

**FISHER LIFE; OR, THE
MEMORIALS
OF CELLARDYKE
AND THE FIFE COAST**

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Fisher Life; Or, the Memorials of Cellardyke and the Fife Coast by George Gourlay

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GEORGE GOURLAY

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BY
GEORGE GOURLAY,
ANSTRUTHER.



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THE MONKS

AND THE

FISHERMEN.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

One day, perchance, an Horestii hunter, wandering as the child of Nature by sea and shore, stops to pile or dig his hut by the brink of the skerrie, where he can launch his skiff or oaracle, or chase the wild boar in the adjacent woods. The incident is scarcely more than the print of his naked foot upon the sands, but it is the birth-day, according to some of the fisher homes of Fife, those picturesque little seaports, ringing ever since with the melody of life and love. If, however, the conjecture is true concerning Skinfasthaven, or Cellardyke, and a hamlet had really sprung up at the little creek, it lay unnoticed and unknown in the eye of history till the eventful day when the lands of Kilrenny passed, by the gift of the unfortunate James the Third, into the hands of his kinsman, James Kennedy, the last and greatest of the Bishops of St Andrews. This was in 1452, and the change is immediately signalised, if we believe the old fathers, by the erection of the "Bishop's House," a stately tenement built, like the grange house of an old abbey, on a tier of massive arches, and shielded

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by the pier, which was originally designed, they also tell us, to save it from the storm. We look back at this point through the mist of more than four centuries; but nevertheless the Bishop and his undertaking can be traced with singular precision amongst the shadows. But let us glance for a little at the romantic circumstances of the times. Thus going no further than Anstruther, on the opposite side of the brook, the Monks of Balmerino are seen so extensively concerned with the enterprise of the deep that the famous baptistry of St Ayles is reserved for their own sea folk, and only a mile or two further on, the beach of Pittenweem and St Monance is ringing with the sailor's song, as the big ship, gunwale deep with pickled cod or herrings, and with the Prior's flag at the main, sails out in the breeze, her course for France or Spain, from which she will not return till her freight has been exchanged for the silks and wines of those sunny lands. "Here is the secret of the golden fringe to the begger's mantle," or the old world wealth of the Fifeshire coast—a secret which none knew better than Bishop Kennedy; and remembering what the historian tells us of his great ship that was the greatest in the seas, of his princely freights that yet live in the crowning splendours of the ancient city, we can so far see and understand his work on our kindly shore, where he could participate in the harvest as he and his predecessors had never done, or could do, on the stormy bay of St Andrews.

After his death the succeeding Archbishops saw it to be their interest to continue to be the same kind masters to the little colony, which one day under them rose to the dignity and consequence of a burgh of regality. It was to the lasting envy of the fishing village of East Anstruther; but a great change was soon to follow, as we find that about seventeen years before the Reformation the lands and port of Kilrenny

had ceased to belong to the Church, having been disposed of by Cardinal Bethune to his favourite cousin John, who at the same time bought the vicarage or fish teinds of the Barony from the Monks of Dryburgh, to whom, with the Parish Church, they had been given as a gift to God by the Countess Ada, the mother of Malcolm the Maiden and William the Lion, those royal brothers, so strangely different in their character and history. The purchase of the teinds, however, deserves more than a passing notice. It is, in fact, one of the most memorable transactions of the period in a local point of view, for the fish teinds of Anstruther, having at the same time passed into the hands of the knight of Dreel, a yet existing agreement was concluded between the two friends, according to which their vassals were to have a mutual right to the harbours, but without any compromise in the case of the teinds, which every vassal was to pay to his own laird, or, in other words, the Skimfie fisher had no taxmaster at Anstruther pier except Laird Bethune for the teinds, and so it fared in like manner with the Anstruther fishers when they sailed into Skimfie, as the old world called the little creek of Skinfasthaven.

