

Tales of Lochleven.

Mildly and soft the western breeze
Just kissed the lake, just stirred the trees,
And the pleased lake, like maiden coy,
Trembled but dimpled not for joy.



PICTURESQUE spot indeed is Lochleven—the pride of Kinross-shire. Lofty hills, from whose snowy summits the streams that feed the lake flow thundering down or tinkle over the rocky crags, hem it round and cast their waxing and waning shadows over its bosom; and when the orb of day has gone down behind the high Ochils and the moon pursues its heavenly course, its glistening waters, studded with

Those emerald isles which calmly sleep
On the blue bosom of the deep,

reflect back the glittering moonbeams. Here, to this vocal vale, the cuckoo pays his earliest visit, and the angler on the lake, as he listens to the thrice-welcome voice, pauses pensively on his rod, while the boatman, never tired of rehearsing the oft-repeated tales of his native loch, points to Kinneswood, the birthplace of Michael Bruce, on the eastern shore of the lake. Poor Michael! At the age of twenty-one he was cut off—an unmercenary bard, whose life penury and relentless disease gnawed away, but whose name is written in bold letters on the scroll of life, and whose genius, too little appreciated during his transient existence, is now, and ever shall be, crowned with fadeless laurels. From his mind emanated that beautiful poem, “Hail, beauteous stranger of the grove!” the finest lyric in mortal language, and that celebrated elegy on Spring which

makes the remembrance of him sacred. Among other pieces he wrote a somewhat lengthy, loco-descriptive poem entitled "Loch-leven," and from it we cull the beautiful episode of Levina, a touching love scene of the most wistful simplicity and tenderness.

Low by the lake, as yet without a name,
Fair bosom'd in the bottom of the vale,
Arose a cottage, green with ancient turf,
Half-hid in hoary trees, and from the north
Fenc'd by a wood, but open to the sun.

The inmates of the cottage are a peasant and his lovely daughter; the former an aged man who is nearing the hill-top of life, whose reverend-looking locks and patriarchal grace belie the youthful ruddiness of his cheeks. Careful is he of his daughter, "the apple of his eye," now budding into womanhood, and growing every day more and more like the wife he has lost.

Belov'd of Heav'n, his fair Levina grew
In youth and grace the Naiad of the vale,
Fresh as the flow'r amid the sunny show'rs
Of May, and blither than the bird of dawn;
But roses' bloom gave beauty to her cheek,
Soft tempered with a smile. The light of heav'n
And innocence illumined her virgin eye,
Lucid and lovely as the morning star.

Her maidenly modesty, smiling cheerfulness, and sweet content set on fire the passions of the shepherds who, while they tended their flocks on the hill-sides and in the dales, sang forth her praises. But Levina knew not love. Her pet diversion was to contemplate nature, to wander through the woods and valleys in quest of birds' nests and herbs and new flowers, which she would carry to the woodmen to learn their names. So the days passed on, till one summer morning—

O'er valleys gay, o'er hillocks green she walked,
Sweet as the season; and at times awak'd
The echoes of the vale, with native notes

Of heart-felt joy, in numbers heavenly sweet—
 Sweet as th' hosannahs of a form of light,
 A sweet-tongued Seraph in the bow'rs of bliss.

As she paused musingly upon a hill-top, "a quivered hunter" espied her and became spell-bound. In burning language he lays bare the throbbings of his heart. With diffidence the maiden tells him the worthless weed might as well presume to match the mountain-oak. Sore was the combat in the mind and heart of the shepherdess; yet every moment her courage was faltering and her resolution breaking down; and her eyes became false to the words she spoke, while

The deep-enamour'd youth
 Stood gazing on her charms, and all his soul
 Was lost in love. He grasped her trembling hand
 And breathed the softest, the sincerest vows
 Of love; "O virgin! fairest of the fair!
 My one beloved! were the Scottish throne
 To me transmitted through a scepter'd line
 Of ancestors—thou, thou should'st be my queen,
 And Caledonia's diadems adorn
 A fairer head than ever wore a crown!"

The blushing maid consents to be his bride, and many halcyon days they spend together in this paradise on earth. At length the nuptial morn arrived. Nature had donned her gayest attire; streamlets murmured their softest lullabies; the warblers of the grove trilled their mellifluous lays; every living thing was glad, "and there was joy in heaven." Now—

Fair in the bosom of the level lake,
 Rose a green island, cover'd with a spring
 Of flowers perpetual, goodly to the eye,
 And blooming from afar. High in the midst,
 Between two fountains, an enchanted tree
 Grew ever green, and every month renewed
 Its blooms and apples of Hesperian gold.
 Here every bride—as ancient poets sing—
 Two golden apples gathered from the bough.

To give the bridegroom in the bed of love,
 The pledge of nuptial concord and delight
 For many a coming year.

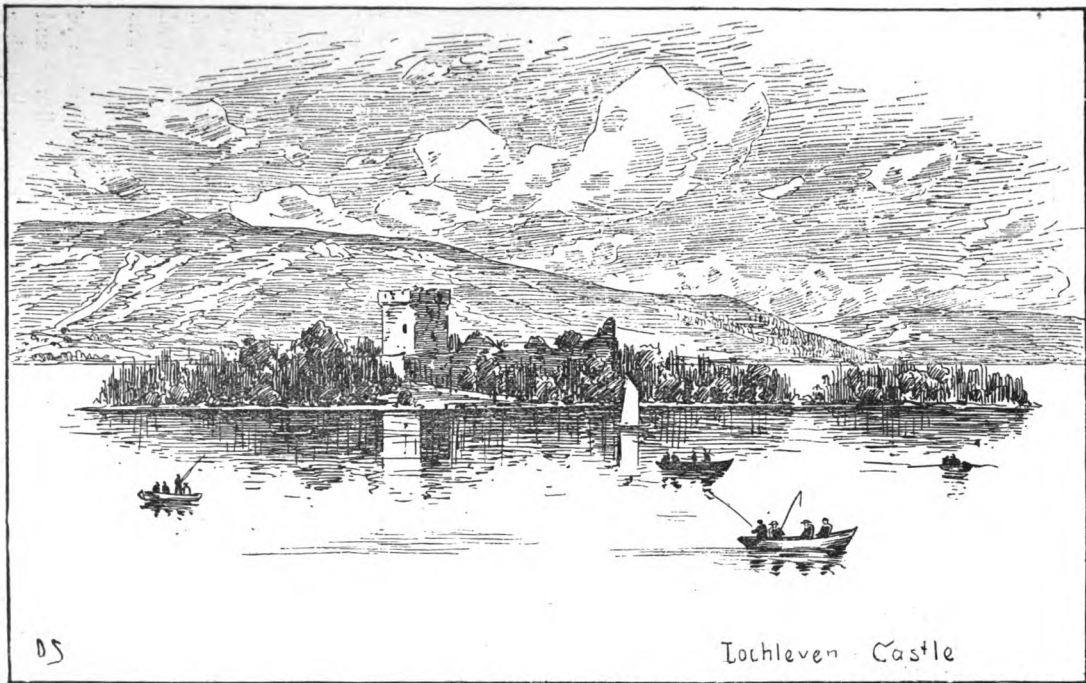
Levina sailed for the island with her bridalmaid and pulled the mystic fruit. Yet she was not satisfied: she coveted the enchanted tree, and so uprooted one of the virgin plants that grew beside the parent stem. No sooner had she done this than the island shook, shrieks of woe fell upon their ears, the air grew dark with mystery, and in terror and dismay they got into the boat and hurried from the isle.

And now they gained the middle of the lake,
 And saw the approaching land; now, wild with joy,
 They rowed, they flew—when, lo! at once diffused,
 Sent by the angry demon of the isle,
 A whirlwind arose; it lashed the angry lake
 To tempest, o'eturned the boat, and sunk
 The fair Levina to a watery tomb.

It is a sad story, a story of mingled tenderness and sorrow. For [the distracted youth heave, gentle reader, a sympathetic sigh; and let a teardrop fall, tender maiden, in memory of the hapless virgin. Lomond and Levina!—on earth they lived in joy, knit together by love; in death they were not divided.

All night he wandered by the sounding shore,
 Long looking o'er the lake; and saw at times
 The dear, the dreary, ghost of her he loved:
 Till love and grief subdued his manly prime,
 And brought his youth with sorrow to the grave.

The story of Levina naturally leads us to the story of its name. Michael Bruce, in his poem, of course infers that Loch Leven is only a corrupted form of Loch Levina. Popular testimony ascribes its name to its "eleven elevens," by supposing it to be an abbreviation of Lochleven. Eleven estates, the story goes, once touched its shores, and it could be seen from eleven parishes. There are said to be eleven hills round it. It is, or was, eleven miles in circumference, is fed by eleven



streams, studded with eleven islands, peopled by eleven kinds of fish, and frequented by eleven varieties of wild fowl. Etymologists, too, are at variance about it. Some hold that Leven means smooth, while others take the derivation from the meandering nature of the rivers that bear the name; but the most acceptable interpretation is that the word signifies clear, transparency being a characteristic of all the rivers so called, of which there are at least five in Britain. The native derivation may be plausible, but is rather far-fetched, when we weigh the eleven peculiarities of the Kinross-shire Leven with those of the other Levens.

Of the islands which dot the loch, two in particular are fraught with interest to the tourist, the archæologist, and the historian. These are St Serf's Isle and Castle Island. The former carries us back to the Apostolic ages.

Fronting, where Gairney pours his silent urn
 Into the lake, an island lifts its head.
 Grassy and wild, with ancient ruin heap'd
 Of cells.

That is St Serf's Isle, or, to give it its Celtic appellation, The Inch, thereby showing that once upon a time it was the principal island in the lake. And, indeed, so it is still as regards size, measuring in extent eighty acres or thereabouts, though the halo of interest which surrounded it in the early days of Christianity has, during the roll of ages, diminished and fallen on its sister island which contains the remains of the celebrated castle that was once the prison-house of Scotland's fairest Queen. Ten and a half odd centuries ago Brudus, or Brude, a King of the Picts, founded a priory on the island and dedicated it to Saint Servanus, or Saint Serf, who is supposed to have come on a pilgrimage from the Holy Land, and who was made its first prior.

Long years before the Culdees, "Albyn's earliest priests of God," had settled there, attracted hither by the solitude and security of the spot. Good men were these Culdees, altogether

different from the idolatrous Druidical worshippers who bowed on bended knee to Odin and Thor; different, too, from the monks who owned the papal supremacy and cloistered themselves in some safe retreat, looking all the while with cold indifference on the outside world. For centuries they lived in cells, ministering to the necessities of the people among whom they dwelt, participating in all the trials and vicissitudes of life, entering into society and mingling their religion with such peaceful pursuits as would ensure their sustenance without enriching themselves at the expense of their fellow-men. And when they died, churches sprang up on the spots which their presence had made holy ground. The time came, however—a time of ignorance—when the Picts and the Scots doffed their simple faith for the deceits of Rome, the vices that subdue the soul and the luxuries which kill the heart, when

Superstition for her cloistered son
 A dwelling reared with many an arch'd vault,
 Where her pale votaries at the midnight hour,
 In many a mournful strain of melancholy,
 Chanted their orisons to the cold moon.

And when the midnight moon would lave
 Her forehead in the silent wave,
 How solemn to the ear would come
 The holy matin's distant hum,
 While the deep peal's commanding tone
 Should wake, in yonder islet lone,
 A sainted hermit from his cell,
 To drop a bead with every knell.

But times are changed, old manners gone, and little now remains of the sacred edifice; time and tempest have both laid their ruthless and dilapidating hands upon the ruins. Where in dark antiquity the saintly Culdees did penance and offered up their humble fealty; where in later times were heard the plaintive strains, or, haply, the festal-songs of the Anglican

monks as the silent midnight air wafted them shorewards, nothing now breaks the stillness save the cries of the wild-shrieking gull, the lapwing, and the heron, or the night-screaming owl.

Popish legends declare that St Serf had a combat with the Prince of Darkness in one of the caves that pierce the coast of Fife, and expelled him from his dwelling. In the reign of David I., a monarch who founded more monasteries than any other Scottish king, the priory of St Moak, as it was called, was annexed to that of St Andrews. Andro of Wyntoun, the ancient historian, was one of its priors, and in the undisturbed quiet of the place wrote his *Orygynale Kronykil of Scotland*.

Many historic memories are associated with Loch Leven, and of these the most interesting is one which every schoolboy and girl knows, or ought to know, the story of Mary Queen of Scots, "the noblest of the Stuart race." The ancient castle, on what is now called St Mary's Isle, was the place of her captivity after the surrender at Carberry Hill. Here was enacted the midway act of that great drama which had such a terrible consummation. In the grey dawn of a summer's morning in 1567 she was brought over to the lake-island fortress and consigned to the care of Sir William Douglas, who is described in history as an honest man, but stern and unbending. Fully ten months she spent in the castle; and her Stuart spirit, ever proud and hopeful, chafed under the long dreary months of confinement and inaction. Burns ably pictures her lamentations—

Now blooms the lily by the bank,
 The primrose down the brae;
 The hawthorn's budding in the glen,
 And milk-white is the slae;
 The meanest hind in fair Scotland
 May rove their sweets amang;
 But I, the Queen of a' Scotland,
 Maun lie in prison strang.

Here, a month after she entered the castle, she was forced to

sign her abdication. Glassford Bell graphically describes the incident :—

The scene was changed. It was a lake,
 With one small lonely isle,
 And there, within the prison walls
 Of its baronial pile,
 Stern men stood menacing their Queen,
 Till she should stoop to sign
 The traitorous scroll that snatched the crown
 From her ancestral line :—
 “ My lords ! my lords ! ” the captive said,
 “ Were I but once more free,
 With ten good knights on yonder shore,
 To aid my cause and me,
 That parchment would I scatter wide
 To every breeze that blows,
 And once more reign a Stuart Queen
 O'er my remorseless foes ! ”
 A red spot burned upon her cheek—
 Streamed her rich tresses down ;
 She wrote the words—she stood erect—
 A Queen without a crown !

Many attempts were made to rescue her from without, but all failed to break down the vigilance of her keeper. Within the fortress, however, the unfortunate sovereign was more successful. All her arts and charms she brought to bear upon her keeper's brother, George Douglas ; nay, it is even averred that she flattered him to such an extent that he hoped in time to fill the place of Bothwell. Whether this was the case or not it would be hard indeed to say ; anyhow, George Douglas became Mary's ardent slave, and the plot for her release quickly gathered strength. On the evening of the 2nd of May 1568, while the family was at supper, Douglas managed to obtain possession of the keys. Historians relate how Little Douglas, a page-boy, while placing a plate before the keeper, dropped a napkin on the keys, which lay as usual on the table beside that stern gentleman. In lifting the napkin he succeeded in also lifting

the keys along with it, grasping them tightly to prevent them jingling. The rest was the work of a few minutes. Mary and her attendants were ready, and soon they were outside the castle gate, which they locked behind them to delay pursuit. A boat was at hand, and they pushed off, the Queen herself taking an oar. As they neared the shore Douglas dropped the keys into the lake, where they were found, rusty and old, after lying for nearly two hundred and fifty years in their subaqueous bed. The hapless Queen's escape has been pleasingly wedded to poesy by Robert Allan.

Put off, put off, and row with speed,
 For now is the time and the hour of need !
 To oars, to oars, and trim the bark,
 Nor Scotland's Queen be a warder's mark.
 Yon light that plays round the castle's moat
 Is only the warder's random shot ;
 Put off, put off, and row with speed,
 For now is the time and the hour of need !

Those ponderous keys shall the kelpies keep,
 And lodge in their caverns dark and deep ;
 Nor shall Lochleven's towers or hall
 Hold thee, our lovely lady, in thrall ;
 Or be the haunt of traitors, sold,
 While Scotland has hands and hearts so bold ;
 Then, steersmen, steersmen, on with speed,
 For now is the time and the hour of need !

Hark ! the alarum bell hath rung,
 And the warder's voice hath treason sung !
 The echoes to the falconet's roar
 Chime sweetly to the dashing oar ;
 Let tower, and hall, and battlements gleam,
 We steer by the light of the taper's beam ;
 For Scotland and Mary, on with speed,
 Now, now is the time and the hour of need !

We know the rest of the story : let us, therefore, draw a veil over the conclusion of the tragedy in which "*King*

Elizabeth" played so prominent a part. Here we bid the poor Queen adieu !

Gothic the pile, and high the solid walls,
With warlike ramparts, and the strong defence
Of jutting battlements : an age's toil !
No more its arches echo to the noise
Of joy and festive mirth.
Naked stand the melancholy walls,
Lash'd by the wintry tempests, cold and bleak.

The castle is of great antiquity, and is said to have been built as a Royal residence by Congal, son of Dongart, a Pictish king. It must, therefore, be upwards of fourteen hundred years old. A curious stone pavement is believed to extend from the shore across to the island, which can thus be reached by wading when the loch is low. Alexander III., as well as many of his predecessors, lived in it. The Douglasses, to whom it was granted by Robert III., held it for some generations, after which it reverted again to the Crown.

Now and again, as we have already seen, it was used as a State prison. Besides the captive Queen, another prisoner of Royal blood was confined in it, and spent his last days within its walls. This was the Archbishop of St Andrews—Patrick Graham, by name—the grandson of Robert III., who was arrested at the instigation of the Roman Catholic clergy, the immorality of whose lives he had tried to reform, hustled about from monastery to monastery, and finally cast into the castle, where, in 1478, he succumbed to the ravings of a terrible insanity, brought on by accumulated misfortunes. The Earl of Northumberland, after rebelling against Queen Elizabeth, sought refuge in Scotland, and spent three years—from 1569 to 1572—as a prisoner in Lochleven Castle, at the end of which time he was basely handed over to the English sovereign, who put him to death.

“ Woe !” says the prophet ; “ woe to the land whose king is

a child!" How often, how very often indeed, did Scotland, in days of yore, experience the truth of the adage! How often was she compelled to play that world-old game where death is the awful price; and how often was she almost overwhelmed by her enemies—and all, all because her sovereigns were minors!

The closing years of the Bruce's reign are in our mind's eye. Scotland was free—untrammelled, independent, gloriously free, and its people were looking eagerly forward to that sparkling buoyancy and gladness which is the birthright of every nation that is free. But Bruce died, and though he left behind him a realm basking in the rosy glow and loveliness of infant freedom, he also unfortunately bequeathed to Scotland an infant son. And misfortunes never come singly. The years following the death of Robert and that of his heroic nephew, the good Regent Randolph, were but young when Edward Baliol—son of John Baliol—claimed the crown. Helped by English soldiers, with whom Edward III., surnamed Windsor, was in no wise loth to supply him; supported also by those disinherited barons who had lost their estates during Bruce's struggle for freedom; and above all, aided by the imbecility of the Earl of Mar, into whose feeble hands had fallen the reins of the state;—thus encouraged, Baliol urged on his claims; and for a time it seemed in truth as if the good genius of Scotland had gone with Randolph to the tomb, so manifestly did everything appear to play into the hands of the would-be monarch and his auxiliaries.

A succession of ignominious defeats befel the Scottish arms. At Dupplin Moor "multitudes perished without stroke of weapon," and so terrible was the carnage that it will ever rank as one of the most calamitous and inglorious reverses in the annals of our country. The battle of Halidon Hill was the crowning mishap. Only five strongholds held out for King David. One of these was the Castle of Lochleven, which was gallantly defended by Sir Alan de Vipont, assisted by James Lambie, a citizen of St Andrews.

Early in the year 1334 Baliol laid siege to the castle. Per-

ceiving, however, that it would be too great a tax upon his time and strength to capture it, he appointed one of his commanders, Sir John de Strivelin, or Stirling, to continue the blockade. Serving in the army of the besiegers there were—be it to our lasting shame!—several Fife gentlemen of note, amongst others Michael and David de Wemyss, Michael de Arnott, and Richard de Melville. The insular position of the fortress made the siege a matter of the greatest difficulty, and the Fifan barons to whom the place was quite familiar, fortified themselves in the churchyard of St Serf, just over against the castle, from which vantage-ground all imaginable attempts were made to reduce it; but in vain, until at last it became evident that nothing but downright strategy would prevail. All other devices having failed, they resolved to drown the stronghold and its stubborn defenders by damming up the outlet of the lake with trees and stones and turf. To cause the water to rise more rapidly they turned the courses of several rivers and brooks in the country round about so as to make them flow into the loch.

Now, happily for Vipont and his brave comrades, it chanced to be the season of Lent, and Sir John Stirling—devout man that he was!—went, for devotion's sake, with a number of his officers to visit the shrine of St Margaret in the holy city of Dunfermline. Yet it would have fared ill with the beleaguered garrison had not news of this manoeuvre been carried immediately to Sir Alan, who quickly made himself master of the situation. The camp of the besiegers, who imagined themselves secure from molestation, was wrapped in heavy sleep. At midnight a boat was launched. Taking with him a few of his soldiers, he rowed with all possible caution to the embouchure of the river, and succeeded in perforating in several places the dyke which stemmed its waters. This accomplished, the little party silently returned to the castle.

Then the pent-up water, having once found a way of escape, widened the orifices that had been made. The great barrier at last creaked—it gave way, and the flood rushed from its one-

time prison like an angry mountain lion. It tumbled and roared—Benarty, in trembling wrath, echoed back the sound. It overflowed the plains. It swept away everything that threatened to impede its progress. It drowned the bastions and tents of the besiegers, and carried the bewildered soldiers, just awaking from sleep, and their affrighted horses away towards the sea. Then the garrison issued forth from the castle to complete the work of destruction, and, falling upon those who had survived the flood, slew a great many of them, the rest seeking safety in flight. Elated with success, and enriched with the spoils and provisions which became his portion, the victorious general prepared his fortress for the lengthened siege which, he felt sure, would inevitably follow. Sir John Stirling, when he heard of the discomfiture of his host, blazed up into the most ungovernable fury, and returned to the blockade, vowing never to depart from thence till he had taken the citadel and put to the sword all that were within its walls.

Yet, after staying there a long time and seeing that it was practically impossible to win the fortress, he deemed it advisable to abandon the undertaking. Thus was the glory of the Kingdom recovered by the intrepidity and fortitude of Sir Alan de Vipont and his brave companions.

To look at the quiet waters of Lochleven, with its castled and monastic ruins crumbling to dust amid their beautiful trees, with nothing to disturb the solitude but the twitters or screams of the birds about them, or the splash and swish of the fisherman on its shadowed waters, few would imagine that it had played such an important part in the roll of ages.