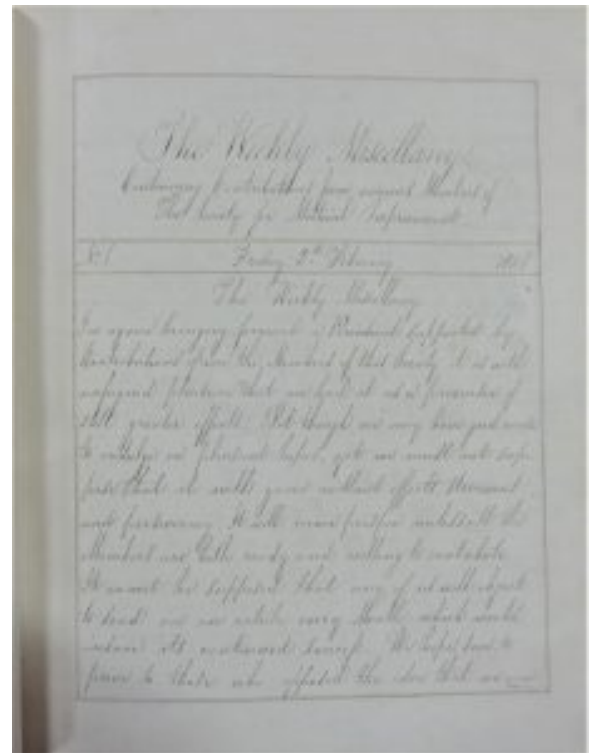


The Weekly Miscellany



The Society for Mutual Improvement (Edinburgh), *The Weekly Miscellany*, [title page], No. 1, 2 February 1849 (Mitchell (AL) 358075, ©CSG CIC Glasgow Museums and Libraries Collection: The Mitchell Library, Special Collections)

Overview

According to the 'Preface' of the 1849 volume, The Society for Mutual Improvement was formed in 1846. Since that time, it had admitted 48 men (see below) and had 108 essays delivered at its meetings. The society had its own library for its members' use in which it was estimated there were between two and three hundred volumes. The object of the society was 'the improvement of the Minds of its Members in Useful and Entertaining knowledge' ('Laws and Constitution, 1849', The Society for Mutual Improvement, Edinburgh, in *The Weekly Miscellany*, Nos. 1-26, 02 February 1849 - 25 July 1849, p. viii).

The group met weekly on Friday nights at 7pm, but the venue is not mentioned (possibly somewhere in the New Town?). The subscription fee was 4d per quarter.

There is no list of readers in this volume, and, with the exception of the Office Bearers — a list of which is found at the front of the volume — we don't know the members' names or addresses. It is unclear if the 48 members stated to have been admitted since the society's founding represented the then current state of its membership: in February 1849, the number of members is given as 22, with only about half of the members attendant at the meetings ('A Correspondent', 'Correspondence', *The Weekly Miscellany*, 9 February 1849, p. 16).

The magazine (the full title of which is *The Weekly Miscellany; Containing Contributions from various Members of The Society for Mutual Improvement*) 'originated in a desire for benefiting the Society with which it is connected by furnishing a medium for the interchange of sentiment between its Members' (James Boyd, 'Preface', *The Weekly Miscellany*, p. iv). There are 26 issues bound together in one hardcover volume. With very few exceptions, each issue is eight pages with between four and five short contributions apiece written by various members of the society using a nom-de-plume, all of which are re-written by James Boyd, the Editor-cum-Treasurer. This was an uncommon practice in mutual improvement and literary groups. It was usually done to try to maintain the anonymity of the authors as their respective handwriting was presumably recognisable by other group members. It also helped to give a uniformity to the magazine, which, for some societies — including this one — was of some import.

The issues contain a mixture of essays and articles on various topics, and some serial fictional pieces along with original poetry. Beginning in May 1849, it also includes a few extracts from published authors (e.g. Samuel Johnson, Saint Basil, William Haslitt) as filler material at the very end of an issue. There is no original artwork in any of the issues.

What is interesting about this magazine is that the society seemed to use it as a magazine-cum-minute book: included in each issue is a piece entitled 'Society for Mutual Improvement', which records the details of the essay given at the previous week's meeting, and includes a summary of the 'criticism' (i.e. the comments made by members) that followed. Debates were usually held after the essays, and a note of the subject and some general comments are included. Typically, these things are recorded in a society's minute book rather than its magazine.

A 'Correspondence' section is a regular feature in these issues. Members wrote letters to the Editor suggesting improvements for various aspects of the society meetings or the magazine (or both), or indeed for the members themselves. These letters could include criticism of the criticisms. This section thus acted as a dynamic discussion

forum for society members.

Name of Club, Society or Group That Produced the Magazine

The Society for Mutual Improvement (Edinburgh)

Date of Existence

October 1846-1849?

Date of Magazine

Nos. 1 - 26, 02 February 1849 - 25 July 1849

Number of Issues

26

Manuscript/Published Magazine

Manuscript

Contents and Contributions

Articles (non-fiction); Correspondence column; Essays; Extracts of published works; Filler; Index; Laws and Constitution; List of Office Bearers; Poems (original); Preface; Serial articles/stories; Title pages

Repository

Mitchell Library Special Collections

Reference

Mitchell (AL) 358075