

CHAPTER V

TRADITIONAL

Of things and others; on the infrequency of types in modern life; with all about "Trootie."

PAINSTAKING historians not a few have laboured both in and out of their vocations to preserve the memory of all most notable within Menteith and the surrounding districts. Graham of Duchray, the Rev. Mr. Kirk of Aberfoyle, "who went to his own herde" in 1692, the Rev. Patrick Graham, also of Aberfoyle, Sir Walter Scott, the Rev. Mr. McGregor Stirling, Sir William Fraser, and others, including Mr. Dunn, have written of the antiquities and legends. Of later years, Mr. Andrew Lang has enriched our literature with one of his most successful flights in minor poetry, in memory of Mr. Kirk, the astral vicar of Aberfoyle. Each in his own particular style after their kind have done brave things for themselves and their district.

Few have been so Homeric as Graham of

Duchray in his account of Lord Glencairn's expedition, of which he was "an eye- and also an ear-witness." Pleasant in these days of prosing to record a history beginning thus :

"The Earl of Glencairn went from his own house of Finlestone in the beginning of the month of August, 1653, to Lochearn, where several of the clans did meet him."

Pretty to read, too, the combat on horseback, as befitted cavaliers, between Sir George Monro and the Lord Glencairn, and to learn how, at the first blow, my lord disabled Sir George's bridle-hand, and when the combat was resumed on foot my lord did strike him such blows on the forehead as caused the blood to trickle into his eyes and blind him; and to hear that my lord evidently intended to "mak siccar," as his lordship's valet, one John White, struck up his lordship's hand, exclaiming, "You have enough of him, my lord; you have got the better of him."

A presuming and impertinent fellow this same John White, and it does one good to hear that my lord turned on him and "struck him a great blow on the shoulder." In fact a case of the most proper infliction of "your right strappado," and an example of what comes to those who interfere between two gentlemen taking the air of a morning upon Dornoch Links.

Duelling seems to have been more severely

punished in those days on occasion, than we generally believed, for a second combat having arisen (also on Dornoch Links) between two gentlemen called Lindsay and Livingstone, on account of their having taken different sides in the quarrel between Lord Glencairn and Sir George Monro, the victor, Lindsay, who had slain his foe, was executed at Dornoch Cross. "The Earl of Glencairn was troubled at this gentleman's death; but all must be done, forsooth, to please Sir George."

Execution was a summary affair in Graham of Duchray's time, for a trifling Englishman, masquerading as Captain Gordon, but whose real name proved to be Portugus (*sic*), was also executed later on for some breach of duty. "Portugus" seems doubtful as an English name; but when have Southrons kept even to probability in dealing with Scotsmen?

After the incident of the pseudo-Portugus, Graham of Duchray relates how Lord Glencairn's expedition laid siege to the Laird of Lethen's house, and lost five men. "The general being incensed at this, ordered the soldiers to pull down several stacks of corn, with which he filled the court and gates of the house, which being set on fire, he judged the smoke would stifle them, the wind blowing it into the house; but it took not the effect that he expected."

Graham does not inform us if this incident "troubled Lord Glencairn," but briefly finishes by saying, "we departed and burnt all Lethen's land." A military incident told in a military fashion for soldiers, quite in the manner of the French in Algeria or the English in Zululand. The narrative finishes abruptly, after describing the terms the Earl of Glencairn made for his followers with General Monk, with the announcement that "this happened on the 4th day of September, 1654. The Earl of Glencairn that same night crossed the water and came to his own house of Finlaystone." The narrative reminds one of the account of the conquest of Mexico by Bernal Diaz del Castillo, though Graham of Duchray lacked the power of description which makes the history of the stout-hearted, simple-minded Governor of the city of Santiago de Guatemala such a charming book.

Antiquarians have commented on and disagreed about the origin and name of one of our natural curiosities, the Flanders Moss. Some have it it once formed part of the *Sylva Caledonica*. Others, again, derive its name from a supposititious Danish word, "Flynders," said by themselves to signify a flat. Antiquarians are such a joy to a community that it is perhaps a work of supererogation to look too closely into their assertions.

The Moss is still amongst us, and Nimmo, in

his "History of Stirlingshire," declares the ancient name was the Tilly Moss, and instances the survival of the name in the local Sessentilly.

Baad nan Sassenach (the Englishman's wood), near the Miltown of Aberfoyle, is duly celebrated in local chronicles, and the slaughter, or murder, for he was said to be shot by a non-combatant, of the luckless Sassenach in the times of Cromwell.

Tobanareal, the spring where the Tutor of Appin slew the Earl of Menteith, or is said to have slain him, on the road to Glenny, has also had its chroniclers and commentators. The old Fingalian path that the Appin men must have followed as it leads past the spring still exists, a whitish trail through the heather and bracken left by the deerskin mocassins of centuries, and perpetuated by the hobnailed boots of the rustics of to-day. Few traverse it nowadays, though in its time many a "creagh" must have been driven from the "Laich" to the hills of Appin, past the decayed old house of Glenny.

Few of the present generation know the "Tyepers" or the "Red Path," and fewer still the wild track which leads out of Glen Finlas, past the Alte Glen Mean* into Balquhiddar. Rob Roy must have known it blindfold by day and night, as it is difficult to see how cattle could

* Alte Glen Mean; in English, the waterfall in the glen of the roe.

have been more quickly driven into Balquhiddy than by that path. A shepherd now and then, or a strolling beggar, can tell the names of the old tracks and paths which frequently crossed the hills from strath to strath. To-day the keeper, the only man except the shepherd who ever uses those forgotten ways, knows them but as the "short cut to so and so." Of cartridges and bores of guns he is learned, but knows as little of the history of the past as the Spanish peasant, who attributes anything older than his father's time to the all-constructing Moors.

The sportsmen, who gambol like skirt-dancers at a music-hall, dressed in the parti-coloured petticoats they believe the clansmen wore, euphemiously call all wells the "Luncheon Well," all stones and rocks the "Telescope Rock" and "Game Bag Stone," inventing as complete and homogeneous a phraseology as if the district of Menteith were situated in Deaf Smith County, Texas. No one can blame them, for Gaelic is not an easy tongue, and an acquaintance with it hard to acquire for many reasons, one of which is the extreme reluctance of the talented possessors of it to condescend to base particulars. Who has not asked a Highlander what such and such a name portends and not been answered, "Och, it is just a Gaelic word whatever!" An excellent explanation, full and satisfying enough

to those proud beings who "have the Gaelic," but strangely unsubstantial to the mere Sassenach.

It might have puzzled even Professor Blackie, who between Greek and Gaelic was never at a loss to construct a derivation for most Scottish names, to disentangle the confusion into which many of the names of places have fallen into in the Menteith district. Naturally, as Gaelic became forgotten, the pronunciation of the names became a matter of personal convenience rather than etymology, and as in Spain, where the Arabic names have often been mangled beyond recognition, the Gaelic words in Menteith have suffered a sad Lowland change. Never shall I forget the efforts of a grave Arab to preserve his gravity before a restored Arabic inscription in a Spanish church. It appeared the verse of the Koran had been written upside down, and several letters wrongly made, so that the inscription assigned some attributes to God which even a true believer could with difficulty reconcile to his belief. Whether a Gaelic scholar would encounter a cryptogamic joke in some of our local names I know not, or even if joking is recognised in Gaelic, but I am certain that names like "Critilvean," "Polybaglot," and others, would puzzle most philologists.

One site of a clan battle none of the historians I have mentioned seem to have dealt with. At

Craig Vadh, above the slate quarry of Aberfoyle, on the ridge where the old Loch Katrine road just loses Menteith from sight, are ten or fifteen long-shaped cairns. Here tradition has it that a band of foragers from Lochaber were overtaken by the men of Lennox and Menteith, and a fierce fight ensued. The cairns are where the dead men's bodies were found; their graves a little farther down the hill, buried in fern and bracken, marked by grey stones.

As for burial places, folk are hard to please. Some like your quiet corner, under a yew-tree, close to some Norman church in England. A quiet resting place enough it makes too, with the parson's pony (or the intruding donkey of the Nonconformist) cropping the long lush grass above one. Pleasant to come to in the summer evenings, when swifts flit to and fro like ghosts, and cockchafers hum in the leafy trees, are these same country churchyards in England.

In spite of the natural beauty of the land, in spite of faith sufficient to turn all Scotland into a pampa, what is it makes a Scottish churchyard so different? It may be that the knowledge that the sleepers' souls are all in torment—for none could possibly have escaped the penalties so liberally dispensed to them in life in church—renders one apprehensive. Again, the absence of "affliction sore" upon the tombstones may make the graves

less homelike, but still the fact remains, our national churchyard is not inviting to the world-worn traveller. Again, there are some who think your three square yards of canvas and your lump of lead, with the Union Jack, and "therefore we commit this body to the deep," the fittest burial for man. Still, for the men who lie so quietly on the green slope under Craig Vadh I fancy no other resting-place would seem as pleasant. What if the tourist passes, in the diurnal coach, within a quarter of a mile? What if the cockney (oblivious of the fact that Rob Roy's well is really under Craig Vadh) descends to slake his whisky and his thirst at a spurious fountain, made with hands, hard by the turnpike road? All this, and how the world is changed, they can know nothing of, or how to-day tall fellows are slaughtered in different fashion from that in which they died. For all I know, the times in which they lived were better than the times we know; perhaps were worse. At any rate, wolves roamed the hills, as the name Craig Vadh would seem to show. Around the desolate Loch Reoichte, perhaps, the Caledonian bull has fed, the wild boar harboured; and yet the ground was more secure than nowadays, for fewer perils from broken whisky-bottles and sardine-tins lurked in the heather. And how shall sardine-tins offend? Are they not, after all, a sign, natural and visible,

of the spirit of the age, and did not Providence place them (most likely) in our path to show us something? What if we cannot see it, and only cut our feet upon the bottles or jagged tins? No doubt the cross, which, seen in the sky, converted Constantine, was there before; and many another Roman general was not so much a deep-dyed pagan as merely unobservant.

Hard by Craig Vadh is the desolate hill tarn known as Loch Reoichte. In the district there are many of these curious black hill lochs, generally in peaty hollows, with water black as jet, peopled with little muddy trout, and often overgrown with water-lilies.

Each has its legend, as in duty bound. Loch McAn Righ, close to the Lake of Menteith, is sacred to the memory of a king's son who, in the days when princes of the blood-royal perambulated the world at a loose end and unattended, almost lost his life whilst chasing the wild deer, by his horse bogging down with him. Tradition hath it that one Betty or Betsy, for there is room for doubt which of the forms of the name the maiden bore, extracted him, like a royal cork, from the mud and saved his life. The field is known as Achnavevity, said by Gaelic-speaking men to mean the field of Betty. Tradition is in error in having woven no romance about the King of Scotland's son and Betty, but then how seldom

tradition, on the whole, misses its opportunities in matters of the sort. Anyhow, near by the field is the "laroch" of the chapel of Arnchly, one of the four chapels connected with the monastery of Inchmahome, so possibly the nearness of the sacred edifice prevented scandal making free with the Prince's or Betty's name.

Other little lochs preserve their legend, as the Loch at Duchray Castle, said to be unfathomable, and the Tinkers' Loch (Loch an Cheird), above the hills of Aberfoyle, in which the mysterious water-bull of the Highland legends was said to dwell. Amongst them all for desolate beauty Loch Reoichte stands first.* In winter it may well be called the frozen loch, standing as it does in a sort of cup on the top of a hill. In summer clouds of midges hang over its sullen waters. Standing by it is the only place in the district where one sometimes fancies he can conjure up what a Highlander of two hundred years ago was like.

It does not want much effort of imagination to see the Lowlander, the hard-featured, commonplace "stipulosus vernaculus," as Bower described Henry Smith of Perth, over whom Sir Walter has thrown such a glamour of romance. Whether in a rusty morrion and jacks, clothed in a "stan o' black," or in the fearsome "defroque" (no

* Reoichte means frozen in Gaelic.

English word expresses the crassness of his appearance) that he wears to-day, the Lowlander must have always been the same. Where shall we find anything like the Highlander of the old chronicles in Scotland of to-day? Not in the gillie of the shooting-lodges, insolent and servile at the same time; not in the crofter or the cotter, for it is well known the bone and sinew of the Highland clans are to be looked for rather in Canada or Georgia than in Scotland.

Still, standing by Loch Reoichte, it sometimes seems one can call up a sort of Indian, lithe and agile, yet lazy and indolent when off the warpath, stealing through the heather with his silent deer-skin shoes, looking at nothing, yet seeing everything, as men who spend their lives in the open air engaged in war or hunting are wont to do.

Types have become infrequent in Menteith, as in the other districts of Scotland. The author of the "Scotch Hairst Kirn," printed in 1821, and descriptive of a harvest-home at the farm of Ledard by Aberfoyle, might search the country in vain for such a character as "Bauldy McRosat," or "Will Shore," and return like Diogenes after his search through the Athenian Stock Exchange. Were it not for "Trootie" we might almost say the type of semi-mendicant, of whom Sir Walter has so many specimens, had ceased to exist. "Trootie," however, saves us from the reproach. In the dark

ages he was said to have been a weaver "about Balfron." This statement I put forth, whilst not believing it, for all it may be worth.

Weavers (*vide* the works of Barrie and others) have mostly been superior-minded persons who were taken up with politics, theology, and other matters which do not go far to help to keep a family. Writers of talent have told us of how the virtues banished from cities still lurk amongst the brethren of their craft. One thing I cannot think it possible they have done, that is, produced a fisher. Fishers of men may be they have put forth, but that kind mostly fish for their own hand, and "Trootie" in that respect is blameless. It may be that his father or some degenerate scion of his family plied the base shuttle in fashion tame and mechanical. "Trootie" himself, I'll swear, has never soiled his hands with honest toil, that honest toil we talk so much about and all avoid. Nature turns out a perfect fly-fisher but very seldom.

Your "pêcheur à la ligne" swarms in the suburbs of our cities, and has his villa. His faith is great, his cuticle is pachydermatous, turning off jokes and midges as a tapir's hide turns off an Indian's spear in Paraguay. Who has not seen and silently despised your fisher with a float?

On the much-painted upper reaches of the Thames, along the quays in Paris, they sit in rows, like penguins on a beach. The very fishes know

them, and eat their ground bait in a condescending way. Their faith is great, as great as a Theosophist's, and just as practical. One wonders at them, but would not care to imitate their mode of life. Your fly-fisher is of a different race. His toil is not productive, as a general rule, but then his daily business takes him into pleasant places. He knows the reaches of the river under the alders, where the water eddies round the stones and where the big fish lie. Not that he catches any of them.

He knows the stepping-stones, can tell of perils in crossing them in the great spate, and does so. The stump the dipper sits upon, for all the world exactly like a judge upon the bench, and just as wise of face, the fly-fisher can point to. Where from the reeds the heron rises of a misty morning, or where the whistling mallard settles with a splash in the gloaming of the day, he knows. The king-fisher flashing through the sunlight like a bit of the tropics gone astray in northern latitudes, the fly-fisher has marked. Something there is of peril in the very exercise and mystery of his craft, at least to the eyes and clothing. So that, take him for all in all, the fisher with the fly to the manner born is not a man you meet with every day.

Nature alone can make him, and, like most of her best products, she turns them out with parsimony. "Trootie," I take it, fly-fished from his

earliest youth. Like Indians I have seen, who could take a tired horse and somehow make him gallop when no one else could make him move, "Trootie" appears to have the instinct of the fisher. Let others fish with all the best appurtenances of fishing-tackle makers, and toil all day and yet catch nothing, let "Trootie" pass and fish the self-same water, with a rod with as many splicings as Petrucchio's bridle, and fly like a piece of a moulting feather broom, and ten to one he fills a basket. Withal not proud of his success, but taking it as something sent from heaven and marketable.

It was on a summer evening I first saw "Trootie," waddling like a Narragansett pacer up the avenue. At first sight nothing about him showed the intrinsic merit of the man. No one could call him handsome or majestic in appearance. Had Edie Ochiltree risen from his grave and stood beside him, your halfpenny had certainly not gone to "Trootie," that is if personal appearance had influenced your judgment. A little shilpet, feckless-looking body, dressed in a sort of moss-trout coloured and much patched coat of various shades of troutiness and stages of decay; summer and winter a grey woollen comforter resembling a stocking, such as farmers used to wear in the dark ages, round his throat; his "cadie," for I cannot call it hat, a cross between a beehive and a

pudding bag, and girt about with casts of fuzzy home-made flies; over his shoulders a dilapidated fishing-basket, always well stuffed with trout; for freedom and convenience in working, his toes protruding through his boots, which looked as if they were chosen on a dunghill; his walk a sort of shuffle, such as fishers often use, and seem to take a pride in.

Apparently the man was older than the rocks; no one can say with certainty they ever saw him younger than sixty. A pleasant age enough to be born at, sixty is, if one was born quite free from rheumatism. Love over, and the taste for speculation and adventure on the wane, avarice but just beginning, with the prospect of a healthy, untroubled life till eighty, and then oblivion of life's troubles, with the usual mendacious epitaph. However "Trootie," if he was not fashed by love, except perhaps of "speerits," and if in his case avarice was a thing illusory, yet had his cross, and it was rheumatism. He thought it was contracted sleeping by the banks of streams, in order to get to business early in the morning, after a glass or two at night. Perhaps it was the sleeping by the streams, perhaps the glasses overnight; at any rate, the rheumatism was "sort o' fashous," and he appeared to think it a special instance of the malevolence of Providence in dealing with His fishers.

His conversation, if I recollect it rightly, was entirely of his craft, and ran on fishes and fishing, fishes caught and basketed, but more on fishes lost. A tale he had of fishing in the Tinkers' Loch alone amongst the hills. There it appears he hooked a monster early in the morning after sleeping beside the loch. Visions came to him of fame and even wealth if the monster could be landed. The "paragraph" in the local paper of "that veteran sportsman, Mr. Wilkie (better known as 'Trootie')," was all set up and ready in his mind's eye; the monster, duly stuffed, was in a case in the window of the fishing-tackle maker's shop, when see, the cursed luck that always hovers o'er a fisher! Just at the bank, "I had almost grippit him; he gaed a wallop wi' his tail," and then "Trootie" can mind no more until next morning, when he woke beside the loch feeling stiff and "sair forfouchten." The devil of it is that from that day to this he is not sure if he passed one or two nights sleeping by the Tinkers' Loch.

Like Lear, his children were not worthy of him, for none of them were fishers, but took up trades and followed settled occupations in a prosaic fashion. This caused him grief, but drew forth no astonishment, for he would moralise upon the hardness of the fisher's lot, and how the lairds of his youth would often give a guinea for the fish

(worth eightpence at the most) that I had purchased most unwillingly for half-a-crown.

Let him fish on, if he still lives to fish—for, for a year or two I have missed him from his usual haunts—let him fish on, before the County Council sends an inspector to see that fishers all wear goloshes and chest-protectors, and none use rods exceeding eighteen feet in length, or contravene the bye-laws.

A man like "Trootie" in a country such as ours, where all endeavour to make money and to rise in the world by shoving others down, ought to be kept (perhaps he is) by national subscription, as an example of how even a Scotchman may revert to the ways of his uncivilised progenitors. As far as it concerns me, all I hope is that his shadow on the bank may never dwindle; and if his personality was somewhat snuffy and his talk like that of other fishers, not always quite exact in detail, much can be excused in one who left deliberately the gross delights of sleeping in a bed and meals three times a day ("about Balfroon") to fish laborious days.