

# Mr. ALEXANDER BANNERMAN.

(From the Aberdeen Observer of January 23, 1835.)

Two weeks ago, we laid before our readers a short Biographical Sketch of Sir Arthur Farquhar. This has produced sundry growls from our sweet-tempered Whig brother, who was pleased to describe the article as magnificent. If he alluded to the merits of the composition, we must say that we feel highly gratified by the approbation of so competent a judge. But if he meant to say that our brief account of Sir Arthur's exploits was overstrained, we must tell him that he was as far wrong as ever he was—and *that* is saying a good deal. It may be, however, that our contemporary was out of humour because we gave some account of Sir Arthur's life, while ignorance prevented him from doing a similar good turn for Mr. Bannerman. To make up for this deficiency, we now take up the pen.

It is well known that our representative is descended from a very ancient family. We pretermit making mention of all that has been recorded regarding them, because a tale which is told by some of the ancient chroniclers is "not at all pleasant," and is, at the same time, somewhat apocryphal. We may state, however, that the first gentleman of the name of Mr Alexander Bannerman, who is recorded as having held a public office in Aberdeen, was one of the keepers of the Forest of Stocket more than four hundred years ago. Whether this gentleman was a progenitor of our M.P. we are unable to say, but it appears that he had not discharged the duties of his office with credit to himself and satisfaction to the community; for we find that in "the year 1398, David Walker, Alexander Bennerman, Matthew Pinks, and William Spelding, keepers of the Forest, were fined eight pennies for destroying, or suffering others to destroy Deers." \* This fine has rather a trifling appearance at the present day, but its value will be better understood, when it is mentioned, that in the following year, the haugh of Gilcomston was let to Matthew Pinks for the yearly rent of eight pounds, and that the whole of the town's lands and waters, rented at that time only 1400 pence.

Of Mr. Bannerman's great grandfather, who was elected to the office of Provost by the rebels in 1715, we have already spoken. Of his late respected father, it is unnecessary for us to say more than that he was Colonel of the blue-coated corps of Gentlemen Volunteers in the early part of the late war—that about forty years ago he was Dean of Guild of the city—and that it was under his charge that the gold chains, which now decorate the persons of our Reform Magistrates, were imported from London.

The subject of the present brief memoir was born about the time when the French Bastille was stormed by the Parisians. Whether this circumstance had any influence on the future destinies of the *native*, (as an astrologer would say), it is impossible for us to tell—but certain it is that Mr B. has never made any conspicuous appearance in a public capacity, except when the public mind was in a state of agitation. Mr B. first entered into public life at Michaelmas 1811, when he became a member of the Town Council of Aberdeen. While he held this office, a schism sprung up in the Council about the appointment of a minister to the East Church. The party to which he belonged was defeated, and at Michaelmas 1812, he *ceased to be* a member of the Council. It is worthy of remark, in these times when so much deference is paid to the wishes of congregations, that Mr B.'s party did not support the clergyman, in whose favour a numerously signed petition was laid on the Council's table, otherwise that gentleman would have been the successful candidate. In the following year (1813), an occurrence took place which nearly cost Mr B. his life. He had an engagement with a man-of-war—but the matter is so neatly and explicitly stated in the first sentence of a pamphlet which Mr B. published upon the subject, that we shall give it verbatim:—"Upon the night of the 10th of August last, returning home about twelve o'clock, an interference took place, on the street, with Sergeant Gordon of the Aberdeen Recruiting District, who endeavoured all he could, and had nearly succeeded in cutting my throat." † Dr Skene bore testimony that, "from the particular situation of the wound, a slight variation in its depth or

direction would most probably have proved fatal." The circumstances which attended the affray were investigated before a military Court of Enquiry. The charge of stabbing could not be brought home to the Sergeant, but an order was issued for his removal from his situation in Aberdeen, which order, it appears, was by no means promptly complied with.

When the town's affairs got into embarrassment in 1817, and when a prospect opened of seizing the high places of the Council Chamber, the number of meetings, cliques, and Committees, which Mr B. attended, it were almost endless to tell. His attention, however, to matters which did not tend directly to the forwarding of his ambitious views, or which were not conducted by his own party exclusively, was always lax in the extreme. At one time or other, he was appointed a Town's Trustee, and never acted—Interim Dean of Guild, and never acted—a Commissioner of Police, and never acted—a Harbour Trustee, and never acted, until he saw a near prospect of the whole Board being elected by the popular voice.

In 1825 a new opportunity presented itself for an attempt to pluck the Town Council from their "pride of place." Notice was given for a renewal of the Harbour Act. Discussions ensued which are familiar to our readers as household words, and in 1828, the Harbour Bill was thrown out. While it was before Parliament, a proposal was made to Mr. Bannerman for a compromise, but at that time he would agree to nothing short of a majority against the Town Council, although he petitioned in the following year for the present act, the terms of which it is unnecessary to state. To pay part of the expense of opposing the Bill of 1828, Mr. B. applied a sum amounting to about £400, which had been raised by a public subscription for procuring volunteers to the navy, and which had fallen into his hands as trustee. A few years previously he had offered to place the money at the disposal of the Magistrates for charitable purposes, and they requested him to retain it until they should consider in what manner it could be best applied. He consoled himself with the proverb that "charity begins at home," and appropriated the money to the payment of Parliamentary expenses without the concurrence of those to whom it belonged. When he was a member of the Town Council in 1811-12 he approved of the building of the Breakwater, and he afterwards stated before a Committee of the House of Commons, that the ship-owners would subscribe money to get it pulled down. Yea, he stated that he disapproved of all the operations about the Harbour, from 1812 to 1828, and yet he admitted that had he remained in the Council, he might have entirely concurred in all that had been done. In 1819, he assured a Committee of the House of Commons, that even the lower class of tea people of Aberdeen had too much common sense to be anxious about Parliamentary Reform; and of his movements in behalf of the great *healing* measure—his speeches from, and fall with, the hustings—his processions under the *Bonnet Rouge* and other such-like constitutional emblems—is it needful for us to speak? Of his conduct in Parliament little need be said. In the House he is nothing but a Whig voter. His friends say that he is an excellent Committee-man, but of this we have no proof, and there is strong presumptive evidence to the contrary. His supporters tell us also that he deserves great praise for his exertions about the Burgh Reform Bill, but what those exertions were, farther than that he wrote a card to Lord Brougham requesting to be informed as to what his Lordship and Earl Grey had said to himself and other Scotch members, we must confess our ignorance. The whole of his addresses and speeches during the late contest are far from creditable to him; and the attack which he made on an Elector who had voted against him, can find no apologist even among his staunchest supporters. He is indebted for his great majority to a heterogeneous assemblage of Whigs, Radicals, Voluntaries, and Revolutionists, with personal friends who believe, no doubt justly, that it is not his *intention* to assist in overturning the established Institutions of the country.

In conclusion we may state that in fairness, we have given a brief account of the public life of each of the late parliamentary candidates for this city; and we are sure that there can be no dissenting voice when we assert that our biographical Sketches have been "clear sensible, and judicious."

\* "An Account of the Antiquity of the cities of New and Old Aberdeen, extracted from their Records. Aberdeen: Printed for Alexander Ross."

† "Statement of Correspondence and Facts, &c. relative to a Court of Enquiry, assembled at Aberdeen, 7th Sept. 1813, to investigate charges against Sergeant Gordon of the Aberdeen Recruiting District. Aberdeen: Printed for John Booth, Jun. 1814."