An Upland Village

By Anna Buchan (1877-1948)

Introduction: Anna Buchan was a grand-daughter of John Masterton, a farmer who lived at Broughton Green, and she was a sister of John Buchan, the famous novelist. Anna was less famous but she also wrote novels, under the pseudonym, O. Douglas. Around the age of 30 she moved to Bank House, Peebles, where she lived for the rest of her life. She came frequently to Broughton, where she visited the Mastertons at Broughton Green and sometimes stayed at Gala Lodge, which her mother had inherited in 1918. Anna's book *Unforgettable, Unforgotten*, was a family chronicle, published in 1945, and includes some interesting details about her times in Broughton: it is available to read on-line. A couple of short pieces she wrote about Broughton were published after her death in *Farewell to Priorsford*, and one of them is reproduced here.

AN UPLAND VILLAGE

There is a village on the high road to London by Moffat, through which the S.M.T. buses run many times daily. *Brochtoun*, the country folk call it, which to my mind is prettier than Broughton.

It is a village that wins and holds deep affection. We used to wonder as children why the railway people went to the trouble of printing the name of the station in big letters on a board; it seemed to us that everyone should know by instinct when they came to the hub of the universe. We saw nothing to laugh at in the story of the sentimental native, who, on going back to his work in the city refused to have his boots cleaned, remarking, "*Brochtoun's dirt's bonny!* "

In our earliest childhood it was the quietest of villages. If we did not reckon time by "the day the chaise ga'ed through Elsrickle," at least we could easily have counted all the vehicles that passed in a week. An infrequent carriage and pair, some gigs and slow-moving farm-carts, a baker's van or two, and – great excitement – the pigman's cart. The "pigman", let it be explained, had no connection with swine, but gave "pigs" or dishes in exchange for old clothes.

Somehow, looking back, it always seems to be afternoon. I see the shadow of the houses lying black across the road; I hear the summer sounds, hens clucking sleepily, the hum of the bees among the flowers in the garden, the *chink-chink* from the smiddy at the burnside.

We endure much noise and *smeekiness* in the march of progress. I wonder what the old inhabitants would think if they could come back and see their village now, see the stream of swift motor-cars, buses and great lorries which never ceases, while hens fly squawking, dogs shrink aside, and timid pedestrians hug the dyke.

We used to know every soul in the village. At the corner by the burnside the smith lived. A mighty man was he, and greatly feared by us. He certainly did not suffer mischievous children gladly, and if we played pranks in his smiddy he was after us with a horse-whip, while we scudded up the braes beyond the burn like human collies.

Next door lived Peggy Leithen, who gave a ha'penny to every beggar that came to the door murmuring as she did so, "Charity covereth a multitude of sins." Then came "Grannie", the tiny mother of many stalwart sons. They all grew up and did well in the world, but she and her man "Tam" would take no help from them, preferring to remain as they had begun. A favourite saying of "Grannie's" was "I may be sodger clad, but I'm major-minded." She was a dungeon of learning about the old tales and *owrewords* of the country side. Once she astonished us by remarking that Tam's socks were no better than "Penelope's web", for what she mended in the morning was a hole again at night. We loved to sit by her fireside, sucking sticks of *gundy*, while Tam read the *Peeblesshire Advertiser* aloud to himself, in a sing-song voice, beginning with the advertisements and going right through, and "Grannie" told us stories that had come down by word of mouth from one generation to another. Wonderful tales they were; true, too, about the beautiful lady – Mrs. Murray of Broughton – who had once lived in a braw house at the top of the long venue that leads past the Old Mill and up to the Green Glen and who "took up" wi' Charlie an' his men …

There is no big house now, only a shepherd's cottage, but there is still a well called "Prince Charlie's Well."

And the lady's husband … He had to fly, but came back to seek refuge with a relative at Kilbuch – disguised as a ploughman. The servants thought it strange that he should sit in the dining-room and drink "claurit", and they talked; so Murray of Broughton fell into the hands of King George's soldiers. How he saved his head is known to everyone …

It was generally summer when we were in Tweedside, but I like to think of our village at the time of year, when the snow lay thick on the hills, and the voice of Tweed was stilled, and the roar of the curling stones called from the ponds, mingled with shouts of: "*Soop her up, man, soop her up: na, dinna; leave her alane – Oh! Ye donnert idiot!*"

Here a common taste sets all classes ln a level: the laird, the minister, the farmer and the labourer meet on common ground. It is told of a sheriff of the county that his bosom friend on such occasions was one Rob Tait, a most noted player, but an inveterate poacher. "Come on, Rob, ma man," the Sheriff would say, "show us what ye can do … Eh man, but that's great – that's the kind of shot ye read about in books: man, Rob, I love ye …" A few weeks later the speaker would be on the Bench, the player arraigned before him for one of his manifold offences. "Robert Tait, sixty days," would come the sentence in cold judicial tones, and Rob would take it all in good part, knowing that when the winter returned there would be no estrangement.

And the evenings after the strenuous days in the open air!

Those parties round about the New Year, when they played at "the bools", and then gathered round the polished table to sing songs and toast each other! Then Airchie Aitken, who knew how to *humour* a song, would begin:

“Come sit ye doon, ma cronies, an’ gie us yer crack:

Let the wind tak’ the cares of this warld on its back!

When the hoose is rinnin’ round aboot it’s time eneuch tae flit,

But we’ve aye been provided for an’ sae wull we yet”

Chorus, gentlemen, please –

An’ sae wull we yet, ay, an’ sae wull we yet …”

I don’t suppose we could give up one of our modern comforts, but that does not keep us from looking back rather wistfully across the years to those spacious, leisurely days when men had that strength born of “toil unsevered from tranquillity.”
