

2. General Characteristics — Position and Relations.

Of all the counties of the west of Scotland, there is only one that is entirely within the Lowlands, and this one is Renfrew. By this it is not meant that the whole shire is low-lying. Far from it. A large proportion of the total area is hilly, but the hills are of the "Lowland" type. This paradox requires further explanation.

There are in Scotland three well-marked natural divisions, the Highlands, the Central Lowlands, and the Southern Uplands; and these three districts differ strongly in physical aspect, in rocks, in scenery, in vegetation, and in industries. The Central Lowlands are separated from the Highlands by a line running from north-east to south-west, between Stonehaven and Helensburgh; they are separated from the Southern Uplands by an almost parallel line, running from St Abb's Head to Girvan. Dumbarton, Lanark, Ayr, Bute, all are crossed by one or other of these two lines; Renfrew alone falls entirely between them. These lines mark the course of two great faults or cracks,

which traverse the whole country, and between which the land has gradually sunk for thousands of feet. This sinking of the central part of Scotland took place many ages before man appeared on the earth ; yet it may be considered the most important stage in the evolution of Scotland, for it preserved the all-important coalfields of



Types of Hills: Highland Type (Loch Long and Loch Goil)

the Lowlands, on which the prosperity of the country largely depends. The Central Lowlands of Scotland are not only the most fertile part of the country, but by far the greatest proportion of the mining and the manufactures is carried on there. It has thus become a district unique in Great Britain, for it possesses the characteristics of at least three separate parts of England—the south-eastern

plain devoted to agriculture, the "Black Country" with its coal and iron industries, and Lancashire with its cotton manufactures.

The hills of the Central Lowlands—Sidlaws, Ochils, Pentlands, Campsies, Kilpatricks, Kilbarchans—are all of a similar kind (the "Lowland" type above referred to), and differ markedly both from those of the Highlands,



Types of Hills: Southern Upland Type (the Lowthers)

and from those of the Southern Uplands. As will be shown more fully in the section on Geology, this difference is due to the nature of the rocks. From an elevated spot within the Highlands there is revealed on all sides a bewildering chaos of mountain and valley. As a rule this tumbled sea of peaks rises into bare rock, sometimes rugged, splintered, and pinnacled, sometimes upheaving a huge,

rounded shoulder of rock terminating in an abrupt precipice. In the Southern Uplands the wildness, ruggedness, and grandeur of the Highlands as a rule are absent, for the outlines of the hills are generally smooth and rounded; yet there is a pure and softly flowing sweep of contour, and a charm of delicate colour about these green and treeless summits, found nowhere else in Scotland. The



Types of Hills: Lowland Type (looking across
Castle Semple Loch)

Lowland hills consist of large, irregular masses of volcanic rocks. They are table-lands, something less than 2000 feet above sea-level, with undulating surfaces, rising into no prominent peaks, and thus differing from both the other types. As a rule the sides of these hills rise very steeply from the low ground, but once the top is gained,

one can walk for many miles over bare moorland, the surface rising or falling within the limits of a hundred feet or so. All the hills of Renfrewshire are of this kind.

The position of Renfrewshire on the western slope of Scotland was at first a disadvantage. For a long time the eastern coastal plain was by far the most important part of the country. The commerce of Europe to a large extent was carried on in the districts bordering the North Sea. The face of the county was thus turned away from the chief commercial centres; but the progress of civilisation in its westward march, particularly the development of American trade, has shifted the centre of gravity of commerce to the shores of the Atlantic, and thus the geographical position of Renfrewshire at the present time is one of its most important advantages.

Although the mineral wealth of Renfrew is not of great value, the county shared in the phenomenal growth of Scottish industrial centres during the last century and a half. It is near enough the rich coalfields of Lanarkshire to participate in the prosperity that came with their development. The banks of the Clyde with their easy access to the sea, and their proximity to valuable coal and iron fields, formed an ideal home for the ship-building industry, and in this branch of trade Renfrewshire is an easy first, claiming yearly about half the total tonnage of the river. Yet it must not be forgotten that of itself the county could not have attained this industrial eminence. It must obtain its supplies of coal, iron, and steel elsewhere, but this consideration only serves to throw into

stronger relief the energy, the skill, and the enterprise that brought the county to the front in spite of the disadvantages it laboured under in its lack of mineral wealth.

But Renfrew is by no means purely a manufacturing county. Its pursuits are numerous and well-balanced. Agriculture and shipping complete the trinity of its most important interests. The county falls naturally into two main divisions, hilly and low-lying, and the former is of no industrial importance. The low ground may be subdivided again into three parts, a broad flat area in the east, submerged below the waters of the Clyde in comparatively recent times; a narrow coastal strip bordering the hills on the north and west (an old sea beach in fact), and lastly the open valleys of the interior. It makes for clearness to think of the first of these districts as the home of manufactures, the second of the shipping trade, the third of agriculture. Of course in nature, divisions are never absolutely sharp; and thus manufactures and agriculture are found to some extent over all the lowlands of the shire.