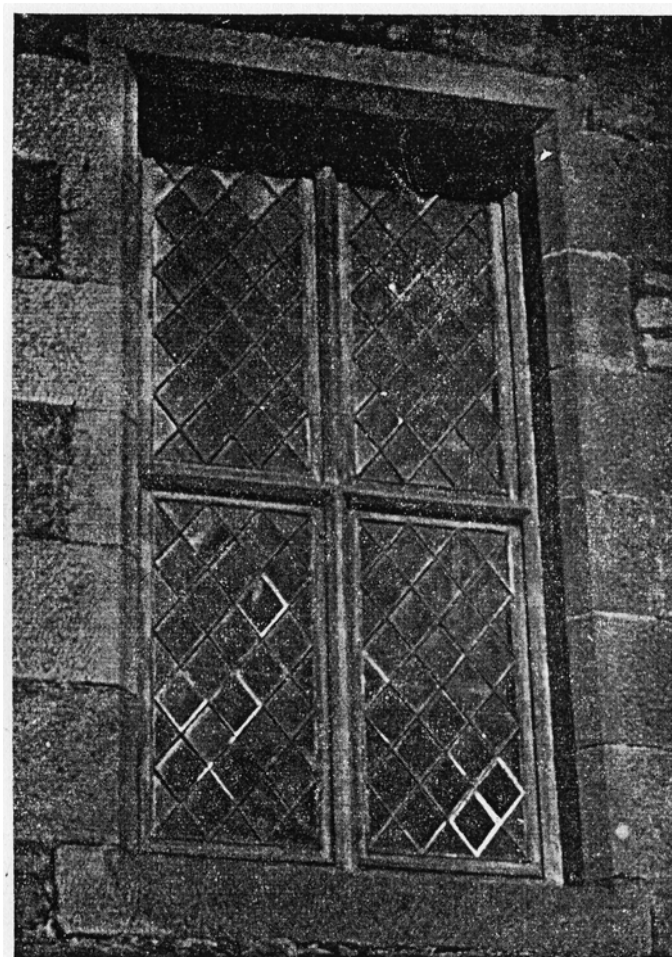


BEHIND THE DIAMOND PANES

The story of a Fife mining community
by BOB HOLMAN



The characteristic Diamond Panes of Fordell village

Cowdenbeath, 1952

FOREWORD

The history books of Scotland record the time and place of great events in our National history. But much of the record of the Scottish people is lost for want of a recorder. More's the pity.

In bygone days, communities were established near the scene of industry and prospered while they served their purpose. Then they passed away leaving little more than a pang of regret in the hearts of those who knew their joys and sorrows.

Old mining villages had a special atmosphere, with habits and customs which passed from one generation to another, and the village of Fordell in the County of Fife was a very outstanding example.

The old rows of houses have served their day and generation. New homes have been found for the village people in nearby towns and villages and little is left to tell then: story.

This book records in simple language the wealth of character and warmth of heart that used to dwell in Fordell village. It illustrates the pawky humour and neighbourly feeling that made life worth living in times that were hard and often sorely trying. The author did not intend this book to be a classic of the English language. But by his real understanding of miners and mining folk, Bob Holman has made it worthy of its subject.

Whether you were born in Fordell, or in nearby Donibristle as I was, or just somewhere else in Scotland, you will find much pleasure, as I did, in reading these pages—so full of human sympathy.

WILLIAM REID,
Crossgates,
Fife,
October, 1952.

Chairman,
Scottish Division,
National Coal Board.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

THE author thanks many of his old Fordell friends for their great assistance in writing this book. Also to Mr Morris Allan, photographer, Dunfermline, for his assistance and photos; to Mr Inglis, Alva, for use of photographic blocks. For that beautiful and encouraging friendship with the family I submit appreciation and thanks to Dr W. Reid.

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INTRODUCTION

HERE is a story of a small mining community in Scotland, close to the main Kirkcaldy-Dunfermline Road, yet with a way of life peculiar to it, a village of less than two hundred people complete in itself, inhabited by generations of the same families for hundreds of years. A community of hard-headed, practical inhabitants, with a kindly outlook, yet of the most conservative nature; they practically cut themselves from the outside world but lived for themselves not as individuals but as a village. Independent to a fault, just living on the existence line, they sought assistance from no outside quarter to attend to their needy and aged, but did so themselves with a modesty that shunned publicity. True they had limited recreation and amusements mostly as village concerns and were thus, all the more enthusiastically carried out.

In connection with their one form of employment, namely, coal mining, there were two unique features, a private railway—one of the very few in Britain—that took the coal from the village mines to a private harbour on the Fife coast five miles away, in characteristic small hand-braked waggons that had done service for over two hundred years. Like the miners the colliery proprietors were also members of generations of one family whom the miners served with unbroken devotion.

*Dedicated to the memory of my late wife Rankin
and our late daughter Kitty
without whose encouragement
the book would never have been written.*

The Paraud

THERE was great activity at the old school house. From my position on a prominent part near the College Brae I stood watching, waiting.

From the different rows of miners' houses dressed children came hurrying out followed by such cries as "noo Tarn, dinna get dirtied afore the ' paraud' or yir faither'll skin you alive." Back came the answer invariably, " A' richt, mither."

Then followed a shout, a chance interrogation cry, "Are you ready, Willie," and without waiting for a reply Tam made a wild rush round Coles Terrace to run full tilt into a companion whom he had said he would "fecht wi' ae arm tied roon ma back."

That was all forgotten, for was not this the yin day o' the year! The twa bools and the plunker they were fighting about when the schulemaister stopped them Tam was willing to give his rival for nothing.

I saw a number of laughing young women beautifully dressed in white coming along arm in arm from the direction of Lovers' Loan. One carried a decorated sash of many colours in which ribbons formed the principal gaudiness.

How were they dressed? Just as I expected - some with hats and some without, but all had long hair hanging behind and, in front, the inevitable "frizz."

A stop was made as the girls, seeing some male companions standing at the Gaffers Gate, cried out their customary salutations such as "Hullo Wull, has yir mither let ye oot?" and "Mind that reel you promised me." The replies were no less characteristic but the greetings and salutations were soon changed from the verbal to the more intimate and soon Wull had his arms around Jean's neck to give her a "Chinney Beardie."

If the object was to give Jean a rosy complexion then the operation was highly successful, and generally Wull's face was also red from the exertion required and the result of one or two hard slaps from Jean in her struggles to get free.

Soon a favoured young man was honoured with "try on the sash," and when he did there were words of admiration - "Man Rab you look real like the thing." However their fun was for the time being brought to an end by a shout from an elderly man who cried out, "Here dinna mess that sash about if I have to wear it the day. Come on, let me see it and let us see what kind o' job you lasses have made o't this time."

"By, that's braw," was his only comment as he admired the work of the girls, who had stayed up late the night before to sew in the many ribbons which hung from the sash.

"Wha's to pit it on? You Jeannie? Come on then lass. Let me bend doon. That's richt. Noo for the usual kiss. That's fine, that taks thirty years aff my life, Jeannie."

A loud banging on a drum nearby caused a stir and there was a cry, "There's Peter Gibb the drummer wanting the Paraud to start."

Yes, I saw this scene from the College Brae as my mind went back sixty years. The boy rushing from his mother's house was myself.

The scene I had recalled was Fordell Paraud, a scene I had pictured scores of times hundreds of miles away, but here I was revisiting the scenes of my youth, unrecognised and unknown.

Coles Terrace was unchanged and no doubt it was the shape of the small diamond-shaped windows in the houses, the old school still the same, the "Lovers' Loan," the old pit in Douglas Cottages the roof of Fordell Store, the Fannies playground, and Day Level Pit, near the unchanged workshops, that made the picture so easy to imagine.

Yes, there it was, and as I lay with closed eyes in that field with my back to a hay rick, no cinema picture could be clearer.

Soon the rounding up by Peter Gibb on his drum did what was necessary. Near by was "Robbie Hardie"; I recognised him quite distinctly. All he wanted was to get to hit that drum, but Peter replied, "no the noo." However, Robbie, years later, replaced Peter Gibb on that drum, and realised the ambitions he had that day.

"Come on, you boys," cried the Deacon. (All men are boys on Paraud Day in Fordell. They are only men when appealed to). "We havena a' day to get ready." Then right in front went the Deacon, proud of his sash. I easily recognise him, it is Rab Penman.

"Twinny" Beveridge, the band leader, gets his men out. I recognise them all with their new uniform, including their pill box caps. They take their places behind the Deacon. The Committee come next and the procession marches a few paces forward to allow the "Hill Women," pithead girls, all dressed in white, arm in arm and in threes, to take their place.

Then follow the villagers who never miss a "paraud." The names? Why they were nearly all Beveridges! There was Beveridge A, Beveridge B, Beveridge C, Beveridge D, and aye, there was Beveridge (Wilson) and Beveridge Dumplin'. Others were there; yes, there was Tam Dryburgh, Willie Smart, Johnnie Japp, the other members of the Penman family, Peter, Eck and Tam, with their sister, Aggie, looking on with admiration at her brother the Deacon.

Then came the schoolchildren, wonderfully quiet for a Paraud morning. The reason was that the "schulemaister," Mr James Currie, senior, was looking on. Only an occasional cheer until the procession got beyond his sight, and then they were beyond his control.

"Are you ready, boys," said Jimmy Carmichael, and at a nod of his head, Peter Gibb sounded the first beat of his drum. At the third the Paraud marched off to the tune of "Ho, Ho, The Merry Masons." One loud cheer drowned the first few notes and soon the procession was on its way.

There was no denying the Paraud was an impressive sight. The parade as it left the old school was one of which all the people in the village were justifiably proud.

In the bright sunshine of the mid-summer morning the procession marched gallantly down the road. Fordell Brass Band was on the lead, while at intervals standard-bearers carried banners, the poles of which were gaily decorated with flowers, begged, borrowed or stolen the night before from the flower gardens.

It was Fordell's great event of the year, which extended to three days, and in the celebrations no outsider was allowed to participate. The only exception was when extra bands were needed for the Paraud, and on one occasion three bands were actually in the procession. After the procession these outside musicians were again "strangers" and dare not use the fact of them being "in the band" for one day, as a means of breaking through the rigid rule that strangers, were not wanted.

Any attempt to get past the rules, that could not have been more stringent had they been drafted into a constitution, was defeated by a solid village veto. This was the unwritten law of the village, which included part of Mossgreen until recent years. "From January till January and a' day and every day, year in and year oot."

There were several who tried to break down that rule, but the attempts always failed, and if a "stranger" came to reside in Fordell he was generally frozen out in a short time.

I remember on one occasion three families of miners coming to Fordell in one day from the Lothians. There were instantly meetings and consultations, for while the ordinary stranger was not wanted, "Lowdeners" were openly detested.

They could "thole" folk from Crossgates or even Donibristle or "Dirthill" as it was called, though they would not confer the honour of allowing them to be looked upon as villagers, but "Lowdeners" to come and bide in Fordell. Why, it was an outrage!

Short of sending round the village bell to call a meeting and ask them to leave the way they came - namely, by Aberdour and the Leith ferry - everything else was done. The women of the village discussed the "outrage" at the "wall," and the men discussed the matter at the "College." The "hill women" had the question before them at "piece time." The only ones, however, who really took drastic action, were the schule bairns. The girls refused to speak to the girl "strangers." The boys went further; they stoned the boys from the schule at Mossgreen.

Mr Currie, the schoolmaster, got to hear of this and his threats of the tawse had some effect - at least the boys in attendance at school stopped the stone throwing. Still no one could stop the villagers from thinking and looking in an unfriendly way or passing remarks.

"How long must a person be a stranger in Fordell?", was often asked by those outside the sacred precincts defined by the Bulwark and the Durham Raw. In the minds of some a stranger could never become a Fordell native.

Maggie Watson, who came to the village as a bride, used to say that it would take fifty years for her to pass the Initiation Ceremony. Yet she was married to one of the "Berridges," as the name Beveridge was called, a family which may have been one of the founders of the village. If that is true, then Maggie has not long passed into the sacred circle of Fordellites, but no doubt to the children of the real Fordellites Maggie was always a stranger.

A friend of mine was walking past Mossgreen Churchyard one Saturday morning many years ago when he saw a funeral. The cortege had come up the College Brae.

He knew quite a number of persons in Fordell and asked who was getting buried, but the reply that it was only a stranger put the question of identification of the dead person out of his mind.

To his surprise a month later, he found that the person who was being buried was an old acquaintance of his - a workmate who had been resident in the village for forty years.

But there was another irritant feature of the invasion of the three families from the Lothians. One of the men wore a hat. Not only so, but he wore it every day. This was unheard of.

On the first day after the man came from his work in the Lady Ann Pit, and after he got washed and had his dinner, he appeared in the Old Square wearing a bowler hat. This was an outrage - a miner, a common or ordinary miner, wearing a hat! The only man in Fordell or nearby who wore a hat "through the week" was the minister, John Clark.

The colliery manager nor the gaffer, not even the doctor, wore a hat on week days. Hidden away in a trunk in every house in Fordell was a hat of some sort, a tile hat or a round hat, but they were not for ordinary occasions. They were for funerals, not even for ordinary kirk service, and after the funeral they were carefully dusted, put into a paper bag and laid away for the next occasion when a native died.

Here was a man who wore a hat every day, even to "gaun to the toon" with his wife to carry home the week's groceries. Why the thing was preposterous! Soon he became known by no name except "The Man wi' the Hat."

He even went to a quoiting match with his hat, and when the local man who was upholding the quoiting reputation of Fordell lost the match, his only excuse was - "Hoo can a body play wi' a man wi' a hat lookin' on?"

The Great Day and its origin

BY this time those of you who are not versed in the history of Fordell will be wondering what this Paraud actually was. You will have ere this associated the word with Parade, but you will be wondering why the parade, why the holiday festivity, and why it should be associated with this little out of the way and, for generations, isolated mining village of Fordell.

Well, you were quite right with the association with the word parade, but the reason why this parade should be held every year in Fordell makes quite an interesting story.

An old friend of mine, who saw many Fordell Parades, used to recite the words of a song which, she said, was composed by a Fordell man. Of this song I can only remember one verse and the chorus. They ran as follows:—

*Then we went to Anson Hill,
The barrels were there wi' five guinea ale.
And the ravens got in to spill
On the 20th day of July.*

Chorus:—

*Hurray, Hurray, for the Fordell Laird,
Lang in Fordell may they be spared,
And the miners' bounty even shared
On the 20th day of July.*

To me it seemed rather two verses of the song than a verse and chorus, but they verify a few things I heard about the Paraud. Firstly, the event was held on 20th July each year or the Friday nearest that date. The song also proves that some of the festivities took place at Anson Hill, which is still the home of the manager of the Fordell Coal Company, and opposite Mossgreen Church.

The ravens, my informant said, were not of the crow family but a name given to the men of the village of the more boisterous type who laid siege to the barrels of "five guinea ale."

As to the origin of the Paraud, I have got all my information from old inhabitants — information which has been handed down for generations and I offer no further proof.

Fordell is one of the oldest mining districts in Scotland or England. Old shafts in fields and many in gardens walled round about, and remnants of shafts long since filled in, give ample evidence of this. Nearly every field has such an old coal pit shaft, and in several there is still evidence of wooden stairs that tell of the days when the women walked up the shafts carrying the coals in creels or wicker baskets.

The earliest coal pits belonged to the lairds or ground proprietors, and at Fordell it is well known the laird was always a Henderson, to whom I will refer later. In these early days of mining not only did the coal pits belong to the lairds, but the miners belonged to him as well, so that when the pits changed hands the miners went with them, and they had a new master whom they had no option but to serve.

The miners were serfs, and exaggerated stories handed down from generation to generation tell of how they were chained to the hutches and how any "gangrel body" walking past the coal mines was liable, as in the days of the press-gang, to be seized and turned into a serf of the mines.

There was never any doubt about the miners being serfs or slaves, but it is surprising how the stories arose of miners being chained to hutches.

There were no deep shafts in these early days, and from the appearance of coal workings at Blairadam, recently exposed by the working of a quarry for "blae" to make bricks, the bottom of the shaft was only a few feet from the surface.

There was no doubt that in the early days of coal mining in Fordell, or even at Dunfermline, it was the "crap oot" or surface seams, which were worked, the inlet being at the place where the coal "cropped out" or, in other words, came to the surface.

These days of serfdom had, of course, to come to an end, and this introduces the origin of the Fordell Paraud. The Laird of Fordell realised that the freedom of the miners was coming soon and, no doubt, being in sympathy with the movement for legislation that was going on to liberate them, he granted them their freedom exactly a year before the time when it became law, and set a splendid example and assisted in the passing of the act.

The Fordell miners, to commemorate the occasion, organised the Fordell Paraud, a day of rejoicing for their liberation.

I cannot tell you the exact date on which the Fordell miners got their freedom from serfdom, but it was a very long time ago.

I have been told that the Day Level, an underground waterway connecting all the pits in Fordell to an outlet near Fordell House, was made by French prisoners in the time of the Napoleonic War, and, if that is so, then the Paraud must have been started before that time, and may have been celebrated in the 18th century.

What is known is that the Paraud Day was near as possible to the 20th July, a date referred to in the song I have quoted above. As can be understood, it was a very important event in the village life of Fordell, for it lasted three days - Friday, Saturday and Monday. The absence of celebrations on Sunday denotes that the observance of the sanctity of the Sabbath must have also been a strong point in the life of the miner, as it was in the life of all the people of Scotland.

Preparations and appointment of Deacon

FOR three months in the year the thoughts of the villagers were on the Paraud. In the month of May each year a written notice appeared on the pitheads stating that a meeting would be held to appoint a Deacon and Committee.

These notices were sufficient to bring a large crowd to the scene of the meeting, namely, The Pannies, a piece of communal ground between the colliery office and the Engine Pit, but to ensure a large crowd the Brass Band paraded the principal rows of houses and then made for the Pannies, followed by the inhabitants.

The Deacon of the previous year called the meeting to order, a duty that for many years fell on Peter Penman, then on his oldest son, Peter. There was little difficulty in choosing the Deacon as it was nearly always a case of re-election, that rule being only broken by death or illness.

Thus Peter would be elected again, and then would follow the election of the Committee, a word that was always pronounced with a long "tee."

Then would follow the nomination of such prominent men of the village as John Japp, James Hope, Tom Beveridge, Bob Ramsay, Twinny Beveridge, Eck Penman, Rab Penman, Wattie Muir. The Committee would be elected, the meeting would end, the band would render a few selections and would play back to the old school, their meeting-place, generally by way of the College, where little encouragement would make them stop to partake of the hospitality of Mrs Hamilton.

The Committee, with the Deacon appointed, lost no time in getting to business. Because of a special privilege by the Sheriff the Deacon of Fordell Paraud had a special licence to sell beer and spirits for six weeks before the Paraud and six weeks after it. This meant that the Deacon's house was turned into a miniature public-house for three months.

The Committee would make their usual calls on Fordell Store to ask the price of the barrel of beer. For many years the tenant of Fordell Store was a Mr James Hamilton, son of Mr Hamilton of St. David's, but no one in Fordell used such a formal name as James, it was always "Jimmy."

Later Messrs. Fraser & Carmichael, Dunfermline, leased the premises, and in turn the managers were first of all James Dick, or rather, to follow the local custom, Jimmy Dick, now of D.C.I. Ltd., Dunfermline, and later Fred Steven, later resident in Cowdenbeath.

The Committee would inevitably tell the manager that his price was more than Mrs Hamilton's price that was in every case a shilling or two less than the figure wanted by the Fordell Store. Then when the price was reduced to that of Mrs Hamilton's, the Committee would march to Mrs Hamilton and inform her that she would get her share of the order of beer at the same price as they were getting it at Fordell Store.

It was only when Mrs Hamilton and Fred Steven met to discuss matters that they found how they had been done, and yet the next year the same trick was played.

The whisky the Committee bought direct from the Grange Distillery at Burntisland - always a grand excuse for a jaunt to the coast town.

The special licence to the Committee was seldom abused. The barrels of beer were kept in a cellar either at the Fordell Store or at the College and were taken away in pails as required. The Deacon was the keeper of the keys of the cellars.

In the days before the McKenzie Act restricted the licensing hours there were a few late nights, but auld Peter Penman did not favour such events, and with his customary, "Working day the morn, chaps," he got his room cleared at quite a reasonable hour.

"Eck" Penman, who told me that he was never the Deacon but often had the chance of the honour, and that his oldest brother, Peter, still alive and resident in Brand's Buildings, Crossgates, and over ninety years of age, was reputed to be a very strict Deacon and did not give the habitues of the house at 1 Monteith Terrace too much rope or too much drink.

"He steyed in this very hoose I am steyin' in noo, as oor fether, Peter Penman, afore us, the auldest Deacon I mind o'," said Alexander. "Peter is the only Deacon left, and wi' Davie Philip, noo bidin' in Cowdenbeath, and me, the last members of Fordell Paraud Committee."

CHAPTER IV.

On the March

A GAIN I visualise the Paraud on its way to the Big Hoose at Fordell after the procession has made a tour of the village. They proceed by way of the mineral railway on which is taken the coal to St. Davids, a private port on the Forth, owned by the proprietors of the Fordell Colliery. Of course a Fordell Wattie never says St. Davids, but the broad version of the name—St. Dauvids.

Along the railway the road breaks off to Fordell House, and I can see the happy gathering approaching Fordell House with Fordell Brass Band still leading. I can see Lady Henderson coming forward to welcome the marchers. After the part of the welcome which is verbal and is reciprocated, I can see the "spiritual" welcome which is very much to the liking of the older men in the procession and they are soon toasting the hostess, the lairds who have gone before, and all persons connected with the Henderson family.

In another corner the pithead girls are each presented with a pound of sweets and the merriment increases, to be broken into by a general invitation to inspect the gardens.

Then comes the time when they must return to Fordell, and the procession again forms up to make the return journey by way of Crossgates, Springhill and Mossgreen. The whole countryside could not mistake that it was the day of Fordell Paraud.

At Anson Hill, the home of the colliery manager, everything was in preparation for more festivities. The manager, whether it was in the days of Mr Robertson or Mr Morton, received the people and, according to the song, "The barrels were there wi' five guinea ale." Some idea of the exuberance of the male section of the paraders can be gamed by the following line—"And the ravens got in to spill."

There was something for everyone, old or young, and the fun went on apace until well on in the night. The children, tired with their play, went home to bed, but not so the older people.

The Paraud Denner

TO the menfolk who were in the know and in favour with the Committee the attraction was the Paraud Dinner in the house of the Deacon—and what a night!

The principal item on the menu for the dinner was "saut fish," mostly "saut skate," a dish that required days of pre-preparation. Not only days, but nights too, were required, as for days previously the salted skate and cod had been lying on the tiles of the house to get it into the right condition. During the Paraud Day this had been boiled and was ready to be served on that night of nights in the Fordell calendar.

I can quite understand a smile of understanding on your face at salt fish being the principal item on the menu that night. The same suspicion often entered my mind as it entered the minds of many more, and I venture to suggest that we are all right.

A miner's house then, as it has been the order for many years until a few years ago, was a "but and ben." The "but" was the kitchen and the "ben" the parlour, bedroom and sitting-room all rolled into one.

It was in such a two-roomed house that the Paraud Denner was held for many years at No. 1 Monteith Terrace. No. 10 Downing Street to Londoners is of no more importance than No. 1 Monteith Terrace was to the Fordell villagers.

There were "tatties" with jackets off and "tatties" with jackets on, and the meal was served with beer drawn from a barrel hi the corner. When the crowd was largest, this meal was served in both the "but" and the "ben."

The chairman, the Deacon, made everyone feel at home and with song and music, in which a melodeon or fiddle figured, the fun went on until midnight, when the revellers reluctantly took their leave, reluctant because of the knowledge that the chairman could not use his customary warning about next day being a working day.

A little after midnight a policeman would make his appearance, but all he could see were small groups of the oldest men discussing, in not too low voices, of how many Parauds they had seen, what to their minds had been the best Parauds, and what each of them would do if he was the Deacon.

There is nothing like a drink just a little over the moderate stage to revive memories and to make all the world sociable, and in the early morning at many a corner-end stories were told of Paraud Day experiences of many years before. The glories, traditions, and accomplishments of Fordell Brass Band were always brought to the fore, and as a large number of the gathering at the Paraud Denner were members or past members of the band, stories of the band's performances were told with pride. These stories were inter-mixed with details of ploys that brought out hilarious laughter.

Such incidents detailed in great detail, often at the expense of one of the company or a relative, refreshed the memory of other such incidents and often "Do you mind o' yon?" started another. Real danger was introduced when someone started an argument on the merits of the original flute band compared with the brass band that followed, but the danger of a first-class lively scene was averted by a timely jocular remark. Gradually the gathering started to disperse in twos.

As the door of one of the revellers was reached, a feminine voice would ring out, "Are ye no' comin' in the nicht, Wull. You had better say 'guid nicht,' or 'guid mornin' raither."

"A' richt, Leeb," one would reply, "I'm jist comin' in, just wait a wee while till I see Tarn roond the coarner." A few minutes later one reveller would get home shouting about how he would meet his pal of the previous night at the sports to-day and he was "gey weel shure he would bate him in the auld man's race."

"You never supped the parritch," came the reply.

The last words, however, were more pleasant and were generally, "I'll see you the mornin'," forgetting the day had been begun already by about two hours.

CHAPTER VI.

Fordell Ball

I WISH I could take all my readers back sixty or seventy years with me to the old School in Fordell on the night of Fordell Ball.

Some may ask if the village could only boast one dance in the year. Certainly not; they had several dances, including die Foresters' Ball, the Gardeners' Ball, and others, but in the life of the village there was only one "Fordell Ball." It was always on the Friday, the first night of the Paraud celebrations, and was held in the Auld Schule.

Now just have a look into the building, which you will see is crowded, and between nine o'clock and ten o'clock others are still being squeezed in.

There are the two fiddlers on a suspiciously rocky platform made up of hall seats. Yes, it is Willie Berridge and partner from Crossgates and they have just finished playing the first dance, which is the Grand March round the hall and then there is the call "Get set for the Circassian Circle."

The changing of partners in this dance always acts as a kind of re-union, and the different greetings round the hall is ample indication that the company of dancers are about the same as the previous year.

One thing will have struck you also, and that is that there is no array of ball dresses and frocks. That is quite true, as it is a recognised rule that the young ladies must come in the dresses they have worn during the day's Paraud celebrations.

There is no doubt you will have recognised by this time that this is responsible for a more than usually happy gathering, and the want of that reserve generally associated with the wearing of orthodox ballroom garments.

Unlike the other dances in the village, no written or printed invitations were sent out. They were not required. The dancing element of the village had been looking forward to this night, and all who cared to come forward were admitted, until the room was filled to its utmost capacity. Even when that stage was apparently reached, others got in.

In the earlier days of the Fordell Ball, there was the selection of the belle of the ball, and stories are still plentiful, and handed down with a certain amount of pride, of how someone's aunt, mother, or even grandmother, was the belle of Fordell Ball one particular year.

The young ladies marched round the hall and a selection committee, after careful judging, for their decision was always very much criticised, chose the belle of the ball. This honour meant that the chosen one's partner for the night had to pay forfeit sweets to the young ladies and something equally acceptable to the men.

Gradually the selection of the belle came to be recognised by the company that a certain young lady was the prettiest dressed and most attractive present, but no forfeits were paid.

There is an old song to the tune of Kelvin Grove still remembered by those who frequented Fordell Ball, and the Chorus went as follows:—

*Are you gaun to Fordell Ball, bonnie lassie oh?
Are you gaun to Fordell Ball, bonnie lassie oh?
If you gaun to Fordell Ball, I will dress you like a doll,
Wull you gaun to Fordell Ball, bonnie dearie oh?*

The last line of the chorus was generally changed to include a young lady's name instead of "bonnie dearie," and among names remembered to this day are Annie Daly, Martha Beveridge, Jeannie or Janet Livingstone.

Reading between the lines of that song one can understand the method of invitation to the dance, which was 'generally by word of mouth by the young man to a girl friend several weeks before the

night of the ball. A young miner generally brought his sweetheart, but a young man not so suited had to make his own selection and to get one of the popular young ladies he had to ask early.

As the Fordell Ball was not strictly a partner dance - but more of a village festival, young ladies not honoured with a formal approach for partnership that night used to go in small numbers, in a manner unattached. Young men were there, too, in numbers, who were also unattached and they were saved the expense of a pair of dancing shoes - the recognised present by a young man to his partner for the night.

Of the ladies who went to the ball a few were employed in linen factories in Dunfermline, and they travelled to their work from Crossgates Station in a special factory train in the morning, returning in the evening.

The largest number of young women were pithead girls for, after all, it is a miners' holiday, and time of rejoicing and thankfulness.

The ball was always a great success. It was one great happy family, and with jigs, reels, waltzes, lancers, quadrilles, polkas, "Flowers of Edinburgh," haymakers, etc., the time sped on only too quickly. The dance was held in the middle of July, and some young men had reached their third collar before the end was in sight. The recognised time for stopping was six o'clock, but often the fiddlers were busy as late as eight o'clock.

The Fordell Ball has been but a memory for many years now, but to-day many a one looks back with fond regret and with loving remembrance to the pleasant nights spent at this dance.

The famous song, "After the Ball," with its suggestion of broken hearts and shattered romance, could not have been written about the Fordell Ball, for the scenes, after the dancing was finished, were always ones of gaiety and signs of deep-rooted friendship.

