Some Account of the Worshipful Company of Grocers, of the City of London

Heath John Benjamin
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SAINT ANTHONY

Patron Saint of the Company of Grocers

from an ancient carved figure preserved at Grocers Hall.
Some Account of the
Worshipful Company of Grocers,
OF THE
CITY OF LONDON,
By
JOHN BENJAMIN HEATH ESQ.

"Ihercibus hic Italis mutat sub sole recens
vagusum piper et pallentis grana cyniciin
Persius, Sat. V.

LONDON. 1829.
Not Published.
TO THE

MASTER, WARDENS,

AND THE

Members of the Court of Assistants,

GENTLEMEN,

In presenting to you the following pages, I ought, perhaps, to express some diffidence at the reception they are likely to meet with, and to make a multitude of apologies for the inefficient mode in which I have executed my undertaking. All this I would willingly do were I an author by profession, or even by pretension; but, as I am neither the one or the other, I shall content myself with saying that I have endeavoured to do my best. I am conscious that my work abounds with faults, both of omission and commission; but, when I assure you that it has been executed at those intervals which my avocations left me, and that,
from the nature of the subject, it was impossible for me to derive assistance from any one, you will, I am sure, peruse its contents with that feeling of indulgence which I claim at your hands. I felt the strongest interest on the subject, and it was natural I should do so, considering that it treats of the origin and progress of the most ancient of the twelve Companies of London, a Company now composed of individuals in whose society I have passed some of the most pleasing hours of my life, and from whom I have received so many proofs of kindness and of friendship.

With every feeling of gratitude and attachment I now present to you the result of my researches into the history and transactions of your predecessors; and I subscribe myself,

GENTLEMEN,

Your obliged friend and servant,

J. B. HEATH.

LONDON,
January, 1830.
PREFACE.

The Grocers' Company is the most ancient of the twelve great Companies of London; and as it was, undoubtedly, the first commercial Corporation ever known in England, and one from which sprung, in aftertimes, some of our greatest mercantile establishments, it has frequently been a source of surprise and of regret, that there should exist no account of the origin and proceedings of this venerable body. In the year 1689, Mr. Ravenhill, their Clerk, at the period when the destruction of their property by the fire of London had placed them in a situation of difficulty, published, what he termed "The Company's "Case," to which he annexed "A short Account of the "Grocers." The object of "The Case" was, to demonstrate to the world, that the Company had acted towards their creditors in the most honourable manner, and that their inability to meet their engagements at that period, arose from circumstances over which they had no control, and principally from the want of faith on the part of those who had borrowed, or rather extorted from them, their
funds. Mr. Ravenhill’s Account of the Company consists of a dozen pages, very superficially written, and composed entirely of materials gathered from Stone, and from other authors who had obtained their scanty information from tradition, without any reference to the early records of the Company, of the existence of which Mr. Ravenhill appears to have been ignorant. Mr. Bridgman, the Clerk in 1792, was the first person who ascertained that the records and journals of the Company were in a complete state; and he was charged by the Court of Assistants to collect and arrange them in chronological order. He compiled, at the same time, a manuscript book, containing extracts from the earlier ordinances and regulations by which the Company were governed, a few lists of the names of the original members, and some portions of the City charters, but he made no attempt at a history of the Company. I ought to state, that the service he rendered in making the above compilation, is in great measure neutralized by the irreparable injury he has inflicted on the first volume of the records, (written partly in Norman French and partly in old English), by transcribing on its margins his own modern version of the text.

Since I was first enrolled as a Liveryman of this ancient Society, I have constantly lamented the want of a history, which could make the members acquainted with their origin, as well as with the principal events in which the Grocers’ Company have been engaged since their formation into a corporate body, and render them familiar with the lives and actions of those distinguished and illustrious personages whose names are inscribed on the records.