

THE TRINITY HOUSE.



ASSING through Trinity Square, City, after a visit to the Tower or the Mint, the stranger in London observes, situated on the northern eminence of the square and forming almost one entire side of it, a long, low, handsome Grecian building in Portland stone. It has a large

railed-in courtyard in front, is approached through wide carriage-gates on either side; and altogether wears an aspect of importance which is sure to excite the stranger's curiosity. On making inquiry of a passer-by, he learns that the edifice is known as the Trinity House; and, if this name conveys to his mind no definite idea as to the purposes for which the establishment exists, a peep into the capacious hall of the building would at once afford him a general notion, at least, on the subject. For, disposed on either hand, he would see models, in glass cases, of lighthouses, light vessels, buoys, and beacons, and would gather that it is with these important matters that the Trinity House has to do. If, when he has returned to his hotel, he should refer to the official pages of the London Directory, he would find, under the head of "Trinity House (Corporation of the)" that the Duke of Edinburgh is the master of this organisation; that Admiral Sir Richard Collinson, K.C.B., is Deputy Master; that the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Argyll, Earl Beaconsfield, Earl Granville, Mr. Gladstone, and several other eminent men are enrolled among its "Elder Brethren;" that Prince Leopold is described as one of its "Younger Brethren;" and that its official staff is composed of a secretary, assistant secretary, engineer, accountant, and a score of clerks. Should the stranger feel still further curiosity on the subject, and desire to be enlightened as to the origin, constitution, history, and labours of the Trinity House, he would have to consult a great many authorities, and should especially study the multifarious evidence published in 1861, by the Royal Commission on lights, buoys, and beacons; but, if he be not terribly in earnest in the matter, he may perhaps be satisfied with such information as the following pages contain.

The Honourable Corporation of Trinity House, or, to use the words of its original charter, "The Guild, Fraternity, or Brotherhood of the most glorious and undivided Trinity," dates its existence back to the reign of Henry VII., though its functions then related only to the piloting of ships. Subsequently—in the reign of Henry VIII.—the association was incorporated by royal charter, which was confirmed and modified by Edward VI., Mary, Elizabeth, and James I. The charter of James I. settled the Corporation as it is now. This charter was, however, dissolved in 1647, but was renewed in the reign of Charles II. It is to this renewal that Samuel Pepys, who was a Younger

Brother of the Trinity House, thus alludes in his famous Diary, under date January 2nd, 1660-61:—

"This day I left Sir W. Batten and Captain Rider my chine of beef for to serve to-morrow at Trinity House, the Duke of Albemarle being to be there, and all the Brethren, it being a great day for the reading of their new charter, which the King hath recently given them."

Pepys, by the way, seems to have enjoyed immensely his connection with the Trinity House. One frequently meets in his Diary with most laudatory accounts of the good fellowship and the good cheer to which that connection introduced him. Here are examples:—

"By barge to Stepney with my lord, where at Trinity House we had great entertainment. . . . At noon Sir W. Pen and I to the Trinity House, where was a feast made by the wardens. Great good cheer. . . . To the Trinity House, and there dined very well; and good discourse among the old men. . . . At noon, with Creed to the Trinity House, where a very good dinner among the old jokers."

The charter of Charles II. was surrendered to that king, and renewed by his successor in 1685.

The first light under the management of the Trinity House was erected in 1680; all lighthouses existing in this country previous to that time—and many that have been built since—having been erected by private persons, who, under patents obtained from the king, levied dues on passing ships, and frequently derived considerable fortunes therefrom. "A speculative man," says an eminent modern writer, "would propose to erect a lighthouse just as he might propose to sink a coal mine. If there was a dangerous rock at sea, in front of a seaport, any man might propose to the Trinity House to erect a building there for the purpose of guiding ships, in which case he was allowed to levy dues on the ships that passed. Or, if he had political influence, he might use it for the purpose of obtaining a lighthouse." It is only, indeed, within the past half-century—viz., by the Act of Parliament of 1836—that private ownership in lighthouses has been compulsorily abolished; and some idea of the wealth which must have accrued from such property may be gathered from the following statement of the immense sums which the Corporation of Trinity House was compelled to pay for the proprietorship of a few of those lighthouses—rickety and dilapidated as they often were—that had not previously belonged to them. Thus:

The Smalls Lighthouse, purchased in 1836, cost .....	£170,468
„ Tynemouth „ „ „ 1841, „ .....	124,678
„ Spurn High and Low Lighthouses (2) .....	309,531
„ Skerries Lighthouse .....	444,984
Total amount paid for five lighthouses	£1,049,661

The Corporation of Trinity House has now the superintendence and management of all lighthouses, light-vessels, buoys, and beacons in England, Wales, the Channel Islands, Gibraltar, and Heligoland, except such as are under local authorities, over whom,

however, the Corporation possesses jurisdiction. It also exercises control over the two other great British Lighthouse Boards—viz., the Commissioners of Northern Lights (Scotch) and the Commissioners of Irish Lights. It is further entrusted with the licensing and supervision of pilots, and with the dredging and supply of ballast, for the Port of London; and is required by the terms of its charter to assist the judge of the High Court of Admiralty in cases where nautical experience is needed; two of the Elder Brethren attending the Court for each such case. Its gross receipts average a quarter of a million pounds sterling per annum; any profits arising therefrom being transmitted to the National Exchequer, through the Board of Trade, to whom it is directly responsible for its revenue and expenditure. The dues which are levied on passing ships for the use of the lights differ in amount, according to a variety of considerations, one of the chief of which is the principle that each light shall pay the cost of its own maintenance. But, in all cases, the charges are fixed at the minimum rates, regard being had to the aforesaid condition. Light dues are paid by each vessel to the Collector of Customs at the port of arrival; and by that officer are transmitted to the Trinity House.

In addition to the public functions which the Corporation discharges, it occupies an important position as one of the most ancient, wealthy, and dignified of the old City guilds. In this respect it, of course, owns no allegiance to the Board of Trade or the Treasury, but disburses its funds as it thinks fit. Its private revenue is derived from bequests of individual Elder Brethren, and from other sources of income which the Legislature would be powerless to control, even were the Corporation to cease to exist as the chief custodians of our lighthouses; and this revenue it largely employs for charitable purposes connected with the mercantile marine.

Its working Board consists of the Deputy Master and fifteen Elder Brethren, composed of retired commanders in the Royal Navy and merchant service—the distinguished names enumerated in the early part of this article being, with the exception of the Deputy Master, those of its *honorary* Elder Brethren merely—and the position of an active Elder Brother is one which is much coveted by such commanders, being a post of great dignity, honour, and usefulness. The Board meets weekly, but committees of it sit almost daily for the transaction of the special duties with which they are entrusted; and periodical inspections, in one of the Trinity House steam-yachts, are made by the Elder Brethren of all the lights, &c., under their control.

Each Elder Brother wears, on official occasions, a uniform very similar to that of a captain in the Royal Navy, consisting of cocked hat, epaulettes, sword, &c., the main difference being that the facings are red instead of white; and every Trinity Monday, in accordance with an ancient custom, all the working members of the Board, in their undress suits, march in procession to the parish church of St. Olave's, Hart Street, where a special sermon is preached to them.

Men of the highest distinction have occupied the position of Master of the Trinity House; the Prince Consort, Lord Palmerston, and the Duke of Edinburgh having successively filled that office in the present reign.

It will thus be seen that the Corporation of the Trinity House is an association of great antiquity and importance. That in its venerable age it retains much of the vigour of youth—though old, is not effete—is sufficiently attested by its recent labours for the benefit of the mariner, notably the erection of such lighthouses as those on the Bishop, Smalls, Wolf, and Hanois rocks, all of which works are triumphs of engineering skill.

