INVERNESS BEFORE RAILWAYS

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BY

ISABEL HARRIET ANDERSON.

INVERNESS:

A. AND W. MACKENZIE.

1885.

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CHAPTER I.

THE MANNERS AND CUSTOMS OF OLD INVERNESS.

HAT Inverness has greatly advanced in many ways, within the last thirty years, and is a much wealthier and much more important place than of old, admits of no denial. Whether there is as much genial intercourse amongst those in the same rank of life, and as much sympathy and freedom from rivalry between the various classes as characterised the old town long ago, is a question regarding which there may be a diversity of opinion.

When those old Invernessians who have been for many years absent from their native town, return to visit it, they are impressed not so much by the numerous new streets and buildings, and the general appearance of activity and prosperity, as by the decay of the old families and the rise of new ones. Many representatives of the old county families still reside in the neighbourhood of Inverness, but—speaking only of the town and the townspeople—among the leaders of fashionable society in the Highland Capital

there are but few descendants of those who filled the same place thirty or forty years ago, few probably that have the slightest idea who really ruled Inverness society at that period. The descendants of many of those old leading families, too, would feel strange and bewildered, were they now to return and settle in Inverness.

"I do not know a single name," exclaimed a gentleman, who, after an absence of thirty-five years, lately paid a hurried visit to Inverness. He had walked along Ardross Terrace, had gone round by Drummond, and, in fact, visited nearly every suburb of the town, inquiring who resided in each handsome villa that he passed, or in each old mansion—though of these but few now remain—which had once been the abode of old friends; but the names which fell upon his ear, in reply, had a strange and unfamiliar sound. "There is only one place in Inverness," he added sadly, "where I meet at every step with the old familiar names, and that place is the Chapel-yard!"

The habits of the Inverness people have changed much more within the last thirty years than in the sixty years which went before. Since the opening of the Inverness and Nairn railway in 1855, not only have a number of strangers come to reside in the Highland Capital, causing a spirit of competition to arise, and an impetus to be given to progress and activity, but their ever-extending arrival and settle-

ment have caused a gradual but complete revolution in the ways of what had for many years been a quiet exclusive little town, in which the advent of a stranger from the South was an event apt to be regarded with a degree of trepidation as well as excitement. As one new family after another came to settle here, and the heads of the old families died in rapid succession, new manners and customs, the effect of competition and ambition, quickly supplanted the primitive old-fashioned ways which had been handed down from one generation to another.

Thirty-five years ago there were only a few classes in Inverness, and these were clearly defined, but this did not prevent each class from taking a kindly interest in the other. One great characteristic of Inverness at that time was the small estimation in which wealth was held, and the small influence which the possession of it involved. This may be accounted for by the fact that the leaders of society in the town were all people of moderate income. The Inverness lawyers and bankers lived mostly in plainly furnished houses above their banks and offices, and the shop-keepers in still plainer houses above their shops.

The usual dinner hour was four o'clock, but it was changed to five or half-past five when there was a party—six o'clock dinners being given only by the county families, or those who were considered on the same level. Young unmarried people were not often

invited out to dinner, but were asked to come to tea at seven, and were expected to be found waiting in the drawing-room, when the elder ladies left the gentlemen seated over their wine. If the gentlemen were very long of leaving the dining-room (which was often the case when a tray had been brought in with materials for toddy—of which the ladies were always expected to partake before leaving), tea and coffee were handed round to the visitors who had arrived only after dinner, and the young ladies were requested to give a little music to hasten the arrival of the loiterers in the dining-room. The young people in the drawing-room were apt to get very impatient when the gentlemen sat long over their toddy and port wine, but as these were the days of toasts, their patience was often sorely tried. These were the days, too, when it was the custom for people to drink wine with each other. The host always asked the lady on his right hand, and each gentleman asked both the lady whom he had taken in to dinner and the one seated directly opposite to him, if he might have the pleasure of drinking wine with them, and so on, until every one had drunk wine with several others. Before taking wine with any one, the glass had to be filled up anew, though the ladies generally only touched it with their lips, after the honour had been requested of them more than once or twice. Then both parties bowed to each other, the gentlemen often saying,