

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY AND EXPLANATORY DESCRIPTION OF THE LEWS AND OUR SHOOTING THERE.

MY ACCIDENT—STILL DEVOTED TO FIELD-SPORTS—MEANS OF LOCOMOTION
—AT SCALISCRO IN THE LEWS—‘STOMACHS TURNED INSIDE OUT’—
AMONG THE STAGS—OUR LITTLE LODGE—A PRETTY LOOK-OUT—‘THE
LONG ISLAND’—THE FOREST OF MORSGAIL—HILL OF CALDERSHALL
—VILLAGE OF FEINACLEIT—COMPENSATING RESULTS FOR THE ABSENCE
OF TREES.

MANY years ago, in India, a horse I was riding reared, fell back, with me underneath, and left me with a fractured spine. I eventually recovered my health to a great extent, but remained quite paralysed in the lower limbs; and from that day to this have been quite unable to walk or even to stand.

Apart from all considerations attending the abrupt and early termination of a career, at that time, not without some little future promise, this terrible accident was in other respects, not unnaturally, a source of grievous trouble; for I was an active man, and devoted to field-sports.

As time went on, and I became more habituated to the new conditions of my life, and the deprivation with which the All-Wise had seen fit to visit me, I essayed what, at first, I had not ventured to think possible.

I fished a little from a well-cushioned wheelchair at accessible places in the lake country. Then I got bolder, and tried some of the Sutherlandshire lakes, and actually killed a salmon in the river Shin, all either from chair or from a stretcher, on which I reclined in a boat.

Waxing bolder still, I cast about for some means which would abolish the necessity of being lifted about in a man's arms when moved from one position to another. This was very trying and disagreeable, especially when travelling, or at other times, in public. After considerable cogitation and exchange of ideas with a country carriage-maker in a small way, I devised a sort of little iron frame-work chair, without hind-legs, which would receive my cushions and myself, and be capable of being placed on an ordinary chair, or transferred, with me still sitting in it, to carriage, cab, or railway carriage. Having succeeded so far, it occurred to me that, by

attaching this chair to poles, and placing men between those poles, I might, by means of their legs, in some measure provide substitutes for my own, and be carried to places unattainable by chair. The possibility of riding a pony had occurred to me, and I had a chair-saddle specially constructed; but I could not provide the necessary support, not having the power to sit upright without support, and, practically, I found it impossible, and was obliged to discard all idea of locomotion in that direction.

With regard to the poles, however, I fully succeeded. With one man in the shafts, so to speak, in front, and one similarly placed behind, with two, one on each side, to assist the latter, he having the principal weight, I can manage to ascend high hills, and get carried to places and over ground which would have been quite inaccessible to a pony. In fine, I shoot over dogs, and even stalk deer with success, though of course it is shooting under difficulties.

These details are necessary, in order to let the reader understand the conditions under which sport was pursued as narrated in the first part of this little book. Indeed, whatever interest

attaches to such is mainly derived from these. But, apart from this, it would indeed be to me a source of unqualified gratification, if the publication of these details should prove the means of encouraging some other poor stricken fellow-sufferer to resort to some similar contrivance, by means of which he might once more enjoy, in however limited a fashion, the sports of the field, or even be brought into more immediate contact with Nature than is feasible when confined to the locomotive capabilities of a wheelchair.

Having thus, so far, triumphed over obstacles in the pursuit of sport, in the year 1880, in conjunction with my eldest brother, General Newall, R.A., I took the little shooting of Scaliscro, in Lewis; and it is the incidents of sport and out-door life there during the seasons of the following four years that I propose to describe.

The most northern island of the outer Hebrides may appear a somewhat distant *locale* to select by a man in my position; but one has to go far afield now-a-days, unless endowed with such means as render expense no object. Moreover,

I had shot in Lewis, where the birds lie close throughout the season, a great object to one situated as I am; I love a wild country also. Above all, on the Scaliscro ground, I knew that there was every chance of getting deer without having to pay forest prices. This it was, principally, which determined our choice, perhaps I should rather say mine.

I found that by taking a deck-cabin on the *Claymore*, or one of Mr. MacBrayne's other steamers from Glasgow, I got to Stornoway with far less change and worry than if travelling the same distance by land. With our own servants on board, we were able to get our meals brought to our airy cabin. There existed, therefore, no necessity to descend into the hot, whisky and food-stricken atmosphere of the regions below. The beauty, too, of the scenery, as the steamer threads its way among the various islands, repays one for many inconveniences; for some of the finest scenery in Scotland exists among those fiords, with which the wild west coast and its islands are so frequently and deeply indented.

Once securely packed in my berth, I bid defiance to storms, for former experience in various

seas had rendered me tolerably exempt from the *mal-de-mer* which so detracts from the enjoyment of ship life.

On the whole, we made several of these little voyages with varying experiences. Only once, however, had we to face anything really bad, and on that occasion we came round the Mull of Cantyre in something very like a whole gale; and to be *on the Mull* in such is an experience neither pleasant nor desirable.

At Greenock, as in Glasgow, it was blowing hard, and many would-be voyagers declined to venture. I asked the mate, an old acquaintance, what he thought of it, and what it was likely to be round the Mull.

‘Weel, captain,’ he said, meditatively, ‘I’m thinking it will no be just so bad as we expect.’

This reply seemed to me of somewhat doubtful import—a little ambiguous, indeed—and did not bring much comfort to my anxious spirit. Neither did an observation I overheard one old sailor make to another, and I fear he did it in a spirit of fiendish malice, hoping that it would be overheard by many and sundry, for he actually chuckled as he gave utterance to the following

vulgar remark: 'There'll be a many stamicks turned inside out the nicht.'

He was coarse, but he was right. Few escaped on that occasion, but it surely must be considered demoniacal to make such an observation in the hearing of the predestined sufferers. And yet I was weak enough, only last year, on a voyage to Skye, to give that old fellow—not a bad old salt, in some respects—the wherewithal to gratify his taste for whisky, because he knew me on my first trip to Lewis.

But worse, perhaps, than the Mull, is Ardnurchan Point; and the Minch, the narrow sea which separates Lewis from the mainland, is sometimes very boisterous, like all these Hebridean waters.

Before I proceed to record the deaths or escapes of stags, and other incidents, it may be as well that I should briefly describe the situation of our little lodge and shootings, a sketch of which is appended. It has, indeed, become almost classical ground owing to its lying on that Loch Roag, on the west coast of Lewis, where Mr. Black, in his 'Princess of Thule,' has laid the principal scenes of his story, and portions of

the scenery of which he has so graphically described. These form no unsuitable background for the beautiful Sheila with her salutation, 'And are you ferry well?'

Mr. Anderson Smith, too, has written a most interesting little work on the life, manners, and customs of the Lews people.* He was for some time resident at Carloway, the other extremity of Loch Roag from Scaliscro, and has described that portion of it. The narrow fiord, however, called Little Loch Roag, seems to have escaped his observation. This runs for some three miles into the hills on the south, and is separated from the parent loch by a narrow channel at one point not one hundred yards wide, through which the tide, both ebb and flow, boils with all the impetuosity of a rushing river, and forms a sort of miniature 'corrievrechan.'

Our little lodge was situated on the east side of this inlet about half-way up.

Lewis, the Lews, the Long Island—for by each it is indifferently known—is, roughly speaking, sixty miles long from Butt of Lewis to Harris Sound, and about half that number broad in the

* Lewsiana.

broadest part, from Gallon Head on the west to Cabay Point on the east. The natives, I think, more commonly adopt the second title, but many, and Scott among them, the last. In the 'Lord of Isles,' he refers to it:

'And all who hear the Minch's roar,
On the Long Island's lonely shore.'

The northern part of the island is for the most part composed of wide, undulating stretches of peat and rocky moorland, broken by innumerable lochs, but only diversified here and there by hills of any great elevation. This gradually alters as one goes south, and the flat moorland merges into small hills and rocky eminences. These, still increasing in number and size, culminate in the mountain ranges of Harris, which, though distinguished by another name, forms the most southern portion of the Long Island.

Most of the Scaliscro ground was composed of small hills of a few hundred feet in height, and these were broken into innumerable hillocks, or tumuli, affording fine stalking-ground. I believe it is principally in the Alpine solitudes of the Harris hills that the deer breed, but the lower hills and plains afford pasturage when the upper

hills are untenable by deer, so one tract subserves the other.

The forest of Morsgail, which marched with us on the south, lies between Harris and our little moor of Scaliscro and the Grimersta shootings. More eastward, the whole or partially-forested shootings of Aline and Park separate it from the more northern portions of the island, which are principally grouse-ground. Uig, which, though not altogether forested, must be pretty clear of sheep in the higher parts very early in the season, affords a large number of stags—from twenty to twenty-five, I think—and lies just opposite to Scaliscro across Little Loch Roag on the west. All deer, therefore, must travel through Morsgail before reaching us. The former is good for about fifty stags.

In former years the late Sir James Matheson retained this shooting in his own hands for the use of his own friends, but of late years it has been let, and it was our good-fortune to have in the lessee a most kind and friendly neighbour, whose early death, since we left, many, like ourselves, have sincerely to deplore.

Since Morsgail has been let and regularly shot,

deer have become scarcer on Scaliscro, and good stags only occasionally run the gauntlet with safety and reach us, though hinds and young ones are frequently to be seen.

Our little lodge had a pretty look-out across the loch here about a third of a mile across. Beyond the rugged shores of this was a tract of rough, but tolerably level ground, meeting some hills of moderate height. In the distance beyond these appeared the tops of the big hills Taival, Taminy-Sal, and others, rising to about fifteen hundred feet. To the left and south, and looking up the loch, which increases to three-quarters-of-a-mile in breadth, we have a grand view of the Harris hills, embracing the tops of Cleisham Langa, the Waterloos, other high hills being shut out by Sgonin and the intervening hills of the Morsgail forest, into some of the corries of which we could look from the height behind our lodge.

Near the head of the loch, and separated from it by our south ground, stands the hill of Caldershall Beg, about two miles from our lodge. Beyond this is Caldershall Mohr, both belonging to Morsgail. I call attention to these hills especially, as my good friend Mr. H. J. had given

me permission to try them for a deer or two towards the end of the season. They were tolerably easy of access, and it is there I propose, in the first place, to ask the reader to accompany me on a stalk.

To the north, looking down the loch, the only prominent feature was the rounded hill of Suaineval. The crags and small eminences about the narrows, a couple of miles away, shut out any view of the open sea; but this could readily be seen by ascending any of the tops behind the lodge.

On the opposite side, a mile-and-a-half lower down, could be distinguished some of the huts of the village of Einacleit. On our side, the nearest village was at the furthest extremity of our shooting, four or five miles away, while our nearest neighbours were the residents at Morsgail Lodge, about the same distance. We were about twenty-four miles from Stornoway, the island town, and nine from Garrynahine inn and post-office. It will thus be seen that my taste for wildness of locality might be considered as fairly gratified.

One great and compensating result of the

entire absence of trees was that the scenery never looked wintry except from snow. The forlorn and cheerless aspect of bare branches and fallen leaves was entirely absent. The general colouring, too, was still bright in late autumn. The bent grass, which, for the most part, covered the surface of the country and mingled with the heather, in summer of a brown-pink hue, changed to yellow and orange as the season advanced. Later on it still retained a bright and cheerful colouring, as it faded to an orange-brown, so that the general aspect was very dissimilar to that we generally associate with winter's or late autumn's garb.

I have endeavoured so to arrange my matter as that each chapter may be taken up and read as a separate sketch of sport or description of autumn life in the Lews. In Part II. each chapter similarly narrates some incident or incidents of sport in India, and details the circumstances under which they occurred and their pictorial surroundings.

The illustrations are my own sketches, and will, I trust, prove faithful indications of the contents.

Will the reader kindly bear in mind that the manuscript of this book was written in 1887. This is necessary to account for dates referred to.