

XII.—FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE SOCIETY, 1814.

THE VELLUM SCROLL AND THE STEAM-BOAT.

BY JAMES CLEPHAN.

READ ON WEDNESDAY, THE 30TH JANUARY, 1884.

THE "Annual Register" has a note of the 6th of February in 1814 (the first anniversary of the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries), which has sufficient interest for the present generation of members to justify its revival after the lapse of three-score years and ten.

The Great Frost of 1814, by which the river had been ice-bound for upwards of three weeks, came to a close on the 5th of February, and the gay promenade began to break up on the 6th. "The revels now were ended." The races, led off by the Dutchman on his extemporized skates of beef bones, had run their course. Football and quoits, pipers and fiddlers, fair and market, were flung on shore by the thermometer; and the newly-incorporated Antiquaries, diverging into Natural History, could not suffer the pageant to dissolve without leaving some mark in their archives behind. Hence the entry in the chronological record of the Metropolitan Register:—"It will be a memorable circumstance in the local history of the country, that so large and rapid a river as the Tyne should have been frozen to the thickness of twenty inches; and the Antiquarian Society of Newcastle have recorded the event on vellum, as a document to be referred to."

Father Tyne has taken securities, in the long years that have since gone by, against the easy arrest of his increasing commerce by the

rage of winter. The sea has been admitted between his banks in vaster volume and profounder depth; obstructions to the tidal flow have been removed; and the funnel fleets, whose foundations were laid in the year when sailing vessels were reduced to enforced idleness for the greater part of a month, now cope at considerable advantage with frost, grinding and crashing their way, as so many battering-rams, through stout floors of ice.

It would be out of place to coerce the vellum scroll of 1814 into a text for an elaborate discourse in the *Archæologia Æliana* on the steam navigation of our river. Equally, however, would it be an oversight in the other direction, to dismiss the record without some allusion to the launching, in the same year, of our first paddle-boat on the tide of the Tyne from the Gateshead shore. One or two pages may be given to the subject, by way of breaking the ice as it were, and linking 1884 to 1814.

Early in February of the latter year, the Society had made for reference its enduring note of the solid yet evanescent platform by which Northumberland and Durham had been connected together by the frost. On the 21st of the month, when the playground had vanished at a breath, "The Tyne Packet," afterwards "The Perseverance," of primitive construction, yet founder of the steam fleet of England, went afloat; and on "The Barge Day" of May, 1814, with her engines in action and her equipment complete, she took part in the civic procession as a passenger boat. If not so stately a craft as any of the barges, she had her especial charm of novelty, and awoke the wonder and admiration of the Mayor and his Brethren, and of the surrounding multitude on land and water, outstripping the slow subjects of wind and tide, and leaving behind at her pleasure the more dignified vehicles of the municipal fleet. His Worship's aquatic coach, with its team of oars, was nowhere in competition with the new birth of Time.

Some months later in the year, when she had been plying for passengers, day by day, between Shields and Newcastle, there came a new development. Vessels moving by steam had been regarded, in their infancy, as suitable enough for inland waters. But the new craft was not content to be so cabined and confined. On the 10th of September, there entered the Tyne a bold adventurer, "The Cale-

donia," from Dundee, which had made her way over the North Sea waves, bound for the Humber as a passenger packet between Hull and Gainsborough. It was an unlooked-for apparition, perplexing the paddler in mid-channel and the populations on the confronting shores; but she promptly made herself at home, and ran for several days, between the Bar and the Bridge, in friendly rivalry with the local boat; till, finally, she departed for her appointed post, peeping in upon Sunderland and the Wearmouths as she passed.

Seventy years flow by; and lo! after many days, she rises up before us once more, a spectre of the past, where least we might have anticipated seeing her again. In the instructive "Reminiscences, chiefly of Oriel College and the Oxford Movement," issued in 1882 by the Rev. T. Mozley (a native of Gainsborough), the author informs us that he saw the first steamer that ever came up the Trent; and (he adds) "a very clumsy affair it was" (as pioneer performances are apt to be).

Robert Fulton, with his "Clermont" on the Hudson, had taken the lead in passenger traffic by steam in the year 1807. Henry Bell followed with his "Comet," in 1812, on the Clyde. Then came the "Tyne" in 1814; a year that was made additionally memorable by the evolution of the printing press of England into a steam machine; to say nothing of the meteor flash of Bonaparte from Elba, to be followed by the field of Waterloo, and the long ensuing peace between France and England; over which we may breathe in passing the fervent prayer, *Esto perpetua*.

A generation earlier than the vellum scroll, in the latter years of the eighteenth century, passenger traffic by steam was in the air. The fixed engine was impatient to be locomotive. The Symington steam-boat, with Robert Burns on board, had made her experimental trip, in the month of October, 1788, on Dalswinton Loch; Henry Brougham, not yet ten years of age, standing among the spectators on shore; and in the same month, Dr. Franklin, writing from Philadelphia to a correspondent on this side of the Atlantic, was reporting that he had no philosophical news, unless it were that a boat moved by steam was navigating against wind and tide on the Delaware, "and it was apprehended the construction might be so simplified and improved as to become generally useful."

The centenary of the gallant enterprise in Scotland and the United States is at hand, and will find the apprehension verified, beyond the dreams of Franklin and his friends, on all the waters of the globe. Our forerunners commemorated on vellum, in 1814, the thickness of the ice with which three weeks of frost had encrusted the channel of the Tyne, then "bound in shallows," and an easy prey to the severities of winter; a remarkable phenomenon, but of how little moment compared with the contemporaneous construction, on the banks of the river, of England's earliest boat moved by the power of steam! It was, indeed, a memorable year, that of the Great Frost; memorable in the course it ran, and in its departure. Midway in the month of December, as the *Annual Register* records, a steam-boat of about 40 tons burden, with the Lord Mayor on board, was put in motion on the canal near Limehouse, and proceeded a mile and returned, performing the distance in 16 minutes; and in Christmas week, when the year was ebbing out, a packet steamer of 200 tons was in the hands of the builder (Mr. Courthorpe) on the Thames, intended to ply between London and Calais; "the vessel and machinery," the *Newcastle Chronicle* does not fail to add, "being the invention of Mr. John Redhead, of Heworth, Durham." The year, which had brought traffic by steam to the Tyne, and witnessed the genius of the mine bearing his flag in triumph over the waves from the Tay to the Trent, was holding out its parting promise on the Thames of the like connection between our country and the Continent.