

James Taylor's

A HISTORY

OF

MUIRKIRK

Compiled from a series of articles

published in

"THE MUIRKIRK ADVERTISER"

in 1927

with the date, 1680, resting on sprays of ivy. The figure on the shaft represents "Faith." On the base the following lines are inscribed:—

"On the mountains of heather they slumber together,
On the waste of the moorland their bodies decay;
Oh, sound is their sleeping, and safe is their keeping,
The Martyrs of Scotland that now are away."

On the lower base the following is inscribed:—"This monument is erected and given to the people of Muirkirk by Charles Howatson of Glenbuck, 18th June, 1887."

On the right side on the granite die are inscribed the names of Smith, Adam, and Brown, who all suffered in the year 1685. The panel under this refers to the resurrection morn. There are sculptured trumpets on each side of the burning bush, with its motto—"nec tamen consume batur." On the frieze above the die there is a shield, with the date, 1685, and sprays of the passion flower. The figure on the shaft represents "Hope." On the base the following lines are inscribed:—

"Behold what witnesses unseen
Encompass us around;
Men once like us with suf'ring try'd,
But now with glory crown'd."

On the die at the back is inscribed the following text:—"These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." On the panel below is engraved;—"The Sword of the Covenant," encircled by a wreath of laurel and holly, and grit with ribbon bearing the Covenanters' motto—"For Christ, His Crown, and Covenant." On the frieze above the die there is a crown, as an emblem of victory, set on branches of laurel. The figure on the shaft represents "Charity." On the base the following appropriate lines are inscribed:—

"We wish to serve ourselves as heirs
To all that noble life
Which showed itself when storms did lower
Amid a world of strife.
We pray that yet, as time glides on,
Where heathbell blooms and wanes;
Where bloody sword and musket rung
Shall Scotland's holy psalms be sung
Around the Martyrs' graves."

(Concluded)

the fields, and he, not being able to answer their questions, they immediately shot him." As already mentioned, John Lapraik and Tibbie Pagan are sleeping their last long sleeps in this God's acre. Finlayson, who invented the plough named after him, here sleeps the sleep that knows no waking; as also does Dr William Rutherford, D.D., author of an excellent work on ancient history. This interesting spot is now closed for burying, except to a few whose claims cannot be set aside.

MARTYRS' MONUMENT

The people of Muirkirk have proved themselves worthy of the grand heritage that has come down to them in the memory of the worthy part their ancestors bore in the struggle for liberty, religious and civil. Headstones were put up at the graves at Wellwood and Priesthill shortly after the Revolution; and religious services have been conducted at regular intervals at the various places made famous in the times of the Covenants. A monument to all who fell in the neighbourhood that is worth going to see was erected on June 18th, 1887, the Jubilee Year of Queen Victoria, by Charles Howatson, Esq., of Glenbuck. This imposing erection occupies a prominent position opposite the gateway of the new Cemetery at Glasgow Road. On the front one may read the following inscription engraved on the granite die forming the centre block of the monument:—"Erected in memory of the faithful and true witnesses, who, for their adherence to the Word of God and Scotland's Covenanted Work of Reformation, suffered Martyrdom in the Muirkirk Parish, 1680-1685." On the shaft are two seraphic figures; one points to earth, where the Martyrs suffered and died; the other points to heaven, where they are reaping their reward. On the base of the monument are inscribed these verses from a well-known hymn:—

"God guard our shores from every foe
With peace our borders bless;
With prosperous times our cities crown,
Our fields with plenteousness.
Lord of the nations, thus to Thee
Our country we commend;
Be Thou our Refuge and our Trust,
Our everlasting friend."

On the lower base is engraved:—"Queen's Jubilee, 1887." On the granite die on the left side are set down the names of the nine Covenanters who fell at Ayrsmoss, with the date of the battle. The panel under this contains the emblems of victory—two palm leaves girt by a wreath of oak, and a ribbon with the words—"I will give thee a crown of life." On the frieze above the die there is a plain shield,

A HISTORY OF MUIRKIRK

Compiled by James Taylor

from an article in "The Muirkirk Advertiser,"

entitled

IN THE HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS OF AYRSHIRE

MUIRKIRK

"Who can long be sick at heart with the glory of hill and dale and sky about him? And who frail of step with his nostrils full of the scent of varied nature, and his tread on the springy heather?"

ANOTHER UNWIELDLY PARISH

As been set down under Fenwick, New Cumnock, and Barr, four parishes in the hilly confines of Ayrshire, about the middle of the seventeenth century, were considered too large for effective supervision, because many families were not within reasonable distance of a place where they could hear the gospel preached. Muirkirk, the parish about which we propose to write, was separated from Mauchline at the same time as the three already mentioned were shaved off from Kilmarnock, Cumnock, and Dailly. Seeing that they consisted of moorish ground, the new parishes were several times larger than the present areas from which they had been disjoined, the notion being to supply something like equal stipends to all the eight ministers. Muirkirk and New Cumnock, though, have now much greater valuation than Mauchline and Old Cumnock on account of their richness in cannel coal and other minerals invaluable in a manufacturing country.

TOPOGRAPHY

The parish is eight miles long from west to east, and seven miles broad from north to south. On the outskirts of the parish is a series of lordly hills—Burnt Hill, Good Bush, Priesthill, Wardlaw, and Cairntable ("the cairn of the sling"). Near the end of the twelfth century all the parish of Mauchline was granted to the monks of Melrose by the Grand Steward of Scotland. At that time the whole district was covered by a dense forest, as giant trunks of trees still found in the bog testify. Indeed, these have done much to form the moss, as, being allowed to lie where they fell, they dammed back the water, which encouraged the growth of sphagnum and other peat-forming plants. The existence of this great wood in former days is kept in mind by the names of many of the farms—Harwood, Netherwood, Wellwood, and others. There are no lakes in the parish now, but there must have

have been a natural body of water in the east, where the River Ayr now rises in an artificial reservoir close to the Lanarkshire boundary, and spreads out into another large dam soon after beginning its course. The more easterly reservoir is crossed by a railway. To a wayfarer over the dreary, treeless wastes that extend from Douglas to Muirkirk, these beautiful expanses of water with their fringing trees and shrubs come as a refreshing break in the monotony. They provide a picturesque setting to Glenbuck House, built in the year 1880, which has been raised at their westerly extremity. The haughs close to the river are the only arable land in the parish which, seen from the surrounding heights, presents a wide uneven surface covered with dark heather growing in dark peaty soil. There is a remarkable absence of trees, although the eye is sometimes gladdened by small clumps of self-sown birches and mountain ashes.

GLENBUCK HOUSE



A MISCONCEPTION

At one time Cairntable was considered to be the highest point in Ayrshire, even when its height was set down at much less than it really is. It was so stated in the first Statistical Account, and the reverend brethren unwittingly kept up the deception in the Accounts that have followed. Paterson, in his "History of Ayrshire," repeated the mistake, edition after edition; John Smith, in a book published quite recently, follows in the same track. Chalmers, in his "Caledonia," ranks it with Misty Law in Cunningham and Shalloch-on-Minnoch in Carrick. Its real height is 1944 feet; strange to say, Sir Archibald Geikie makes it only 1693 feet. Though it is a very imposing height, there are five hills in New Cumnock

she was startled by the report of the firearms. With a faltering step and throbbing heart she hastened on, with a sickening dread that her beloved William had fallen a victim to the guns of the godless foe. This dreadening thought was strengthened by the appearance of several horsemen coming over the rising ground where she was to meet the one dearer to her than life. She was crossing the little brook on a plank laid down for the convenience of shepherds, when the troopers were fording the stream in the opposite direction. One of them jocularly pretended to push her into the water with the flat of his sword. With the desperation of despair she wrapped her apron round her hand, seized the blade wrenched it from the soldier's grasp, snapped it in two over her knee, and flung the pieces into the burn. When she reached the trysting place, her worst fears were realised; there lay her affianced stiff on the ground, which was stained with a deeper dye than that of the heather.

KIRKGEEN

As its name betokens, this is an old part of the town, where the first Church in the parish was built; very soon it was surrounded by a field of the dead, in which the forefathers of the parish have been laid to rest. The building of the present church was chosen by Tibbie Pagan as a theme for a satirical poem in imitation of Burns's "Twa Brigs." The oldest stone in this sacred enclosure—"The Martyrs' Stone"—was erected in 1731 in memory of John Smith. Tradition has come down to us that he was shot by Colonel Buchan and the Laird of Lee in February, 1685; when found by them he was so exhausted from cold and hunger that he could not stand without support. Wodrow, the historian, says "they stumbled upon him in



KIRKGREEN

it was noised abroad that the Glendinnings had ceased to attend the Church at Muirkirk, and that they had gone over to the hill-folk. Claverhouse, kept well informed by spies, sent a small troop under one Morton to apprehend him. Friends conveyed information of his danger to Glendinning, who reluctantly withdrew from his home and dear ones. At the dead of night Morton and the other hirelings burst into the farmhouse expecting to pounce on their prey. The disappointed leader vowed all sorts of vengeance on the defenceless wife; lifting their only child from its cradle, he swore that he would hew it to pieces with the glittering blade that he was brandishing over his head. Glendinning, who had removed to no great distance, had cautiously approached the window to see what was transpiring within. At sight of the appalling scene, he rushed into the midst of the soldiers with drawn sword. "Hold, ye murderers!" he cried wildly, as he sprang to the rescue of his child; "hold ye savage murderers or I will sever your heads from your bodies." He tore his darling child from the grasp of the rough trooper, aiming at the same time a furious blow at his head. The blow fell on a Dragoon who had rushed to the aid of Morton; and a second blow laid another soldier bleeding on the floor. Morton, a coward like all bullies, rushed from the house, leaped on his horse, and left the rest of the band to follow as they could.

Knowing well that there could be neither safety nor rest for them in Scotland after this encounter, Glendinning and his wife emigrated to Holland, which was a country more enlightened than Britain and France, that were driving out their best men. Through the kind offices of other Scottish exiles, he was introduced to the Prince of Orange, who was always glad to promote men of sound principles, good address, and material heroism; all of these Glendinning possessed in an eminent degree. He came back to Britain as an officer in the army of that Protestant prince; he fought in his service at Killiecrankie, where Claverhouse fell, also Morton his former antagonist.

A FATAL TRYST

Though many other happenings in this classic district could be cited, we will close with the tragic story of William Adams, who lived at one of the Wellwoods. This youth, who had become marked for his piety and non-conforming principles, was about to be married to an amiable young woman of like mind as himself. On a day specified he had made an appointment to meet his future wife at a certain time at a place well known to them both. Being first at the trysting place, he took out his well-worn Bible and commenced to read. He had not read long, when he caught sight of a party of Dragoons close upon him; he started to his feet with the sacred book in his hand; this was sufficient proof of guilt, and he was shot dead on the spot. Meanwhile his sweetheart was hastening over the heath, when

parish still higher—Knipe, 1950 feet; Blackcraig, 2229 feet; Blacklog, 2231 feet; Alwhat, 2063 feet; and Albang, 2100 feet. Three hundred feet higher than any of these is Shalloch-on-Minnoch in Barr parish, just within the county, the lowest height in the imposing Galloway range culminating in the Merrick, the highest point south of the Firth. In the Ordnance Gazetteer for Scotland it is distinctly stated that Shalloch-on-Minnoch is "the source of the Stinchar, and highest point in Ayrshire."

CAIRNTABLE

We seldom find hills of striking appearance built up of stratified rocks which are usually rounded off by a covering of boulder clay. Cairntable is an exception to this rule, for it is mainly a mass of millstone grit containing small pieces of quartz from an intrusive igneous rock. This formation, hard as granite, is found on the very top of the hill; formerly it supplied millstones over a wide area. The view from the top is extensive. Tinto is its sister hill. The Leadhills are close at hand towards the east; due south the hills around Sanquhar stand boldly forth; Ben Beoch and other hills near Dalmellington are seen clearly on the west; and between these the blue hills of New Cumnock are prominent. Loudoun Hill seems to be keeking slyly over the town. A man that knows his country well can pick out heights in the Grampians, the Lammermuirs, the Pentlands, and the Arran mountains. In front one sees mile after mile the white road from Strathaven to Glasgow, along which sometimes trudged Edward Irving and Thomas Carlyle before the latter had become famous and the former had suffered eclipse. Douglas Water has its source at the foot of the hill; bonny Douglasdale is spread out like a map, showing the policies of Douglas Castle and the ruins of Castle Dangerous.



THE SUMMIT OF CAIRNTABLE

A DECISIVE BATTLE

Tradition asserts that these lands came into the possession of this family through the prowess of its founder. When Donald Bane was trying to wrest the crown of Scotland from his nephew, a battle was being waged in which Duncan was losing ground. However, the tide turned in his favour when a stranger, with his sons and followers, flew to the help of the rightful King. After his rescue Canmore's son asked one of the officers standing near who the valiant man was. "Sholto Douglas" (there is the dark man). The grateful King gave him this delightful tract of land, and the surname Douglas, to a race that in after years were often more powerful than the King. When the stranger took possession the domain and river were named after him; Sholto has been a hereditary praenomen among various branches of the Douglas family every since. In the days of Wallace and Bruce, Douglasdale was often traversed by English soldiers passing and repassing between Ayr and Lanark. Many skirmishes would take place between companies of the Southrons and the retainers of the haughty Douglas; tradition asserts that a great battle was fought in the wilds of Cairntable, after which a large body of Englishmen had to retreat before him and his men. The ascent of Cairntable is easy. At its base a small cairn of stones can be seen in the distance from which a well-defined track leads right up to the summit, on which there are two large cairns and a much smaller one which are concealing secrets that may yet be disclosed. A tumbled-up heap of stones is also passed on the way, which may have been raised to celebrate some forgotten event, such as an encounter with mosstroopers from Annandale, in which the Ayrshiremen would be victorious. Other standing stones found over the parish may have been set up for the same reason.

MUIRKIRK
II.

ANTIQUITIES

The most ancient house in the parish is Wellwood, which bears the date of 1600 on one of the gables of the older part of the building. In living memory a great many cairns of loose stones have been swept away by farmers to facilitate their operations; probably some pillar stones have met the same fate. Of those still left the most imposing is the standing stone on Lightshaw, which is seven feet high and a little more than that in circumference at the base, being smaller at the top. The name of the farm on which it stands has been softened from Laight Shaw, "the grave in the wood." The existing pillar will mark the site of that burial place. On

welcome. Suspecting no cheat, he told them that he never lost an opportunity of succouring people in distress like themselves, that a party had left his hospitable hearth a few days ago, and that he would continue the Christ-like practice as long as he was spared. This cruel deception would have been carried to greater length had not one of the pretending religious men rapped out a customary oath. Greenock Mains was shot at Cumnock two days later by order of Colonel Douglas. His grave is within the sacred enclosure there under the twin thorns, the wayfarer may read the inscription on the headstone as he wends down the brae into Cumnock town.

VIII.—MARTYRLAND

A RURAL HERCULES

In the times of the Covenants a sheep farm was rented on the outskirts of Cairntable by James Glendinning, a man gifted with immense strength, though of kindly disposition. Though an upright and well-living man, he had given religious matters no consideration till he was joined in marriage to a serious-minded woman, the daughter of a bonnet laird in the district. His wife often conversed with him on the position of affairs in the trying times through which they were living; she pointed out that there must be something more than commom in the case of the Covenanters, who took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and who submitted to death itself rather than renounce their principles. Though they sympathised with the wanderers, and never turned one of them away from their door, they did not openly adopt their principles until Glendinning, having gone to Edinburgh with a flock of sheep, witnessed the death of a martyr in the Grassmarket. Though he and his wife had attended the ministrations of the illiterate curates, he had no clear knowledge of the Gospel story. A flood of light burst into his soul as he stood in the crowd listening to the good man's dying testimony; his mind was lifted up to higher things by his dying prayer; and he marvelled at the eagerness with which he welcomed the grappling with death.. In the country a revulsion of feeling in favour of the downpressed was caused by every shooting in the fields; through witnessing executions in the bigger towns; impressions were made on thousands that were never effaced. These facts seemed to dawn on the minds of the prelatists; towards the end drums were beating at dying scenes on the scaffold to prevent the crowd hearing anything the doomed men wished to say. Glendinning came back to Muirkirk with his mind made up to identify himself with the Covenanters, and to share their sufferings. Though his good wife had been secretly longing for this, she dealt faithfully with her husband by making clear that they had to expect spoilation of their goods, and even death itself. Soon

rushed, only to find the rooms and outhouses empty. When they came back forebodingly a few hours after, the farmer and his dependants were relieved to find that Irvine had restrained his followers from doing much harm. This pleasing anecdote of McLelland proves to us that little deeds of kindness are not forgotten by the beneficiary, though the benefactor may have ceased to think of them.

ANOTHER ESCAPE

Proceeding in the darkness further up the banks of the mossy streamlet, Irvine and his followers stumbled into a hut inhabited by a weaver, who had just returned from delivering a web that he had been weaving for a customer. Why was he dressed in his best clothes? Had he been attending a Conventicle or a meeting of some Society? The man endeavoured to clear himself of these charges, and showed them the true state of matters. Bonshaw, with seeming reluctance, accepted his explanation on condition that he would guide them to Netherwood, the farm still further up, the tenant of which, though well disposed to the sufferers for conscience sake, had been careful to give no offence to the ruling powers. Though he had no great liking for the business, Netherwood had to guide them to Greenock Mains, which was tenanted by Thomas Richard, probably a brother of the farmer in Burnfoot, whose house was suspected as a free refuge for the hillmen. On the way Netherwood devised a plan to let his well disposed neighbour know of the imminent danger that assailed him. When he arrived at the brow of the slope, at the foot of which Greenock Mains stands, he called a halt; in tones needlessly loud he warned the soldiers and their leader that they incurred considerable danger in making their way down the steep declivity in such a dark night. When they were again on the move these injunctions were repeated in a still louder voice; he seemed particularly solicitous about the safety of the Captain, whose name he repeated with great emphasis, giving him every time the high-sounding title of "Your Honour." Bonshaw tried to impose sentence.

"But Netherwood him honoured still,
Till Greenock Mains sped to the hill."

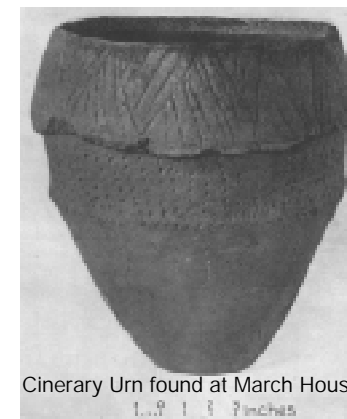
Alas! The worthy man, then in his eighties, was too old to hasten, even in the face of danger like this; he could only hirkle to the back of a stone dyke close to the house; but this sufficed for that time.

AN ISRAELITE IN WHOM THERE WAS NO GUILF

Shortly after this deliverance Colonel Douglas got this kindly old soul into his clutches by a very mean trick. Stationed at Cumnock, he sent Peter Inglis, "by birth a tiger, rather than a Scot," along with four or five troopers, disguised as Whigs, to solicit hospitality at Greenock Mains. The old man bade them kindly

the side of the hill above the Boghead Burn there is a solitary block of reddish conglomerate. Though it has been called the Gray Mare Stone—a corruption of Gray Hare Stone or Gray Memorial Stone—it is evidently a natural boulder that has been brought to its present site by the carrying power of ice. On fine Sunday afternoons it is visited by many people, for the sake of the fine view obtained from it, many of whom have inscribed their names and addresses over its surface. It is undermined to a considerable extent by sheep in their efforts to get away from bright sunshine. Near the place where Greenock Water opens into the Ayr there is an ancient fort still called by the name of Castle Hill; and on Upper Whitehaugh Moor there is another ring camp called Sighthill. On High Priesthill Farm there is an unsightly patch where thirty acres of land were swept away last century by a water spout during a thunderstorm. Mr Adam Whyte, Muirkirk, states that an iron battle axe was found near Kames Pit, and a deer's antler in a moss near the same place; that a stone celt was discovered near March House; that a silver-mounted riding whip was got at the ford near Wellwood; and a bronze spear near Greenock Dyke. In the Ayr and Wigton Archaeological Collections are figured two perfectly preserved bronze weapons from this parish. One is a spear head of rare type, measuring 10½ inches in length by two inches at its widest part, which was got at a depth of six feet in Whithaugh Moss. It is tanged and fluted, with a central mid-rib, and there is a hole at the end of the tang. The other weapon, which was turned up by the plough, on West Glenbuck Farm, is a winged celt measuring six inches in length by fully two inches in breadth.

A very interesting discovery was made at March House quite recently, when the public road from Muirkirk to Cumnock was being repaired. A natural sandhill, which had formed a steep gradient in the course of the road, was being removed to meet the requirements of modern traffic. In doing so the workmen exposed a decorated cinerary urn containing burnt bones, an incense cup, and other relics. The find was immediately reported to Mr Archibald Fairbairn, who was speedily on the spot, accompanied by Major and Mrs Broun Lindsay of Wellwood. The snowy whiteness of the burnt bones, and the care by which they had been sifted, were noticeable. With the permission of the farmer a trial trench twenty-seven feet long and seven feet wide was opened into the field parallel with



Cinerary Urn found at March House
10 1/2 inches

the road, at the end of which a setting of stones eight-and-a-half feet wide was encountered and laid bare, and this was traced round and proved to be the circular foundation of a cairn forty-seven feet in diameter, at the exact centre of which the urn with its contents was discovered. A careful search within the circumference of the circle was not rewarded with any other discovery of importance.

A PAINSTAKING ANTIQUARY

This instructive find was reported to the Society of Antiquaries for Scotland, in whose custody the relics now are, by Mr Fairbairn, who is the corresponding member of this and other learned Societies. The same gentleman is referee for ornithology to the Glenfield Ramblers, whose leader he was three years ago up the "haunted Garpel," the first considerable tributary of the Ayr in its left bank. Many of us still remember hunting for fossils in the Solurian rocks, and admiring the bladder ferns on the banks of the stream. Not to be forgotten, too, was our reader's description of the foundations of a fifteenth century house, which he had laid bare on the Moor, and a delightful trudge to a collection of hut circles in which our neolithic ancestors had crouched for safety. At present Mr Fairbairn is carrying out extensive excavations at Priesthill, the erstwhile residence of the godly carrier, John Brown, who was butchered by Claverhouse.

THE WELLWOOD COLLECTION

Mr Fairbairn has been an eager student of bird life all his days. In this pursuit he had as a colleague, Mr J. G. A. Baird, M.P., who was almost as keen as himself. Bird after bird was added to the collection until it comprised a hundred and seventy-two specimens, which were displayed in the dining room of Wellwood House. In his own neighbourhood variety was sometimes restricted to hill birds owing to absence of wood and water, but the collection is fairly representative of bird life all over Ayrshire, and there are a few from Russia and other countries. By-and-by it became necessary that the birds should be removed from Wellwood, and the opportunity of acquiring them was promptly seized by the Kilmarnock Philosophical Institution, who made arrangements with Mr Fairbairn whereby they have been added to the treasures of the Dick Institute Museum, the avian section of which, now that the collection of eggs brought together by Mr John McCrindle has been added to it, can hardly be equalled outside the national collection. That Mr McCrindle's gift is appreciated is proved by the fact that one seldom sees a case without a student bending over it. Including the Richmond Paton collection of British birds of prey and wading birds, close on five hundred specimens of British birds may be studied in the Dick Museum.

is ready to perish be upon thee, dear child!" The situation was relieved by the entrance of the carrier, who joyfully grasped the hand of the stranger, to whom he extended a hearty welcome. It was James Renwick, whom evil tongues had deprived of many supporters within his own party. The carrier remained true to the young preacher. They had much to talk about; and midnight was past ere they thought of going to rest. Meanwhile Janet's bedtime had been forgotten; and she was found curled up at Renwick's feet, sound asleep. We are not certain whether Janet was still at home when her father was murdered. Probably she would be at service that "her sairwon penny fee" might help to keep her parents in their croft.

VII.—MARTYRLAND

In the troublesome times of which we are writing the farm of Burnfoot stood a short distance from Muirkirk on the Greenock Water, which joins the Ayr near the town. Information had been logged at Nether Fauldhouse that the tenant of this farm, John Richards by name, had favourable leanings towards the cause of the Covenanters; this was sufficient for a troop to be sent by Claverhouse to arrest him under command of Irvine of Bonshaw. The evening chosen was so dark that people descended from ancestors settled in the parish for a long time still say that a darker spell than ordinary is like "Bonshaw's Night." On such a mirky night Irvine felt sure he would find the farmer at home enjoying the heat of the peat fire, surrounded by his children and dependants. In the company, however, was a trooper named McLelland, who had served the farmer in Burnfoot for several years, and had grateful remembrance of many acts of kindness rendered to him by the farmer and his family during his stay there. Consequently, this man, determined to save his former master, from death or captivity, detached himself from his comrades in the darkness and hurried through byways that he knew right well, to the farmhouse, into which he burst in with needless noisier and swagger. When the excitement caused by his irruption had subsided, he warned the household that Irvine and his crew would be upon them in a few minutes, and advised them to flee, one and all, to the morass that lay close to the house. Then, drawing his heavy sword, and advancing to the centre of the kitchen, he struck the crook, as the broad hook at the end of the chain hanging from the roof over the fire was called, three times, leaving a deep dint at each blow, which were to remind all and sundry of his kind action "when he was dead and in his grave, and all his bones were rotten." Having re-joined his comrades in the darkness, he was loudest in denouncing Richard, and Whigs in general, when the detachment reached the farmhouse, into which they all

round a fire of blazing peats. One evening in each week, too, he expounded the Bible and the Confession in faith to grown-up men; three of this remarkable Bible Class obtained the martyr's diadem. In this quiet way John Brown spent his time; he engaged openly in no controversies; he had participated in none of the risings: only he refused to attend the new church after the Rev. Hugh Campbell had been supplanted by a time-serving curate.

A HAPPY HOME LIFE

Three years before the end came, the tenant in Priesthill had married Isobel Weir out of a well-known family in Sorn. The young wife had those attributes towards the making of a happy home life that her husband lacked; he was grave, sedate, and introspective, while she was bright, bustling, and humorous. These two were made one by Alexander Peden, who pronounced a heavy benediction when the ceremony was over. Taking the bride aside, "Isobel," he said, "you have got a good man; but you will not enjoy him long. Prize his company, and keep linen by you to be his winding sheet; for you will need it when you are not looking for it, and it will be a bloody one." During her brief married life the memory of these words would often bring an undertone of sadness into the music of Isobel's days.

THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

She was his second wife, and there were children by the first wife, of whom we only hear of Janet, who was aged ten when her stepmother came into her life. History has preserved to us two pleasing glimpses of this little lady. On the morning after the marriage she came bashfully into the room after her father had gone out. "They say ye're ma mither." "Well dear bairn, what if I be your mither?" "If ye're ma mither, I would like to come in beside ye." This episode would surely ennoble them both. A year or two after the marriage the two were sitting up waiting anxiously on a stormy winter night for the return of the husband and father, who had been delayed on some carrying business longer than they had expected. It caused the young wife an effort to be cheery now; for the shooting of men on the moors and hills was a daily occurrence, and she knew that her husband was a marked man. Suddenly a footstep was heard outside. With a joyous cry the child bounded to the door to be the first to welcome her father. Instead of that loved one, an unkempt man, ragged, bedraggled, and almost shoeless, staggered in. Knowing how numerous spies and dishonest men were in those times, Isobel looked askance at the stranger; but Janet, with the keener insight of a child, led him to a chair by the fire, and helped him to take off his dripping cloak. Overcome by her kindness, the wayfarer burst into tears, exclaiming, "The blessing of one who

A SINGER THAT SHOULD BE HEARD

A native of Muirkirk being in England was asked one delightful summer evening to hear the singing of the nightingale, his friend informing him it was rarely, if ever, heard in Scotland. After he had listened with attention for some time, he was asked if he was not delighted with the music. "It's very gude," he answered, "but for my pairt I wadna gi'e the wheeple o' a whaup for a' the nightingales that ever sang." Hearing the nuptial song of this bird a few days ago on the hills around the Inches Station, we came to the conclusion that the Muirkirkonian was right. To the dwellers in the uplands the curlew is the real harbinger of spring. Till the month of March everything is silent; then the whaups come, flock after flock, and they have all paired before the opening days of April. To people who come to the hills in late summer the whaup's cry is an eerie whistle, but there is no more rousing and tuneful sound in nature than the love song of the male bird, which is heard only at nesting time. Flying along the moor a few yards above the surface of the ground, he suddenly checks his flight and soars high into the empyrean, beating the air with his wings like a lark. As soon as he begins his song he glides earthward in a slanting direction. Commencing with a couple of whistles long drawn out, the song quickens and the notes become sharper and clearer till he reaches a quivering break in his song, then the key is lowered, the calls become more subdued till they subside, as they, commenced, in low whistling. Altogether the performance is strangely mindful of the episodes in human life. On a calm day the higher notes can be heard over three miles of quiet moorland; the doleful dirge of Philomel can only be heard by a listener close at hand.

Some years ago the listener was conducting a clerical friend to Lochgoin, who was anxious to see the relics carefully preserved there. In the heather we surprised a curlew chick over which the young minister threw his mackintosh. Before setting it at liberty we admired for a considerable time the exquisite beauty of the markings on his head and body, which appealed to us as a proof of the beneficence of the Great Creator who had placed them there solely to delight its mate.

The hen bird also makes use of trilling tuneful cries during nesting time, which she emits without rising in the air. These birds lay eggs as big as those of a duck to give room for the enormous bill that grows to a length of seven inches in the adult bird. The curlew is one of our swiftest birds. Those that nest with us migrate to Spain at the beginning of August; the birds of this species that we see in our country between Autumn and Spring have nested further north. Moorland farmers are noting that the lapwing is nesting at higher altitudes since the introduction of basic slag on the lower grounds.

FAMOUS WELLS

Many of these in the parish possess petrifying qualities; a piece of moss, a bird's nest, or other absorbent body, after sufficient soaking in the water, is taken out white as alabaster, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. In the bed of the little stream than one crosses on the way to Cairntable is the "boiling well," so named because the water scatters the sand about as it wells up. Two miles up the Garpel is the Minister's Well, to which the Rev. John Shepherd used to repair every morning for a drink of its cool water before he partook of breakfast. Cairntable has been rightly named "The Hill of a Hundred Springs." One of these, rising at the smallest cairn near the summit, sends a gentle trickle into the valley beneath, where it bifurcates to form two separate streams, one of which, the Garpel, can be seen to join the Ayr below the town; the other, the Duneaton, runs to the Clyde at Abington, through the channels of which it is borne to the Firth of Clyde, where it mingles with the waters of its sister streams outside "the ratton quay," after a journey of more than a hundred miles.

MUIRKIRK III.

GROWTH AND PROGRESS

At the time of the disjunction from Mauchline there were very few houses in the district then known as Garron, a name still remaining in the oldest part of the town, which is known as Garronhill. At the Reformation the Lairds of Loudoun, who had acted as hereditary baileys for the Abbots of Melrose, obtained a grant of the lordship of the lands. After they lost their estates they were acquired by the McKenzies of Seaforth, in whose possession they remained until they were bought

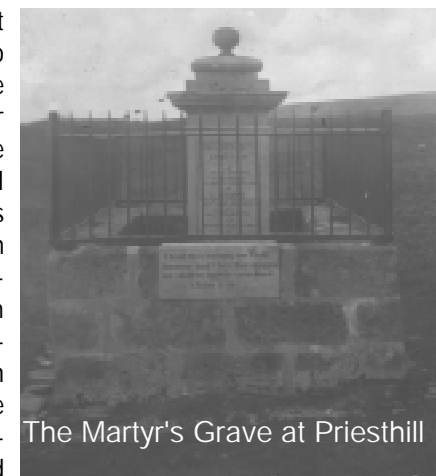


A DESOLATE HOMESTEAD

In Covenanting times Priesthill was a lonely farm in the wilderness lying fully four miles in a north-easterly direction from Muirkirk. In those troublous times the tenant was a pious man named John Brown, who is known in history as the "Christian Carrier," seeing that he eked out the scanty livelihood derived from his croft by fetching and carrying necessities for his neighbours on the back of a pack horse. Till recently the site of this good man's household was marked by a heap of nettle-covered rubbish; now extensive excavations, conducted by Mr Fairbairn, have laid bare the foundations of the house, the hearthstone, and a part of the cobblestone flooring. The "fail dyke" can still be traced round an oblong of deeper green that would be the garden in the days of the worthy man; round the end of this patch meanders a mossy burn as it did on the morning of the dread tragedy. No dwelling is in sight; there is no drearier landscape in the county of Ayr. Emerson maintains that nature environs great moral transactions with a portion of its own loveliness; if the converse be true, there is no more fitting setting than the view from this ruined homestead for the meanest crime in history.

DOING GOOD BY STEALTH

From boyhood the tenant in Priesthill had set his mind on higher things. His desire to preach the Gospel had to be abandoned on account of a hindrance in his speech which he could not overcome in intercourse with his fellow-men; but he never stammered when he was praying to his God; and his wife remembered afterwards that on his dying morning he addressed Claverhouse in clear and unshaking accents. So noticeable was the distinctness of his utterance that the arch-persecutor asked his guide to the lonely dwelling-house whether he had ever heard the doomed man deliver a sermon. A hundred years before Robert Raikes opened his Sunday School on Gloucester this devoted man was gathering the older children around him on Sabbath afternoons from long distances to tell them wondrous stories from the Bible, after he had spent the afternoon himself in some secluded glen in prayer and meditation. In summertime the instruction was imparted in a near-lying sheepfold; in winter they gathered



The Martyr's Grave at Priesthill

districts. Indeed, James Kirkwood, the curate of Sanquhar, proved, time and again, that he was a sincere friend to the persecuted remnant, and often shielded them from the fury of their adversaries. It is related that one day this good-natured man was playing at quoits with some of his parishioners on the banks of the Nith, when two fugitives reached the opposite bank, and dashed into the river. "Where shall we run?" cried the two men who had been pursued by the soldiers all the way from Carsphairn. "Doff your coats" said the curate, "and play a game with me. They lost no time in doing this, and the ruse was altogether successful. When the pursuing dragoons forded the Nith, they passed the curate, and continued the pursuit, as they supposed. If these wilds could speak they would be able to tell us sad tales that have been forgotten; but many startling stories have been preserved to us by the labours of people with literary tastes in the various parishes surrounding the scene of so many stirring events; Mr Adam Whyte in Muirkirk; Mr A. B. Todd in Cumnock; Mr John Johnstone in New Cumnock; Rev. Robert Simpson in Sanquhar; Mrs Dey in Strathaven; Rev. John Jamieson in Douglas; and others. From such wealth of material we propose to select a few of the most interesting narratives.

A DISPUTED SITE

In the boyhood of some of us now growing old a book written by Dr Simpson—"Martyrland, or the Perils of Persecution"—was widely read. This book proved that the worthy author could write a stirring story as vividly as he could portray the sufferings of the Covenanters. People interested in these matters have not been able to agree as to the location of the Miny, the farmhouse in which Gilbert and Grizel Fleming ministered to so many wanderers for conscience sake. Most probably, however, the historian of the Covenanters had in his mind the farm of Friarminion, which was really a refuge for the oppressed all through the troublous times. It stood on the easterly confines of Auchinleck, in the very heart of the dreary solitudes near the spot where the three counties—Ayr, Lanark and Dumfries—come together, at the base of Mt. Stewart, about midway between Sanquhar and Muirkirk. It was a central point in the wilderness for conventicles and meetings of the sufferers for other purposes.

In this neighbourhood the Second Declaration of Sanquhar was drawn up. Readers of the story will remember that it is entwined round the mansion-house at Auchtytench, which Dr Simpson calls the "Auld Auchty;" and mention is made of an old vault, used as a place of safety, which diligent search has failed to discover. Men, driven from Friarminion, could easily escape to Mt. Stewart, or seek refuge in the soft quaking moss, where men on horse-back could not follow them.

by the Duke of Portland. The first church was a primitive affair like a barn, with narrow windows and thatched roof; and it remained in this state till 1775, when the walls were heightened, and the inside seated. The heritors refused to provide a school; happily in 1771 a seat of learning was gifted to the parish by Mr Niven, Tardoes. In 1790 the Muirkirk Iron Company, three years after it came into being, proposed to the Kirk Session that they should build an aisle at their own expense for their workers. This favour being refused, steps were taken to have a new and more commodious church erected. The present Parish Church was built in the year 1812. At first the new parish was styled "The Kirk o' the Muir," which was soon changed to a more imposing title, "Muirkirk of Kyle." As the town grew in size this was shortened to its present name.

The Ironworks belonged for many years to James Ewing & Company. At first the iron was obtained from clay band, which contains of the metal thirty-seven parts in the hundred; but a great fillup was given to the trade by the discovery of black band, which yields forty-eight parts in the hundred of the metal, and contains coal enough in combination to cheapen the process of smelting. Altogether five workable seams with a depth of thirty and a half feet are below the surface yielding at places three tons under every square yard. After being in possession for some time of Messrs Wilson & Dunlop, the iron works came under control of the Bairds, who have been exploiting them ever since according to up-to-date methods, including "catching the ammonia." Close to the Sanquhar Road one's attention is attracted by heaps of ruins covered in weeds and rank grass. These are all that are left of the old Tar Works carried on here for a few years by Lord Dundonald with a view to supplying his beloved navy, which then used thousands of tons of it for caulking Britain's "wooden walls." The invention of copper sheathing for vessels left tar a drug in the market; and Lord Dundonald lost heavily.



GLENBUCK

This little hamlet close to the Lanarkshire border has fallen on evil days owing to the working out of pits in the surrounding districts. It had its origin in a grant of land to a body of communists that they might try to work out their pet ideas. One or two of the original houses are still extant. They remind one of the semi-Dutch houses of fisher-people, common on the east coast, with outside stairs. The system was found to be unworkable. Ayton, in his survey, says that "Glenbuck was in a despicable condition, there being a dunghill or stenching gutter before every door." In older times the land around was the hunting ground of the Douglasses. In the year 1802, taking advantage of the natural body of water, the source of the River Ayr, James Finlay & Company constructed two reservoirs covering 120 acres to supply their works at Catrine. In the beginning of last century the rails for the Duke of Portland's railway from Kilmarnock to Troon were made at Glenbuck. There were seventy thousand rails of forty pounds each, weighing 1250 tons, and costing, when laid down, twenty thousand pounds. The district around is famed all over the world for the excellence of its blackfaced sheep. Circumstances here suit these prime mutton-bearers to a nicety; they are living at the proper height, with plenty of "white land," and just the right quantity of heather, without which they cannot thrive. A few years ago the "Scottish Farmer" declared—"At the top of the tree stands the famous Glenbuck flock, sweeping all before it." Time and again animals of this hardy mountain breed, reared in this district, have carried off the first prize at the Royal Show and the Highland and Agricultural Show; and at the Paris Exhibition of 1867 a sheep of this breed from Glenbuck was declared champion. The greater number of prizes have been won by Charles Howatson, Esq., of Glenbuck; but there are other well known breeders in the parish, amongst the number being Over Whitehaugh, Garpel, Netherwood, Greenockdyke, Priesthill, and others.

WILL BROWN

There formerly lived in Muirkirk a worthy of this name who was reported to be "daft," though his shrewdness seems to have been greater than his lack of wit. Nearly every droll story that is related of him seems to prove this. Will, for instance, was one day present at the edge of a frozen pond near his native town, where some gentlemen fond of the sport of curling, had assembled, who were in some doubt as to the bearing power of the ice. Thinking that Will would make an excellent cat's paw, they asked that he would go on first, and they would immediately follow. "Oh, no," said the so-called fool, "I ha'e mair mainners that tae gang afore gentlemen."

MUIRKIRK VI.

MARTYRLAND

"They of old, whose tempered blades,
Dispersed the shackles of usurped control,
And hewed them link from link—Then Britain's sons
Were sons indeed; they felt a filial heart
Beat high within them at a mother's wrongs,
And, shining each in his domestic sphere,
Shone brighter still when call'd to public view."

CLASSIC GROUND

An old saying, and a true one, has come down to us throughout the ages that truth is strange—stranger than fiction. Our wildest writers of romance—Radclyffe, Ainsworth, and the rest—can imagine nothing more startling than the true happenings of history. Of no time and place can this be said more truly than the south-west of Scotland during the misgovernment of the last two Stuarts, when this region was turned into a hunting ground for the chasing of men. With the single possible exception of the sufferings of the Waldenses, the world has never seen such keen persecution; every day had its tragedies, its hairbreadth escapes, and its acts of self-sacrifice, on the one hand—on the other, inhumanity, ungodliness, and treachery. In this dreadful drama the region lying to the east of Muirkirk parish played a leading part. It is a district of tangled hills, interspersed with dark moss-hags, full of dangerous quagmires drained by streams flowing through narrow glens into the upper reaches of the Nith and the Clyde. Progress can be made through this waste only by jumping from one tussock to another, the penalty of jumping short being a souse in the black, sticky mud; the depth of the immersion depends on the part of the moss and the state of the weather. Treacherous pools, known as well-ees or lotches, are everywhere covered with slimy green algae. Now and again, after a prolonged drought, this wilderness can be crossed dry-shod by laboriously forcing one's way up the dry bottoms of the ditches. Apart from the natural pieces of refuge that this wild region afforded, it was considered a place of safety by the refugees for other reasons. The Marquis of Douglas permitted every man on his lands to worship God according to his conscience; his example was followed by the Campbells in the three Wellwoods, and other land proprietors. The curates in the neighbourhood did not belong to the rabid type common in other

numerous in the district. One of these, Mr Frank Whyte (no relation to the Whytes), was doing excellent stratigraphical and palaeontology work when his career was cut short by death at a comparatively early age.

John Whyte, now enjoying well-earned retirement, has loved close on thirty years at Entryhead, on the Wellwood Estate. He is a poet of more than local fame, who has recently given to the world a collection of his pieces bearing the title, "Musings in Wellwood's Vale." The value of this pretty little volume is greatly enhanced by ten artistic illustrations, drawn by the author's daughter, Kate, which have a piquancy all their own. The soul of poetry breathes through all these pieces; one in particular a man wants to read over and over again, "Only a Step Remove," some verses set to music wrung from his heart by the death of his wife. As it becomes better known this soulful thing will gradually become a song that the public will not let die. The same unstinted praise is due another dainty volume of verse, "Cairntable Rhymes," recently published by Mr Thomas Floyd, another Muirkirkonian. The poems are somewhat interwoven, for a few of them are epistles addressed each to the other in the kindly style of Burns and Lapraik, very different from the venomous "flytings" of the old "Makkaris."

WELLWOOD HOUSE



On another occasion some gentlemen were deliberating with a number of engineers as to the proper place for sinking a coal pit. In the midst of their anxious questionings, to Will thrust in his advice—"Gentlemen," said he, "whit'd'ye say to Ayrs moss? If ye dinna get coal there, ye're sure o' some peat at ony rate."

The following story shows a strain of selfishness in our hero that we would not expect from the other stories that have come down to us of his harmless exploits. Calling once at a farmhouse far up on the moor, the good wife fed him with a piece of bread and butter to entice him to conduct to the next farm a blind man who had, in a similar manner, been led to her house that afternoon. Will went away with the medicant and the piece, and as long as any part of the latter remained uneaten the former had no reason to complain. When the piece was done, however, all sense of the duty he had undertaken was done, too; and he said to his travelling companion—"Blind man, d'ye see yon peat-stack? Haud straight for it, and ye'll find a house." So saying Will left the afflicted creature abruptly and made a bee-line for his own home.

BURNS AND MUIRKIRK

On a dull November day in 1786, our greatest national genius would pass through the growing town of Muirkirk, on a borrowed pony, on his way to Edinburgh. The place would be well known him through his friendship with "bauld Lapraik." Every episode in the life of Burns impresses on our minds the tragic shortness of his career. Lapraik was a man aged thirty-two when the great poet was born; he lived for eleven years after Burns died. The poet's friend was descended from the ancient family of Lekprevick, printer to His Majesty, James the Sixth of Scotland. The family inherited for generations the estate of Dalfram in Muirkirk parish, to which Burns's friend succeeded when little more than a boy. From the contract of marriage, still extant, the estate seems to have consisted of three separate farms; and he leased, in addition, the neighbouring ground and mill of Muirsmill. His wife was sister to "rough, rude ready-witted Rankin," consequently she was aunt of the who convoyed the youthful poet through the barley "wi' sma' persuasion." She made a good wife to him till she died on the birth of her fifth child; then he married Janet Anderson, of Lightshaw, a neighbouring farm possessed by her father. Lapraik fell on evil days at the stoppage of the Douglas and Heron Bank, in which he was involved through having become security for friends. "If thou be surety for thy friend, thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger. Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth." The calamity left him penniless; indeed, he was a prisoner for some time in Ayr jail, where the song that attracted the attention of Burns was written. On his release he opened a public-house in the Kirkgreen, and was appointed post-master at Muirkirk. A few old

trees by the river side still mark the place where once stood the old farmstead of Dalfram, and loving hands have heaped together a rustic cairn to keep the memory green of

An odd queer chap
That dwelt about Muirkirk

Friendly gatherings in the days of Burns were called "rockings," for the girls took their rocks, as distaffs were called, with them in the early evening. After the horses were bedded the young men dropped in to enliven things. The frugal supper done, the swains would carry the rocks to the homes of their charmers.

On Eastern-e'en we had a rockin',
To ca' the crack an' weave our stockin';
And there was muckle fun and jokin',
Ye need na doubt;
At length we had a hearty yokin'
At sang about.
There was ae sang, amang the rest,
Abune them a' it pleased me best,
That some kind husband had address
To some sweet wife;
It thrilled the heart-strings thro' the breast,
A' to the life.

Burns wrote his first epistle to Lapraik, trysting to meet him at an early date. During the same winter they met at Mauchline, and Burns afterwards slept a night at Muirsmill. Two years after, when Lapraik was in his sixty-first year, he issued a volume of poems from the Kilmarnock Press containing a dedication to Burns, in which he declares he had no thought of giving the world his "dull, insipid, thowless rhyme."

Till your kind muse, wi' friendly blast,
First bootied up my fame,
And sounded loud thro' a' the wast
My lang-forgotten name.

The best piece in the collection is the song which cemented the friendship that remained warm till Burns died:

When I upon thy bosom lean,
Enraptured I do call thee mine;

For two or three centuries, or langer than that,
Tam's worthy ancestors hae whuppit the cat,
An' Tammis aye tells as he whups in the steeks,
A Whyte made auld Adam his first pair o' breekers

It should be mentioned that Mr Thomas Whyte Dickie, who has done more than any living man to make the Glenfield Ramblers Society the huge succeeds it has become, is a cousin to those gifted men, and is named after the worthy man of whom we are writing. As a youth, Mr Thomas Whyte had a natural lodging to see what the great world was like beyond the source of the Ayr. With this end in view he spent some years as a Scots draper in London, after which he wrought for some years at his trade in Govan, where he met the lady whom he married and brought to Muirkirk, where they stayed until they were laid to rest in the "auld Kirkyaird." In passing through life he had more than his share of trouble, three pretty and clever daughters died just as they were blooming into womanhood. Mr Whyte was a great authority on local history, much of which has been preserved to us by his diligence and research. One's attention is arrested by the naivete expressed in a paragraph of a well-written obituary notice that appeared in the local paper after his death in 1917, which may cause some of us who are proud of our collections, to wonder what value may be placed on them by outsiders:—"He hoarded up and prized articles which the commonality regard as rubbish. What percentage of value is in his unique collection of old coins, moths, butterflies, flags, maps, books, and manuscripts, we do not pretend to demonstrate; for although we glanced at the same. and admired all which we saw, we are unable to determine the value thereof. Still we know that at least two skilled men gave their opinions to the heirs and executors of Mr Whyte, and this was that nothing of these curios should be destroyed meanwhile." Mr Adam Whyte, who died five years ago, became very successful as a patternmaker, which pursuit demands a thorough knowledge of draughtmanship and solid geometry. Left early fatherless, he was the mainstay of his widowed mother as long as she lived, and he continued to stay in the same house until he died. Possessed of great powers of observation, he was the source of all knowledge relating to the rocks and antiquities that one finds relating to this parish in books. Many interesting specimens presented by him may be seen in Kilmarnock Museum, and his private collection of fossils was second to none in Ayrshire. In indulging his pet hobbies he had wonderful facilities, for many relics of the past are still preserved in this high-lying parish that would have been swept away in more fertile districts, and he could gather fossils from Silurian rocks, old red sandstone, and coal measures. Moreover, intrusive rocks and their action on other rocks are displayed to advantage. For years painstaking geologists have been

MUIRKIRK V.

MADE FAMOUS BY ONE POEM

Though born in Crawick Glen, the Muirkirk Shepherd, as James Hyslop preferred to style himself, spent the most of his short life in this parish. He was brought up by a grandfather who was too poor to give him much education. To a mind like his, however, ability to read was a key that could set free all the words of knowledge. He came to Nether Wellwood in 1812, where he remained four years, learning the duties of a shepherd. How he was inspired by an experience of James McCartney, a rollicking fellow-servant, to write the piece that has preserved his name, "The Cameronian Dream," has already been set down in these sketches. This poem was brought under the notice of Lord Jeefrey, who procured for him the situation of schoolmaster on Board His Majesty's ships Doris and Tweed. While cruising in the West Indian Archipelago he caught fever and died in his 30th year.

John McCartney, a descendant of the youth who inspired this masterpiece, was in later times a humorous poet of considerable merit who wrote on local subjects. His best known piece is "The Auld Mare." Coming home late from an outing he found that useful animal lying near the road close to the farm of March House. The poem takes the form of a monologue, in which the intelligent quadruped complains, amid many other grievances, that the farmer

Sent me oot against my will
To scart the face o' March House hill.

MORE RECENT WORTHIES

Doctor John Black, a former Minister of Coylton, was born near Ayrsmoss. In the world of letters he will be long remembered for his admirable "Life of Tasso." His literary career, however, was largely spoiled by an obsession that the New testament was originally written in Latin, from which the Greek version was a translation. He endeavoured to prove his theory in a learned work which he called "Palaico Romaica."

In a moorland district like Muirkirk, where men are often alone with nature and their own thoughts, it is not wonderful that there are many who have distinguished themselves in art or science; space, however, will only permit us to give some particulars of three members of a brainy family and a few others that have come within their influence. Until the year 1917 these three brothers of the name of Whyte were active and influential over a wide radius; from the inception of Muirkirk as a parish, the tailoring of the district was almost entirely in the hands of this family.

I glory in those sacred ties
That made us one who once were twin;
A mutual flame inspires us both—
The tender look, the melting kiss;
Even years shall ne'er destroy our love—
Some sweet sensation new will rise.

MUIRKIRK IV.

PAGAN BY NAME, PAGAN BY NATURE

Indirectly our greatest poet had influence on the work of another Muirkirk versifier. All that we know of the upbringing of Tibbie Pagan has been told by herself in a slim volume of doggerel which she published:—

I was born near four miles from Nithhead,
Where fourteen years I got my bread;
My learning it can soon be told,
Ten weeks when I was seven years old,
With a good old religious wife,
Who lived a quiet and sober life;
Indeed she took of me more pains,
Than some does now with forty bairns.
With my attention and her skill,
I read the Bible no' that ill,
An' when I grew a wee thocht mair,
I read when I had time to spare,
But a' the whole tract of my time,
I found myself inclined to rhyme;
When I see merry company,
I sing a song with mirth and glee,
And sometimes I the whisky pree,
But 'deed its best to let it be.
A' my faults I will not tell,
I scarcely ken them a' mysel';
I've come through various scenes of life,
Yet never was a married wife.

Her childhood must have been spent, as we gather from the first line of this long quotation, in close proximity to Dalricket Mill, in the Parish of New Cumnock. She did credit to "the good old religious wife" mentally, though morally she went through life "Pagan by name and pagan by nature." The greater part of Isobel's life was passed in the neighbourhood of Muirkirk in a house given to her by Admiral Keith Stewart, which was renovated from an arch originally built for a brick store in connection with Lord Dundonald's tar works. Lame from birth, this strange creature was never able to walk without crutches. In an old book she is described as a "woman of very unearthly appearance." She had a great vivacity of spirit, however, to which were combined a witty tongue and a clear ringing voice.

The site of her house is still pointed out to the right bank of the Garpel, near the Sanquhar road, less than two miles from the town. Here she kept a shebeen, which night after night rang with licentious mirth, in which the hostess was leader. In the autumn the shooters who assembled on the moors sometimes patronised Tibbie under the arch; occasionally they sent for her to divert them in their inn by her nippy tongue. Notwithstanding her dissolute life Isobel was close on eighty years of age when she died on the third day of November, 1821. Though it was a stormy day, crowds came long distances to follow the cart that conveyed her remains to the graveyard at Muirkirk, where her last resting place is marked by a plain headstone. Tibbie gave the world the first verse of "Ca' the Yowes to the Knowes," which was changed by Burns from the obscene thing it was to the flawless gem it now is. The only quotable thing left by this strange poetess is the sweet lyric, "The Crook and the Plaid":—

Ilk lassie has a laddie she lo'es aboon the rest,
Ilk lassie has a laddie, if she like to confess't,
That is dear unto her bosom whatever be his trade;
But my love's aye the laddie that wears the crook and plaid.

Ilk morn he climbs the mountains, his fleecy flocks to view,
And hears the lav'rocks chanting, new sprung frae 'mang the dew;
His bonnie wee bit doggie, sae frolicsome and glad,
Rins aye before the laddie that wears the crook and plaid.

And when in summer weather he is upon the hill,
He reads in books of history that learn him meikle skill;
There's nae sick joyous leisure to be had at ony trade,
Save that the laddie follows that wears the crook and plaid.

King David was a shepherd, while in the prime of youth,
And following his flocks, he ponder'd on the truth;
And when he came to be a king, and left his former trade,
'Twas an honour to the laddie that wears the crook and plaid.

This beautiful thing shows what the world has lost in the perversion of Tibbie's genius. With a Godly upbringing, and the encouragement that her talents should have had, she would have ranked with the poets that have made the songs of Scotland the finest in the world.



TIBBIE'S BRIG

James Taylor's

A HISTORY

OF

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