.

Mr. James Stewart, M.P., stated that he had "always looked upon Mechanics' Institutions as one of the great educating machines for the working classes. . . . Those who have the intelligence to work out such institutions are sure to succeed in life, and to be examples of the benefit which the right use of them is sure to bring."

Provost Dugald Campbell advocated the establishment of a technical school in connection with the Institution, in which direction the managers performed services according to their ability and means, and now, after long years of waiting, the School Board have tackled this important section of their work with a will.

Mr. James Auld took the opportunity of emphasising the fact that "the Institution is still to a very large extent composed of the working classes of Greenock, and if a large number of the clerks and shopkeepers of the town have availed themselves of the advantages and have connected themselves with the Institution, I do not think that that can in the slightest degree be complained of. . . . Although the Institution has not been all that its founders wished, if we will compare it with the general number of Mechanics' Institutions that were started about the same time, we will find that for every one that has done more there are twenty that have done a great deal less. I am certain that a great deal of the character which Greenock has won for herself has been owing to the reading of the young men in the Mechanics' Institution."

Rev. J. F. Macpherson was of opinion that the Institution "stands to-day not only as an evidence of the public spirit of its founders, but also of those who now fill the places of the founders."

Gifts to the Institution

In addition to the extensive list of volumes from first to last presented by good friends to the Library, there were also, beginning about the time of the Institution opening, many gifts to the Institution of which notice should be taken in these pages. It is noted in 1840 that £2 had been received from Mr. Thomas Fairrie, being his yearly subscription, which must be taken as conclusive proof that Mr. Fairrie performed numerous kind acts towards the

Institution which were not formally acknowledged in the minutes. In this connection it may be admitted as appropriate to make a passing reference to the allegation circulated in 1885 by means of a newspaper letter to the effect that Mr. Fairrie had at a later date gifted a set of scientific instruments to the Mechanics' Institution. No member of the directorate or of the Institution had ever seen the instruments or could recall the presentation. The publication of the statement imposed upon the directors the necessity of issuing a declaration on the subject. With the view of clearing away any shred of doubt, they appointed a committee of inquiry, who ransacked all available sources for traces of the transaction, without the least result. Furthermore, the secretary communicated with Mr. Fairrie's heirs for any information they might possess on a matter they were likely to have heard of, had it ever happened; and with a like issue. It may be taken as beyond all doubt that the instruments were never in the possession of the Institution. All the burden of evidence is in favour of such a valuable gift having been acknowledged by the secretary of the time in an effusive notice. This list of donations of money and articles-of value is gleaned from the records :—

1840. Robert Wallace, M.P., facsimile of Burns' handwriting. Mr. Wallace was spoken of as "our steady, untiring, and ever-mindful friend."

1843. Original cast of head of John Galt, by M. McLarty; contributions to the Museum, by Robert Wallace, M.P., W. McLaurin, James Motion, Port Glasgow, Daniel Kennedy, Francis Alexander, Neil McNaught, Mercer, M. McLarty, and J. Morrison.

1844. Contributions to the Museum by G. Neilson and Neil McNaught (bust of Sir Isaac Newton).

1845. Contributions to the Museum, by Joseph Henry Galbreath, Francis Alexander, John Henry, and W. A. Orr.

1846. John Cameron. cooper, *Daily News* for year; Scott & Mackenzie and Jas. H. Donnan, newspapers and periodicals to Reading-Room; contributions to the Museum, by Thomas. Lawrie and Peter Bryson.

1847. A. Murray Dunlop, M.P., £5.

1850. Contributions to the Museum, by J. D. Hogg.

1851. Sir Michael R. Shaw Stewart, £5; Mrs. John Scott, £1; framed engraving of Sir Gabriel Wood's Mariners' Asylum, by the Trustees.

1853. Two cases of preserved insects, George Farquhar, grocer.

1854. Busts of Robert Wallace, M.P., A. Murray Dunlop, M.P., of Scott, and Shakespeare, by members' subscriptions.

1862. Marble bust of Walter Baine, M.P. ("one of the best friends of the Institution"), from his sister, Mrs. Ramsay.

1864. Engraving, "James Watt and the Steam Engine," from Allan Park Paton.

1869. Portrait of John McAllister, from heirs.

1870. Contributions to Penny Readings, by James Stewart of Garvocks, £1; Captain Gordon, H.M.S. Black Prince,

1871. Legacy by Duncan Smith, engineer and feuar, one of the original promoters, £5.

1872. Pictures and maps, Graham Brymner, James Auld, and D. Fleming, carver and gilder.

1878. Painting of Old Greenock, by N. McLeod.

1879. Town Council, £20

1882. Alexander Black, barometer; J. R. Wilson, David Blair, William Cameron, and J. G. Bisset, engravings.

1885. Dean of Guild W. W. B. Rodger, supply of "*Scientific American*"; Thomas Sutherland, M.P., atlas; John Barclay, engineer, old Cartsdye Bill.

1887 Laurie & Fleming, old painting of Mathias Smith (Dr. Kirk's "Black Boy")

1888. Photograph Football Extravaganza Teams, by members.

1889. Thomas Sutherland, P. & O. Travellers' Pocket Book; Mrs. Robert Hendry, portrait of deceased husband.

1890. Allan Park Paton, relief of Charles Morison.

1891. McKelvie & Sons, "Views and Reminiscences of Old Greenock." 1892.

1892. G. M. Butler, plants.

1900. Proprietors *Glasgow Herald*, barometers; members, plants

List of Honorary Office Bearers

Presidents

Greenock Mechanics' Library at Cartsdye

1830 Thomas Scott

1831 James Walker

1832 John Hunter

Greenock Mechanics' Library at Greenock

1832 Alexander Thomson

1833 John Nelson

1834 Michael McLarty

Combined Building Committee

1834 Michael McLarty

1836-7 John Lamb

1838-9 John Blue
1840 John Macfie

Greenock Mechanics' Institution

1841 Alexander Muir
1842 James Russell
1842 Hugh McLeod
1843 James Henry
1843 John Henry
1844 John Hunter
1844 John Macdougall
1845 William Taylor
1846 James H. Donnan
1846 John Cameron
1847-8 John M. Crawford
1849 James Henry
1850 Alexander Mackie
1851 Robert Hendry
1852 Duncan McNeilage
1853-4 Neil Muir
1855-6 David McIlwraith
1856-8 John Lennox
1859-61 Robert Hendry
1862-64 William McIlwraith
1865-66 James McCunn
1867-68. John Ferguson
1869-67 James Auld
1872-73 Robert Hendry
1874-75 John M 'Naught
1876 Peter Scott
1877-8 Donald Mc Donald
1879-80 William McWhirter
1881-5 Robert Hendry
1886-8 James McCunn
1889 John McNaught
1890-3 Thomas O. Stewart
1894-5 Robert M. Smith
1896-7 Alexander T. Anderson
1898-9 William M. McCallum
1900-2 Gilbert Moffat
1903-4 Alexander Malcolm

Treasurers.

The following is the list of Treasurers in chronological order :—Robert Sheer, William Alexander, George Allan, James Simpson, Robert Allan, Peter Blair, John McLeod, Michael McLarty, John McAllister, John M. Crawford, James Macfarlan, John Macallister, William Campbell, John Browning, James Fisher, James Henry, William Hair, James Macfarlan, William McIlwraith, Robert Lang, David McIlwraith, James McCunn, William McNaught, Robert Hendry, Peter Scott, John Steven, John McNaught, James McCunn (six years), Gilbert Moffat, Thomas O. Stewart (nine years), Alexander T. Anderson (five years), Thomas O. Stewart, John T. Park, Thomas O. Stewart, David W. Cook, William Young, Thomas O. Stewart.

Secretaries.

The following is the list of Secretaries in chronological rotation :—James Walker, Morison Wark, Robert Fisher, John Stewart, John Cameron, John Stewart, James Graham, David McLeod, William Alexander, James Graham, David Currie, Robert Sinclair, James Slater, Alexander Muir, John Hunter, John Macallister, William Galbraith, Joseph Orr, James Morrison, John Crawford, John McAllister, Daniel Shearer, John M. Crawford, James Horn, M. McLarty, junior, John M. Crawford, James Horn, George Millar, John M. Crawford, Robert Hendry, John D. Hogg, Robert Campbell, Robert McLeod, John Lennox, Robert Hendry, Thomas McClellan, James McCunn, Samuel Lang, Andrew McAllister, Alexander Campbell, Andrew McAllister, Robert Fleming, William McNaught, P. R. Crawford, George Hutton, John M. Crawford, Alexander Black, Donald McDonald, William McWhirter, Thomas O. Stewart, Alexander Campbell, T. W. McMillan, James McCubbin, Alexander Montgomery, Robert M. Smith, Alexander Malcolm, William M. McCallum, Robert M. Smith, William M. McCallum, James A. Brown.