

GLASGOW: A FRONTIER POST.

By GEORGE BLAKE.

THE visitor to Glasgow stands in no need of literary reminders that he is on the borders of the Scottish Highlands. The fact is bawled at him by the advertisements of railway and steamboat companies; the names above the shops cry out to him for recognition of their Celtic origin. There are more "Campbells" than "Smiths" in Glasgow; the accent of the Glasgow people has the falling intonation of the west. From the summits of the many hills on which the city is built the eye of the observer is ever held by the near beauty of the Highland hills that overlook the Clyde.

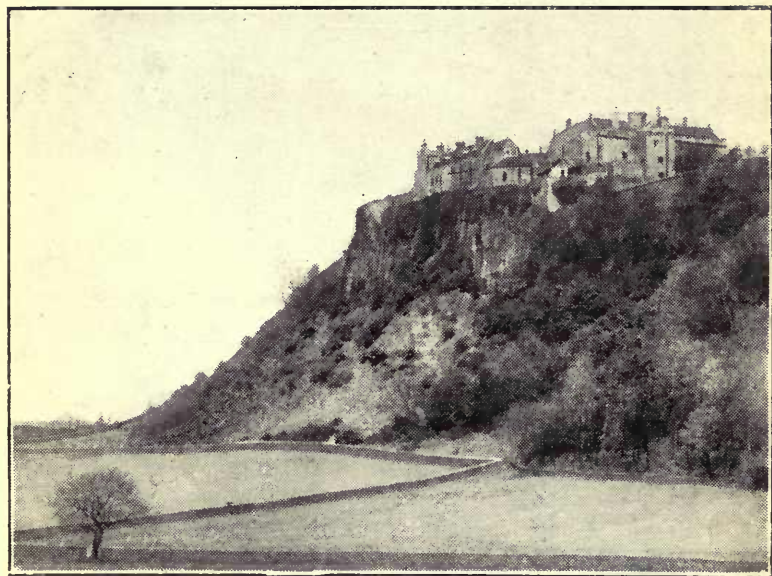
It is not the least fascinating feature of journeying through this country of Britain that he who journeys traverses dialects as well as shires. There is for the traveller more abiding interest in variation of language and racial type than in the straightest line of demarcation ever traced by the Boundary Commissioners. It is a truer satisfaction to reflect that one has passed from the district where "lad" is pronounced "laad" to that where it is delivered as "laud" than merely to know by the map that one has travelled from Cumberland into Dumfries.

This interest, in Britain, does not end with dialect; we have our language problem as well. At least

three tongues are spoken in this island. It is a fact that the two less popular conventions have dialectical variations; the Gaelic of Skye rings hard and strange to a Lorne ear, for instance; but we who have no command over these primitive, if interesting, modes can only regard them as other tongues than ours, and, as such, complete. Our interest is to note where, geographically, our own speech ends and the other speech begins.

English, of course, is practically universal now. Here and there in the Hebrides live old men and women who have not a word of the southern speech at their command; all over the Highlands are folks who handle our tongue with difficulty; and it is probably so in Wales. Mono-lingualism is the exception in the Celtic provinces now. But it remains picturesquely true that in such parts of the world, the native language, the Gaelic, is still the vehicle of everyday use. How that state of affairs will be modified by the adoption of modern practices in the field and in the home: how far the strong movement on behalf of the preservation of the old tongues will prevail, it is not our interest here to conjecture. We are, or ought to be, content with the fascinating fact that in odd corners of our island foreign people of foreign temperament, expressing themselves naturally in foreign tongues, hold out still against our vigorous Anglo-Saxondom. If we are of a mind to consider such conditions as worthy of a passing thought, we shall find a treasure of romance in all our transactions on the fringe and within the province of Gaeldom.

It happens that for the most part—in Scotland—



Stirling Castle



Callander and Ben Ledi



Bridge of Allan

those borders are clearly defined. At many points they are marked with the clarity of a wire fence almost. There, where East meets West, so to speak, this bi-lingualistic romance is found at its most intense.

In the extreme West, particularly, the Highland line is a thing to be crossed in half an hour's walk. Theoretically, the Firth of Clyde is the boundary. If you are in Greenock, say the geographers, you are in the Lowlands; if you row two miles across the Firth to Rosneath you have entered the Highlands. Really, it is not so. The Lowlands have spread their influence further afield than that, especially during the last half-century, so that now it is necessary (ignoring the patchy canton of Cowal) to go so far afield as the peninsula of Kintyre to discover a dramatically abrupt transition from Anglo-Saxon to Celtic conditions.

At Tarbert, Loch Fyne—there are scores of Tarbert's and Tarbet's in the Highlands, signifying a narrow neck of land—the line of demarcation is, perhaps, most thin. Here the long peninsula is deeply indented by the two lochs, West Loch Tarbert and East Loch Tarbert, separated by little more than a mile of land. There is no natural barrier of any significance between the two sheets of water; indeed, a good and busy road connects them; but to cross that road is, for the traveller, to pass from home into foreign country. On the Loch Fyne side their speech has the Gaelic intonation, it is true—but that is all that is characteristically Highland about the town of Tarbert. Its relationship with industrial Clyde-side has too long been close. It is irrevocably com-

mercialised; and so are the people. The glamour of the Celtic inflection fades away before the assault committed on your romanticism by tennis courts, bowling greens, and a picture house or two.

Thus Tarbert East. You can leave it—and it is seemly so to do—either on foot or on a vehicle, and fare a mile across country to the pier at West Loch Tarbert. It is a process, either way, that is full of glamour for the right sort of observer. You set out in the atmosphere of industrialism. In Tarbert East the people are busy at their affairs of money-making—loading ships, building ships, and selling picture postcards—and they converse in a dialect that would be unremarkable in Glasgow. The driver of the brake hails acquaintances in the doric—“A gran’ day, Donald.” Then he takes the reins and drives his horses across the isthmus. Twenty minutes later he is saying “*Tha la briagh ann*” to the solitary man on the solitary pier at West Loch Tarbert. Swans are floating round the piles of that pier, and shaggy cattle stand knee-deep and solemn in the marshy shallows at the head of the loch. It is very quiet. You know yourself to be in the heart of the old Highlands. If you care, the little steamer will take you off to the Islands where they converse with difficulty in English. Higher up this peninsula of Kintyre is another point where a main route changes its nature, as it were, as suddenly and dramatically within the space of a few miles. In this case Ardrishaig and Crinan are the pillars of the gateway. Some half-dozen miles apart, they are centuries apart in time. The one is wholly, even sordidly Lowland—the picture house and the slum



The Old Brig o' Doon, Ayr



Glen Sannox, Arran



The Monument, Glencoe



A bit of picturesque Killin

are there; the other consists of two or three white cottages, a hotel, and a post office, where any demand above half a crown in value is liable to exhaust the stock of stamps. Theoretically, the Canal ought to make of Crinan a busy terminus, but Crinan only acquires the more romance from the passing of the lighters and smacks, manned by leisurely islanders, that go to and fro with the homely merchandise of the Hebrides.

Elsewhere in Scotland the boundary line is broader and less clearly drawn—made by a range of hills, a valley, or even a shire. As time goes on the tendency is for every line to grow less and less distinct. Finally, perhaps, the lichenous growth of industrialism will spread over the existing frontiers and envelop Crinan and West Loch Tarbert, and go on pushing the old and the beautiful farther and farther back until the dead, dull level of the commonplace is everywhere attained. The paradox of progress But it may be that the very poverty of the waste places will be their future salvation as it is our present joy. Surely there will be here a loch that cannot be tamed into driving turbines and here a hill that is not made of iron ore; and on the shores of the one, surely, and on the slopes of the other will be found those who speak a tongue older and plainer than ours, and practise a habit of life that is based on simplicity. The frontier of language, at least, is the last that will be passed.