

The woods climb up boldly along the hillsides, overshadowing every little dingle and watercourse, and so sweeping onwards up the valley, in every tint of green, and every variety of mass and outline, until a bend of the hills closes in the view. Even as a piece of scenery, this vale of the Girvan, though less known than many others in the lowlands of Scotland, has a charm which these often want. There is one respect, at least, wherein it has a peculiar interest. I know of few Scottish landscapes so circumscribed in extent, yet into which are crowded so many human associations of bygone times. On the hill-tops that look down upon us are the mouldering ramparts of the earthen forts of the early races. From the lower grounds the plough and harrow have long effaced such antique memorials: but the traditions of the primitive people survive in the very names of the hamlets and meadows. From these names we learn of Culdee saints to whom shrines were erected all down the course of the Girvan. And we see how the natives were Celtic, speaking the same language that still survives in the Highlands, and displaying the same nice discrimination and poetic turn of thought in the choice of names for their rivers, and crags, and hills. The castles of feudal times have survived better in this district of Ayrshire than in most other parts of Scotland. There are the remains of at least a dozen of them in the lower sixteen miles of the Girvan valley. Most of these, indeed, are ruinous; but some still form part of more modern mansions, and at least one—the old house of Killochan—remains nearly as it was some three hundred years ago. Nor are these merely interesting from their antiquity. Each is linked more or less closely with the history of the district, and sometimes not of the district only but of the kingdom at large. For the barons of