

A Day in Scotland's Poet-Land



Lord Byron, whose estimate of Wordsworth, we consider to be all wrong, and in his amusing lampoon upon the great nature poet:

"If he must fain sweep o'er the ethereal plain;
And Pegasus runs restive in his "Wagon",
Could he not beg the loan of Charles's Wain
Or pray Medea for a single dragon?
Or if, too classic for his vulgar brain,
He fear'd his neck to venture surh a nag on,
And he must needs mount nearer to the moon
Could not the dullard ask for a balloon"?

It was with some such feeling that seven of us, mostly cousins, and the chauffeur, started, on August 31st, 1908, from our home in Edinburgh—the city in whose Austan days, Jeffrey and Scott, Wilson and the Ettrick Shepherd, Dugald Stewart and Alison were the literary lions—started, I say, to take a flight with Pegasus, the steed of the muses, in that most prosaic of vehicles an Auto-car, through what we may call the poet-land of Scotland—a delightful round of 110 miles in one day by Esk and Tweed by Ettrick and Yarrow, and over the Pentland Hills to the Northern Capital again.

It was fitting that before we started from Edinburgh which Burns addressed as "Edina Scotia's darling seat", we should take a look at the Princes Gardens, and admire in the statue sculptured by Steele the figure of Allan Ramsay, the poet of a past century, who wrote the best pastoral poem in the realm of British Literature—the "Gentle Shepherd". Allan Ramsay was, like Burns, of humble birth, but made his own way well, as he declared: "He fain wad prove to ilka Scot"

That poortith's (poverty) no the poet's lot". Yet from Allan Ramsay have descended several titled people of Scotland. The author of the "Traditions of Edinburgh", says: "Thus we find—owing to the esteem which genius ever commands, the poet of the "Gentle Shepherd" in the immortality of marble, surrounded by the figures of relatives and descendants, who so acknowledged their aristocratic rank to be inferior to his, derived from mind alone.

Here in the Gardens also let us look at Sir Walter Scott's monument, designed by the sculptor Archibald Kemp—a monument which all know but which few of us have closely examined. Here the great Wizard of the North sits with faithful Bevis at his foot—Sir Walter, the Dean of Scottish ministralsy; facing Princes Street, on the monument, and dear to the Jacobite soul of the great novelist is the statue of Prince Charlie from Scott's Waverley, drawing his sword; on the South side facing the Castle Hill is the figure of the Lady of the Lake stepping from a boat in Loch Katrine; on the East side is one of Scott's greatest creations—Meg Merrilce—as pictured in Guy Mannering; while facing the West is the appropriate figure of "The Last Minstrel," playing upon his harp.

But it is equally appropriate, that, as we skirt along the foot of Calton Hill, we turn our eyes to Burns, on his monument, addressing Edinburgh:

"All hail thy palaces and towers!
From marking wildly-scatter'd flowers,
As on the banks of Ayr I stray'd,
And singing, lone, the lingering hours,
I shelter in thy honour'd shade."