

## THE BROOMIELAW.

IT is a sorry place now-a-days. From the railway bridge, which forms an archway at its eastern extremity, a sign might well be suspended bearing the word ICHABOD. For the glory of the Broomielaw has departed. Its *life* has fled; its flavour has gone; no longer does it attract the curious. In the daytime it is all a bustle of whirling traffic; at night it is deserted, dark, and forbidding. No signs of revelry are there, nor are the strains of sea chanties heard from its shuttered doors. And yet it was a gay place in its time, full of colour and atmosphere, a place too of wild life and of passion. Its stone setts have known a range of comedy and drama and grim tragedy undreamt of by any theatre. And what the moon has looked down upon in that place, no pen could ever write.

In the old days it was the haunt of every adventurous boy, the pilgrimage of pilgrimages. That it was forbidden made it all the dearer. There, generally on Saturdays, we boys would go. "Ye've been doon at the quay again!" our mothers would say; and our little hearts would sink. But it was worth it. The quay! There's a word with a lineage and a meaning, before which *dock* and *wharf* tumble down as varlets in presence of their queen!

The east end of the Broomielaw was the gateway to wonderland. Here were the barrows with, in their season, oranges, figs, monkey nuts, cocoanuts, raisins, plums, cockles, mussels, wulks, and other delectables;

a harmony of colours pleasing to the eye, a blend of odours pungent and intoxicating.

Then came the steamers (the river at that time was the great highway to the lower Clyde valley) a wonderful fleet with their jangling bells and their gay crowds aboard, Sunday-school trips, lads and lasses, auld wives and wee bairns, cheering and hanky-waving; the perennial wheeze from the quay: "Mind an' bring us hame a monkey, Jean!" And the Clyde aroma? Gone! Even the smell of tarry ropes and tarpaulins which, from Jamaica Street to Finnieston, filled the nostrils—swallowed up in petrol fumes! The shops with their curiously assorted wares, from parrots to Bibles, now warehouses and stores! No Aladdin-like money changers there; the windows, that were filled with strange coins and notes on which our young imagination used to feast, closed to mortal eye! The old windjammers, from the fo'castles of which could be seen emerging, at odd times, men of divers races, sinister figures—Chinese, Lascars, Spaniards with fierce moustaches, swarthy Italians, fair-haired Swedes, cut-throat Greeks, not to speak of our own tough old shellbacks—all vanished! Of its former glory nothing remains but the occasional excursion of some foreign crew to the shipping office, sad, commercialised creatures, who later may be found wandering aimlessly along Argyle Street, buying umbrellas and other ridiculous things.

Boys no longer frequent the Broomielaw. The age of romance there is over. It yields little now-a-days of either comedy, drama, or tragedy. And yet it was at the corner of the Broomielaw not so many years

ago that I witnessed a perfectly delightful piece of domestic comedy.

It was the guidman home-returning after having spent his pay in the haunts of his boyhood. He was cheery fou, and carried, as peace-offering, parcels of sausages and other things that showed themselves exuding from their wrappings. His chief prize was a huge ling fish, no doubt picked up at some ship store. With this he flicked playfully any girls who happened to be passing. All was going well until he met *something* at the corner of the bridge. It was Nemesis in the form of the guidwife.

"Hallo, Maggie!" he shouted affectionately, as inebriated men will.

"Nane o' yer Maggies to me," was the guidwife's retort. And with that she got the ling fish by the tail and lounded that unhappy man over the bridge, round Clyde Place, and into Commerce Street. "I'll ling-fish ye!" she kept yelling as clout after clout descended on the head of the running victim; nor did she stop till every bit of that fish was spent, and nothing remained in her hand but the stump of a tail.

But perhaps this is not a comedy, and it happened not in the Broomielaw, but at the corner. Nothing will ever again happen in the Broomielaw; its glory is departed; it is as a tale that is told.