

CHAPTER XII.

THE STORY OF THE WINTER DRAVE—HERRING
ADVENTURES AND THE WRECK AT THE MAY.

Happier days were in store, and in the interval a new fishery, like a new and richer mine, was opened, so as to make hope and confidence once more sparkle in every eye. We refer to the winter drave. In one sense it was no discovery; the Monks of the May knew, and fished the herrings for ling and kellin bait. It was the same errand that led, as we saw, to the catastrophe at Cellardyke in 1800; but it was the conviction of the old fathers that their single chance was to anchor the net in some secluded inlet or bay, where, like the sea trout, the shoals would hover in the mystery of their birth. So it had been, and so it was likely to be, till one night, as the "Box Harry," of Cellardyke, was bound on the usual errand, the signs of herring life in the offing were so singular and decided as to induce the old skipper, Alexander Cunningham, to exclaim—"Men, what do you to say to shoot?" The idea of casting the nets for herring in such a situation was so fantastic that his son could only laugh. "Just as weel dae that, faither, in Renny Hill Park," and, wrapping his jacket round his head, went to sleep between the timbers—then the fishers' only midnight couch—but the old skipper was not to be dissuaded, and, with the assistance of the rest of the crew, the drift was cast into the witching sea. It was an interesting experiment, and curiosity was on tip-toe to catch the result. Nor was she disappointed; for, drawing the rope, the lug of the first net was shining like silver with the scally treasure. Old Saunders

was in ecstasies. "Clash them in the lubber's chafts, Tam," he cried, throwing up a handful of herrings. It was the signal for active work, and the success of that night gave, as we shall see, a new and brighter turn to the destinies of the shore.

Another incident, no less romantic, enriched the harvest, and may also be regarded as the birth of one of the leading industries of recent times. Red herrings hung for days in the kiln were familiar on the coast; but the Anstruther cooper—Andrew Innes—was the first to glean the secret of the rich and delicate "bloaters," which he did from a grateful Englishman in the harbour of Peterhead. The cooper was not the man to lose a chance for his master, Bailie George Darsie, and, hearing that the Pittenweem boats had, the year after the adventure of the "Box Harry," fallen in with a large shoal in the Forth, he travelled west and purchased right and left at five-and-twenty shillings a barrel. "What's the news at Pittenweem, this mornin'?" asked the gracious old Bailie, standing in his own door, at a sedate fish merchant of the sister burgh. "News, Bailie! Weel may ye speer, Bailie. Yer man has bocht forty barrel o' herrin', and the price is naething less—no a penny less—than five-and-twenty shillin's a barrel." "Is he drunk or daft," exclaimed the perplexed Magistrate, who could not conceal his anger and surprise, which had not left him when his trusty overseer came to report the transactions of the morning. "A foolish thing, Andrew, man; a foolish thing," and refusing his countenance, the master indignantly turned away; but, full of his project, the cooper hastened to the herring yard to put his kilns in order, and the first Packet that sailed carried the first Anstruther bloaters for shipment with the Leith and London steamers. "Yer bloaters ha'e turned the penny, Andrew. "I never did sae weel wi' naething before," said the Bailie, radiant as a

May morning, as he glanced over the sales about a week later. The herrings had actually realised forty-seven shillings a barrel in Billingsgate; and need we say that "Try again" became the order of the day, as indeed it has ever been the watchword of the fishing trade. The herrings were bought on the 9th of February 1827, and the Pittenweem crews continued the fishery with great spirit and general success till they were overtaken by an unparalleled disaster on Wednesday, the 20th of February 1833. The herrings were on the coast, and, full of hope and rejoicing in the singular mildness of the day, the crews had sped betimes to sea. They had cast and even drawn their nets, some with four or six and even eight crans, but by midnight the estuary was wrapt in one of the most dreadful storms that ever rolled across the German sea. The boats, in the first hours of the storm, ran into Elie harbour, and others, in the last extremity, found shelter in Cocklemill burn, but three boats belonging to Pittenweem, and one to St Monance, perished in the gale. One of the Pittenweem boats struck on the rock at the entrance to the west harbour, when one man, Robert Adamson, escaped to the shore, but his companions, with their death cry ringing in the ears of wife and children, met a watery grave. This was the "Helen" and "Robert," owned by the skipper, George Horsburgh, who was lost with three of his crew. The other boats were the "Rising Suns," which swamped in deep water, though neither Skipper Duncan nor any of his four companions were spared to tell the tale, and the "Peace and Unity," which was cast ashore keel up on Elie beach, her crew of five men, including Skipper Bridges, having also perished. A similar fate overtook Alexander Reekie and his crew—five in all—of the St Monance boat, which was seen drifting in the same melancholy situation as the last in the stormy offing. The

total loss was nineteen fishermen ; but the public sympathy rose to the calamity, and a relief fund having been organised by Andrew Johnstone, M.P., Sir Ralph Anstruther, and Colonel Lindsay, about £2000 were collected for the widows and the fatherless. In those years was seen for the first time the broad contrast which has so often existed since between the old enterprise and the new—that is, the herring fishery of spring and the herring fishery of Lammas—the one spreading out like a forest tree, but the other once and again not more than a shadow of the past. We refer, of course, to the Forth, for season by season the coast was sending a larger fleet to Caithness and Peterhead, though at home it actually seemed, as the Fife chronicler had said two centuries before, that “there was to be no drave hereafter.” But here is an old herring fisher to speak for himself. It is James Lindsay, so famous in Edinburgh University as Sir John Leslie’s man. The season was 1826, when the philosopher, as his neighbours called him, was a boat mate with Bailie Crawford and four others. For a month and a day they toiled night after night and caught nothing ; but the cry of herrings at Dunbar sent them scudding to the southward, though there only to learn that the shoal was at Holy Island, for which it was next resolved to tack and steer. Here they found the sloop “Williams,” of Crail, with Andrew Innes as supercargo, waiting, but waiting in vain, for their own errand, till one day advices came of herrings at Stonehaven, for which sloop and boat were that very tide under-way. Again, however, it was “a wild goose chase,” and the end of the forlorn season saw them “settling up” in John Wilson’s public-house on the shore of Cellardyke. It had been truly a luckless venture, for instead of a profit each man was seven shillings in debt, and, as may be supposed, more

was felt than said, till the father of the company, John Reid, old and lame as he was, sprang to his feet, "I've seen a' this afore," cried the veteran, "we'll ha'e gude fortune yet, brithers—half-a-mutchkin on the head o't." The advice, need we say, was taken, but many a day, notwithstanding, the home fisher toiled on a fruitless sea. Brighter times, however, dawned at last, though, as so often happens, the watchers are asleep at the opening gate. The shoals return as mysteriously as they went, and no one suspected that herrings were on the shore, till a lovely September day in 1836 two urchins—George Barclay and David Roger—came racing in from the hand lines with the joyful cry that "living herring in the cod's mooth." That night the old Dyker yawl, with a volunteer crew and a volunteer skipper in our old friend James Lindsay, set ten herring nets in the offing, and came in next morning with six, on the morrow with eight, and on the third day with twenty barrels. The news flew along the coast as if it had been rung out from the steeples, and boats gathered in like sea birds to the banquet. But a sudden storm ended the season, though not before new plans and new resolutions were taken for the next. In 1836 the Cellardyke fleet fished in the north, with the exception of four reserved crews, who divided the season between the Forth and Holy Island, but in the following year instead of four there were forty boats at home—the success being so remarkable that four hundred barrels are estimated as the average of the hundred boats on the Fife coast. The usual selling price of the cure was twenty-two shillings a barrel, so that in official circles it was stated and believed that the value of the harvest was not less than £41,000. The coast wakened up in a day from the apathy and slumber of years—the dry sands are once more singing in the sunlight ; but we cannot forget the appalling

catastrophe which plunged the shore into mourning, and that on the gladsome harvest eve. The sorrow of the sea has indeed few more affecting incidents than the wreck of the excursion boat at the Isle of May on Saturday, the 1st July 1837, when so many sweet young lives were whirled like a leaf on the blast, from the scene of revelry and mirth, into the solemn secrets of the grave.

It was no new adventure that fatal sail ; on the contrary, it was a time-honoured custom of the shore to launch the drave boat, and give friends and neighbours a holiday on that romantic isle. A dance on the May—how young hearts throbbed and fair cheeks flushed with joy at the thought. Even old eyes, dim with years, and it might be with the weariness of the life march, brighten up over the sunny memories of the olden time. Here, then, we have the secret this Saturday morning on the pier of Cellardyke, where as many as five boats are unmooring for the island. All eyes, however, turned towards one, evidently the "Admiral" ship in size and build ; but listen, and you can hear the attraction, as it is confessed by a ruddy maiden, "Come, Rob, and let's gang wi' the music." Three violins have struck up at the moment, and the "Johns," with her living freight of five-and-sixty souls, is pushed from the pier. It is a summer sky and a summer sea, and the island is reached betimes, and with Kirkonhaven on the lea the boat is steered for the little pier. The breakers, the last echo of the sea winds, are white and booming on the reef ; but the oarsmen are young and fearless, and a skilful hand is on the helm, and all goes well. "A good voyage, and a pleasant landing," cries one, and fair hands are busy with shawl and kerchief ; but at that very moment a wild plunge and a startled cry betrays the danger—scarcely heard, however, when, with a deafening crash, the

doomed boat falls upon the skerry. How changed is now the once joyous scene! All is confusion and terror; the air is rent with shrieks of women and children, who stand the very picture of despair. Still there is a chance; a firm foot can leap the chasm, and brave men are bounding to and fro with precious burthens; but, alas! a panic seized the remnant, who, rushing to the higher gunwale, the boat rolls from her perch, and sinks like a stone in the deep water. It was a fearful scene—a frantic mass of women and children clinging to each other with the grasp of death, struggled in the waves; but the terrible appeal is not in vain. Heroes plunge in to the rescue. “I saw the Kingsbarns sailor, David Spence, bring seven to the shore,” said a Cellardyke friend to us. One young fisher had his sister and another dearer still in his arms; but both were lost, and he himself was scarcely saved. Yet after all the gallant deeds that were done thirteen sank to rise no more. The death roll is a sad one. The bereavements in Cellardyke are—Margaret Carstairs, thirteen; Euphemia Stevenson, twelve; and Euphemia Anderson, nine years of age. The others are a fair damsel with rich golden tresses, named Jane Brown, belonging to Kingsbarns, and Isabella, aged twenty, the daughter of James Butters, the foreman of Thirdpart. Anstruther was especially smitten that day—eight of the sufferers being connected with this place, namely, Margaret Taylor, the wife of Captain Sangster, and her sister’s child, Magdalene Young; old widow David Wilson, or Mary Bell, as the neighbours would say, and her daughter-in-law, Mary Skinners, the wife of Alexander Wilson, schoolmaster, Radernie, and James, their infant son, nine weeks old. There was also the gentle maiden, Katie Andrews, the orphan child of poverty and talent, with Ann Anderson, scarcely seventeen years, the daughter of the old sheriff-officer; and the

bride-elect, Janet Muir, aged twenty-two, of the household of Peter Muir, who had another child amongst the rescued from the wreck. The scene at Cellardyke pier that Saturday evening was, indeed, solemn and affecting, nor soon to be forgotten. It was an awful contrast to the song and dance of the morning, for now the bodies of the dead, dripping with the cruel wave, had been landed, and bereaved friends had come to recognise, or to make enquiries after their own. Amongst these was Alexander Brown, who chanced, like hundreds, to be at the draper's sale at Anstruther looking into the faces of the dead. "My Jeannie's no there," he said, with a sigh of relief, as if the next boat would restore his beloved safe and well to his bosom. Yet she was in the ghastly train; but the old crofter of Kingsbarns is not alone in failing to realise the once familiar features when written with the secrets of a watery grave. A notable incident in point occurred some fifty years ago on Anstruther beach. A singular character, named Philip Oliphant, better known as "Cuddie Deil," stung to despair by age and want, threw himself into the midnight sea at the back of the old pier. The lifeless body was found next morning. A crowd gathered on the spot, but not one knew or could name the unhappy victim, till, at the suggestion of an old sailor, he was lifted to his feet, when a hundred voices cried in a breath, "Cuddie Deil." The disaster at the May was a crushing misfortune to the poor skipper. He lost his boat, and not only so, but for more than a year a cruel and unnecessary prosecution hung over his head. It devolved on the late Town-Clerk, M. F. Conolly, at whose instance as Procurator-Fiscal for the East of Fife, he was apprehended, but liberated on bail, to answer to a charge of culpable homicide. The trial took place before the High Court of Justiciary on the 15th of March 1838. He was indicted for

having crowded sixty-five persons into a boat thirty-six feet long and twelve feet two inches wide ; with having landed at Kirkonhaven, instead of the stand or the "Altar Stanes;" and with having used four oars instead of six or eight, which, in the prosecutor's view, ought to have been taken to pull the boat through the eddies. "Guilty or not guilty," fixed all eyes on John Sutherland, the panel at the bar. A look of anxious concern shaded his honest brow ; but bearing and answer bespoke the innocent man. Evidence was then led—the first witness being Alexander Wood, or "Briton Sandy," whose boat was one of the five that fatal day at the island. He was asked why he on that occasion selected another landing place, and his manly answer exploded the most serious charge against his townsman, "My own pleasure. I might have taken one landing as well as another." The next witness was Robert Davidson, one of the twelve fishermen on board of the "Johns," who aptly explained that though the boat belonged to John Sutherland, yet he had no more interest or responsibility than his eleven companions in the excursion, for which nothing was asked and nothing was paid by the excursionists, who were, moreover, the boatmen's dearest relatives and friends. It fairly broke down the charge, which the Lord-Advocate at once withdrew. The acquittal followed : but the presiding judge warned the fishermen not to take so many passengers in future, a warning, however, which has not since been needed, as with that fatal trip the once favourite holiday was ended.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE REV. GEORGE DICKSON AND THE FISHERIES —THE BLACK DECADE.

The well-remembered minister of the parish, the Rev. George Dickson, wrote about this time an interesting sketch of Cellardyke in connection with the statistical account of Kilrenny. The account includes the census of 1841, when the population had increased from only 1043 in the year 1801; from 1233 in 1811; from 1494 in 1821; from 1705 in 1831, to 2039. Cellardyke at this time had 282 seafaring men, and likewise, according to the returns given in by the schoolmaster, Mr Bonthron, 197 houses, 318 families, and 1486 inhabitants. Mr Dickson quotes the following from the Blue Book on the Scottish burghs:—"That Nether Kilrenny has a harbour for fishing boats, for the improvement of which £1200 were advanced by the Board of Trustees for the improvement of fisheries, and £500 were raised by the town, which have been expended in building new quays; but they have not been judiciously placed, and the harbour is said to have been rather injured than improved in their erection." For the sake, however, of the venerable writer we give the notice of the sea as it left his pen. Here it is:—"The fishery in Cellardyke is carried on to a very great extent. The fishermen are active, hardy, and enterprising, and prosecute their lawful employment oftentimes under circumstances of great danger. There are about 100 large boats, varying in tonnage from 13 to 18 tons, employed during the summer season in the herring fishery, each of these being manned with three or four regular fishermen, and one or two half-dealsmen, as they are called,

who have no nets, but merely assist in rowing and hauling the nets ; or if they have not the full complement of men two or three strong boys are sometimes taken. It was the usual practice for the whole of the fishermen to go to Peterhead and Wick to prosecute the fishing, without a single boat being left to try if herring could be got in the Firth of Forth ; but in 1837 or 1838 some of the fishermen remained at home, and were very successful, and since that period a great number of boats have been employed at home with various success, and during some seasons have been more successful than those which went to the north. At times the boats were brought into the harbour with from forty to eighty crans ; but when the herrings are so abundant the fishery continues only for a few days. When the fishermen get 200 crans they account such a fair fishing ; but many do not attain to that number. During a successful fishing season lately one or two boats got about 400 crans or barrels, and it is believed that one caught the extraordinary number of 500 crans. Their agreement with the curers is generally from nine shillings to eleven shillings per cran, with a certain allowance of whisky. It is not, however, all gain that is made by the fishing, as it is attended with very considerable expense. The boats, when thoroughly fitted for going to sea, cost about £100, and require a considerable sum to keep them in repair, while the nets, when ready for use, cost about five pounds each, and the number taken by each boat varies from fourteen to twenty. The herring fishing is prosecuted for a short time in winter, during the months of January and February, and in autumn during the months of August and September. The other months are occupied by the fishermen in prosecuting the white fishing, when 28 or 30 boats go regularly to sea every morning if the weather permits, and proceed oftentimes to the distance

of 40 or 50 miles in search of fish. The boats in these cases are manned with eight men each, and while each man furnishes a certain portion of line, with the necessary hooks attached, the produce is equally divided among the fishermen, the owner of the boat being entitled to a double share. In this mode of fishing a considerable expense is also incurred, both in the purchase of mussels for bait, which are generally brought from the Eden beyond St Andrews, and also by the frequent loss of their fishing tackle. In summer the fish are generally taken to Fisherrow and Newhaven, or to Dundee and Perth, and in winter they are generally brought into the harbour, and sold to the fishcurers or to the cadgers, who cart them to a great distance, and dispose of them in the different towns throughout. The fishcurers smoke the haddocks and pickle the cod which they purchase, and send to the Glasgow, Liverpool, and London markets. Besides the fishermen who are engaged in the fishing, the means of subsistence are afforded to a number of other individuals, such as coopers, carters, and women, who are employed in cleaning and curing the fish. It would be difficult to ascertain the amount of money which is brought in from the deep in the course of a year; but estimating each fishing boat at 120 crans on an average in ordinary years, the sum realised at 10s per crans would amount to £6000, besides the profits arising from the takes of cod and haddocks during the summer season, which is very considerable; but when the expense of keeping up these lines, and the payment of their bait, are taken into consideration, these apparent gains are much diminished. A cartload of mussels brought from the Eden costs from twenty shillings to thirty-two shillings, and the lines which are employed in fishing by each fisherman extend to 1800 feet in winter, and double that length in summer, so that when the whole or even a portion

of the line is lost a considerable sum is necessary to repair the deficiency. Many of the fishermen are in respectable circumstances, and careful in the management of their substance; but it is matter of deep regret that the same cannot be said of all of them. Mrs D. Bethune, as the superior, is entitled to every fourteenth fish of the different kinds, with the exception of herring, of which she has a right to every eighteenth; but instead of exacting the rent in fish an agreement has been entered into with the fishermen, by which they consent, in lieu of the fish, to pay £40 annually. As the harbour is intended merely for fishing boats, no ships or foreign vessels are allowed to enter it." Such was our old sea home when it was overtaken not by one but by a series of disasters, which make the next seven years the darkest in the annals of the coast. The first occurred during the dreadful gale from the westward on Tuesday, the 29th of March 1842. Many an anxious eye was turned that day towards the North Sea, as the billows, like warriors waving their white plumes, rushed to the conflict with the howling tempest; and well might mothers and sisters weep for the brave men exposed to the wrath of the pitiless storm. The fishing boats were at sea, but one by one they gallantly breasted the raging west. Now on the port, now on the starboard tack and all went well, till in a fatal moment one luckless craft, the "Lord Melbourne," just as she had rounded in the wind's eye, but before the ballast could be trimmed, is struck by a dreadful squall. It was an evil moment for the death wrestle. Helpless and unprepared the boat sinks before the destroyer, and seven gallant men have looked their last on sea and sky. They perished, but not without a struggle, as men struggle for life, and all that makes life sweet and lovely—for home, for children—yet all was in vain; and now, like

the last two disasters, one solitary man is left to fight the awful conflict, when his companions are one by one gone by his side. He would have shared their fate ; but in a fortunate moment he clutched some bladders or buoys, which proved to him the ark of life, till he was rescued by the boat "Sovereign," of Cellardyke, which bore down to his relief. The survivor was James Dickson, whose story, as we shall see, is a sad and touching one. The sufferers were—the skipper and owner, Henry Reid, unmarried ; Adam Reid, left a widow and three children ; William Reid, left a widow ; James Meldrum, a native of St Monance, but married and settled in Cellardyke, left a widow and five children ; William Robertson, left a widow and three children, besides a son, William, who perished with his father on that fatal forenoon ; Andrew Anderson, a native of Queensferry, and a son of the old fish trader already referred to, left a widow and two children. The skipper and his brothers, Adam and William, perished side by side ; but the fate of William Robertson and his son is amongst the most touching incidents of the sea. When the boat was struck by the squall, and all was lost, the young man, less perhaps in terror than in the pathos of the last farewell of life and love, gave way to a burst of tears, when his father quitted his hold on the mast, and clasped him to his bosom, saying, "Dinna be fear'd, Willie, yer faither's gaun wi' ye," and so they sank into a watery grave.

"Alas ! for love, if thou were't all,
And nought beyond, O, death."

The next disaster was little more than two years later. It happened on the 16th of May 1844. During the day the weather had been singularly soft and sultry, with a sickly south wind, ever struggling, ever beaten as if by some strong but secret enemy, which in the meantime has been gathering

and marshalling his squadrons for the onslaught, and then

“Colder and louder blew the wind,
A gale from the north-east ;
The snow fell hissing in the brine,
And the billows frothed like yeast.”

An old fisher near the Urquhart Wynd had a quaint but expressive way of picturing this deceitful weather. “It’s a butter melter the noo,” he would say, wiping his honest brow ; “but look out for the tarry freezer the nicht.” The deep sea going boats of Cellardyke, however, true to the intrepid character of the shore, were ploughing in the light of the evening stars, some homeward, but more outward bound ; indeed, it seemed, as so often happens in a Scottish spring, that “all signs had failed,” and that the summer had already come to gladden sea and shore. Such were the feelings of the hour when a little squadron of Cellardyke hoisted sail for the deep sea. One of the boats, named the “William,” was gallantly dashing through the deepening gloom, foresail and mainsail set full to the breeze, and with a young but kindly hand upon the helm, when last seen, or at least recognised by some neighbours, who were themselves all but overwhelmed within the hour by the terrific whirlwind, on which, as it rushed past, death and destruction seemed to sit as charioteers. It was midnight, and the Bell light flickered faintly through the driving storm, “when, was it the shriek of the wild winds or the cry of drowning men ?” no one could tell. It came and went so swiftly on the startled ear, but that gallant boat returned no more. The sea holds the secret—the sad secret—over which wives and children wept so many days ; but the whisper was only too fearfully realised that the boat had gone down in the midnight squall. The eight sufferers were—the skipper and owner, George Smith,

who left a widow and three children ; James Smith, his brother, who was also a married man, with five children, his son George being one of the hapless crew ; James Forrester Watson, who left a widow and seven orphans ; John Sutherland, whose young widow bore her son six months after his father was sleeping in the waves ; Wilson Brunton, who had but lately taken to sea life, left a widow and four orphans in helpless childhood ; James Salter, a native of Kilmrenny, who left a widow and one child ; Robert Mackay, a young unmarried man, from Sutherlandshire. The third calamity occurred within the second year, being on the night of Tuesday, the 23d of April 1846. The circumstances bear a painful resemblance to the former catastrophe—indeed, the one is almost a shadow of the other, for here again the gallant new boat, the “Nancy,” is last seen dashing through the midnight waves. She had all sails set, and was cleaving her path in foam and spray, and so fitted away till she was lost in the shadows of the midnight, where the old fishers believe she was caught like a bird on the wing by the dreadful hurricane, which, as before, swept from the stormy North. Next day many an eye was turned to the stormy main, but it was only to watch and weep ; the stately boat never came back again, and, like his three brothers but four years bygone, the skipper and his six companions lay in a watery grave. It was a surmise at the time that the “Nancy” was swamped about five leagues to the eastward of the May, but on such occasions rumour, like the sea bubble, is only a child of the air. The names of the crew who perished that night, with the particulars of the widows and orphans, are as follows :—Thomas Reid, master, a widow and five children ; William Muir, a widow and four children ; Thomas Muir, a widow and two children ; George Anderson, a widow and two children ;

John Wilson, a widow and two children ; Alexander Wilson, a widow and a daughter, not born, however, till many weeks after the loss ; John Boyter, unmarried, but the last support of his aged mother. The eighth man of the crew, Andrew Wilson, chanced to be on shore that night, in consequence of a sore hand, and thus escaped the fate of his brothers, John and Alexander. The following lines were written, it is said, at the time by a ploughboy on the farm of Caiplie, and were prized in the hour of distress far above more elegant compositions, and so we here give them a place—

“ You fishermen of Cellardyke, that on the sea do sail,
Come listen with attention unto this mournful tale,
It's of a splendid new boat—the “ Nancy ”—lost at sea,
With seven of a crew, my boys, the truth I'll tell to you.
On the twenty-second of April, a dark and misty night,
She sailed out of Anst'er pier at ten o'clock at night ;
She steered her course to the eastward of the May,
And there, they say, she did go down, when fifteen miles away.
O ! these poor and humble fishermen all meet a watery grave,
Without an eye to pity them, or yet an arm to save ;
Nor was there any present their hurried death to prove ;
But we hope they all have landed in that happy home above.
Six widows they have left behind, and fifteen children dear,
For to lament the loss of them that on the seas did steer ;
Oh ! Providence, be kind to them, and good unto them prove,
Guide them and protect them all with thy sovereign love.
You, brethren, join in unity, and show your liberal hand,
And let the harvest season do all the good it can
For to maintain their widows, who are now so bereft,
Likewise their orphan children, who fatherless are left ;
Rear you up their children unto some future stage,
And then they will remember you when once they come of age.
I must conclude, and make an end, and finish out my lines ;
I hope it will give no offence to whom it does belong.
Although I am a ploughman's boy I feel for others too ;
Now I have got no more to say—I bid you all adieu ! ”

The fourth of these terrible catastrophes, which occurred on the morning of Tuesday, the 3d of November 1848, had in some touching particulars a mystery and pathos all its own. In those years, indeed, a strange fatality seemed to hang about the deep sea fleet of Cellardyke. "I remember," said a grey-haired father on the bulwark, "when the boats were long reckoned at four-and-twenty." Another launch, another loss; but it happened again, some thirteen or fourteen years later, when the four crews suffered, and turned the count as often back to twenty-nine or thirty. Such was the muster on Cellardyke pier that morning— a morning so dark that a crew actually boarded their neighbour's boat for their own, and had the sails rigged before realising the mistake. Two had just chimed when one gallant boat after another pushed out to "veer and tack" in the rising sea wind, and anon through the driving mist and rain. Weathering the Island of May, however, the fleet encountered the full sweep of the gale, and boat after boat bore up for the friendly shore. Others continued the conflict in all the dashing spirit of the sea—

"Oh! who can tell, save he whose heart hath tried,
And danced in triumph o'er the waters wide,
The exulting sense, the pulse's maddening play,
That thrills the wanderer of that trackless way?"

The most fearless, however, gave up the endeavour to cast hook and line, and sooner or later fled from the storm; but that night there was one brave crew the less in the dear old home. It was the "Johns and Mary," of whom no tidings could be heard, save the short and hurried whisper which passed from lip to lip in the twilight, the import of which was but too easily read in the hushed voice and dejected face. The gale and the waves were raging high; but in neither lay the dreadful secret which that midnight rent the air with the

widows' cry. The rumour ran, and none might doubt it, that one of the Baltic fleet, a large brig under close reefed topsails, bearing up like the fishing fleet before the storm had dealt the fatal blow, which sent boat and crew to the bottom. The scene was believed to be a league to the south-east of the Isle of May, where—oh, sadly true of many a sea hero of Fife—

“The ocean is a mighty grave,
Its breast a burial ground ;
And every little swelling wave
Is but a graveyard mound.”

That very morning two oars, a broken plank, and three or four line baskets and other apparellings of a fishing craft were seen tossing in the waves ; but if any misgivings still remained as to the fate of the boat, they were cruelly put to rest, and for ever, within the week, by the spars which were cast ashore on the sea board of Dunbar, and recognised as those of the “John and Mary.” The sufferers who thus perished in the full bloom of life, with their widows and orphans, are as follows :—John Smith, master and owner of the boat, aged thirty, left a widow and four children, the eldest five years, the youngest eleven months ; James Fleming, over forty, left a widow pregnant, besides seven children from two to sixteen years old ; Henry Reid, forty-five, left a widow and seven children, five of whom were under fourteen years, the youngest being born the same morning on which the father perished ; Thomas Fleming, bordering on fifty, left a widow and six children, four of whom were from nine to sixteen years old, but his son John, a fine young man about twenty, now shared his fate ; James Dick, twenty-three years old, left a widow and two children, eldest five years ; David Birrell, perhaps the most powerful and resolute man in Cellardyke, left a widow

pregnant; James Dickson, unmarried, aged twenty-seven. He was the solitary survivor in the loss of the "Lord Melbourne;" and thus, in little more than seven years, no fewer than thirty brave men of Cellardyke perished at sea.

"Far down below the sounding wave,
Still shall they lie though tempests o'er them sweep;
Never may flower be strewn above their grave—
Never may sister weep."

On that memorable morning the fleet, instead of tacking for "Skimfie," bore up for "Stinkin' Hin," as the old fishers called Anstruther harbour, which became almost from that day, for the sake of its unrivalled fairway and cosy lee, the constant rendezvous of the Cellardyke boats; nor let us forget that these had for a second time outgrown the accommodation of their own little harbour. The fishermen, as we saw, in virtue of the old charter between the two lairds, had a free and unchallengeable right to Anstruther harbour—a right which was now more valued, because more to the general interest, than any other in the common good, whether of burgh or barony. It left, of course, the vicarage teinds in the original position, these being still leased from the superior by a committee acting for the community, at an annual rent of £40 or £50.



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