ON PENTLAND'S EDGE.

DESPITE the boom in golf and the boom of bicycles, the buckstane on the Braids road is still the goal of his evening walk to many a douce citizen of the gude toun of Edinburgh. Here he "stops to blaw" under the pretext of surveying the scenery, and, content with the moderate exercise and a peep at rurality, hence he returns—like Milton's cattle, "bedward ruminating"—with sober thoughts and pulses gently stirred. It is only on such special occasions as a town holiday that he ventures to extend his walk. The buckstane then becomes his starting-point, from which he has a choice of routes for the day's adventures. He probably feels drawn towards the Pentlands, which stand to him as the embodiment of freedom; but as the enjoyment of freedom on the hills implies the exertion of climbing, and as our burgess is, like Hamlet, "fat and scant of breath," he makes compromise between his limbs and his longing by proposing a leisurely walk to Nine-mile-burn. From the buckstane to the burn is as near as may be a matter of nine miles; it is mostly a level road, agreeably varied with easy ascents and picturesque windings, and it has the great advantage of the close neighbourhood of the Pentlands the whole way. Here and there, indeed, as at Hillend and Wood-

houselee, the hill tumbles in furze, or dips in lawny turf, to the very feet of our pedestrian. He inhales the fine fragrance of mountain air; his ear is charmed by chaffinch and yellow yeldrin, by the babble of brooks and the bleating of ewes. The peace of pastoral life is around him. It is the home of the Gentle Shepherd.

If ever "the Lang Linker"* and his merry companions should write up the land of Allan Ramsay, it is along this road, which, from the buckstane on the Braids to Nine-mile-burn or Carlops, runs close to the sunny side of the Pentlands, that they must direct their pilgrimage. There are traces and traditions of Allan the whole way. It is not forgotten that Ramsay was a burgess—an eminently sensible and successful burgess—of Edinburgh; that he was a denizen of that city for nearly sixty successive years. It is not of the sensible and successful burgess we are here speaking; the type is common and commonplace enough. It is of Allan the poet—not the laureate of Canongate publics and suburban ale-houses, malodorous change-houses and their detestable Lucky Spences and Mother Needhams—but the pastoral Allan, Scotland's own Theocritus, the callan that paints auld Nature to the nines.

> "In gowany glens his burnie strays
> Where bonnie lasses bleach their claes,
> Or trots by hazelly shaws and braes,
> Wi' hawthorns gray,
> Where blackbirds join the shepherd's lays
> At close o' day."

* Hew Ainslie, author of *A Pilgrimage to the Land of Burns.*

It is there the stream of his genius runs sweet and pure—among glens and green hills and village bleaching greens, hazel bushes and hawthorns in "flourish," and vocal with the strong loitering note of the blackbird. His body may have been among wigs and books in his shops in High Street for far the greater feck of those threescore years, but his better spirit was abroad, and his more congenial life was lived among what was calmest in nature and cleanest in human nature, on the sunny side of the Pentlands.

That Ramsay was familiar with the scenery of the whole route from Carlops to the Braids needs no demonstration. If it must be given, it will be found in the established facts of his life, and in the general spirit, as well as in many particular references in what is best of his verse. He first traversed the route, a boy of fifteen, in the opening year of last century. It was along this route, under the conduct of his stepfather, Mr Crichton, that he made his first approach to Edinburgh. First Craigmillar Castle and then the bold outline of Arthur Seat caught his eye as he descended the winding path to Hillend, admonishing him of the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, the destination of his long journey, and his future home. He brought with him, of course, a knowledge of pastoral scenery and rustic life, picked up from daily intercourse in his boyhood among the sheep farms of Crawford Moor. This early knowledge doubtless gave his mind, so far as it was poetical, its bent to pastoralism, and formed the basis of his pastoral creations in both lyric and eclogue. But it can hardly be denied that this early bent was developed

by Pentland pastoralism, and that Pentland scenes mingled in his poetry with his recollections of Crawford Moor. Before he was thirty he was the recognised laureate of the Pentlands. Cairketton was his Soracte :—

> "Look up to Pentland's tow'ring tap,
> Buried beneath great wreaths o' snaw,
> O'er ilka cleuch, ilk scaur, an' slap,
> As high as ony Roman wa'."

At three points on the hill-foot road, at the Hunter's Tryst, Woodhouselee, and Newhall, tradition is busiest to-day with the memory of Allan Ramsay. Strange that each of these places should claim to be the true and original scene of "The Gentle Shepherd." The Hunter's Tryst, in view from the buckstane, is some three miles nearer Edinburgh than Woodhouselee, while Woodhouselee is some five from Newhall, a little beyond Nine-mile-burn. The weakest tradition, and probably the most recent, is concerned with the Hunter's Tryst. Miss Warrender, in her *Walks near Edinburgh*, repeats this tradition, and connects it—if I remember rightly, for her book is not at the moment at hand—with interesting particulars in the life of Scott and Hogg. Whether we are to look townward on the farm lands of Comiston, or hillward on the braes of Swanston for the fields of Glaud, tradition does not stoop to inform us; but perhaps Swanston now furnishes as near a representation of "the shepherd's village and fields some few miles from Edinburgh," where Allan located his rustic drama, as the Pentland district at this late date can offer. I must not be misunderstood; I am far

from identifying Swanston with the poet's original. Newhall, in my opinion, is that original, as far as there was one; but Swanston is just such a pastoral hamlet of low-walled, thatch-roofed cottages, clustering carelessly round a brook-divided common on the lower declivities of the Pentlands, as might answer to "The Shepherd's Village" of the drama. At Newhall tradition is loud-voiced, and articulate, and definite. She points the visitor to Patie's Hill and Patie's Mill, to Habbie's How and Patie's Lee. History comes to her support with a record of duly authenticated facts. At Newhall House lived Sir David Forbes, whose frequent guest our poet undoubtedly was. Here often met the Penicuicks and the Clerks, occasionally the Queensberrys and Gay, perhaps young Jemmy Thomson—all friends of Ramsay; here, in the hospitable knight himself, Allan may have found the prototype (in character) of Sir William Worthy; here a Habby's How that, unlike the Glencross fraud, finds a faithful reflection in charming Peggy's charming description:—

> "Out o'er a little linn
> The water fa's an' mak's a singin' din;
> A pool briest-deep beneath, as clear as glass,
> Kisses wi' easy whirls the bordering grass."

There remains the tradition of Woodhouselee, a tradition which was full-blown before the eighteenth century closed. It expresses itself in a rustic "Temple" on the green hillside—one of those private shrines which were so much in vogue in England in the earlier half of the eighteenth century—such as Shenstone, for example, loved to set up

under every green tree at the Leasowes. The Whitehouselee temple is of unbarked fir branches, nicely and compactly fitted into a sort of octagonal kiosk, which opens on three sides to the east with an extensive and really charming view of the valley of the Esks—the Scottish Tempe, as some one has dared to dub it. The "temple" is a snug little summer-house perched on a shelf of the descending hills, where one might sit in peace, disturbed only by the sounds of a rookery overhead, and meditate, half-pleased and half-curious, the inscription on the votive table which the "temple" protects:—

"ALLANO RAMSAY ET GENIO LOCI.

"Here midst those scenes that taught thy Doric muse
Her sweetest song; the hills, the woods, and stream,
Where beauteous Peggy strayed, listening the while
Her Gentle Shepherd's tender tale of love;
Scenes which thy pencil, true to nature, gave
To live for ever. Sacred be this shrine,
And unprofaned by ruder hands the stone
That owes its honours to thy deathless name."

Above the legend is a collection of pastoral emblems—panpipe, crook, stock-and-horn, and comic mask. One is pleased with the devotion, and curious to know what personal connection Ramsay had with the ancient estate of Fulford (or New Woodhouselee).