

A REVERENT PILGRIMAGE.

PART VII.

A QUARTETTE OF ABBEYS.

From solitary island and stormy seas, let me guide you to-day, O fellow-pilgrim, into the goodly land which is watered by the Tweed—the pleasant valley where the magic of the Wizard of the North was most potent, and where, when his prosperous days began, he set up his Penates. When Scott writes of the Highlanders, he is the poet, the romancer, seizing on what is picturesque; when he writes of the Borders, he is the borderer himself.

This blue, clear river, so dear to the modern angler, was not less dear to the monks of old. Wandering by its side, the abbey of Melrose, Dryburgh and Kelso meet you in rapid succession, and that of Jedburgh, on one of its tributary waters, is not far away.

As the Scotland to which the transatlantic pilgrim repairs, is always the Scotland of Sir Walter, so the central point of his pilgrimage is invariably Abbotsford and Melrose. The most despotic tourist agent, understanding this, does not deny to the meekest of his charges a glance at these. And so, the "personally conducted," on the evening of his second (and last) day in Scotland, is borne southward—in time to see Abbotsford before the gates are closed, and the Abbey "by moonlight." Herein is a mystery! The moon,

Mary, and bestowing it upon Cistercian monks brought from Rievaulx, in Yorkshire. It was destroyed by the English under Edward II. in their retreat in 1322; after which King Robert Bruce gave £2,000 sterling—equal to £50,000 at the present day—to rebuild it. At the Reformation the monks, whether justly or otherwise, had the reputation of keeping their rule none too strictly,* and their monastery was attacked and demolished by the mob.

What remains is the Abbey Church—a most exquisite specimen of decorated Gothic; and, fortunately, built of so hard a stone that time and the elements have had but little effect on what the mob spared.

Some one of poetic fancy has called architecture "frozen music." What term could more fitly describe Melrose, particularly if seen by genuine moonlight? Profusion of ornament, which mars some Gothic buildings, has been the making of this. What need to point out the plan of chapel, and sub-chapel, and cloister; the beauty of doorways and windows, of statues and canopies; the vaulted and fretted roof—but little of which is left, alas! the carving so prodigally lavished everywhere, and so delicately wrought that you may insert a straw

Within the Abbey sleeps many a gallant warrior, many a nameless monk. Alexander II. was laid beneath the high altar; a curious slab of greenish black marble, with petrified shells embedded in it, is supposed to mark his grave. Many of the Douglasses lie near; among them the second Earl, who fell at the Battle of Otterbourne, and William, "The Dark Knight of Liddesdale." Most precious



DRYBURGH ABBEY.

dust of all is that of the heart of the Bruce brought here after Douglas's vain attempt to convey it to the Holy Land. How this faithful friend and brother warrior stayed not on his errand, save to give battle to the infidel; how, finding himself overpowered by numbers, he threw his treasure forward into the thickest of the fight, "where it was wont to be," and, pressing after it, was slain; and how the heart was recovered and brought to Melrose, has been often told, and never more charmingly than in Aytoun's "Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers."

Not even for the wealth of abbeys still before us can I ask you to pass Abbotsford and its "gabions." So, while I wander down to the Tweed and across it, do you commit yourself to yonder Jehu, who driveth so furiously that you will overtake me before I have gone a third of the way. You can see, too, between here and Dryburgh, the Glendearg of the Monastery, in which so many marvellous events occurred; the village of Earlstoun, or Ercildoune, the dwelling of Thomas the Rhymer, in whom

"The honoured name
Of prophet and of poet was the same,"

and the remains of the Rhymer's Tower.

Dryburgh Abbey is situated in a richly wooded haugh, around which the Tweed makes a circuitous sweep. It is another foundation of the reign of David I., though not the gift of that generous king. It was built by Hugh de Moreville,—Lord of Lauderdale and Constable of Scotland, and given to Premonstratensian monks from Alnwick. Like Melrose, it was burned in the retreat of Edward II.; but though the Scottish king contributed liberally towards its rebuilding, it seems never to have fully regained its former magnificence. At the Reformation it was granted by James II. to the Earl of Mar.

Few pictures of Dryburgh give any just idea of the extent and beauty of the ruins. The principal remains are the gable of the nave, the chapter-house (in the floor of which a double circle marks the founder's grave), St. Moden's Chapel, the ends of the transept, and part of the choir and monastery. A noted feature of the Abbey is the St. Catherine wheel window, twelve feet in diameter—the tracery wreathed about with ivy. A refectory 100x30 feet, and 60 feet high, with wine and almonry cellars beneath it, suggests that monastic life in Scotland, in pre-Reformation days, was not all fasting.

In St. Mary's aisle lies Scott—his wife on one side; his eldest son, in whom such proud hopes were centred, on the other. I suppose it is bleak here in winter; it is beautiful to-day; the air balmy; the soft turf emerald, save where the shadows of the ruins and of yon ancient yew-tree, as old as the Abbey, fall upon it. If ever the gentle ghosts of the old monks revisit their ancient haunts, I am sure they think kindly of the sleeper who thought so kindly of them.

Fifteen miles from Melrose, and, like Dryburgh, on the opposite bank of the river, stands the little



MELROSE ABBEY.

even at charmed Melrose, waxes and wanes as elsewhere; the stream of tourists is constant; and yet every one of them sees the ruins by moonlight. Have Cook and others of his kind their private electrical appliances? or do they manage matters as did good Peter Quince and the "hard-handed men that worked in Athens," on that enchanted midsummer night long ago:

"This lantern doth the horned moon present;
Myself the man-i'-the-moon do seem to be."

Or is the supposed moonlight but the Scottish twilight—the tender, beautiful "gloamin'" which the exile, half a world away from it, never ceases to remember, and never ceases to regret?

Melrose, at the foot of the Eildon Hills,—the Tremontium of the Romans, was the seat of a religious foundation in the time of the Heptarchy. When the Scots obtained the district from the Saxons of Northumbria, the establishment was destroyed. This original monastery was about three miles to the east of the later one, on a site nearly surrounded by the river. In 1136 David I. founded the Abbey; dedicating it to the Blessed Virgin

between leaf and stem? You have seen it all in pictures, you have read it all in books, a hundred times. And no description has improved on that with which, probably, you began—hackneyed as it is, and will be to the end of time:

"On pillars lofty, and light, and small;
The key-stone that locks each ribbed aisle
Is a fleur-de-lys or a quatre-feuille.
The corbels are carved grotesque and grim,
And the pillars with clustered shafts atrim,
With base and with capital flourished around
Seem bundles of lances which garlands have bound."†

A still more beautiful description is that of the east window. It is, says the poet, as if

"Some fairy's hand
Twixt poplars straight the osier wand
In many a freakish knot had twined;
Then framed a spell when the work was done,
And changed the willow-wreaths to stone."‡

"The monks of Melrose made guid kail
On Friday, when they fasted;
And wanted neither beef nor ale
Sae lang's their neighbour's lasted."

†Lay of the Last Minstrel.

‡Ibid.