

ROSSLYN CASTLE

ROSSLYN has three great attractions—its wonderful Chapel, its ancient Castle, and its valley of scenic romance.

Having visited the Chapel let us now make our way to the famous Castle, which for long was one of the most important in Scotland. It stands on a rocky peninsula or promontory, surrounded on three sides by the far-famed river North Esk. We enter by a road over what was originally a deep and precipitous defile, once crossed by a drawbridge. Through this ravine a road led to the south crossing the river by a bridge. This was the road used in going to the adjoining Castles of Hawthornden, Dalkeith, Borthwick, and the Monasteries of Newbattle, Temple, Mount Lothian. This bridge has gone. The middle arch was destroyed about 1700. The abutment on the north side is still visible. The present bridge giving entrance to the Castle is fifty feet high. The first arch across the defile was built by the founder of the Chapel, Sir William St. Clair, about 1446, the second by another Sir William in 1596-7. As we pass under the archway through which kings and queens and heroes have entered the Castle, we see the ruins of the earliest part of the building—the Tower at the north-east corner.

THE LANTERN TOWER

It was called the "Lantern" or "Lamp Tower"; probably built about 1304, shortly after the Battle of Roslin, 1302, although there may have been an earlier building. At the bottom of the high wall adjoining, *i.e.*, on the south-east, there are remains of a stair of nine steps cut in the face of the rock, probably leading to a terrace above.

THE GREAT DUNGEON

The dungeon or "Keep," on the south-west corner, was built about 1390. Father Hay says that Sir Henry, the second Prince of Orkney, "builided the great dungeon of Rosslyn and other walls thereabout, together with parks for red and fallow deer." It was five storeys high and fifty feet long.

Sir William, the Chapel-founder, who succeeded to the estate about 1417, enlarged and strengthened the castle, and employed great numbers of workmen. "He builided the church walls of Rosline, having rounds (buttresses) with fair chambers and galleries thereon; he builided also the forework that looks north-east; he builided the bridge under the castle, a fruit orchard, and sundry office-houses." Nothing now remains of the "church walls" which presumably had to do with some early church, "galleries and fair chambers" or of the "office-houses" which would doubtless be very necessary for the accommodation of the numerous dependents whom the Prince had continually about him. Many French features were introduced in the additions to the castle—the galleries and projecting chambers and turrets, probably because Sir William and his Princess spent much time in that country. What however is most interesting is that the west wall of enceinte with buttresses or "rounds," is unique, being matched only with that of the twelfth century Château Guillard on the Seine, built by Richard I. It is also interesting to note the oyster-shells in the mortar used in building the walls. Oysters were plentiful and cheap in those days. James I bought 45,100 in 1434-35 for £8, 10s. 1d. (Exchequer Rolls, IV, 618).

There are some ruins on the steep bank below the "Great Dungeon" to the north-west; part of an arched roof is seen in two places. What these "out-works" were is unknown, perhaps the remains of the two Towers—"Robin Hood" and "Little John," which Sir William St. Clair allowed the Gypsies to inhabit, about 1559, when they came to act their plays, referred to later (p. 87).

LIVED IN GREAT MAGNIFICENCE

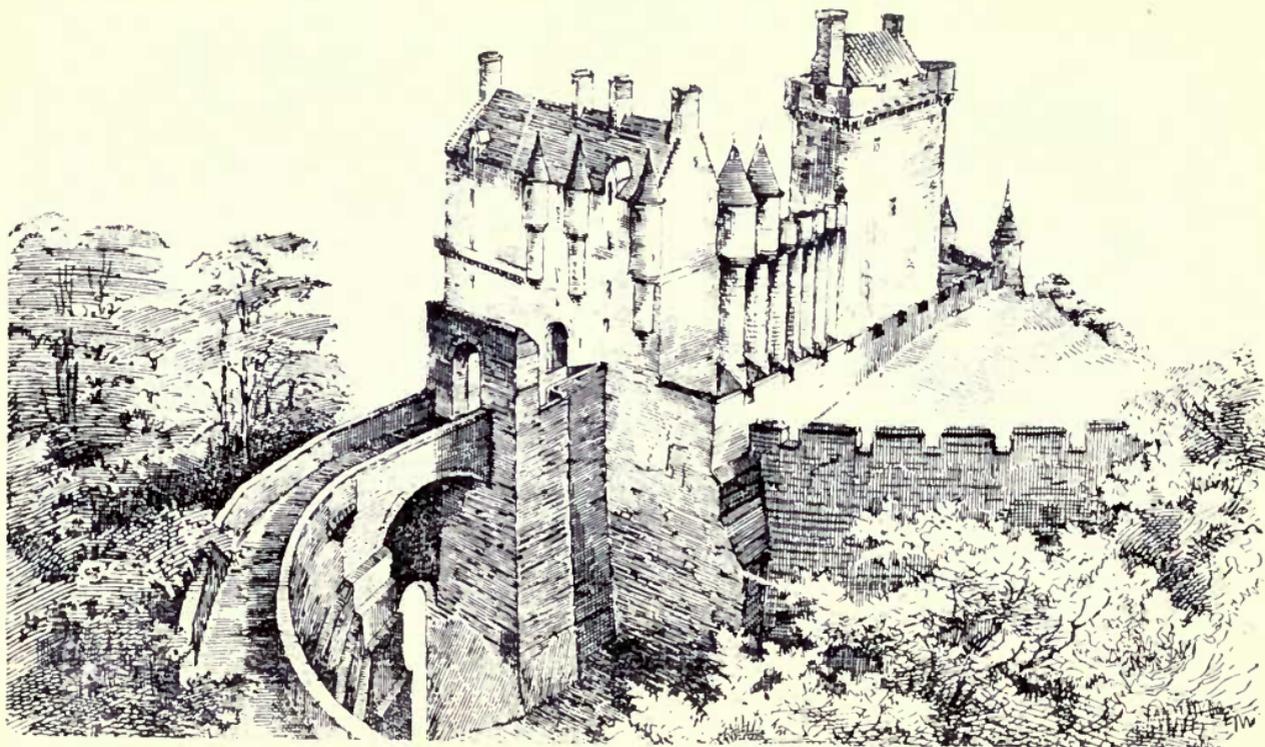
In this massive, strange and picturesque Castle, upon which so much skill and time and money were spent, Sir Henry and his son and grandson Sir William would seem to have lived in almost regal magnificence. We have already spoken of the first and second Prince of Orkney (both named Sir Henry) and their high position in the national life. Of Sir William, the third Prince and Chapel-founder it is recorded that "in his house he was royally served in gold and silver vessels, in most princely manner, for the Lord Dirltone was Master of the Household, Lord Borthwick, his Cup-bearer, and Lord Fleming, his Carver," and noble Deputies to take their places when absent—the Lairds of Drumelzier, Calder and Drumlanrig. "He had his halls and his chambers richly hung with embroidered hangings." His Princess, also, Lady Elizabeth Douglas, whose various titles are given in Father Hay's manuscript, was held "in great reverence, both for her birth, and for the estate she was in, being served by 75 gentlewomen of whom 53 were the daughters of noblemen, and all of them were attired in silk and velvet, and adorned with chains of gold and other jewels. When travelling from Rosslyn to the family mansion in Edinburgh—at the foot of Blackfriar's Wynd—she was attended by 200 gentlemen on horseback, and, if after nightfall, by other 80 persons bearing torches. Indeed, 'none matched her in all the country, save the Queen's Majesty'" (Hay, vol. II, p. 234). So that it may be concluded that the princely builder of the Castle and the founder of the Chapel, lived in regal splendour. It is further recorded that in the Courtyard were six recesses, in which stood the guard horses, saddled and bridled, ready to convey messages to or from the King.

But in the course of history it sometimes happens that such magnificence of dignity and wealth has its zenith and also its decline from various causes; and it was so in the case of the "Saintclairs":—

"No more in Rosslyn's stately halls
The joyous feast is spread,



THE THREE PILLARS OF EASTERN CHAPELS



ROSSLYN CASTLE AS IT WAS WHEN COMPLETE

Mute rests the harp on Rosslyn's walls
Its strings are damp and dead.

“The sprightly dance of prowest chiefs
And tissued dames is o'er,
Yea, all the pomp of feudal times
In Rosslyn is no more.”

(Gillespie.)

THE CASTLE IN FLAMES

It began with a mysterious cryptic warning, and a fire. Let Father Hay speak:—

“About this time (1447—a year after the founding of the Chapel) Edward Saintclair of Draidon coming with four greyhounds and some ratches (slow hounds, used to start game) to hunt with the Prince, met a great company of rats, and among them an old blind one, with a straw in its mouth, led by the rest, whereat he greatly marvelled, not thinking what should follow; but within four days after, to wit upon the feast of Saint Leonard (6th November, 1447) the Princess, who took great delight in little dogs, caused one of the gentlewomen to go under the bed with a lighted candle to bring forth one of them that had young whelps, which she doing, and not being very attentive, set fire on the bed, whereat the fire rose and burnt the bed, and then passed to the ceiling of the great chamber in which the Princess was, whereat she, with all that werè in the dungeon, were compelled to fly. The Prince's Chaplain seeing this, and remembering all his master's writings, passed to the head of the dungeon where they were, and threw out four great trunks where they were. The news of the fire coming to the Prince's ears through the lamentable cries of the ladies and gentlewomen, and the sight thereof coming to his view in the place where he stood, to wit upon the College Hill, he was sorry for nothing but the loss of his Charters and other writings; but when the Chaplain who had saved himself by coming down the bell-rope tied to a beam, declared how his Charters

and writs were all saved, he became cheerful and went to recomfort his Princess and the ladies, desiring them to put away all sorrow; and rewarded his Chaplain very richly. Yet all this stayed him not from the building of the College, neither his liberality to the poor, but was more liberal to them than before—applying the safety of his Charters and writings to God's particular Providence." As to misfortune foretold by rats! (See Intro. to "Legend of Montrose.")

The fire damage was soon repaired, for, eight years later (1455) there was a prisoner in the Castle—Sir William Hamilton of Cadyou, for joining in the Rebellion of James, Earl of Douglas, against James II; but not for long; he was released and taken into the Royal favour (Contemporary History, pp. 59-60). That in these dungeons many captives pined cannot be doubted. Of Sir William the Chapel and Castle builder it was said that he disapproved of cruelty, such as the rack, for extorting information from prisoners.

THE CASTLE AGAIN BURNED

The Castle was attacked and again set on fire, in 1544, during the rupture between Henry VIII and Scotland, in the matter of the proposed marriage—"The Rough Wooing"—between the Prince of Wales (Edward VI) and Mary, the infant Queen of Scots, his grandniece. The Earl of Hertford invaded Scotland with Henry's instruction "to put all to fire and sword," landed at Granton, and prior to attacking and burning Rosslyn, he burned Edinburgh, Leith, and Craigmillar Castle. Edinburgh burned for three days and nights and the glow was seen all along the Fife and Lothian coasts, impressing upon the Scots what it meant to be at the mercy of the King of England. Jedburgh was burned and Melrose destroyed when as Duke of Somerset, he destroyed Holyrood Abbey. Fortunately the Chapel was spared; and Rosslyn Castle was again rebuilt.

THE CASTLE VAULTS AND STAIRCASE

In 1580 Sir Edward St. Clair gave his estate to his successor Sir William St. Clair of Pentland. "He built the Vaults and Great Turnpike of Rosslyn (the large stone staircase four feet wide, leading up from the basement, through the various storeys of the Castle); he built one of the arches of the Drawbridge, a fine house near the mill (both have disappeared), and the Tower of the Dungeon where the clock was kept, with the date 1596." He also built the Great Hall adjoining the Clock Tower, and over the Vaults mentioned.

Then we learn that the rising expenses, the rebuilding of the Castle, the numerous extensions, losses through loyal attachment to the Royal cause, reduced Sir William's resources, and he sold part of his estates—Herbertshire in Stirlingshire, Morton and Morton-hall, etc. His son, also Sir William, continued his father's work and finished the building over the vaults, which his father had constructed on the solid rock, up to the level of the Courtyard. These are his initials you see over the door as you enter the present living apartments of the Castle—"S.W.S. (Sir William St. Clair), 1622." Note the dining-room ceiling—of fine ornamental plaster, divided into nine panels, richly decorated with hunting and hawking scenes and floral decoration. The district was a favourite one for royal sports, and Scottish Kings hunted on the surrounding moorlands and hills; the village of Pentland was a hunting centre. A former Sir William, Baron of Rosslyn, Pentland and Pentland Moor in free forestrie, was GRAND MASTER HUNTER OF SCOTLAND. He was knighted by Alexander II for his military services, fought under Alexander III against Haakon, King of Norway, in the Battle of Largs, 1263, and died about 1300. His son, also Sir William, took part in the Battle of Roslin, and this son, along with two grandsons, fought also at Bannockburn in Scotland's War of Independence, as we shall see later. The central panel of the ceiling has the St. Clair Arms—the engrailed cross; supporters, *dexter*, a mermaid with a comb in one hand,

and a bunch of seaweed in the other; *sinister*, a griffin; crest, a dove; Motto, "Credo"; date, 1622. The Castle was again complete. This was that Sir William who was interred in the Chapel on the day of the Battle of Dunbar, 3rd September, 1650, and the last to be buried in his armour, as previously noted.

CASTLE BATTERED BY CROMWELL'S TROOPS

His son, Sir John, called the "Prince," resisted the attack on the Castle by Cromwell's troops under General Monk, in 1650, but in vain, and Sir John was sent a prisoner to Tynemouth Castle, returning to Rosslyn to die in 1690. Rare literary and historical treasures perished. The only part of the building that escaped the fire of four pieces of ordnance, a mortar piece and 600 troopers, is the part now standing, the north-east and west sides being battered down, and the Castle pillaged. It was again pillaged during the time of Sir James St. Clair, Father Hay's stepfather, on 11th December, 1688, at 10 o'clock at night by a mob from Edinburgh, assisted by Rosslyn's own inhabitants and the Laird's own tenants; the Chapel was also entered and damaged. The object of the rabble was that the furniture and vestments were regarded as popish and idolatrous. This was the time when the Prince of Orange landed in England, prior to the final establishment of Presbyterianism in Scotland.

Well indeed has Byron described it—

" Oh, Roslin! time, war, flood and fire,
Have made your glories star by star expire.
Chaos of ruins! who shall trace the void,
O'er the dim fragments cast a lunar light,
And say, ' here was or is,' where all is doubly
night.

" Alas! thy lofty castle! and alas!
Thy trebly hundred triumphs! and the day
When Sinclair made the dagger's edge surpass
The conqueror's sword, in bearing fame away."

A hundred years later (1788) Grose speaks of the Castle as "haggard and utterly dilapidated—the mere wreck of a great pile riding on a little sea of forest, and a rueful apology for the once grand fabric, whose name of 'Rosslyn Castle' is so intimately associated with melody and song" (Grant's "Old & New Edinburgh," vol. III, p. 347). For even in the early centuries of the Castle's existence when life in this northern land might be considered hard and austere, it must be remembered that Scotland had a culture and refinement of its own; the fine arts were not neglected, and there was all the splendour of feudal pageantry. How lively and splendid for instance was the Court of James IV? And the Court of James I was luxurious we know from the Exchequer Rolls. His widowed Queen bought from Flanders "gold rings, crimson satin, purple velvet, ostrich feathers and mantles of marten fur as well as a silver seal; and had a new little ship built for herself at Leith in 1435, costing £25, 18s. 3d." (James I, Balfour Melville, pp. 278, 249, 263). Chivalry and pure knightly virtues as well as noble austerities—courage and duty, found expression in knightly adventure of most resolute and determined heroism, and in joust and tournament. Chivalry in the earlier phases of our history was not considered a moral extravagance, but rather the sole justification of power and strength. Students, bards, poets and painters lingered here, and oaken hall and tapestried chamber resounded to the music of lute and harpsichord. Love and laughter held high carnival, and fair maidens were wooed and won by valiant squire and knight, conflicting emotions of love and duty not infrequently playing a decisive part in tragic and romantic amours.

"And in the lofty arched hall
Was spread the gorgeous festival.

"Their clanging bowls old warriors quaffed,
Loudly they spoke and loudly laughed:
Whispered young knights in tones more mild
To ladies fair, and ladies smiled.

“ Round go the flasks of ruddy wine
From Bordeaux, Orleans, or the Rhine,
Their tasks the busy servers ply,
And all is mirth and revelry.”

(“ Lay of the Last Minstrel.”)

As we enter the Castle by the bridge the massive fragments which we see point to the strength of the former fastness, and its strong defence against attack. Built truly for security and protection in stern times, we do well to remember that those were days in Scotland when national sentiment was a vital force, and valiant men fought and fell for that Freedom which they counted dearer than life itself. The walls of the Castle were nine feet thick, and the total length about 200 feet by 90 feet broad, and in several places we can see where it has been hewn out of the living rock. The modern part of the 1622 building is inhabited, and visitors can gain admission to the two lower tiers of Vaults by passing through a doorway in the garden wall to the left. In front of the entrance to these Vaults called the “ Old Guard Rooms,” from the garden, and near the base of the Clock Tower stands a very ancient yew tree of immense size that may have been planted about the time the Castle was built, at the beginning of the 14th century. Tradition says it supplied wood for the archers’ bows. It may be an indication of the poor condition of Scottish timber that the Parliament of James I, in 1426, passed a law that merchants trading overseas were to bring home from each voyage harness and armour, with spear-shafts and bow-shafts. The Castle gardens were so famed for their strawberries in 1815 that they formed a chief attraction for many Edinburgh citizens.

OLD KITCHEN, BAKEHOUSE AND DUNGEONS

These are accommodated in three storeys below the level of the courtyard under the present living apartments.

The bottom floor consists of the Kitchen with a very large fireplace and a small window; the “ Great

Turnpike” and four cellars or dungeons, only one of which has a fireplace. The tier above has the Bakehouse and large oven. The two tiers are connected by the staircase and with the garden by means of the passage on the second floor, the entrance to which is near the yew tree.

At the bottom of the “Great Turnpike” on the right hand between the stair and the kitchen, is a doorway which leads down a few steps under the stair—how far it is impossible to say—it has been filled up. Perhaps it led to Vaults farther down—remains of strong iron hinges for a heavy door are visible; or it may just have been a cupboard or recess, who can tell! Many of the recesses would hold the open iron lamp used with a rush wick—the Scottish crusie lamp, for these ancient dwellings admitted little daylight.

LIFT, SPEAKING-TUBE, DRAINAGE, WATER

At the foot of the “Great Turnpike” is an aperture or “hatch” in the roof—evidently a lift or hoist from the kitchen and bakehouse to the Great Hall above or the ante-room adjoining. In the kitchen, and also in the bakehouse, there is a small aperture, 8-9 inches square, probably used as a speaking-tube or shaft communicating with the ante-room of the Great Hall. The drainage was primitive. Examples are seen in the south-east side of kitchen and bakehouse, while in the window jambs of both apartments, a broken aperture shows how the drainage was conducted down through the body of the wall, and emptied itself through an opening cut in the rock outside. Several such outlets are seen in various places round the Castle.

The Dutch contractor Peter Bruschi who brought in the first public gravitation water supply to the City of Edinburgh from Tod’s Well, Comiston, in 1676, brought water in lead pipes to the inner Court and lower Vaults of Rosslyn Castle in the time of Sir James St. Clair, who although a Roman Catholic, was made a Burgess of Edinburgh by Provost Currie in 1673, and was responsible for obtaining Bruschi’s

services for the city ("Genealogy," p. 106, and "Call of the Pentlands," ch. xiii).

The oven in the Bakehouse is 8 feet long by 5 feet high, and the Kitchen fireplace where the oxen were roasted whole 10 feet by 9 feet and 7 feet high in the middle, with a cut runway for the grease from the dripping roasting-jacks and spits.

The third tier is now entered only from the house above. Near the bottom of the stair, in the passage, opposite the door of the first compartment to the left is a built-up doorway, which leads into the Vaults said to be under the Courtyard. Here, we are told, is a dungeon, called "Little Ease," a pit into which prisoners were let down with ropes!

Above the third tier is the Great Hall, part forming the kitchen of the modern dwelling. The other part which is ruinous contains a handsome moulded fireplace over which are the initials of Sir William St. Clair and his wife Jean Edmiston, with date 1597. There is also a small recess, perhaps used by the butler washing glasses and cleaning silver. Through a doorway with Gothic moulding is the entrance to the Clock Tower. All the compartments of the two upper tiers and the Clock Tower have eyelet or shot-holes, while in the lower flats the original iron window bars horizontal and vertical are interlaced in the usual ancient Scottish fashion, to give additional strength and security.

THE FIVE DIFFERENT PERIODS AT WHICH THE CASTLE WAS BUILT

- (1) 1304 (approx.) Lantern, Lamp or Peel Tower, at north-east corner.
- (2) 1390 (approx.) Keep or Great Dungeon.
- (3) 1417-1450 Connecting portion between 1 and 2 along the north-west, north and north-east sides.
- (4) 1582-1597 Vaults up to the Courtyard level, Tower at south corner, and Great Hall.
- (5) 1622 Modern part now standing over north-east end of the Vaults.