



The Beggar's Benison: Sex Clubs of Enlightenment Scotland

David Stevenson

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Two clubs, dedicated to proclaiming the joys of libertine sex, thrived in mid and late 18th-century Scotland. The Beggar's Benison (1732), starting from local roots in Fife, became large and sprawling, with branches in Edinburgh, Glasgow - and St Petersburg. As a toast "The Beggar's Benison" was drunk at aristocratic dinners in London as a coded reference to sex, and the Prince of Wales (later George IV) became a member. In Edinburgh, also, the Wig Club (1775) gave the elite of the Scottish Tory establishment a forum in which to dine, gamble and venerate a wig supposedly made of the pubic hairs of the mistresses of Charles II. Both clubs flourished in a great age of raucous clubs in which bawdy often played a prominent part, and both died as changes in sensibility made such behaviour seem gross and unacceptable. As the Victorian age approached, the clubs withered away under its disapproving glare. In this book, the author tells the story of these clubs, analyzes the obscene relics of their rituals which survive, and places the clubs in their social, cultural and political contexts. It is an extensively researched study, but at the same time recognizes the entertainment value of the many anecdotes concerning the clubs, the absurdities inherent in the antics of club rituals, and the appeal of the bawdy.

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