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## A SCOTTISH "PHILOSOPHICAL" CLUB

### IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

IT IS WELL KNOWN that literary and philosophical "clubs" flourished and exerted considerable influence throughout Britain during the eighteenth century. The student of the period is perhaps somewhat saddened, however, that relatively little is known of the discussions and activities of these societies. What one knows of Dr. Johnson from Boswell and other recorders of his sayings, for instance, merely whets one's appetite for more—and much more there must have been during the life of Johnson's "Literary Club". It is therefore of interest to look at the manuscript "Minutes" of a similar club, the Philosophical Society of Aberdeen (1758-1773).<sup>1</sup> The Minutes are remarkably detailed and undoubtedly shed considerable light on the aims and activities of similar societies.

The Society was didactic in nature, scope, and aims. Its members met to learn from one another; all were of impeccable character and keen mind, and they obviously enjoyed each other's company. Criticism and advice were given and taken freely at the meetings. But the Society's aims extended far beyond its membership, and here it achieved much. Many writers emphasize the great and growing desire for intellectual and cultural improvement in Scotland at the time. Walter J. Hipple, for instance, stresses this great revival and calls it "the Scottish Renaissance".<sup>2</sup> The Philosophical Society is a clear reflection of this "Golden Age", showing an excellent spirit of inquiry into the sciences and philosophy and also the newly aroused interest in the humanities. It did much to cultivate the growing desire to use the English language better, both in speech and writing, and had a widespread effect on the rapidly growing interest in the fine arts. Its influence on philosophy was profound, for it started a philosophical movement—the School of Common Sense. It contributed greatly to the hotly-waged battle between religion and scepticism, entering the lists strongly on the side of the Church. It accomplished all this

because of the select nature of the group, all of the members but one being university teachers and quite a number clergymen, and because of the books of the members. Clearly the common people of Aberdeen appropriately named the Society the "Wise Club".<sup>3</sup>

Five members were celebrated writers. Thomas Reid, one of the club's founders and the acknowledged leader of the Common-Sense Philosophy, was a Regent at King's College for the first six years of the Society. In 1764 he published *An Inquiry into the Human Mind upon the Principles of Common Sense* and, having moved in the summer to Glasgow University as Professor of Moral Philosophy, he issued his more mature *Essays on the Intellectual and Active Powers of the Human Mind* in 1785. James Beattie, Professor of Moral Philosophy and Logic at Marischal College, was well-known as the author of *The Minstrel* (1771 and 1774)—the first attempt in English verse at writing about the effect of nature and custom on the author's own mind and imagination—but was even better known as the philosopher who had irrevocably refuted the philosophical "reasonings" of David Hume and other sceptics in *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* (1770). Beattie in fact was a prolific writer, publishing poems, and books on literary criticism, Christian apology, and the education of youth. George Campbell, Principal of Marischal College and the most learned Presbyterian divine of the time, produced many theological works and sermons, but was best known for *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776). These and other books earned him a reputation as an astute philologist and psychologist. Another professor at Marischal College and also a minister of the gospel was Alexander Gerard. His two essays on aesthetic theory, *On Taste* (1759) and *On Genius* (1774), gained him a high reputation as a literary critic. Dr. John Gregory helped Reid to organize the Society and later published *A Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man with those of the Animal World* (1776), which earned him a considerable reputation as a philosopher. But his very popular posthumous book, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), which went through sixteen editions and numerous reprintings between 1774 and 1868, gained him an even greater reputation. As a medical doctor, moreover, he wrote *Duties and Qualifications of a Physician* (1772), which made him one of the most famous medical practitioners of the time. Although none of the others were well known as writers, some did publish. While Regent at King's College, James Dunbar made one of the earliest attempts at a "philosophical" treatment of history in *Essays on the History of Mankind in Rude*

*and Cultivated Ages* (1780). William Ogilvy, Professor of Humanity and colleague of Dunbar's at King's, published his *Essay on the Right of Property in Land* in 1782.

No public writings came from any other members; yet they were all highly reputable "philosophers" as the term was understood. David Skene, Dean of Faculty at Marischal College, was known locally for his scientific experiments in natural history, and George Skene, who was considerably younger than most members, gained a high reputation as a natural philosopher in later years. In an allied field was the mathematician, John Stewart, who relinquished on his death in 1766 his Chair of Mathematics and his position in the Society to William Trail. Robert Trail, the minister at Banff, was one of the original members and he continued in the club until 1761, when he moved to Glasgow to become a professor. The only other clerical member, and also an early one, was John Farquhar, the minister of a parish near Aberdeen. Thomas Gordon, who was often referred to in the Minutes as "the Humanist" because of his post of Professor of Humanity at King's College, and who was elected only three months after the first meeting on January 12, 1758, remained one of the most faithful members for the duration of the Society. The only other membership bestowed was an honorary one upon Robert Trail's uncle, the Bishop of Down and Connor, who attended the meeting of November 8, 1768.

It will be noted that fourteen of the fifteen regular members were university teachers and that four of these were also clergymen, John Farquhar, the minister of Nigg, being the only person outside the college circle. The original members were Reid, Gregory, Campbell, Stewart, David Skene, and Robert Trail. Gordon, Gerard, Farquhar, and Ross were elected in March, 1758; Beattie and George Skene in 1761; and Ogilvy and William Trail much later. The unusually small total of members and the average attendance of seven is explained by the method of election. It was the rule that a person could not solicit membership, at least openly. Rather the group decided upon a worthy candidate who was then asked to join. And all this "to prevent offence that might be taken at the Secretary's procedure in the election of members." Each member apparently had the power of veto, so it is certain that there was genuine comradeship and that members were of high intellectual calibre.

Meetings were held twice a month on the second and fourth Wednesdays,

beginning at five o'clock in the afternoon and ending at ten. The business of discussion was carried on from five-thirty to eight-thirty, with extensions if necessary. Some experimenting with starting-times went on in the early years, with four o'clock and even 2 p.m. being tried; but five o'clock seems to have been settled on fairly early. The only other change of this kind was the holding of only two meetings during the two summer months. It is difficult to say where meetings were held, except that they were conducted in taverns, probably in Aberdeen and Old Aberdeen. There are few references in the Minutes to meeting places; the most specific is this notation of September 13, 1768: "Questions 97 and 98 are to be the subjects of conversation at the next Meeting, which is to be held at Mrs Campbell's in Old Aberdeen on the 10th of October, at the ordinary hour." It is certain that meetings were held both in the New and in the Old Towns, for most of the members, the professors, were almost equally from King's College in Old Aberdeen and Marischal College in New Aberdeen.

In the beginning each member took his monthly turn as President, but after 1760 the President was elected for a year. His main function was to control discussion on the "discourses" delivered in the second meeting of the month and on the "questions" handled in the first. In case of dispute, the secret ballot was used, so that the office of President was one of utility and possibly of prestige. When he was not presiding over the main business of meetings, the members were free to enjoy each other's company. As the Rules put it, rather forcibly, "when the Chair is empty the Members shall not be confined to Form but have the Liberty of free conversation." Presumably they could then partake freely of food and drink, for it is recorded that "Any member may take a glass at a By table while the President is in the chair, but no Health shall be drunk during that time." In fact however they did not partake freely, for the very next Rule states: ". . . and the Entertainment shall not exceed eighteen pence a head." This may seem a modest estimate of the cost of "Entertainment" for a thirsty man of an evening; but obviously the thirst of the Society was intellectual. Even later, when expenses increased, the total cost per person for a whole year was never more than twenty shillings sterling. Expenses were recorded faithfully and two tavern bills are extant. The following seems representative of an evening's fare:

To 1 Mutchken Punch	0	2	6
To 2 botels Red Port	0	4	0
To 3 botels Porter	0	1	0
To Supper	0	3	0
To Pipes & Tobacco	0	0	6
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	0	11	0
Additional by Entertainment	0	1	6
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	0	12	6

The highest bill was recorded on May 8, 1770—19s. 10d. And it is known that there was no lingering at the inns till a late hour, for it was a rigid Rule that "the Members shall leave the Meeting Room at ten."

The hearing and discussing of discourses and the debating of questions were the life-blood of the Society. Its originators put much careful thought into the procedure of "conversations"; the rules dealing with discussion are models of sense and enlightenment. Each member, having announced his subject at a previous meeting, read his discourse, after which all members had "access" to make observations "in a free but candid manner". But conclusions upon "style, pronunciation, or composition are to be avoided as foreign to the design of the Society." The reader could then answer any criticisms made, but the critic could not speak in return, unless the President felt it was expedient. The rules thus eliminated unnecessary haggling through the astute recognition that ideas are more important than language—thoughts take precedence over mere words. The same desire to eliminate wastage is seen in the handling of questions. To assure that everyone gave his opinion cogently and concisely, no one could speak to a question more than twice.

But these are only the forms of discussion. The content permitted shows a great range of interests. Discourses and questions are to be philosophical:

And Philosophical Matters are understood to comprehend every Principle of science which may be deduced by just and lawful induction from the phenomena either of the human mind or of the material world; all observation and experiment that may furnish materials for such induction; the examination of false schemes of Philosophy and false methods of Philosophizing; the Subserviency of Philosophy to the Arts; the Principles they borrow from it and the means of carrying them to their Perfection.

It is plain that the range of topics was wide enough to cover many of the

learned societies of today, taking in philosophy, theology and allied subjects, the education of youth, literature, philology, politics, law, economics, history, mathematics, physics and chemistry. Such an immense scope might lead one to suspect superficial coverage; but a consideration of some topics handled shows great concern over serious problems, curiosity and practical insight into less pressing matters, and zeal and candour in pursuing all knowledge. At the time, for instance, there was much agitation in Britain over the slave-trade, and the members showed great interest in the general unrest. James Beattie wrote to William Forbes in 1788: "It is with great pleasure I see your name in the news-papers, subjoined to a petition to the House of Commons in behalf of the poor negroes. The society, to which I belong, [the University] resolved some time ago to present a similar petition, but the thing is delayed till we hear from our chancellor. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

This resolution had obviously been influenced by the debates in the club on several questions showing deep concern over the problem. Beattie, for instance, wrote about it in his *Essay on Truth*, composed an unpublished dissertation on it, and lectured vehemently about it for over thirty years. It is clear in fact that the Society helped to form an atmosphere of intolerance towards slavery which eventually led to its abolition. In considering population, discussion in the club seems to foreshadow Malthus's *Essay on the Principles of Population as it affects the Future Improvement of Society* (1798). Robert Trail was particularly interested in this and put two questions: "Whether the Substituting of machines instead of men's labour, in order to lessen the expense of labour, contributes to the populousness in a country"; and "What is the Agrarian law that will conduce most of the populousness of a nation? Or what is the maximum of estates fittest for that purpose?" Thomas Reid emphasized another aspect of the problem by asking "Whether by the encouragement of proper laws the number of births in Great Britain might not be nearly doubled or at least greatly increased?" But the clearest indication of the Malthusian doctrine was given by James Dunbar, who asked in 1766 "Whether the considerations of good policy may not sometimes justify the laying of a restraint upon population in a state?"

Much time was spent in handling rhetoric and *belles lettres*. All members were men of learning and sound taste; all learned from one another; and all influenced others outside the Society. It consequently helped to stimulate an interest in polite literature and the art of criticism and an enthusiasm for literary pursuits in general. It had a similar effect in helping to satisfy the

widely-felt need of improvement in speaking of all kinds, writing, and reading. As John M. Lothian notes: "The records of the literary clubs and associations of Scotland in the eighteenth century . . . reveal a society animated by an awareness of a need for culture and by an intense ambition to improve, an ambition which was shared even by those who were the obvious intellectual leaders of the day."<sup>4</sup> It is plain that the Aberdeen club was among the most powerful intellectual forces which produced the "Scottish Renaissance".<sup>5</sup>

There are specific notations in the Minutes indicating the desire to be practical. On July 24 and August 14, 1759, the company had debated Thomas Gordon's question: "In what cases and for what causes is lime a proper cure." But they were not content to be theoretical, for this is noted from the August meeting: "The meeting resumed 26 Question and recommended to Dr. Gregory, Dr. David Skene, and Mr Reid to concert a plan of Experiments proper for determining the Effects of Lime in Vegetation." There are indications that effort was made to see all sides of a problem. The minute of October 7, 1761, states: "Mr. Reid presented his abstract of question 44th, which was not read at the meeting, but recommended to the consideration of Dr. Skene & Principal Campbell, as Mr. Reid had mentioned that he had only taken notice of what was to be said on one side of the question." Three "Books" were kept, "one to record Discourses . . . Another . . . for the Questions and a third for the Rules and Minutes of the Society and annual accounts of the Society's money." Later abstracts of "conversations" on questions were entered as well.<sup>6</sup> The discussions on questions must have been substantial, for not only were never more than two handled in a meeting but some were extended for more than a session and many filled a whole period. Members knew in advance which questions would be debated and so could prepare their thoughts. In fact they probably took the abstracts and essays home for close study, for it was decided in November, 1763, to impose fines on those who had not "regularly returned [them] when taken away". The members thus gained more than favourable impressions and vague memories of ephemeral readings and discussions. As a "debating" club it had other special features. The sessions seem to have been conferences rather than meetings filled with loud argument and "hot" debate. It thus never occurred to them to record the voting on questions, even though it is known that they did vote. The "Entertainment" was never in excess—a far cry from the riotous living and hard drinking so characteristic of the age in Scotland. The nature and scope of discussion were so vast and comprehensive that they should be the envy of



similar societies today. Much may also be learned from the good sense and wise definition of the club's rules.

The most effective way the Society stimulated Scotsmen and others to read and to think was through its members' books. Here also one can see the effect on each other, for the "Minutes" show that several books grew out of discussion and debate. The club's influence is aptly described by James Beattie in a letter to his friend and biographer, William Forbes, on January 30, 1766:

I am a member of a club in this town, who style themselves the Philosophical Society. We have meetings every fortnight, and deliver discourses in our turn. I hope you will not think the worse of this Society, when I tell you, that to it the world is indebted for "A Comparative View of the Faculties of Man", and "An Enquiry into Human Nature, on the principles of Common Sense". Criticism is the field in which I have hitherto (chiefly at least) chosen to expatiate; but an accidental question lately furnished me with a hint, which I made the subject of a two hours discourse at our last meeting.<sup>3</sup>

The "accidental question" was "What is the difference between Common Sense and reason?" Beattie read an abstract of the discussion on the question on January 28, 1766; and the "two hours discourse" was a continuation of the topic. A little over a year later, on February 10, 1767, he continued "his former subject". In October of the same year he was back with "the universality and immutability of the Moral Sentiment"; and on January 12, 1768 he read a "voluntary Discourse in continuance of his former subject". Finally the minute for April 19, 1768, reads: "Mr. Beattie read the conclusion of his discourse on the permanency and universality of moral sentiment. This is a voluntary discourse." Thus the Society witnessed the birth and infancy of the *Essay on Truth*. One may also trace the development of Beattie's *An Essay on Poetry and Music as they affect the Mind* (1776) in the Minutes as well as some other "essays". Similarly, Thomas Reid's *Enquiry* and George Campbell's *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* were almost entirely read and discussed in the club. Alexander Gerard read some of his *Essay on Taste* and all of his *Essay on Genius*, and Dr. Gregory read all of his *Comparative View*. The Society thus gave birth to the book which started the Philosophy of Common Sense (Reid's *Enquiry*); the treatise which popularized Common Sense and spread its influence to Europe and America (Beattie's *Essay on Truth*); the most important eighteenth-century work on rhetoric (Campbell's book); two of the most im-



portant books on literary theory in the age (Gerard's essays); a very popular work on general philosophy (Gregory's *Comparative View*); and many minor essays.

The club's fertility in the production of books was no accident. The following are two of the several references in the Minutes to members preparing work for the press. On July 14, 1761, it is noted that "there was no discourse from Principal Campbell, who being engaged in a work for the public, the meeting dispensed with his discussion until the month of January next." The minute for October 10, 1768, reads: "It being Mr Beattie's turn to discourse next month, he intimated to the meeting that it will not be convenient for him to give a discourse before December. The meeting considering that Mr. Beattie had delivered several voluntary discourses of late, left it optional to him to deliver a discourse at any meeting that suits him best". Beattie was preparing the *Essay on Truth* for the press. In fact the members were so overwhelmingly in favour of publication that the following proposal was passed unanimously March 8, 1768: "Mr. Beattie proposed an overture, that the law concerning inserting the discourses of the members in a book, should be rescinded." This meant not that no more essays were recorded but that recording was voluntary. The behind-the-scenes necessity of having one's manuscript handy when preparing for publication obviously prompted the "overture", and the Society wisely complied.

The writings of David Hume caused much discussion and debate in the club, inspiring and sometimes inflaming the members. The resulting controversy gave rise to criticism and admiration—a mixture of concern and esteem that prompted both Reid and Campbell to send him the manuscripts of their attacks on his work. When Hume received Reid's MS. in May, 1763, his first reaction was annoyance at yet another inane defence of religion. But his annoyance soon turned to respect and, as he read on, to admiration. Reid had sent an accompanying letter, which is indicative of the Society's attitude towards Hume. "I shall always avow myself your disciple in metaphysics. I have learned more from your writings in this kind, than from all others put together . . .", he begins; and goes on to indicate Hume's reputation as a philosopher:

When you have seen the whole of my performance, I shall take it as a very great favour to have your opinion upon it, from which I make no doubt of receiving light, whether I receive correction or no. Your friendly adversaries, Drs Campbell and Gerard, as well as Dr. Gregory, return their compliments to you respect-

fully. A little philosophical society here, of which all the three are members, is much indebted to you for its entertainments. Your company would, although we are all good Christians, be more acceptable than that of St. Athanasius; and since we cannot have you upon the bench, you are brought oftener than any other man to the bar, accused and defended with zeal, but without bitterness. If you write no more in morals, politics, or metaphysics, I am afraid we shall be at a loss for subjects.<sup>9</sup>

George Campbell also acknowledged his debt to Hume: "I have not only been much entertained and instructed by his works; but, if I am possessed of any talent in abstract reasoning, I am not a little indebted to what he has written on *human nature*, for the improvement of that talent."<sup>10</sup> He had sent the *MS.* of *A Dissertation on Miracles* to Hume, who reacted more quickly to its quality, even to the point of writing Campbell a letter. In a very complimentary tone, he thanked him for his courtesy and, even though his mind had not been changed by the book, he added that "it is impossible for me not to see the ingenuity of your performance, and the great learning which you have displayed against me."<sup>11</sup> These letters show mutual admiration and respect, with only a hint, in Reid's, of the great concern felt by the Society over the effect of Hume's books. Campbell, for instance, described Hume's attacks on religion in terms of the wind howling around a giant oak: ". . . they shake it impetuously and loudly threaten its subversion; whilst in effect they only serve to make it strike its roots the deeper, and stand the firmer ever after."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Hume caused Gerard to publish a sermon against his *Essay on National Character*. The usual admiration is here, for Gerard praises his "very considerable share of genius and penetration"; but it is this very talent he fears most: "This will gain his attention from the inquisitive; and will render his reasonings on every subject, more specious than those of many others, and on that account more dangerous, when, at any time, he happens to mistake."<sup>13</sup> Gregory's *Comparative View* contains many strictures on the effects of scepticism on philosophy and religion, and, even though he never mentions him, Hume is obviously never far from Gregory's mind. And Beattie's *Essay*, an emotion-charged diatribe, is largely devoted to an exposé of Hume's whole system of philosophy. In fact the popularity of the book apparently gave public life to Hume's work and coloured the interpretation of it for a long time.<sup>14</sup>

Hume's reaction shows that he was greatly affected. Like Reid he had early decided not to answer an opponent in print; but he came near to admitting defeat when he published a retraction of his *Treatise on Human Nature*, the

book which had caused most of the criticism. And Boswell records the following anecdote: "Heard him [Lord Kames] rail against Beattie for attacking D. Hume, which I contradicted. He told of Hume resolving never to write against Religion."<sup>15</sup> Hume seems even to have been in the minds of the club's founders, for Rule 17 stated that one aim is "the examination of false schemes of Philosophy and false methods of Philosophizing." Thus the first stimulant to Common-Sense Philosophy came from him; without him Reid probably would not have written his *Enquiry*, nor Beattie his *Essay*. Also Campbell's *Dissertation and Rhetoric* and Gregory's *Comparative View* were wholly or in part prompted by him, as were many sermons. And of course he provided many hours of debate. Thus Common Sense grew through the club's discussions. In fact its role in the development of Scottish philosophy can hardly be over-estimated. Without it, Scottish thought and probably English thought would not have evolved as they have. It was "chiefly owing to the encouragement which . . . [Reid] received from [the Society] that he resolved to publish his *Inquiry into the Human Mind*";<sup>16</sup> and without it there would have been no *Essay on Truth*. The impact of Scottish thought in general in the age was so great that it spread far beyond Scotland to France, Germany, and America. And Common Sense formed the bulk of this export. Perhaps the best way of judging its influence is to consider the opinion of a contemporary in Edinburgh, the Mecca of sceptics. William Smellie, the eccentric printer and companion to the city's literati, points out the many works from the Society: "The philosophical opinions and writings of Reid, of Campbell, of Beattie, of Gerard, and of Gregory, establish virtue on a firm and unalterable basis, give stability to morals, and vindicate the supremacy of what is denominated common sense."<sup>17</sup> But the final estimate lies with the historians of philosophical thought. M. Cousin declares that "Reid represents Scotland in philosophy": "In face of the authority of Hume, and despite the attacks of Priestley, the philosophy of common sense spread itself rapidly, from Aberdeen to Glasgow, and from Glasgow to Edinburgh; it penetrated into the universities, among the clergy, into the bar, among men of letters and men of the world; and, without producing a movement so vast as that of the German philosophy, it exercised an influence of the same kind within narrower limits."<sup>18</sup>

When James Valentine wrote about the Society in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1863, he had more of the Minutes than now exist. In fact the surviving MS. ends at March 12, 1771, so that Valentine saw the record of almost exactly two more years. It is interesting to note that Reid "visited the Society once

during his vacation in August 1771, and no doubt took part in the conversation of the evening—How are the Proceedings of Instinct to be distinguished from Reason or Sagacity in Animals?"<sup>19</sup> It is also noted that, apart from the Bishop of Down and Connor, only two other "outsiders" were ever permitted to attend meetings—the young Earl of Buchan, visiting Aberdeen on one of his usual ostentatious pursuits of literary persons, and Dr. James Fordyce, a native of Aberdeen, who was a popular preacher in London. Alexander Gerard, it is recorded, was present at 212 out of 239 meetings held during his membership—the record for attendance. Valentine, himself an Aberdonian, gives some imaginative and sympathetic, though somewhat sentimental, vignettes of the members. He makes the point that they went through great inconveniences and even hardship to attend winter meetings, for the road between the Old and the New Town was a "Pandemonium of mire and darkness, with oceans of mud and other horrors." These horrors included stormy weather and the road infested with "sturdy beggars, vagabonds, and robbers." But it was not always winter:

On a summer afternoon, the walk to Old Aberdeen, for the New Town professors, would be a healthful recreation. The road passes from the 'Howe' over a considerable eminence, from which an excellent view is to be had of a fine sweep of bay, extending from the Gridle Ness to the Buchan Ness, some thirty miles; and we can easily imagine the group of philosophic friends pausing on this height—for they would probably go in company—to admire the scene, and perhaps, watch the approach of a vessel from some distant voyage. Then would come the dip to the lower level on which the Old Town stands. No one can look along the outline of pinnacles and towers which this out-of-the-way place presents without some emotion; it is not likely that the sight would be lost upon our philosophers, especially the ardent and imaginative Beattie.<sup>20</sup>

The extant *MS.* ends while the club was at the height of its glory. Campbell, Gerard, and Beattie are still attending, with the lesser lights, and reading papers and debating as earnestly as ever; but the signs of coming dissolution are evident. Reid and Gregory have long since departed; David Skene, Farquhar, and Stewart have died; Beattie is attending less regularly, because of his visits to London, Edinburgh, and Peterhead, his frequent illness, and the problems of coping with an insane wife; and no new members have filled the vacancies. The end of the club is inevitable: "Sometimes now two or three members assembled, but this formed a quorum only for "entertainment"; one could scarcely discourse to two auditors, nor could three "handle" a question

with much spirit. So the Society came gradually to a pause. There is no record of its actual dissolution; but, after the minute of March 9, 1773, the book is blank paper."<sup>18</sup>

Many writers have stressed the importance of clubs and societies in the social, economic, political, philosophical, and literary history of the eighteenth century. John M. Lothian, for example, asserts that in Scotland "the result of all these diverse activities was a wide-spread cultivation of the 'critical' spirit, which was in keeping with the national interest in political and economic philosophy, in history as a branch of literature, and in the discussion of philosophical and literary principles. It ultimately produced such notable results as the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine*."<sup>4</sup> Obviously the work of public education was well done. Writers who have mentioned the Philosophical Society of Aberdeen have pointed out its great influence on every-day life and its considerable production of books. By temperament, inclination, and situation the members were peculiarly suited to play their important role. It is clear in fact that the Society was an outstanding example of the type of literary and philosophical club which helped to produce the great period of Scottish letters.

#### NOTES

1. MS. "Rules and Minutes of the Philosophical Society of Aberdeen" in King's College Library, University of Aberdeen, MS. 539. All references to rules, procedure, discourses, and questions are from this source, unless otherwise indicated. The "Minutes" have been described or referred to in books and magazines, but these references are dated or cursory and do not give the Society the prominence it deserves. The only considerable attempt to interpret its importance was made over a hundred years ago by James Valentine in *Macmillan's Magazine*, Vol. 8 (October, 1863), pp. 436-44. One feels that a fresh approach is needed.
2. Introduction to Alexander Gerard's *An Essay on Taste*, Edinburgh, 1780, in *Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints*, Gainesville, Florida, 1963, p. vi.
3. William Forbes, *An Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie*, Edinburgh, 1807, Vol. I, p. 43, III, 356, I, 100-1.
4. Introduction to Adam Smith's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, London: Nelson, 1963, pp. xxxv-xxxvi, xxxix.
5. Campbell's *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) is an excellent example of the way in which one intellectual leader, influenced by his colleagues in the club and at university, by his students and the public, responded to the "intense ambition to improve". The book was reprinted at least forty-two times, most in the nineteenth century and one in 1911. In fact it became a highly-regarded

and widely-used text on oratory, composition and criticism, until superseded by writers whose dependence upon it is great. It is therefore of interest to note a new scholarly edition under the series-title *Landmarks in Rhetoric and Public Address*, ed. Lloyd F. Bitzer, Southern Illinois University Press, 1963. This edition was called for because of the new interest in the book resulting "from a growing opinion among scholars that Campbell's work is an important contribution to rhetorical theory—a contribution which deserves study along with such traditionally honoured works as Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Cicero's *De Oratore*, Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory*, and Longinus' *On the Sublime*. [p. ix.]

6. The MS. "Minutes" include some 120 questions handled and the titles of all discourses read, with occasional comments.
7. The popularity of this book is unquestionable; it went through fifteen editions in its first twelve years and at least thirty by the mid-1850s. It was also translated into French, Dutch, and German and published several times in America. The reason for its appeal is clear from, for example, Dr. Johnson's response, which is typical: "Why, sir, there is in it a depth of reasoning and a splendour of language which make it one of the first-rate productions of the age." [Quoted in Margaret Forbes, *Beattie and his Friends*, Westminster, 1904, p. 71.]
8. It is noteworthy that most of the books and essays read before the club were also used as university lectures. Everything except verse that Beattie published, for example, formed part of his class lectures, and one can trace the considerable influence of students as well as of his colleagues on their development. Clearly this is one of the major ways in which the great desire for self-improvement was catered for.
9. *Works*, Edinburgh, 1863, p. 92.
10. *A Dissertation on Miracles*, Edinburgh, 1797, Vol. I, p. ix.
11. Cited in *A Dissertation on Miracles*, p. 7.
12. Quoted in W. Keith Leask, *Intermina Borealis*, Aberdeen, 1917, p. 299.
13. *The Influence of the Pastoral Office on the Character examined . . .*, Aberdeen, 1970, p. 6.
14. Norman Kemp Smith asserts that the *Essay* played a great role in the popular attitude towards Hume's work, calling initial attention to it and later influencing the attitudes towards it of James Mill, John Stuart Mill, Bain, and Leslie Stephen. [See *The Philosophy of David Hume*, London, 1941, pp. 6, 7, 80-1, 520-1.]
15. *Private Papers of Boswell*, privately printed, 1932, Vol. XV, p. 69.
16. Henry Laurie, *Scottish Philosophy in its National Development*. Glasgow, 1902, pp. 126-7. Dugald Stewart makes the same point.
17. *Literary and Characteristical Lives . . .*, Edinburgh, 1800, p. 5.
18. Quoted in James McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy*, London, 1875, pp. 267-8.
19. *Macmillan's Magazine*, Vol. 8 (October 1863), pp. 440, 439-440, 444.