REMINISCENCES OF THE PEN' FOLK: PAISLEY WEAVERS OF OTHER DAYS, &C.

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Reminiscences of the Pen' Folk: Paisley Weavers of Other Days, &C. by David Gilmour

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SECOND EDITION

ALEX. GARDNER
EDINBURGH AND PAISLEY
1879

PREFACE TO PRIVATE EDITION.

IT may be proper to explain why the distinctive name "Pen Folk" came to be given to the Christian brotherhood I have written about.

In the year 1723 the Paisley authorities resolved to remove the old Alms-House, then situate on the north side of High Street, and to rebuild a more commodious structure on the site. This was done in the following year, when there was added a Public Hall for meetings of the various Corporations, with a steeple and bell in connection with the Alms-House. The steeple, placed in the centre of the Alms-House, abutted on the pavement, and had three horologes—seen from east, south, and west; the north side being towards the hill immediately behind, it was deemed unnecessary to place one there. A stair on the east side of the steeple led to the Public Hall, and on the west side was an arched passage or "Pend"—familiarly pronounced "Pen"—the upper portion of which still remains—leading backwards from High Street to Oakshaw Hill. In 1808 both the Alms-House and the "wee" Steeple, as it had come to be called after the erection of its taller brethren of the "Cross" and "High Church," were taken down, and replaced by the property at present numbered 82 High Street.

Simultaneously with the taking down of the "wee" Steeple and Alms-House, Orr Square was laid off, by which a new passage was given to Pen Lane, and to the Baptist Meeting-house erected on the east side of it. Paisley has long been proverbial for giving distinctive names to peculiar habits or idiosyncracies, whether of a personal, social, or religious character; hence, nothing was more natural than that the congregation whose meeting-house was in the Pen Close should come to be known as the "Pen Folk."

I certainly had no idea that what I wrote for the *Gazette* was worth the distinction of separate publication, but on this point I have yielded to the request of certain friends who cherish a fond remembrance of the good old pioneers of the "Pen." Never having hitherto entered openly the fraternity of authors, I allow my bantling to go forth without the name of its parent; still I must confess to the solicitude of one who, seeing the first efforts of his child to walk alone, consoles himself with the reflection that if the babe falls, it falls into loving arms. So, then, I commend it to the reader—

> "Besekyng hym lowly, of mercy and pité,
> Of its rude makyng to have compashon."

PAISLEY, *June*, 1871.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

MY Publishers tell me I must say a word or two of a private nature to the Public, by way of Preface.

Few people in the West of Scotland have not heard of the cobbler in Beith parish who, having arrived at the responsible age of seventy, finding that his education had been neglected in youth, cast aside his lapstone and awls, and took lessons in dancing. Well, my appearing as author is excusable, on the ground that the *step* is not more unwise than his. I am sure that he was not more surprised at his success, than I was at the kindly reception which the Private Edition of these Reminiscences received from those it reached. There is this difference between the cobbler and me, however—he, from seventy upwards, adopted dancing as a profession, whilst I, in all probability, will "rest on laurels won"—such as they are. Had more time been at my disposal when the Papers appeared in the *Gazette* as an obituary notice, other incidents quite as interesting would have been added; but taking the cobbler as a warning, I kept hold of my lapstone; and for the same reason I have thought it best to allow the present edition to go forth exactly as the former, with the exception of a few verbal alterations and the incorporation of some notes into the text. Whether any additions appear or not during my life-time

will depend entirely on how business-matters claim my attention.

I have dedicated the re-issue to Dr. JOHN BROWN, author of *Rab and his Friends*, as a feeble expression of my gratitude to him as a writer; from whom, too, came the first note of public *heartening* to re-publish the *brochure* and to acknowledge its paternity.

DAVID GILMOUR.

PAISLEY, *May*, 1873.

THE "PEN FOLK."

"At 31 Wellmeadow, Paisley, on the 31st ult., Mr. William Dickie, aged 94 years."

SUCH was the obituary notice, in the *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette* of January 7th, 1871, of that venerable man—the last link remaining in this country of a brave, hale-hearted band, who stood forth in defence of ecclesiastical freedom at a time when its champions were few and dissent reckoned akin to infidelity. He outlived all his compeers, and, at his great age, all worth living for, except the fulfilment of his Father's promise of the "rest that remaineth," in which he had unwavering trust.

To the younger generation of his brethren some traits of the child-like simplicity, and genuine though unconscious humility of William Dickie, might now and then become apparent; but those only who enjoyed his confidence could estimate the value of his rare truthfulness, and, under a somewhat brusque manner, the womanly tenderness of his affections. Those to whom he was not known might have readily concluded, from a casual interview, that he was ignorant, vulgar, bigoted; yet such judgment would have been beside the truth on each point. He was not an educated man; indeed, few who labour as he did for his daily bread can be reckoned educated—in the popular

acceptation of the term. But few even of the educated class are so well informed; and fewer still generalise their knowledge, or trace the connection between one topic and another with such clearness and accuracy of detail, as did old William Dickie. He was plain-spoken, but never rude, never vulgar; and his apparent bigotry arose from his thorough honesty, and the directness which springs from strong loving conviction. His unassuming geniality and deep sympathy with the afflicted, and quiet open-handed liberality to the poor, will not be readily forgotten by those to whom he ministered; yet to the most intimate of his friends he seldom, if ever, complained of his own troubles, which through his long life were almost unremitting. But many who, long ago, listened to his opening prayer on First-day mornings, were often moved to tears at perceiving the undercurrent of thanksgiving for sorrows overcome. Of that prevalent piety which *seeks* a blessing, he was unobtrusive, if not deficient; but his life was a beautiful exhibition of the Christian love which yearns continually to bless others. As the door of the soul's audience-chamber opens from within outward, influx is in proportion to efflux, and the blessing received is measured by the blessing conveyed to others—so his peace was fretless and almost unclouded. We therefore discard the traditional "Peace be with him," and pray rather that his peace may be ours. His gifts as a "speaker," in his younger years, were very extraordinary—as, indeed, were those of many of his co-worshippers; and although oratory was perhaps too much undervalued, their thorough acquaintance with the subject in hand, and their highly-flavoured zeal, gave their utterances a piquancy that in finer-turned periods is altogether wanting. Whatever of