

## THE BOOKS OF LOCHLEVEN.

THE oldest human associations connected with Lochleven and the lands about it would seem to be of Basque origin. Much interesting mystery is involved in the migrations of that strange people, but ethnology gives assurance that we are on their traces in such localities as reveal in their place-names the significant syllable *ur*. The statement of a general law like this tempts one to a hundred applications; it sets the mind skipping at once, and we find ourselves in Mesopotamia, speculating on the relationship of the grand old Patriarch to the Basques, and how Ur came to belong to the Chaldeans. But to return to Lochleven. There is no denying the fact that among ancient place-names in the neighbourhood the word that is said to bewray the Basque now and again appears. There is, for example, the district of Urwell or Orwell; there is the Ury burn, midway between Milnathort and Kinross; there is Loch Ore, on the sunny slope of Benarty. And the list could be extended. Whether the lake-dwelling recently discovered in the loch was a Basque homestead, or the haunt of a Pictish community, is an interesting problem. We forget what the learned Society that meditates on the Mound made of this part of their subject. And they might

well be excused if they did not even touch it, in the famine of information which everywhere surrounds the adventurer into time's unchronicled wastes. Most people are content to make the period of the Roman occupation the limit of their explorations in "the dark backward and abysm of time;" and there is no absolute want of suggestive material in the remote historical hunting-grounds of Lochleven; but even in this department of antiquity, whether as affects Romans or Picts, all speculation here is vague, and much of it vain. It may have been that in the early centuries a royal castle—as royalty went in those days—stood on the island in which young Queen Mary, a thousand years later, pined for a twelvemonth, and that Pictish kings were rowed in rude pomp where the bourgeois angler to-day plies his rod over Lochleven waters. It may have been that the battle against Galgacus was fought on the slopes of the Lomonds. The case in favour of this view was warmly urged some sixty years ago by Colonel Miller of Upper Urquhart, and the testimony of Tacitus called into court not without a show of plausibility. We are, however, on the surer ground—the *terra firma*, so to say—of direct record when we get quit of the Romans; and by the end of the sixth century we seem to stand on parchment. The signs of ancient life on and near Lochleven are no longer a dumb show, dimly seen through the morning twilight. They become clear to the eye, and fall, as through a phonograph, articulately, if faintly, on the listening ear. With the advent of St Serf its earliest reliable memories come to Lochleven.

St Serf's Isle is, indeed, the *locus classicus* of Lochleven. It is *par excellence* the inch, or island, of that famous lake. It has long suffered unaccountable neglect, and even its indisputable title to rank as the centre of Lochleven interest has been usurped by the Castle Island. History and romance, the fortunes of Queen Mary, and the fiction of Scott have directed, more especially within the century now running, the popular gaze away from St Serf's to the Castle Island. But whether as regards size, or antiquity of association, or intrinsic historical value, the palm that belongs to superior regard must be restored to the Island of St Serf. Before the partial drainage of the loch in 1830, it included somewhere over thirty acres of very fair land, when the area of the Castle Island consisted of but two; and now the reduction of the loch area has added fifty or sixty acres to its natural and original extent. It is at present in pasture, but the goodness of at least part of the soil of St Serf's may be inferred from the excellent crops of peas and barley which it yielded to tillage, as I have just been informed, not many years ago. The antiquity of its associations is undoubted. They go back, as already stated, to the seventh century. The annalist of the island is Andrew Wyntoun, whose ambitious chronicle of "The History of the World, from the Creation of Man to the Captivity of James I. of Scotland"—a work rivalling, if not in style and philosophical reflection, at least in scope and range, the *magnum opus* of Raleigh—was written in the solitude of St Serf's, "where that this lord was keeper of the cell." According to Prior Andrew,

a certain Pictish king, about the year 700 A.D., piously made over to St Serf, and the Culdees residing there, the holy Island of Lochleven. Serf, or Servanus, was then seemingly the Prior of Lochleven, called to that position by Adamnan, the Abbot of Iona, of whom he was a contemporary. Wyntoun informs the painful reader of his Skeltonian Chronicle that Adamnan met St Serf at Inchkeith, and, struck with his capabilities and virtues, invited him to Lochleven Inch, in Fife, there to become a commissioned follower of St Columba, and "drive owre the time of his life there." The original priory or church of Lochleven, like that of Iona or the Nor' Loch, was, no doubt, a primitive affair of turf and wattles. The rude stone structure, the basement ruins of which are the one visible feature of the island now, though venerable with age and old associations, is doubtless of later date. But shortly after the original establishment, and in recognition of the piety of the pale monks of the isle, royal donations began to flow in, to the comparative enrichment of the Priory. King Edgar, Malcolm Canmore—it will put his character in a new light perhaps when we add the name of Macbeth: these were among the royal donors to the religious house of Lochleven, which now began to be known as another Iona, and "the School of Virtues." Malcolm's gift was the town and lands of Balchristie; Edgar bestowed Pitnemokin—identified as Portmoak; while Macbeth compounded with the Church for the sins of his usurpation by conveying (in the Pistolic sense?) to the servants of God and St Serf the lands of Kirkness and the village of "Bolgy," or

Bolgyne" (*qu.* Balgedie?), and craving an interest in their prayers. But it was David, of beneficent memory, that effected the greatest change in the history of the Culdee connection with Lochleven. Generous above all Scottish kings to the Church though he was, he unhappily broke the Culdee traditions of Lochleven. About the middle of the twelfth century he caused to be made over to the Canons of St Andrews Lochleven Island, and the property of the Culdees therein and therewith connected. A record of this generous but unjust transference of power and property is extant, and will prove of great interest to local landowners and residents in particular, to all students of early Scottish ecclesiastical history and to antiquaries in general. The transference of the establishment of St Serf's from independent government to the authority of St Andrews included the transference of the roots—as one may call them—by which the establishment had drawn from the lands and localities around Lochleven its temporal or material sustenance and growth. Those feeders of the visible Church, regarded in its corporal and carnal aspect, lay almost exclusively round that end of the loch, the east end, where is situated the island of St Serf, and landward away into Fife. They included Findathy (now Findaty), Kirkness, Pitnemok (now Portmoak), Markinch, Balchristie, Bolgyne; but there is no mention of Orwell, Kinross, Gairney, or other places at the opposite end of Lochleven. While the lands of several, if not all, of those estates and farms went from a Culdee to a Catholic proprietary, certain tolls

and taxes from all of them were diverted to St Andrews. A copy of the deed of conveyance of the entire Culdee property from Lochleven to St Andrews will be found in Dr Jamieson's *History of the Ancient Culdees* (Appendix, p. 376). The tolls and taxes included so many measures of peas from this field, so many bushels of barley from that; a pig from this township, the duties of pontage or the use of a mill in that: "cum Findahin (clerical error for *Findathin*) cum uno molendino in terra Findathin," etc. But most interesting of all is the inventory of that part of the Culdee property in St Serf's Island, in the year 1150, which consisted of books. In the deed of conveyance, they come after the pigs and mills—as being probably of less worth to the canons of St Andrews. A meagre library, in sooth, it was—in these days of princely book bequests; yet the most palatial of modern free libraries must give place in point of interest, perhaps in point of influence as well, to the little bookshelf of old Lochleven Priory. Where, and in what circumstances, and by what hands those books were written; whence they were borrowed, or on what friendly errands as loans they were sent; what pious hearts they cheered, or what ignorant minds they enlightened; what animated discussions they gave rise to within the seclusion of the Priory walls, while without autumn rains lashed the loch, or wintry showers whitened the passive Lomonds; what calm meditations they induced in moon-lighted walks on the open island—these and a hundred other similar questions occur to the thoughtful mind, and must for ever remain unanswered.

The books, mainly on moral and religious subjects, were twenty in number—exactly what Chaucer's clerk of Oxenford wished to have at his bed's head. Here is the authoritative list of the books of Lochleven:—*Liber Pastoralis*, *L. Gradualis*, *Missalis*, *L. Origeni*, *Liber Sententiarum*, *Tres Quaterniones de Sacramentis*, *cum Bibliothice (sc. Patrum)*, *Lectionarius*, *Acta Apostolorum*, *Textus Evangelorum*, *Tres Libri Solomonis* (with a Gloss to the Song of Solomon), *Collectio Sententiarum*, *Expositio super Genesim*, *Exceptiones Ecclesiasticarum Regularum*, and what seems to have been an explanatory dictionary—probably of Latin terms. The Pastoral book seems to have been a definition and description of the duties of Priors, etc.; the Gradualis has been explained as a book of Responses; the Missal, a kind of Mass-book; the *Liber Origeni* may have contained the peculiar and debateable doctrines of Origen; and the *Exceptiones*, etc., appears to have been a species of Dispensations or Indulgences. It is interesting to know that while only three books of the Old Testament—"Proverbs," "Ecclesiastes," and "Canticles," with a commentary on "Genesis"—formed part of the library of Lochleven, as many as five represented the New Testament, and that these were the books essential to a correct and full knowledge of the rise and early history of Christianity—viz., the four versions of "The Gospel" and "The Acts of the Apostles."

The purpose of Lochleven Island in the history of Christianity and civilization has long since been

accomplished. The purpose was, indeed, a high and holy one, though it has at no time, perhaps, been sufficiently realised, and is just at present in imminent danger of being lost sight of altogether. Yet no one acquainted with its early history can fail to feel, on visiting it, some portion of that spiritual enthusiasm which Johnson felt when he found himself "treading the illustrious island" of Iona. For here, too, in this bleak Kinross-shire lake, as among the stormy Hebrides, lived and laboured, for no temporal gain or mercenary ends, a band of as devoted disciples of Christ as ever cast a net into the Sea of Galilee, or carried the religion of brotherly love from Asia into Europe. St Serf's Island should be to the Scottish Lowlands what Iona has long been to the Highlands—a shrine of pious memories, where devout hearts (and why not devout feet?) can occasionally rest on life's pilgrimage and be refreshed. Oh why did not Scott, who knew it and its traditions so well—why did not he extend a ray of the romance which he flung around the Castle Island to break the sombreness which broods over St Serf's? The monastic pile, even the hermit cell, was as much a picturesque object to his eye as the lordly tower or the Border peel; the monk and the hermit were as attractive figures to his portraying pen as the knight or mail-clad man-at-arms. Why did not he look with the eyes of his own Fitz-James, and see, as he rode from Blairadam to the eastern terminus of Benarty—

"On yonder *island* far away,  
The turrets of a cloister grey"?



His was the ear to have heard the sound of vanished bells and long-hushed voices, with which that lonely island was once familiar.

“And when the midnight moon did lave  
Its silver splendour in the wave,  
How solemn on *his* ear would come  
The holy matin’s distant hum ;  
While the deep peal’s commanding tone  
Should wake in yonder island lone  
A sainted hermit from his cell,  
To drop a bead at every knell.”

Scott might have told us how St Serf’s looked in the early centuries. How does it look to-day? To me, at least, it is attractive in its desolate bareness. The sigh of the wind is among its windlestraws where the kine are quietly feeding; the low roar of the loch water keeps it locked in everlasting dream. The clang of the curlew, the complaining cry of the lapwing, even the dissonant scream of the gull, which float and fly over it, fail to break its reverie. As seen from the nearer shore, it lies low on the water, a drear expanse of withered ling and lake-weed, “tawny, but with an eye of green in it,” like Shakespeare’s imaginary isle. Round it runs a beach of brown pebbles and small grey sand, from which, as I write, come to my open window, through the calm of noon-tide, the voices of lazy fishermen and the laugh of lurching anglers. One, only one, permanent feature of human interest now appeals to the eye on St Serf’s : it is the ruins of the last priory, now abandoned to base uses—a low, square relic of grey stone, with the darkness of a doorway in its southern wall. But what

a troop of saintly memories quicken into ghostly life,  
and throng that silent doorway, when in the imagina-  
tive moonlight that old ruin rouses for a moment  
from its long day-reverie !