

A FORGOTTEN ROAD AND A FAMOUS VIEW.

It can hardly be affirmed that the roads of old Scotland were *civilly* engineered. If our forefathers knew of any such method or manner of making mutual communication, they certainly did not practise it. A blunt boldness characterised their plan ; savage rudeness their execution of it. Right forward, up hills of the steepest acclivity, down braes of abruptest descent, they projected their lines of intercourse, and with their rough-shod feet beat and battered them into permanent tracks. The shortest cut possible was their motto, when they first entered on a career of road-making. But by-and-by, mistaking means for ends, they seemed actually to prefer the surmounting of difficulties to the avoidance of them, and would go a goodish bit off their way for the dour pleasure of tackling a mountain. Nothing short of forty-five degrees stopped them. It was only a precipice that brought them up. Even then they scorned "to refer the foot," but would skirt the cliff at its very brink—"the view o't gave them little fricht." It would give way before they did ; and they took sharp advantage of the first signs it showed of retreating or sloping off in the way they wanted.

One of several benefits which the primeval manner of road-making over mountains secured to travellers was freedom of view. They could see round about them. The modern way is rather against this. It prefers the base to the brow, and would rather tunnel or fetch a turn than overtop. For this reason the modern traveller—unless he inherit the ancestral spirit, or has caught the craze of the antiquary to drive him into forgotten paths—must be content to know his native land only to that meagre extent and in those aspects to which his road condemns and confines him. The lines—whether of high road or railroad—which have been laid down for him do not contain the best points of view. He trudges or trots along the hill-foot, with petty microscopical peeps within his narrow horizon; or he is whirled past “loose revolving fields” which only weary his retina and bewilder his sense of locality. And this is about the best the modern road can do for him in the way of views. But at its worst—and it is often at that—he is caught between what are called “cuttings,” and shuttled into malodorous tunnels, or he has the blinkers of confining walls and excluding hedges to keep his gaze on the dusty road that lengthens before him in a dreary perspective of vanishing wires. It is not, of course, argued that our earliest road-makers, as if possessed of a superior sense of scenic beauty, drew their lines of intercommunication with the view of indulging it—the opportunity which their roads offer of such æsthetic advantage was a mere accident; but the fact remains that if one is desirous of knowing his country to the best scenic or topographic advan-

tage, without adventuring on forbidden ground, the route for him is the old roadway.

The great North Road from Edinburgh to Perth, constructed with a view to an improved stage-coach communication, conducts the traveller along a course which, in the matter of scenery, has little to offer that is pleasing; less that is picturesque, and nothing that is romantic, till it enters Glen Farg, near the village of Damhead. The passage through the glen, which was engineered in 1808-1810, descends to Strath Earn by a broad, smooth, sinuous roadway, some four miles in length, revealing at every turn a varied succession of moss-mottled rocks and bosky banks, screened at pleasing intervals with covers of larch and fir. But while these rocks and banks form and enclose short views of romantic charm, such as awoke the descriptive powers of young John Ruskin, they also shut out the grand sweep of distant landscape which the older road by the Wicks of Baigley affords from the heights which are the culmination of the western wall of the glen. These are two of the four lines of communication from Kinross-shire into Strath Earn, and both are charged with memories of the old stage-coaching days. The other two are the oldest and the newest respectively. The newest, which is also the least attractive, though the most frequented of the four, is the recently opened railroad which has brought Perth by the fast train within seventy minutes of Edinburgh. To the lover of natural scenery domiciled in Edinburgh, a great recommendation of this road is that it conveys him within about one hour to Glenfarg Station, at which point he can recover the liberty of

his legs, and begin at his own leisure to gratify his taste for the picturesque. If he is fond of what one may call Nature's "interiors," he will stroll down the glen road to the music of the Farg ; if he prefers the open landscape, he will strike up the hill road in the direction of Paris, and speir the way he can hardly miss to the pass of Baigley. The remaining line of communication here to be noticed is the most ancient of all, and dates from times that are almost prehistoric. Now in part a mere track, fast fading into the grassy and heathery wilderness, and scarcely known, except to country people of the neighbourhood, it also leads over the heights, but lies considerably farther to the west than the Baigley road. It steals away westward from the route by Baigley in a grass-grown track which used to be known as Wallace's Road, and descends to the water of Earn by the old homestead of Dron. It is the best of our four roads for magnificence and variety of view ; yet it is the least frequented of all, being, indeed, all but disused. It must have been along this road that Walter Scott, then a boy of fifteen, journeyed on that first famous pony excursion of his, which is for ever memorable as having afforded him his first view of Perth. It is only on this route that a view of the Fair City can be had. Some may even think it is only this view of the town that makes it fair. The impression then made upon Scott's youthful imagination by this view was the *raison d'être* of his last great romance—"The Fair Maid of Perth." In referring to this incident in his early life, Scott's language is unusually ecstatic. He forgets the grandeur of the

Trossachs, and even the varied graces of his own Tweedside home, to cry up the view to northward of Perth and the Tay, as commanded from a spot on this unfrequented path over the eastern Ochils. He claims for this one particular spot the glory of being "one of the most beautiful points of view which Britain, or perhaps the world can afford." The prospect from this spot he describes as a thing of the past, when, nearly half a century after he saw it, he recorded his recollection of its magnificence in the first chapter of his novel. The alteration of the road avoided the view. He beheld from the ridgy eminence, after a long stage from Kinross through a country then waste and uninteresting, and still only moderately attractive, except to natives—"the valley of the Tay, traversed by its ample and lordly stream; the town of Perth, with its two large meadows or Inches, its steeples and its towers; the hills of Moncrieff and Kinnoul, faintly rising into picturesque rocks, partly clothed with woods; the rich margin of the river studded with elegant mansions; and the distant view of the huge Grampian mountains, the northern screen of this exquisite landscape." But it was, he confessed, beyond the power of even his pen to communicate "the exquisite charm which surprise gives to pleasure, when so splendid a view arises when least expected or hoped for, and which Chrystal Croftangry experienced when he beheld for the first time the matchless scene." The praise seems so extravagant, he admits that childish wonder may have been an ingredient in his delight—"I was not," he goes on, "above fifteen years old; and as this had been the first excursion which I was

permitted to make on a pony of my own, I also experienced the glow of independence, mingled with that degree of anxiety which the most conceited boy feels when he is first abandoned to his own undirected counsels. I recollect pulling up the reins without meaning to do so, and gazing on the scene before me as if I had been afraid it would shift, like those in a theatre, before I could distinctly observe its different parts, or convince myself that what I saw was real. Since that hour, and the period is now more than fifty years past, the recollection of that inimitable landscape has possessed the strongest influence over my mind, and retained its place as a memorable thing when much that was influential on my own fortunes has fled from my recollection. It is therefore natural that I should pitch upon some narrative connected with the splendid scenery which made so much impression on my youthful imagination." His keen sense of the beauty of the landscape found metrical expression still more laudatory, and even defiantly boastful. "Behold the Tiber"—he wrote, making use of a poetical tradition which it is common to refer to a point of vantage on the opposite side of the Earn—

"Behold the Tiber ! the vain Roman cried,
Viewing the ample Tay from Baigie side ;
But where's the Scot that would the vaunt repay,
And hail the puny Tiber for the Tay ?"

On the publication of this eulogium of a particular view from the Ochils of Perthshire, various letters were sent him from the county he had belauded so lavishly, not, indeed, to find fault with his laudation, but to correct some little mistakes about names.

Scott was willing enough to allow that he might so far have erred after such a lapse of years, but he insists on his language being the truthful expression of his feelings. "Sure enough," he writes, August 1831, "the general effect of the valley of the Tay, and the ancient town of Perth, rearing its grey head among the rich pastures, and beside the gleaming waters of that noblest of Scottish streams, must remain so as to justify warmer language than Mr Croftangry had at his command." The chief, if not the only, error in Scott's description is in locating his view-point on the Wicks of Baigley. The name may have been vaguely spread over a larger part of the heights a hundred years ago than it is now, or Scott may have been misinformed by a rustic of the locality speaking in the loose way common among rustic topographers, but the fact is that Perth cannot be seen for Moncrieff Hill from the precise place on the Ochil ridge which is now called the Wicks o' Baigley. His view-point, as already indicated, was a few hundred yards further west, on the path that descends to the caller homestead of Dron. There is, however, a splendid view, though it does not include the small city, from the Wicks of Baigley, and it is more easily reached from Glenfarg Station, and therefore from Edinburgh. Indeed, within two hours after leaving Edinburgh, the traveller, with a meditative pipe, may be reposing, in the hush of a fine summer noon, on an Ochil top of fragrant turf near enough to do duty for the Wicks o' Baigley. This pleasure the writer has enjoyed neither for the first nor, he hopes, the last time. It is Clochratlaw, set down in the survey maps as Clochridgelaw, and

rises a well-known landmark from the narrow interval between the glen road and the hill road. It may be regarded as the last of the Ochil tops at the east end of the range. All round in the immediate neighbourhood lies a visible dream of pastoral peace, accentuated rather than disturbed by the hurry of the town pulsating through the scene in swiftly passing trains. Here cocks are crowing an eternal Sabbath among the hills. The bleating of sheep is in one's ears. Now and again a dog barks among the echoes of the larch-wood that lifts its green spires in the foreground. A bee revels in the thymy fragrance, till the incense of your tobacco sends him off grumbling in a zig-zag flight. The main body and middle of your picture is that part of Perthshire where Strathearn approaches to unite with the gränder strath of Tay. It is a view of rich level lands, here and there dotted with hay-coles, through which wind in shining links the stately waters. It realises, as far as anything in northern latitudes can, the scene which Lot surveyed when "he lifted up his eyes and beheld the plain of Jordan, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt." The eyes never tire of dwelling on the view. But no inconsiderable part of the charm of this lovely low-lying landscape is the setting. Eastward, the German Ocean glances a welcome to Tay round a pine-clad hill which hides Pictish Abernethy; northward, over the firs and crags of Moncrieff and Callerfountain which curtain Perth, stands the great Highland rampart of the Grampians, with their clear etherealised outlines and their dim glens, and Schiehallion their advance-guard; westward, over

bare Baigley and Balmanno, the sky-line is fretted with the dark peaks of Ben Lomond and Ben Ledi and the rough turbulency of the West Highlands. The scene, of course, is northward, with a semicircle of horizon for boundary. Southward there is little to take the eye but the back of the Lomonds and the sullen brow of Benarty.