

GALLOWAY BYGONES

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AS RAIDERS COUNTRY

I.—WHY WE ARE WHAT WE ARE

Between Dee and Cree—that is our Galloway. A link of Forth were almost worth it all. The uninstructed conceives of Galloway as but a parish somewhere in broad Scotland. To the native it is—as its wild Picts were in the national line of battle—the very vanguard of empire.

When we meet each other far overseas, or even in such outlandish parts as Edinburgh, to be of Galloway warms our hearts to one another, and not unfrequently, perhaps, uncorks the 'greybeard.' But when we of one part of that wide province meet one another down in Galloway itself we are a little apt to walk round each other, and growl and snarl like angry stranger curs at one another's heels. For to the man from the Rhynns, the man from the East Side that looks on Nith is but a border thief. And with regard to a man from Dumfries itself, the question is not whether any good can come out of such a Nazareth, but rather whether any evil can come out of anywhere else.

However, we are forgetting Ayrshire. To belong to Dumfries is indeed a crime in the eyes of every true son of the ancient and independent province. But yet there is a kind of pity attached to the ignoble fact, as for men who would have helped the matter if they had been consulted in time, but who now have to face the fault of their parents as best they may.

The case is, however, entirely different with an Ayrshire-man. He is an Ayrshireman by intent. For him there can be no excuse. For his villainy no palliation. Is there not in the records of Scottish law a well-authenticated case in which one Mossman was hanged on May 20, 1785, upon the following indictment:—

1. That the prisoner was found on the king's highway without cause.
2. That he 'wandered in his discourse.'
3. 'That he belonged to Carrick.'

The last count was proven and was fatal to him. And with good reason. Many an honest man has been hanged for less.

I remember a very intelligent old native of Kirkcudbright telling me that the reception of Burns's poems in Galloway was much retarded by the prejudice against an Ayrshireman, and was indeed never completely overcome during the poet's lifetime.

Other parts of the country were little regarded by the true sons of Stewartry and Shire. There were known to be such districts as 'Lanerickshire and the wild Heelants,' but they were ill thought of. People who said that they had been there were looked 'a thocht agley,' as we might look at one who, with no record for conspicuous daring, asserted that he had been to the summit of Mount Everest. Accounts of their travels were received with conspicuous and almost insulting unbelief. 'Oh, ye hae been in the Heelants, say ye?' 'Ow, aye,— umpha —aye!'

Edinburgh was known, of course. It was a bad place, Edinburgh. A Galloway man only went there once. The place he visited was the Grassmarket, where the king's representative presented him with the loan of a long tow-rope for half-an-hour.

So that though most of the Galloway lairds of any degree of respectability in the olden times had had their little bit of trouble in the days before the Union, most of them preferred to be 'put to the horn' (that is, proclaimed rebel and traitor to the realm and the king's majesty by three blasts upon the horn at the Cross of Edinburgh), rather than come up and risk getting their necks mixed up with the 'King's tow.'

It was a very far cry to Cruggleton and a farther to the Dungeon of Buchan, and the region of Galloway was not healthy for king's messengers. The enteric disease called 'six inch o' cauld steel in the wame o' him' was extraordinarily prevalent in the district, and anyone who was known to carry the king's writ or warrant about his person was almost certain to suffer from it.

It was told of Kennedy of Bargany that on one occasion his man John had cruelly assaulted an innocent traveller upon the highway, and was brought before the Sheriff Court at Wigton for the offence. Bargany appeared to defend his man, and his plea of innocence on behalf of John was that the man assaulted 'lookit like a Sheriff's offisher or a lawyer.' John got off.

All Galloway is divided into three parts—the Stewartry, the Shire, and the parish of Balmaghie. Some have tried to do without the latter division, but their very ill-success has proved their error. The parish of Balmaghie is the Cor Cordium of Galloway. It is the central parish—the citadel of Gallovidian prejudices. It was the proud sanctuary of the reivers of the low country before the Reformation. Then it became the headquarters of the High Westland Whigs in the stirring times that sent Davie Crookback to watch the king's forces on the English border. From its Clachanpluck every single man marched away to Rullion Green, very few returning from the dowsing they got on Pentland side from grim long-bearded Dalyell. It was the parish that for many years defied, indiscriminately, law courts and Church courts, and kept Macmillan, the first minister of the Cameronian Societies, in enjoyment of kirk, glebe, and manse in spite of the invasion of the emissaries of Court of Session and the fulminations of the Erastian Presbytery of Kirkcudbright.

Balmaghie was a great place for religious excitement in the old days—though, as one of the historians of the county says, it is remarkable with what calmness the people of Balmaghie have taken the matter since.

The adjoining parts of Galloway—the Stewartry and the Shire—are important enough in their way. They cannot all be Balmaghies, but they do very well. The Stewartry was in ancient time the more important of these two larger divisions. Its rental and taxable value were to the Shire in the proportion of nine to five.

But, strangely enough, it was not proud of the fact, and has often since tried to get the valuation reduced. This shows how little conceit of themselves Stewartry men have. If you want to see real conceit you must go to the neighbourhood of Glenluce, and ask who makes the best bee-skeps in Scotland.

Now a word as to time. The eighteenth century did not begin in 1701 according to the received opinion. It really began with William of Orange coming over from Holland in the year of the 'glorious revolution,' and settling the country down into that smug respectability which for a good while played havoc with the old picturesque interest. Yet in Galloway there always remained elements of special interest, owing to the remote and independent nature of the country.

On the other hand, it was Walter Scott who put an end to the eighteenth century. The Waverley Novels were a great civiliser, and by making the old world the world of literature, Scott convinced people in Scotland that they were living in modern times—for many had lived contentedly all their lives and never known it. They were as surprised to hear it as M. Jourdain was when he found out that for a long season he had been talking prose.

'Guy Mannering' was the instrument by which Scott cultivated Galloway out of the eighteenth century. Yet the local colour of the book is slight, and to a born Gallovidian hardly recognisable. For Scott did not know Galloway. He got Galloway legends from Joseph Train, that careful and most excellent literary jackal; but he dressed them up in the attire of Ettrick Forest. He thinks, for instance, that the hills of Galloway are smooth, green-breasted swells, like Eildon or Tinto; and there is nothing to show that he even suspected what fastnesses lie hid from the ken of the ordinary romancer and topographer about the Dungeon of Buchan and Loch Enoch.

So in this wide field of the eighteenth century it is not easy to give a general idea of how the people of the double province lived. There was indeed a great advance in all the comforts of living in Galloway during the eighteenth century—though not so great, perhaps, as during the nineteenth.

The ancient gentry of Galloway, of true Galloway blood, were never a very numerous race, and some of the greatest names were extinct long before the eighteenth century. The Douglasses, of course, the greatest Names of all, had had neither art or part in Galloway since the fifteenth century. The great house of the Kennedies of Cassilis had retired upon Ayrshire. Gone were the days when

'Frae Wigton to the toun o' Ayr, An' laigh doon by the cruives o' Cree, Nae man may houp a lodging there Unless he coort wi' Kennedy.'

But in the eighteenth century there were still Agnews in Lochnaw as there are to this day, Stewarts in Garlies, MacDowalls in Garthland, M'Kies in Myrtoun and in Barrower, Maxwells in Mochrum and Monreith, and of course there were the great politicians of the time—the Dalrymples of Stair in the old Cassilis stronghold of Castle Kennedy.

In the upper Stewartry the well-known names were those of the Gordons of Lochinvar and Kenmure—of Earlstoun, and of Culvennan. On the Dumfries Marches the Maxwells held sway, and the Murrays of Broughton were rapidly acquiring land in the south.

The baronage were mostly content to live quietly on their estates in a kind of 'bien' hospitality and good-fellowship. One of the big houses could account for a sheep a week, besides many pigs and an odd 'nowt beast' or two in the 'back end.' But even in the great houses porridge and milk and homely oatcake were still the commonest of fare. We find, for instance, a Galloway soldier of Marlborough's mourning in a far land that in these outlandish parts they had neither 'farle of cake,' nor yet a 'girdle' to bake it on. The great houses were mostly defenced, and such were the exigencies of the time that sieges were not unknown—the gipsies and outlaw clans of the hills making no scruple to come down, 'boding in fear of weir,' and to assault any man's house against whom they had a grudge.

The position of many of these Galloway gentry was little different from that of a feudal baron. In the seventeenth century two and three 'merklands' were still granted to likely young fellows who would settle down on the estates of a knight, under pledge to be his men and breed lusty loons to wear the leathern jack, and ride behind him when he went to leave his card on a brother baron with whom he might

have a difference. This, says Sir Andrew Agnew of Lochnaw, in his excellent 'Hereditary Sheriffs of Galloway,' is the origin of the phrase— '*Ye are but a bow o' meal-Gordon.*'

This was a telling sarcasm against undue pretensions to pedigree, based on a tradition that a Gordon of Lochinvar and Kenmure, anxious to increase his vassalage, gave any likely-looking young fellow willing to take his name at least three acres and a cow—together with a boll of meal yearly. From which it will be seen that the supposed Radical innovation of 'three acres and a cow,' used as a bribe, was really feudal in origin, and began, as many wise and good things did, in the province of Galloway.

Still this was a better custom than the charge which is enshrined in another Galloway story: 'Ye gat the price o' it where the Ayrshireman gat the coo.' The admirable Trotter has the story thus: 'There was a queer craitur that they caa Tarn Rabinson leaved at Wigton, and he had a kind o' weakness; but he had some clever sayings for all that. Also, like most Gallowaymen, he disliked the Ayrshiremen for what he considered their meanness and their undoubted habit of taking people's farms over their heads. One day Tarn found a very big mushroom, and was taking it home to his mother. So when he came to the corner end, a lot of men were standing about, and a big Ayrshire dealer of the name of Cochrane among them that had the habit of tormenting Tam, and trying to make a fool of him. Seeing Tam with the big mushroom, Cochrane cried out:

'Hullo, Tammock, what did you pay for the new bannet?'

'The same price that the Ayrshireman payed for the coo,' says Tam.

'An' what did he pay for the coo?' asks Cochrane.

'Oh, naething!' says Tam, 'he juist fand it in a field.'

Which was a saying exceedingly hard for an Ayrshireman and a cattle-dealer to stomach.

The bonnet lairds were a well-known class in Galloway, and were mostly the sternest and most unbending of Whigs.

They were reared exactly like the ordinary farmers, but their farms belonged to themselves, though a certain service was given to some of the great barons in return for steadfast protection. Some of these rose to considerable honour. For instance, there was Grierson of Bargatton, in Balmaghie, who on more than one occasion was returned to Parliament as one of the representatives of the Stewartry.

The bonnet lairds lived much as the better farmers did, but in some things they stood aloof. For one thing, they locked their doors at night, which no farmer body was said to do in all Galloway during the eighteenth century. They lived in the summer time and in the winter alike on porridge and milk, flavoured with occasional fries of ham from the fat 'gussie' that had run about the doors the year before. Sometimes they salted down a 'mart' for the winter, and there was generally a ham or two of 'braxy' sheep hanging to the joists. Puddings, both white and black, were supposed to be an article of dainty fare.

Sometimes the country folk did not wait till the unfortunate animal was dead in order to provide entertainment for their guests.

'Saunders, rin, man, and blood the soo—here's the minister gettin' ower the dyke!' was the exclamation of a Galloway goodwife on the occasion of a ministerial visitation.

It is told of the famous Seceder minister, Walter Dunlop, of Dumfries, that he too loved good entertainment when he went out on his parochial visitations.

Specially he liked a 'tousy tea'—that is, one with trimmings.

On one occasion he had to baptize a bairn in a certain house, and there they offered him his tea—a plain tea—before he began.

This was not at all to Walter's liking. He had other ideas, after walking so far over the heather.

'Na, na, guidwife,' he said, 'I'll do my work first—edification afore gustation. Juist pit ye on the pan, an' when I hear the ham skirling, I'll ken it's time to draw to a conclusion.'

In the early part of the eighteenth century the common people of Galloway lived in the utmost simplicity—if it be simplicity to live but and ben with the cow. In many of the smaller houses there was no division between the part of the dwelling used for the family and that occupied by Crummie the cow, and Gussie the pig.

But things rapidly improved, and by 1750 there was hardly such a dwelling to be found in the eastern part of Galloway. The windows in a house of this class were usually two in number and wholly without glass. They were stopped up with a wooden board according to the direction from which the wind blew. The smoke hung in dense masses about the roof of the 'auld clay biggin', and, in lieu of a chimney, found its way occasionally out at the door. But many of the people who lived in these little houses fared surprisingly well. The sons were 'braw lads' and the daughters 'sonsy queans.' They could dress well upon occasion, and we are told in wonder by a southern visitant that it is no uncommon thing to see a perfectly well-dressed man in a good plaid or cloak come out of a hovel like an outhouse.

'The clartier the cosier' was, we fear, a Galloway maxim which was held in good repute even in the earlier part of the eighteenth century among a considerable section of the common folk.

Later, however, the small farmers became exceedingly particular both as to cleanliness in food and attention to their persons. We saw recently the dress worn to kirk and market by a Galloway small farmer about 1790. It consisted of a broad blue Kilmarnock bonnet, checked at the brim with red and white; a blue coat of rough woollen, cut like a dress-coat of today, save that it was made to button with large silver buttons; a red velvet waistcoat, with long flaps in front; corded knee-breeches, rig-and-fur stockings, and buckled shoes completed the attire of the douce and sonsy Cameronian farmer when he went a-wooing in his own sober, determined, and, no doubt, ultimately successful way.

I have yet to speak of the 'ministry of the Word' and of the state of religion. Things were not very bright in Galloway at the beginning of the eighteenth century. We hear, for instance, of a majority of a local Presbytery being under such famas that the Synod had to take the matter up; and in several of the parishes of Galloway the manse was by no means a centre of light and good example.

This was perhaps owing to the state of the country after the Killing Time and the Revolution. Many of the people of Galloway would not for long accept the ministrations of the regular parish clergy, who were ready to hold fellowship with 'malignants.' The Society men, Cameronian and other, held aloof, and though, till the sentence of deposition was pronounced against Mr. Macmillan of Cameronians at Balmaghie, they had no regular ministry, their numbers were very considerable, and their influence greater still. They knew themselves to be the salt of the earth, and we remember that even thirty-five years ago the Cameronians of the remoter parts of Galloway held themselves a little apart in a stiff kind of spiritual

independence and even pride, to which the other denominations looked up, not without a certain awe and respect.

But the effect on the Cameronian boy was not always so happy. We were in danger of becoming little prigs. Whenever we met a boy belonging to the Established Kirk (who learned paraphrases), we threw a stone at him to bring him to a sense of his position. If, as Homer says, he was a lassie, we put out our tongue at her.

But it is a more interesting thing to inquire concerning the state of religion among the people than into the efficiency of the clergy. In many of the best families, and these too often the poorest, religion was instilled among them in a very high, noble, and practical way indeed. Such a house as that of William Burness, described in the 'Cotter's Saturday Night,' was a type of many Galloway homes of last century.

Prayers night and morn were a certainty, however early the field work might be begun, and however late the workers were in getting home. On the Sabbath morn especially the sound of praise went up from every cothouse. In the farm kitchens the whole family and dependants were gathered together to be instructed in religion.

The 'Caratches' were repeated round the circle, and grandmother in the corner and lipping babe each took their turn, nor thought it any hardship.

The minister expressed national characteristics excellently well. But even he of the Cameronian Kirk was to some extent affected by the tone of learning in the university towns where he had attended the college, and 'gotten lear' and 'understanding of the original tongues.' But in the sterling qualities of many an old Galloway farmer (who, perhaps, never had fifty pounds clear in a year in his life, and whose whole existence was one of bitter struggle with the hardest conditions) we get some understanding of how the religion of our country, so stern and tender, so tempest-tossed and so victorious, stood the strains of persecution and the frosts of the succeeding century of unbelief. In the darkest times of indifference there were, at least in Scotland, many more than seven thousand who never bowed the knee to Baal, and whose mouths had never kissed him—though, so far as Galloway is concerned, let it not be forgotten that even this comes with a qualification, like all things merely human. For it is of the nature of Galloway to share with Providence the credit of any victory, but to charge it wholly with all disasters. 'Wasna that cleverly dune?' we say when we succeed. 'We maun juist submit!' we say when we fail. A most comfortable theology, which is ever the one for the most of Galloway folk, whom 'chiefly dourness and not fanaticism took to the hills when Lag came riding with his mandates and letters judicatory.'