

IV.

NOTICE OF A MAHOGANY PITCHPIPE FORMERLY USED IN CULTS PARISH CHURCH, FIFE. BY GEORGE LEITCH, M.A., CULTS SCHOOLHOUSE, LADYBANK.

This quaint instrument of music is an important relic of Scottish Church psalmody. It is of considerable age, and until recently was the property of a Pitlessie octogenarian, Mr James Speed, who bought it about the year 1845, at the sale of the goods and chattels of the Parish Church precentor. At that time there was a keen competition amongst the various Fife leaders of psalmody for the possession of what even then was considered an interesting memento of the past.

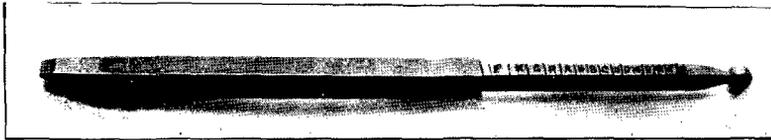


Fig. 1. Mahogany Pitchpipe formerly used in Cults Parish Church, Fife.

The instrument was shown to several nonagenarians, and one—Mr William Arthur of Monimail—pronounced it to be an old-fashioned pitchpipe, used at Cults, over a hundred years ago, to regulate the pitch or leading tone of the tune.

“In the Auld Kirk, in my younger days,” said Mr Arthur, “there was neither choir nor organ. The musical service then was not a kind of performance or concert. On William Durie—the old precentor—sounding the keynote from his whistle, immediately all the people joined in, and, keeping time to the evolutions of the pitchpipe, they sang together with great sound and evident pleasure.”

The sterner spirits, however, regarded the use of this instrument in the house of God with great abhorrence. Sir Walter Scott tells that, on his first interview with “Old Mortality,” he found that the spirit of the sturdy Covenanter had been sorely vexed by hearing in a certain

kirk the psalmody directed by a pitchpipe, which to him was the abomination of abominations.

The pitchpipe now presented to the Museum (fig. 1) is made of mahogany, and, considering its age, is in excellent preservation. It consists of a long stopped diapason pipe, fitted with a movable graduated stopper, adjustable to any note of the scale. By pushing the stopper inwards, or pulling it outwards, an adept could play a tune: only, the tone being somewhat strident and coercive, it is better adapted as a prelude to the singing of the Psalms in the house of God. Directly attacking the nervous system, the shrill notes of the pitchpipe roused the sleepers when everything else had failed, and at the same time indicated the keynote to the congregation.

The dimensions of the pitchpipe are as follows:—

Length of pipe	13 $\frac{3}{8}$	inches.
Length of stopper	11 $\frac{3}{8}$	„
Length extended	21 $\frac{5}{8}$	„
Pipe	$\frac{7}{8}$	„ square.
Length of scale	5 $\frac{5}{8}$	„

on which the following notes are marked:—

F	#	G	#	A	#	B	C	#	D	#	E	F	#	G
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Mr Herbert Diggle, Cupar, a member of the Pianoforte Tuners' Association, tested the pitch of this unique instrument, and found that the note C



corresponded with the Society of Arts standard pitch, the vibrations of which are 530 per second. Mr Diggle regards the pitchpipe as a great curiosity, and said he had never before seen such an old-fashioned device.

Alongside the older and more formidable-looking instrument may be placed a specimen of Eardley's patent chromatic pitchpipe, which consists of a small reed pipe of the free species in which the length of the

vibrating portion of metal is controlled by a rotating spiral. As may be seen, it is less bulky than the more ancient contrivance, but as regards pitch the two coincide, both corresponding with the Society of Arts standard pitch.

In Cooper's novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*, the ancient pitchpipe plays a conspicuous part. David Gamut, a half-witted musician, is introduced, treasuring beneath the flap of an enormous pocket an unknown engine, which turns out to be the beloved pitchpipe of the master of song. Throughout the tale, David repeatedly essays the virtues of his much-prized instrument. Performing the indispensable preliminaries, the singer produces from it a high, shrill sound, followed by its lower octave from his own voice. Then, without circumlocution or apology, he sings a psalm in such full and melodious tones that the surrounding savages are astounded by the upliftings of his mighty voice. David accompanies the delivery of the skilful rhymes by the regular rise and fall of his right hand, his fingers dwelling at the descent on the leaves of his psalm-book; and on the ascent there ensues such a flourish of the arms, that none but the initiated could ever hope to imitate. David believed that his immunity from death at the massacre of William Henry was due to the saving virtues of his pitchpipe and power of song. Both of these he exerted to the utmost in the hour of danger, pouring forth a strain so powerful as to be heard even amid the din of that bloody field. But Hawk-Eye the scout expressed the truth when he remarked, as he significantly tapped his forehead: "The Indians never harm a non-composer."

The history of the pitchpipe now under consideration is lost in the obscurity of the early part of last century; but without doubt this obsolete instrument, now superseded by wonderful inventions, has often sounded the prelude of the joyous voicing of congregations long since gone from this earth. That it was used in the Kirk of Cults through the early years of last century is indisputable, and that Sir David Wilkie often heard it in his youth, follows as a matter of course. Had Wilkie done for the old Precentor what he did for the "Blind Fiddler," or

"Pitlessie Fair," the story of this quaint old instrument might have ranked among the classics of our land.

The following note is added by Mr F. R. Coles :—" In October 1899, among other curious objects, a wooden pitchpipe was left with me by Mr J. Falconer, of Dundee. In general, it resembles the pipe above described, being of mahogany, and measuring, when closed, $13\frac{1}{8}$ inches, with a horizontal breadth of $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches, and a vertical thickness of $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The bar carrying the scale was kept from being pulled entirely out of the tube by a small wooden peg plugged into the bottom of the pipe, and over which there ran a slot in the bar. Into the upper surface of the scale-bar, a thin piece of white wood (possibly willow?) had been inlaid, so as to throw up into greater relief the horizontal lines marking the scale; and these lines, as well as the names of the notes, were neatly cut and darkened with some blackish pigment. But the greatest difference between the Cults pitchpipe and this one from Dundee is to be observed in the scales. In the Cults pipe the scale begins on the note F, the first space on the treble clef, and ends on the upper G, ascending by semitones. In the Dundee pipe, the scale is from D below the clef to the octave above, also ascending by semitones, but not having the semitones correctly named. Another minute difference is that, in the Dundee pipe, instead of the sign \sharp in common usage to designate a sharp, the maker has cut a neat double-lined St Andrew's cross. And either he, or the owner of the pitchpipe, has cut the initials WC within a deeply cut oblong cavity just below the air-hole.

"I learn from Mr R. Milne, formerly of the Third Battalion Royal Scots Regiment, now an attendant in the Museum, that pitchpipes of a similar kind were sent down from Pimlico to the regiment, in order to keep the pitch correctly for the bagpipes.

"The approximate date of any of these pitchpipes can best be computed by a careful comparison of the difference between their pitch and that of the modern standard 'concert-pitch.' In the absence, however, of a sufficiently varied number of pitchpipes, it will be safe to assert only that, the lower the pitch is, the older is the pipe likely to be."

MONDAY, 8th January 1906.

DAVID CHRISTISON, M.D., Vice-President, in the Chair.

A Ballot having been taken, the following were duly elected Fellows :—

Dr JOHN AITKEN, Ardenlea, Falkirk.

ANDREW EDWARD MURRAY, W.S., 7 Eton Terrace.

JAMES LYLE, Waverley, Queen's Crescent.

The Very Rev. JAMES C. RUSSELL, D.D., 9 Coates Gardens.

The following Donations to the Museum and Library were laid on the table, and thanks voted to the Donors :—

(1) By the DAUGHTERS of the late JOHN BUCHANAN, Esq., LL.D., Glasgow.

Collection of antiquities of various kinds, comprising—

Two fragments of decorated "Samian" ware and a fragment of an Inscribed Stone, with II in one line and V in the line below, from Cadder.

Base of a small Vessel of soft red ware, from New Kilpatrick.

Fragment of decorated "Samian" ware Bowl, small shallow Vessel of "Samian" ware $2\frac{7}{8}$ inches in diameter and $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in depth, plain; two small decorated fragments of the same ware; portion of large shallow Vessel of reddish ware 9 inches in diameter by $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches in depth; handle and portion of Vessel of smooth greyish ware; handle of Amphora, with potter's stamp VMEDIC; portion of small terra-cotta Bust of Female Figure, described in Stuart's *Caledonia Romana*, p. 348; six fragments of Tiles; small portion of the rim of a glass Vessel,—all from Castlecary.

Fragment from arch of gateway at Garscadden, with inscription "OMNIA FIRMAT."

Stone Cup, slightly oval, measuring over all $5\frac{1}{4} \times 3\frac{5}{8}$ inches, across the

hollow $2\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and $\frac{7}{8}$ inch in depth, with short rounded handle at one side, from a tumulus at Gallowflat, Rutherglen.

Four blue, decorated, glazed Tiles, 5 inches square, from Slatefield.

Pocket Sun-dial, with Compass and hinged Gnomon, in brass case, with lid to screw on.

Embroidered Satchel, lettered in red silk thread — I LIEVE AND DEY IN CONSTANCIE. ABSENCE NEVER PAIRTS LOYAL [HEARTS]—the last word being symbolised by the figure of two hearts entwined.

Flat piece of lead, 8 by $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches, pierced for seven nails, found underneath one of the dug-out canoes discovered in May 1852 at Clydehaugh, near Govan.

Piece of Mosaic from Hadrian's Villa; and fragment of the Arm of marble Statue, with the Hand of a child resting on it, from the Baths of Constantine, Rome.

Small slab of grey sandstone, with figure of Hindoo Goddess, from Sangor, Central India; and brass Figure of Krishna, from Benares.

Bridle-bit of iron, from Cawnpore.

(2) By the MASTER OF THE ROLLS.

Acts of the Privy Council of England, New Series, vol. xxix., 1598-99, and vol. xxx., 1599-1600; Calendar of Close Rolls, Edward III., vol. viii., 1346-49; Close Rolls, Henry III., 1231-34; Patent Rolls, Richard II., 1391-96; Patent Rolls, Henry IV., vol. ii., 1401-05; Year-Books, 18 and 19 of the Reign of Edward III.; State Papers, Ireland, 1660-62; Treasury Books, vol. ii., 1667-68; State Papers, America and West Indies, 1697-98.

There was exhibited:—

(1) By Mr C. O. DUSSEL, 8 Danube Street, through Mr JAMES URQUHART, F.S.A. Scot.

An ornamental horse-crupper from Kirkwall, Orkney (fig. 1), consisting of thirty brass plaques affixed to two longitudinal straps of leather,

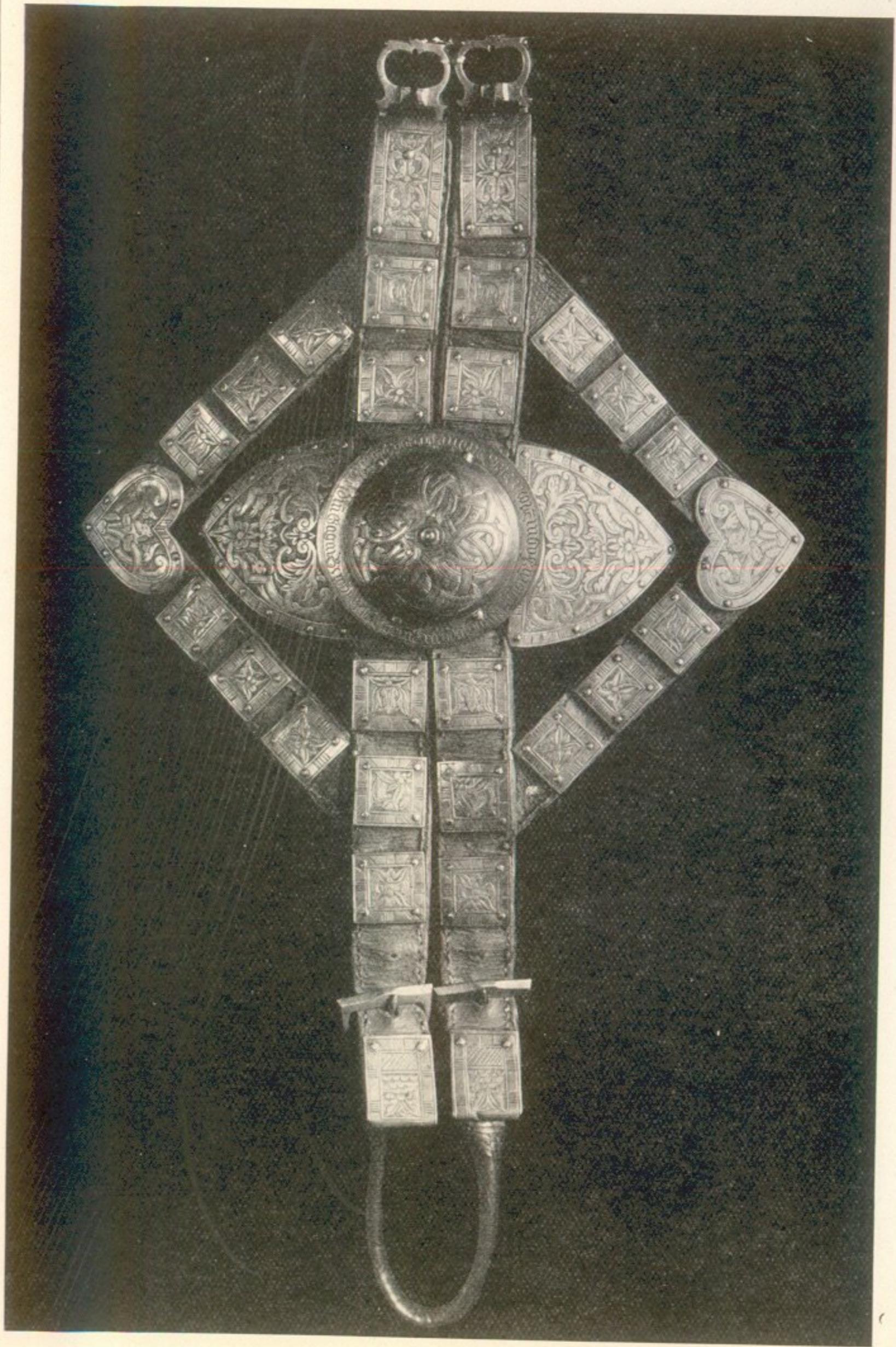


Fig. 1. Ornamented Crupper of a Lady's Saddle from Iceland.

with a lozenge-shaped centre-piece consisting of a central boss flanked by two side-pieces of triangular curvature. The length, including the buckles at the end, is $21\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and the breadth from point to point of the lozenge-shaped part is $14\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The terminal plaques are oblong, those at the posterior end being $1\frac{7}{8}$ inches in length by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in breadth, and those at the anterior end $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in breadth. The other ten plaques on the longitudinal straps are $1\frac{3}{8}$ inches square and placed half an inch apart. Twelve similar square plaques are similarly placed on the straps which make the lozenge-shaped part, and the two terminals on the outer side angles of the lozenge are heart-shaped. The central boss is $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches in diameter, surrounded by a flat border half an inch in width. The flanking plaques of triangular curvature measure $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches along each side. The oblong and square plaques are chased with a floral device in an oblong or square panel in the centre of each, surrounded by a border crossed at intervals by groups of parallel lines. The heart-shaped plaques have each a bear seated upright, and looking out of the floral scroll with his fore-paws clasped round two of its branches. The plates of triangular curvature which flank the boss have an elaborate floral scroll filling the space within a border of the same character as that of the other plaques, but studded with small boss-like nail-heads at intervals of $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch. There are similar nail-heads in the angles of the margins of the oblong and square plaques, and round the margin of the heart-shaped plaques. The central boss has four such studs round the margin and one on the top, and the whole of its convexity is chased with an elaborate pattern of interlaced work, with incipient leafage at intervals. Round the flat margin of the boss is an Icelandic inscription incised in the old black-letter character, which Mr Eiríkr Magnússon of the Cambridge University Library, in a letter to Dr Anderson, discusses and explains as follows :—

“The inscription of which you send me a rubbing and a correct transliteration proves the boss on which it is engraved to have been an ornamental affixture to a *crupper* attached to a saddle given to a bride on the occasion of her bridal ride, or procession on horseback, with her party to the church, or

to the place where the wedding feast was to be given. This the translation of the quatrain will bear out inferentially.

"The quatrain is in Icelandic. In form it is an absolutely perfect piece of poetry, and yet of an elaborate technique. The language is remarkably pure, and, in want of any data, may belong to any time from, say, 1600 to 1800; but must belong to the time when ladies' saddles and harness decorated with ornamental plaque-work in brass were most in vogue—the 18th century.

"I will now give you a copy of the quatrain such as will exhibit at a glance the technique of its poetical form :—

Reidiñ	Gagni	Frægda	<i>Brwdi</i>	<i>Best</i>	<i>Dafni</i>
<i>Byriñ</i>					
Leidiñ	Fagni	ægða	<i>Mooti</i>	<i>Mest</i>	<i>Safni</i>
<i>Medur</i>					

"The vertical arrangement shows the *assonantic* syllables, the letters in italic type show the *alliteration*. Reduced to ordinary 18th century spelling, the verse reads :—

Reidinn gagni brúdi best,
Byrinn frægða dafni,
Leidinn fagni móti mest,
Medur ægða safni.

Before interpreting the verse, I must call attention to the assonantic first words of lines 1 and 3 : *reiðinn*, *leiðinn*—I use the normal spelling of to-day. At the end of a word the *unstressed* syllable *inn* has the same sound volume as the (*unstressed*) syllable *in* ; therefore :

1st, Reidiñ may stand for reiðinn or reiðin.
2nd, Leidiñ " " leiðinn or leiðin.

"Both words stand in nom. case with definite article *hinn* or *inn* = Engl. *the* suffixed. Therefore : *Reið-inn* = *reiði'nn* (*reiði hinn*, *reiði inn*) may be nom. of *reiði*, m. (= a crupper), meaning *the crupper* ; or it may be nom. of *reið*, f., a ride, *reiðin* (*in* = the fem. of the article *hin*, 'in) = *the ride*. Now both *crupper* and *ride* suit the sense of the first line equally well ; so I take it the author meant *reiðin(n)* to have the double meaning I have pointed out.

"*Leidiñ* can stand for *leiðinn*, m., *the tedium*, *the weariness* (unfulfilled desire of a love-lorn heart) ; or it may stand for *leidin*, f., which I think has here the sense of *leet*, assembly, wedding party. Accordingly the translation of the quatrain will be :

Let the { ride } suit the bride in the best manner,
 { crupper }
Let the fair wind of renown(ed deeds) increase (for the couple to be married),
Let the { weariness } rejoice at its most in the meeting (of bride and
 { wedding party } bridegroom),
With a collection of *comforts* (wedding presents).

“*gagni*=pres. subj. of *gagna*, be of gain, suit; *brúði*, dat. s. of *brúðr*, bride; *Byrr*, ‘bearing,’ fair wind; *best*, superl. of *góðr*, best; *frægða*, gen. pl. of *frægð*, fame, renown, deed worthy of fame; *dafni*, subj. of *dafna*, to thrive, increase; *fagni*, subj. of *fagna* (‘fawn’ upon), rejoice; *mest*, most; *medur*, prep. with dat. with; *þægða*, gen. pl. of *þægð*, f., an obliging act, gratifying deed, comfort conferred upon a person, winning gift; *safni*, dat. sing. of *safn*, n., collection.

“In his *Reise igiennem Island*, 1772, pt. i. p. 44, Eggert Olafsson gives a description of the 18th century lady’s saddle in Iceland as follows:—

“‘In other places of the country the ladies ride by themselves in a *lady’s saddle*, somewhat resembling those in use in Denmark. Yet the Icelandic saddles are much more decorated. They are lined by blue or green cloth, covered by brass work, and here and there ornamented by large bosses of the same metal, engraved by foliate designs, animals and birds. The bridle, crupper, and breast-straps are also thickly set with bosses of brass.’

“This antiquarian curiosity is very valuable, now that all traces of brass-bound ladies’ saddles seem to have vanished in Iceland.”

As the crupper has been thus shown to be undoubtedly a product of Icelandic handicraft, probably of the 18th century, it would have been interesting to have known how and when it came to Kirkwall; but unfortunately, although it is known to have been there for at least fifty or sixty years, no traces of its previous history appear to be obtainable.

The following Communications were read:—