

COMPARATIVELY RECENT DESTRUCTION OF  
THE FORESTS.

---

AUTHOR.—Your legend, my dear Grant, is extremely valuable as matter of history. The preservation of the circumstances which fortuitously caused the destruction of one vast extent of forest, enables us easily to imagine those which may have contributed to the annihilation of all the rest.

GRANT.—Doubtless, it does.

AUTHOR.—It appears, that many of those tracts of woodland must have perished at periods much more recent than we should at first sight be led to suppose ; and it now occurs to me, that I lately heard enough to convince me that this was the case with the forests covering the bare country you are now looking at. Both of you know enough of it to be aware that the upper part of Strathspey, far

beyond those distant hills, is somewhat about eight and twenty or thirty miles from Cawdor Castle ; and you know that bare heaths, such as we see before us, now cover the whole of that stretch of country, with two exceptions ; I mean that of the picturesque forest of Dulnan, immediately to the south of the Bridge of Carr, and that presented by the now almost exhausted forest of Dulsie, the remnants of which you may see behind us yonder to our right, running along the trough of the river Findhorn, and covering part of the hills to the north of it. In the whole of the space I have mentioned, these are the only fragments of woodland left to interrupt the dull monotony of the moors.

CLIFFORD.—I was over it all this very season. It is not very easy for me to conceive that it could have ever been wooded at all. 'Tis excellent grouse ground every bit of it. But, as to timber, if there be any, it is all buried beneath the heathery sod.

AUTHOR.—True. Yet a respectable man, perfectly worthy of credit, assured a friend of mine, that in his grandfather's younger days, the state of this part of the country was very different. The old man he alluded to lived near Aviemore. He

sent his son, who was the father of my friend's informant, on some errand to Fort-George. He had himself become blind from age, and as he had not travelled that way for many years, he earnestly questioned his son after his return. "What sort of a country is that you have been seeing?" said he; and when his son had described it as having pretty much the same appearance as it now wears, "Och, hey!" exclaimed the old man, "what a change!—When I was a youth, I used to go in underneath the shade of the forest on this side of the woods of Dulnan, and I hardly ever saw the sun again till I got out of it below Cawdor Castle!"

GRANT.—That is a very curious fact. Why, that would bring the existence of the forests of this part of the country down to within three generations; and, even allowing that your friend's informant was advanced in life when he told the story, and that his father and grandfather were rather patriarchal in the endurance of their lives, yet I think the evidence you have brought forward would enable us safely to say, that these moors we now look upon were still covered with wood at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

AUTHOR.—Such, certainly, ought to be our con-

clusion. Is it not surprising, then, that I have never been able to pick up any account, legendary or otherwise, of the circumstances which must have produced the extirpation of these forests at a period comparatively so recent.

CLIFFORD.—From the roots and trunks which are left, it would appear that the trees were almost entirely pines.

AUTHOR.—The pine is certainly the prevailing tree, but it is by no means the only one. Birches, alders, and hazels are common, and oaks of immense size, some of them three or four feet in diameter for a great way up the stem, are dug up in various parts of these moors, and many of them in situations where it is now matter of astonishment that such monarchs of the wood could have been produced; for they are found high on the hills yonder above Dulsie, as well as in the mosses far up the courses of the rivers Dorback and Divie.

CLIFFORD, (*with enthusiasm.*)—With what a different scene should we now be surrounded, if we could conjure up all these ancient tenants of the soil, like the reanimated bodies of dead warriors from their graves, as told in some fairy tale of my childhood, to live again, and to wave their leafy

banners triumphantly over these hills and hollows!

GRANT.—It would be a very different scene indeed.

AUTHOR.—Aye, truly it would. Conceive the bleak face of these moors so covered, and then carry your imagination back into remote ages, and let us endeavour to people it in fancy with the animals which must have roamed through its endless wildernesses, and couched within the protection of its almost impervious thickets.

CLIFFORD.—What a country for sport!

AUTHOR.—Let us picture to ourselves the myriads of birds of all kinds which winged their flight over the boundless ocean of its foliage, as it was blown into billowy motion by the breezes, or which nestled among its branches as it quietly settled itself to repose, and we shall not only have produced out of these wastes a gorgeous landscape, most romantic in its character, but we shall have opened a wide field for the speculations of the naturalist.

CLIFFORD.—Yes; but, talking of the romantic character of your landscape, what would all that be to the ancient figures to be found in it?—Fancy, only fancy the figures!—Think of the dress, the arms,

the hunting-implements, and the houses of its human inhabitants!—Would we could have but one glimpse of them truly as they were!

AUTHOR.—If you were to go far enough back for them, you would fill our forests with a race of men, rude as the scenes in which they lived and roamed, and the whole sketch would be one for which we could hardly now find any really existing resemblance, save in the wilds of North America.

GRANT.—Your view of the matter is probably correct enough.

AUTHOR.—I believe it to be very correct; and, now I think of it, a discovery was made some eight or ten years ago, which would seem to bear evidence to the former existence of this ideal picture, in which we have been indulging. Some labourers, who were employed in digging in a moss on Lord Moray's estate of Brae-Moray, to our left there, found a curious bundle, which they took from under ten feet of a solid peat stratum. The bundle was about two feet long by one foot thick, and in form it very much resembled such a cloak-bag as you may have at times seen strapped behind a horseman's saddle. A careless inspection of it would

have led one to believe that it was covered with leather tanned with the hair on it, and it looked, for all the world, like that of one of those strange old trunks, which were frequently to be seen bristling like bears among the uncouth baggage on the top of our ancient *Flies* and *Diligences*. When I first saw it, a piece of it had been torn up by the curious peasants who had found it, and the aperture they had thus made enabled us to become instantly acquainted with the nature of the mass within, which proved to be tallow.

GRANT.—Tallow!—*Adipocere*, I suppose. That fatty substance into which animal fibre is frequently converted by long immersion in water.

AUTHOR.—No such thing, I assure you. It was pure tallow; and the whole appearances connected with it were very easily explained. It was evident that the tallow fresh taken from the recent carcase had been pressed into the raw hide the moment it had been stripped from the newly slain animal, and the whole had been stitched or rather laced up with thongs cut from the *skin itself*. The perfect state of the leather into which the skin had been converted, exhibited a beautiful proof of the extent to which the chemical prin-

ciple *tannin* exists in peat moss. No modern tan-pit could have performed the process more effectually. Nor were the preservative properties of moss less established by it; for the tallow was quite entire and uncorrupted, and perfectly inodorous and tasteless. On first inspection it presented a hard appearance, so much so indeed, that it might have been mistaken for chalk; but the moment heat was applied, it melted as readily as fresh tallow would have done.

CLIFFORD.—By your account of this strange mass, it might have been valuable for the candle-makers, if not for culinary purposes. Pray, what became of it?

AUTHOR.—The noble proprietor of the estate where it was found gave it me at my request; and with his permission I sent it to the museum of the Edinburgh University. But whilst it remained in my possession, I never could look at it without its bringing to my mind what we have so often read of in North American travels,—I mean the Indian practice of killing an elk, or a deer, or a buffalo,—bundling up the tallow of the creature in its raw hide with all manner of expedition, with the future purpose of making *pemmican* of it, and



so marching off with it on their shoulders, leaving the flesh to feed the wolves and the bears. And really I cannot divest myself of the conviction that the mass of tallow I have described belonged to a period of the history of this country, when the state of its inhabitants differed but little from that of those nomade North American tribes.

GRANT.—It certainly does appear to give no small degree of probability to your fancy.

CLIFFORD.—Nay, but might not some of your cattle-lifters of a much later date have performed all that you suppose your savages to have done ?

AUTHOR.—The circumstance of the bundle being found beneath ten feet of solid moss, which had formed over it since the time it was left there, together with the various layers of trees found in the same bog, lying one over the other, would seem to forbid any such apparently modern explanation, and to throw back the period of its deposition to a very remote era indeed.

GRANT.—Undoubtedly ; and the probability is, that the tallow was the produce of no vulgar beast, but rather that of some of the bisons or magnificent wild cattle of the ancient Caledonian forests.

AUTHOR.—Certainly. But I have since had

another lump of tallow sent me, which had all the evidences of a much more modern origin. It was found on the farm of Drumlochan, on the south side of the Findhorn, about a mile below Dulsie Bridge yonder; and it was covered by a little more than two feet of moss. Its form was very peculiar; for it was round one way and flat the other, like a North Wiltshire cheese, which it very much resembled in shape and size. It had indeed every appearance of having been pressed into a cheese shape, until it had become firm enough to be removed. It had no covering of any kind on it; and although in hardness and consistence it was quite like the matter of the other mass, yet it must strike every one that its form, and the comparatively small depth at which it was found, render it probable that its origin was much more recent. I sent it to the Museum of the Northern Institution at Inverness.

CLIFFORD.—Ah! I shall be right at last, I find. This surely may have been the work of some of these freebooters of whom I have heard you speak,—of some of those very *limmers*, for example, who, as you once told me, stole Mr. Russel's cattle.

AUTHOR.—Oh no. That story is much too modern even for this last mass of tallow.

GRANT,—Bravo! Have you a tale of cattle-stealing to tell also? Allons, let us have it, I have a fair right to demand it of you.

AUTHOR.—There is little in my tale; and I fear it will tell but tamely after yours. Besides, I have already given an abridgement of it in an early number of a well-known magazine. But as you may not have seen it, and as we are now in the very scene where part of its events took place, we may sit down under the lee of yonder large stone on the brow of the hill, and I shall there give you the particulars of it, whilst you are enjoying the prospect which that elevated position commands.

By the time we had reached the spot I had indicated, my friends were not sorry to rest a while, and I began as follows:—