

ON RETURNING TO EDINBURGH AFTER LONG EXILE

A dead Vesuvius this city,
sooty, bible-black with age.
The remnants of a capital
gashed to death with motorways.

Birdlike the workers have departed.
Carparks and office blocks
mutilate a bourgeois skyline.
The heart is one great tourist shop.

I sleep and see the work-grey faces
in the churning twilight street.
Hear the dockers' morning tramcar
on its long haul down to Leith.

Hear men singing, cursing, stamping,
on the sand floor of the pub
while old Andy bashes the piano
who ran a backstreet poker club.

I wore baggy shorts and braces,
ate gobstoppers, was never bored.
Talked Scots and socialism in the alleys
and tossed my cap at Easter Road.

I wake and find they have departed,
and I don't know where they've all gone.
Whenever the TV stops its chatter
I stare at my silent telephone.

A dead Vesuvius this city.
The grey concrete doesn't sing,
and the poets' silent, unread volumes
grow yellow on the shelf in Thin's.

Colin Mackay

JULES VERNE AND EDINBURGH

This title may seem suprising, linking as it does the Capital City with the author of Journey to the Centre of the Earth, 20000 Leagues Under the Sea, Around the World in Eighty Days, The Mysterious Island and From the Earth to the Moon. It is not generally known that Scotland was considered by Jules Verne (1828-1905) as his spiritual home, was the first foreign country he visited, and provided the setting for two of his books. Indeed Scotland was "in his blood": the first part of Verne's mother's maiden name, Allotte de la Fuye, comes from a Scottish archer called Allott, who had emigrated from Scotland in 1462 to join Louis XI's Scottish Guard, and did so well for himself that he earned the right to keep a "fuie", a dovecote, plus a "de" in his name. As for his father's side, "verne" means "alder" in Breton, and whether or not this is the real origin of the name, Jules Verne's birth and upbringing in Nantes in Brittany encouraged him to think it was, and to consider himself a pure "Celt", and to identify with the at least 200 "Celtic" characters in his novels.

In 1859, four years before publishing his first novel, Five Weeks in a Balloon, Verne was living in cramped conditions in the Latin Quarter with his pregnant wife and two step-daughters, when a musician friend called Aristide Hignard invited him to come on a free trip to Britain on his yacht. Verne was overjoyed; the two sailed to Edinburgh, Liverpool and London (where he saw the Great Eastern being built), and Verne wrote up in his notes as Voyage en Angleterre et en Ecosse ("Journey to England and Scotland").

The parts on Edinburgh are readily accessible, as as Verne transcribed them, more or less wholesale, in the first of his Scottish novels, Les Indes

Noires (1877), translated as Child of the Cavern. "The Black Indies" - a reference to England's other Empire, under the Scottish soil - is about a family living underground in a disused coal-mine, the new seam they stumble on, mysterious acts of sabotage, a girl called Nell they find who has never been above ground and who speaks nothing but Gaelic (!), and their efforts to re-educate her, obstructed by interventions of the "spirit" of the mine, who turns out at the end to be her grandfather, previously sacked from the mine. The original plan for the book was pure science fiction, involving a "parallel world" stretching under the whole of Britain, inhabited by the working class (twenty years before an identical idea in H.G. Wells's The Time Machine); but his editor disliked the idea, and Verne fell back on the theme of the exhaustion of energy sources, itself well ahead of its time.

The first chapter opens with a letter addressed to "Mr J.R. Starr, Engineer, 30 Canongate, Edinburgh", and describes Starr's journey to the mine, via Holyrood, the inn where Scott's Waverley stayed, the Prison with its sundial, John Knox's House, the Bridges, the "General Railway" Station, and Newhaven ("a pretty fishing village" with a chain pier), where he embarks on the Prince of Wales, sees the "snowy peaks of the Grampians" from Queensferry (!), lands at Crombie Point, and from there travels to Callander.

The action comes back to Edinburgh towards the end of the novel, for Nell's first experience above ground is to climb Arthur's seat: after landing at Granton by night, the Child of the Cavern, her future husband and the chaperone (in real life, "Miss Amelia", Verne and Hignard) go past Calton Hill with its Observatory and Monument to Nelson, along Regent Street, and then past the Canongate

Church. Nell is introduced to the history of Scotland by seeing the Palace of Holyrood ("a large country-house which looked as if its feudal appearance had been maintained through a whim of its owner"), the Abbey of Holyrood, Salisbury Crag, and the road up to the Queen's Park, which Sir Walter Scott claimed to have had built "by writing a few lines in a novel".

At sunrise, Nell and her companions see the "green ray" - not another science fiction idea, but an effect caused by refraction of the rising sun, Verne informs us, occurring over the sea in very clear conditions, and visible only to the pure in heart ... (The Green Ray will be the title of the other Scottish novel, set in the West.) The whole of Edinburgh then becomes visible to Nell, "the newly built, carefully laid-out New Town, the higgledy-piggledy houses and labyrinthine streets of the Old Town. Two hills dominated Auld-Reekie, the Castle clinging to its basalt outcrop, and Calton Hill with the modern ruins of a Greek monument on its rounded brow. Magnificent tree-lined avenues spread outwards from the capital to the countryside. To the North, on the incision of the Firth of Forth, the Port of Leith could be seen. Even further, the harmonious shore of the County of Fife was spread out. A single road, as straight as the one to Piraeus, joined this Athens of the North to the Sea. To the West stretched the fine beaches of Newhaven and Portobello, with their yellow sand tinging the edge of the breakers. Further out, two or three steam-boats were sending furry cones of blackish smoke into the sky (...)". The three then come down to earth with a hearty breakfast at "Lambret's Hotel"; and travel finally to Loch Lomond on the "Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway".

Although Verne's panorama strangely resembles a

spread-out map, it can be concluded that he knows his Edinburgh well and that he loves all things Scottish. The interest accorded Scotland's Capital by one of her more famous great-grandchildren does honour to both writer and country, and, given the continuing importance of the Auld Alliance, deserves to be better known.

William Butcher



THE KIRK CARE PLAN

Growing old but staying independent, and still living right in the centre of the community, amongst friends, relatives and familiar scenes, that is the Kirk Care plan for people of Stockbridge and other areas when they reach the 70's and 80's.

On the corner of Leslie Place and Deanhaugh Street where the old Stockbridge Church once stood, now stands the Church tower on its own, but round it will grow a cluster of flats, homes for our senior citizens. It will be about two years before the flats are ready to be occupied, but eventually there will be 26 one-person flats, 9 two-person flats, 3 three-person apartments, 2 guest rooms for visitors, a communal lounge and a laundry. The resident warden will be in touch by telephone both in the office and in their own home with all the flats, so no one need feel isolated in an emergency.

19 of the flats will be under the dispensation of Edinburgh District Council and the other 19 flats for the Kirk Care body to allocate. Prospective tenants are not required to belong to any denomination or church, the housing is being built by Kirk Care (an organisation started by the Church of Scotland but legally separate) to provide homes for people in their later years, so that they can live as part of the life of the place, near to the shops they know, the library and the post office. When residents look out of their windows they will see, not a blank wall, but people they know going about their daily lives.

And the Church tower will continue to stand as