

DUNDEE LAW.

BY ALEXANDER ELLIOT.

THE geographical compass that was recently erected on the summit of Law Hill through the instrumentality of ex-Bailie Mathers, Convener of the Recreation Grounds Committee of Dundee Town Council, has not only been found interesting in itself, but, judged from an educative standpoint, it has proved exceedingly popular. Since its erection, especially on holidays and Sundays, the pillar on the capital of which the compass and accompanying chart are fixed has been surrounded by crowds of visitors, the majority of whom, for the first time probably, became acquainted with the names of specific objects and places, with their relative distances, forming conspicuous features in the magnificent panorama of hill and dale, of field and flood, to be seen from a position so elevated. In the opinion of the majority of the citizens the selection of the Law Hill as a point of observation could not be improved upon. In fact, there are few cities favoured with an eminence so admirably adapted for such a purpose, be it physical or astronomical, and its distance from the centre of the city should form no obstacle to those who take an interest in such matters, or who may be desirous of entering upon a systematic scientific study. The radii from the Law extend to close on thirty miles, comprehending a wide expanse of varied and attractive scenery. The hill rises from the shores of the Tay in a series of undulating ridges to an altitude of 571 feet above the sea level. It is a conspicuous landmark, and stands out prominently almost in the centre of the Dichty Strath.

Apart from its physical aspect, the Law teems with archæological association; and if we are to pay heed to tradition and antiquarian research, we must accept the theory that it was a position of military importance at a

very remote period. It has been described as a place of security used by the ancient Picts; the Romans with their usual judiciousness in securing points of vantage selected and fortified it according to the idea of the military architecture of the time; and latterly it was occupied as a castellated fortress by Alpin, King of Scots, prior to and at the time he engaged in the fatal battle on the plain to the north (subsequently designated Meric Moor, but colloquialised into American Moor), which led to his overthrow and decapitation by Brude, King of the Picts. That there is truth in these statements or not, it would, in the light of the limited information possessed by historians, be hazardous to assert or deny. At the same time it must be admitted that the upper surface of the hill has all the appearance of having at one time been surrounded with embattlements, and there is every probability that it had been in possession of the Picts, Romans, and Scots alternately—as the one people obtained by force of arms supremacy over the other. It may be of interest to state that a Pictish burial ground was discovered on the south-west shoulder of the hill about sixty years ago. That the Law and neighbourhood in later years became the scene of fierce encounters is matter of history. Thomson and Maclaren, in their "History of Dundee", referring to the Law, say that "in the neighbourhood great quantities of human bones have been turned up by the plough and spade in all directions—unequivocal evidences of the destructive ravages of war; but unfortunately no records survive from which any particular account can now be given of the sanguinary conflicts that must have occurred about the Law Hill while Edward I., Montrose, and Monk entrenched their forces upon its summit".

There is another interesting detail which should not be overlooked. In the days when telegraphy was not, and when the fiery cross and the beacon were the media by which the alarm of impending warfare was given, the Law Hill was used as a site on which the warning fires were lit. Dr. Small, a well-known divine of the 18th century, in his sketch of Dundee in 1792, records that "on the top of the

Law are the remains of a fortified post. The ditch is yet visible. Though the whole enclosure, which is of square form, is not of the structure of the towers, which have been supposed to have been cemented by the force of fire, one small part of it has been thus compacted. Probably on this the fires for alarming the town were lighted, and, by frequent lighting, some of the stones have been put in fusion". Between fifty and sixty years ago the stones to which Dr. Small refers were to be seen. They either have been removed, or in the course of time have become covered with earth and grass, as they are not now visible. It may, however, be pointed out that the geographical compass stands within a few yards of this historic spot. The Castle of Dudhope, the ancient seat of the Scrymgeour family, who held the hereditary dignity and office of Constable of Dundee, occupies a commanding site at the extreme southern base of the hill. It was from this old pile that Claverhouse—Bonnie Dundee—marched with his troops over the west shoulder of the Law, ere long to meet his fate on the momentous field of Killiecrankie. If the Law itself is full of stirring incident, not less so are its surroundings. There is not a hill or dale or strath from the Sidlaws on the north, Kinnoull and Shakespeare's Dunsinane on the west, the Carse of Gowrie and the Tay on the south-west and south, and the spurs of the Sidlaws extending far away to the east until they are lost in the shadows of Kincardine, that have not a tale to tell of the "ringing clash of arms as when our fathers fought". The object Mr. Mathers had in view when the compass was erected was twofold—in the first place to enable sightseers to ascertain the location, the altitude, and the distance of the most prominent hills and places of interest from a given point; and in the second place to stimulate the intelligent portion of the community to become better acquainted with the details—historic or otherwise—of the neighbourhood in which they reside—a recreation which would be full of intellectual gratification to those who engaged in it.

The view from the Law Hill is as comprehensive as it is picturesque, and as the spectator stands beside the

pedestal he can fix within the radius of his vision eminences of note, the exact distance and exact height of which he can at once determine by consulting the indicator. Cast your eyes on a clear day towards the Bell Rock. The lighthouse stands like a pale spectre where the sky and the waters meet, and the chart tells you it is $23\frac{1}{4}$ miles away. Look southward through the glack that divides the estates of St. Fort and Tayfield, on the shore of Fife, and you discern St. Andrews, the most conspicuous objects being the antique tower of St. Rule on the one hand and the famous bay on the other. The distance is 12 miles almost due south. Fifeness, looming mistily in the far, far away, tests the eye at 26 miles. A few miles westward, but on the same line of vision, your attention is arrested by two dome-shaped eminences towering skyward and dwarfing the hills in the foreground into pigmies by comparison. These are the Lomond Hills—East and West. That on the east keeps guard over all that remains of the erstwhile Castle of Macduff, the Thane of Fife of Shakespeare, and the semi-ruinous home and hunting-seat of the Stuart Kings and Queens—Falkland Palace; whilst that on the west looks south upon Loch Leven and its castle, where the ill-fated Queen of Scots was imprisoned, and the “auld-waird” sleepy town of Strathmiglo on the north. At the extreme west can be seen the Pictish tower and town of Abernethy, the reputed Camelon of ancient days, and nearer, shimmering in the sun, are the roofs of Newburgh, with a magnificent foreground of a great embayed river. Nearer at hand is Norman Law, a prominent hill close to the seat of the descendant of the standard-bearers of Scotland—Mr. Wedderburn of Birkhill. It rises to 850 feet above sea level. Closer, and almost “lipping” the waters of the Tay, sheltered in a cosy nook on the Fife shore, are still to be viewed, in the shape of decaying stone and lime, relics of the Abbey of Balmerino, founded by Queen Ermergarde, mother of Alexander II., about 1230. The Queenly founder, at her death, was buried before the high altar. Balmerino is about four miles distant. Woodhaven, the old watergate from the northern shores of Fife,

to which particular reference is made in Scott's "Antiquary", has been shorn of its ancient prestige, and now forms a stop-gap between the rapidly developing villadom of Newport and Wormit. Tayport (in days of yore—Port-on-Craig) on the south and Broughty and its Castle on the north form the guardians of the Tay, each being about four miles distant.

The Tay Bridge is an object so familiar to all, and its history is so well known, that it would be superfluous to refer to it; but no one can look upon the structure without thinking of its predecessor—the "thread across the Tay"—and its fall, an event which took place on the evening of Sunday, 28th December, 1879. Let the spectator turn northwards. The character of the scenery is entirely changed. Instead of ranges of verdure-clad hills fringed by an expansive river, the eye is carried to the

"Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
Land of the mountain and the flood".

Over the hills and far away the vision stretches for 44 miles to the striking peak of Schichallion, which rears its lofty head, like unto an inverted sugar cone, 3547 feet into the Highland air. Along the same line Ben Chonzie, 38 miles off, is fairly conspicuous. It has an elevation of 3048 feet. Mount Blair, a great rounded pyramid 2441 feet high and 24 miles distant, is beheld due north through a rift in the Sidlaws. Ben Muich Dhui is more difficult to trace, and the eye has to traverse $48\frac{1}{2}$ miles before its rugged top can even be dimly outlined. These are a few of the giants of the mountain race whose summits may be seen in clear weather from the point of the compass, and there are others of an equally imposing character, particulars about which the spectators will no doubt verify for themselves from the source at hand.

The Sidlaws are the most striking objects at closer view. They consist of a long stretch of irregular heights extending from Kinnoull Hill, on the north bank of the Tay in Perthshire, to the Redhead, in Forfarshire, and even impinging upon the confines of Stonehaven, in Kincardineshire. These rugged elevations form part of what is known

as the Lowland Screen. Seen from Fifeshire, they have the appearance of a brown mountain barrier, drawn out like a huge rampart to give protection to the beautiful valley of Strathmore on the north, and the equally beautiful, if less extensive, valley of Strathdichty on the south. The highest peak of the range is Craigowl, a bare, barren hill, rising to an elevation of 1493 feet. Auchterhouse Hill, which is close to the village of that name, is the next highest, its elevation being 1399 feet. These hills, and the neighbouring Balkello, are about $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the Law. Kinpurnie, topped with the ruins of an old observatory, the Craggs and Lochs of Lundie, and King's Seat are all familiar to the eye, their heights and distances being recorded on the indicator. On the east, the most conspicuous feature in the landscape is the Panmure Testimonial, the "Live and Let Live" monument. It was erected by the tenantry on the estate of Panmure in 1839, and its elevation from the ground is 105 feet. From the south angle of its base a wide view can be obtained. The visitor can see at a glance the East Neuk o' Fife, the grey towers of St. Andrews, the Old Steeple of Dundee, the Redhead, near Auchmithie, and the venerable ruins of the Abbey of Arbroath. The Monikie Reservoirs belonging to Dundee are situated about a mile north of the Monument. We have enumerated a few places of interest that can be observed from the Compass. Add to these the many historic mansions that cannot fail to interest, such, for instance, as Rossie Priory, Fingask House, with its Royal and Jacobite traditions; Castle Huntly, at one time the residence of the Glamis family; the townlets of the Carse; Broughty, Monifieth, and Carnoustie, and the extending suburbs of Dundee.

Could a site better adapted for all the purposes of an observatory be obtained? It is understood that Mr. Mathers is interesting himself in this direction; and it has now been definitely ascertained that by the will of a deceased gentleman, a native of Dundee, the sum of £5000 can be applied to the carrying out of the scheme. That sum is certainly too limited for the erection, equipping,

and maintaining an observatory; but it would go a long way, and the ex-Bailie is sanguine that with a little help from the elastic Common Good, and substantial aid from persons who have a taste for scientific study, especially in the way of meteorology and astronomy, the whole scheme might ultimately be launched, and sufficient funds subscribed to keep it in good working order. A plateau on the west side of Balgay Pleasure Grounds has also been suggested as a suitable site; but, although it possesses many advantages, especially in the way of access, it is, with these exceptions, secondary to that of Law Hill. The whole question, however, is in its first stages of consideration, and there is no doubt, when the mind of the public is thoroughly awakened to the importance of having a scientific institution of this class in their midst, they will give no uncertain opinion as to the position it should occupy.

SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD.

Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.

Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-
fortune,

Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need
nothing,

Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criti-
cisms,

Strong and content I travel the open road.

The earth, that is sufficient,
I do not want the constellations any nearer,
I know they are very well where they are.

WALT WHITMAN.