

“GAY” KINROSS.

“ Press’d by heavy laws,
And gay, alas ! no more,
It bears a name of joy, because
It has been gay of yore ! ”

THE FOUNTAIN (*adapted*).

LOCHLEVEN is the lodestone of Kinross-shire, and the attraction is only for anglers. They make no account of its town. It furnishes them with a hotel, and it is of no further service. The relationship between loch and town has changed. Once Kinross owned the loch ; now it is the other way about. It has become a mere adjunct of the lake ever since the discovery was made, scarcely half a century ago, that Lochleven trout will rise to the lure.

It is hard to realise that Kinross was ever young, and spruce, and sprightly. To speak of Kinross as gay must sound like irony in the ears of one acquainted with the present condition and appearance of this dingy, little, old and antiquated town. It is, indeed, sadly in want of something to enliven its dull gables and lack-lustre windows. It looks gay neither near nor afar. There is nothing in its mean-looking buildings to suggest a romantic past ; nothing in its dowie or deserted street to promise a prosperous

future. Anything over Coyctus drearier than its dull, narrow, winding street in November—or, for that part, a drenching day at Lammastide—it would be difficult to imagine; might be impossible to find if one did not stumble on Dunning or Auchtermuchty, Cities of Dreadful Night, in the neighbourhood. In moist weather it is little better than a “lake-dwelling” of chills and cramps and rheumatics; in wet weather—which its inhabitants euphonistically describe as “*saft*”—it is a swamp, a paradise for frogs or cranes, and filled with croaking. Moist or wet weather prevails here for nine—perhaps for eleven—months in twelve. The town squats among waterflags and rushes on a dead flat fast by “the Thrapple Hole,” not many feet from the loch side, and only a few inches above the loch level.

“I see the muddy wave, the dreary shore,
Which mortals visit, and return no more.”

The whole small county is damp, an inland Ayrshire, moister than any shire of Scotland under the same meridians, but in comparison with its one town and the loch area, the rest of the county is almost dry. What chiefly gives the western character of humidity to this eastern county is that green gully of the Ochil range, where the heads of Gleneagles and Glendevon meet on the lowered water-shed. Through this pass, this gap in the central rampart of Scotland, the clouds and storms ascending from the Atlantic roll in unbroken column, till, spreading out over Kinross-shire, they at last come to camp, caught within its basin by the encircling hills of the Ochils,

the Lomonds, Benarty, and the braes of Cleish. Over this area they shed their liquid treasures, or hang in uncondensed imminence for weeks and weeks. It would make some amends for western superabundance of moisture if western mildness of temperature accompanied it; but the "harrs," or hoar mists, and the cutting winds of springtime indicate that the east has not quite surrendered Kinross-shire to western rule.

The county, which, it must be acknowledged, flings through parting clouds and flying scud a coquettish glance of rare loveliness now and again in early summer, looks its best when arrayed in the matronly charms of settled and sober September. It then that its friends would wish to present the county. Then Cleish and the Ochil uplands to south and west are green and rough with fragrant pasture; the majesty of the Lomonds is "invested with purpureal gleams" of blooming heather; even the gloom of sullen Benarty is lifted, or at least lightened; the lake rocks, or rests, a deep blue below; the sky soars, illimitably high, a light blue above—blue washed with milk, the turquoise blue of forget-me-nots; while from the heart of a hundred peaceful farms on the plain the yellow radiance of ripe corn illumines the roadways, and delays the coming on of evening. Even the vagrant, or the huxterer of herring, is transfigured in the autumn glow.

Little of all this, which seems to transform the county, making of at least one nook of earth "an insubstantial faery place," affects the town of Kinross. It is impossible of metamorphosis. It is one of those

dull rustic towns that manage, through a perversity of disposition, to exclude rurality, which alone makes rusticity bearable. It would require much lilac and lavender to brighten and sweeten it; much paint to conceal its grime; a new pavement, smoother, more regular, less muddy; a new arrangement of its houses, a new style of houses; a new situation.

And yet we must believe that Kinross was at one time gay. Its gaiety was indeed its distinguishing characteristic. Carlisle was scarcely so merry as Kinross was gay. Not more pronouncedly gay was the family of Gordon. The next most marvellous thing to the fact of its former gaiety is the apparent fact that the lost gaiety has only recently disappeared. About the middle of last century the town was still gay. Such is the testimony of Michael Bruce. Suspicion, however, arises that the youthful poet may have been referring to Kinross, in his description of its gaiety, relatively to his own sombre and slumbrous village of Kinnesswood. It may have been gay comparatively with that hillside hamlet of peat-reek and Puritanism. However this may be, it is undeniably accredited with gaiety in the local epic—respectably written, in serious imitation of the sedate, not to say pompous, style of Thomson—"Loch Leven: A Poem." Michael, the beloved of his country, studied United Presbyterian divinity in Kinross, in a little room professionally known as "The Hall," situated in a narrow wynd leading off the main street. Here some half-dozen lads or so had a professor all to themselves. To their unsophisticated minds the ongoings of a few wild weavers

on a Saturday at e'en may have suggested the idea of gaiety. There is some reason at least for connecting the gaiety of Kinross with the weaving fraternity. The modern weaver—I speak of that dwindling and dwindling genus, the hand-loom artisan—is melancholy itself, embodied in emaciation. But the weaver of a hundred years ago might be a very different creature. There were then two varieties of him—the respectable and the regardless. He made good wages, and a sense of independency gave him spirit. The respectable representative, the weaver of an ancient tradition, like Michael Bruce's father, sang psalms when he was merry, and prepared for duly observing the Sabbath, on the lines laid down by Moses, by shaving himself, and setting his house and household in order on Saturday afternoon. The "regardless," again, neither feared God nor regarded man, but drove the industrious shuttle all week, and went raking and boozing on Saturday and Sunday. To this lot belonged the "gallant" weaver of the old songs. Kinross had its complement of them. It is surely Tennant who alludes in his "Anster Fair" to Kinross and her "weavers gay." With them he couples the cutlers, a sullen class of mechanics now (in vain) lost to Kinross. Yet Kinross and cutlery were long and honourably associated. The most trustworthy steel blades came from Kinross. They were the crack of Fife. They were sought for at every Scottish fair, were in every packman's box or bundle, in every ploughboy's pouch. The Kinross guild of knife-grinders, proud of their pre-eminence, had even the hardihood to challenge the ancient

English home of cutlery, Sheffield itself. They circulated their challenge with their wares. For example :—

“ In Kinross was I made,
Horn-haft and blade ;
Sheffield ! for thy life,
Show me such a knife ! ”

The cutler has cut his last stick, and travelled away from Kinross for ever ; his weaving brother is in a wandering and waefu' minority ; and with their decay and disappearance, its gaiety has gone from the loch-side burgh. Once a year, on the last Monday of July, a perfunctory attempt is made even yet to keep up connection with the reputation for ancient gaiety. The occasion is known as *Jooley Fair*. But an attempt at the resurrection of mirth is generally dreary ; and in the case of Kinross the attempt is from without. It is the mirth of merry-go-rounds, and mountebanks, and cheap-jacks ; the Kinrossian looks on with his hands in his lank breeches-pockets, and draws melancholy comparisons. The only possible restoration of the ancient mirth and merriment is in the power of Lady Fiction ; and of her creation, consummated by the pen of Scott, we may have a peep at will in a few wonderful pages of *The Abbot*. It is curious to reflect that the last living prototype of Scott's long array of Scottish characters belonged to Kinross, and that this personage was comparatively recently still moving about in the flesh, ignorant of the niche in fiction in which she had been for ever fixed. All old and many middle-aged people in Kinross must remember Mother Nicneven, the parent