



## CESSNOCK CASTLE, AYRSHIRE.

BY JOHN MACKINTOSH.



HOWEVER largely the various districts of Scotland may be endowed with the historical riches and legendary associations of a dimly remembered past, there is no county presents a wider and more varied field of interest to the antiquary and historian than the far-famed county of Ayr. From the time of the wars of independence down to the Reformation, the hardy sons of Ayrshire have made themselves famous by countless stirring and courageous deeds of valour, which stand out against the dark background of the past in as bold relief as ever was sculptured by the chisel of time. To deeds of valour, succeeded in more peaceful times, gifts of land and baronial power, and those by whom they were acquired built strongholds for protection against the grasping greed of neighbouring tribes. Hence we find that almost every nook and dell of the shire can now boast of its old baronial keep

to which is attached some more or less interesting tale of prowess and romance. Of these, one of the most interesting is Cessnock Castle, the Ayrshire seat of His Grace the Duke of Portland. What is now known as the Castle consisted in olden times of a single quadrilateral tower, called the Tower of Galliestoun, dating as far back at least as the 14th century, and around this tower or fortress arose a village of the same name, which still exists, and can be readily recognized under the modern name of Galston.

The old tower was doubtless built for purposes of defence, its walls being of great strength and of sufficient thickness to contain in several places small rooms or dormitories. On the ground floor is a dark foreboding apartment, said to have been used as a dungeon, and appearing admirably adapted for such a degrading purpose. High above is the crowstepped gable, terminating in a belfry, which is reached by a narrow winding staircase in the inner angle of the tower. On the pediment over the door leading to this staircase the initials of Sir Hew Campbell are carved with the date 1668. On the lintel of the window immediately above the main entrance door is the date 1669, and above this again is the Campbell coat of arms, bearing the motto "Craignez Honte." The situation of the building is admirably chosen for purposes of defence, being protected on three sides by a rugged and picturesque ravine, through which meanders a crystalline stream famed all over the realm for its beautiful jasper stone, known as Galston pebble. On every side but one the ground slopes upward from the castle, and is clad in a luxuriance of oak and ash and beechen tree, with here and there a clump of firs, which effectually screen the castle from distant observation. To yonder hill eastward of the fortress the trusty vassals of old were wont to betake themselves for the purpose of reconnoitring in times of special danger, so as to summon their retainers to arms against the intrusion of their feudal foes. Here also perhaps the gallows was erected, on which many a noble fellow met with the most ignoble of fates, under doom of the fierce though loyal baron who held the right of pit and gallows, and made right good use of his imperial privilege.

Of the ancient proprietors of the Tower of Galliestoun, history has left us but scanty record. One of the earliest proprietors was Sir John Keith, Great Mareschal of Scotland, who held the barony in the latter part of the thirteenth century. The Keith family were noted for their attachment to King Robert the Bruce,

and when Sir James Douglas carried the heart of that patriotic king for burial at the holy sepulchre of Jerusalem, Sir William Keith was one of those who accompanied him in that ill-fated expedition.

In later times, the outstanding name connected with this ancient building is that of Sir Hew Campbell, the baron who built the more modern portion of the castle, and who probably changed its name from Galliestoun to that of Cessnock.

Sir Hew lived in the troublous and uncertain times of prelatie persecution, and being a noted reformer, called down the curses of an unrighteous government upon his head. In 1665, he suffered imprisonment in Edinburgh, and subsequently he was unjustly accused of being accessory to the Rye House Plot, had his estate confiscated and annexed to the crown, and was at length imprisoned on the Bass Rock, a harsh treatment which he did not long survive.

Cessnock Castle is now the property of His Grace the Duke of Portland, who has recently effected an extensive restoration of the ancient building, opening up an old subterranean passage, forming a lake, and otherwise laying out the grounds in a manner suggestive of a miniature Wellbeck. During the renovation of the old building, some curious and interesting decorations and inscriptions were brought to light. When tearing down the plaster ceiling of the hall, the workmen discovered some painted figures on the underside of the flooring boards of the rooms overhead, and on carefully removing the remainder of the plaster-work, it was seen that those boards had at one time formed the ceiling of the hall. The entire ceiling was then found to be decorated with a series of grotesque designs, executed in a high-class style, and representing human faces, animals, flowers, and fruit in endless variety. This valuable piece of antique work is supposed to belong to the Elizabethan period. It has been carefully repaired, the new pieces being so skilfully painted in and so well harmonized with the rest that it is difficult now to tell which parts have been renewed. At the south end of the hall, and just below the ceiling, was found a painted panel bearing the following inscription:—

“ Mony thair be quha quieklic will espy,  
The faultis of frendis althocht so small I.”

The subjoined sketch of the panel and inscription is from a

drawing by Mr. John J. Railton, architect, Kilmarnock, taken at the time the hall was being repaired. The inscription is doubtless fragmentary, and may be the opening lines of a metrical composition which extended down the wall. From the sentiment contained in these lines, it is not unnatural to conjecture that the verses may have borne reference to the sufferings of Sir Hew Campbell.

Looked at in this light they are of great interest, and it is tantalizing to think that the remainder of the lines are for ever lost. A second panel was found on the opposite wall of the hall, but the painted letters of the inscription were so faded that only a few words were legible.

This hall, with its curiously painted ceiling, now forms an outstanding feature of the Castle. The furnishings are appropriate and very suggestive; the old muskets, swords, and other warlike implements with which the richly wainscoted walls are adorned bearing out, in an admirable manner, the idea of an ancient baronial home, fully equipped for the emergencies of feudal warfare. This somewhat stern adornment is judiciously chastened by many beautiful trophies of the hunt displayed above the doorways and windows. The fireplace is ornamented with encaustic tiles, and on the mantelshelf are two equestrian statuettes, one representing King James the Third, and the other King Richard the First. Between these is a beautiful bronze cast representing a racehorse, after the work of Emile Loiseau, a famous sculptor of the French school.

That such an ornament as the latter should form part of the furnishings seems very natural when one remembers the fondness displayed by His Grace for this particular race of animals, and this reminds us of an anecdote which, at the expense of appearing digressive, is worth telling. The Duke, who has been accustomed to give his Ayrshire tenantry free trips to his estate at Wellbeck, was on one of these occasions showing his guests over the stables there; and having pointed out two foals of the thoroughbred type, he enquired of one of the Ayrshire farmers which of the two animals had the greatest number of good points. "Deed," said the canny Scot, singling out one of the foals, "sae far as I can judge, this is the best ane o' the twa." His Grace, who evidently acquiesced in the farmer's opinion, smilingly replied, "Very good, sir, we must name that one 'Ayrshire,' in honour of your visit to

Wellbeck." As everyone knows, the subsequent career of this fine animal bears ample testimony to the sound judgment of the Ayrshire farmer.

Reverting to the Castle, it remains only to add that, sparing no expense in its restoration, the apartments throughout have been fitted up and furnished in a style altogether appropriate for a temporary ducal residence, and the work reflects much credit on Mr. J. Harling Turner, His Grace's representative, under whose directions the restoration was effected. Since the restoration of the Castle, His Grace and the Duchess have been accustomed to pay occasional visits at Cessnock, and without wishing to parade the virtues of the noble pair, it is only courteous to add that by fostering a love of agriculture among the tenantry; supporting a sick nurse for the district; giving Christmas treats to the children; and in many other ways dispensing their generosity, the Duke and Duchess have happily endeared themselves to the good folks of Ayrshire.

