

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE RAILWAY AND THE FISHERY.

Glancing back over the last thirty years, let us here briefly notice the extraordinary changes which have taken place in the condition and prospects of the Fife fisheries.

The railway and the steamer are now scattering in their royal progress the fruits of sea and shore. Turning to the cod and ling fishery in the middle of last century, we see the cream of the sea in the hands of the Falls of Dunbar, at less than 7s a score. Fifty years after their bankruptcy, the trade was so active that the cure at Anstruther alone is estimated by the assistant minister—the Rev. David Wallace—writing in 1837, at six hundred barrels a year. The price, however, did not advance, nor indeed was it always sustained till 1841, when no little excitement was caused in Cellardyke by a new merchant offering a shade less than 12s a score for the season, which, by immemorial usage, ran from the first of winter till the closing week of Lent; but in these days, when the railway brings within the morrow the sea harvests at Anstruther pier, on the dinner table in London or Manchester, we almost hear the impatient order of the lady or mistress of the house in the impulsive bidding and “the unheard o’ prices,” as the ancient curer said, with a wicked bite at his tobacco “chew,” of our own “representatives” from the leading fish firms in England, now drawing their supplies direct from the East of Fife.

The crab and lobster fishery is another no less eloquent testimony. A century ago the London merchant saw that he was on the right side of the ledger, when he hired the “Well Smack” to

run as a lobster trader to the Scottish shore, where they were fished at a few scattered points, such as Cellardyke and Crail, at the rate of 5s a score. But the first whistle of the railway train across the Border gave such an impetus to the demand as to double the price within the year. "They'll be a shillin' the piece yet," said the old Bailie, referring to a time when they were not worth the landing, and the prediction has been more than realised. There was no such introduction, however, to the crab or partan fishing, which the honest Ceres crofter, who acted as a kind of pioneer to the trade, not inaptly described "as jist a railway bairn." Every grizzled beard, indeed, had seen them fished, if fished at all, for handline or haddock bait; and more, he would tell you in his own Fife way, "was driving saut to Dysart," because any day, especially after the weird "three fills o' May flood," they were to be gathered in bushels amongst the low water rocks, no one thinking them worth king's coin, unless, perhaps, when a "twalpenny" or two was given to a needy neighbour for saving you trouble about a little parcel for the cousin's children in the country, or an old friend in the city, who still retained the schoolboy liking for "wilks and partan taes." Old John Robertson, of the herring kiln, tried to storm the Dundee palate with crabs so far preserved by the boiling process, but in the end he had to confess "they didna pay kindling for the big pat." The same expedient was occasionally acted upon by others; but till the iron horse was put into harness the partan was of so little value that a "dizen o' big taes for a penny" was an everyday errand in the season to the fisher's door. Now, however, a new industry has been added to the coast, and with the miners and cotton spinners of Lancashire, not to speak of Billingsgate amongst the customers, the price of this once despised shell fish has

---

become fourfold in less than twenty years. Indeed, every turn of the tide, every cast of hook or line, is more or less a debtor to the railway; but it is never so true as of the winter drave, which you will remember in connection with the lively anecdote of the "Box Harry," or Bailie Darsie and the herrings. It is of all others the harvest on the fallow ground, springing up with a new and richer sheaf after the steam plough. "They'll no dae," mutters the little fishourer, as he crumples up the advices of the last consignment of bloaters, ruined by the foul winds, encountered by the London smack, or her rival, the lumbering old paddle wheel steamer. But another and widely different field is for a time the hope of the Fife trader, till a visit to the bookseller's shop in Anstruther one day undeceives you. "It'll ruin us and our herrin' market," cried the old Bailie, scarlet with rage over the proposed emancipation of the slave in the West Indies, to which large consignments had been sent towards the diet of the negroes; but in spite of pickled herrings and more powerful interests, abolition came, when the curers had once more to look about for a new customer. An outlet was at last found in sending out the catch almost wholesale as red herrings, a description of article usually and not inaptly referred to as "wissened sticks." A shilling a hundred was reckoned a fair price in those days, but a change was at hand, though no one might see or suspect it—that February morning, in the year 1849, as the muffled up old English skipper went rocking like a cock-boat down the pier as the herring boats began to creep in one by one through the haze. Forty winters in the North Sea had left the old sailor as bashful as a school girl, and this, with his asthma, made him unfit to be his own buyer; but an electric tailor from the uplands of Ceres was at his elbow, and that morning his orders cost less than half the money they must have done at

Newhaven. "I owe the secret to a torn letter, just as much and no more left to tempt me down," said Skipper Mooltan, chuckling over his discovery, which, however, was blown within the week, when another class of traders appeared upon the scene. Now it was youth and energy, as in the case of Thomas Brown, of Lowestoft, and others, backed not with letters of credit but with bagfuls of new sovereigns and commissions from the best fish stalls in England. There was a long link then needed between the East of Fife and the great artery, but the steam towing service of Leith was hired to the last boat, till a dozen or so have churned away from Anstruther pier with "straw taps" for the Edinburgh railway station. "They're the life o' the shore they English chaps," said the herring skipper. "It's the ass's gallop wi' them," sneered the evil prophet already referred to. But it was not. The next season and the next saw them returning with larger commissions and in greater force, and even the loungers with their hands buried deep in their pockets at the "Wheengin' Brig," confessed that "the old book had got anither leaf and was the better for't." The river was rising; the old eddies throbbed with the new life, the waifs and straws danced to the generous music. It was no passing wave, but the stream swelling on the dry sands, and wafting in the harvest, which from that day lent a new and kindlier destiny to sea and shore.

There was once an old fisher of Cellardyke who cast a knot as another would make an entry in the log-book concerning the disasters of the sea, and now the thread would run unbroken through the horny fingers for his reckoning of seven years or less when the fatal mark again told like a whisper the sad old story. Then, as you remember, the black clouds of winter curtained the mariner's grave; but now the golden

---

harvest gladdened the sunny shore, when the exulting cry, "the herrin's in the Haiks," sent the boats like bees in rosy June to the ancient rendezvous. It was Monday, the 20th of August 1855, and for once the hopes of the coast were more than realised. That season Cellardyke had so far outgrown any former fleet as to have over a hundred and thirty boats at the Lammas drave. The herring shoal also has never been exceeded, and boat after boat was laden to the gunwale, amongst others being the "Venus," which had a haul of nearly eighty barrels. With a calm sea there was no danger, but unfortunately the west wind freshened into a gale, when the old craft, in the gathering twilight, was seen to make sail for home. "My dead mother beckoned to me last night," said one of the crew, and the presentiment was sadly fulfilled, for in the offing of Crail the overburthened boat was struck first by one and then by another roaring billow, which utterly overwhelmed her. There was a chance for life, however. She did not sink, and the crew clung to the wreck, these being Adam Reid, the skipper and owner of the boat, and his two sons, Adam and William, the latter a boy about eight years of age; and three half-dealsmen, Kenneth M'Leod, from the Isle of Skye; James Malcolm, Dundee; and David Laing, Arncroach. And so they struggled in the darkness and the tempest, with every wave breaking over them as they hung on the dismantled wreck. The youth had found a heroic guardian in his elder brother, but within the hour his old father and Kenneth, the Islesman, were martyrs to the storm. The others, faint and exhausted, were clinging with the grasp of despair, when two hours later their cries attracted the notice of the St Monance boat in charge of William Mathers, who bore down to their rescue. Touching to tell poor Malcolm perished with the relief cheer ringing on the waters, and

the youth, like a smitten blossom, was lifeless in his brother's arms, when he and David Laing were dragged through the surf by the life lines on board the friendly boat, which at once hastened, with all the speed that a contrary wind would admit, to Anstruther. Four perished and two survived, the corpse of the little brother being brought ashore with them ; and one of the most touching sights ever seen on the streets of Cellardyke, was that morning when the desolate widow—with a grief on her face too deep for sighs or tears—bore home her darling as if hushed not in death, but in the nestling sleep of a mother's bosom.

The next boat disaster, which was painfully akin to the sinking of the "Lord Melbourne," occurred on Friday, the 8th December 1859 ; but here let us observe that other tragic incidents had more than once cast a shadow on the shore. Thus about thirty years before a fine young man, Andrew Robertson, fell overboard and was drowned in a boat race towards a large ship, which was flying her colours for a pilot in the offing of Cellardyke. Again in 1835 an intrepid fisherman, Thomas Birrell, lost his life in the act of trimming the sail. He made an heroic struggle for life, and had so far succeeded that he was hand in hand with one of his boat mates ; but his sea glove slipped, and he fell backward to a watery grave. Thomas Birrell belongs on the mother's side to the old sea captains of Anstruther, that shared as few have shared in the romance of the deep. Many sleep in a sailor's grave, and this, like his own, was also the fate of his brother, the loss of whose boat it is now our melancholy province to tell. She was the "Heroine," an Anstruther built clipper, which had sailed that morning to ply the haddock or small line fishing near the Marr or inner reef. At that time the crew carried eight "ties" or "hundred" of line to a hand,

and having worked her fishing gear the "Heroine," with the sea studded all round with the wing-like sails of the fisher boat, bore away for the land. The south wind was blowing so strong that the foresail was fully half-reefed as the boats came flying, like the sea birds, through the driving mist. The waves were also tossing wild and high, and a brave hand was needed to "luff," or "keep away" to wind and sea, till at last danger seemed left behind in the kindly Forth. So it was on board of the "Heroine," as three of the crew, like men after an harassing watch, were seen, bread kit in hand, to enter the cabin, which they had scarcely done when a great wave, swift and terrible as the chariot of death, rolling in from the sea, dealt the fatal stroke, which sent the ill-fated boat to the bottom. A consort boat, the "Union," Skipper George Barclay, was perhaps not two hundred yards to leeward, and not an instant was lost in tacking to the rescue; but so quick and ruthless had been the work of the destroyer that one man alone clung to a floating plank. He caught the friendly line, and was taken on board the "Union," which, as it was in vain to tarry on the scene of death, at once hoisted all possible sail for Anstruther to land the survivor, and break the melancholy tidings of the loss of the boat and seven of the crew. The disaster occurred at noonday, and was so near as to be witnessed from the Fife shore as well as from several of the boats, which crowded, though all too late, to the fatal scene, where, strange as it may appear, the sea was now so calm as to be really like a refuge place in the storm. The survivor was Daniel Fleming. The seven sufferers were—Wm. Birrell, skipper and owner, aged forty-three, whose household consisted of his wife and four sons, the oldest, David, aged seventeen, as well as his nephew, Thomas Birrell, sharing his fate; James Davidson, another nephew, left a widow and two little daughters;

William Wood, known far and near as the precentor in the Parish Church, left a widow and nine children ; George Kay, left a widow and three children ; James Reid, but a few months married, left a widow, who became a mother long after his gallant father lay entombed in the waves. The day following the calamity was one of tempest and storm ; but on Sabbath a squadron of some fifteen or sixteen boats went out to search for the bodies. Hook and line were cast and recast over the place where the boat was seen to founder ; but the volunteers returned from the pious errand without finding either the wreck or the hapless crew.

“ Alas ! the pillows  
Of that uneasy bed  
Rise and fall with the billows  
O'er our sailors' head.”

The 10th of May 1865 was another grief-stirring day in Cellardyke. The month opened in witching loveliness. The birds sang, the leaves and the blossoms danced in the sunny air. The beauty of spring was on land and sea, and the fisherman, like the farmer, was at work with a diligent hand, not in sowing, indeed, but in gathering the generous spoils of the main. Most of the boats had taken to the haddock lines ; but several, including the “Helen,” one of the largest and finest of her class, of which Henry Beat was skipper and owner, continued at the ling and cod fishery. The voyage promised well, so well, indeed, that the little squadron had been betrayed to an unusual distance in the North Sea, where they were overtaken by a dreadful gale from the east-north-east. Night blackened in with the storm on sea and sky ; like the sea birds overhead every gallant boat was now hastening to the shore. It became as dark as the grave. The eye was baffled and lost, except, perchance, when the breakers would flit like ghosts



amongst the gathering shadows. "I never was at sea in a night like this, men," said a grey-haired fisher, and every hour seemed to increase the perils of the voyage, especially when crossing the dangerous reefs, where the broken seas were as treacherous to the keel as drifting sand or snow to the foot of the wanderer astray in the midnight storm; but in the language of the heroic skipper, who rubbed the salt out of his eyes next morning on Anstruther pier, "God was the pilot," and boat followed boat to the friendly shore. The tread of the big boots echo through the streets, and loving households wait and watch, expecting the next comer to be their own. The fire is trimmed; the table is set; mother and children are looking out at window and door; but one crew tarries longer than the rest. It is the "Helen," and all day long eyes are straining to catch the well-known sail; but night comes, and then the morrow, and then the night again, but still no tidings from the weary sea. At last—alas! how slowly and how reluctantly—the telescope is shut, and the door is closed, and friends go out and in, their eyes red with weeping, in the home of the widow and the orphan. The "Helen," like the other deep sea going boats of the time, had eight of a crew, the sufferers being—Henry Beat, skipper, left a widow and four children; Thomas Brown, a widow and two children; Thomas Reid, like the former, a brother-in-law of Skipper Beat; Andrew Robertson, a wife and seven children; Thomas Wood, a wife and three children; Daniel Fleming, a wife and two children; Francis Montidore and Thomas Muir, both unmarried. The widow and the orphan, however, were not forgotten; for by the middle of July over three hundred and eighty pounds had been subscribed as a relief fund, chiefly through the exertions of Mr David Murray, of St Ayles. The outgush of sympathy was far and near; but in the universal feeling of the hour one aged

mother, whose heart was wrung with no common anguish, was especially remembered, and well may it have been so, as her life story will tell. It is as follows:—"Mrs Reid, one of the most remarkable women ever connected with the Scottish shore, died in Cellardyke on Saturday, the 25th February 1873, in the sixty-ninth year of her age. There is many a mournful tale of the sea—the cruel and remorseless sea—but few have had so much cause to lament over the weary waters as the aged pilgrim who then entered into her rest. Mrs Reid, or Agnes Birrell, to give her maiden name, belongs to one of the most numerous families of Cellardyke of our day; but her father, a strong-limbed, clear-headed, sea-faring native of Kinghorn, was the first of his race in the East Neuk, where he had taken to himself a wife from that fine old stock, the sailor Robertson's of Anstruther. Agnes, as the strapping fisher lass, married her promising townsman, James Davidson, and a happier young couple never crossed the Old Kirk stile of Kilrenny, but the sun was to go down on the very morning of their joy. On the 24th of September 1828, her husband, as one of his father's crew, as was the custom at that time with the Cellardyke fishermen, had gone round with the boat to the Eden for mussel bait, and was lying ready to sail in the river, when the wind rose violently from the westward. The older hands wished to remain at their moorings, but the young men were impatient to be again with their wives and sweethearts, and though one of the crew predicted the coming disaster as he stepped on board—"There'll be mussels scauppet the day whaur they never were before"—the sail was hoisted, and the boat dashed out to sea. The little craft reeled gallantly through St Andrews Bay, and tacked to windward of the Carr; but while crossing the stormy 'Hurst' she was struck by a dreadful sea. It was the old sad, sad story: the boat

rolled over on the weather side, and lay unbosomed and helpless to the next stroke of the waves, which rushed like a cataract over the gunwale. 'She is sinking,' and a long, wild cry rose over the hoarse roar of the storm as the poor fishermen cast their farewell look on sea and shore ; but James Davidson and his father, as lovingly and trustingly as in the old days of childhood, and as if death could never divide them, clasped each other round the neck, and so sunk together into a watery grave. His old uncle was saved to tell the affecting story, which made a deep impression at the time on the public mind, though it could fall on no ear with the same heart-crushing misery as on that of the young widow, who nursed her new born child in the silence of the night, with the saddest of all music, the wail for the loved and lost. But time softens every grief, and as years rolled on the widow became once more the happy wife and joyful mother of five fine children. Her second husband, Thomas Reid, was an enterprising fisherman ; and his fine new boat, the 'Nancy,' of Cellardyke, had only been a fortnight at sea when she foundered during the memorable gale on the night of the 23d April 1846, about fifteen miles, as it was supposed, from the Isle of May, when all on board perished, 'with no ear to pity and no arm to save.' There were seven of a crew, and six widows and fifteen fatherless children left to mourn their untimely fate ; but the bereaved widow had not drained the cup of affliction. Her handsome brother, Thomas, was one day accidentally drowned at sea. But on the 8th of December 1859 her bleeding heart was again torn by the loss of another Cellardyke boat, with her gallant brother William, and her own eldest son—the child of her first love, James Davidson—who perished like the rest of the crew, with the exception of one survivor, who was spared to tell with what martyr-like

constancy brave men could meet their fate. Three brothers of Mrs Reid's second husband had years before met a similar death ; but the afflicted widow again participated in no common measure in the last distressing calamity which befel Cellardyke, when her son Thomas—the Benjamin of her household—and her two sons-in-law suffered with all hands by the foundering of their boat in the North Sea on the stormy night of the 10th of May 1865. By these accumulated disasters Mrs Reid has lost two husbands, two sons, two sons-in-law, two brothers, and three brothers-in-law ; or to include nephews and other connections, more than twenty near relations have perished by the sea ; and was it then strange that after all these manifold afflictions the bereaved wife and mother should love to linger where she could gaze out on the far away German Sea—'the weary sea,' as she would say—and listen so wistfully now in the still summer gloaming, to the voice of the waves in their soft hymn-like murmurings ; or, again, in the night of gathering storm, when the billows trampled the shore fierce and loud as the crash of battle—for both to her was full of meaning—sadder it could not be, yet falling on the quivering heart with all the pathos of the dirge song to the mourner sitting by the lonely grave. But while mourning long and truly for the dead, she never forgot her duty to the living. There is no situation in the ordinary lot where woman is more truly the helpmate of man than as the fisherman's wife, for she is not only the companion of his home and the mother of his children, but in all the operations of the busy year, her industry as her thrift is the secret of his prosperity and welfare. Mrs Reid was one of these people you never find idle ; but her nimble fingers were not confined to the common duties of her sphere, for in her earlier years she handled the tar and paint brush on her husband's boat with all the skill

of a tradesman, and this energy of character may be said to have remained with her to the last, as only that winter she was to be seen gathering limpets from the rocks as bait for the fishing line. The old heroine was also remarkable for her sterling Scottish independence, and ungrudgingly toiled from sunrise to sundown on a long summer day, in order, as she said, 'never to be obleeged either to frien' or frem;' and so her life past on with exemplary diligence and usefulness, till she was struck down a few months before by paralysis; but it is pleasing to know that as the evening shadows deepened around her—the heralds of the coming change—her spirit rejoiced in the hope of the better and brighter day, and of reunion with the loved ones 'not lost but gone before.'"

And thus many and sad have been the unspoken farewells, the thrilling sorrows of the sea; but the direst and most heartrending of all, so far as our narrative leads, is that which is still to be told. We refer to the dreadful sacrifice of black Friday, the 19th of November 1875, when no fewer than five East of Fife boats, with all on board, were lost in the English seas. It was on the homeward voyage from a fishing adventure, which illustrates more than any other the indomitable energy and enterprize of the mariners of Fife. Centuries ago the old fathers fished the herring at the Lewis, and the cod at the Orkney Isles. Seventy years ago and less the fishers of Fife led the Lammas fleets of Wick, as they do to-day, along the Buchan coast, but their story is never so interesting and romantic as in connection with the Norfolk fisheries. About two-and-twenty years before our narrative opens, some four or five Cellardyke boats had as many seasons fished the summer herring from old Yarmouth quay, but scarcely ten seasons had come and gone since the first adventure on the autumn sea. It came about in this way: Profiting by a hint on

Fisherrow beach, the skipper of the old "Hope" sailed to the southward, but on arriving with his Fifeshire gear he and his crew were exactly in the sad plight of gold seekers without a single hammer or pick to break into the mine. There were those who laughed; but unmoved and undaunted they at once rigged their twenty nets with cork and messenger, and thus, like their English neighbours, went to sea, where they in the end prospered so well that they returned home with £32 to a hand, or in other words, with a double harvest as compared with hook and line. This was in 1863, and the following autumn the lucky little craft and a companion boat renewed the venture, which from that day so engaged the enterprise of the coast season after season that we find the departure on the fatal cruise thus related in an Anstruther news-letter:—"After a brief respite from sea labour, but at the same time after a season of incessant sweat and hurry in the double work of 'drying up' the old fleet, and preparing for another harvest—our fishermen are again taking their departure for the romantic coast of Yarmouth. The pioneer of the fleet, with the same gladsome north-easter, the welcome 'Lady Anst'er wind,' which was whistling the choicest of all music through the golden sheaves, hoisted foresail and mizen, and so with flowing sheet sped merrily across the sparkling Forth on the distant voyage. Two Banffshire 'skaffies,' which were waiting in Anstruther harbour for a convoy, or to speak the truth, 'a pilot through the deeps,' also headed to sea, and in the course of the morning tide several of the Cellardyke crews were likewise afloat and speeding southwards like seabirds on the wing, while, need we say that from many a quiet retreat, moistened eyes gazed long and lovingly after the fast receding sails. Notwithstanding the friendly breeze, however, the great bulk of the crews will

---

not leave till Monday, when, unless the weather is all the worse, the shore will be well nigh as deserted as in Lammas, as Cellardyke is expected to send over forty boats to Yarmouth or the sister station of Lowestoft. An English buyer writes, 'Little doing, and that little far away at sea. Quality also small, and only finds a market, because, like the hungry man, there is no choice in the bill of fare; but I fancy it is with us here, as it was with my friends at Stonehaven and Aberdeen, There'll be no luck till the Dykers come.'" The subject is thus continued in the following week under the text of a run to Yarmouth:—"In the course of Wednesday the remaining crews hoisted sail, and telegrams have been thus early received announcing the safe arrival, after a fine run of from thirty-two to fifty hours. Several boats had sailed on Thursday week, but these encountering the north-east gale had taken shelter in the creeks of the coast, and only left their moorings to join the squadron, which crossed the harbour bar at Anstruther with Monday's tide. The passage south seems, indeed, to have been a sight to see, as the picturesque sails full to the breeze, ploughed a foaming track through the dark blue waves at a speed which made the magnificent regatta all their own. In more than one instance the voyage was run with a swift trading screw, and as the little fairies sped past the sooty steam colliers of the Tyne, 'Geordie,' with a sailor's candour, had to rattle his compliments, 'She sails like a witch, hinny,' while saucy Montrose men, who usually lead the windbound fleet, gave an extra pull to their lofty royals, but all in vain, being lost to leeward much in the same way as a dashing car leaves behind the labouring wain. We learn that there are nine crews from Pittenweem this season at the south, and about thirty from St Monance—those from Cellardyke being little

short of fifty first-class deep sea going boats." But bad news, which always travels swiftly according to the proverb, were soon received of storm and disaster, and on Friday morning, the 22d of October, it was known in Cellardyke that a gallant fisher had perished in the gale of the previous night at Lowestoft. The incident is thus specially referred to in a news letter of the 30th of the month:—"Letters and telegrams from the Norfolk Coast this week bring only one tale—namely, stormy weather and fruitless labour. The boats during the season have night after night watched like blockade runners for a passing chance at the fishing ground, but were unable to venture from behind the great sand banks which, however fatal to the unwary mariner, yet serve to shield the shore from the fury of the surge, and men have grown grey in the vocation who do not remember so little work with the net as in the October of the present year. As at home, a lull in the gale on Monday allowed the fleet to go to sea, but they were lucky who saved their drifts, which in many cases were dismantled by the gale. Little or nothing, therefore, has to be said of the doings of our crews since our last report; but it is yet hoped that with a favourable change the errand may still be overtaken before our fishermen steer for the north. At Lowestoft the melancholy accident to James Gardiner has caused a dark cloud over the spirits of the East of Fife men. The crew were one family in kindred or feeling, but poor James was the guiding spirit, trusted and loved by all, and thus his post was the tiller on the fatal Thursday night the boat ventured to sea. Few, indeed, excelled him as a helmsman, and under his skilful hand the gallant craft sped merrily on her stormy course till she was rounded to on another tack. The manœuvre was cleverly done, but seeing his comrades struggling with the sail as it wildly tossed in the rising gale,



the generous steersman sprang from his seat to give a helping hand, but the heroic act cost him his life, for in stepping forward he was caught by the sail and thrown into the sea. He was never seen again, finding a martyr's grave, as we may say, where many a brave man rests from the battle and the storm. James Gardiner was in his forty-seventh year, and unmarried; but the sister who shared his home, and many friends, will long lament the fate of as gallant and true a heart as ever sailed from the shores of the Forth." His memorial stone in Kilrenny Churchyard is thus inscribed:—

"A watery grave we do not dread,  
The sea shall render back its dead,  
And restore each scattered bone;  
And land us safe on Canaan's shore,  
Where sin and death divide no more  
The glorious land of home."

And so the sand trickled down the glass till some three weeks had come and gone, when the crews once more packed up their sea chest and prepared for the homeward run. But again the storm was booming on the lee, and the Sabbath before their departure is thus remembered on the shores of Fife. Thus we read of the Lord's Day of the 14th of November:—"The sea wall at the golden strand of Cellardyke having been beaten down by the fury of the waves during the early tide of Sabbath, and the herring boats wintering on the ground being thus in imminent danger, it was found necessary to call out the inhabitants by the town officer and his bell to lend a helping hand to save them. Such a duty was quite a thing of course with old James Wilson some fifty years ago, but the unwonted summons had a startling effect on the Cellardyke of to-day; but nevertheless men, women, and children at once hastened to the scene of action. Vener-

able elders of the Free Church, sedate deacons also, and exemplary Christians of all denominations, stayed only to exchange church-going coats for less dainty garments, and then hastened with quicker footsteps on the errand of duty. It was no easy task to drag the big boats up the soft bank, in which the busy workers sank ankle deep at every step; but 'where there's a will there's a way,' says the old proverb, and a right noble illustration it had on this memorable Sabbath morning, for the men had no sooner adjusted roller and lever than the signal 'haul awa', saw the rope tighten in the grasp of the willing matrons, who, like true heroines, never once rested nor yielded to fatigue till the six or seven boats which were in peril had been placed beyond the reach of the flood. As an instance of the urgency of the situation, we may state that one or more of the boats had been filled with spray, and had to be pierced to drain it off; indeed, the safety of much valuable property was simply due to the spontaneous help of the community without distinction of sex, age, or calling." The tempest, as we gather from an extract, was of almost unparelled severity. Up to Saturday last the weather for the week was singularly settled for late autumn, a keen frost, especially after nightfall, dispelling the mists which so often obscure a November sky; but if pleasant on shore it was far otherwise at sea, and vessel after vessel arrived in the Forth confirming the report of heavy gales in the far offing. The wind rose on Saturday, but the surf outran the gale, as usually happens with storms in the North Sea, and night closed as one of the most threatening and dismal ever remembered by old sailors on the shores of Fife. As in the dreadful gale only a month ago the tides were unusually full, and the waves thus hurled with unbridled fury against the sea defences, so wrecked and dismantled, the consequences

---

have been in a melancholy degree disastrous to property, though happily neither life nor limb has suffered on this occasion. Captain Miller, with a half-century's experience, informs us that he never saw so much surf on Anstruther beach; but with the exception of snapping their mooring chains, no damage was sustained by the craft in the harbour. The storm, however, suddenly subsided; but to resume the narrative, which goes on to tell that, in order to avail themselves of the moonlight for their long and hazardous voyage, a number of the crews this week left Yarmouth for home. A fleet of some twenty-five Scottish boats sailed with the evening tide of Monday, and four of the Cellardyke squadron arrived at Anstruther in the same tide on Wednesday. Many others are on the homeward run, and on the braehead and almost every outlook where the eye can sweep to seaward of St Abbs, little groups were to be seen on the following days watching for the well-known sail which should once more bring "luck" and gladness to the lone fireside. Not a few of the homes by the sea have been cheered in this way; but a number of the crews have signified their intention to continue for some time longer at the south, owing to the very encouraging success on the Norfolk coast. On Monday evening, some fortunate crews are said to have earned from £50 to £100, thus adding still more to the singular vicissitudes of the season, seeing that while some crews are reported to have grossed from £300 to £500, others will not clear the expenses of the trip. An unfortunate accident happened on Friday week at Yarmouth to the fine Cellardyke boat "Favourite," which took fire during the absence of the crew. The fire was caused by the cabin stove, and was only extinguished by the scuttling of the boat after damage to the hull, tackle, and the clothes of the crew exceeding £100.

“Mind, lassie, and rin for the papers next week. Your faither ’ll be at the fireside, an’ it’ll be so grand to read the welcome hame,” exclaimed a devoted mother, glancing over the paragraph ; but, alas ! weary weeks came and went before the bereaved widow could turn to the prized page—and then, alas ! not to read of united and joyous homes, but how near and dear ones had suffered and died. Here is the account written in the first burst of grief and despair :—“ Dreadful as have been the tempests of the season, none have proved so sad and disastrous as the north-east storm which raged along the coast from Friday morning till Sunday, and which has added one of its blackest chapters to the weary chronicle of the sea. The haddock fishers all along the Scottish seaboard were busily plying hook and line when the gale burst upon them like a thunder peal, scattering the boats in every direction, and threatening to consign one and all to the swoop of the Destroyer as the martyrs of Fate. In many cases the poor mariners were only rescued in the last extremity. One of these hairbreadth escapes was in the case of the Arbroath yawl ‘ Integrity,’ the crew of which were snatched from the brink of the grave by the deep sea going boat, of Skipper Archibald Peebles ; but, unfortunately, in the leap for life, one of the perishing men, named Thomas Beattie, was nearly crushed to death between the two boats. Skipper Peebles and his comrades not only did what they could for the comfort of the crew, but they also took the boat in tow and landed her at Pittenweem, where their humane example was seconded by the inhabitants, who opened a subscription, in particular for the relief of poor Beattie, whose injuries included a broken thigh bone. The conduct of the Pittenweem men on this occasion appears to more advantage from its noble contrast with the cruel indifference of the master of a passing brig,

who left the poor men to perish. The same generous assistance was also given by the master of the schooner 'Lord Clyde,' who took on board the drowning crew of a yawl belonging to Castle, near Colisten. The yawl was also taken in tow, but had to be abandoned off Girdleness by the parting of the thwart to which the rope was fastened. The crew were landed on Saturday morning at Elie, and the skipper, James Philp, and his three neighbours, made their way to St Monance, where the inhabitants at once saw to their necessities, and furnished them with the means to return home. But we only linger on the threshold of the dreadful tale. Old seafolk describe the storm as the most dreadful in their experience, whether for the suddenness of the outbreak or the fury with which it assailed them. The first whistle of the blast, like the preconcerted signal in war, roused the sea in raging billows, which, like white-plumed squadrons, everywhere swept the wide and weary prospect as the messengers of death. Who shall tell the terror of the fisherman's home with the hoarse cry of the tempest ringing like a dirge wail on the shore. Nor were their fears the idle terrors of the night, for many an eye red with weeping, tender hearts breaking with despair, will never, oh! never, again be gladdened in the shadows of time as in the happy days of the past.

' But thou, my friend, my brother,  
Thou'rt speeding to the shore  
Where the dirge-like tone of parting words  
Shall smite the soul no more.  
And thou wilt see our holy dead,  
The lost on earth and main,  
Into the sheaf of kindred hearts  
Thou wilt be bound again.'

In the East of Fife the safety of the white fishing boats was

soon ascertained ; but it was far otherwise with the large squadron on the long and perilous voyage from the herring rendezvous. Over forty of these boats were caught in the hurricane, some scarcely out of sight of the Norfolk shore, but others almost as nigh the dear old headland of St Abb's on the other side of the Forth. The skipper of one of the leading boats gives us the following log leaf :—' We sailed from Lowestoft about noon on Wednesday, and crossed the Deeps with a spanking breeze from the westward. Easy weather off Flamborough Head, but stood to the northward under flowing sheet till to windward of the Ferne Isles, when the warning, which could for some time be read in the driving showers and troubled sky, was followed by the sudden shifting of the wind from the north-west to the north-east, and with scarcely an interval we were in the teeth of the most terrific hurricane I ever encountered at sea.' Several of the homeward bound Cellardyke boats met the Eyemouth crews working their haddock gear, and these, after a long and weary conflict with the wind and waves, reached Anstruther harbour by midnight. Such was the fury of the tempest that the crests were torn from the waves and scattered like snowdrift ; while, unable to hoist sail, the boats were again and again swept by the mountain billows, which but for the protection of the decks must have engulfed one and all in hopeless destruction. The boat in particular of Skipper Alexander Watson split her foresail in rounding St Abb's, and was for a time in great peril on the leeshore of Dunbar. Five boats, as the last chance of safety, ran for shelter into Holy Island, and, though not without risk, ultimately gained safe anchorage. Others obtained a harbour of refuge in Shields and other ports on the coast, but the rear of the fleet bore up for the Norfolk coast as the first hope of shelter. Two lamentable

disasters occurred to the leeward part of the Cellardyke fleet. The crew of the boat of Skipper David Wood were tacking for Grimsby after nightfall on Friday, when Alexander M'Ruvie, a promising youth, aged 17, lost his hold and fell into the sea. His father was on board; but how frail is man before the hurricane, and the brave lad sank before his eyes into a watery grave. In Skipper George Anderson's boat his brother-in-law, John Watson, a free-hearted and gallant mariner, 32 years of age, was washed overboard while on duty at the mizen. His comrades did all and more, but it was the old sad, sad story—perchance a pale face, seen for an instant in the dark abyss, a single cry heard, but scarcely heard in the crash of the storm, and so the voyage of life for ever ended. A fearful accident also happened in the Deeps to one of Skipper Robert Davidson's crew. His brother-in-law, Robert Brown, while at the post of danger, was struck in the forehead by the yardarm and rendered insensible. The accident occurred on Saturday morning, but it was not till the boat reached Anstruther harbour on Monday afternoon that medical assistance could be obtained for the unfortunate fisherman, who all the while continued unconscious. On examination his skull was found to be fractured, and grave fears were felt for his recovery. Robert Brown is a married man with a family.

“These were sad calamities, and the report caused a profound sensation on the coast; but they were only the heralds of wider and more thrilling disasters. As night fell on Friday, some six or eight of the boats in the neighbourhood of the Fernes, as an expedient to outbrave the storm, cast from seven to eighteen of their nets, or, it might be with the same object, threw out their big sail, to which they rode as under the lee of a floating breakwater. One of these boats was that of Skipper John Wood, who cut away his drift of fourteen

nets, and made sail with the first lull in the storm. The other was the boat of Skipper James Murray, which was at one time within hail, and also for hours in convoy on the Northumberland coast. His boat likewise made every precaution for the night, and one of Skipper Wood's crew saw her light bright as a beacon fire, tossing in the darkness of the storm so late as 9 P.M. The one boat arrived at Anstruther on Sabbath night, but a fatal mystery hangs over the fate of the other and her hapless crew. The same cruel destiny befell another Cellardyke boat—that of Skipper Robert Stewart, who sailed from Lowestoft only about four o'clock on the fatal morning, and who would thus encounter the tempest in all its fury in the waste of waters known as the Deeps. The melancholy waves hold the secret, but the sad story is so far revealed by the fate of the St Monance boat, 'Quest,' which sailed at the same hour from the Suffolk coast, but which, according to a telegram received at St Monance early on Wednesday, had been cast ashore a broken and dismantled wreck on the sands of Norfolk. The two missing Cellardyke boats, 'Janet Anderson,' No. 1176, and the 'Vigilant,' No. 1214, were almost new—the latter indeed only launched for the Lammas fishing. The crew of the 'Janet Anderson' were—James Murray, skipper, aged twenty-six, who was to have been married on his return home; Andrew Stewart, aged thirty-four, married, four children—an infant being only born on the Monday after his loss; William Bridges, aged twenty-two, married, one child; James Walker, a native of Kingsbarns, married, four children; Alexander Lothian, a veteran fisher of fifty-four, who had braved many a storm on the Scottish shore, married, four children; Hugh M'Kay and William M'Kay, two fine young men, cousins, and unmarried, from Portakerrie, in the north



of Scotland. Seven men, four wives, and thirteen children. The crew of the 'Vigilant' were—Robert Stewart, skipper and owner, aged forty-two, married, four children; William Stewart, aged forty-six, married, one child—his wife being also in an advanced state of pregnancy; James M'Ruvie, aged forty-five, married, three children, in addition to his son James, aged sixteen, who perished with him; Alexander Doig, aged thirty-two, married, six children—the oldest being scarcely twelve years of age; Leslie Brown, aged nineteen, unmarried—being six men, four wives, and fourteen children. The crew of the 'Quest' of St Monance, No. 221, were—David Allan, skipper, married, six children; Robert Allan, his son, unmarried; William Allan, his brother, married, five children; Alexander Irvine, married, seven children; Alexander Hutt, unmarried; Alexander Latto, unmarried; David Easson, unmarried; being seven men, three wives, and eighteen children.

"Words can never tell the heartache and the agony in the homes of Cellardyke and St Monance. Every face is clouded with sorrow, and everywhere you hear the wail of the mothers and children weeping in their bereavement and despair. The first death knell may be said to have sounded with the mournful tidings on Saturday of the fate of young Alexander M'Ruvie, followed on Monday morning by the same sad message of John Watson, the last stay of a widowed mother; but the friends of the missing crews had to wait on from day to day in cruel suspense, as those who realise the bitter, bitter truth that 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.' Under any circumstances the loss of so many brave men, the flower of the Scottish shore, the stay and breadwinners of so many helpless children must be an overwhelming and irreparable calamity; but there is much, very much, about this unexampled disaster that moistens the cheek with the

generous tear. 'For home and children' is ever and may well be the watchword of the hardy mariner toiling and struggling on the midnight sea, far away on a stormy shore; but now the old streets by the beautiful Forth were once more busy, as crew after crew returned to their own. Then came the kind and cheerful talk of those still on the sea, and fond eyes watched long and lovingly, or ran to welcome every coming sail. The fire burned bright in the hearth, and the children—the little children, who already divided the gifts which a father or a brother was sure to bring, and over which little tongues had been so busy—flew to meet every footstep on the stair. 'He will come next,' the mother would say, and the little household, if disappointed for a moment, would rejoice again. In such a scene, oh! how slow but how crushing would the sickening thought—the terrible truth—at last steal on the heart. Who, indeed, can fathom the agony of those that

— Doubt, and fear, and wish and grieve,  
Believe and long to unbelieve,  
But never cease to ache;  
Still doomed in sad suspense to bear  
The hope that keeps alive despair?

Although dark uncertainty may rest upon the closing struggle, it is only too probable that the boats foundered, going down with all hands in the crash of the storm. 'We could do nothing—we had lost all hope; but God guided us through,' a brave veteran said to us, with a tear in his eye; and under that black midnight sky, with the thunder of the storm ringing in the ear, and the foaming breakers on every side, well might the storm-tossed mariners thank God for their deliverance. Amongst the many miraculous escapes was that of the boat of Skipper James Stevenson, who sailed on the morning of the gale, and who was thus overtaken in the Deeps. The most

---

painful anxiety was felt for the safety of the crew ; but on Tuesday the gladdening message arrived that boat and men were safe at Lynn. Skipper John Birrell and his crew also came through dreadful sufferings, but happily succeeded in the effort to return to Yarmouth. The boat drove twelve hours before the hurricane, and a large schooner was seen to founder and go down with all hands. But this was only one of many instances where

‘ Backward on her course she drifted,  
Heeding not her helm ;  
Now on giant waves uplifted,  
Threat’ning to o’erwhelm.  
Now adown a vale  
Of dark, angry waters driven ;  
While, like spirits chased from Heaven,  
Loud the wild wind’s wail.’