

common inshore organisms, of whose early stage of growth we are singularly ignorant.

Thanks are due to the Fishery Branch of the Scottish Home Office for the data for the last few years.

Further information about *Pecten* may be found in—

Dakin, W. J. *Pecten*. The Edible Scallop. Liverpool Mar. Biol. Comm. Memoirs, No. 17, 1909.

Priol, E. *La coquille Saint-Jacques (Pecten maximus)*. Rev. Trav. Pêches Maritimes. Paris, 3, 1930.

Yonge, C. M. The evolution of the swimming habit in the Lamellibranchia. Mem. Mus. Hist. Nat. Belg. (2), 3, 1936.

Annual Reports of the Fishery Board for Scotland; Statistical Tables.

THE ROTHESAY BEGGARS' BADGES.

By Rev. JAMES HAY HAMILTON, B.D.

These large metal badges, of which there are some specimens in the Museum, throw light on the social life and customs of this town and parish during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

An important function of the Church in these times was the care of the poor. The Kirk Session of each parish allocated all church collections to the relief of poverty-stricken persons living within the bounds, and this money was supplemented by the fines which they were empowered to impose for breaches of church discipline, and from other sources. Despite these measures, the funds received were quite inadequate to cope with the need, and Kirk Sessions were in the habit of giving badges or tokens to deserving poor persons within their bounds to entitle them to the privilege of eking out their living by begging. The law was very severe in its punishment of able-bodied beggars and vagabonds, but when badges or licences were granted to poor people by competent authorities these badge-bearers or license-holders were allowed to beg with impunity. This begging system was even sanctioned by Act of Parliament. An Act of 1672 directed heritors and Kirk Sessions to "condescend upon such as, through age and infirmity, are not able to work . . . that they may be supplied by the contributions at the paroch Kirk, and gif the same be not sufficient to entertain them, that they give them a badge or ticket to ask alms at the dwelling-houses of the inhabitants of their own paroch only, without the bounds of whereof they are not to beg."

Long before the passing of this Act, however, the system of licensed begging was in operation in Scotland. As far back as 1424 certain "thiggaris" were by statute "tholit to beg," but were required to have "ane certain takin on thame, to landwart of the schiref, and in the burrowis . . . of the Alderman or of the Baillies." Acts of similar import were passed from time to time by local bodies, both in Church and State.

There came thus in course of time to be several orders of licenced beggars. These were first and foremost in order of privilege and distinction the King's bluegowns, who had a badge to pass and repass over the whole country, and who made good and diligent use of their privilege. Their type is vividly portrayed in Sir Walter Scott's *Edie Ochiltree*. Other beggars again had their badges from Church Courts, such as Synods, Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions, and the activities of these mendicants were confined to the bounds of the jurisdiction of the court that granted license. These Church licenses were further limited to a specific time, at the end of which they might be renewed or withdrawn, as the court found expedient.

Our concern here is with the beggars' badges issued by the Kirk Session of Rothesay. The specimens which I have seen are all of the 1827 edition, though it is certain that badges or tokens of some sort must have been issued long before that date. The procedure followed that in other parts of the country, and the first reference is found in a Session minute of 8th May, 1827, during the ministry of the Rev. James Denoon.

8th May, 1827.

"The Session taking into consideration the extent to which begging is carried, and imposition on the respectable inhabitants by strangers from other quarters, did and hereby do unanimously resolve that each of the begging poor of this parish shall be furnished at the expense of the Parish Session with a badge regularly numbered, and the words 'Rothesay Parish' to be inscribed

on the same. Such badges to be produced when required and to be returned to the session on the death of the wearer."

It seems from this minute that the folk of Rothesay were not at all pleased to see strangers coming among them to live off them. But the time was to come when their attitude was to change. Strangers were to be received with joy, and instead of the strangers living off Rothesay, Rothesay was to live off the strangers! The badges struck in 1827 were 100 in number, of which 60 were issued—round discs of a base metal alloy, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter and $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick. The stamp is clear, and the number occupies the centre panel. "Rothsay" is spelt without the "e."

The Kirk Session could, at will, suspend the privilege conferred by the badge:—

6th Feby., 1832.

"The Moderator reported to the Kirk Session that at a meeting of the Board of Health held on Thursday last, it was resolved to suppress public begging for the next twelve weeks; that in the meantime measures must be adopted to prevent the poor from suffering from this necessary regulation. The Kirk Session, as the natural guardians of the poor and of their funds, feel an interest in this matter, and appoint a committee of their number to consult with a committee of the Board of Health, and to concur in any measure judged proper for the accomplishment of said purpose. The Committee to consist of Messrs James Muir, Robert Stewart, senior, and Robert Fisher."

The reason for suspension was an epidemic which swept through the town, and which door-to-door begging would have greatly aggravated. The Session figures well in the matter. We see them exercising their function in the broadest sense as trustees of the welfare of the whole community, promptly shouldering their responsibility as "natural guardians of the poor," concerned over the welfare of their charges, and prompt to

co-operate with the public authority for the common good.

The list of licensed beggars frequently needed revision:—

9th Mar., 1835.

"The Session appoint the following elders, Mr John Gillies (convener), Bailie McIndoe, Mr William McKirdy, Mr Archibald McKirdy, and Mr Dugald Munn, a committee to consider the list of those who are permitted to wear badges for the purpose of receiving charity in this parish, and to do what may be deemed necessary to regulate in the best manner what pertains to this class of the poor."

The badge was a valuable privilege: it represented a considerable yearly income. We are not surprised to learn that although they were "not transferable," they sometimes passed by various means into unauthorised hands:—

Feby. 27th, 1837.

"The committee on badges report that there are 26 persons alive, having badges, in the parish; that there are 5 badges out known to have been in the hands of persons now dead; that there are 15 badges in the hands of the treasurer; that the highest No. of the badges discovered is No. 60; and that they know not in whose hands the remaining 14 are. The Session, on considering their report, resolve to get new badges of a different shape and to issue them to proper persons, to call in the old as far as possible; and to render the rest useless by advertising the public of the change that has taken place, and so appoint the old committee to carry this into effect."

But the new badges were never made. The 40 unissued badges of the 1827 edition were found, and another and cheaper expedient—but one equally effective for the end in view—was resorted to:—

April 17th, 1837.

"The committee on badges report that they have discovered the old badges from No. 60 upwards to No. 100 inclusive, and recommend that those be painted red with the numbers painted black, and a re-issue of them to be

used instead of the former; and that handbills be posted up and circulated to advertise the public that no other badges are authorised by the Session."

Specimens of this painted badge, still retaining their bright red colour, are to be seen in the glass case in the vestibule of the High Kirk and in this Museum.

The change-over from the old badges to the new was a process not without some difficulties:—

Sept. 12th, 1837.

"The committee on badges gave in their report containing a list of new badges issued in place of the old, beginning with No. 61 and continuing up to 78 inclusive—(the list of the names *in retentis*); that 7 persons who have old badges have not returned them to receive new ones; that there are 12 old badges not accounted for."

Ere long, however, the system is working smoothly, and the new beggars' badge has its accepted place in the community life. All this took place in the ministry of Rev. Robert Craig. Future entries are mainly concerned with the granting and withdrawing of the badges:—

Nov. 26th, 1838.

"The Session order the badge No. 74 to be called in from Ann D."

June 21st, 1841.

"The Session allow badge No. 76 to Duncan M."

12th Jany., 1844.

"Widow A., originally belonging to the County of Ross, having applied for a badge to beg, which the Session have agreed to afford her until there is a communication from the parish to which she belongs. . . . Also Grace M., widow of a deceased seaman, and who is in poor circumstances, requested a badge to enable her to beg, which the Session agree to give."

25th June, 1845.

"The Session instruct the treasurer to give Widow C. 12/- per calendar month, also to give her a badge."

These last two entries are under the ministry of Rev. Alexander Brown.

There the narrative ends. For many a year thereafter the badges continued their eventful history, until with the improvement of our social services they became superseded. By that time the care of the poor had passed from the Church to the State; the beggars' badges were succeeded by the more impersonal but securer methods of poor relief and public assistance levied through taxation. With the new ways, the old race of professional beggars began to dwindle, and have now almost disappeared. And while from most points of view we are glad to see them going, and to know that the relief of poverty is now carefully organised and equitably administered, there are those who feel that something of savour and vitality has passed out of our environment. For these licensed beggars were, many of them, great worthies. They did exceedingly well for themselves, and often lived much better than some of those from whom they extracted sympathetic contributions. As might be imagined, their trade gave them a ready tongue; they were masters of repartee, talkative and facetious. When they toured the landward part of the parish, they were expected to give something more than a mere exposition of their distress. They had to bring news and entertain by their conversation, and indeed had many of the attributes and privileges of the jester of ancient days. To be a "gude crack," that is, to possess talents for conversation, was as essential to the men of the badge as to those of a loftier station.

Of course, there were sad stories too—stories of dire distress and need, of poverty bitterly and reluctantly submitted to, and the unwilling donning of this last symbol of Christian charity. Many a weary and heavy heart would beat behind the beggar's badge.

But I trust I have said enough to show the human story which lies behind these rough metal discs. If they could speak! If they could tell of the different owners who have possessed them, of the different hands they have passed through—what a catalogue of adversity and sorrow, of shrewdness and plausibility, of humour and good cheer, of bleak old age and lonely death-beds they could relate! There is their value, that to him who has the reflective mind and the thoughtful imagination, they speak of a Rothesay which has long since passed away.