

THE ABBEY CRAIG.

BY DAVID B. MORRIS.

SHORTLY after the train, on its northward journey, has left Stirling station, the traveller may see, a short distance to the east, a precipitous hill surmounted by a conspicuous tower. The hill is the Abbey Craig, a fitting pedestal for the Wallace Monument, and it is worth while to break the journey to visit it. No mountaineering skill is required for the ascent of the Craig, whose height is but 362 feet, and the paths are pleasant though steep. The hill is, however, a notable one among the lesser heights of Scotland, as it is a place of much historic interest, while the view from the summit is of great extent and beauty.

Geologically, the Abbey Craig is a mass of intrusive basalt which has been thrust along the bedding of the Carboniferous rocks. This probably took place in Tertiary times, and was part of the great outburst of volcanic activity of which we also find evidence in the terraced lavas of Skye, Mull, and other Western Islands. The basalt or ancient lava, of which the Craig consists, was never poured out at the surface, but was thrust along between beds of rock then existing, and consolidated under great pressure. It now presents a steep cliff facing west, with a gradual slope to the east, and its peculiar appearance is due to the influence of denudation upon rock structure. The softer sedimentary rocks which lay above and around the basalt sheet have been worn away, but the basalt, being harder, has resisted denudation. Not only so, but the basalt cap has also protected the softer underlying rocks. If we examine these we find that they dip eastward. The slope of the hill is therefore very much the natural dip of the strata. It follows from this that, as the strata dip east, the cliff will face west. This is the case with Stirling Castle Rock and with most of the other similar crags in the midlands of Scotland. At the base of the

Abbey Craig, the two ancient marine terraces known as the 100 feet and 50 feet raised beaches may be well seen. When the 100 feet terrace was the sea beach, the Craig was an island, and at the later stage, when the 50 feet beach marked the limits of the sea, it was a rocky promontory on the northern shore of the old Firth of Forth. Immediately opposite, on the southern shore, Stirling Castle Rock formed a similar promontory, and as the waves washed westward as far as Gartmore, sixteen miles away, the tides must have run strong through the narrows between the Abbey Craig and the Castle Rock. This would have made a splendid site for a prehistoric Forth Bridge, but the human inhabitants of the time were content to paddle about in their canoes, formed of hollowed oaks, while the whales, whose remains are now frequently found in the clays of the carse, disported themselves in the water.

From the days of the Neolithic men, whose rude horn implements have been found beside whale skeletons at the base of the hill, the scene of stirring events in the national history has never been far from the Abbey Craig. On its summit stood an ancient British hill fort, whose protecting mounds encircling the hill-top from cliff to cliff can be seen to the present day. What events occurred here, how the Caledonian watched from his perch the marching Roman legions in the plain below, what strife of contending Picts and Scots took place, who can say?

The Abbey Craig receives its name from the Abbey of Cambuskenneth, whose mouldering remains lie in a loop of the river Forth to the South. The Abbey was founded about the year 1147 by David the First, who established so many religious houses throughout Scotland. The Abbey was appropriated for monks of the order of St. Augustine, and was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Many events of great importance took place within its walls. The building suffered very severely at the Reformation, and now only the tower is standing, while a few fragments of stone work and the foundations of walls and pillars give an idea of the extent of the original structure. At the high altar were buried the remains of James III., who

was murdered at Milton Mill after the Battle of Sauchieburn, and his tomb was restored by the late Queen Victoria in memory of her ancestor.

But the Abbey Craig is specially memorable as the scene of Sir William Wallace's great exploit, when he overthrew the English at the Battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297. There is some doubt as to the exact site of the bridge, which was destroyed at the battle. Tradition has placed it at Kildean, about a mile westward of the town, but it seems now to be established that the ancient bridge stood at or very near the site of the present old bridge, which was erected to replace it. Wallace had his army posted on and behind the Abbey Craig, where their numbers would be hidden from the English. A stone near the top of the hill is pointed out as the spot where the Scottish hero watched the movements of the enemy and timed the decisive stroke. The English army were in the act of crossing the bridge, which was narrow and frail, and half their number had assembled on the northern bank when the Scots rushed from their hiding place and overwhelmed them. Their friends on the southern shore could render no help, and the bridge became so crowded that it fell, and many English were drowned. The slaughter was great, and the immediate effect of the victory was to secure the independence of Scotland, until it was finally established at Bannockburn in 1314.

The Abbey Craig at the present time is thickly planted with trees except on the highest parts, and is laid out with beautiful winding paths. The western face is a perpendicular cliff formed of basaltic columns. At the base of the cliff lie great masses of rocks which have become detached from the columns above and fallen. The Craig is very rich in wild flowers. Along the edge of the cliff grow the rockrose (*Helianthemum vulgare*) and the Viscid Campion (*Lychnis viscaria*), while among the rocks below may be found the Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa Belladonna*). The view from the summit is very extensive. The Grampians are outlined against the Western sky, including Ben Lomond, the Cobbler, Ben Venue, Ben

Ledi, Am Binnein, Ben More, and Ben Voirlich. The green Ochils lie to the North, the Campsie Fells to the South-West, and in the South-east may be seen the distant Pentlands. In the valley below, the silvery Forth threads its winding course, doubling and bending like a gigantic serpent.

On the summit of the Craig stands the National Wallace Monument. It is in the form of a Scottish baronial tower, surmounted by a crown, and is 220 feet high. The Monument is a magnificent piece of work, and, though it may be doubted if Wallace needed any such structure to keep alive his memory in the hearts of his countrymen, there can be no question that the Monument is a fine one. It was erected by public subscription at the cost of £18,000, and was opened in September, 1869. Inside are preserved a number of relics, and one chamber is set apart as a "Hall of Heroes", where busts of eminent Scotsmen are gathered together.

The Abbey Craig is no lonely mountain peak which only the stout climber may hope to reach. It is one of the most frequently visited hills in Scotland in the holiday season, yet it is a spot of rare beauty, where much may be quietly learned of nature and her ways. From no other point can the topography, particularly the relations of the hill groups of central Scotland, be so well studied, while all who have a true love for their country will wish to visit a place which has been the scene of such great events in the national life. For these reasons I would commend the Abbey Craig to the members of the Cairngorm Club.