

BAGGING A HUSBAND.

A ROMANCE OF THE TWELFTH OF AUGUST.

HEIGHO! Another of Time's milestones past. Can it really be a full twelve months since I sat with that merry party in the smoking-room of the little lodge at Rowantrec, on Loch Lomond, at the close of a hard day's walking after grouse on the hillside? Alas! it must be so, we think, as we scratch our bald head and stroke our grizzled moustache; we are not travelling so fast as we used to do, but the milestones keep turning up with the number of miles we have done—and without the slightest indication of the number we have got to go; the old horse of life is not so fresh as he was when he started from the last half-way house. Ah, well, the Twelfth, the glorious Twelfth, brings its recollections of purple heather flanked in the far distance by ripening yellow cornfields, of trailing mountain mists, purring waterfalls, whirring coveys, the near bang of the guns at hand, and faint, distant crack of guns over the hill. Happy indeed may all be who are out on the hillside enjoying the cool mountain air. May they have good sport, dine well off mountain mutton, and enjoy as happy an evening as the writer did hearkening to the ever-fresh story of "Bagging a Husband." As a rule the story is started by the stranger of the company, and this night a year ago it was the stranger of our party who started it, and in the following way it was told:

"Wonder what sort of a bag old MacLaverock had on the other side of the loch; he was *pot-potting* away all day, and if he's as good with the gun as he is with the rod he won't miss much. By Jove; what a basket of fish he can make at times! Why, yesterday when I could not raise a trout he was drawing them in as hard as he could. And, I say, how nicely that charming young wife of his can handle the oars, just a stroke now and then and an easy drift down to the shore. I don't believe there's a professional boatman on the loch side knows how to do it better."

"Yes, there's something in the way she handles her oars, let alone the easy way she drifts down. The old laird could tell you that himself if he cared," said one.

"How in the world did he get hold of her? He seems to be about the last man one would think of taking a wife, and here he is with one who could quite readily be his daughter, who pulls his boat about the loch when he is fishing, and I'll almost swear she works the dogs when he's shooting, for I was watching them with the glass to-day," said our novice.

"Just so; that accounts for your light day's sport," chimed in the wag of our party. "You would better send another certificate to the maker of your binocular, 'Will show bullet marks on a target at a thousand yards, tell the time on the nearest church clock, or detect the fluttering of a lady's dress on a moor five miles off.' You just let the MacLaverockess alone. She's rather a rasper if all is true, and an old retired Edinburgh lawyer as he is, would perhaps like a good fat co-respondent like you. Keep the loch between yourself and them, my boy."

"Humph!" said the young one, who, though fond of sport, had still to get quit of some youthful spirits, and did not care to discuss such dry subjects as the cause of grouse disease, affairs in the East, or sit silently over a hand at whist; "I think if I go in for matrimony I'll not likely begin with another man's wife, fashionable as it seems to be nowadays. What I want to know is, How did such a queer old canny-faced Scotchman—whose grey eyes always seem to be saying, 'Did you see a saxpence?'—get hold of her?"

"How did she get hold of *him*," you mean, said another, grudging apparently the loss of his pipe during the moment of utterance.

"With her oars, of course."

"Drifted right down on the top of him," said a third, "and put the landing net under him before he knew where he was."

"But I say, Macfarlane here knows all about it; tell us, Mac, old boy, how she gave him the gaff. It was rather a funny business, I know."

Macfarlane, who was the head of our bachelor party of four guns, and the individual who had examined the moor, signed the lease, and in general made himself useful—there should always be an experienced foreman over a bachelor grouse party—laid

down his pipe, and partly by way of changing the metaphor and partly by way of explanation, said,

“Weel, weel! I don’t mind telling ye the story, lads, though ye mun ken I was varra near being bagged mysel, but that’s nae matter.”

“Fancy! *Mac* married, with his wife working the dogs for him on the hill-side!” shouted our stranger again.

“Never mind that, lad; it’s mair pleasant than the man nursing the bairns, and the wife working the dogs; and I have seen such things come aboot through watchin’ the lasses five miles off through a binocular, as you seem to have been dacin’ a’ day. But never mind.

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“Ye see, gentlemen, before grouse shooting got very fashionable, and lads like yourselves come down from London with mair siller in their purses than sport in their hearts, moors were verra moderately rented. Ye, maybe, had na got sic verra fine lodges as you have nowadays, but had to sleep in some shepherd’s hut or some farmhouse, a shakedown in the barn at times, or a berth beside the coo in the byre. But there was aye lots of sport. Weel, this verra place was called Haggishaw then, and a rough place it was, but when the laird thought he would build a lodge on it of course he must give it a grand name to help it to let. Well, just a year or two before the lodge was built, Dugald’s Well over the loch came into the market in Edinburgh fashion, that is, it was advertised for sale, apply to Duncan MacLaverock, W.S., Edinburgh,—and in true Edinburgh fashion Duncan MacLaverock got possession of the place himself, and in time named it Laverock Hall. Having been put out of this place, which I had shot over for many a year before, I managed to lease the shooting on three of the next big sheepfarms, and took up my quarters at the hotel two or three days before the Twelfth, and was having capital sport, when an old gentleman arrived one night by the coach with the bonniest lassie I had ever seen in my life. She was the niece of the old gentleman, who was Colonel Grogan, a retired officer, and the gentleman who had taken the lodge here, then very cheap compared with what it is now. The explanation that I was the former lessee was a sufficient introduction, and in the course of the evening I was introduced to Norah, ‘me

darlint naace, the only daughter ov me poor ould brother Pat. I think I hear his rich brogue and her laughing voice yet. Well, I shot with them on the Twelfth, and I fished with them, and the Colonel had days with me. And as to me, I could neither shoot, fish, nor sleep. Something came over me. Duncan, the keeper, said I must have been glowerin' at a water-wraith." There was a loud laugh here, but the speaker lifted his pipe and resumed: "However, I'll no say what would have come aff, but the Cornel borrowed five pounds from me, and then I began to see the lass had not anything but her looks, and I held aff."

"Oh, you skinflint, Scotty!" came the call through the room.

"Weel, weel, richt or wrang, men, but I held aff, and nothing was said till old MacLaverock, who was fishing one day, came across the loch to have a cast here on the shore with the westerly winds, and he was whipping away round the point at the bramble-bushes there, when somewhat carelessly, or through short-sightedness, he cast too far, and got entangled in the bushes.

"Weel, he was wriggling, and twisting and backing water with the oars when the sweetest vision ever he had seen in his life, attired in white muslin, said, 'Oh, pray allow me, sir!' and jumped out from the bushes to relieve the casting-line—that is, if you believe that feminine nature is, real, genuine and honest, which I *don't*. Well, she undid the line, and made to cast it into the water, when—pew!—the whole casting-line was round her lovely figure, and every hook sunk up to the hackles in the muslin dress. MacLaverock had never been heard to swear, except once before, and that was when he was fined for street-preaching in his native town, but I think he must have relieved himself with a bit aith at that time."

"By Jove!" said the stranger, "I would have given a hundred pounds to have been in his place."

"No enough, lad, to get oot o't, if you'll wait to hear me finish. So nothing could be done, MacLaverock saw, but back the boat ashore and assist the lady to undo the hooks, two of which were caught in the bosom of her dress and one in the very skirt. It was a ticklish job, but the old fellow tackled to it, and with his left arm round her waist was busily engaged working out his 'bob' fly, a teal wing, when who should come upon the scene but the Colonel and his keeper. The lady gave the usual



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slight scream, and the Colonel gave the usual oath, and the game-keeper said, 'Guid preserve us,' all arranged I have nae doot, and as I could have fetched out in cross-examination. MacLaverock explained as well as he could, there was a good hearty laugh over it, the flies were cut off from the gut, to be unfastened by the lively Norah at leisure; and after partaking of the Colonel's hospitality, The MacLaverock returned home.

"Weel, gentlemen, as the night's getting late, and as we have got a lot of grouse to kill the morn', I may explain, to make a long story short, that Miss Norah not having sent the flies, the old skinflint MacLaverock wrote her 'for the lovely teal wing that was fastened to her breast,' and got it back with a very affectionate letter, and then there were one or two more meetings, and one or two more letters, and then just as the season was finishing a visit from the Colonel, who demanded 'your intentions, Sorr, to my naace, the only daughter of my poor brother Pat.' MacLaverock was rather staggered, but suggested a little quietness in the meantime till they talked the matter over; 'and we can take it to avizandum. You know.'

"'You may take her to any place you like, Mither MacLaverock; but, if you do, it will be as your wife, or, be the powers, you'll pay for it.'

"It was a bad job, so MacLaverock went through to Edinburgh and consulted his fellow-partner. 'You've got a bad case,' said the latter; 'that scene with the fishing hooks, and that letter about the teal wing in her breast is bad—jurymen are not all anglers, and I am inclined to think would go against you Better, I think, marry the girl if you like her now that you've retired. She will help to relieve the loneliness of Laverock Hall.' And marry her he did, and a good wife she's proved; though her previous career proves her to have been a puller and inclined to run away."

"And the Colonel?" asked our young stranger.

"Oh, Colonel be hanged; he never was a Colonel; he was merely a husband-and-wife monger, who never had a brother or sister, but went about hawking pretty girls about the Highlands as his nieces. If they secured a husband they never forgot him; if they did not, then they went halves over the breach-of-promise or compromise damages."

"Was this Colonel Grogan a tall thin fellow, bald-headed,

with a grizzled moustache and always inclined to talk about days at the Curragh ?” said the stranger, timidly.

“The same,” said MacFarlane.

“Had he not another niece, tall and straight, with the loveliest black eyes ?”

“My boy, I tell you he was never without a pretty niece on his hands for market purposes—but what’s the matter with you ?”

“Matter enough, and the deuce take grouse moors, Irish colonels, and Scottish county balls,” he shouted, pulling a ring off his finger. “I danced with her all night at Stirling, and met this infernal old uncle, who was always talking of days at the Curragh !”

“And made up, I suppose, to his Uncle Pat’s only niece,” said MacFarlane, coolly. “Aweel, aweel, may-be she’ll make as guid a wife as the ane ye were looking at a’ day through the glass ; if no, ye’ll——”

“See him and his black-eyed niece to the bottom of the loch first. What time does the coach start in the morning ? I’m off to London. If I stay, this old impostor will bag his bachelor like a blackcock-on a cornstook !”—and there was a gun less at Rowantree all last season.

