

## CHAP. XXXII.

## THE KYLES OF BUTE.

How to leave Tarbert. — The *Iona*. — A Herring-laden Steamer. — Tarbert Quay. — Street Slaughtering. — Our Caliban. — East Tarbert Loch. — Loch Fyne. — Aird Lamont. — Last View of Cantire. — Rough Water. — Entrance to the Kyles. — Calais and the Kyles. — Scenery and Sea Sickness. — Formation of the Kyles. — A Loch-y Labyrinth. — Travellers' Opinions as to the Kyles. — Pennant. — Lord Teignmouth. — Miss Sinclair. — Gushing Raptures. — Macculloch. — A Fairy-like Sea. — Sir George Head. — Passage of the Kyles. — Rothesay. — The Poet Prince. — The tragical Story of the first Duke of Rothesay. — My Lord Bute reads my Lady a Lesson. — Toward Point. — The Firth of Clyde.

THERE are two ways of leaving Tarbert for the Kyles of Bute—which is the route by which I would conduct my readers away from Cantire, and back to the spot from whence we first set out on our journey to the Land's-end of Scotland. The one way is, to catch the *Iona* — the swiftest steamer on the Clyde, on her way from Inverary to Glasgow. But to achieve this — as the *Iona* does not call at Tarbert — it is necessary to take a boat, and get through the diffi-

culties of East Tarbert Loch, and pull out into Loch Fyne, far enough to meet the steamer. Then you must lay-to till she comes; and when she does come, you must board her, and be hoisted up on to her deck. Hence there are many drawbacks to this arrangement, even if the skies be propitious, and the sea as unruffled as a mill-pond; but if the weather be “varry coorse,” and the waves rough and rude, then the arrangement is one which (unlike the teas of advertising grocers) cannot be “highly recommended for family use.”

But there is another way open to us. A steamer, not quite so expeditious in her movements as the *Iona*, calls at Tarbert. By all means, let us go by her; she will obviate that unpleasant boat voyage, by picking us up at the quay; and though she is somewhat long over her passage to Greenock (about three hours and a-half) yet this will allow us the more time to see the scenery of the Kyles, which is the very thing we want. And is there no drawback? assuredly; for there is a skeleton in every house, whether afloat or on shore, and our steamer’s skeleton is one begotten of Loch Fyne and Tarbert,—the herring. Her burden will consist chiefly of herrings. All those great rubric’d boxes which are now ranged on the quay, will be stowed away upon her after-deck; and if there should not be room for them there — and there is no knowing

what sort of a load she may bring from Inverary and Ardrishaig—they must be stowed away on the fore-deck, and offend our noses during the voyage.

Let us try the experiment, however, and make ready for our departure. As she will be at the quay for at least ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour, we shall have time to arrive at a final decision when we have seen the actual state of affairs; and if her decks prove to be too odoriferous and herring-crowded, we can then boat out to sea, and waylay the *Iona*. The windows of our lodgings look on to the quay; and a sentinel is posted there, prepared on a given signal to bring forth our *impedimenta*.

The boat is due a little before eleven; and a crowd of herring proprietors steeped in a fishy scent, are ready for her. Various passengers too have walked or driven to the quay; a dog-cart, laden with dogs, guns, game, and everything to betoken that its proprietor has made a successful raid on the Cantire moors, also rattles towards us; and two well-appointed carriages contribute those fair occupants who are to join us in braving the tossings of the waves, and the odours of the herrings.

A quarter of an hour thus passes away while we hang about for our tardy steamer, noting the new arrivals, and watching the boatmen plying to and fro across the harbour, and on its further side, busied at their nets, spread out on high poles, and forming a long line of

net-work, like the side of a great poultry-yard. The adventurous gulls are flapping about and darting at their prey, almost heedless of the two boatmen in the centre of the harbour, who are whiling away their time, by firing at the birds, and making the echoes ring from the old castled rock over our heads, where the crumbling ruins have had no tenants, save the birds, for this many a year. Close by the Bank a "Flesher" is slaughtering a sheep in the open street. As we saunter up and down we have a glance at the various stages of the skinning and cutting up; and are thus enabled to fill up our spare moments by meditating on this humanising spectacle, and by speculating on its probable effect upon the minds of the select circle of bare-legged children, to whom the exhibition appears to afford amusement blended with instruction.

At length, after more than half an hour's delay, a puff of steam is observed above the ragged lines of rock that make East Tarbert Loch into a labyrinth; and presently our boat heaves in sight and swings round to the quay. In a few minutes we have decided upon our course; the signal is given to our sentinel at the lodging; and Mrs. MacArthur is desolated of ourselves and our *impedimenta*, which are transferred to the steamer. Our feet for the last time touch the solid ground of Cantire, and then tread the throbbing deck of the steamer. There is a power

of herrings on board already; also, a horse and dog-cart, with a few other "inconsidered trifles;" and the Tarbert subscription is quickly added to the general account. But, after all, there is but little luggage on our side of the paddle-boxes, and though the steamer is a very Caliban in respect of its "very ancient and fish-like smell," yet, if we sit well forward, the sea-breeze will waft the perfume away from us, and make things pleasant.

Unless, indeed, it has the contrary effect. For the breeze is rising surely and swiftly; great blue-black clouds have blotted out the sunshine; and, before we are well clear of the quay, a sharp scud of arrowy rain smites us savagely, and the old ruin on the rocky height above us is swept away in a storm mist. It is but an April shower, however, and the sun's rays are drying the deck ere we are half through the labyrinth of East Tarbert Loch; and the crimson moons from the black-cocks in the pile of game close beside us, once more gleam brightly in the sunshine. But ominous clouds, very much of the black-cock hue, are *still* massing "over the hills and far awa'"; and, by the time that we have threaded the labyrinthine rocks, and our Caliban has turned his head for his straight run of about ten miles down Loch Fyne, the storm clouds have advanced to meet us, and salute us with a full discharge that drives the ladies into the saloon, and

those who wish to see the scenery into despair. We are told that we are passing many houses belonging to the clan Campbell; and, that in one of these houses, the "Pleasures of Hope" was written; but, our pleasures of hope are all set upon a longing for fair weather, and, for anything that we can see of houses or shore, we might be in the middle of the Atlantic, so completely is the landscape on either side obscured from our view. The storm, however, if it was to come, has come opportunely; for the scenery of this southern portion of Loch Fyne, though bold is bald, and (as Miss Sinclair tells us) is fine only in name.

By the time that the storm has ceased, and sunshine has once more restored the landscape to our view, and the ladies to the deck, we are nearing Aird Lamont, and our Caliban is churning his way through a rough sea. The rugged mountains of Arran rise before us; and, to our right, we have the eastern coast of Cantire, with the square keep and towers of Skipness Castle. It is our last sight of Cantire, and we gaze upon its shores, as do those who are parting regretfully from an old friend. It was hereabouts that Pennant lay, when he wrote thus:— "Weigh anchor at three o'clock in the morning: are tiezed with calms, but amused with a fine view of the circum-ambient land; the peninsula of *Cuntyre* here lofty, sloping, and rocky, divided by dingles, filled with woods, which

reach the water edge, and expand on both sides of the hollows; *Inch-marnoc* and *Bute* lie to the east; the mountainous *Arran* to the south; *Loch-fine*, the *Sinus Lelalonnus* of *Ptolemy*, opened on the north between the point of *Skipnish* in *Cantyre*, and that of *Lamond* in *Cowal*, and showed a vast expanse of water wildly bounded; numbers of herring-busses were now in motion, to arrive in time at *Campbeltoun*, and animated the scene."\* This quotation describes our field of view. *Inch-marnock* is a pretty islet, that once belonged to *Saddell* monastery in *Cantire*. *Aird Lamont*, or the Promontory of *Lamont* — so called, because it forms part of the estate of the family of *Lamont* of *Lamont* — is a notable headland, in rounding which we leave the waters of *Loch Fyne*, and enter those of the *Kyles of Bute*. The family of *Lamont* once stood next to the Duke of *Argyle* in county importance and broad acres; and they "are among the very few clans whose chieftainship remains undisputed, as there is scarcely another family of the name, besides that of the present laird."† We see *Aird Lamont House*, the modern seat of the family; and then, we enter the *Kyles of Bute*, our *Caliban* fighting his way through the waves, and staggering and reeling under their thumps and buffets.

\* *Voyage to the Hebrides*, p. 164.

† *Miss Sinclair's "Scotland and the Scotch."*

Miss Sinclair tells us, that “Aird Lamont Point is reckoned a perfect Cape of Good Hope for storms;” and, though we have sunshine above us, yet we have the effect of the recent storm below us, and we can readily believe anything bad of this western entrance to the Kyles of Bute. Instead of being “tied with calms,” like Pennant, we are teased with qualms, like to those which reduced Dr. Johnson to “a state of annihilation.”\* It is uncommonly rough; we keep our seats and our stomachs with difficulty; there are heavings and tossings from within and without; and some of the ladies who have been enjoying the scenery in a more ghastly manner even than that with which, according to Froissart, the English nation take their pleasures, make a precipitate retreat to their cabin, or calmly resign themselves to their destiny.

“It reminds me of that dreadful passage to Calais,” says a lady, who has no sooner spoken, than she becomes “one more unfortunate.”

If she had not been too far gone for etymological diversions, I could have told her that these Kyles were reminding me also of Calais, but in a different way. For *Kyle* is but a corruption of the Gaelic word *caol*, which means “a narrow sound;” and

\* Boswell’s “Tour to the Hebrides,” Oct. 3.



*caolæs* signifies the ferry-place across a sound; and hence we get Calais, the ferry-place from France to England.\*

But our staggering and rolling, and pitching and tossing does not last long; and when our Caliban has doubled Aird Lamont, and has fairly entered into the still waters of the Kyles, he behaves himself more seemly, and the miseries of sea-sickness have a cessation until we reach Toward Point, at the western end of the Kyles, which becomes an untoward point to many, and renews their woes *da capo*. But this is anticipating evil; let us, while we are in the placid stream of the Kyles, enjoy the lovely landscapes while we may; for as the *Saturday Review* has well said, "Though it is much more important to a traveller that his digestion should be in order than that the landscape around him should be fine, yet descriptions of scenery are more interesting to readers than descriptions of heartburn and rhubarb pills."

All travellers (with the exception perhaps of Pen-  
nant and Lord Teignmouth) seem agreed as to the  
beauty of the scenery of the Kyles. And this can  
hardly be wondered at; for it is a succession of

\* Though here again etymologists differ; for Mr. Chambers tells us that "Kyle means a woody region." ("History of Scotland," vol. i. p. 4.) Gaelic scholars would appear to provide five or six varieties of etymology for the English student to pick and choose from.

surprises, and is singularly free from monotony. It appeared to us all the more enchanting, from its pictorial effects being greatly heightened by the brilliant sharpness that was given to the landscape by the sunlight that shone upon us all through the Kyles, the while the dark storm-clouds that had burst upon us in Loch Fyne had rallied their forces and pursued us in dense rolling masses to Toward Point, where for the space of a quarter of an hour they did mighty execution, and then left us to voyage up "the broad and brimming Clyde" under the restored dominion of sunshine. It was a chequered day of shine and shade, of fair and foul; but all through the Kyles we were happily favoured with the shine and the fair.

The Kyles of Bute form that narrow arm of the Frith of Clyde that flows between the island of Bute and the coast of Cowal in Argyleshire; and appear upon the map somewhat like a capital M, painfully penned in no very capital style by a village schoolboy. Loch Straven and Loch Ridan form the two points to the upper part of this imaginary capital letter, and the island of Bute is thrust in the first arm. As a necessary consequence of this peculiar formation of the Kyles, the steamer's course is most erratic and bewildering: she is unable to keep her head in the same direction for half a mile together; the breeze catches her now on

the larboard, and now on the starboard, and to the passengers she appears to be vaguely wandering backwards and forwards and in and out of a confused medley of bays and lochs, where we see scores of houses that we covet for a summer residence, but no practicable outlet by which we can make our escape from this loch-ey labyrinth. Both with the beauty of the scenery, no less than with the bewildering character of our route, we may say,

“We’re in a maze, as though at Hampton Court!”

Pennant and Lord Teignmouth have been mentioned as two travellers upon whom the Kyles made no favourable impression. Pennant, indeed, never mentions them, although he devotes several pages to a description of Bute, telling us that the land is manured with corals and sea-shells (think of that, O ye poets and syrens!) and that “throstles and other birds of song, fill the groves with their melody; nothing disturbs their harmony; for instinct, stronger than reason, forbids them to quit these delicious shades, and wander like their unhappy master (*i. e.* the then Earl of Bute) into the ungrateful wilds of ambition.” Lord Teignmouth does mention the Kyles, but in these words: “The narrow branch of the outlet of the Clyde, called the Kyle of Bute, offers no scenery worthy of notice; but opens nobly on the majestic heights of

Arran." But if all the tots of the *tot homines tot sententiae* be tottled up, we shall find that there is, in effect, but one opinion on the scenery of the Kyles of Bute.

Miss Sinclair, for example, goes so far as to say that it "has but few equals in the world," and that the Kyles, "in their rugged magnificence, have frequently been compared to the Rhine,"—many travellers, however, assigning the palm to the Scotch beauty. "At every turn," says Miss Sinclair, "the mountains seemed to close round us like those that stopped the Arctic career of Captain Ross. We were imprisoned within a circular barrier of wooded and rocky hills, 'with the blue above and the blue below,' but the narrow sea still found its own way out of the labyrinth, and carried us along with it through a maze of beautiful old castles, villas, and villages, all sprinkled about by the finger of taste (!), and looking their very best under a bright glowing sunshine. I should like to live a hundred summers equally divided among the hundred places we passed during those few hours, while merely catching a momentary glimpse of their velvet lawns, drooping trees, smoking chimneys, which promised internal comfort (!), rustic chairs that seemed spontaneously growing out of the ground (!!) and a noble array of handsome mountains, uniting grandeur to grace, and giving a dash of perfection to the whole.

Never did fifty things at once appear so lovely — never, never.”

This authoress would seem to be what is vulgarly termed “a gushing party;” but rapture and panegyric will be found to enter largely into nearly every description of the scenery of the Kyles of Bute. Take, for example, Dr. Macculloch, who, with a keen appreciation for the beauties of a landscape, yet always described it within the bounds of propriety and truth. He is approaching the Kyles from Rothesay and Loch Straven, and says: “Nor is there anything very interesting in the passage of the Kyles until we begin to approach the ferry.\* The long vista of this narrow strait is here striking; overshadowed, as it were, by the high ranges of hills which rise from the water on each hand, expanding at one extremity into the spacious sound of Rothesay, and on the other losing itself amid rocks and woods, as if all further progress was at an end. Though the passage of the Kyles is everywhere interesting, it is more particularly beautiful between this ferry and the entrance of Loch Ridan, where it is contracted, as well as varied, by four islands. These, and the forms of the land on both sides, render the passage so narrow and intricate, that for a considerable space it seems to be at end, repeatedly,

\* Culintraimh. See Appendix: Nelson's Handbook.

in working through it. It is the same, indeed, for nearly four miles through this intricate and narrow strait, the land closing in in such a manner as to appear to meet from the opposite sides. Thus, while in some places we feel as if passing through the labyrinths of an Alpine river, in others we appear to be enclosed within a lake. It is only by the rise and fall of the tide, and the appearance of the sea-weed on the rocks, that we are led to suspect the maritime nature of this channel, since it is so far removed from the sea and so involved in all that class of ornament and scenery which we are accustomed to associate with fresh water, that it is scarcely possible to divest ourselves of the idea of being in an inland lake. At the same time *it is no less beautiful than extraordinary*; the land rising suddenly and high from the water, often into lofty cliffs interspersed and varied with wood, the trees growing from the fissures of the rocks even at the very margin of the sea, and aiding, with the narrowness of the strait and the height of the land, to produce a sober, green, shadowy tone of forest scenery, which adds much to the romantic effect of *this fairy-like sea.*" And, elsewhere, he says, "The Kyles of Bute resemble nothing on earth."

"The whole way from Rothesay through the Kyles of Bute," says Sir George Head, "a series of striking images appeared one after the other." (The usual se-

quence of the parts of a series.) “Sometimes we found ourselves among broken islands, scattered abroad as it were at random in the ocean; at others we steered among abrupt rocks; and again, in a more inland course, as if within the channels of a gallant river, whose mountain-banks are tufted to the water’s edge with bright alluvial verdure. The day was made cheerful by incessant changes of scenery, as, passing through a tortuous channel, each moment placed the various objects in a different position, thus embellishing the landscape with ever-varying tints and outlines. Meanwhile we glanced along in our course from point to point, peacefully, as the shadows of clouds on the distant hills.”

And so did we; from Lamont Point to Toward Point we peacefully did thread our way through those labyrinthine Kyles (our Caliban’s captain holding the clue), touching at Ormadale, and Colintrae, and passing those many note-worthy objects of which a full record will be found in the guide-books, until we come in sight of Rothesay, with its crescent bay and sheltering hills, where the climate is that of Devonshire, and where magnolias and myrtles, cape-heaths and camellias, bloom and thrive in the open air. There is a castle in Rothesay, now “an old ugly thing,” says Miss Sinclair, but once the residence of monarchs. Here the lame King Robert III. died of a broken heart on hearing of



the capture of his son by Henry IV. of England; that son who lived to be James I. of Scotland, and the husband of the Lady Jane Beaufort, whom,

“With beauty enough to make a world to doat,”

he had seen from his prison window, and to whom he at once made love and poetry. It was this poet-prince's elder brother, David, Earl of Carrick, whom his father made the first Scottish duke, under the title of the Duke of Rothesay\*, a title still borne by our Prince of Wales.

Does the reader know what a sad fate befell the first Duke of Rothesay? It happened well nigh five centuries ago, and the tragical tale has been told in Latin by Hector Boece, and translated into quaint Scotch by Bellenden. In effect it is as follows, Boece's narrative being here completed from other accounts. The while his mother, the Queen Annabella Drummond, was alive, so long was David, Duke of Rothesay, “holden in virtues and honest occupation;” but, after her death, he fell into evil courses, and gave himself over to the worst vices. So, at least, said his uncle, the Duke of Albany, who for thirty-four years had had the real power of the state in his hands, and viewed with alarm

\* In the fourteenth edition of Black's “Picturesque Tourist of Scotland,” this and other deeds are ascribed to Robert II., who died 1390, p. 425.



the growth to manhood of a youth of so much promise, who would be able to defeat his ambitious plans. The lame King Robert was old and imbecile, and was easily persuaded by his brother to believe many foul stories of his son David's enormities, and also to write a letter, in which he begged the Duke of Albany to take charge of his scapegrace son, and "learn him civil and honest manners." Armed with these instructions, the Duke of Albany (who must have been the original Wicked Uncle) carried away his nephew to his castle of Falkland, in Fifeshire, and there threw him into a dungeon with the cruel purpose of starving him to death. But the life of the unfortunate Duke of Rothesay was feebly sustained for some little time; first, by a pitying woman, who (according to Bellenden's version) let meal fall down through the loft of the tower where he was imprisoned; though, according to another narrative, it was the daughter of the governor of the castle who took pity on the hapless prisoner, and, through a small crevice in the wall, pushed thin cakes into his dungeon. But whichever version may be the correct one, both are agreed in saying that the woman was put to death for her merciful action. Yet even this brutal deed did not deter another tender-hearted woman, employed in the family as a wet-nurse, who supplied him with milk from her breasts by means of a long reed, until she also was discovered and slain with great cruelty.

Then was the poor duke destitute of all mortal supply, and was brought to so fearful a condition that he even gnawed his own fingers, "to his great martyrdom," and so died miserably. A Sir John Ramorney is said to have assisted in this cruel deed. The emaciated body of the captive was buried, either in the old church of Kilgour, near Falkland, or in Lindores Abbey, where they still show a stone coffin which is said to have been that of Prince David, the first Duke of Rothesay. Hector Boece tells us that it caused miracles for many years after; but that when the poet-prince James (who was the second Duke of Rothesay) succeeded to the throne, and punished the murderers of his brother, then the miracles ceased.\*

So much for an old story and a sad one. By way of relief, take one that is more modern and merrier. It has been told by Miss Sinclair. Ere the Bute family settled at Mount Stewart, they inhabited a house facing Rothesay Castle. When Lord Bute brought home his newly-married countess, a daughter of the Duke of Argyle, he observed during dinner something like discomposure. As soon as the servants withdrew, he ventured to inquire if anything had dis-

\* I need not remind the reader that the history of this unfortunate Duke of Rothesay forms the groundwork of Sir Walter Scott's "Fair Maid of Perth." Fordun, Boece, and the old Chroniclers are quoted in the *Notes to the Nevel*, vol. ii. p. 378.

agreed with her ladyship. She whimpered that she thought when he married *her* he would have had a better place to bring her to. He rose, marched round the table, and, with the formality of the olden time, offered her his arm and led her to the window; then, pointing to Rothesay Castle, he said, "My lady, do you see that building?" "Yes, my lord." "Well, madam, that is the mansion to which I should have had the honour of conducting your ladyship, if your uncles had not burnt it for our family."

But the present hereditary keeper of Rothesay Castle, and descendant of King Robert III., will be able to build ever so many castles if he be so inclined, for, when he attains his majority, he will be one of the wealthiest peers in Great Britain.

Over against Rothesay, on the Cowal shore, are the two Toward Castles; the old ruin is the castle of the Lamonts, the modern edifice is that of Mr. Kirkman Finlay, and its situation is remarkably fine. While we are admiring it the black clouds rise over the Toward Lighthouse, and sweeping over us, suddenly burst upon us with a hurricane of rain and wind, and send us reeling round Toward Point and into the Firth of Clyde. And thus our entrance and exit to and from the Kyles of Bute on that day, were made in far too *brusque* a manner to be agreeable.

But, ere we reach Dunoon, it is all sunshine again,

and the ladies come upon the deck to see the Cloch Lighthouse shining white on our right hand, and the Holy Loch and Loch Long before us, with the tumbled heap of mountains in the distance, crowned by peaked Ben Lomond. And soon we are between Roseneath and Gourock, and are steaming up the Clyde, and set foot on Greenock Quay, the end of a long journey, and also of this book —

“Longæ finis chartæque viæque.”