

THE TINTO HILLS.

BY ALEX. INKSON M'CONNOCHIE.

But tho' a lassie were ere sae black,
Let her hae the penny siller,
Set her up on Tinto tap,
The wind wad blaw a man till her.

THOUGH not the highest in the county of Lanark, the Tinto Hills are considered the most conspicuous, and are certainly the most noted. They form a short range some six miles east to west, between the River Clyde and the Douglas Water, four parishes, Symington, Covington, Carmichael, and Wiston, meeting at the top of Tinto (2,335 feet). Tinto itself is indeed the local monarch, and has a reputation far beyond Clydesdale. Its bright pink igneous rocks, especially where the steepness of the slopes has aided water in causing landslides, are a striking feature.

The ascent is usually made from Symington, for the eastern division is the most striking. St. John's Kirk, now only a name and a rabbit-haunted burial ground, may be taken as the starting point. Its traditional connection with the summit of Tinto is peculiar, for its priests imposed a penance for certain offences which is believed to account for the huge cairn of stones on the top! The Carlisle road is kept for about two miles south from the "Kirk;" then the hill is tackled, preferably making for the ruins of Fatlips Castle which will already have attracted attention. This name is peculiar, though not quite singular, but its etymology has still to be explained. Robert Chambers ("Picture of Scotland") can only refer to the time-immemorial custom in the ruined castle of the same name in Roxburghshire—"that every gentleman, by indefeasible privilege, kisses one of the ladies [of the company] on entering." The Tinto Fatlips Castle, which probably dates from the sixteenth century, is built on the south-east slope of Scaut Hill, a summit at the east end of Tinto

Hills, and stands at a height of about 1,200 feet above sea-level. While it thus commands the valley of the Clyde, the keep itself is dominated by Scout Hill, whose slope, fairly steep, is practically unbroken from the public road to the cairn (1,925 feet). The stronghold had been a small one, about 35 feet by 25, with walls about 10 feet in thickness. What the height had been can only be matter of conjecture; at the highest point now above ground the wall is only 9 feet. Thus all that remains is merely two vaults, divided by a wall, the materials used being small flat stones. The laird of Symington, it is said, built this castle so that he might the better observe the goings-on of his neighbour and enemy the laird of Lamington. As such a watch tower it must have had much to recommend it, but we doubt if Messrs. MacGibbon and Ross would have accepted the popular explanation. As it is, the tourist will find the ruins convenient for a halt so that he may turn his face to the strath. The road, the railway, and the river are thence seen closely parallel, and the landscape is not without trees; yet some may feel, for a time, that something is lacking. Certainly not hills; soon we realise that we are in the Lowland Highlands, if that name is permissible. Grandeur is absolutely wanting, nor can the scenery be called picturesque; only when one looks with an open mind, as it were, can the undoubted beauty of the prospect be grasped. Ruggedness has been exchanged for softness, peaks for curves; what though the hills are comparatively low and featureless, their outlines are pleasing, and gradually their numbers grow on us.

In the Western and Northern Highlands one naturally expects mountains; here we seem to have suddenly dropped on the Southern Uplands. The scene is mainly pastoral, arable land not extending far beyond the banks of the Clyde, which, as we look this glorious March morning, shines like a broad ribbon of burnished silver. True, the more distant hills are not clearly visible, but the white clouds o'ertopping them are meantime more beautiful, however long they may restrain themselves. We feel more

and more that it is a good thing to be alive, and there are many birds like-minded. We noted a solitary mavis singing all to itself, quite indifferent that none of its fellows was within sight or hearing, but it was an exception. Black-birds and mavis generally were in high glee, and lapwings had resumed possession of the fields. Seagulls closely followed the plough, and wood pigeons fearlessly showed themselves. Just below us rabbits and moles had been busy underground: we wondered how their feet fared casting up so many sharp-edged porphyry chips.

The old ruin and its outlook kept us a full half-hour ere we resumed the climb, and as we neared the flat top of Scout Hill, with its spreading cairn, another world was shown us. There was snow, not many days old, a reminder that we were not yet out of winter, at high altitudes at least; the clean cut rocky face of Pap Craig; and the zigzag road leading to the top of Tinto. Pap Craig is an outstanding rock on the south side of the hill, and it is also interesting owing to its so-called Wallace's Seat. Tradition, if not history, associates Wallace's name with several places on the Tinto Hills: there is his leap close by where a stone-figured horse recalls the national hero; a thumb mark on the great cairn on the top; and a chair, otherwise a rock, where he sat when presiding over a council! The zigzag driving road somewhat reminds one of the military road over Coryarrick; not content with a pony path, a shooting tenant was determined to drive to the summit of the range. As we look towards Douglasdale and Lanark from the top of Scout, a sea of hills is behind us and a rich agricultural and mineral district is in front. Unfortunately the light had not improved with the increased altitude; for instance Glasgow, which is usually "swallowed up in its own smoke" when seen from a distance, had on this occasion a more ethereal covering, but quite effectual against us. Ere we reached the summit of Tinto itself a weird sound bore down upon us; that it was probably caused by the rising gale did not quite explain the peculiar noise. Ultimately it was accounted for by the wind tearing through the wire fence at the cairn.

Tinto cairn surpasses all similar erections. Chambers modestly estimates that it must contain "at least two hundred cart-loads of stones;" had he said thousands there would have been no exaggeration, for it has a circumference of about 140 yards. How came they there?

Chambers quotes a curious rhyme:

On Tintock tap there is a mist,
 And in that mist there is a kist,
 And in the kist there is a caup,
 And in the caup there is a drap;
 Tak' up the caup, drink aff the drap,
 And set the caup on Tintock tap.

Tinto is said to signify "the hill of fire"—was it a place of worship or a hill fort? There can be no question that Tinto has a long-forgotten history, and that it is still a problem which lacks certain solution. The range abounds with the remains of "camps" and "circles," antiquities probably of yesterday when compared to the mysterious pile on the highest point. Quite a modern tradition tells of a bullock's skin full of gold lying deep underground on the north-east foot of the range near St. John's Kirk.

The view from the cairn has always appealed to the public. Sixteen counties was the extent of the prospect authoritatively given long before hill-climbing was recognised as a popular recreation, and at sixteen counties it stands to-day, though curiously enough no writer has ever condescended on a list of them. Our visits have been unfortunate in some respects, yet an attempt may here be made to specify the counties within sight. The only unquestioned authority on such points is the Ordnance Survey, and their lists as given to the public are never complete; in the case of Tinto one has to dig for the production of the following table. The figures indicate the bearings in degrees— 90° = W., 180° = N., 270° = E., 360° = S.

HILL.	Direction.	COUNTY.
Merrick,	45	Kirkcudbright.
Goat Fell,	92	Bute.
Hill of Stake,	111	Renfrew and Ayr.
Ben Lomond,	137	Stirling.
Meikle Bin,	147	do.
Ben Lawers,	162	Perth.
Beneleuch,	174	Clackmanan.
East Lomond,	201	Fife.
Carnethy Hill,	221	Edinburgh.
Dun Rig,	274	Peebles and Selkirk.
Hart Fell,	321	Dumfries.

Thus twelve counties are accounted for. Add Lanark (13); the Dumbarton Hills (14); the Arrochar Hills, Argyll (15); the Lammermoors on the borders of Haddington and Berwick (17); Rubers Law, Roxburgh (18); and this not taking into consideration the peeps of Ireland and England which certain observers report. Probably some readers will be able to revise the non-official part of the above list; it requires many a visit to any great height to accurately determine the extent of the prospect, for seldom can a complete view be obtained of the horizon.

A long fence runs westward from the cairn, separating Wiston on the south from the other parishes named. The descent westward is, if not monotonous, at least easy, the greater part of the long ridge being known as Lochlyock Hill (1,734 feet). We had remarked on the scarcity of grouse on the east side of Tinto, but that reproach could not be laid to the west. Curlews and golden plovers were also fairly numerous; the wailing and irritating pipe of the latter seemed to accompany us for an hour. Foxes had evidently preceded us, and little wonder, for this seemed to be a region of fat hares. Suddenly the sun was obscured, and a sharp little snow-storm sent us down by the eastern head streams of Carmichael Burn. We were glad of the shelter of the Territorials' targets ere we set out on the road down to Carmichael church. Not that it was on

our route, but one of the party could not resist the opportunity of a look at some of the epitaphs and inscriptions in the churchyard. He had his reward, for on a monument erected to the memory of a blacksmith was a horse-shoe—and only the other week he had discovered a shepherd's grave-stone with a crook. Time was when Carmichael like many other parishes did not allow Christian burial for all, for at the west end of Tinto Hills, at a height of nearly 1,400 feet, there is a suicide's grave on the parish march.

THE MOTION OF THE MISTS.

Here by the sunless Lake there is no air,
 Yet with how ceaseless motion, with how strange
 Flowing and fading, do the high Mists range
 The gloomy gorges of the Mountains bare.
 Some weary breathing never ceases there—
 The ashen peaks can feel it hour by hour;
 The purple depths are darken'd by its power;
 A soundless breath, a trouble all things share
 That feel it come and go. See! onward swim
 The ghostly Mists, from silent land to land,
 From gulf to gulf; now the whole air grows dim—
 Like living men, darkling a space, they stand.
 But lo! a Sunbeam, like a Cherubim,
 Scatters them onward with a flaming brand.

ROBERT BUCHANAN.