

**CAKES, LEEKS, PUDDINGS  
AND POTATOES: A LECTURE  
ON THE NATIONALITIES OF  
THE UNITED KINGDOM**

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Cakes, Leeks, Puddings and Potatoes: A Lecture on the Nationalities of the United Kingdom by  
George Seton

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PUDDINGS, AND POTATOES'

A LECTURE ON THE

*Nationalities of the United Kingdom*

BY GEORGE SETON, ADVOCATE  
M.A. OXON. ETC.



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Lane fund

'Hear, Land o' Cakes, and brither Scots,  
Frae Maidenkirk to Johnny Groat's;  
If there's a hole in a' your coats,  
I rede you tent it:  
A chiel's amang you takin' notes,  
And, faith, he'll prent it.'

'CAKES, LEEKS, PUDDINGS,  
AND POTATOES.'

THE mysterious words which compose the title of this Lecture have long formed the subject of a bumper at the annual dinner on 'George Heriot's Day.' They are intended to represent the four constituent portions of the United Kingdom, viz., Scotland, Wales, England, and Ireland; and my object on the present occasion is to say a few words respecting some of the more striking characteristics of the inhabitants of these formerly distinct, but now happily united countries. Each of the four is made up of districts or counties, and each district or county is made up of clans and families. Now, the most careless observer must have remarked that many families, as well as counties, are distinguished by certain characteristics, not only physical, but also intellectual and moral. This is undoubtedly the case on the south side of the Tweed, where many of the great historical 'Houses' have long been characterized by remarkable peculiarities, and where the inhabitants of different counties are still essentially distinct. Thus, although all rejoicing in the proud appellation of 'Englishman,' the London Cockney, the *Yorkshire* yeoman, and the *Zumersetshire* peasant present several distinctive features. In Ireland, also, the inhabitants of the north and south are far from similar; while Scotland furnishes numerous examples of my proposition, both in the case of families and counties, to a few of which I shall here refer.



In his *Popular Rhymes of Scotland*, Mr. Robert Chambers gives several instances of the former, chiefly supplied to him, as he himself once informed me, by a very competent authority—Sir Walter Scott. Among others he specifies, with illustrative comments, the ‘gallant Grahams,’ the ‘gay Gordons,’ the ‘light Lindsays,’ the ‘haughty Hamiltons,’ the ‘handsome Hays,’ the ‘saucy Scotts,’ the ‘muckle-mou’ed Murrays,’ ‘the wild Macraus,’ the ‘greedy Campbells,’ and the ‘dirty Dalrymples.’ Even in my own experience, I have occasionally met with very striking examples of some of these characteristics. Mr. Hannay, in one of his *Essays from the Quarterly Review*, comments upon the same peculiarities; and in his interesting notice of the House of Douglas, he refers to the phrase ‘doughty Douglas,’ as being not a mere unmeaning alliteration, but as admirably expressive of the ‘pluck’ and manhood of the race which produced so many distinguished heroes.

In like manner, in the case of certain localities, special characteristics are frequently associated with the inhabitants. Thus, the people of Lothian and Berwickshire are flatteringly described as ‘Loudon louts, Merse brutes, and Lammermuir whaups;’ the inhabitants of the three great commercial towns of the west, as ‘Glasgow people, Greenock folk, and Paisley bodies;’ the natives of the Carse of Gowrie, in Perthshire, as the ‘carles of the Carse;’ and the male population of Kincardineshire, as the ‘merry men o’ the Mearns.’ Again, while some of the inhabitants of the ‘kingdom’ of Fife are considered to be slightly subject to *lunar* influences, as indicated by the term ‘Fifeish,’ the legal gentlemen of the capital of Angus are not very enviably characterized as the ‘drunken writers of Forfar.’ In allusion to this unfortunate reproach, at a public meeting held several years ago with reference to the proposed drainage of a lake in the neighbourhood of that town, the late Earl of Strathmore

said that he believed the cheapest method of draining the loch would be to throw a few hogsheads of good whisky into the water, and set the *drunken writers* of Forfar to drink it up! The same idea appears to have been present to Professor Aytoun's mind when he composed his amusing ballad entitled 'The Massacre of the Macpherson,' in which the following passage occurs:—

'Fhairshon had a son,  
Who married Noah's daughter,  
And nearly spoiled ta Flood,  
By trinking up ta water.

'Which he would have done,  
I at least pelieve it,  
Had ta mixture peen  
Only half Glenlivet.'

Spalding the annalist frequently speaks of the 'brave toun' of Aberdeen, which is also referred to in the ballad of the 'Battle of Harlaw.' Independently of their *bravery*, the Aberdonians have long been celebrated for their extra sagacity and shrewdness; and without venturing to allege that they are in the habit of looking after the 'main chance' more zealously than Scotchmen in general, there can be no doubt that they are fully 'longer-headed' than the majority of their countrymen. An English lawyer remarked to Lord Elibank that, at the Union, the law of England should have been extended all over Scotland. 'I cannot say how that might have answered our purpose,' said Lord Patrick, who was never at a loss for an appropriate reply; 'but it would scarce have suited *yours*, since by this time the Aberdeen advocates (or attorneys) would have possessed themselves of all the business in Westminster Hall.'

Again, with respect to physical characteristics, even in these days of extended intercourse and increased intermarriage, various parts of the kingdom present very dissimilar aspects. The marked difference of appearance between the Highlanders and Lowlanders must be familiar to the most casual observer; and the same remark applies, with equal force, to the inhabitants of the rural districts on the one

hand, and the sea-board population on the other. Every one must have been struck by the fine physical appearance of both the men and the women of many of the fishing villages on the east coast of Scotland; and as a single example, I cannot do better than point to a settlement in the immediate neighbourhood of Edinburgh, viz., Newhaven. I am disposed to think, moreover, that a decided intellectual difference is, in a general way, discernible in the different races which make up the population of our country. Morally, there can be no doubt that very striking differences exist in the various districts of Scotland; in some cases, more remarkable and unaccountable than those which present themselves when we compare the country at large with other nations. A friend of my own, now a learned professor in the University of Edinburgh, has long seriously averred that the Celt is 'an animal incapable of civilisation;' but I certainly do not incline to take quite so extreme a view. Sir Walter Scott remarked that 'if the Scotch Highlanders were really descended in the main from the Irish blood, it seemed to him the most curious and difficult problem in the world to account for the startling contrasts in so many points of their character, temper, and demeanour.' 'How is it,' he added, 'that our solemn, proud, dignified Celt, with a soul so alive to what is elevating and even elegant in poetry and feeling, is so super-eminently dull as respects all the lighter play of fancy? The Highlander never understands wit or humour; Paddy, despite all his misery and privations, overflows with both.' The Highlander's indolence and aversion to labour—in plain English, his lazy habits—are well known to the Southrons, and are sometimes explained as the result of his ludicrous dignity and self-importance—features which present themselves in all grades of the Gaelic population. 'The stately step of a piper,' is a proverb in Scotland, which reminds me of an anecdote of a certain noble Lord when in