

CHAPTER XI.

Agriculture in Sutherlandshire—Facilities of reaching the County—Caledonian Canal—Travelling in Sutherland—Inns, excellent management of—Lairg—Tongue—Durness—Scowrie—Inchnadamph—Inveran—Conclusion of Sutherlandshire.

I WILL now finish my sketches (hurried and imperfect as they are) of Sutherlandshire by recommending my readers, who may wish for a week's enjoyment, to follow my example and travel round that county; there are few who would not derive much pleasure and amusement by doing so. The agriculturist and improver of land would be interested by seeing the different stages of husbandry in the county, from the perfectly-cultivated farms and cattle of the southern parts, to the rude and primitive method of raising small crops of oats amongst the rocks of the north and north-west, where the ground is turned up by ancient and quaintly-shaped substitutes for spades—ploughing being quite impracticable in many places; at the same time that about Tongue, near as it is to the extreme northern point of Britain, both the mode

of cultivation and the crops would do credit to many a southern county of England.

The sheep, black cattle, ponies, etc., in many parts of the county, are not to be surpassed in Britain. The naturalist, whether his tastes incline to botany, ornithology, or any other line of this interesting pursuit, will find ample means of enriching his cabinets; while I can safely promise the lover of fine and varied scenery a treat that would repay him for a far more difficult and weary journey.

There are three ways of reaching Inverness from Edinburgh: by the steamers which ply along the east coast; by the Highland road, which passes through the centre of the country; or by Aberdeen: the latter is the least interesting road, as it passes through the bleakest and least beautiful part of Scotland. The Edinburgh and Inverness steamer, the "Duke of Richmond," is comfortably enough arranged, and makes good way through the water, but the number of stoppages at different ports is tiresome to the traveller whose object is to reach the end of his journey. The Highland road has a paucity of public conveyances on it at present, but passes through a fine and characteristic range of country. I have occasionally taken the circuitous route going from Edinburgh to Glasgow, and

thence up the Caledonian Canal to Inverness; and this is, after all, though apparently rather longer, much the most interesting and the least fatiguing manner of reaching Inverness. Not being exposed to rough water, the passengers by these steamboats are able to enjoy the beauties of the whole route; and they are constant and varied throughout the voyage. Independent of the very great natural beauty of the country through which the canal passes, there is a constant succession of objects of historical and legendary interest: while the captains of the boats are well versed in the history of these localities, and also are most obliging and attentive to all strangers, in pointing out and explaining everything that is worth seeing. The managers and proprietors of these steamers at Glasgow are most ready and obligingly anxious to attend to the comfort and amusement of travellers, and to aid them in their movements in any direction, in the most easy and economical manner. No complaint (if one is ever necessary), made against any of the servants of the company, for neglect of their duty, etc., will pass unheeded by the proprietors. In fact, the tourist can scarcely be in better hands, or take a trip that will repay him better than that by the Caledonian Canal.

From Inverness to Tain or Invergordon the way

is easy by land or sea. Once there, the traveller in Sutherlandshire has two ways of going through the county—either by hiring a horse and suitable machine, or by travelling by the mail-carriage, a kind of open phaeton, which takes (as well as I remember) several passengers: this vehicle goes twice a week northwards, and as often south. I rather prefer the more independent way of hiring a horse, which ought to be done for four or five shillings a day, exclusive of his keep. Although hay is not always to be had, I never failed getting good oats at the inns, and good grass, so that a horse is never at a loss. From Tain or Invergordon the best route to the north of Sutherland is to Ardye, near Bonar Bridge; a good inn and excellent landlord. From thence to Lairg is eleven miles.

At Lairg is another excellent inn, in a most beautiful situation. Lairg to Aultnaharrow, twenty-two miles; thence to Tongue, seventeen miles; Tongue to Durness, eighteen miles, with a resting-inn at Heilam Ferry, or Loch Erriboll, about half-way.

At Durness I should be content to pass many a day. The inn is one of the best in Sutherland, and the landlady, Mrs. Ross, makes her visitors as comfortable as they can desire; at the same time,

her charges are as moderate as the most economical traveller could wish. The country round Durness is full of magnificently wild scenery, and the sheltered little sandy bays afford excellent bathing.

Durness, by Rhiconnich, to Scowrie, is about twenty-six miles. Scowrie should be another resting-place: there is much to see, and a good inn. For my own part, I have a most pleasing recollection of Scowrie, and of the hospitality of Mr. M'Ivor (the Duke of Sutherland's manager in that district).

Scowrie to Inchnadamph, by Kyleska Ferry, still takes the traveller through a country every step of which is most splendidly wild and picturesque. Inchnadamph Inn, at the foot of Ben More, and at the head of Loch Assynt, is another good resting-place. Loch Inver, four miles from Inchnadamph, has also an excellent inn, and is well worth going to see. To Inveran Inn, on the Shin river, from Inchnadamph is thirty-two miles; but with two inns on the way, Altnagalcanach and Oykel, at both of which tolerable accommodation may be had. Inveran is a small house, but as cleanly and comfortably kept as any inn in Britain. I never knew an angler on the Shin river who did not say the same of the inn at Inveran; the landlady, in her

homely "motherly" way, makes her guests so comfortable that they always leave her with regret.

All the inns on the Duke of Sutherland's property (almost without exception) are well kept, cleanly, and moderate in their charges, to a degree that the most suspicious and fastidious cockney traveller can find no fault with ; and there is none of that paltry imposition which one meets with so frequently in remote places in other parts of the Highlands, where a stranger is looked upon as fair game for plunder.

My tastes have generally led me to the north and north-west of Sutherland, but there is also much to interest and much to see in the eastern parts of the county. Going by Dornoch and Golspie, both excellent inns, thence along the coast to Brora and Helmsdale, two fishing-colonies, and turning northwards to Bighouse, the traveller can either return by Tongue or by Strathnaver, a beautiful green strath, which takes him to Aultnaharrow.

My description of the different routes is short and imperfect, as I do not pretend to write a "road" or "guide" book ; but I simply give this sketch as the result of my own note-book, hoping that it may be of use to any one wishing to see the most interesting county in Britain, and one

of the least visited. Ross-shire, Inverness-shire, etc., lie more in the way of grouse-shooters and sportsmen, and are consequently more known and written about than Sutherland, although the latter can be travelled through with more ease, comfort, and economy than either of the other named counties.

I must conclude my rambles in Sutherland, but hope that some more able and scientific pen than mine will be found to describe the objects of natural history and of interest in the county, which I have merely glanced at. These notes I now commit to the public with all their errors and imperfections, hoping that the fact of the incidents and remarks contained in them, being the result of the personal and unprejudiced observation of one more skilled in using the rifle than the pen, will induce the reader to excuse their faults, and to look more favourably on my scribbling than any merit of the notes themselves may deserve.

