



Scots Language Centre

Crack Aboot Politics



Document 9

The Schule Brod 1897

Historical Background

The schule brod (school board), which is the subject of this letter, was a recent innovation. Since the Reformation in 1560 schools in Scotland had been run and maintained by the local parish, or burgh council. Schoolmasters were appointed by the parish minister and heritors (landowners), the heritors having the right to nominate and approve because they were liable in law to pay for the schoolmaster's salary and to build and repair schoolhouses. Schoolmasters also had to belong to the Church of Scotland. However, the system began to run into trouble after the Church of Scotland broke apart during the 'Great Disruption' of 1843. Finally, in 1872, the Education (Scotland) Act was passed which established a new national system of education for the country. Attendance at school was now made compulsory until the age of 11, though teachers did not (since 1861) have to belong to the Church of Scotland. School boards were also established to oversee the administration of the schools, and staffed by elected officials who stood from among men in the local community, often including ministers and priests, so churches continued to have a strong influence in the choice of candidates. The school board system would last until 1918.

The Edwin Dardie Letter of 1897

The letter below was sent to the editor of *The Dundee Courier and Argus* and printed on Saturday 10 April 1897. There had been a public meeting held at Ardler, near Dundee, on Wednesday 7 April 1897, at which the present School Board had given account of its activities. During the meeting one of the new candidates for the board, Reverend Stuart, had made some discourteous remarks about the old board members, and they had apparently replied in kind. The meeting became the subject of letters to the press printed on the day of the election (10 April) and one of those letters was written in Scots. It is a good example of local politics, and petty rivalries at play.

Language and Style

The letter generally reads as if it was first drafted in English and then altered and Scotticised. This is because the grammar of English is often carried over, along with phrases typical of English, but not of Scots. But subject to these constraints, and some inconsistencies, the letter is a fair representation of the style of written Scots which was established in the press during the middle of the 19th century and has continued to influence writing even to the present. In particular we might note the following:

ANGLICISMS

There are one or two forms and expressions that are typical of English rather than Scots. For example, the author uses the forms *amount*, *opinion* (possibly pronounced as Scots, but we cannot be sure), *shows*, *strongly* (rather than Scots *shaw* and *strang*, but these may have been typos), *lang-headed* (possibly another typo, but pronounced as Scots *lang-heidit*), and *too* (rather than *an-aw/an aa* or *forby*). The author uses *conspicuous* and *intimate* (rather than Scots *kenspeckle* and *couthie*) and grammar-wise employs *jist noo* (rather than *the noo*, though he does employ *the day*) and *wha hae votes* (rather than *that haes votes*) which are literal translations of English 'just now' and 'who have votes'. He also says *tak it canny* (rather than the usual *caw cannie*) for 'be careful' or 'go easy'. Both Scots *necessar* and English *necessary* also appear.

APOLOGETIC APOSTROPHE

This is the name given to the tradition which began in the 18th century of adding an apostrophe to the middle and ends of words where the writer imagined a letter was 'missing'. This grew out of the confusion caused by the adoption of English conventions for writing.

For example, in Older Scots we find the forms *gangand* (going) or *makand* (making) but because of English influence in always writing *-ing*, people now thought that the correct way to write these words was *gangin'* and *makin'* to show a sound was 'missing'. That is why today we would still write *gangin'* and *makkin'*, though the 'apologetic apostrophe' is avoided by writers except where a word is abbreviated, such as *intil't* (in til it) or *ye'll* (for *ye will*) or to usefully show a difference in pronunciation, such as *dee'd* (the verb, died) rather than *deed* (the noun, act or document). In this text we find the forms *a'* (all), *an'* (unstressed and), *awfu'* (awful), *ca'ed* (*cawed* or called), *e'e* (*ee* or eye), *i'* (unstressed in), and a number of verbs such as *bein'* (*bein* or being), *grantin'* (*grantin* or granting), *peyin'* (*peyin* or paying), *preten'* (pretend), *seekin'* (*seekin* or seeking), etc.



COGNATES

These are a class of words which are clearly related to equivalent words in closely related languages, having sprung from a common origin. So, for example, English *home* and *stone* and Scots *hame* and *stane* both originated from Anglo-Saxon *ham* and *stan*. In this text we find many standard Scots forms such as, *a'thegither* (altogether), *ane* (one), *ain* (own), *anither* (another), *auldest* (oldest), *brod* (board), *depairment* (department), *faither* (father), *fairmer* (farmer), *faut* (fault), *fower* (four), *frae* (from), *freens* (friends), *gie* (give), *gif* (if), *guid* (good), *hame* (home), *ken* (know), *lang* (long), *mair* (more), *manner* (manner), *nicht* (might), *pairty* (party), *regaird* (regard), *sae* (so), *schule* (school), *sud* (should), *tae* (to), *tap* (top), *themesel's* (themselves), *thocht* (thought), *whase* (whose), *whilk* (which), *whaur* (where), *wid* (would), *wye* (way).

NEGATIVE ENDINGS

The author uses fairly standard forms in Scots for representing 'not' and 'did not' at the ends of words. So we find *dinna* (don't), *hisna* (hasn't), and *isna* (isn't).

OO/OU/OW

We have noted in earlier articles that the letters o/u/w could be interchanged in written Scots, but were generally pronounced as 'oo', as in *toun/town* or *cov/cov/cow*. By the 18th century Scots texts had begun to follow the custom (as our author does) of spelling words in common with English in the same way, as in *about*, *out* and *now*, though the vowel was pronounced 'oo' in Scots just as it is today. The writer of the letter tends to spell this sound with 'oo' as we would today – as in *noo* (now) and *oot* (out), *poopit* (pulpit) and *undoobtedly* (undoubtedly) though some words today might retain the 'ou' as in *toun* (town).

VOCABULARY, ETC

The text contains a number of words which are either exclusive to Scots, or most closely associated with Scots. These include *aiblins* (possibly, perhaps), *anent* (concerning or regarding), *aye* (always), *bairns* (children), *billies* (companions, friends), *birkie* (smart ambitious person), *ilka* (every), *unco* (strange, uncommon, unusual). The writer uses *wid* for traditional *wad* (would). Over the years the 'a' had been clipped in speech leaving *w'd* and some writers imagined there was an 'i'. Some writers continue to use the traditional *wad* and simply pronounce it without the 'a'. The author also uses the form *childer* (plural of child) which also existed in Scots, though *bairns* and *weans* have been the standard words used for a long time. It is from the Anglo-Saxon word *cild* that Scots evolved the word *cheil* (person or thing).



TO THE EDITOR OF THE DUNDEE COURIER

SIR, Gin ye wid hae nae objections tae grantin' me the necessary space, I wid like, through the medium o' the *Courier*, to say a wurd or twa anent the above, whilk taks place the day, an' the object o' whilk is tae appoint five gentlemen to tak full chairge o' educational maitters for the neist three years i' the parishes o' Meigle an' Ardler, or "Meigleshire", were I to be mair particular an' gie the district its local name. Noo, I dinna preten' to be an awfu' great authority on Schule Brod affairs, but still anon I ken a thing or twa, an' as I happen to be mair or less intimate wi' ilk ane o' the seven gentlemen wha are seekin' honours jist noo, maybe the electors widna tak it ill oot where I to gie a bit hint o' whilk, in my opinion, wid be the five maist suitable billies for the situation. As an affset, then, I wid beg to remind a' them wha hae votes to dispose o' that there's fower o' the members o' the auld Brod wha are seekin' re-election, and as there hisna been, tae my knowledge, ony complaints as to the wye they hae conducted the affairs o' the Brod durin' the past three years, I wid strongly recommend them for anither term in office. There's nae doot but they're fower guid men, an' the success whilk has attended them i' their ain professions shows that they're possessed o' a guid deal o' common sense an' a fair share o' bisness aptitude, an', bein' unco big ratepayers themesel's, we may tak' it for granted that, while peyin' a due regaird to what is necessar' for the education o' the childer, they will at the same time pey strict attention to the Brod's finances by practisin' economy in a' depairtments. Then, as a suitable colleague to these same billies, I wid hae nae hesitation in recommendin' young Tasker, or "Arny" as he is commonly ca'ed. He's a birkie wi' a keen e'e to "bis", as ony ane can tell gif they'd tak' the trouble to note his success as a risin' young fairmer. An', besides, isna he the auldest son o' "Cammo" the birkie wha, in the capacity o' chairman, his sae ably guided the affairs o' oor Schule Brod for a lang number o' years, an' for whase services it wid be bit fittin' testimonial that "Geordie", the worthy son o' a worthy faither, sud be returned at the tap o' the poll?

A' that I wid say as to the merits or demerits o' the ither twa candidates is, Mr Armit may be, an' I dinna doot that he is, a lang-headed billie, wha, as the genial an' ever-obliging secretary o' the Horticultural Association, has gained a certain amount o' popularity i' the district. Still, I'm thinkin' he has fauts, an' isna' a'thegither a fit an' proper person to represent the ratepayers at the Schule Brod. An' neyther is Mr. Stuart, the rev. gentleman wha has made himself sae conspicuous durin' the contest wi' his fine stage mainnerisms an' somewhat advanced ideas on sic subjects as "Hame Lessons?", "Corporal Punishment", "Should Teachers Supply Books?", *etc.* Puir man, he sud tak' it canny. He hisna been lang in Ardler yet, an' some we ken werena aye his freens. I'm thinkin' he his a guid lot to learn yet, an' it wid aiblins be to his advantage were his services declined too. He cud then gie a little mair attention to the educating' himsel' 'boot the wyes an' means o' hard-workin' country fowks, an' some day it micht dawn upon him that in country districts ilka second or third door isna a bookseller's, whaur the bairns cud get their books wi' a line frae the teacher. I winder gif he means the "tammy shop" principle? I'm thinkin' ye'll be grudgin' me space, though, Maister Editor, sae I'll jist close by askin' the rev. gentleman tae console himsel' i' the meantime wi' the thocht that "corporal punishment," though permitted in oor schules, is maist strictly prohibited in oor poopits; but undoobtedly hame lessons gie's the best results in baith places. Trustin' to see the five I hae mentioned returned as the successful pairty, I am, etc,

EDWIN K.DARDIE

Source: *The Dundee Courier and Argus*, Saturday 10 April 1897.