

screw that two hundred thousand pounds per annum out of the diamond-buying public for a good many years to come yet. You see, they won't cut short the pension by slaying me, because, *ipso facto*, they would smash their own trade by doing it. As a very necessary life-insurance, I naturally stick to the publication clause in the newspapers on the day of my death. So I fancy, McHinnie, I've got that Diamond Ring as nicely on toast as ever yet blackmailer——"

A crash and a blinding explosion cut short Macdonald's sentence. The further wall of the place swept bodily towards us in a whirlwind of smoke and flame; and as the blast smote me on the head, life appeared to tear itself away with a jolt and a jerk.

It was by a very marvel of marvels that in that moment we were not transmuted to the clay whereof our corporal bodies were formed. Nothing but the tank had saved us. But the advancing breath of the explosion had driven us over the brink, and the water had acted as a cushion against the shock. So violent had been the power of the bomb thrown against it, that of the building nothing remained but a scattered mound of dusty rubble.

By its agents the Diamond Ring had lifted its hand against Conrad Macdonald with lust to slay, and by its agents the same coterie drew his unconscious form (and mine also) out of the chilly haven of that water-tank. By a curious irony Mr. Levenstein was the first person to bring us assistance. He had just arrived in Burton by special train to say that the demand for the £200,000 annuity was agreed to. I have never seen an Israelite so effusively genial and civil as Mr. Levenstein made himself whilst he attended to our physical needs after that explosion.

The process of blossoming out into a man of means was one I did not see, as the French were going up to Timbuctoo just then, and I wanted to go with them to see whether the place really existed, or whether it was only a magnified joke. As it turned out, the neighbourhood proved intensely interesting, so I stayed there a longish time, and when I got back to England again, Macdonald had quite settled down to the new order of things.

That tank, the only creature comfort of his working days, was a forerunner of what is the man's abiding-place now that he has come into enormous wealth. On the flank of his more stable residence he has built him a huge house of glass, and filled it with palms, and bananas, and palmettos, and other tropical foliage-plants and ferns. There is no method or order in their placing, nor are there concrete walks about the place. Some of the floor is soft short grass, the rest water, winding in deep narrow channels in and out of the islets of foliage. The temperature stays in the eighties.

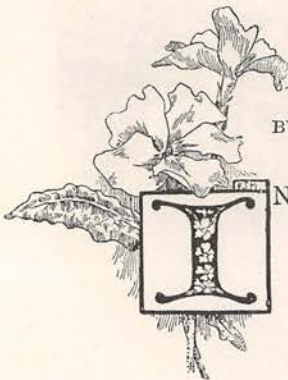
Here Conrad Macdonald, in the garb that Nature gave him, basks, and swims, and dives for six hours of the day, and meditates over an air-ship built on natural principles. He studies the flights of birds, and butterflies, and insects which skim and flutter in the warm air around him, but till now he has made no practical effort to put his observations into shape. Yet I think he will make that air-ship.

If you don't know Macdonald, and do not believe this tale, go round to Hatton Garden, and ask any diamond merchant there, Jew or Gentile, how much he pays towards Conrad Macdonald's pension. He may wax eloquent, but the odds are he refrains from giving a civil reply.



ON WESTERN ISLAY.

BY JAMES BAKER, AUTHOR OF "JOHN WESTACOTT," "BY THE WESTERN SEA," "MARK TILLOTSON," ETC.



IN Scotland, as in other parts of Europe, it is but necessary to strike away slightly from the beaten ruts of tourist travel to find calm, pleasant corners where crowds are not, but where enjoyment is, for those who love old-world manners, strange relics of the past, hospitable people, and wild scenery.

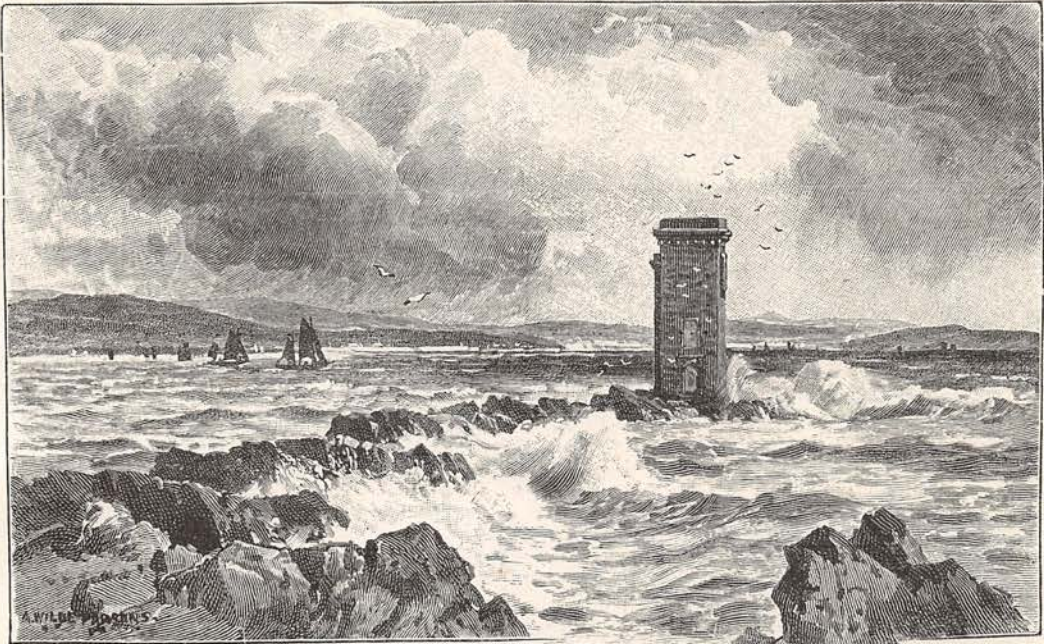
Every tourist in Scotland goes to Oban, or, at least, travels up Loch Fyne on the famous *Columba* steamer; but few, very few, comparatively speaking, stop short at Tarbet, go across to West Tarbet, and sail away westward, past lone Gigha, to halt on Islay. And yet there is much pleasure to be had on this once famous home of the Lord of the Isles.

The journey thither is agreeable, but it may be rough; a very fair sea can sweep in towards Islay around the Mull.

At last the little harbour of Port Ellen opens out, and we steer in past a lighthouse, rarely having a light in it, and land under the long lines of whitewashed houses that constitute the town—an unpromising-looking town; but at its extreme west end is a comfortable hotel, with a host who soon becomes a friend; and Islay slowly proves itself to be one of those places that warns off the day tripper, but seduces the lingering tourist into loving it.

Tourists are generally recommended to

McQuaick, gave us better advice, and on a fine, bright, warm afternoon drove us as far as Kintrog. And then with a guide we tramped on, at first along the sea-beach on the shores of the great Lochendaal bay that nearly cuts Islay in two; then on away to the left, up the soft boggy hillside, over a tiny bridge, where a brown amber flood came leaping down over dark rocks, forming a salmon pool beneath; then working out on to the headlands that were all worn and broken up, giving glimpses far down



PORT ELLEN HARBOUR AND LIGHTHOUSE.

make Bridgend their quarters whilst in Islay, but it surely is better to make Port Ellen—pronounced Por-Tellen—a halting-place, for from here can conveniently be visited the Mull of Oa, and Kildalton, and Slochd Mhaol Doraihd, this latter being the grandest bit of scenery on the island, and Kildalton the most interesting spot to the antiquarian, as Finlaggon, on the other side, is to the historian. But do not let the stranger attempt to find his way to Slochd Mhaol Doraihd by himself.

He should no more attempt this than he should attempt to pronounce the name, except after many lessons.

We were coached up in the route, and told we could easily find these caves, and rock piers, and wild cliffs by following on until we came to a peat bog; but luckily our host, Mr.

amid the rocks to the lifting foam-capped waves.

On we went, springing from turf to turf, pushing our way over boggy land behind our guide, who knew every pure spring on the mountain-side, and produced a glass to drink of their crystal waters, until we got out to Rowmoor Point, where was a grand bit of broken precipitous headland, one conical green island breaking the dash of the waves inland. From here we scrambled down to the biggest of the caves. We had been pointed out the way down to other caves, but ways too dizzy for our untrained heads.

The great bay of Lochendaal lies in front, and high over the lower moorland rises the high range of hills on Islay that blocks the view of Jura's mountains; though the rounded forms of the Paps overtop the lower Islay

Hills, the brown worn rocks beneath, above which the sea-birds wheel and cry, lead the eye on across the sunlit sea to the opposite shores of the loch, at the jutting point of the Rhinns, one of the wildest bits of the island.

In the dim distance is seen Tory Island, out beyond the line of green and rocky headlands that stretch far away to the Mull. But we were not yet at the goal of our walk, with the—to Saxon tongues—unpronounceable name; but we shortly reached it, and learned on the spot from our guide that Slochd, or Slaog, meant leap, and Mhaol Doraihhd was the giant or great Doraihhd; and we were pointed out a really wonderful slit in the here black cliffs over which the giant is said to have leaped. A great natural bridge gives a narrow passage across this slit, and the extreme point can be gained, with a terrific view of the sea sweeping in around the fantastically-worn pillars of rock. One square pillar rises up some eighty feet from the swirling sea; in its centre, midway up, a line of white spar forms a belt, and this has given it the name of the Soldier; and not far off is a square chimney-like aperture in the cliff, of the same shape as the Soldier, and this the peasantry have dubbed the Soldier's Cradle.

Upon the extreme headland are two conical mounds, looking as though made by man, and near them a most lovely mass of spar appears above the green sward, and forms a

point of view from whence the lines of grey, green, brown, and white rock can be studied, and the great black arch, all beautified with green moss and yellow and ruddy lichen.

We had made friends on board the Islay with a gentleman who turned out to be a post-office official, whose work was akin to that done by the late Anthony Trollope; and on the following morning, after our tramp o'er moor and fell to the western cliffs and caves, he suggested we should join him in a long day's work, visiting all the small post-offices on the shore of Lochendaal right out to the extreme western point of the Rhinns.

The day promised to be stormy, but the chance of seeing the inner life of some of the dwellers on Islay was too tempting; and so, provided with double layers of overcoats and rugs, and something by way of internal refreshment, off we started in early morning.

Our first halting-place was the strange little town of Bowmoor, with its curious church, with its eastern apse and tower of three square stages, topped by two of octagon shape and surmounted by a cupola. One striking contrast between the cottages here and on the not far distant shores of Ireland was the presence in all the windows of pleasant flowers. One may travel hundreds of miles in Ireland, and see no cottage garden or flower in a window. One great, wide, steep street led down from the church to the little harbour.



SLOCHD MHAOL DORAIHHD,

A terrific squall and torrential downpour of rain came on as we stood and sheltered behind the church, and chatted with a stonemason who, like Old Mortality, was making clear a name on a tombstone; the dozen small craft and the one bark tossed and strained at their moorings, as the white waves raced into the pier.

No chance now of a boat across to Bruichladdagh, as our friend had intended: the squalls were too heavy for a boat to venture out: and so soon on we drove again towards the hills that sheltered Bridgend, along the loch shores, with a strong scent of seaweed here and there, with the wholesome peat smell that the Princess of Thule loved.

Our friend, Mr. Macdonald, knew the "Princess" and her after-life, when romance became reality to her, and hardly the reality that Mr. Black has so charmingly allotted to her. Many a story had he of distant islands and their people, of their wild lone lives; and his work sometimes entailed considerable roughing it and some spice of danger—sailing out to those remote islands, being weather-bound for days; and some tragedies had come under his notice which were full of pathos and romance.

So the rain threshed against us as we drove on listening to these stories, or taking lessons in Gaelic from our driver; the striving to pronounce "calf" in Gaelic alone occupying us a quarter of an hour. At Bridgend we halted at the inn, with pleasant garden and tree-sheltered surroundings, to change horses and driver; and then again went on, now along the western shore of the loch, with constant portions of wreck sticking up in the sand, and with one abandoned schooner standing up high and dry near low-water mark.

We made no halt now till we reached the extreme end of the island, the Rhinns, or Port-na-haven. Here the low walls were strewn with fish, salted and lying out to dry; the boats were all drawn up out of reach of the waves that were thundering on the outer rocks, sending up great foam-clouds high into the air, and salt hard drops with a pinge into our faces.



THE MULL OF OA.

We found a very comfortable, clean, newly-painted inn at the seaward side of the township, and taking some fish off the rocks, asked that it might be cooked for our tea, and then started out for the post-office; but a fierce squall drove us into a cottage for shelter, and we disturbed the housewife, who was lying in bed, and a little child that was playing by the great fire. The child's bare feet pattered over the mud floor, and it jumped into the bed, whilst the mother leaped out to put the things in order.

A table and some stools were by the fire, and a row of fish hung along over the chimney, drying in the peat smoke. Outside the door we could see the fish ranged all along the stone walls, and the boats drawn up, with two new ones just added to the fleet. A group of girls came down the hillside as the sun

burst from beneath the storm-cloud; their bright colours of red and blue and white, and healthy-looking faces, and bare brown legs, forming a characteristic picture against the scene of port, and boats, and cottages.

The landlord of the inn had quickly learnt we were in the township, and joined us at the cottage; and whilst our friend attended to his post-office work, we were enabled in an interval of rain-washed, clear, brilliant sunshine to wander away out over the green head towards the lighthouse.

On the little islet, beneath the shadow of the lighthouse tower, was a ruined church, said to have been built by Columba, but the lifting, tossing rollers in the narrow sound prevented all attempt to cross over to it.

But as we strolled on and rounded the point, we saw another one-street township ahead, and so, leaving the fisher-lad, who had been our guide, and crossing a little bridge, beneath which a tawny burn rushed down over picturesque rocks, we entered this street, and were soon accosted by another lad of the sailor type, who had very little of "the English," but whose dog, a big animal of the pointer-mastiff type, seemed to resent the intrusion of a Sassenach. He called the dog off, and asked—

"And where do ye come from?"

And at the reply, "From England," said—

"Oh! from England; thank you, thank you. And what are ye doing here?"

So we explained we were just looking at the lovely view.

"Oh! ye're just looking at the view; thank you, thank you."

And so each answer ended with this curious "Thank you, thank you," accompanied by a hearty slap on the back or an enforced shaking of the hand. Before we were at the end of the street he suggested a look into his cottage, just to taste "a wee drop," and as that was declined, he halted at the end of the street behind the gable, and invited us to a drink of "good stuff" from a bottle he had in his pocket; but on declining, he laughed, and with more "Oh! thank you, thank you," left us for a while to look out over the scene at the end of this strange little town. And an impressive scene it was—standing up on these dark, iron-like, and brown-hued rocks, with heavy volumes of dark green sea sweeping in and lifting white crests, and veiling in lace-like foam the intense iron hardness of the coast; behind was the one street, with its peat stacks, black as the rocks, its fowls and calves, and ducks and cottages, some clean and well-paved, others mud floors and dirty—a lone scene, in spite of the cottages; but as we stood, almost swept away by the wind, a

lovely rainbow formed and arched the iron rocks, and the now sunlit sea and green isle beyond, with its ruined church of past ages.

As night was falling, and much more work had to be done, we inspanned our horse, and drove off from the interesting busy settlement.

Our first halt was at Port Charlotte, a dirty, straggling village. We wandered up the muddy road whilst our friend was in the post-office, but the too earnest offers of friendship from a drunken man, and the quiet declaration of war on his part upon our rejection of his friendship, drove us into the post-office, for in spite of double overcoats, the night was very cold. The numerous distilleries in Islay work havoc with the natives.

Standing in the general shop, that was also post-office, the light of a good blazing fire in an inner room suggested a seat by its warmth, and on being invited in, we found the old grandmother sitting by the blazing peat fire, with a crutch by her side—for she was a cripple from a broken leg—the children clustered round her; and on the opposite side sat a fair-haired lad of some nineteen years, whose answers to our questions and general talk was of so educated a tone that we were somewhat perplexed.

But the thing was made clear when we drove on by Mr. Macdonald's explaining that in winter this lad was a student at Glasgow University. He had another post-office, where the son was a D.D. and a professor; who had lived in Glasgow on twelve shillings a week whilst studying. These lads work on the crofts in summer, and go to "Glasgie" to study in the winter.

Our next halting-place was Bruichladdagh; and here we found a little pent, run out before the post-office door, and being shut in, was used as the village lads' club and smoke room. A crowd of some ten or twelve lads were always there, going and coming, and chatting in Gaelic at full tongue, one recurring phrase sounding like "One and fourpence in balk"—perhaps some Gaelic student can turn that nonsensical English into good Gaelic, with an Islay pronunciation.

At length we reached Bridgend, and were glad to go into the warm room with a blazing fire, and get some refreshment; and highly astonished were the comfortable occupants of that room when we were told our fresh horse and driver were ready, and we started out once more into the dark, stormy night.

We afterwards heard ourselves described as tourists rushing over the island at night, trying to see it in a day. A long drive we had over the upper road to Port Ellen, reaching it safely at midnight, well-satisfied with our rough, interesting day's work and pleasure.