

8. The Coast Line.

It would not be easy to say at what point in Renfrewshire the bank of the river ends and the coast of the estuary begins. For navigation purposes the river merges into the sea at Greenock, but a distinct widening of the waters occurs about Langbank, which may therefore be taken as the starting-point of a tour round the Renfrewshire coast. If the tide is in, covering the ugly mud banks in the foreground, the picture across the water is altogether charming. Here is the best place to view Dumbarton Rock,

still grim and threatening as when the tide of battle ebbed and flowed around it (see p. 109). The low Vale of Leven is flanked by volcanic hills, while in the background Ben Lomond stands head and massive shoulders above his Highland neighbours. We walk along the old raised beach with low cliffs on our left, against which in ages past beat the waves of the sea. Now we look across to Cardross, where the Bruce spent the evening of his days. His ships must often have cleft the waters at our side. Inshore are the floating wood-yards that indicate our nearness to Port Glasgow. On the outskirts of the town is Newark Castle, the old baronial dwelling of the Maxwells. We hurry through the dingy main street of Port Glasgow, our ears assailed by the incessant, clattering fusillade from the ship-yards, and make for Greenock. The navigable channel of the estuary, guarded by lights, keeps close to the Renfrewshire coast, and a constant stream of shipping marks the course.

Our approach to Greenock is fittingly heralded by its finest harbour, the great James Watt Dock, the culmination of a magnificent series of enterprises in harbour construction. More perhaps than any other town in Scotland, Greenock owes its prosperity to one family, the Shaws, lairds of the town. The eastern suburb of the town is Cartdyke, famous in former times for its red-herrings. It was here in 1696 that a ship was fitted out in order to take part in the ill-omened Darien Scheme. Nowadays the native place of James Watt seems entirely devoted to engineering and industrial enterprises, yet its literary associations are neither few nor uninteresting. John Galt



Highland Mary Monument, Greenock

died here, and here in the old kirk-yard lies Highland Mary. To Greenock as schoolmaster came John Wilson, the author of *The Clyde*, his philistine employers sternly banning the profane art of poetry. At the west end of the town is Princes Pier, one of the main gateways of the summer tourist traffic. In the broad estuary opposite the pier a submarine shoal stretches out a long arm that is known as the Tail of the Bank. Fort Matilda stands at the end of the beautiful esplanade, and looks across the firth to Kilcreggan less than two miles away. Should a hostile man-of-war by some chance escape the forts lower down the firth, and keep close to the Kilcreggan shore to avoid the guns of Fort Matilda, it would find itself between Scylla and Charybdis, for those innocent, smooth mounds along the shore mask the black muzzles of another fortress.

We round the bend into the beautiful Bay of Gourock. The sheltered blue waters are dotted over with pleasure craft of every kind. The sun shines white on the sails of the dainty little two and a half raters, and sparkles on the gleaming brass-work of palatial steam-yachts. The creamy-waked river-steamers dash up and graze the piers with an *abandon* that would make an English river-captain gasp in horror. It is an intrusion of volcanic rock that has caused the bay. It is sheltered from the western gales by Kempoch Point, which juts into the sea forming a natural break-water, because the igneous nature of the rock makes it harder than the surrounding sandstones. Granny Kempoch, a monolith of mica-schist six feet high, stands between the cliff and the castle. For ages



Yachting at Gourock

it has been an object of superstitious reverence. Seamen and fishermen would pace seven times round it singing in order to ensure a prosperous breeze. From "the Goraik" James IV put to sea in 1494 on his expedition to the Western Isles to subdue the Hebridean chiefs. The



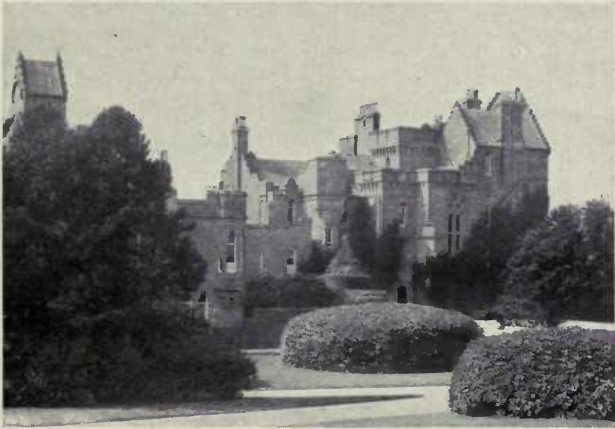
Old Granny Kempoch, Gourock

shore-road runs south-west, past the pleasant villas of Ashton, with cliffs and sea-caves on the left, and seaward a glorious outlook up Loch Long and the Holy Loch. A few yards off the high road is the ancient ruined Leven Castle, a former stronghold of the Mortons and the

Sempills. By the side of the castle a little road runs up the hill from the shore. It is easy to find, for it is lined with minatory boards invoking many and grievous penalties on the head of the unlucky trespasser. Walk up this road, pass through the farm and up the hill side as far as the track continues, and, on looking round, there shall lie before you one of the finest panoramas in all Scotland. Some of the peaks that are visible are shown on p. 17, but one other interesting feature may here be mentioned. The even crest-line of the low hills to the north is deeply notched just behind Kilcreggan. This marks one of the most important geographical features in Scotland. It is the line of the great fault that separates the Highlands from the Lowlands.

A mile past Leven Castle we reach the white tower of the Cloch Lighthouse. On clear nights the steady white beam of the Cloch stabs the darkness for some 15 miles, while in times of fog, the mournful wail of its steam-horns sends eerie messages to the dwellers on the opposite Cowal shore. Cloch Point, like Kempoch, is produced by the occurrence of hard rock among the softer sandstones. The bedded lavas of Renfrewshire reach the coast only at this point, and this makes it salient. The broad sandy stretch of Lunderston Bay brings us to Inverkip. In the seventeenth century the county was sorely plagued by witches, as we shall see later, and this district was the scene of some of their pranks. South of Inverkip the road swings inland skirting the grounds of Castle Wemyss, the home of Lord Inverclyde, head of the famous Cunard line of steamships. A little farther and we pass the road

to Kelly House where lived James Young, founder of the paraffin-oil industry of Scotland. It is but a few steps now to Wemyss Bay pier and the Kelly Burn, south of which we enter Ayrshire. From Inverkip to the boundary we have walked on Old Red Sandstone rocks, the bright red



Castle Wemyss

of which is crossed every now and then by a black band marking the course of an igneous dyke. Just on the county boundary the railway stops, and the passengers pour on to the decks of the speedy paddle-boats that wait to take them to their longed-for summer havens.