

CHAPTER XXIII.

EMIGRATION—MODES OF TRAVELLING—ILLUMINANTS.

“ Oh, why left I my hame,
Why did I cross the deep?
Oh, why left I the land
Where my forefathers sleep?”

EMIGRATION from the North of Scotland was a rare event in a parish. Well do we remember the sensation caused in ours when the news spread through it that a well-known man and his wife had resolved to emigrate with their large family to Australia. The very name of Botany Bay at that time made people's blood curdle. The recital of deeds done there by the convicts had spread over the North in an exaggerated form, and filled the minds of the people with dread and horror. The day that the family referred to quitted the village left on our mind a memory that time cannot efface. No trait in the Scottish character is more observable than their love of home and country. Their poetry abounds with the deep fervency and heartfelt sentiments of devotion to their native land. We have seldom or ever witnessed a sadder event than the parting scene that took place on the village green, where the inhabitants had assembled to say farewell to the emigrants as they left their native place, never to return. Had not the father of the family been the son of a farmer with some means, he could not have borne the expense of emigrating to the antipodes with a family. A voyage to Australia when Queen Victoria began to reign was in all respects a great and expensive undertaking. I believe that the time they were on the voyage was about nine months. Nearly two years after leaving, news came that they had landed, and that one of the girls had died on board ship and was consigned to a watery grave. At the sad news many eyes were filled with tears, and mothers bewailed the death of the lovable, fair-haired girl.

Emigration from the North of Scotland sixty years ago was for many reasons a rare event. Even migration was a diffi-

cult matter. Well do I remember the obstacles that beset my departure from Speyside. Money was a scarcer commodity then than it is at present. A box of certain dimensions had to be made according to the size carried by the mail coach. With the limited box and a light purse, I travelled in a cart to Keith to meet the mail coach that passed there from Inverness. While waiting there for its arrival, my father, who had on several occasions travelled by it, with other sage advice, advised me to pay great deference to the guard. When his horn sounded and the coach drew up at the inn door, the great man descended from the boot, resplendent in a scarlet coat, with a broad leathern belt across his shoulder. Never before had I seen a man that impressed me more as being "a man of authority." When he saw my box he at once took exception to its size. After being assured that it was the exact prescribed dimensions, he condescendingly accepted a coin of the realm bearing a likeness of George IV., and passed the box into the boot. Fresh horses were yoked to the coach, the passengers mounted to the top, and the mighty man blew his horn until his scarlet face seemed like a ball of fire. When the great structure began to sway and rock, a feeling of alarm drove all thought of sadness from the heart in anxiety for personal safety. By the time that Huntly was reached all fear of the coach overturning had vanished, and now scenes familiar in song and story presented themselves. There flowed the Deveron, with the lasses that inspired the famous air that we had danced so often to. Then came the Glens of Foudland. That by report was the scene of many weird stories, and above all it was the place where bonnie Jeannie Gordon wished she was in when in her sorrow she said—

"Oh, if I were in the bonny Glens of Foudland,
Where hunting oftimes I hae been,
I could go to bonnie Castle Gordon
Without either stocking or sheen."

When "the tap o' Benachie" appeared in view, standing out in relief against the eastern sky, I longed to be upon its top and see at its back the Gadie with its ever-living music. I even made bold to approach the great man, and enquired if he could tell me whereabouts the battle of Harlaw was fought. With a scornful voice he replied, "I ken naethin' aboot sic a place. It may be at

the back o' Beelzebub for a' that I ken or care about it." As we entered the suburbs of the Granite City, the great man in uniform "blew a blast baith loud and lang." Many women folks in the streets along which we passed lifted their window blinds (for darkness had fallen) to look at the great lumbering mail and the reeking horses that were being driven at a gallop for the entertainment of pedestrians and bystanders in the streets. When they slackened pace and were unyoked by the inn door in the market-place, the poor animals were led away to their stable like drowned rats. Fortunately a Speyside friend met me by appointment, and took care of me and my belongings. On leaving the market-place, we had to go the full length of Union Street to reach his residence. The sight that met my eyes as we entered it made an impression on my mind that has never left it. I had heard of gas, but I had only formed a vague idea of its illuminating power. The sight of the double row of gas lamps along the full length of that unrivalled street was to me, a country-bred loon who had only seen the light of a penny dip or a cruzie, both beautiful and bewildering. Since the night that I stood and looked along Union Street I have seen a good many cities and towns lit up with gas, but in none of them have I looked upon a prettier sight than that street presented with its rows of lamps receding in beautiful perspective.

The advancement made in illuminants during the late Queen's reign is as notable as any that has been effected for domestic and public comfort in the last sixty years. At the time when Her Gracious Majesty ascended the throne many a poor man's house had no other illuminant than "the fir can'le." The "peer man," as the article was called that held the split laths of bog fir, stood in the corner by the fire. When night closed in it was lifted on to the middle of the hearth, the resinous fir lath was lighted at one end in the fire, and then stuck into the cleft iron hand that held it in its grasp. The stalk of the "peer man" was about four feet in length; the lower end was set into a round stone that kept it erect and steady. The feeding of the "peer man" during the winter nights was taken in turns by the young folks of the family. An iron rack the length of the fireplace took the place of a mantel shelf. It was kept filled with long split fir laths, dry and ready to feed the "peer man." When the fir

“can’le” was placed within his jaws, a girl or boy stood and regulated the light by moving its burning end up and down in see-saw fashion, and lifting and placing it forward as it became consumed. When the end was reached, another “can’le” was “raxed doon fae the rack,” lighted at the expiring end of its predecessor, and took its place.

I was under the belief that no more primitive mode of illumination could be found in the King’s dominions until I had occasion recently to visit the Shetland Isles. Being the guest of a doctor there, I frequently accompanied him on his professional visits. On a Sunday afternoon he had occasion to make a visit to a crofter’s house on the margin of a very inaccessible voe. In reaching it we had to cross a wide stretch of peaty moorland with deep bogs full of water. Before the doctor was able to leave the crofter’s house night came down very dark. “John,” said the doctor, “get your lantern and light us across the moor.” “I am sorry, doctor, I hae nae sic a thing,” replied the poor crofter; “but I’ll gie ye a blink across wi’ the old Shetland light.” While speaking, he lifted a long-legged tongs from the hearth, and with it two newly lighted peats, and laid them flat one above the other; then he placed two dried peats under his left arm, and lifted the two lighted peats with the long tongs. His wife opened the door, and we sallied forth, John leading the way holding aloft the two burning peats. Being fanned by a brisk north wind, they cast a wonderfully clear light around us for several yards. On our way we had to shelter in the lee of a crofter’s cottage from a fierce blast of hail; still the peats burned on. At the end of a mile and a half, when we parted with the primitive islander, the peats were still alight; the two carried by John to replace them were not required. During a three months’ holiday in the islands, I became pretty familiar with the light of “the Shetland lantern” passing across the moors from one crofter’s cottage to another. Amongst the people I saw many primitive habits that were familiar to me in my boyhood; but in another decade or two these will have given place to modern ideas of dress and a new class of household conveniences, and the steel spade and fork will replace the most primitive agricultural implement that I have ever seen, namely, “the Shetland spade.”

The most remarkable thing in the Highlands of Scotland sixty

years ago was the use made of natural and animal products in supplying domestic and personal wants. The fleece of their sheep clad them, the produce of their farms fed them, with the milk of their cows, and the wick of their oil lamps was found by the waterside. The rushes that grew there strong and lengthy were gathered and stripped of their rind, the beautiful white pith within was carefully tied up in parcels, hung on a nail near the fire, and used as wicks for the oil lamps. When the flame was required to cast a stronger light, two or three wicks were used. The sauch bush by the burnside supplied the material for lingals to the flail and halters to the horses and cows upon the place. The sight of a family fireside in the Highlands when the late Queen was crowned was indeed a contrast to a fireside gathering in the coronation year of her successor. When darkness closed the short winter's day, the family gathered round the wide and open hearth in a circle, the spinning wheels were brought out, trimmed, and set in motion by the deft hands of the daughters and maidens of the house; the old father or grandfather got out his muckle gully knife to split the fir log that was to feed the "peer man," while song and story went round. As books were a rarity, the night's entertainment consisted of oral tales and ballads of love and war.