

CHAPTER VI

PANTHEISTIC

Setting forth some particulars of two Menteith worthies, with something of Sith Bruachs, and some remarks on shadows.

ONE of the most characteristic of the few remaining types of the past was certainly Hugh Graham, of the Port of Menteith. Those who do vainly (like the Pelagians) think that good manners and courtesy imply servility ought to have known Hugh Graham. Personally I am not certain if he knew with any accuracy the situation of the Seychelle Islands, or could have told one much of the binomial theorem. What I do know is that he retained in a great measure the ancient Highland manners. Oh, how refreshing those ancient Highland manners were, starting as they did from a different basis from our modern method of deportment! Strange as it may appear, Hugh Graham, although a boatman, considered himself, and was, a gentleman, and being one himself, he treated all humanity in the same style.

The modern fashion, which implies that every one is not a gentleman, leaves a different feeling on the recipient of their flavour. Not that most probably they are not better than the older style, in the same way that a bicycle is better than a horse; but then the style is different. All the legends of the district were known to Hugh, who, of course, "had Gaelic," and seemed to have personally assisted at most events of importance in Scottish history for the past two hundred years. That is the way in which a man who has the traditions should take himself—as he grows older and contemporaries die, always to antedate his birth each year a year or two, so that at last he comes to have really lived with those he talks about.

Only by living with people do we really get to know them (not always even then); and if a man makes it his daily duty to talk of Claverhouse, John Knox, Rob Roy, and other men of violence in days gone by, he gets by degrees to think he knew them all. With what an air of truthfulness old Hugh would tell the story of "Malise and the Roeskin Purse."*

One saw the Earl of Menteith laid up in lavender in Edinburgh; one saw the faithful

* McGregor Stirling preserves this story in his "History of the Priory of Inchmahome," now become a somewhat rare book.

Malise arrive on foot, bringing relief, and when the door was opened accept the halfpenny the owner of the house bestowed on him, struck with his miserable appearance. Then the Earl appeared upon the scene, and chid his follower in Gaelic for accepting alms; and Malise answered, "Och ay, my lord, but I would cheerfully have been accepting every penny the honest gentleman had in his possession." Instinctively the listener divined that Hugh had borne the purse, or been at least a listener to the dialogue, either in person or in some previous incarnation. A sportsman, too, was Hugh, having walked to Ayrshire to attend the tournament at Eglinton, of which he had a store of reminiscences. Other envious old Highlanders, when Hugh, at ninety years of age, used to go "east to the Port" to fetch his cow at nights, were wont to say, "Ay, Hugh was gey and souple for his years, but then Hugh never wrocht ony in his youth." If this was so I honour him the more, for he who can live to ninety without having "wrocht ony," and be, as Hugh was, free from guile and property, is a man to be admired.

Scotland at one time must have been full of men like Hugh. They fought at Bannockburn, at the Harlaw, were at the Sheriffmuir, went with the Chevalier to Derby, and suffered after Culloden, taking the losing side on all occasions with unerring

accuracy. Commonly in every battle the winner commands respect, the vanquished has our love; and so it may be that, whilst the men like Hugh have gone down hopelessly before the men of single and double entry, still a corner of our hearts is kept for those who fought, not against their mere conquerors, but time itself.

Of the small gentry who in times past furnished so many perfect types, those who produced the "gash Garscadden," and that fine old laird who thought there might be "wale of wigs upon the Stockie Muir," McLachlan of Auchentroig was about the last survival. Sprung from one of the oldest families in the district—his ancestors had been at Bannockburn, his grandfather at Minden—he occupied a place that no one fills to-day. Keen at a bargain, yet always loser by it; active in the affairs of others, forgetful of his own; his face as red as the great bottles in a chemist's window, he seemed a tower of strength, and yet was delicate. A sort of link between the gentry and farmers; with the first by choice a farmer, with the latter a gentleman; esteemed, yet overreached by all mankind, as lovers of a bargain often are, the laird of Auchentroig was an instance of the survival of the unfittest—that is, the unfittest for modern life. Had he been born a little earlier, he had been content to ride his Highland garron over his estate and keep his health, and midden at the

door, till eighty. As it was, his lot was cast in times too hard and uncongenial; so, like a wise man, finding the chimney of his house always a-smoking, he left the house, and also left the world the poorer by the extinction of a type.

The gradual decay of the English yeomanry is often deplored by writers and historians; few seem to take into consideration that the Scottish yeomanry is quite extinct. The Laird of Auchentroig was the last specimen of his class—at least in the district. With him expired the last of a family whose ancestors were present at almost every battle famous in Scottish history.

The little foursquare, grey stone house,* with its courtyard and its “crowsteps,” the coat of arms with its entablature let into the wall over the entrance door, the door itself studded with iron nails, and curiously wrought-iron pendant, serving for knocker and for handle, and which, tradition says, endured a siege from no less a commander than Rob Roy himself, the giant ash trees opposite the house, are now the only relics of the McLachlans, for, after all, what is the tombstone in the churchyard of Drymen? One reads “Hic Jacet,” has just time to start a-moralising, and then to catch a train.

* The house still stands, and can be examined with pleasure by those who take no interest in modern improvements.

History informs us that the Romans once ruled the greater part of Scotland, and one wonders sometimes, looking at the Roman camp, or the camp which some call Roman, others Pictish or Caledonian, at Gartfarran, why they came so far. The little camp, with its ditch now dry and fringed with hazels and with rowans, and through which runs a road, making it so like the camp where Marmion fought the spectre knight that I fancy that Sir Walter had Gartfarran in his mind's eye when he described it, is pleasant enough to go to on a summer day and sit and ponder in.

What an abode of horror it must have been to the unfortunate centurion, say from Naples, stranded in a marsh far from the world, in a climate of the roughest, and blocked on every side by painted savages! No doubt there was a sense of glory in being (except the camp of Ardoch) the farthest outpost of articulate-speaking man in the known world, but even that could scarcely have made up for the lack of news from Rome. Although the building spirit of the age has left intact (as yet) the Fairy Hill at Aberfoyle, still for some time past, in fact since the time of the Rev. Mr. Kirk, that eminent pastor "amongst the Scoto-Irish of Aberfoyle," we have no information of the Daoine Shi. Yet the existence of a veritable and historic Sith Bruach is a thing to be envied by the inhabitants of less favoured

regions. It profits little whether the Daoine Shi were really fairies or merely "Peghts," as some folk say. With all due deference to Andrew Lang, to the Rev. Mr. Kirk, and to the members of the Psychical Research Society, I opine for the theory of the "Peghts."

Sanchoniathon, Apollonius Rhodius, and Diodorus Siculus, with other well-known and deeply studied writers, such as Silius Italicus, Albertus Magnus, and Mr. Stead, may be against me, still I cleave to the "Peghts." "Singular little folk and terribly strong" is the description given of them by an ancient writer. Besides, in almost every country of the world there are traditions of a former pigmy race having trod the ground where now the giant inhabitants of the land disport themselves. So flattering to the vanity of the present inhabitants and so like the habit of mankind. All those who have gone before us were pigmies, that is proved to demonstration. Solomon never wrapped up a foolish thought in finer-sounding words than when he said that the dead lion was not the equal of the living dog.

Ten times more philosophical was the unknown elector of the State of Illinois, who always voted at the Presidential election for Henry Clay, on the plea that if it were impossible to get an honest living statesman he preferred a man like Clay, who had been honest when he was alive. So I stick

firmly to the "Peghts," and not entirely because I have seen the interior of the Sith Bruach called the Peghts' House in the moss near Coldoch, but because a fairy is a thing that a true Scotsman should not tolerate. What value can possibly attach to fairies, upon 'Change? They are never quoted except by foolish and unpractical men who deal in poetry, in folk-lore, history, and other exercises of the imagination. That which we do not see, cannot exist, else why should Providence have given us the power of sight?

In the Laguna called Yberá in Corrientes there exists a wondrous island. From the days when Hulderico Schmidel and Alvar Nuñez first sailed upon the waters of the Parana, the tradition has existed that the inhabitants of that island were pigmies. No one has seen them, and though to-day in the city of Corrientes, some fifty miles from the shores of the great Laguna, the inhabitants enjoy the blessing of electric light, municipal government, the delights of bicycles, the income-tax, as well as a revolution every three months, the mystery is still unsolved.

In matters of this sort it is well to premise a little sometimes, like the ancient Scottish lady who, having stated that the apples grown in Scotland were the finest in the world, added a rider to her statement and said, "I maun premise I like my apples sour." Therefore I must premise the Laguna

Yberá is nearly three hundred miles in length, and the interior a thicket of canes and "camaloté," through which no Christian (he who is not an Indian is an *ex-officio* Christian in those countries) has ever passed. Some of the more imaginative Christians of Corrientes assert there are no pigmies in the islands in the lake at all, and quote the Holy Scriptures, and cite the "Witch of Endor" and other portions of Holy Writ, all just as apposite, to show that fairies are the dwellers in the hidden recesses of the cane-brakes of Yberá. Fairies or pigmies, it matters little which they are, whether in Corrientes or Aberfoyle.

Good Mr. Kirk, the "painful preacher," is gone, as his son says, to "his own herd," and is said to dwell in the centre of the Fairy Hill. Better that there he stays; and if he has learned wisdom, he will never venture out again. A man might easy travel far and fare much worse than have his dwelling in the Fairy Hill.

Of pigmies in the world there will always be a plenteous supply, but fairies tend to become less common, even in Menteith. I do not mean to say a fairy is of necessity a being opposed to progress. When wire fences first were used in Scotland some thirty years or so ago, horses turned out to grass in pastures generally ran into them and maimed themselves. The more sagacious horse of modern times rarely or ever does so, but takes them into

regular account with the other foolish devices contrived by man to stop his grazing at his pleasure. All in good time the fairies will get accustomed to changed conditions, and dance as merrily upon the girders of a railway bridge as formerly upon the grass and tussocks. The motley elements which went to make the history of Menteith are gone and buried, but their shadows still remain. The Earls of Menteith, from Gillechrist to the Beggar Earl, the fairies, the Rev. Mr. Kirk, Rob Roy, the monks of Inchmahome, the Romans, Peghts, the Caledonian cattle, with the wolves, John Graham of Claverhouse and Mary Queen of Scots, have left Menteith for ever, but the shadow of their passage still remains ; at least I see it.

Life is a dream, they say, but dreams have their awakening. A shadow, when it passes over the bents so brown, across the heather, and steals into the corries of the hills, returns no more. Only a reflection of the clouds, you say. Well, if it is so, is not life only a reflection of the past ?

Could we but see a shadow of the future, and compare it with the shadows of the past, why then, indeed, we might know something of Menteith and other districts where the shadows play, coming, like life, from nowhere, and returning into nothing.