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Observations made in a journey through the Western Counties of Scotland

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Although comparatively bare of wood; yet the country between Kirkcudbright and Gatehouse of Fleet affords several agreeable features.... the numerous snug-looking small farm-houses interspersed., ...the fine vale of Fleet is discovered to the eye. I have seen few scenes naturally more beautiful, and few more highly ornamental than this. Within the bounds of one landscape, the eye beholds the river Fleet discharging itself into the Firth; the houses of Bardarroch, of Ardwall, of Cally, the beautiful and populous village of Gatehouse, and the ancient castle of Cardoness, with a large extent of adjacent country, either cultivated, and thick-set with farm-houses, with abundance of wood interspersed, or - towards the extremities of the prospect - wildly picturesque.

Cally House is the principal seat of Mr. Murray of Broughton, whose estates in the neighbourhood are very extensive. It is a large, modern building, situate on the plain, on the eastern bank of the Fleet. The apartments are numerous, specious, well-proportioned, elegantly furnished, and possessing especially some fine paintings. The circumjacent grounds are laid out and decorated with great taste.

Immediately around the house, the lawn is left open. The office-houses, forming a large square, are removed to a convenient distance. The gardens are divided from the house and the office-houses, by the road running between the village of Gatehouse and the parish-church. They are enclosed within high-walls. The extent is considerable. No expense has been spared to accommodate them to the stately elegance of the house and to the dignity and fortune of the proprietor. They contain green-houses and hot-houses, with all that variety of foreign herbs and fruits which, in our climate, these are necessary to cherish; abundance of all the riches of the orchard, all the beauties of the parterre, and all the useful plenty of the kitchen-garden. They are dressed at a great expense. When the family reside not here, all the country around, as far as Dumfries, are supplied with abundance of fruits from these gardens. Where the road running between the village and the church passes through these pleasure-grounds, it is lined with trees. Every deformity within these grounds is concealed, or converted into a beauty by woods everywhere, except at proper points of view, these environs are divided by belts of planting from the highways and the adjacent country. Many fine swells diversify the scene. These are crowned with fine clumps of trees. Within the extent of the pleasure-grounds is a house occupied by a farm servant which has been built in the fashion of a Gothic Temple, and to accidental observation has all the effect that might be produced by a genuine antique. South from the house of Cally, is a deer-park, enclosed within a high and wall, and plentifully

stocked with fallow-deer The lands adjoining on the south and south-east are commonly well enclosed within hedges, or decent, dry stone-walls. The farm-houses are very decent buildings, and almost all covered with slates. To the north, rise hills, bare of wood, but, on the front green, gently sloping and considerably cultivated. Sheep and black-cattle wander in great numbers, over such parts of these scenes as are not occupied by corn, potatoes, and other articles of crop.

GATEHOUSE of FLEET

Within the remembrance of several now living, there was only a single house on the seat of this fine village. It was the scene of a considerable market, held, once a fortnight, for a certain number of weeks in the end of harvest, and the beginning of winter. Lying on the great road from Dumfries to Portpatrick, and at a considerable distance - ten or twelve miles - from Carlingwark, the last good inn on this road; it was naturally, a proper situation for an inn. An excellent inn, with a suitable yard and offices was built. A smith and a few tradesmen were equally necessary. The vicinity of the inn, and the highway, with the advantage of the well frequented markets rendered it a situation promising enough for a shop-keeper or two. To a great land-holder, it would naturally be honourable and agreeable to have labourers, tradesmen, and shop-keepers, near his principal seat, that they might be ready to perform a variety of little services which his household would necessarily demand. It would be no less worthy his care to provide shop-keepers, labourers, artisans. etc. for the accommodation of his tenants, upon his own estate. The situation was one of those which seem intended by nature for the seat of towns; In a beautiful and fertile vale; by the side of a fine river; so near where that river discharges its waters into the adjacent Frith, that it might easily become a sea-port town; and in a neighbourhood where the principal articles of provision were so plentiful, as to be the only or chief articles of export. With these advantages of situation, and though the influence of circumstances already begun,... nothing could be more natural or proper than for the proprietor of these scenes, to think of raising a town here.

Accordingly, as Mr. Murray built his own spacious seat, he invited inhabitants to settle and form a village here, by offering very advantageous terms of feu. A plan for a village was formed by his own discretion: and the feuars were required to build their houses in a certain order, and of certain dimensions. The spot which was marked was a fine plain, not more than a mile distant from Cally House, close by the inn and the scene of the markets, and on the highway. Two streets were marked out, divided from each other by intervening gardens. The one, named the fore-street, and lying along the highway, was to have all its houses two stories in height and covered with slates. Those in the back-street might be meaner in their structure and dimensions, but were to be equally orderly in their arrangement.

The situation, and the advantages offered, were sufficiently inviting. The enlightened and public-spirited proprietor had soon the pleasure of seeing a fine village rise near his principal seat; more orderly in its arrangement, more uniformly handsome in its buildings, happier in its situation, than perhaps any other village in Galloway. Attempts were soon made to render it a seat of trade. A Company engaged in the establishment of a tannery here, with sufficient success. Another Company tried to establish a wine-cellar, and to import wines, at this port, to supply the gentlemen of the county: a trade which, if I am not mistaken, has been since relinquished. Mr. Murray, at no inconsiderable expense, either formed a short canal, or deepened and widened the channel of the Fleet, (for indeed I cannot, with certainty, recollect which) so as to form a passage by which small vessels might advance from the Firth, almost close up to the village.

Meanwhile, the richer cottagers were invited from the adjacent country, by the haughty prospect of becoming Lairds in Gatehouse. Mr. Murray had occasion to throw some smaller farms together; and this circumstance drove several families from the country into Gatehouse. The local advantages brought the tradesmen and shop-keepers at Gatehouse into a thriving condition; and this naturally allured others to repair from the adjacent 'clachans' and hamlets to settle in the same seat. Tanners, glovers, weavers, shoe-makers, sailors, masons, carpenters, butchers, bakers, alehouse-keepers, day-labourers, smugglers were thus brought together in Gatehouse. The parish school was transferred hither. And although in one or two instances, the attempts to augment its opulence and population might misgive; yet in the whole, it continued to advance with wonderful success.

Thus was it advancing when Messrs. Birtwhistle, gentlemen who had for some time before dealt largely in cattle purchased from Kirkcudbright-shire, and had lately become proprietors of an estate in the neighbourhood of Kirkcudbright - proposed to establish a cotton-work here, and obtained a suitable lease from Mr. Murray. It was said that these gentlemen had previously applied to the Earl of Selkirk for a lease of grounds near Kirkcudbright, on which they might have erected their cotton-work; but that his Lordship apprehending, that an Earl's mansion might be disgraced by the vicinity of an establishment of manufacturing industry, rejected their offers with earnestness.

More successful in their application to Mr. Murray, they immediately built a large fabric, at a great expense, at the western end of the village. Water to drive the machinery, by the apparatus of wheels and cranks, was to be brought from a lake, several miles distant, among the hills to the

north-east, by an aqueduct, to the expense of forming which Mr. Murray contributed: The Fleet lying too low to leave it possible to obtain water from it which might be conveniently raised to such a height as to command the wheels. Every difficulty was overcome. The works were prepared; and the manufacture begun. The poor people in the immediate neighbourhood, although numerous enough, were however so little accustomed to anything like the regular industry of manufacture, that that they could not at first be persuaded to apply to the employment which this establishment afforded, or reasonable wages. Those in the neighbourhood again who had provisions to sell, had fancied that they might now obtain for such articles any extravagant prices they should choose to ask. But labourers soon flocked from Ireland and other places, to perform that work which the good people about Gatehouse could not be induced to perform: And the importation of butter, cheese: and some other articles of provision from a distance soon brought the farmers of the neighbourhood to reason. The returns answered the wishes of the adventurous undertakers. The money circulated, served to enrich, and to quicken the industry of the whole country-side. And, there was soon an enthusiasm among all to be employed about the cotton-mill, and to contribute to the success of the manufacture.

The increase of opulence, the growth of population and the rising activity of industry have, through these means, been astonishingly rapid and powerful. A second large edifice for a cotton-work, has been erected by Messrs. Birtwhistle. Another has likewise been built by a Mr. McWilliam. All intended as houses only for the spinning of cotton-yarn. By that machine, named a mule, between forty and fifty pounds of cotton-wool are made into yarn in a week. For, many have been induced to try this manufacture, who could not erect cotton-mills, and were therefore obliged to content themselves with spinning mules and Ginnees. A maker of these machines has settled here. A Brass-foundry has also been established here, to supply those articles of wrought brass which are necessary to the construction of the spinning and weaving apparatus. Three hundred pounds of cotton-wool are spun into yarn in the week in the large cotton-work of Messrs. Birtwhistle. Three hundred Persons are employed in the labour; of whom two hundred are children; and fifty pounds of weekly wages are paid. On the Ginnees, a hundred pounds of cotton-wool are spun in a week. This yarn is all sold at Glasgow, and, in the neighbourhood - for the weaving of cotton-cloth begins to be carried on here with little less earnestness and success than the spinning of cotton-yarn. Nor is the spirit of cotton-manufacture now confined exclusively to Gatehouse. It spreads fast through the whole country. Every person who can spare money enough to purchase a mule or a Ginnee, and a little raw cotton to begin with, eagerly turns into a Cotton-Spinner. The country weavers too either purchase yarn and make cotton-cloth for themselves - for which they find a ready sale - or are employed by the manufacturers of Glasgow or of Gatehouse, to weave

cotton-cloth for them. The ploughman forsakes the plough, the schoolmaster lays down his birch, the tanner deserts his tan-pits, the apothecary turns from the composition of pills, and the mixing of unguents; and all earnestly commence spinners of cotton-yarn or weavers of cotton-cloth.

The village of Gatehouse has thus been greatly enlarged, within this short time, by the a addition of new streets and the extension of those which had been before begun. Its inhabitants are multiplied to the number of fifteen hundred. It has even been extended to the western side of the river Fleet, with which there has been long an open communication by an excellent bridge. A library has been formed here, on the plan of that of Kirkcudbright, begun upon a fund of twenty pounds raised by subscription, and to be maintained, and enlarged by the payment of two shillings quarterly, by each proprietor. Here is a mason-lodge too, for free-masonry is a hobby-horse with some of these people - to which no fewer than seventy members belong. Provisions are laid in to their labourers by Messrs. Birtwhistle and Co. The wages ore paid once a fortnight. The labourers do not all squander their money, as it is acquired; some of them begin to accumulate property. In their Sunday's array, they are well-dressed. Marriages are frequent. The price of coals has risen considerably here as in other places in this season. The coals are from White-haven. Peats are sent in for sale, by the farmers on the contiguous muirs. Garden-stuffs are to be had in abundance from Cally. Many more vessels now frequent the harbour.

I wish I could honestly add that the morals of these good people have been improved with their circumstances. But prostitution and breaches of chastity have lately become frequent here. I was informed by the intelligent exciseman of the place, that not fewer than an hundred and fifty gallons - of whisky alone - had been consumed here for every week of the last six months. The licentiousness of Gatehouse affords frequent business for the neighbouring Justices. The Clergyman of the parish has found it necessary to act both as a Justice of the Peace and as a Clergyman; and although exceedingly active in the former of these capacities, has yet found it too hard for him to restrain the irregularities of these villagers. An assistant has been employed to aid him in the discharge of his clerical functions. Yet, both the Pious assiduities of his assistant, and his own labours, clerical and juridical have proved insufficient to maintain among the manufacturers of Gatehouse, all that purity of morals and decorum of manners which might be wished. Marriages are indeed so frequent that the clergyman has found it necessary occasionally, for the sake of dispatch, to dispense with the ordinary ceremonies of the church. A sunday school has been instituted for the instruction of those children who are employed at the cotton-work through the week: And I am pleased to relate, to the honour of Mr. McWilliam, who is the most

considerable cotton-spinner in Gatehouse, after Messrs. Birtwhistle, that he pays the teacher for the Sunday instruction of the children of all his own workmen.

As a moralist, I cannot but regret that crowded population, and the prosperity of manufactures should be so invariably attended with the extreme corruption of the lower orders. In this mind I should not wish to see Gatehouse increase greatly above its present population: and I would gladly see some expedients used to restrain the growth of village, where, but for vice, want and idleness might be unknown..... The institution of Sunday schools is almost the only thing that has been done. towards preserving a sense of religion and of decent morals among the poor. The lord of the manor and the principal manufacturers about Gatehouse might also use means to enforce a due attendance on public worship among all, whether old or young, They ought to establish a strict police. Men habitually addicted to drunkenness, and women abandoned to prostitution ought to be invariably discharged from employment, and dismissed out of the village. The wages ought not to be paid oftener than monthly. The manufacturers ought to provide for their workmen ...the more necessary articles of subsistence; meal, butcher's meat, etc.. Some small part of the wages of every labourer should be saved for him, to the end of the year; and interest be paid him upon it The labourers should be persuaded to establish a common fund, formed by the contributions of all who are in health to labour, and destined to relieve the wants of the sick and the infirm. The use of whisky should be discouraged; and good malt liquors, ale and porter introduced in its stead. I will even venture to suggest that the establish^ment of an Antiburgher or Cammeronian meeting-house might have no bad effect here. I shall add, that it might be better, if Mr. Murray, the manufacturers, and the neighbouring gentlemen should be induced rather to encourage the formation of other villages, at the distance of every five or six miles than to promote the further increase of Gatehouse.

The vale of Fleet is beautiful, for a good many miles above Gatehouse. Rough, heath-clad hills rise, indeed, on both sides; but, the lower declivities, and the intermediate plain are fertile, cultivated and adorned with large tracts of wood. At Carstrammon, Mr. Murray has a handsome hunting seat, on the eastern side of the river, and about four or five miles above Gatehouse...

...concerning the general character and circumstances of the inhabitants of Kirkcudbrightshire. Potatoes have become almost the chief article of food with the common people. The use of tea is very generally adopted among the farmers. Except an individual or two in every little village; they are little addicted to the drinking of intoxicating liquors. it is but of late, that the use of whisky has been introduced through the country. Rum, and brandy have been less drunk, since the Galloway smugglers have been vigorously checked by the exertions of the

Commissioners of Excise. The time was, when farmers meeting at a market-town, or clachan, would sit together for days, and tittle penny-ale. But, punch is now the beverage upon such occasions; and the sitting is never prolonged for so considerable time. The clothes worn by the farmers and peasantry are still chiefly of their domestic manufacture, met, every young man has young women are no longer satisfied with their stuff and drugget gowns, and blue cloth cloaks : every servant maid has her cotton gown, her silk cloak, and a smart hat or bonnet. Hats are universally worn by the men; bonnets, though of the manufacture of Kilmarnock in the next county, have been laid aside.

The furniture in the houses is not inconvenient. The beds are stuffed with chaff or feathers. Three-footed stools have given place to chairs. The tables, presses, and chests are all decent and commodious enough. The spoons are horn. Plates of earthenware, with knives and forks are generally used. Forty years ago, a candle-extinguisher might have been mistaken by any farmer's wife in the country, for a dram-glass. But, the uses of this and such other articles of accommodation are now universally known. The houses are now generally built with chummies; not with a hole called a lumm in the middle of the roof, answering to a hearth in the middle of the floor, Everyone is taught reading, writing, and a little arithmetic; whereas, eighty or ninety years ago, it was thought enough to teach the eldest son of a family to read and write. Carts have now come into general use, instead of the cars and creels which were the carriages formerly employed. The form-servants of Kirkcudbrightshire do less work, than those in Ayrshire and some other counties. They are commonly left idle for the greater part of the winter evenings....

....at Gatehouse, although a seat of manufacture, where a good number of the industrious part of society were assembled, in a state of considerable independence, no Reform Society had been instituted or suggested. All were content with their political situation, and were ready to attribute chiefly to its advantages, that rapid progress of wealth and industry in which they rejoiced.

From Gatehouse of Fleet, to Ferry-Town of Cree.

Not many years since, the road from Gatehouse of Fleet to Ferry town, led among hills of the most difficult ascent, and was so imperfectly made, as to be often impassable... .Nor is this road only rough and difficult of ascent. The country is on both hands, wild and dreary; exhibiting only heath and black rocks.

Within these last few years, therefore, the gentlemen of the county have procured a new road to be led along the coast between these two towns.....for a great part of the way, it is both

naturally charming, and considerably beautified by the hand of industry. It leads, for the first three or four miles, from one gentlemen's pleasure-grounds, into another's.

Crossing the Fleet by the bridge, the traveller first passes by a line of new houses which have been hastily run up on its western bank, for the accommodation of some new adventurers in the cotton-manufacture.....