# A
# SEASON IN SUTHERLAND

BY

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'Glad days were those by flood and glen'

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# CHAPTER I

"Beatus ille, qui procul negotiis
Ut prisca gens mortalium."

IN the extreme North of Sutherland stands a little, old-fashioned, white farm-house, relic of many years ago, added to at different times, and built into so many shapes as to defy description. It is from this that these short notes of *A Season in Sutherland* will be dated.

It is overgrown with honeysuckle and other creepers, variegated ivy, jasmine, climbing roses, the everlasting pea, clematis, etc. Around it on three sides grows a belt of trees, within the embrace of which lies a lawn, studded with flower-beds and big tree roots; over the latter are trained creepers similar to those which cover the house. The lawn runs up

almost to the wall which, built due east and west, divides the kitchen garden on its north from the flower garden on its south side. Between the lawn and wall is the long bed in which grow most of our flowers.

Below the house, to the east, the field stretches down some three hundred yards to the little river in which we catch an occasional salmon, and beyond which rises the rocky moor. Above the house, to the west, runs the road; cross it, and you step on to the moor. From our north windows we catch a glimpse of the sea, and, when the wind comes from that "airt," hear the waves, as with a wild sweep, unbroken since they left the fields of Northern ice, they dash themselves upon a broad line of sand, which, only a mile and a half from the house, gleams in a long yellow curve between two jutting rock-bound headlands. From the little wicket-gate that opens into the field leading down to the river we look up the strath to the south, till, at its farthest point, we see where the rocky citadel capping the peak of Laoghal, most beautiful of all the Sutherland hills, like "topmost Gargarus, stands up and takes the morning."

In fact we are right on the North Coast of

Scotland; half-way, roughly speaking, between Cape Wrath and John o' Groat's House—a wild neighbourhood I imagine in the opinion of most people, and they have good authority on which to base their supposition. For Mr. Swinburne writes of the country "By the North Sea," and assuredly our little house and moor must be included in such description, as—

> "A land that is lonelier than ruin,
> A sea that is stranger than death,
> Far fields that a rose never blew in,
> Wan wastes where the wind lacks breath."

Mr. Swinburne is always musical, but occasionally he sacrifices accuracy to the alliteration and lilt of his rhythm. I cannot believe that he has ever visited the country which he so grossly libels. Should he do so in the future he will certainly find that the winds over these "wan wastes" do anything but "lack breath," and I could promise to show him that our garden is far from unable to grow roses. From our south wall I have taken as fine blooms of La France, Souvenir de Malmaison, and Triomphe de Rennes, as one could wish to see, and I hope to do so again this year.

The season has been even later here than in England, and we have arrived almost as spring has begun. The lilacs are deep purple with unopened clusters; though here and there a lighter tint shows where some bud, heedless of Lord Tennyson's warning, that

> "The ptarmigan that whitens ere his hour
> Woos his own end,"

has blossomed into flower. I have often wondered where, and how, Tristram found opportunities of seeing, and noting the habits of the ptarmigan, and of compassing the end of the more precocious in the covey. Hitherto, no solution has suggested itself to me. But our lilacs need have no fears. We are of Mr. Ruskin's opinion that "plants that grow are pleasanter objects than flowers that are gathered." Who is it who has so well and wisely described this season of spring as "the daily development of the great natural pageant of the year?" Before us now are passing in all their beauty the primroses, polyanthus, cowslips, and oxlips. The auriculas, which do right well up here, border some of the naked beds with their tortoise-shell blossoms. Another border which is quite charming and most effective is

composed of gentianella. What a marvellous depth of indigo lurks in the hollow of its bell-shaped flower! Near the porch, sheltered from all winds, a wall flower is opening its scented spikes four feet and more from the ground. How many writers, from Bacon's to the present time, have expatiated upon the sweetness of these rich brown flowers, yet none I think in fashion kindlier than the quaint moralities of Edie Ochiltree, the old gaberlunzie, among the ruins of St. Ruth. The double narcissus, so like and almost as sweet as the gardenia, and the tulips are just beginning to open, the latter stand a good twenty inches from the ground. Most of them are pink and white, but there are a few of a most gorgeous combination; a claret-coloured purple blended and streaked with gold. I have tried to get some more of these, and have inquired at one or two nurseries for them, but hitherto without success. The buds of the rhododendrons, trollius, and lupine, are beginning to show colour. The Brompton stocks and alyssum are coming out; the laburnum is growing yellow. We have a charming effect of colour along the little drive to the gate; laburnums and copper beeches are planted alternately by its

side, and in a fortnight when the former are fully out, and the foliage of the latter has darkened to its bronze, the contrast between the "dropping wells of fire," and the deep brown will seem to add intensity of colour to each. The rose-trees are full of promise, the sweet-briar scents the air for yards around it, but our greatest success, and that to which we always look forward with the keenest anticipation, is the honeysuckle. Nowhere else have I ever seen it as luxuriant as it is here. We have it everywhere. It grows over the greater part of the house, peeps in at the windows, climbs the large roots on the lawn, creeps along the garden walls, and three little standard bushes play the sentinel over our big flower-bed. We are too early for the flowers as yet: not one single "bugle bloom divine," as Keats called them, is to be seen among the "velvet leaves," but the buds are thick, and later on we shall have a glorious show, while some few blooms, lingering among the red wax-like berries, will remain with us till October.

Nor is the honeysuckle confined to the civilised domain of the gardener. The original cuttings whence all these plants have sprung, came, I am

informed, from the open moor, where in places it still flourishes among the rocks. Two little bushes in particular overhang my favourite salmon pool just below the falls of the river, so that in July we may chance to enjoy "the woodbine's sweet perfume" at the very moment when we are engaged in the supreme struggle for his life with the king of fishes. It is curious to note how much cultivation and good soil has improved our lonicera in the garden. Where, in its wild state, it has to take its chance, with other plants, of what moisture and nutrition it can get from the barren soil, I have seldom, if ever, been able to find more than five, or at the most eight, blossoms in the same coronal of flower; while, in the garden, it is quite common to count over twenty, and I have seen as many as thirty-three.

I think that some remnants of the gulf-stream, following the coast from the west, must come as far as here, and give us a milder climate than these northern latitudes would lead one to expect. Otherwise it would be difficult to account for the flowering of some plants, double fuchsia for example, which we are able to grow out in the open air without giving them any artificial protection during the

winter. And this theory of mine finds support in the fact that we lie almost at the very spot where early and late salmon rivers divide. There seems to be a general, I believe an invariable, rule (at least I cannot call to mind any exception to it) that in rivers to the east of us salmon begin to "run," or go up the rivers from the sea, early in the year: in those to the west of us they do not run till late. The best explanation that I can suggest is that the sea is so much warmer along the West Coast, where the gulf-stream strikes, that it makes the contrast between the cold water of the rivers, fed by the melting of the snow on the hills, and the comparative warmth of the sea greater than the fish care to brave; and they therefore wait until later in the year when all the snow-water having run off, the rivers are warmer. To the east where, beyond the influence of the gulf-stream, the sea is colder, the contrast is not so great, and they take to the rivers earlier.

We seem to have come to a favourite haunt of the cuckoo. They really are literally all over the place. Seldom do we go for even the shortest walk without seeing one or two of them. Driving to the next

strath the other day we counted no less than eight, while on all sides, and all day long, we hear the double note, which Mr. Grahame in his *Birds of Scotland* most happily describes as

> "The voice of spring among the trees
> That tells of lengthening days of coming blooms."

Mr. Phil Robinson in the *Poets' Birds* tells us that the belief of the ancients with regard to the cuckoo was that "in winter it changes into a hawk, but reappears in the spring in its own form, but with an altered voice." The origin of the theory is not far to seek, for the cuckoo both in form and flight greatly resembles a small hawk and sometimes pays a penalty for its likeness. Two years ago I was walking home with a gun in my hand, when suddenly ten yards in front of me over the garden wall darted a cuckoo followed as is usual by a little bird; I took it to be a small hawk and killed it. Possibly the small birds that often mob the cuckoo make the same mistake; they can't *all* be its foster parents.

The friend who is with me, and who makes his first visit to the North of Scotland, is greatly struck with the length of the days at this time of year.

It has probably not occurred to him that since leaving London he has travelled some six or seven hundred miles nearer the land of the midnight sun. We sit out after dinner with coffee and cigarettes, and our newspapers, sixty hours old though they be, till the first star begins to peep; and when the walk has been long, the fish coy, and, as our old keeper here puts it, there has been "plenty of slashing," we go to bed rather early by the lingering remnant of the light which has cheered us through the day. Most pleasant are they, these still, peaceful evenings, when twilight, as Mr. Russell Lowell quaintly, and I think originally, phrases it, "twilight duskens into dark," when the winds are hushed to sleep, and the sweet silence may almost be felt, intensified as it seems to be by the weird cry of the curlew, the wild whistle of some sea birds that nest inland, and the cuckoo's melancholy call. And as beyond and below we hear the gentle prattle of the river mingling with the long low murmur of the sea, we cannot help thinking that it must have been scenes such as these that Dame Nature in Wordsworth's poem, selects as the school-room of her foster child, whom she took to herself "to make a lady of her own."

"The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her, and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face."

Such education must still be no bad school for even the wisest and the best of us.

## CHAPTER II

> "The common air, the earth, the skies
> To him are opening Paradise."

*UNE* 3.—I maintain that in the whole world of Nature there is nothing—absolutely nothing—so entirely beautiful as a fair summer morning, when, as Lord Byron says :—

> "Night wanes : the vapours round the mountains curled
> Melt into morn, and light awakes the world."

Usually this grandest of all transformation scenes is enacted when we are in bed and asleep: but for once it has been delayed. A mist has lain thick over the glen, so that on first getting up we could hardly see fifty yards or so from us ; but the sun

gained strength, dispersed the fog, and now at nine o'clock we rejoice in the first blush of morning. It is like the first morn-break over a new-born world. Everything is so fair, so pure, so still. The gentle breeze touches our cheek as it steals softly from the sea. Meadow, grove, and stream seem apparelled in celestial light. Each flower and leaf sparkles with its diamond dewdrop. The countless blades of grass, amongst which are interwoven the myriad meshes of the gossamer, gleam with a glimmer like the sheen of pearls. To the shoulders of mighty Laoghal high in heaven, the light clouds still cling, as clings the maiden, in Sir John Millais's famous picture, to her Huguenot lover, and from bough, bush, and briar, bursts the many-voiced chorus of the birds. Truly a day in a thousand! One on which the most inveterate town mouse might well choose to drain his "potion of eyesell," and in the language of Shakespeare, "do observance to a morn of" *June*.

But after our first long deep delight we confess to some feeling of disappointment. The rude consideration of sport obtrudes itself upon our perfect enjoyment of the pure loveliness of Nature.

"Medio de fonte leporum
Surgit amari aliquid quod in ipsis floribus angat."

These morning beauties will not last for ever—nay, perhaps in their evanescent character lies the very secret of their charm—they must "fade into the light of common day," and how will bright sun, blue sky, and north wind suit our fishing, which after all was the magnet that drew us towards the Pole?

Well, let us leave the fish alone for one day, or one morning at least, and take a stroll down to the river and through the little wood. We open the garden gate on to the pasture meadow. It looks almost like a sheet of snow, so thickly grow the daisies, every one with his bright eye wide open looking undazzled at the sun. Here and there we see a crowfoot, or a lesser celandine, immortally sacred to the memory of Wordsworth, as is the primrose to that of Lord Beaconsfield; then a little wild pansy or heartsease, perhaps a dog violet: but these lie low and are lost in the general blaze of white. So on to the river. Here on the little embankment raised to protect the fields from a spate runs a long line of golden gorse, worthy indeed of the traditional adoration of Linnæus. How it glows

and blazes in the sun! We sit down to leeward, and its subtle sweet fragrance is borne to us softly by the breeze. What a rich warm scent it is! Quite like that of a peach or an apricot. It seems absolutely to smell of the sun, and it is only in the very brightest sunshine that it gives forth its fullest flavour. I wonder whether the old derivation of apricot be after all the correct one, and whether it takes its name from "apricus," as the fruit that has caught the very scent and savour of the sun? It was only last autumn that we were sitting by the gorse here on a still summer-like day and heard a soft crackling sound, like the skirmishing of an army of fairy infantry. For some time we were puzzled, but eventually we found that it was caused by nothing more warlike than the explosion of the little seed-pods among the whins. There, among the loose stones and sand at our feet, rises the tuberous, fleshy foliage of the stonecrop, or wall-pepper, as the country folk often call it. Another fortnight or so before it flowers, and then one will understand the derivation of its other soubriquet of "golden moss." Next to it is the little meadow vetchling with its reddish orange buds opening into golden flowers;

there again the penguecula looking very like the wild violet ; and beyond it, springing upright from the sheep-cropped sward, stands the first orchis of the year.

But the sun is getting high in heaven and the heat makes us long for shade, and thankful that we are not vainly throwing a useless fly. We will move on to the moss-grown bank in the wood under the shadow of the alders. There, as on our way we step across a little rill that trickles from a spring in the park, we see among the long lush grasses the "caltha," looking like a gigantic buttercup, and remember how Lord Tennyson tells us that

> "The wild marsh marigold shines like fire in swamps."

A primrose here and there, a cuckoo flower or lady's smock, and we draw near to our chosen seat. Yap, yap, helter-skelter, off rushes "Joe," our mongrel fox-terrier, in hot pursuit of a rabbit. They are old friends those two, and capital exercise for both of them their game affords. Of the two, I think Ole Brer Rabbit is in least danger : he knows his way best, and is not so likely to knock his head against a branch. Well, digging at the hole, enlarging its entrance to palatial size, then lying in

touches. Over him again for one cast, but it's no use, and we will "allow" him for a bit. The day is getting darker, the water is very rough; perhaps the fly may be a trifle small. So, having lit a pipe, we overhaul the fly-box, and give him a complete change. See, here's a medium-sized yellowish-green fly. What its name is I know, but I will not tell. It is my own particular favourite, and I find it a most useful change to the ordinary routine; so I mean to keep it to myself. We put it on, and throw over him again; three times the fly passes and sweeps round, and I feel something akin to despair. Just as I am preparing for a fourth cast the fly seems to stop. I take a firm feel at it. Yes, a quiver! Up goes the point; once more the hook is home, and right merrily rings out the welcome music of the reel. A strong fish and a fairly hard fight; but most tussles of the kind are similar to each other. The ghillie, warned by the morning's experience, is now more careful, and at the first attempt gaffs a darkish fish of 12 lbs.

The rest of the pool is blank, and we return to our rising fish of the morning. He came up and just touched; it was a sluggish rise, and he never

seemed to mean business; but it was exactly the same cast, and no doubt the same fish. No chance of his coming again, and, as nothing else shows, we put up the rod, collect our spoil, and drive off home, well contented with our day's sport. If we could only get some more water now we should have some grand sport, and as we go I am reminded of Mr. Froude's words:—"The days by a salmon river, with the flood running off, the south-wester streaming over the pool, and the fish fresh-run from the sea, are marked with chalk in the lives of the bitterest Radicals of us all." Alas! this year—up to the present at least—we have had little room to doubt whether our fishing days were "*cretâ an carbone notandi.*"

## CHAPTER IV

> "Where the pools are bright and deep,
> Where the gray trout lies asleep,
> Up the river and o'er the lea
> That's the way for Billy and me."

*UNE* 29.—Another blazing hot day, whereby I am reminded of an East Indian legend. There was once a kindly youth of genial manners gazetted to a regiment serving in India. Each morning at breakfast he saluted his brother officers with the remark that it was a lovely day. For a time they bore it, but at last it was too much for their Indianised livers; they rose as one man, and that amiable youth was compelled to exchange. Were any one to congratulate me at the present moment upon the glories of the weather, I should examine his or her face most care-

fully with a view to detecting therein signs of covert sarcasm. Yes, the last fortnight has been one of bitter disappointment to all our sporting instincts. The Game Book shows a record of two hares, eighteen rabbits, and two grilse—all killed by the keeper; and, *horresco referens*, the grilse by the ignoble use of the worm. Our only sport, if sport it can be called, has been shrimping, and here we have done pretty well. We have had a net made specially for the purpose. There is a framework in the shape of a "big, big D." The upright line is the beam, into which fits a pole, and the semicircular part of the net is lashed to the pole a couple of feet or so from the beam. The beam is laid on the ground, the fisherman takes the pole in his hand and pushes it in front of him; the net opens wide and tapers into a kind of bag at the end. Herein gradually as he goes the fisherman collects his spoil. We find that the brackish water at the river mouth is the best place for shrimping. In the sea itself, however calm it be, we never get good results. Of course the whole operation is limited to the hours just before and after dead low water. On a calm sunny day it is most interesting work. The water is so clear that

you can see every ribbed tide-mark upon the sand. As the beam sweeps over it a mixture of sand and water flows into the net. But the shrimps feel the compression and disturbance of the sand before it reaches them, and they dart off about a foot or so in front of the net. Here, there, and everywhere they go. Many turn foolishly back, and these are, of course, infallibly caught; but others also are involved as the net moves on. Every five or ten minutes the shrimper is glad to go ashore and empty his catch upon the sands. The sizable ones we put into a basket, and return the small fry for another day. On June 20—Jubilee Day—I got three good dishes in an hour and a half. Of course the use of waders is necessary.

Still the last fortnight has been one of disappointment. The rivers are so abnormally low and clear that, except at the very throats of the pools, where the stream is strong, or in very deep holes, one can see almost every stone at the bottom. The wily angler will, of course, utilise this by making himself acquainted with the formation of the river-bed, and will frequently discover why certain casts are better than others, by finding under them some stone or hole which forms a lair for the fish. But in shal-

lower streams if any poaching with gaff or leister be done at all, now is the time when it may be done with ease. The poacher crawls to the bank and carefully scans the hollows under it. Hither the fish usually resort when

> "The sun's perpendicular rays
> Illumine the depths of the stream."

If, as is probable, he sees one, there's nothing easier than to approach him carefully from behind with the gaff and lift him out. I blush to write it, but *esperto credite.* In company with one, now a gallant officer in the Guards, I once perpetrated the crime. Many a long day was it since we had tasted salmon. We found one in a small hole under the bank, and upon August 17, 1882, wrathful as Herbert, Bruce, and Percy, in the days of Marmion, we did a deed of shame second only to theirs. But to return to the habitual poacher. Should he be disturbed in his unholy work, the weapon is easily hidden, and he wades out into a shallow, ostensibly the most innocent of pearl-fishers. Scotch pearls are still found in the fresh-water mussels, and the piles of rejected shells, lying every here and there on the river-banks, form abundant evidence that the fishery is still pur-

sued. It is not now as profitable as it used to be. The people say that this is on account of the erection of bridges across the rivers, and the consequent disuse of fords; the injuries done to the shell of the mussel by hoof of horse or cattle crossing the ford, caused the disease which produced the pearl inside.

One pearl-fisher whom I saw the other day was more ingenious than his fellows. He travelled the country in a sort of cart. It consisted of little more than a flooring set upon wheels, and removable at pleasure. In the centre of it there was a small mysterious round hole. The manner of his fishing was as follows:—He drove to a pool, removed the flooring of his cart, and dragged it to the river-side. Then throwing an anchor into the stream fastened the rope to the cart flooring, which he now used as a raft, and seating himself upon it launched himself on the surface of the pool. The use of the mysterious hole now appeared. Into it fitted a water-telescope —a plain water-tight tube, with a piece of glass at the bottom. This defeats the rippled surface so antagonistic to the sight, whether of man or fish, and reveals all the bed of the river. With a long stick cleft at the end, he could secure any mussel spotted

from his raft, and by gradually letting out his mooring cable could—and did—work over the whole of the pool. The effect of this upon the chances of the salmon-fisher who followed him later on may be more easily imagined than described. But he was caught red-handed one day, and promptly warned off.

Banished by circumstances from the rivers we have betaken ourselves to the lochs. Many of these are nameless mountain tarns, but counting all that are marked upon the Ordnance Map (a *vade mecum* which no sporting tenant should neglect), I find that on my own shootings there are some forty. Of these the majority contain trout, large or small, good, bad, or indifferent. Some of them are near the road, and an ordinary boat conveyed in a cart may easily be placed upon them. Others lie long distances across the moor, and of the trout that inhabit them marvellous legends were told. In one, trout from 1 to 1½ lbs. had been taken—nothing under that—from the shore. In another, still more inaccessible, giants were supposed to reside. A backbone some 15 or 18 inches long—leavings, doubtless, of an otter—had been found upon the bank. At all hazards such sport as this must not be neglected.

But to convey an ordinary boat to them was an impossibility. So after careful inspection of all portable boats exhibited at one of the Sportsman's Exhibitions, I decided that the best thing for my purpose would be a 9 ft. duplex Berthon collapsible boat. So far as the boat is concerned, and not one inch further, it has fully come up to our most sanguine expectations. As its name implies, it is a combination of two separate boats. These, however, do not lie side by side as in the case of the Calais-Douvres, but end to end. Each boat, folding separately into a comparatively small compass, when expanded for use is 4 ft. 6 in. in length, by about 4 ft. in beam. One is fitted with a bow, the other with a stern; but the end of each, at which is the extreme breadth, goes down sheer and flat. A hook at the bottom of one corresponds to an eye at the bottom of the other. Fit these together, lash the two ends at the top, on both sides, by ropes passing for extra strength twice through the gunwale or saxboard of the boat, and fastened in cleats, and the ship is ready for use. It consists, of course, of two separate compartments; each boat forming one. The rower sits in the bow half, the fisherman in the

other, upon a plank laid across the boat so as to place him with his face to the stern; although so stiff are these boats that any one accustomed to modern rowing may with perfect safety command a larger stretch of water by standing up to fish. I may add that the total weight of this combination of boats, ready packed for travelling, is about 1 cwt., and the price rather under £15.

So we packed the boat upon the pony: first we put on a deer saddle, then two big bags filled with straw to prevent injury from friction, then we hung the boats, like panniers, one on each side, lashed them there, and started for our four or five miles tramp across the moor. As we walked it was delightful to reflect that these lochs had never before in the memory of man borne the weight of a boat, and only very occasionally been fished, say on an average once in every two or three years, and that from the shore. We anticipated a sort of competition among these unsophisticated fish as to which should be the happy one to possess himself of the neat insect so soon as our fly lighted on the water. Following out the principle which obtains, we believed, among fish, as it most assuredly does among

men, that " the weakest goes to the wall," we fondly pictured to ourselves the small fry, the three or four to the pound fish, scattering at the advance of some patriarch of their tribe,—five pounds if he was an ounce,—who with deliberate and sure sweep, and massive boil on the water, should seize the fly and begin the contest which could only end in his death or our defeat.

Thus pleasantly enough the miles fell behind us, and we arrived at the scene of action. There was a good ripple on the water ; true it was from the north, and the old saw, which contains more sense than we had in our stupid heads, might have warned us that

" When the wind is in the north
The wily fisher goes not forth."

Still that, thought we, applied to fish educated to the gentle art of Izaak Walton, not to these innocents. The sky was cloudy, and our hopes were high. The boat was put together ; nothing could look better. We embarked ; nothing could be safer. I put on the flies which I have always found to be most successful in this neighbourhood. For first " bob," a red spinner ; second " bob," a zulu ; and for the tail fly, a pale green body with hare's

lug hackle, red tail, and teal wings. But on commencing to fish there seemed to be some doubt as to the gullibility of the trout. A policy of fly-annexation had no charms for them. A good hour's whipping produced five wretched specimens — together they must have been under a pound.

"If this won't do we'll try another." We packed the boat and proceeded. To avoid a "floe," *i.e.* a soft place, where the pony might get bogged, the boat had to make a detour, but a straight cut brought me to the side of a wee, weedy lochy. I tried it from the shore: rose three, landed two— bonnie little fish they were, though small, just under half a pound a piece; they ran and jumped right well, and were in capital condition. Then we came to the loch where none had ever been caught under 1 lb., and where they had been known to run from that to 2 lbs. An hour and a half's careful fishing resulted in one rise. I got him, and he proved to be a long, lean, hungry-looking fish of ¾ lb. It seemed useless to go on, but another loch lay only 300 yards off, and the old keeper urged us to try it. We lifted the boat across.

Here occurred a very curious incident. Beyond

all doubt it was a bad day for fishing, and the trout were "gey dour." However, about the tenth cast a trout came up and fastened on the red spinner. As he dived I thought I saw two other little boils on the water behind him. I supposed he was struggling near the top. He played very dead and heavy. This surprised me, for I had seen him, and he was only a small fish. Soon, however, I saw there was another on the second "bob," and eventually I found a third fast to the tail fly. I landed all three. Doubtless others have done the same before, but it has never fallen to my lot to do so. The three weighed together about 1½ lbs. I went home after another hour's unsuccessful flogging, hugely disgusted, and with only fourteen small trout!

True, there still remained the Loch-an-Ealachan, the loch by the side of which was found the giant fish-bone, and on another day we did try that; but I have no heart to tell of that day's work. An hour and a half's good fast walking over moor and fell brought us there, and three little trouties—dark and ill fed—were all we got out of a black, weedy, boggy loch. Yet this was on a fairly good day, rather too sunny, but with a strong westerly breeze

and a lovely ripple on the water. The Loch-an-Ealachan means the Loch of the Swan, and tradition has it that on the island in it the wild swans used to nest. They do not seem to have done so of late years. We were, however, fortunate enough to see the black-throated diver, with its young one. This bird, the late Mr. John Colquhoun, in *The Moor and the Loch*, describes as "the most beautiful of all divers," and says it is pretty common on the northern lochs of Scotland. Those charming specimens, so beautifully set up in the Natural History Museum, South Kensington, were, I believe, procured by Colonel Irby and Captain Reid from either this or the adjoining shooting. And three years ago, when out grouse-shooting, we saw two curious birds upon a little black mountain tarn. A long wet crawl got us a shot, and they turned out to be the red-throated divers. They now ornament the room of the friend who was with me on that occasion.

Ever since that time all these wild birds have been unmolested by us. Their numbers seem to diminish perceptibly. I suppose this is due to the increasing number of tourists, and consequently of boats, fishing the larger lochs. The wild fowl recede

before the advancing tripper. The larger lochs are thus becoming closed to them, and such as remain are driven to the smaller lochies, where, so far as we are concerned, they shall receive the hospitality they desire by being left undisturbed. The wild duck, too, are much scarcer than they were. In 1879 we killed thirty-one wild fowl. The last four seasons have averaged three a piece.

The most annoying of our bird visitors are the golden plover. *Now*, wherever we go over the moors we hear their wild, weird whistle, and can see them flitting from point to point. They claim our hospitality during the breeding season, and in another fortnight, when they have their families about them, our moor will be fairly well stocked; but when August 12 arrives, and we set out with dog and gun, every one of them will have gone elsewhere, not to return to us until next spring brings the close season. It seems very hard that this, nearly if not quite, the best bird for the table, should spend the spring and summer here, and then in autumn, when we should like to see it, have gone for more fortunate sportsmen to shoot elsewhere.

## CHAPTER V

> "Irresolute Spring hath gone!
> And Summer comes like Psyche, zephyr-borne
> To her sweet land of pleasures. She is here!
> Amid the distant vales she tarried long,
> But she hath come, O joy!"

*ULY* 16.—We have returned after a fortnight's absence in England to find things, from a sporting point of view, little or no better than when we left. There have been occasional showers and one thunderstorm, with its usual accompaniment of what is locally termed "a plump" of rain. For the time the burns came down brown, flecked with white, and the river went up some three or four inches, but the former fell almost as quickly as they rose, the water ran off the parched surface instead of sinking into it, and the latter is

front of it with wistful sidelong glance, and imploring with occasional sharp barks its inhabitant to come out and renew the game, will keep Master Joe busy for a quarter of an hour or so, and we can sit down to listen and to look.

No one who has not read some of the late Mr. Richard Jeffries's charming essays, or himself tried the experiment, has the very slightest idea of how much there is to be seen and heard in the mid-day heat of spring or summer by any one who will only be content to be all eyes and ears, and otherwise motionless as stone. Of course, as we take our seat all the birds fly away in different directions scared at our approach. No matter; the ubiquitous Joe is thoroughly occupied, and in his absence, if we are quiet, they will soon come back again and take no notice of us at all. Meanwhile let us look about us at our surroundings. Scanty indeed is the shade afforded by the alders. They have not nearly got their full foliage yet; but what gray, gnarled, rugged trunks they have!—gray with very, very old age and covered with a kind of gray hairy pendant lichen like an old man's silky ashy beard. It must surely have been something of this kind to which Mr.

Emerson alludes when he says:—

> "The moss upon the forest bark
> Was pole-star when the night was dark."

There, to the right, a birch-tree has fallen against a dog-rose bush. Some of its roots must still be in the ground, for there are a few leaves sprouting from the fallen branches, and the rose-bush, recovered from the assault, peeps up through the middle of it. But the time of roses is not yet.

And as we listen we first hear the indescribable hum of summer. I know and love it, but I know not whence it comes or what it is. As Mr. Richard Jeffries says, "It is not enough to be called a hum, and does but just tremble at the extreme edge of hearing." Can it be the myriad wing-beats of countless insect-life as they glance to and fro in the beams that peep and play between the branches? Or is it as he suggests, and is this exquisite undertone, heard and yet unheard, the result of countless millions of vibrations from leaf and flower and grass, as they gather life and growth from earth and air, individually inaudible, but amounting in the aggregate to something perceptible by the senses? Is there some truth underlying the paradoxical expres-

sion that you can hear the grass grow? And now we lose it, for behind us is the field; from it the lark rises, and

> "At his matins hangs over,
> Thanking the Lord for a life so sweet."

Below us, two or three hundred yards away, the river babbles over its stones. It used to run close in here among the trees not fifty yards from our feet, but somebody turned it into a new channel years ago; some enterprising farmer, I believe, who coveted the rich pasture beyond and thus brought it to his side. They have no Ash Wednesday liturgy up here, and know not what the Commination Service has to say concerning him who "removeth his neighbour's landmark." From across the river comes the cuckoo's cry. Among the moss-grown stones to the left the foxglove is pushing up its furred and velvety leaves. What a curious insight into old tradition does that name give us! It is the folk's-glove. By "the folk," or more commonly "good folk," our ancestors meant the fairies. The French and Germans had a similar idea, for their old writers speak of it as *Doigts de la Vierge* and *Frauenhandschuh*. Beyond it, at the foot of the bank, the

wild iris rears its pale-green spiky foliage. A month or so hence and our bank will gleam with purple and gold, like the cohorts of Sennacherib. By their side the bracken, already a foot in height, is gradually unfolding its green fronds from their brown curled tops. Here, quite within our easy reach—we are almost sitting on it—is the first blue-bell or wild hyacinth, a poor weakly thing; and close beside it, bright and bonnie, looks up "the little speedwell's darling blue"—quite Etonian, isn't it? And to-morrow will be "The Fourth of June."

But the birds are coming back. The bush of rose and birch is almost alive with them. A cock chaffinch with his many colours hops from twig to twig; sparrows, linnets, tits, even wrens, I think, are there; and how they chirp and chatter! A young thrush comes in on one side, two more fly in together on the other. Then comes a cock black-bird with jet plumage and orange beak. The lark and cuckoo have stopped. But a robin is swearing from some tree close by, and somebody must be crossing the moor opposite, for thence come the calls of peewit and curlew. They have got their young ones over there somewhere, and swoop over and cry

at the approaching intruder. Now the blackbird takes up the harmony—chut-chut-chut—chut—chut—he stops, he has moved away a few yards, then he begins again. But I think he has got into the neighbourhood of Joe's excavations, for his note ends abruptly in his loud whistle of alarm, and away he goes. We shan't see him again for the present.

What a hush there comes suddenly in the bird chorus. One or two faint, frightened chirrups, nothing more. Not a bird moves. Yes—there—one darts over the wall behind us, and with swift wing-whistle a brown bird swoops down behind him, and within a yard or two of us. We could see that he was broad and brown of wing, but no more. Hardly did we see him before he darted past, threading his way among the branches. Is it an owl? There are a pair, I think, that belong here. No; for the wing-beats of an owl are silence itself. On a dark night one might fly within a yard of your head and you might neither see nor hear it. We catch a glimpse of the bird again as he rises out of the wood to his hover. Then we know how

> "Sometimes the spar-hawk, wheel'd along,
> Hushed all the grove from fear of wrong."

It was a small hawk ; not so small as the merlin, but smaller than the falcon or the harrier, probably a sparrow-hawk or kestrel. Here comes Joe, rather hot and dusty, and looking very sheepish. His little game of Prisoners' Base is over, and the rabbit has evidently won, as, indeed, he invariably does. Were it ever to chance otherwise, I fear he would play no more. But Joe is of an unrestful and inquisitive disposition, and his researches into the mysteries of Nature are conducted personally, actively, and chiefly by means of his nose. While he is about us we shall see no more bird-life in the woods. The birds have "spied strangers present," and according to old Parliamentary usage "strangers will withdraw." And so we return to the house to see what the others are going to do. I don't think we have altogether wasted our morning.

An old story, isn't it ? and nothing but the merest commonplace in it. Nothing that the veriest child in the country may not see, with all its myriad variations, each and every day of the 365 if it will only look and listen. An old-world story, old as the very creation, and yet, thank God, yearly ever new.

## CHAPTER III

"'Tis blithe the mimic fly to lead:
When to the hook the salmon springs,
And the line whistles thro' the rings;
The boiling eddy see him try,
Then, dashing from the current high,
Till watchful eye and cautious hand
Have led his wasted strength to land."

*June* 11.—"Barnaby bright, Barnaby bright!
All day and no night."

O runs the quaint old country distich. And up here, on this the feast of St. Barnabas, we realise its full force and truth. At this happy season there is no absolute darkness in the extreme North of Scotland. Perceptibly have the days lengthened during the past three weeks. Probably, if upon the 21st we were to make a midnight picnic to the bleak top of Ben Sto-

mino, the hill which stands at the head of our little strath, we might see the sun scarce even "at midnight's hour of harm" completely dipped 'neath the Northern Ocean. Probable, however, as this may be, there is an even greater probability that we should catch our deaths of cold, and an absolute certainty of our suffering immense personal discomfort. So we are content to stay at home and see what may be seen by

> "The simpler souls
> That dwell upon the plains."

And as close on midnight we watch the far North, we see how the last dying rosy tints of sunset grow paler and paler under the dark cloud, till in one short hour they are lost in the faint yellow of coming dawn, and become what Lord Tennyson, in that most charming of all English songs, calls "a bed of daffodil sky."

What a dissipated lot some of the birds up here must be! There was a thrush who at 11.30 p.m. was trilling out a grand chorus. No man in his sober senses sings absolutely to himself, and I suppose no bird does either. Doubtless our thrush was surrounded by a crowd of admiring and sympathetic

Bacchanals; among them possibly a cuckoo, for we heard one give a last husky call as he roystered home a quarter of an hour later. But if they are not early to bed they are at least early to rise, and here, as according to Mr. Lewis Morris on the Latmian Hill, with the first dawn—

> "The sentinel thrush within the yew
> Sings out reveillé to the hosts of day,
> Soldierly."

The corncrake, too, grates upon one's ear very early in the morning. There seem to be several of them about. I watched two the other day as they ran and called among the tiny blades in the field, where the oats are just showing green. I had a powerful stalking glass upon them, and they are the funniest sight as they open their beaks quite wide when they call. Sometimes they invade the garden: only last Sunday, we caught one under the net which is stretched over a mignonette bed in the hopes of preserving some of the seed from the attacks of the omnivorous sparrow.

Still we have a drought, still the rivers are at low summer level. But on Monday and Tuesday there were some heavyish showers, and on Wednesday

there was a perceptible rise in the Naver, just enough to give a little freshness to the dead water, and perhaps also the faintest tinge of colour. As our beat was number two, some fifteen miles off, pony and trap were ordered betimes, and at 11.30, we found ourselves by the side of Syre Pool, to my mind the very best and surest pool on the whole river. A strong wind streamed gustily half across, half down it, turning the blue to purple as it passed, and flecking it every now and then with white breaking bubbles driven on the little wrinkled wave-tops. The day was good enough when we started; fairly dark, with the wind from a good "airt," W.S.W., but afterwards the sky cleared; overhead it was hopelessly blue, though studded here and there with nasty white fleecy cloudlets few and far between, and in mid-heaven a brazen blazing sun. It seemed almost hopeless, but we watched each cloud as it flew past, and got a cast as best we could as each one crossed and momentarily hid the sun. More than that, I made my ghillie stand behind me and hold the fly with the line at full length, so that whenever there came a moment's shadow I could take advantage of it without having to get the line

out afresh every time. There is a little art in holding a fly for this purpose; if it is clumsily held, the holder may not infrequently chance to become the hooked. It should be lightly but firmly grasped between the first finger and thumb, the fly being held feathers down, hackle and point of the hook up.

A cloud came up, I cast, and, as the line worked round, a back fin followed by a tail broke water just behind the fly. The line of course was in the water almost to the rod point; it is difficult enough to keep it in the water at all in such a gale. Probably therefore it was bagged, possibly the fish came short: the rise was much too deliberate to argue very great keenness; certainly a strike produced no effect, and the sun blazed out hotter than ever. The patience even of an angler has its limits. The water was of course heavily rippled, and I have a certain fly called "a canary" with which I have ere now killed fish—and good ones to boot—in bright sunshine and clear lowish water. There was really little use in waiting for the rising fish, nor did I wish to lose the chance of getting him later on if a cloud came. I put on my "canary" and began a few yards farther down,

determined to fish the remainder of the pool and then come back and try my friend after a good rest.

At the very first cast, head and shoulders out of water, gleaming in the sunlight like polished steel, a glorious fresh-run fish sprang to the fly. I struck, and the heavy pull showed that the hook had gone home somewhere. Down he turned and rushed a clear thirty yards to the bottom of the pool: turned again and came straight back to the rod. Until that moment I never knew what pace I could get on going backwards over roughish ground. Still I fear the line was very slack; perhaps the strong gale that bellied the line out kept up some kind of tension. I reeled him up in a moment and once more the struggle commenced on fair terms. First, fierce and ominous shakings; then two or three rolls over on the top of the water, beating it with a broad tail, the very sight of which made my heart go a good ten a minute faster. Then down again and then the maddest rush I ever saw a fish make. Up through the pool, past where he rose, the water spurting almost a foot in height over the line which cut through it with a peculiar low hissing sound—through the stream, breaking and boiling round him,

up on to the shallow beyond—a run up stream of a good hundred yards without a check. Truly a very sprint-swimmer even among salmon! Then still fiercely struggling, all his dorsal fin and some of his back out of water, up the shallow, and still with the same dull dead strain of a strong greenheart rod, bent nearly double, upon him.

At last a pause, and I get up level with him: gradually he yields, rolling over almost on his back, and showing a great broad silvery side. Shallows are dangerous ground on which to play a beaten fish, so out among the stones, with trousers tucked up to his knees, steals our faithful henchman, brandishing the fatal gaff. Nearer he gets and nearer, then quietly stretching it out, till all seems certain, he makes his attempt—too late!—the fish saw him, one mad effort, out rings the reel and the fish is some yards farther up stream. But he is getting very weak, he yields to the gentle pressure of the strong rod, once more he rolls over, this time between two big stones, the near one by the way looking nastily sharp at the edge: "Now no shots, man; take him canny." Again we have victory within our grasp. Once more the ghillie is well within distance; one

more attempt; his foot slips on the stones and he gashes the fish's side. There is a last convulsive struggle, and, horror of horrors! the rod straightens and the line comes back fly-less in my face. It has been cut against that past-participled stone!

Everything is past-participled — the fish, the ghillie, the river, the stone, and my own peculiar and particular luck. Yet the fish is dead-beat, and lies quiet, gasping with his twitching gills. "After him now, man, before he gets away." And then ensued a scene which should have been instantaneously photographed. The fish floundering badly, but still a yard to the good; the ghillie floundering far worse after him; and over him, the outstretched gaff impending like the sword of Damocles, quite as imminent, but ah! not so accurately poised. Once, twice the gaff claws at the salmon; each time he just evades it. Another couple of feet and he'll be in the edge of the pool, in water deep enough to cover him, and then it will be "all up." But he runs against an awkward stone, which stops him a little. This lets the ghillie up. One more dive with the clip—this time a successful one—and ghillie and fish stumble ashore together.

Bravo! We knock him on the head, exchange congratulations, and are all smiles and delight. I examine him, and there, just in the tough white skin under the left pectoral fin, I find my "canary" fast as ever, with a couple of inches of ragged, frayed gut attached to it. Well, all's well that end's well. He weighs over 15 lbs.; 16 lbs. fisherman's weight that is; he has still a mark of the sea-lice on him; fresh-run and foul hooked, no wonder he made a gallant fight for it. It was that last fatal stone which lay in his way that did it. "*Ibi omnis effusus labor.*" I know of nothing so tragic as his capture, just as he had almost entered his pool, since Orpheus looked behind him at the very doors of Hades, and Eurydice was dragged back just as she had tasted the first faint breath of the fresh upper air.

The flask is produced, and we do him justice. "Health to man and death to fishes," as old Sandy used to give the toast years ago upon the Ewe. May no morning's "head" be attributed to the remains of so gallant a fish! We find a snug corner for him under a heathery bank, and up stream we move to the next pool. Not a fin stirs, so to the next—Upper Craggie. Here the wind catches the

water fairly, and it has risen to a perfect hurricane. Now it tears down stream, now it comes straight behind us. Then a gust catching on the rock opposite seems to rebound across the water below. The day, too, has changed, clouds have come up; a good honest dark fellow is covering the sun even now. We take off the "canary," and put on a small "Popham." This fly is not so much used now, but it did well—indeed, it was almost the standard fly—when I first fished the Naver, fourteen years ago. We fish the top of the pool after such fashion as the varying blasts will permit. Then we come opposite a certain rock over which the water just breaks. Well known is that spot to both man and fish. If there's only one fish in the pool the chances are he is here, and over that rock the fly must pass, and quiver life-like as it passes. Swish!—out it goes. No; a rebounding gust catches it, and it comes back almost to our feet. Pick it up, and out it goes again, but it straightens too soon, and splashes as it falls into the water. Never mind, it is well out to the other side; we will let the fly sink a bit, and it will work over the place well enough. There, with a great boil, he comes fairly enough, but never

nearly as low as ever. The nets at the mouth of the rivers have taken all the fish. I hear of 110 being caught one day, followed by 80 the next, chiefly grilse, but grilse running up to 9 lbs., and averaging about 7 lbs. These things require all one's philosophy.

But it is the heyday of summer. It is the season of the roses; and so we turn to the garden and rejoice in what it has to give us. There have been two sharp frosts during our absence, and up the straths the bracken is browned as in December; the potatoes are blackened and apparently killed; but the destroying angel has passed over our cherished acre of garden, and left bud and blossom, berry and fruit alike unharmed. Laburnum and lilac, narcissus and London Pride, rhododendron and the spring flowers have all gone by, but new blooms have taken their places.

The honeysuckle is at its very best, and a glorious show it is. The east side of the house is yellow with bloom. "The woodbine spices are wafted abroad" and fill the whole garden; nay, they creep so strongly into the east window of our bedroom that my wife positively declines to have

that window open during the night, as she finds the scent overpowering. Curiously enough Lord Tennyson, in the song from which I quote, has selected, whether by chance or design I know not, the very hour when, as it seems to me, the fragrance is strongest, just when the first morning sun beats full upon it.

Our garden is one of the most old-fashioned kind. We try to attain the realisation of Abraham Cowley's wish, and make it

> "A garden painted o'er
> With Nature's hand, not Art's."

It is the one plan, for instance, of our big bed that it shall have no plan at all; that the flowers shall all appear in it as if some great seed-bearing wind had passed over it, dropping its burden heedlessly as it went, and that all should grow up as it were upon the principle of the survival of the fittest. In spring when we have our seeds to sow we just look out for a vacant place here and there and sow a little patch; later on, when we have our little plants to put in, we proceed upon the same lines. And the result is the most curious combination of flowers all huddled together, and in too many cases

struggling with each other for the light and air, which to them mean life itself. High over all, giants of the bed, tower the standard honeysuckles, the queenly *lilium candidum*, the pride of many a cottage garden, "the lady lily looking gently down," and some standard roses. On a lower level antirrhinums or snap-dragons are elbowing the pansies and overshadowing the heliotrope, itself rather crowded on the other side by a mule pink. Next to them is a scarlet lychnis, then one or two pen-stemons of different colours. Beyond are one or two scattered clumps of sweet william, then a larkspur, and next to it perhaps an aquilegia or columbine. These have really done very badly with us. We planted out a dozen of them last May. One attended strictly to business, threw up a flower spike within a month, and "opened its folded wrapper;" but the rest, all struck at the same time and place, planted out on the same day and in the same bed, have shown no signs of flowering, but have preferred growth of leaf and lateral expansion.

So we find out a mistake into which other tyros like ourselves may well be led. We never allowed sufficiently for the plant's powers of self-extension,

many of them therefore are very short of room. The older inhabitants, pansies, musk, myosotis, almost *αὐτόχθονοι*, as the old Athenians boasted themselves to be, sprung from the soil in which they live, smother the newcomers. But how could I have guessed the size of the bush into which the tiny sprig of an antirrhinum would eventually develop? All these things must be more carefully considered next year, and I fear that we shall be forced either to content ourselves with fewer plants, or increase the accommodation for them by making further encroachments upon the lawn. We do not like the idea of floral evictions, and so I suppose that in the end the lawn will suffer.

As it is, the lawn is already cut up into a good number of little beds, some thirteen of them. There are diamonds, and ovals, and circles. With regard to these our first object has been to fill them with *sweet* flowers. All carpet-bedding, producing a blaze of colour and nothing more, would be utterly inappropriate to our little Scottish garden. Whether this pandering to "the lust of the eye and the pride of life" be desirable in the case of some stately mansion is a matter for its rich owner, or rather the

horticultural artist into whose hands he has entrusted this part of his property, to decide, but with the pomps and vanities of pelargonium, verbena, calceolaria, echeveria, pyrethrum, cerastium, *et hoc genus omne*, all drilled into some rainbow ribbon or fancy pattern we have nothing to do. Some calceolarias were sent to us in spring, and we relegated them to a corner of the kitchen garden, vacant by the failure of our onions, and there they blaze to their heart's content.

My favourite bed on the lawn is one in which are roses surrounded by a border of pinks and carnations. The latter have not yet opened their buds, and what they will be we know not. They are a mixed lot, and no doubt have some surprises in store for us. But the roses are, as I have already said, at their very best.

> "It was the month of roses,
> We plucked them as we passed."

What can be sweeter or purer in its virgin white than the Boule de Neige? Next to it stands Annie Allcroft, and Reine du Midi in pink: then the very dark crimson, almost purple, of the Duke of Edinburgh or the bright red of Doctor André. Then in

a neighbouring bed we have tried the convolvulus major or Ipomæa, but something has gone wrong with it. A wych-elm has "countercharged its floor . . . with dusk and bright," and I think the preponderance of shadow may have depressed the young seedlings. At all events we have no present prospect of any "morning glories." Then comes a bed of *lilium candidum*, but it too has disappointed us this year. Out of about twenty bulbs only nine have thrown up flower spikes. Yet last year it was such a success, that on one warm sunny morning I photographed it, and find that there were no fewer than eighteen flower-spikes then: and now there are only nine, yet it has not been interfered with. This bed must be thoroughly replenished before next season.

Into another bed we put some new rose bushes last March; alas, out of nine, four at least have died. To hide the barrenness of the ground we begged some petunias from a neighbour, he kindly promised to send them and some borage over together, on a certain afternoon. I gave the old gardener the clearest instructions with regard to them and went off to fish. On going round the garden next

morning, I found the borage in the rose-bed, and the petunias in the kitchen garden! of course there had to be an immediate transplantation, but both are hardy and did well. Already the petunias have crept along, and filled the bed with their many coloured blooms, varying from mingled pink and white to deep purple. Above them stands a Boule de Neige with its snowy flowers, and a little La France which bears one magnificent bloom.

The other beds contain stocks, sweet-peas and mignonette, three beds of each. These are so arranged that what with them, the honeysuckle, the musk (which by the way has been very poor this year), the white or summer pink, and the sweet-briar away there in the far corner, wherever you stand or go in our garden, at morn, midday, or eventide, some soft wind shall reach you from some sweet-scented bed "stealing and giving odour." Our borders to these beds are mostly spring flowers, polyanthus, auricula, candytuft, viola, alyssum, etc.; they give some colour to the naked earth in spring, and in the summer, when the beds themselves are full and flowering, we can do without them. Next year we hope to make our little wood give us some spring

colouring; we have already got in some primroses, oxlips, and cowslips from the hill, and we mean to plant some daffodil, pheasant's eye, and crocus bulbs.

Besides these beds the lawn has two or three large roots upon it. They were dug up years ago in the course of some land reclamations, carted here, and placed on the lawn: over them honeysuckle and everlasting pea have been trained. They are both at their best just now, but we have to keep the latter obtrusive plant within due bounds, or he would oust his sweeter comrade. The large root in the middle of the lawn is a heap of roots, and here we let all go as they please. Its garments are ivy, everlasting pea, and the common fern; these are all hardy and may well be left to fight their own battles.

*August* 4.—This is the hottest morning we have yet had, even in this hot year. Not a cloud has overshadowed the sun since he rose, and there is hardly a breath of wind. At seven o'clock Laoghal was belted like Orion, but with a broad band of pure white mist, above which in purple, green, and gray, infinitely softened by the distance, his rugged head rose to cut the blue sky beyond. All the lower hills seem clad in varied shades of "*living* green," as Dr.

Watts in his well-known poem describes the fields of Paradise. The morning sunlight seems to give them life. There is the bright green of the short sward, then it grows darker with the bracken, and darkest of all where the heather, already purpling here and there, rises on the hill. No wonder that in weather such as this, the "Pageant of Summer" moves all too quickly, and our garden is earlier than usual.

Fishing would be absurd. We took one lounge after mushrooms, and got a good basketful of them in the wood by the river; but action of any kind is distasteful, so I betake myself to the hammock under the shade of the ash-trees by the road, and there, building those airy fairy castles of which it is given to so few of us ever to see the realisation, enjoy to the full

"The soft eye-music of slow-waving boughs,"

The honeysuckle has crept up the ash from which the hammock hangs, and one long tendril, flower-crowned, swings slowly past my head. On a day like this the bare fact of existence becomes a palpable, almost tangible, delight.

But the heat seems to kindle the old strength

of our gardener. He braves it on the lawn; and pregnant with memories of childhood's days before cogs, wheels, and knives were ever fashioned into mowing machines, there comes to me the

> "Sound to rout the brood of cares
> The sweep of scythe in morning dew."

From the hammock I look under the rowan whose berries are already darkening, past the large clump of fuchsia with its crimson pendants, to the south wall. This is the sun trap of our garden. The wall protects it from the north; the house from the east; the hill and the trees under which I am lying, from the west. It stands full-facing the mid-day sun. It was here that La France gave us our first rose on the 20th of June. By the end of the month her first flowering was over, but now she has begun again, and nothing could be sweeter or more beautiful than the bloom which has fully opened this morning. A Gloire de Dijon on the same wall does not do so well, and I can't think why, but the Triomphe de Rennes is splendid, full of bud and blossom. Had we stood with Richard Plantagenet and the three earls in Temple gardens, we, as true Lancastrians, would have been bound to pluck the

red rose with Somerset, and yet I know not whether our great sister county may not boast the fairer flower. Farther on is a Souvenir de Malmaison. For some years it had been one of the strongest and best flowering roses in the garden. Last year in spring it suddenly died right down and disappeared. In the summer, phœnix-like, it rose again from its ashes, or more literally roots, and now though later than it used to be, gives fair promise of a return to its former fertility.

Next to it is a little jasmine bush, rather backward, for its buds are not white yet, while the jasmine on the house came out yesterday. Then over the door that leads to the kitchen garden is another honeysuckle bush; it covers both sides of the wall, but the south side flowers a week or ten days before the north. Among it, for they seem to intertwine, is a kerria, which gave us some yellow flowers in spring; then a pink spiræa, very like the meadowsweet which we find on the moor, but what it gains in colour it loses in fragrance, for the pink variety that we have is scentless. This year it seems very sickly; it has some rosy buds, but the leaves have all turned yellow, and the buds refuse to open. Along

this wall we have tried the *lilium auratum*, but so far without success. We have attained to tall spikes and even to buds that have seemed on the very point of opening, and yet have never done so. I hope to try some new bulbs next year. Too much space here, for this is our sunniest and most sheltered spot, is occupied by some Japanese anemones. They came up in the spring of '85—tiny, fragile-looking mites, and were in pity planted here; now they have become great bushes of a most aggressive character, and this autumn will witness their eviction. So with some prolific but poor single roses. They are very charming, but they fill spaces required for their choicer sisters. They too must go. In their places I shall put a La France, Boule de Neige, and one or two others. The evicted ones shall retire to some more exposed spots where they and the weather must settle it between them. Mr. W. Robinson, in his *English Flower Garden*, says that Japanese anemones are "charming in the shade of a wood," so I shall put them where the convolvulus has failed.

Then from the big bed we mean to turn out two large plants of the *Helleborus niger* or Christmas rose. To us they are useless, for we go south long

before they think of flowering, but a friend who lives near here all the year round accepts them gladly, for he says that a plant which I gave him last year just saved them from being absolutely flowerless at any time during last winter; and they will be a little return gift for the petunias. We are very much disappointed with the mignonette. It sprang up from the seed quite thickly, then by degrees most of it browned and died off. Perhaps we ought to have thinned it more severely, or perhaps our watering was in fault. Our old gardener insisted upon conducting this upon his own plan. Every evening during the drought he damped the top of the ground, never giving sufficient water to moisten the deeper soil where the roots should grow. Hence I suspect when the little fibres sought moisture they found it on the surface, were attracted to it, formed and grew too near the surface, and withered when the sun's heat baked the top of the soil.

The sweet-peas will be in flower directly; all, as Keats says,

> "On top-toe for a flight
> With wings of gentle flush o'er delicate white."

I see some of the buds are already showing colour.

We always sow them mixed; but I have noticed that the red ones open first, some days before the others. Indeed at one time last year I began to fear that we had been supplied with only one variety by mistake, but the others appeared in due time. A carnation is beginning to open, I think it is a scarlet clove. And the heliotropes are all doing capitally. We have often tried them up here, but hitherto cold or wet has always killed them. This year I think there is no doubt about their flowering.

But I have exceeded the space I usually allot to any single chapter or subject. Other matters claim attention and I must pass on to them, but meanwhile in our little acre of ground, as Mr. Emerson says, "In graceful succession, in equal fulness, in balanced beauty, the dance of the hours goes forward still."

## CHAPTER VI

> "Now while the swift ship thro' the waters clave,
> All happy things that in the waters dwell,
>
> . . . . .
>
> "In the green water gave them greeting free.
> Ah! long light lingered, late the darkness fell,
> That night upon the isle of Cranaë."

*ULY* 29.—We have had a day on the sea, and a picnic on the little island that stands some two or three hundred yards off the coast. A wild, wide, rugged, and inhospitable coast it is; not even Tenedos in the Æneid more thoroughly earned the description of "statio male fida carinis." Here and there, generally where some river or burn discharges itself into the sea, there is a broad stretch of sand. Otherwise on all sides upstand precipitous iron-bound rocks, which

"Chide like Loch Eribol their caverns hoar."

And the sands themselves, entirely exposed to all winds with north in them, are ill adapted for launching or stranding boats, so the local fishermen chiefly use a little shingly beach about three miles from our house, where the island on which we held picnic affords some shelter.

Here then, having given timely notice for the collection of limpets from the rocks at the last ebb-tide, and the baiting therewith of a long line, we embark about midday. It is half-ebb now, so from four to five o'clock will be the best time for setting the line. The boats about here are certainly devoid of any of the beauties of naval architecture. They are built apparently with the idea of permitting their crews to proceed bow or stern foremost, as pleases them best; with equal despatch, or rather lack of it. There is usually a mast and a lug sail of a deep chocolate tan, such as the Royal Academician loves to introduce into the foreground of his conventional sea-piece. The oars are of great length and even more than proportionate unwieldiness, any leather binding or button at the thole is unknown; in place of this each oar is enclosed in a

kind of square wooden casing, so as to prevent it turning in the hands of the oarsmen, which, considering the primitive nature of the thole pins, it would be very apt to do. These are literally brands plucked from the burning, bits of what in England would be used as firewood, fashioned, when and as required, by the knife from any piece of wood that happens to be at hand. It is needless to say that feathering is an art unpractised—indeed impossible. The boats themselves are massive and heavy. I believe they have a substructure or framework of strong wood, but it is overladen with innumerable yearly coatings of tar. Bottom boards are a luxury. Usually, before you lies the black shell of the boat with all its ribs and timbers showing. Clothes worn on one of these marine expeditions are fatal to the drawing-room afterwards.

We run the boat down the shingle and embark. As there is but little wind, and the island is so near, we put out the sweeps instead of hoisting the sail. There are two islands off the coast just here. That to which we are going is called Island Comb; it is only divided from the mainland by a narrow channel about a couple of hundred yards across. The other,

two miles off to the north-west, is called Island Roan, or Seal Island. Thither, later on in the year, we shall go with our stalking-rifle, and hope for a shot at the animal whence it takes its name.

And so we get out into the open sea, and what a sea it is! Blue and clear as the sky and air. There, right away to the north-east, we see the faint, gray shadowy outlines of another bold, rocky coast. One seems to go sheer down into the sea. That, they tell us, is Hoy Head, in the Orkneys; perhaps some of the others, farther and fainter, may be the heights that overlook the Shetland "Voes" —the land associated with the tale and fortunes of the worthy old Udaller, Magnus Troil, and his family at Burgh Westra, and wild "Norna of the Fitful Head." To the north there is nothing up to where sea and sky meet. That is the path of those sturdy old sea-dogs, the North Sea whalers from Peterhead. Beneath and around us the water is a pale green; for we are moving over a bottom of yellow sand. Out there to seaward is rock, and there, as to the happy lover in "Maud,"

"A deeper sapphire melts into the sea."

The Mediterranean itself cannot boast a purer blue.

Farther out still, under that dark rain-cloud, it becomes purple, and vindicates the truth of old Homer's epithet—*ἐπὶ οἴνοπι πόντῳ*—upon the wine-dark sea, as it assumes the colour deeper than that of Burgundy—the colour of the ancient Chian.

Meanwhile, we are coming close to the little island on which we are to land and lunch; and as under its lee the faint ripple dies off the surface, we can look down, so clear is it, some twenty or thirty feet below us. Backwards, forwards, in the tide, sweep long trailing masses of many-coloured sea-ware—the varied tangled foliage of the ocean. The rock there is gray with clusters of myriads of infant limpets, there violet with innumerable mussels, while crimson spots, scattered up and down, show where the sea-anemones have fixed their homes. We are "off shore," and with Mr. Swinburne we see how

> "Far under
> In the depths of her hold,
> Some glimpse of its wonder
> Man's eye may behold
> Its wild weed forest of crimson and russet and olive and gold."

We can almost sympathise with the weird fancies of "them of old time" which peopled these marine

pleasances with merman, nymph, and goddess, and refused to believe the truth, seemingly so much more incredible, that they are but the accident of circumstance or the outcome of self-evolving laws. At the point of the island behind us, to the west, juts out a scarped shelf of rock, buried ever and anon by the long rolling swell of the Atlantic,—mighty messengers are these that tell us of angry battlings, wherein winds and waves have warred together, it may be a thousand miles away. But the sun is hot, the air is well-nigh still, and the gentle oar-splash is soothing as the rills that babbled long ago in the garden of Alphius

> "Somnos quod invitet leves;"

and as the scene lends itself to the imagination I dream of how bound to such an iron rock as that, Andromeda, fairest of all royal sacrifices, awaited in far Æthiopia her doom at the pitiless jaws of the sea-monster. A few moments and there will come the ring of the divine armour, the "glorious sun uprist" will gild the green crests of the Eastern waves, will glance on gleaming sword and shield, and Perseus with winged feet will bear off his lovely bride and win for himself undying renown.

But a scream and chatter from some oyster-catchers, and a bump upon the rock where we are to land, recall us from the days of mythology to the very present necessities of lunch. We land and picnic. We stroll up the cliffs among the short sheep-cropped grass. There are no mushrooms as yet: but we take a look at the sheep. Here they summer the tups, and also some four-year-olds destined for Borgie dinner-table. In the winter gales, sea and spray sweep right over the rocks and across the grass, so the meat is truly *pré salé* such as our soul loveth. Meanwhile the time is fast slipping away. We must go and set the line.

Hand-lines are useless here. We have some fifty fathoms of water and the tides set strong. So our fishing is conducted by means of a "long line" or "trot." This consists of a strong cord, some three hundred yards in length, upon which are fastened, at intervals of six feet, snoods; each snood with a hook at the end of it. The hooks are baited with bits of herring, lug-worms, sand-eels, limpets, almost anything will do, and the whole line, or, as in the present case, two tied together, making six hundred yards in all, weighted at either end with a heavy

stone, is paid out so as to lie on the bottom across the run of the fish as they sweep in with the flood or out with the ebb. Half-flood is the best time. At one end we fasten a long cord with a big black bladder attached to it. This will show us where our line is and enable us to recover it. We know well the points which mark the best fishing-ground. You get that rock there upon a line with the peak of Ben Laoghal, and go along that line till the arched rock, church-window as we call it, at the extremity of Island Comb, no longer hides Strathy Point. Then you are at the place. We drift about in a semicircular course as the old fisherman quickly but carefully throws the line overboard. It is soon done; and if there be any lady or gentleman on board who has not complete confidence in her or his sea-worthiness, now is the time for them to be put on shore. It is trying times, rolling lazily in the swell, when the line is being laid, but much worse is it when we are hauling it in, possibly because it takes longer. We must leave it down for an hour or so, not less or the fish have no time to be caught; not much more or the crabs and dog-fish will come and take a Benjamin's portion of our spoil.

No one for shore. Then up with mast and sail, we'll tack about a bit. Pass the rudder and tiller aft. We have not shipped them as yet, for the fishermen dislike being steered when they are rowing. They prefer to do the business themselves with the oars. Possibly they have had experience of amateur coxswains, and are wise in their generation. They do not positively object to my being at the helm, for they have found out that I too have done and suffered greatly at the hands of ambitious and precocious youth, writing its ill-starred name upon the water as it went: still I generally leave them to themselves. We set the sail, and the boat leans over from the breeze, and the bubbles splash merrily to leeward. "Poof!" and the passengers start as if Andromeda's

"Wallowing monster spouted his foam-fountains in the sea."

It is only a porpoise. Wait a moment and he'll be up again to blow. "See, there he is," as a great black fellow plunges up and dives again. More than once have I tried them both with gun and rifle but never with any satisfactory result beyond this,—we waste powder and lead upon them no longer. Now let us look for the black bladder. We find it half a mile

off and almost dead to leeward. Hard up with the tiller, slack away the sheet, and we are there in no time. Down sail; and now the excitement begins. We have a visitor on board, a man of thew and sinew. Will he undertake to pull up the line? Will he! Won't he? And the crew smile curiously at his eagerness. Well do they know that a hard day's salmon fishing isn't more trying to the small of the back than ten minutes' hauling of a long line if you *stand up* to do it; which of course, in the interest of his knickerbockers, he will do.

We catch hold of the bladder, lift the stone, and then the hooks begin to come in; the first two or three are bare, bait gone and nothing caught. Then comes a star-fish, he is thrown overboard contemptuously. Meanwhile, all eyes are peering anxiously into the blue depths. Then at last there is a green gleam far away down, wobbling about in a kind of circle, —that's our first fish,—and as he comes up to the top his curious gyrations inform us of his kind. He is a flat fish of some sort, perhaps a flounder, perhaps a plaice. Then two or three fish come almost together,—haddocks with a peculiar mauve or violet bloom upon them, and the mark of where, according

to certain traditions, St. Peter's thumb left its blessed and indelible mark. They look very different from the grayish-brown washed out articles which we see on the marble slab at our fishmonger's in London. Then, bristling in his panoply of spikes, armed *cap-à-pie* like the knights of old at Ashby de la Zouche, comes up a gurnet in green followed by another in scarlet. Our guest draws himself up and straightens his back to relieve the strain, and the old boatman silently takes the line. His nether garments are covered with a mackintosh and he *sits down* to haul. Grimly does the old man smile, for he has not done with our friend yet. He points to the larger gurnet and says, "Ye'll no' eat the meat frae the heid o' yon fush ; gin ae body ate the meat frae the heid o' yon fush he wad be poisoned : but his body—oh aye, his body will eat fine." Of course we explain to our surprised guest that a gurnet's head is all skin and bone, but the old boatman is pleased. He has resurrected his ancient fishing "sell" and added one more to the long list of its victims. But his smile grows stern as a lean, long, leopard-like, shark-mouthed fish comes to the top. He seizes it, extracts the hook, then shifting his grasp to near the tail

swings it over his head, dashes its head upon the side of the boat, and flings it more than half dead into the water. We gather from his mutterings that though by this summary proceeding he has saved the dog-fish from any chance of the frying-pan, his eschatological creed condemns him to an eternity of the fire. But a series of fish are coming to hand—a whiting, then some more haddock, a gurnet, a few plaice and flounders, a crab, some codling, and a few more star and dog-fish; nothing out of the way except a lean hungry-looking cod, very thin about the tail, he is flung overboard, but unharmed, with the one remark, "saft." About seven or eight dozen fish, a good catch all things considered, and they will keep the house going for a few days. As soon as we get home we will have our flounders filleted and fried crisp in bread-crumbs. Eat them thus, within six hours of their being caught, with sauce Hollandaise, and nothing can be better. Keep them till next day, and they are soft and well-nigh worthless. The haddocks will improve by being kept, sprinkled plentifully with salt, for a few days. The largest of these, by the way, scaled 6¾ lbs., a fish not inferior to those of far-famed Dublin Bay.

But the West is glowing with rosy tints. To the South, over Stomino and Laoghal, a glorious violet is deepening into dark purple. It is high time we turned shorewards. The wind has died in the sunset; out with the oars, round with her head, and so home.

## CHAPTER VII

"O fortunatos nimium sua si bona nôrint."

*UGUST 7.*—Sunday. Our day of rest, and as I walked to the shore I encountered a sight which to English eyes appeared irresistibly comic. It seems that the minister of the nearest kirk had taken leave of absence, and his flock, or such of them as disdained to be the victims of circumstance, were obliged to seek the consolations of religion elsewhere. This necessitated fording the river. I met one of these parties near the ford. It was headed by an elderly gray-haired man, irreproachably clad in tall hat, black frock-coat, waistcoat, and trousers. Down to his very feet he was attired in a costume suitable to the church parade in the park. There, however,

his qualifications ended. For the convenience of wading he carried his boots in one hand, his socks in the other, while he himself marched barefoot!

I passed them with the usual friendly greeting, and walked on to the little burial-ground, where down by the sea

"The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

It stands right on the shore of the bay; at high tide the waves lap its very walls; at its back lie the crofts and corn patches, and behind them rises the purple moor; a little burn plashes pleasantly past it. If external surroundings could, as some seem fondly to fancy, affect them that lie within, they should sleep peacefully and happily enough. I opened the little gate and went in. They have this year added some few square yards to its area, and there are, I noticed, several graves, hardly green yet, which were not here when we went south last October. One monument stands out in proud relief from the others. It is the only one, and it presides over a burying-place specially enclosed for what must have been the chief family of the neighbourhood. Its headstone, protected by some brickwork for its better preservation, announces that it was erected in

1808 by the Tongue Company of Sutherland Volunteers to the memory of their Captain—John Mackay of Skerray, and it bears the following poetical tribute to his excellence:—

> "To the hearts of the good be his memory dear,
> Whose nature such virtues adorned,
> As living were praised and beloved by the PEER,
> And dead by the PEASANT were mourned."

Many of the graves are very old; many of the stones that once told the names of them that lie beneath, have mouldered so long uncared for 'neath wind and weather as to have become quite undecipherable. In other instances there is no record at all; just a little mound of earth with two common pieces of gray rock picked from the hillside, one at the head, one at the feet, marks where one of the poorer portion of the little community lies forgotten in a nameless grave. Where I can decipher names, I find, as might have been expected, that Mackays largely predominate,—of course this is their particular country, the old country of the Reay family,—but there are also Munros, Morrisons, and Macbeths. The new graves are all as yet nameless. In one of them lies an old woman whose age could only be

guessed at from the fact that she was, so she said, a woman of about thirty-six when gathering kelp for glazing pots ; an industry which was discontinued some seventy years ago. She was supposed to have outlived the century by two or three years. Another mound shows where reposes the village schoolmaster, overtaken by a sudden snow-storm as he crossed the hill last winter. He was found some days after, "half-buried in the snow," like the youthful standard-bearer of Longfellow's poem, a mile or more from the path. There again lie together in one grave a bright-eyed boy, who almost this very day last year fell from a high rock on Island Roan, whither he had gone after a pigeon's nest, and his long-ailing mother whose lingering strength was unequal to her sudden bereavement. The father who was at the East Coast herring-fishery was telegraphed for, and arrived to find his house left unto him desolate, and two corpses instead of one to bury. Truly in cases such as these

"Sunt lacrymæ rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt."

There is not a flower in the whole graveyard—nay, there is just one in a corner ; one little blue-eyed forget-me-not lifts its mutely eloquent protest on

behalf of the memory of those who have gone over to the majority.

On three sides of God's acre lie the crofts of men. They look well enough: the frost which blackened the potatoes up the strath was powerless close to the sea. Perhaps there may be too great an abundance of corn-marigold, and charlock to satisfy the critical eye of the modern farmer; and every here and there the unwilling glebe yields but a scanty crop; yet on the whole the season has been a good one, and the fields bear silent but unanswerable testimony to the fact.

In this parish of Tongue there are 255 crofters and cottars at an average annual rental of under £3 : 12s. For this they have a bothy or cottage to live in, an average holding of from four to five acres to cultivate, the right to cut divots or peats, and to run a pony or two and a few cattle and sheep, upon 22,000 acres of hill grazing (and that by no means the worst in the neighbourhood), which they enjoy in common. And at their very doors lies the inexhaustible harvest of the untilled ocean. Besides this the able-bodied men go for eight or ten weeks every year to the

East Coast herring-fishery, whence they bring back wages or part profits running often from £12 to £25 apiece. And yet they consider themselves to be an oppressed and impoverished population. That there exists a certain amount of pauperism is evidenced by the fact that the poor-rate alone amounts to 3s. in the pound. This is due partly to the extreme old age to which many of them live, partly to their want of thrift with what they do get, and partly to the fact that, except at the time of the herring-fishery, the male portion of the population is imbued with an engrained determination to be idle. The women do most of the labour—even of the hard labour in the fields—and an annual exhibition of work, limited to the county, recently started at Dunrobin by the Marchioness of Stafford (who will assuredly win ample reward for her trouble from many a thankful heart in Sutherland), seems to have revived a waning interest in their knitting needles and spinning wheels.

But in proof of what I have said as regards the men, I will give two instances which have come under my personal notice. The rocks off the coast here abound with lobsters; the people have plenty of

lobster pots; but I can't get a lobster for my table, except at prices exceeding those which would be asked by a West-end fishmonger in London. Two years ago I publicly offered to pay the average market price, as given in the last London paper that had arrived, on delivery of a dozen lobsters at my house. This offer was unanimously declined as not good enough.

I have already in my last notes referred to dragging the boats down the shingly beach to the sea when they are required for use. That, however, is comparatively easy—as easy as, according to Virgil's well-known lines, was the descent into Avernus, compared with the toils and difficulties of the return journey. And hauling these heavy boats back again *up* the shingle out of reach of the tide is very hard work indeed. Yet I have seen young women and boys little more than children pressed, not unwillingly, into the service. It may be questionable whether it is work to which young boys should be called; there can be no question whatsoever that it is work for which women are utterly and physically unfitted. Some time ago, therefore, I suggested the desirability of procuring a capstan or windlass, such as I think

is used at Brighton, and other watering-places on the south coast, for similar purposes. I offered to subscribe, and to approach the Duke of Sutherland upon the question. My offer was accepted, and I spoke to the Duke's representative at Tongue. He informed me that he happened to have in his store the very article required, and assured me that a deputation of fisher-crofters asking for it would be favourably received by him. I was free to mention the fact, and I did so; but from that day to the present they have not thought it worth their while to go and ask for what they said they wanted, and what they were assured that, if they asked for it, they would get.

With such surroundings and circumstances most English labourers not yet in possession of the three acres and a cow would gladly change. And yet the crofters are not satisfied. Land hunger is an infectious disease. The West Coast has caught it from Ireland. The agitators of the Land League are trying to spread it along the north. Wherever they go they find soil more or less ready for their purpose. Men will always listen to people who tell them they are ill-used. From Jewish days, he has been the most popular preacher who has obeyed the

command, "Speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits." Deep down in the hearts of my crofting neighbours there lies a vague and unreasoning discontent. Like most primitive people they cherish the illusion of a Golden Age. Then they were not upon the sea-shore, wind-swept by the northern gales, but settled up the straths now so green and fat. To these they desire, and consider that they have a right, to return. But so far from the past having been to them an Age of Gold, their removal was only decided upon because they failed in these straths to obtain adequate subsistence. The hardy, it is true, survived; but the weakly died, sometimes in quasi-epidemics caused by insufficient food and clothing. The migration to the sea-coast was designed for the purpose of adding the resources of the sea to those of their crofts. And the present smiling aspect of their ancient holdings is due, not to any relics of their industry, but to the reclamations extensively carried on by the large sheep farmers who succeeded them.

A year or two ago I happened to drive down "bonnie Strathnaver" in company with one of the crofters, and we discussed the question in which he and his fellows were so much interested. I asked

him to point out how in old days the local population were better off than they are at the present. There was a long hesitation. That they were better off was an article of belief, undeniable as any or all the great thirty-nine, unquestionable as a postulate of Euclid. I endeavoured to clear the way by suggestions. What resources had they then that they had not now? How did they live? Well, they got their meal from their crofts then, and occasionally one of them would kill a sheep, and the community partook of the mutton. Could they not do this equally well now? Certainly they could. Had they not the sea-fishing now, which they had not then? Doubtless they had. At last came after much hesitation the great grievance, the great disadvantage of their condition at present as compared with that of their forefathers. They had no bill with the "merchant" for tea or stores in those days. Perhaps there was no merchant to give them credit? Well, that was admitted to be so. Thus the grievance of a discontented crofter dwindled to the fact that he now was able to procure, upon credit, such goods as he desired from a shop locally established, instead of getting them (as formerly he must have done if he

got them at all, which is doubtful) from a travelling pedlar, whose only terms were ready money down, or its equivalent.

Of course there are some crofters who could enter into elaborate traditions of ancient rights encroached upon, ancient usages violated or even summarily abolished to the detriment of the crofting interest: but the general feeling is really a vague one. There is a tendency to look enviously at, and hear eagerly of, recent legislation about Irish land. There is discontent at hopes raised by ambitious delegates at and before the appointment of the Royal Commission of '83, and confirmed, as in their simplicity the people thought they were, by the visit of the Commissioners, but never realised. There is an idea that they ought to be re-established in their old holdings—but with new dwellings to be erected at the expense of any one but themselves—without payment of compensation for recent improvements, and that they should be able to procure grants of money from Government with which to stock their resumed tenancies. Such at least are the ideas which seem to crop up in general conversation with them.

There was a sharp summer shower during

luncheon, and afterwards we strolled along the road towards the bridge. We lingered in a little hanging wood at a snug corner, sheltered from all winds save that from the soft south. The sun came out warm, every leaf sparkled with its water-jewel, and if a breeze stole among the foliage

"The birch-trees wept in fragrant balm."

Has any other poet ever noticed the peculiar but delicious odour of "the silver birks"? And so we strolled on to where, by the side of the road beyond the bridge and across the river, stands what to the most inexperienced eye is evidently the remains of some ancient stronghold. The Ordnance Map notes its position as the "site of a Hill Fort." It is now little more than a circular mound rising from a wilderness of heather, and surrounded by a depression which must once have been a moat. Clearly this used long ago to be a base of warlike operations, offensive or defensive, against the neighbourhood. Probably its earliest garrison were of the Pictish race; for all round us here numerous little collections of piled stone are marked in the Ordnance Map as Pictish circles or towers. If this be so these relics must probably date back to a period long before the

Norman Conquest. The Picts made their first appearance, or, at least, are first mentioned by that name, in the early years of the fourth century. They lived by plunder, they went almost naked, and used to puncture the figures of animals on their bodies, a habit which moved one, Claudius Claudianus, to embellish his verse with a pun—

> "Nec falso nomine Pictos
> Edomuit."

How the worthy old Roman courtier must have chuckled to himself as he perpetrated an atrocity destined to raise a smile some fourteen hundred years after he had gone to his rest!

I wish I had a friend learned in the mysteries of archæology, for here, I think, he might find something to interest him. Failing that, the next time the Duke of Sutherland comes round to visit his possessions in this neighbourhood, I think I shall suggest to him that if ever he entertains any of the archæological fraternity at Dunrobin they might spend a day of congenial investigation here. Surely excavations similar to those made some time ago near Golspie might produce similarly satisfactory results. Who can say what we might or might not

find here? rude weapons perchance of an age well-nigh pre-historic; flint knives, spear or arrow heads, bones or shells, evidences of feasts long, long ago. Or perhaps like Virgil's husbandman upon the plains of Emathia and Hæmus, we might break rudely in upon the repose of some great chieftain resting from his wars—

> "Scilicet et tempus veniet, cum finibus illis
> Agricola, incurvo terram molitus aratro,
> Exesa inveniet scabra robigine pila,
> Aut gravibus rastris galeas pulsabit inanes,
> Grandiaque effossis mirabitur ossa sepulcris."

## CHAPTER VIII

> "Ilk flower that blooms on foreign fell
> Wad mind me o' the heather bell.
> Ilk little streamlet's jouk and turn
> Wad mind me o' Glenouroch burn.
> Lands may be fair ayont the sea,
> But Hieland hills and lochs for me."

*UGUST* 24.—The long drought broke up in Sutherland just as our thoughts had ceased to dwell on fishing, and we had begun to furbish up our shooting tackle, and take the dogs out for some preliminary walks on the hill. The rain came on the 8th of August. A few showers fell on the Saturday and Sunday, but the real downpour began on the Monday. Then the windows of heaven were opened, and then came the Lammas floods, just a week after their day. It rained more or less for nearly a fortnight; the rivers

ran big and brown—and how filthy they were! All the accumulations of three months' drought had to come down, all the greasy relics of the sheep-dipping, all the slimy green and brown filth which had grown on the bed of the river—all were washed away in one reeking flood. What few fish there were in the rivers were sickened, and those on the coast were, I verily believe, driven out to sea. At least, I know that sport with rod and line didn't begin till some time after it, and even then, in what His Grace of Beaufort, with due acknowledgment to the Irish authors of the phrase, calls "Soolky Agust," there was very little good done. Grouse shooting was miserable work. Once or twice we snatched a day, never quite escaping a wetting. Showers always kept coming up, drenching the heather, making the birds wild, and draggling the plumage of such as hung from the sticks; but, *tout vient à bout a celui qui sait attendre*, and what a perfect day was this 24th of August! Bright, sunny, hot, with a gentle breeze stealing up from the south-east. Now we have one beat far away, which we always shoot as early in the season as we can—indeed, upon the first fine day we have. This has come at last, so off we go.

The men and dogs start betimes. I follow them on pony back—four miles across the moor on a pony track to a shepherd's house, and thence there is a two miles' trudge across some wet floe ground. We keep the dogs in their couples till we get to our own beat, a long, precipitous hill, lying in a semicircle, the concave side to the north, with some good low ground at its foot. Five minutes, and the keeper discards his coat, and I my waistcoat. Then the dogs, though in their couples, begin to feather. "Look out, sir!" We follow up with them, and on the far side of a dry nobbie (I wonder how that Scotch expression should be spelt, is there a "k" mute before it or not?)

> "The muir-cock springs on whirring wings
> Amang the blooming heather."

"Bang!" goes the first barrel, splashing the water of the floe a good half foot under him; but he turns in the air, followed now by his covey, and the second meets him full. Down he comes with a plump, and we have scored one. It should have been two, but with all apologies to Lords de Grey and Walsingham, Messrs. Archie Wortley, Rimington Wilson, Ward Hunt, and some few others, whose mighty

achievements we unsuccessfully endeavour to emulate, the man who never misses has yet to be born. A "right and left" follow in better fashion, and we plant our first step on our own beat.

We shall take the spur of the hill, and zig-zag it up. The wind is good for the dogs, blowing gently down both sides of the hill, which lies E.S.E. to W.N.W. We loose "Sweep" and "Flos," an old Gordon and a young English setter, and off we go. Sweep has taken a wide beat to the right, a little behind us, and is drawing up to a point. "To-ho!" and he stiffens to his birds. There they are—with their heads up, worse luck!—some twenty yards before his nose. Flos sees what is coming, and is anxious to share the fun, but the whistle and uplifted hand put her down. When birds are ticklish, it is always a good thing to get them between you and the dog. Generally they are looking back at him, and you may step down upon them unperceived. So it happens now, and I get to about thirty yards; then they see me, and down drops every little head. I walk on and encourage the dog. He steals a yard or two nearer; and now we have them! Up they get in a cluster. The first

bird leads off to the left, and there's a second flying close under it. I take the first, and hope to get its neighbour too. It feathers and falls, but I don't see what becomes of the other. A young cock crows, and falls to the second barrel. "Down charge!" and I slip fresh cartridges in. "There's one bird dropped by that stone; you'd better go and get him," says the keeper, as we watch the remaining seven birds of the covey top a ridge half a mile away down wind, and well off our beat. No doubt this bird was neighbour to the victim of the first barrel, and got a shot-corn or two. I go up, and the bird rises wild, having run some thirty yards. However, my choked barrel turns him up into the boundary burn of the beat. We'll keep him some time on the stick, till he dries in the sun and wind.

This is a matter about which no one can be too particular. Every bird shot and gathered should be carried in the open air, with the wind blowing about his feathers, for half an hour, till he cools; then, and not till then, let him go into the panniers. Once home, let every bird be hung up in the larder for a whole night if possible—an hour or two at least.

Then, when they have to be packed, a pepper-pot should be handy. Lay the bird flat down on a large square of kitchen paper. Sprinkle pepper on his beak, under his wings, and wherever else there may be evidences of heavy shot mark; then roll his head up in the paper, slip it under his wing, fold him up so that some part of the paper goes between his other wing and his breast; twist the end off at his tail, and lay him in the box; put him and his *compagnons de voyage* heads and tails, a few sprigs of nice fresh heather on the top, and nail the lid down; so will he arrive fresh at his destination, and so will you be complimented by the grateful recipients upon the condition in which your birds have reached them. A year or so ago a friend was good enough to send me some partridges. They arrived in a bass bag, the sort of receptacle in which city men, living at Clapham, carry home the fish for their dinner. Into this they had been chucked anyhow, and the opening sewn up, not deftly enough to defeat the railway porter, who had levied a small percentage. They had fermented, or something, on the way, and the first brace we tried tasted so "cupboardy" that we couldn't eat them. What happened to

the rest I know not, but eat them I neither would nor did.

Meantime, sport has progressed. Sweep has been down wind into one lot, and tasted whipcord. Flos has greatly relished a bird or two being killed over her, and is shaping capitally. A little experience, and she'll be as good as a dog need be. I've climbed the hill after a blue hare, which I had marked and hoped to find behind a hillock, but which, arrived there, I did find sitting up on a top, some 300 yards above me, rubbing her face in a manner suggestive of a London street Arab, "who put his thumb unto his nose and spread his fingers out." "To-ho!" from below, and I bundle down to where Flos is standing. The keeper is crouched close to her, and beckons me to him. "There's a big lot there—twenty, I think; they've run over that bare top;" and so I follow fast. There they are on the opposite face, and off goes the pack, undiminished by a wild shot from the choked barrel, fired at the last one on the principle of "the devil take the hindmost." They number seventeen, and they go as if for Caithness. I ought to have got in front of them, but it can't be helped now; we shan't see them

again to-day. Then Sweep points in some yellow grass. Heads up again, and at my first attempt to manœuvre round them they're away after the seventeen. However, we have been picking up, now one, now a brace, out of more confiding coveys, and meeting an occasional young bird by himself, a straggler from his family, have added him to the pendants of the stick—eleven brace in all.

So the time has come for lunch, and we sit down on a green mound of short grass at the foot of the hill (for we have worked down to follow a covey)—horrid nuisance, it means climbing on a full stomach, which is hateful. The short grass here shows the site of an old clearing; indeed, it is the scene of some of the famous Sutherland evictions, for which, whatever their forefathers may have been, the present generation is not sufficiently grateful. Great smokers have ere now raised serious debate as to which part of the whole day, or night for matter of that, lends most zest to the enjoyment of tobacco. Some support the first cigar after breakfast, others the cigarette which is lit as the door closes behind the ladies retiring from the dinner-table; but I should give my vote to the after-luncheon pipe upon the

moor. The scene lends enchantment to the pleasant incense. There is, as George Lawrence described it,

> "The rest beside the brindled rock,
> The broad view far and near,
> The wandering pondering dream of dreams,
> The dream beside the deer."

And though our deer be not the lordly stag,—we once killed one within 400 yards of the very stone on which we are sitting,—but only such small deer as grouse and hares, from our enjoyment of "the broad view," that detracts not one whit. There is the consciousness of strong exercise taken in strong air and manly fashion, of lungs well filled, of supple sinew, of exuberant health, and of an eye and hand that have not grievously erred. There below us lies the long broken level of the moor, here purple with heather, there yellow with already fading grass; through it winds a line of green, amid which, ever and anon, the river sparkles in the sunlight. Far off, at the end, stretches the cream-edged yellow of the sand, and beyond it the unutterable blue reflected on

> "ποντίων τε κυμάτων
> ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα."

Surely, surely it is good for us to be here.

But close by me, between two big stones, half over-grown with rushes and ferns, is a hole, something like a fox's den, and the old Scotch keeper interrupts my dreams by coming up to tell me about it. It is the mouth of a passage supposed to go right into the hillside. He had never been into it, nor did he know of any one who had explored it. He had asked the shepherds. They knew of it, but had never been inside. This was quite enough for me. I collected all the paper in which our luncheons had been wrapped, took a box of matches,—all these as a provision against mephitic gas,—and on hands and knees groped my way in. The passage was three feet to four feet in height at first, gradually rising till, about forty feet on, I came to where it ended in a sort of cell, apparently hexagonal, some five or six feet in height to six or seven in diameter. Giant flag-stones formed the roof, the sides were roughly built of jutting stones, the floor was hard earth and stone. It was quite dry, and quite empty. The supply of paper, and therefore of light, being nearly exhausted, I crept out again. In the passage I found a few old bones, which I picked up, and upon which, once more *Sub Divo*, I began to expatiate, in a manner worthy

of Mr. Pickwick over the stone with the "strange and curious inscription of unquestionable antiquity," discovered at Cobham. Alas! my Mr. Blotton was at hand, for said the venerable keeper, "I'm thinking they'll be the bones of a collie I shot here some years ago, and threw into that hole to be out of the shepherds' way." *Solvuntur risu tabulæ*, and I took hurriedly to the hill.

We had beaten almost all the good ground on the near side of the range, so "the plan of campaign" was to climb over the top, through a pass, go down wind on the far side, then, making a little *détour*, set in again to leeward of some good lying, on the face of the spur opposite to where we had begun, into which we hoped that as we walked down wind to it we might drive some birds. Heavy climbing is it to that pass, and when over it, we find the far side has been extensively burnt, and a long walk produces little result. So we make our *détour*, killing a brace grouse and a hare on the way, and face the wind once more. The birds now lie better, and we find them, though not so plentifully as before lunch; but as we go on, our fresh couple of dogs are sadly puzzled by the blue hares. They go up the hill in

twos and threes, crossing the very best bits of feeding ground, and flushing birds every now and then as they go, until I felt like the gudeman of Charlie's hope who said "There's mair hares than sheep on my farm," and am inclined to think there are too many of both before me now. Some few of these pests we stop, but only a very small percentage, and, finding our beat fail, we turn back, and face homewards. A few birds have been driven to the part we shot in the morning, and we pick up one or two on our way. We cross the burn where we started. "Seldom go through this without finding a covey or two," says the keeper. "Yes," I reply, "and I remember Mr. Frank Mackenzie getting a woodcock about here three years ago."—"Mark!" as a bird springs out of a sheep drain at my very feet. Bang! "Mark woodcock!" as I miss him; then the second barrel goes, as I think, clean to his left, for he twists; but no; luckily some outside pellet caught his wing, and he comes down about ten yards farther on. And so we reach the shepherd's bothy. Twenty-four and a half brace grouse, eight hares, and a woodcock. That's the bag; and I canter home, tired, but happy, to dinner.

Still, I wonder for what purpose, and by whom, that underground cell was built. Is it Pictish? or was it a refuge in Jacobite times? or, perhaps, of more modern origin, and merely intended to cheat "the gauger"?

## CHAPTER IX

"For how my busy brain would dream, and how my heart would burn,
Where gorse and heather flung their arms above the forest fern."

*UGUST* 28.—Sunday. Our day of rest, very welcome after a hot week and some hard work. The wind seems to sigh up fitfully from the south. It passes over acres and acres of swampy ground all heated by the sun before it comes to us, and they appear to rob it of all life and freshness. Even in these high latitudes we often think that the climate is relaxing when the wind is southerly. So our legs drag rather wearily behind us, as we climb the little hill just across the road above the house; and then we lie down among the short grass and heather. Happily, on the open moor there is just wind enough to keep the midges

down, or they would soon make the place too hot to hold us. As it is, the garden, sheltered by the little wood, is quite unendurable. Upon warm days they are a perfect curse whenever the breeze fails. For fishing this does not so much matter. I *have* seen fish rise when the midges were active, but I think only *once* in all my experience, though that is of course limited to Scotland. And it is only fair to add that, what between a strong conviction of the inutility of fishing under these circumstances, and a positive loathing of their attacks, whenever the noble armies of the midge gather in battle array, I at once adopt the better part of valour, and retreat from a position no longer tenable.

To the angler the gad-fly, or "cleg" as they call them up here, is perhaps a greater nuisance. On a hot showery day in July they are sure to be out and about. I know of nothing more irritating than his, or rather her, bite; for, as with the gnats, the females are the only bloodsuckers. The gad-fly belongs to the same family as the terrible Tsetse of Southern Africa, and one can well enter into the feelings of poor Io when Prometheus tells her of the

long and tortured wanderings that are only to end with the birth of swarthy Epaphus aside the sweet and holy waters of the Nile. Sometimes, too, the bite has very unpleasant consequences. Three or four years ago I suffered much annoyance from one. I had been fishing and a fly, that had dined off a dead sheep which lay in a neighbouring burn, finished her foul banquet on my forehead. The place became very angry indeed, and though, under medical supervision, it yielded at last to careful poulticing, the doctor was of opinion that, however slight, it was a clear case of blood poisoning.

The last nuisance to which we are liable is the adder, but I have never seen any of them upon our arable land or near the house, and the greater part of the moor is fairly free from them. On two beats only do we find them in any numbers, upon the steep braes that rise from the western banks of the Naver. Here, if the sun be out, we are sure to kill four or five in the course of a day's shooting. There are various opinions as to the virulence of their venom. No doubt dogs and sheep occasionally fall victims, and there are always stories of human beings having succumbed to it. The Rev. J. G. Wood

quotes from Mr. W. C. Coleman an account of the latter's personal experience of a viper's bite which, with intense pain, produced fainting, sickness, delirium, and fever. Others again assert that a thick worsted stocking affords sufficient protection. But a dear friend, the late Mr. Frank Buckland, who might well have applied to himself as regards all animate Nature the line in which Virgil declares his devotion to the Muses—

> "Quarum sacra fero, ingenti percussus amore,"

urged me most strongly to wear long spats reaching half-way up the calf of the leg, cut in fact just like those worn by kilted regiments, as a not unnecessary precaution. Said he, "I don't think a bite would be likely to *kill* you, but your leg would be certain to swell enormously and be exceedingly painful, and you would be sure to lose ten days' or a fortnight's sport just at the very height of the grouse-shooting." I have always followed this sensible advice. Adders must emit some peculiar kind of scent, for dogs will draw up to them, as to game, but in a hesitating undetermined fashion. I once saw a pointer do this, and coming up found her looking at the adder about a yard from her nose. The

bitch couldn't make it out, but the adder fully appreciated the situation and was coiled with head and neck erect ready to strike—

"Arduus ad solem et linguis micat ora trisulcis."

But up here where we are lying there are no midges, clegs, or serpents. There is only the hush which seems part and parcel of Sunday. Perhaps the very prettiest passage in all Mrs. Boyles's charming *Days and Hours in a Garden* is that in which she describes the deep calm of a Sunday morning—August 26, 1883, almost this very day four years ago—when in the happy harvest-tide "the sheaves like praying hands stand together on the field, and in the green pastures the grazing cattle seem to tread with hushed and silent step." There must I think be a little touch of east in the wind; for there is a peculiar bluish haze, that reminds one of London milk, over everything, and through it mighty Laoghal shows only the faintest and most shadowy outline. All nearer objects are dancing in the mirage and we, with Lord Tennyson

"Mark
The landscape winking through the heat."

Turn for a moment to the heather on which we

are lying. What hundreds of little tiny plants seem to be interwoven with its gnarled yet smooth and beech-like stems! I suppose each one of them is carefully named and tabulated by the cunning discrimination of the botanist. Of course we have our stalking-glass with us,—no one ever thinks of going for a walk in Scotland without one,—but the atmosphere makes it useless, at least for its ordinary purpose. Never mind; we will still get some amusement out of it. Unscrew the eye-piece, and with it all the lenses except the one at the extreme end, that which I believe they call the object glass, and at once you have a powerful microscope. True, it turns things upside down just as a photographic lens does, but look through it at the heather. You will have to put it very near, less than an inch off, or you will see nothing: but when you do get it into focus what a microcosm does it not reveal? The short stunted heather seems to grow into the giant limbs of some primeval or tropical forest; some of its tiny white bells are magnified until they resemble the noble chalice of a *magnolia grandiflora;* the white lichen increases to huge tuberous vegetation; and a little fern leaf waxes into the majestic frond of

some Indian palm. How curious, too, are the magnified insects, especially the spiders and ants, they seem to be changed into many-limbed monkey-like creatures. We almost appear to have opened the door into a new creation.

Away to the north the sea ripples in the sunlight, and *faute de mieux* we perpetrate the crime of a parody upon—or rather an adaptation of—Charles Kingsley; surely he has deserved better treatment; my apologies to his *manes*—

Oh sweet it was in Borgie to hear the sighing breeze
And lie with good tobacco on the moor above the seas,
With the soft south wind to fan us, as we listened to the roar
Of the breakers on the reef of sand, all plunging on the shore.

And so our thoughts wandered, as when one has nothing to think about, they always will, restless and purposeless, like the island of Delos in the ancient legend, floating upon the seas of Greece without a root, a direction, or a home. We turned from parody to poetry. And then it struck us how utterly the Highlands of Scotland are neglected by the poets. Byron and Scott have sung of Lochnagar and Morven, of Loch Coruisk and the Cuchullin hills, but their real and best work was where their

hearts were, the former's along the sunny shores of the Mediterranean, the latter's in the Border Country and among the wild moss-troopers of the Debatable Land. There is, indeed, the trite tale of Norval on the Grampian Hills, and, for those few who have ever read them, the weird legends of Ossian have been translated by Macpherson into somewhat halting prose; there are Collins, Moultric, Aytoun, and of course Clough's fascinating "Bothie of Tober na Vuolich," the adventures of the reading party at Shieldaig of Gairloch, and doubtless many occasional lines in other poets; but we could recall to mind no great sustained poetical effort worthy of the scenes before us. Burns is essentially a poet of the Lowlands. Charles Kingsley's "Outlaw" seemed to us to strike a fresher, freer, and perhaps a truer note—

"Crawling up thro' burn and bracken, louping down the screes,
Looking out frae craig and headland, drinking up the simmer breeze,
Oh, the wafts o' heather honey, and the music o' the brae,
As I watch the great harts feeding, nearer, nearer a' the day.
Oh, to hark the eagle screaming, sweeping, ringing round the sky—
That's a bonnier life than stumbling ower the muck to colt and kye."

But alas! the great harts usually prefer to lie down

rather than to feed in the day-time, and I am sceptical as to the eagle's screams. Often as I have seen them "sweeping, ringing round the sky"—what an absolutely perfect description that is!—I have never chanced to hear them scream. Still all this is a very poor and inadequate return from the land

"Whose every vale
Shall prompt the poet and his song demand."

Hither has come the novelist. Only twenty miles from this very spot, Mr. William Black caught his salmon, and word-painted the fleeting lights and shadows of April, as they glittered and darkened upon the birches of bonnie Strathnaver, into the book that tells the tale of Rose Meenie's love. Hither too have come painter and photographer. It was the year before last, I think, that, wandering round the Academy, I looked up at the serrated crest of Cnoc an Fhreiceadain (what a Shibboleth! few indeed can "frame to pronounce it right") or the Watch Hill, as we call it, towering above me. Hither the tripper and the tourist with their sweet and winning ways. But the poet still lingers, the glories of Sutherland, like the heroes that preceded Agamemnon, *carent vate sacro* and

remain unsung. Here then for all the race of rhymesters and poetasters, votaries of the gentle Muse, is a new field of well-nigh virgin soil. Let them come, and look, and linger, ere they sing. If they fail to witch the world with noble verse, the fault will lie at their own doors, and not be due to lack of inspiration in their subject.

But they should come soon. More than a century has elapsed since Mr. Collins wrote his "Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland." The railroad has approached us, the telegraph wire takes its yearly tale of grouse from our moor, and in their train the great tide of civilisation sweeps up, and sweeps away relics of old legends and superstitions as it flows. "Second sight," said some one the other day (I almost think it was Professor Blackie), "second sight is disappearing gradually and simultaneously with the gradual suppression of illicit stills!" But the stills have not all been disestablished yet, nor has the ancient belief in second sight been altogether extinguished. Doubtless it cannot now boast the adherence of giants such as were Dr. Johnson and Sir Humphry Davy, among the men of light and leading in the present

day: while Sir Walter Scott, who introduces an instance of, indeed a dissertation upon, second sight into the dialogue between Allan M'Aulay and Ranald MacEagh, the Son of the Mist, in his *Legend of Montrose*, is recorded by Lockhart, his faithful biographer, to have believed thoroughly in it. And there can be no doubt that some of the prophecies of Kenneth Mackenzie, the Brahan Seer (who died more than 200 years ago) with regard to the extinction of the great house of Seaforth, have been fulfilled in the most marvellous manner within the memory of existing individuals. These legends, however, have nothing to do with Sutherland, and I must refer those who are curious in the matter to the very interesting little volume in which "The Prophecies of the Brahan Seer," together with dates and facts bearing upon them, are collated by Mr. Alexander Mackenzie, F.S.A., Editor of the *Celtic Magazine*.

Dr. Beattie, upon the other hand, ascribes this and similar superstitions to the effect of wild scenery upon uneducated imaginations. Probably there is much reason for his contention. The inhabitants of wild mountainous districts are usually silent, frequently

melancholy, always superstitious. Witness the weird legends of the Norwegian fjords, the Erl-king who roamed the Black Forest of Thuringia, the Stut Ozel, the great horned owl that flew before the Wild Hunter in the fastnesses of the Hartz mountains, and others too numerous to mention. And though, in this matter-of-fact age, such crude fancies are naught but idle tales, yet as we lie at the feet of these hills that have watched in solemn silence the progress of the centuries, outlasting, like Mr. Rider Haggard's tree, "individuals, customs, dynasties—all save the landscape they adorn, and human nature—" that have stood so long before we were born, and will stand so long after we have been gathered to our fathers; as we hear the moaning and sighing of the wind in cleft and corrie, and the wild unintelligible call of bird or beast, the glamour of the solitude, the Genius Loci, seems to steal even over our practical nineteenth century hearts, and we realise that a something which the ancients called divine may be found and felt here still. Nay, we ourselves are not wholly free from taint of superstition. Twice in our own Scotch experience have we met with what are considered death warnings, and each time the warning

was followed by the death within a month of some one who was with us at or about the time. [Note A].

Here, however, nothing of the kind has troubled us, nor have we been visited by any such nocturnal sights or sounds as have made the castles of Glamis, Fyvie, Armadale, Meggernie, and other great houses unenviably notorious in Scotland. So far as I know there are no local ghosts or ghost-stories. But there is a quaint tradition attached to a loch on the other side of the Naver, Loch Manaer, which reminds one of the troubling of the waters in the pool of Bethesda. The old people say that if any invalid visit its banks before sunrise on the first of May, throw in some money and proceed to bathe, he or she will be immediately cured of all or any sort of sickness. A dangerous experiment I imagine for any one not possessed of the requisite amount of faith. I have never heard that this loch seriously interfered with the practice of the local Æsculapius.

And as we think of superstitions, strangely enough a blue hare canters slowly to the top of a neighbouring hillock. There she sits, erect upon her haunches, silhouetted against the blue sky. Now

there are few things more unlucky, according to Scotch superstition, than a hare. If it cross your path, go back; you will have no luck in your undertaking. But there are so many about here that we are obliged to disregard the omen, otherwise we should return in dejection almost as often as we set forth in hope. I believe that witches are supposed now to assume the form of hares. Fifteen years ago at Flichity, near Inverness, my father was solemnly assured by a ghillie, on other points fairly intelligent, that witches did still exist, but assumed this guise, possibly for their greater security, and that they could only be shot by a gun loaded with the expensive wadding of a silver coin. The conversation occurred as a party of four or five fair game-shots were crossing the moor to a grouse drive. Scarcely had my father's laughter died away, when a hare sprang up within easy distance, ran the gauntlet of the whole line of guns, and ran it uninjured! She seemed to hide in a bunch of rushes about 150 yards off. We searched them thoroughly, and ran the dogs through them, but could not find either hare or hole in which she might have hidden. I need hardly say that though our incredulity was unshaken, the ghillie

was triumphant. His features dilated into a broad grin which a day's heavy walking failed to remove; and this not at the absurd exhibition of our capabilities in the "missing" line, but because he did honestly believe that the hare was "no canny," and that if we had had some silver coins in our guns the result would have been different. But this occurred in those illiterate ages which preceded the dynasty of the School Board.

By the way, I find that the superstition of bad luck following a hare that crosses the road in front of the traveller is of Roman origin—

"Lepus quoque occurrens in viâ, infortunatum iter præsagit et ominosum."

## CHAPTER X

*"Φῶκαι δ' ἐξ ἁλὸς ἦλθον ἀολλέες· αἱ μὲν ἔπειτα,*
*Ἑξῆς εὐνάζοντο παρὰ ῥηγμῖνι θαλάσσης."*

*EPTEMBER* 7.—Two of the greatest poets of Italy and England have agreed to teach posterity that

"A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

So when to-day we took boat, according to our promise of July 29, in high hopes of slaying a seal on Island Roan, and yet found none there, we might have been expected to hang our heads, and give way to disappointment, aggravated by the recollection of how we slew our seal there years ago. But nothing of the sort; we lit our pipes and tried to forget present failure by recalling memories of our past triumph; like Alexander at the feast we

"Grew vain,
Fought all our battles o'er again,
And thrice we routed all our foes, and thrice we slew the slain."

Yes, that big seal we did kill a year or so ago was a gallant animal; and as this year I have no similar triumph to record, I must for once borrow from the past.

It was a glorious morning, bright and hot; the sea-breeze stole up with a pleasant freshness from the north, while the little rippling waves laughed as it tripped over them. So we determined to spend our day on the sea, and kill whatever we found worth the killing, be it fish, flesh, fowl or, even if it were possible, good red herring. The tide was ebbing as we embarked. It wanted about three hours to the first of the flood. We were prepared for all kinds of sport. There was a long line such as I have described in a former chapter. There were rods and lines and artificial minnows for trolling, either for mackerel (which are very scarce here) during the day, or for lythe in the evening near the rocks. We had white flies for the cuddies in case we happened to find them "in," a gun for the benefit of the rock pigeons, first on the little corn and pea-crops on

Island Roan, and then rocketing out of their caves in the evening, and finally our 450 double express for the benefit of a seal if we happened to come across one. And there were rumours of seals having been seen about the rocks recently; nay, only a few days before I had emptied a charge of No. 3 shot at a seal of the smaller kind, without any more satisfactory result than surrounding his head with a momentary halo of salt spray, and inducing him to take a long dive from which we never witnessed his resurrection.

The rocks on the Sutherland coast remind one of Calypso's Island.

> *Ἔνθα δέ τ' ὄρνιθες τανυσίπτεροι εὐνάζοντο,*
> *Σκῶπές τ' ἴρηκές τε τανύγλωσσαί τε κορῶναι*
> *Εἰνάλιαι, τῇσίν τε θαλάσσια ἔργα μέμηλεν.*

So exactly does the varied and multiform bird-life here correspond with old Homer's description. Here truly are birds long of wing like that great gray-breasted cormorant who sits solemnly on the point of Island Comb, surrounded by a crowd of his smaller brethren, the shag or lesser cormorant, their black plumage shot with dark green just as that of an old blackcock is shot with blue. Never do I

see one of those big old birds winging his swift way with slow beat of pinion, undisturbed apparently by weather fair or foul, without recalling those glorious lines of Longfellow's, in which the fierce Viking tells the tale of how, 'mid the rage and swirl of angry winds and waves, he won old Hildebrand's daughter for his bride—

> " As with his wings aslant
> Sails the fierce cormorant
> Seeking some rocky haunt
> With his prey laden.
> So toward the open main
> Beating the sea again
> Thro' the wild hurricane
> Bore I the maiden."

Farther off to sea with snowy plumage, orange heads, and wide wings tipped with black the solan geese or gannets are always fishing in the bay. A pretty sight it is to see them hovering over the shoals of fish, and every now and then, slanting quickly in the air, darting down into the water with a splash like the ricochet of a small cannon ball. I wonder how deep they go: often they seem to stay a long while below, and it is seldom that they come up without their fish. Then there are the graceful terns, or sea-

swallows; and they too dive after their prey; but they appear hardly to pierce the surface of the water—no sooner are they down than they are up again. Backwards and forwards, over and along the cliffs float and sweep hundreds of gulls, from the little black-headed gull, who, having reared his young ones, will soon be off and away to other climes, to the big black-back, great robber that he is—all's fish that comes to his net. Vermin is he of the worst description. Go on the moor in spring and you may see him and his mate quartering the ground like a brace of pointers, and woe betide the luckless grouse whose nest meets his keen eye,—eggs or young birds, all will be taken,—and if some wretched sheep lie "cast" in a drain, down will they come with greedy swoop, *volucres obscenæ* as the Harpies of old, and, plucking out the eyes, begin their horrid meal before the mercies of death have ended the poor thing's sufferings.

Then there are the crows, the "hoodies," preening the feathers of their gray bodies or their black wings and tails. Like other great thieves, the "hoodie" rejoices in a number of aliases that would shame the veriest gaol-bird that ever entered a dock

—Royston crow, gray crow, hooded crow, dun crow, gray-back, and many others. Above all other things the hoodie loves eggs: a few of them, and a very little poison judiciously inserted will make a very sensible diminution in his accursed ranks. Then there's a curious screen of rock in the steepest part of the island behind which the herons have their nest every year: above it even more inaccessibly placed, is the home of the peregrine falcon, much too handy to the caves where the rock pigeon, the blue rock *par excellence*, loves to build.

Then all about you as your boat leans over from the breeze and begins to chatter as she goes, you may see the guillemots, the common guillemot and the smaller or black variety, *uria grylle*, and the razorbills. Quaint little fellows, all of them, with their torpedo-like bodies and tiny wings. We caught one of the black guillemots the other day, a young one. We hunted him in the boat, and just as I was getting the landing-net under him he dived—but dived into the net—a fierce little beast, he plucked and fought gallantly, biting at all and sundry, but we took him home and tried to rear him

for the Zoo. It was no use. He wouldn't eat the bits of fish which two young gulls, who shared his captivity, devoured greedily enough; and the second morning after his capture we came down to find the poor little fellow cold and stiff.

But we must return to our seal, and tax our memories for the incidents of his slaughter three years ago. The beetling rocks of Island Roan are close under our lee, and the keenest eyes, aided by binoculars, are all on the look-out to leeward. "I'm thinking that's him on yon rock," says the old keeper. Up goes the stalking-glass, and there, sure enough, is something like a huge gray corn sack. It is one of the large or gray seals, basking in the sun upon a rock left high and dry at dead low water. We must stalk him, for seals in these days of express rifles are not as easily approached as in Sir Walter Scott's time when Captain Hector M'Intyre surprised, and was in his turn surprised by, "one of the herd of Proteus, a phoca or seal, lying asleep on the beach," a beach ever after memorable for the Captain's discomfiture and the loss of old Monkbarns's stick. There is no time to lose. He is lying on the near island; for the Island Roan

consists of a pair of islands. At high tide there is a little strait between them; now at low water there are huge rocks over-grown with slippery sea-weed and deep water-holes between them. We must get right round the far island and come down upon him from the top. We take our bearings as well as we can: not very good going, but if we can only get over it we shall be right above him and get a capital chance. We gybe as we come to the point, and run in behind the far island to the only landing-place possible on that side. Luckily it is well to leeward. The old boatman, keen as every Highlander is after a seal, our keeper from England and I go on hands and knees, a nasty scramble up the rock, and get on to the short sward above; then across the island, and so to the crags below where we spied our seal. Here is the first difficulty. We have to find and recognise our landmarks. They looked simple enough as one lay half a mile out to sea, but now that we are among them everything seems so big, shapeless, and confused.

However, we crawl down a narrow gully, and there I recognise two rocks which I had specially marked. I remember that he lay below them, a

little to the right; so now he should be below us, and rather to our left. The old boatman differs, and moves on; but our English keeper, from the top, waves us back. He has seen the seal. It is still there, and I am right; it is down below us. We scramble farther, and come to a deep cleft in the rock; but one could stride across it. We follow as it narrows to our left, and we can peep over. There he lies, fifty yards, or even less, just below us. One couldn't desire a fairer chance.

"Ye'll tak' her in the heid, man, the heid; ye'll no kill her in the body," says the old fisherman, his voice quavering, his muscles twitching, and his face working with excitement as he speaks. I had made him doff a black felt hat he had been wearing as something not quite in accordance with the ethics, or æsthetics of stalking, and I seem to see him at this moment, with his handsome, rugged, and excited face, and his gray hairs floating wildly in the breeze.

The seal's head looks very small, but there is a good thick throat, and I know of few more deadly places than that for a bullet, be the quarry what it may. How watchful and wary the beast is! Hardly quiet for a moment, his head turns here,

there, and everywhere. Once a minute, as it seems to me, he looks all round, then down goes his head again for thirty or forty seconds. Two or three oyster-catchers, a couple of hundred yards away to our right, have seen us, and are chattering and screaming. Evidently the seal is suspicious of some evil in that direction, for he looks there oftener and longer than anywhere else. Meanwhile I have made myself comfortable, drawn out the bolts, and silently cocked the rifle. I have got a good rest; and now the little fore-sight covers his head. I must take care to aim low and make ample allowance for the short distance and shooting down hill. He'll look up in a moment at the oyster-catchers, then turn towards me; and when he gives me a fair chance at his throat, I shall fire. His head's up now. He looks long to the right; then slowly he turns his head up towards me. I can see his little beady eyes, his squat nose, and the thick bristles on his snout. Now his throat comes fair towards me, and I pinch the trigger—Bang!—off go the oyster-catchers with a scream, and as the smoke clears away I see his head thrown back and red blood-bubbles coming from his nose and mouth, his head

moves convulsively; and on the Red Comyn's principle of "I mak siccar," I give him the second barrel in the head. He lies quiet enough now.

Then there is the question what to do next. Many people kill seals, but comparatively few recover them when killed; for, according to the best authorities, such as Sir John Colquhoun of Luss, etc., their bodies sink very shortly after death. We can't get down to the rock on which our beast is lying; yet the tide has turned, is now "making" fast, and will soon wash over it and sweep him off. We must get the boat round as quickly as possible. It will be a long pull against the wind, and through a nasty "bobble" now that wind and tide meet. The old fisherman hurries off to bring the boat; the keeper and I stay to watch. The body lies some two feet above the water; every now and again some spray touches it, but no more. A quarter of an hour flies fast enough, but the sea is creeping ominously near. We look towards the point, but nothing appears. A wave has just touched him. They would save him if they came now; and again we look up, anxiously as did sister Anne from the battlements of Blue Beard's castle. Another wave

dashes against him, moves him, turns him over, actually rolls him higher up the rock. But my delight is short-lived; part of the wave has passed under him, and the back draught pulls him off. I am prepared to see the water close over him as he rolls into the foam. To my intense surprise and delight he seems in no hurry to sink; he rolls over and over, he turns in the eddies of the tide, but—he floats. Not only have we got, or as good as got, our seal; but we have pricked the bubble of a now exploded theory. A shout announces the approach of the boat. They come up, and the men catch hold of him and try to drag him into it—a dangerous thing to do, and a nasty thing to look on at, for I have my wife and boy on board. There is a choppy sea, and, as they raise the monster, the gunwale comes very near the treacherous water, so I insist upon embarking.

Now that I'm alongside him, I see what an immense beast it is, as big as the prize ox at an Islington cattle-show. No man can hold him with his hand while we row, we can't possibly get him into the boat till we get on shore, there's no landing-place for a mile or two, and we've no tow-rope. Stay,

there's the sheet. We can fasten that round his stern flippers; true he will tow against both shape and grain, but it's the only way, and I'm determined to secure my prize. I've had some nasty work before now with the light blue of Cambridge alongside us in Corney Reach, and so I sit down to the stroke oar. At all events I'll keep them going. All things come to an end, and at last that row did, but while it lasted it was awful. We made the landing-place on the island, got him on board after much exertion, and then it was high time for home. We ran across to shore, and when we arrived it took six strong men at a rope fastened round his flippers, so that he would run with the grain of his hair, to haul him up the shingle.

The seal measured a good honest 7 ft. 1 in. in length and 5 ft. in girth. When he was skinned and cut up next day the "he" was discovered to be a "she," and not only a "she," but a "she" in a most interesting condition. A young one just ready to be born was found inside her: it was the most beautiful little thing with long cream-coloured hair. This explains the floating of the body, the young one was still alive; so the old theory holds good

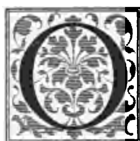
still. The fishermen boiled a big pile of blubber down into a barrel and a half of oil. I took the skins, and having dressed them, sent them to a very eminent taxidermist in London. Their safe arrival was duly acknowledged, and advice was given as to how they should be made up. Two months later I called to see them, and was shown one tattered article, which I was gravely assured was mine. Almost the only place in the whole skin absolutely free from holes was the back of the head where my second bullet had gone through. So I knew this was not mine, and said so. None other, however, would the eminent taxidermist produce. I consulted a friendly solicitor. Said he, "What's the value of the skins? nothing very much I suppose; if you sue him you may, probably will, get their bare value, and it will cost you more than that to get it. What you want is your two skins, and them no court can make him disgorge." The advice was unpalatable, but it was undeniably good; so very regretfully I followed it.

Moral, never send sporting or other trophies to a man you don't know, and of whose honesty you are not thoroughly assured. This seems rather barren

advice, but in the present very doubtful state of the law of libel I daren't tell you whom to avoid. But I may say this, if the spoils of the chase be within reasonable distance of Inverness, they will be quite safe, and sure of careful and experienced treatment, if entrusted to W. A. Macleay of Church Street in that city.

## CHAPTER XI

"It is fit
The spell should break of this protracted dream."



*CTOBER* 16.—Alas our season in Scotland is drawing rapidly to its inevitable close. The days are getting very short, the nights very long. The wild moors, whose green soothed our eyes after the glare of London streets, and which we watched growing purple in August, have once more assumed their brown winter coat; and the brackens, once so gloriously green, are all "rusted on the crag." Still what we lose in colour there we gain in the brilliancy of our autumn tints in the woods. These are so bright as to remind us of how Southey has well said

"That the woods wear on sunless days
A sunlight of their own."

Each tiny birch-leaf is like a golden coin fresh from the mint. The alders have not browned, but the rowan, or mountain-ash, is scarlet. Yet gorgeous as are these hues of autumn there is sadness with them all ; for we feel but too truly that they are only the livery of death, the image of our decay, and the harbinger of their own.

I think it is an American poet, Mr. Brainard, who, devoting a poem to the Indian summer, asks the bold question

> "What is there saddening in the autumn leaves ?"

We all know the answer right well. It is these same withered leaves that inspire it. Though the air be still warm, balmy as when spring melts into summer, we know the warning whispered by the falling leaf. It reveals to us the momentary deception of the season, and makes us, to quote Mr. Morris's well-known lines,—

> "Feel therewith the treachery of the sun
> And know the pleasant time is well-nigh done."

And now as we look back we see what a pleasant time it has been. Back to our minds hurry proud recollections of our battle with the foul-hooked sixteen-pounder ; and of how on another day, after

toiling almost as long, and quite as unsuccessfully as the apostles of old, we had our little draught of fishes when we hooked three grilse consecutively from the same stone in the very last pool, and landed two of them. Yes, and of long days over the heather in its August robe of Imperial purple, or shorter but sharper walks after grouse, strong and wild, in October, when steady hand, clear eye, and sound wind were all required to lay the old cock low. Of days when we went down to the sea in boats and saw in our little limited fashion "the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep;" of all and everything which has been recorded, feebly enough, in these pages; yes, and of many things too insignificant to note, of our ferreting in the burn bank when, after a stormy morning, we slew fourteen couple of rabbits in two hours, on a steaming afternoon; of how we waited among the corn in the gloaming for the wild-ducks that came not, or, if they came, came unseen; of where we took, and how we developed our best negative, in which each leaf comes out crisp and sharp in a manner that would do no disgrace to Mr. Valentine or Mr. Vernon Heath.

These and such as these crowd to our mind, and yet over none of them do we linger so long and so lovingly as we do over the memories of our garden. Our shooting and our fishing have been isolated exploits, full no doubt of charm, but occurring, the former only at the end of our season, and the latter very very seldom. The garden we have had always with us. In it we have lolled, read, written, slept, dreamt, thought. It has been to us an enduring interest. True, it has provided us with disappointments, fruitful, as it was in some cases, of failure rather than of flower, but these have been slight and temporary at the most. Indeed if they can be said to have had any lasting influence upon us, it has been in their pleasant fertility of plans for ensuring success in the future, otherwise they have been swallowed up in the great joyousness of the seeming and savour of our flowers. These have met us as we stepped out in early morning, and wafted their sweet fragrance to us as we came home at night. They have seemed to soothe such slight sorrows as we have had to bear, and they have added largely to our joys. Then when August days were hot, the moor slippery with drought and dusty with

heather pollen, when birds were crouched and huddled together, away from the mid-day heat under the bank of some burn, when scent was none, and our dogs more keen to find water than birds; days when the fear of the midge was a burden, and the desire for grouse did fail; days such as George Lawrence beautifully described:

> "We knew the red hills of the deer,
> The glories of the purple heath,
> The mirror of the breezeless mere,
> The west wind's honey-laden breath."

How sweet it was to give up all idea of slaughtering anything, to lie down under the shade and let the flowers speak to us, and tell us not only of their own loveliness, but of those who have loved and sung of them in days gone by.

And they do not entirely fail us even now. Perhaps we might yet find some companions to "the last rose of summer," but what we do find will have been storm-drenched and draggled. The Japanese anemones are still bright; there are still some blooms upon

> "The clematis, the favoured flower
> That boasts the name of virgin's bower."

And by careful hunting we may gather a few

jasmine. The double fuchsias, too, are at their best, and the auriculas and some of the coloured primroses have risen from their summer lethargy into a second, though a feeble, flowering.

But only last week the snow came and lay for an hour or two right down to the house. The hills are even now all clad in their winter robes. All is over for this year: it is high time we went. And so to all the good friends who have followed with me hitherto, and none others will have come so far, I must now bid "farewell," and address myself to one page of personal explanation, an

"APOLOGIA PRO LIBRO MEO."

These notes were penned with but the vaguest idea that they would ever be collated and published. Their publication is due to an overpowering superfluity of leisure, and an honest desire to save his Satanic Majesty the task of finding other, and it may be worse, mischief for my idle hands to do. And yet throughout there has run some kind of purpose, the key-note to which was struck in earlier years. On October 30, 1868, was published at Oxford an essay by Mr. R. S. Copleston, the present Bishop of Colombo, upon Art and the intellectual

appreciation of external beauty. It urged upon undergraduates that they would do well to devote some portion of their vacation to culture of this character, just as they were supposed to devote some portion of the term time to study. And after discussing the effects of foreign travel, scenery, galleries, architecture upon ingenuous youth, the essayist proceeded:—

> "And those of us who have stayed at home have been no further from the glorious teaching. When we least thought of it, we have been learning the noble lesson; one compared to which scholarship or science, if they could be separated from it, would be poor indeed. The sportsman who walked through the turnip-fields thinking of nothing but his dog and gun, has been drinking in the love of beauty at every pore of his invigorated frame, as from each new tint of autumn, every misty September morning, from each variety of fleeting cloud, each flash of light from distant spire or stream, the unnoticed influence stole over him like a breeze bringing health from pleasant places, and made him capable of clearer thoughts and happier emotions."

And if this influence when unnoticed be pleasureable, surely by positive perception that pleasure can be largely augmented. My purpose, then, has been to bring this feeling home, if I could, to such as I might happily persuade to wander through these

pages; and further, to plead that sport is not really, and ought never to be, synonymous with slaughter. I am afraid that in the world of sport there are too many unconscious followers of Peter Bell, of unenviable fame. And surely in these days of rapid breechloaders, of immense game preservation for the mere purpose of immense game destruction, of sybaritic grouse-butts, encircled by their hecatombs of slain, my faint protest, however feeble, comes none too soon. I know well that these things

> "Demand
> A keener weapon and a mightier hand;"

but, according to my poor lights, I have done my best.

Let me not be misunderstood. I should be the very last person in the world to cry down "sport." No one enjoys it more than I do; no one has derived more benefit from it; no one is more thoroughly convinced of what it has done, and yet will do, towards hardening our British youth. I acknowledge with regret the cruelty which is unfortunately inseparable from it. At the same time I recognise its inevitable, though deplorable, necessity. And yet I have found that the best sportsman (and by this I do not mean the best shot, sometimes very

far from it) is usually the man most averse to causing avoidable pain. His joy lies not in the actual death of his victim, but in the test and proof of his own superior skill, which pursues his prey into its own element, which neutralises the gifts of nature, which arrests the flight of the bird in the air, and conquers the swift strength of the fish in the stream. I acknowledge, too, with gratitude, the patience which sport inculcates; the temperance, sometimes the hardship and self-denial, which it demands. I have felt, and rejoiced greatly over, its æsthetic side, that which is so frequently overlooked,—the thousand associations, historical, classical, poetical, mythological, which surround it, and which spring unbidden, as one treads the moor, lingers by the river, or dreams upon the sea. Some few of these I have ventured to ask my friends to share with me, in the hope that they may find the enjoyment of them not less keen because less cruel. I have endeavoured to hint, rather than to urge, that the highest, and therefore the truest and best, aim of a Scotch shooting should not be the primary and objective result of big bags published in the *Field*, but the secondary and subjective one on the moral

character, as well as the physical constitution; a result which, if moderation and appreciation rule, they will infallibly produce; that the moors should expand a man's heart, as their fresh air expands his lungs, to drink in the glories and the loveliness of the hills; that a man should, in Mr. Mallock's words

> "Learn to love the sea, and the woods, and the wild flowers, with all their infinite changes of scent and colour and sound—the purple moor, the brown mountain stream, the rolling mists, the wild smell of the heather."

Aye, and more than that, nature animate as well as inanimate—not only the scene, but them that dwell therein. Possibly, nay probably, I shall fail. Be it so. The fault will be of the head rather than of the heart. But I shall have succeeded up to, yes and beyond, my highest expectations if I open to one friend a new chapter of enjoyment which in his book of life he has hitherto skipped, which will add much to, yet diminish naught from, that of his past: or if I can induce any single reader to come and sit with me, humble yet loving pupils, at the feet of the "Mighty Mother"; to learn from her what she assuredly has to teach; to realise the wild and wanton wickedness of slaughter for the mere sake

of slaughter, that crime against Nature for which Coleridge made the Ancient Mariner pay his imperishable penalty; and cherish in its place that love of

> "All things both great and small,"

which, strange though it seem, can and does sometimes coexist with all the keenness of a true sportsman, which formed so large a part of, so great a charm in, Charles Kingsley's own manly and muscular Christianity—

> "The Saxon love
> Of wild things and wild sports by wood and wold."

# SUPPLEMENTARY CHAPTER

*May* 1, 1888.

R. BRERETON, who now presides over the management of the Duke of Sutherland's Scotch estates, has done me the honour to consult me with regard to the improvement of the angling in the rivers and lochs of Sutherland; with special reference, of course, to those in which I have been accustomed to fish, viz., the river and lochs of Borgie.

The angling in the Borgie has, like that in many other rivers, deteriorated; partly from causes which are obvious and cannot be remedied, partly from such as we may hope to palliate, if not remove. The Borgie flows out of the last of a chain of lochs, which give it a long, though narrow, basin. Loch

Laoghal is the farthest and largest, Loch Craggie comes next, both in size and position, and out of Loch Slam, the smallest of the three, the Borgie flows. Twenty years ago, I am told, it was no uncommon thing to take half a dozen salmon or grilse out of Loch Slam, even when fishing from the shore; and a walk down the Borgie on a favourable day, with the river in good order, would in those good times have yielded a similar return. Nowadays the fish in Loch Slam are very "dour," and those in the river very few and far between. But it must be remembered that the nets at the mouth of the river, if indeed there were any at that time, which I am inclined to doubt, were not worked with the same skilful persistence that now characterises the net fishermen; and, during the angling season, a wire netting was stretched across the little stream that connects Loch Craggie with Loch Slam, until the spawning time came round, when it was removed. Curiously enough, notwithstanding the spates of many years, some broken remnants of it lie there still; but of course, as this would now be an illegal engine (under 36 and 37 Vict. cap. 71. sec. 18), its restoration, even if it were desirable, which I do not

consider to be the case, would be impossible. In our efforts, then, to improve the river, we must take into account nets at the mouth, and a free passage for the fish from there up to the source.

The heaviest blow at Borgie angling was struck by Dame Nature in one of her wildest moods on August 14, 1883. It had been a warm, close morning, and the river, though fishable, was rather low. Thunderstorms were circling about the county, and at about 2 p.m. three of them met almost exactly over Loch Laoghal, and discharged themselves into the basin of the Borgie. Such a flood as followed had never been seen within the memory of that prosaic individual, the oldest inhabitant. Within four hours the little river, from being a clear stream varying in breadth from 15 to 25 feet, became a roaring yellow flood 200 yards wide. Embankments were swept away, walls knocked down, fields submerged; and, as one watched the spate, one saw birch-trees, hay, and turnips floating and rolling on the surface. While we sat at dinner that evening we could hear the high gravel banks on the other side, falling in every now and then with a sound like distant musketry. When, in a week's time, the

river settled into its normal condition, we found that below the house it had left its old bed, and formed a new one for itself through a turnip-field. Eventually it was firmly reconducted to its old course. Before this was done, I hooked, but, alas! failed to land, a sea-trout who came at the fly from behind a turnip top. No doubt there is a wide difference between a turnip and a forest-tree, yet it reminded us of that great convulsion of nature described by Horace when

> "Piscium et summâ genus hæsit ulmo."

The devastation was of course great, and even at considerable distances from the river, on the moor or in the fields, we used to find carcases of little troutlings and salmon parr; while, more curious still, all the trout caught in the lower part of the river for a month after the spate were quite silvery like sea-trout. No doubt they had been swept bodily down to within the tidal influence, and the brackish water had affected their scales. These effects were only temporary. What was permanent was the great increase in the breadth of the river-bed, and the filling up of the pools. This has had a most serious effect upon the angling, and it is with

this that I am preparing to grapple. The river is too broad for its normal supply of water. The amount of water which would render a shallow, fifteen feet wide, navigable by a running fish, would make it an impassable barrier to the same fish when the breadth was doubled, while the filling up of the pools deprives the fish of resting-places on their upward journey. The first principle in dealing with water is that you must lead and coax Nature, you cannot force or oppose her. The last time any improvements were attempted on the Borgie, the latter course was pursued. In several places, where a stream running into still water seemed to promise a possible pool, dams were built across the tails so as to deepen the water. As they deepened the water they also deadened the stream, which, depositing there the stones and shingle which the spates bring down with them, filled the pool up. Mr. Brereton has been good enough to promise me a small annual sum to be expended upon experiments in the making of pools. Of course, before attempting anything of the kind, the first thing to do will be to make a careful inspection of the whole river; but my present idea is to concentrate the stream in certain places

by means of buttresses, so that it may work upon some bed or bank of peaty soil, and thus hollow a pool out for itself. We shall have to feel our way very carefully, especially at first; but no doubt experience will teach us as we go on. Then the shallows ought to be dealt with, by cutting channels through them in such a manner as to make them passable to running fish. This, however, is work of very doubtful permanence; there is always the possibility of the first spate reproducing the *status quo ante*. How far we shall succeed or fail it is of course impossible to say, but I hope to be able next year to beg the hospitality of some sporting paper in which to relate the result.

And if the salmon-fishing has gone off in the rivers, so also, I think, is it with the trout-fishing in the lochs. Here, however, though I may find it harder to trace cause and consequence, I can at least note and record facts. To take one loch in particular. A glance at the back numbers of that to me most interesting work, my Game Book, shows that six or seven years ago two or three hours' fishing on that loch would average from two to three dozen trout, running about two and a half to the pound; and I re-

member that such a basket could be got easily, with careless fishing, among a good supply of fish, all apparently keen to rise. I am afraid I don't often weigh my baskets of trout, but I have done so upon one or two occasions, and here is a fair example: May 29, 1883, 27 trout, 12 lbs., weighed on return to the house. In 1887, I find that the same loch was carefully fished on May 31, June 1, and 3, with results of six, four, and eight trout respectively. On August 28, 1886, a whole afternoon on the loch only produced nine fish. Why this should be so I do not know, but the following circumstance may shed some light upon it. On a bright day, July 26, 1884, as I was fishing the loch I saw something lying glittering on the bottom of the loch among the stones. We could not be sure what it was, a dead fish, a curiously shaped stone, or what? By turning up our sleeves, and making a long arm add its resources to the handle of the landing-net, we got it into the meshes and hauled up—an otter! not such an otter as the people in the neighbourhood would be likely to use, but one gay in colour, and costly in trappings. It was painted a warm chocolate below; then came a black water line as a

sort of Plimsoll's mark, and above that again a creamy white; while its runners were of stout copper wire, and the line was attached to brass swivels. Quite a *chef-d'œuvre* of a West-end tackle shop, where no doubt some poaching tourist had procured it. Of course if the use of the otter occurred only as an isolated instance no great harm would be done, but we had no idea at the time that tourists or others used otters, and if they did so *then* without our knowing it, they may also do it now. If they do, it would quite account for the falling off of the fishing in that loch.

And the fishing *generally* has gone back during the last five years. I take my yearly totals as given in the Game Books.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1883 . . . | 424 trout. |
| 1884 . . . | 294 „ |
| 1885 . . . | 242 „ |
| 1886 . . . | 184 „ |
| 1887 . . . | 135 „ |

If one tried to find any complete explanation of these figures one would probably fail. Various things have contributed to the result, *e.g.* (1) the falling off in two of our best lochs, one of which is

described above; (2) possibly more time has been devoted to salmon, and less to trout fishing; (3) in some lochs the trout, though numerous, are so small that one really doesn't now care to take the trouble to go after them; still whatever subsidiary causes there may have been, I believe the falling off of the fish, either in quantity or quality, or both, is the main one. But in considering what measures should be adopted for the purpose of improving the angling, I must divide the lochs into four divisions.

1. Where there are a few trout that run large, *averaging* over 1 lb. On my own ground I can only put two under this head, they are both small lochs, and four or at the most five fish is pretty good for one day. The largest fish I ever got in either of them weighed exactly 4 lbs., but he was a very ill-shaped fish, with a long lean pike-like head.

2. Where they run about three to the pound, but are usually "dour."

3. Where there are any quantity of fish, but all small.

4. Where (owing to there being no burn to supply the loch, or drain its superfluous waters, or if there be an outlet, one passing over falls which

prevent the trout from ascending) there are no trout at all.

Of these four classes No. 1 may be left alone for the present. No. 2 might be the better for the introduction of some yearlings for the purpose of crossing the breed. Nos. 3 and 4 give one the best chance of doing some permanent good.

As to No. 3. In lochs under this heading it is clear that the indifferent size of fish is due to insufficiency of food, and not to any inferiority in the breed. On June 28, 1884, I caught fourteen trout in one of the lochs of this kind; perhaps all together they weighed a trifle over 2 lbs. I had slung my creel over the side of the boat, the basket part under water, the little hole in the lid above it: as I caught the fish I dropped them into the creel. Then going on shore I had a large garden watering-can ready, and with the help of the keeper carried them to another loch about three quarters of a mile off. This transport was full of difficulty. Fish require oxygen just as animals do. Fourteen trout immured, if I may use the word, in the small amount of water that can be carried in a garden-can up hill and over very rough

ground, soon exhaust the available oxygen. Fortunately we were able to renew the water once or twice as we went. Failing fresh water, a bellows with a long snout does admirably; whenever the fish look sickly you blow the air into the water, which it at once impregnates with oxygen, and on you go. We were not up to this dodge, and had to do the best we could. Arrived at the loch into which we turned them, thirteen appeared fairly well, one only had evidently gone beyond hope. This loch was one of those I should place under the fourth heading. It contained no trout but had plenty of weed in it, and deep water in places. In it then we left the thirteen fish. Upon July 22, 1886, I tried this loch with a fly. First I caught a tiny little fish smaller than those I had turned in. Clearly my original thirteen had increased and multiplied. In a corner of the loch I saw a fair trout move and proceeded to let the boat down to him. On my way I got two nice trout, both over 1 lb., and at last I finished by killing the fish I had seen move in the corner. He played grandly, jumping seven times before I got him in, and, when secured, he could have been but little under 2 lbs. Last year I tried the loch again, but

only once. The small trout had increased in size but I never saw one of the original stock.

This, however, is quite sufficient to prove what food will do, and to support my argument that where fish fail to grow, it is due to an insufficient dietary. To remedy this I can only suggest two methods—

1. To thin the existing stock.

2. To increase the food supply.

Thinning can only be done by means of a net, and that in weedy lochs or over rocky bottom is practically impossible. I have thought of dynamite, but I reject this as being, I think, illegal, but certainly too dangerous.

My friend Mr. Brydges-Willyams, to whose opinions large and varied angling experience gives considerable weight, suggested to me the other day that this thinning might be effected by the introduction of a few *male* pike, the greatest possible care being taken that no mistake should be made in sex. I do not know that any insuperable objection could be urged to this. If great care were taken, the reproduction of the pike would of course be a physical impossibility ; but speaking for myself, such is my horror of the rapacious brute, that I would not

trust him in any place or under any circumstances. There may be pike in Sutherland, though I have never come across them, but I am sure there are none in our neighbourhood, and I hope there never will be. At the same time it is only right to say that Mr. Brydges-Willyams told me that he had tried the experiment elsewhere, and with success up to a certain point. He proposed to leave the pike in the loch till the trout had been thinned down and the survivors had increased in size, and then remove them by means of a net. The growth of weeds, however, protected the pike, and they are there still; but the trout though fewer, are larger, and better in quality. Mr. Brereton suggests that it might be well to introduce a few large trout, if such could be got out of the river or burns during the spawning season. This sounds very feasible, the great difficulty will be their transport to the loch; still, I think this could be managed. But I am afraid it would require more large trout than we are ever likely to be able to lay our hands on to have any very perceptible effect in thinning out the small fish.

We must turn then to the alternative of food. And in order to get practical information on this

point, I have recently paid a most interesting visit to Mr. Andrews's piscicultural ponds near Haslemere. His great aim with regard to food is to provide all his trout with the best kind of natural food, more or less artificially produced. Fresh-water shrimps (*gammarus pulex*) and fresh-water snails (*limnæ*) he considers to answer this description ; and he utilises every little spring and water-course on his ground for the purpose of their production. Limited area has hindered his complete success. Five to seven hundred trout, *averaging* from 1 lb. to 2 lbs., in the *perfection* of health and condition, contained in a pond of a thousand square yards, or roughly speaking a fifth of an acre in surface, require an enormous amount of food ; so that the shrimps and snails have to be supplemented with an artificial commissariat. But these are special conditions, inseparable indeed from a breeding establishment in which almost every cubic foot of water has to be used, that do not apply to moorland lochs with which we have to deal.

With regard to the fresh-water shrimp, Mr. Andrews told me that at the Howietoun piscicultural establishment there had been great difficulty

in breeding it: and that the fish there had to be fed, either artificially, or upon Loch Leven snails, the *limnæ*. If, as he surmised, the temperature was the cause of their failure at Howietoun, it is hardly likely that we, farther north and with fewer appliances, could do any better in Sutherland. On the other hand, there is a loch upon a neighbouring shooting, some six or seven miles from us, wherein, for so I am assured upon the reliable authority of friends who have caught them, large and well conditioned trout run up to—yes and over—3 lbs. Here, say the same informants, these fresh-water shrimps are to be found in abundance. And Mr. Brereton writes me that he has seen them in quantities in Loch na Cuaran near Inchnadamph, on the west side of Ben More Assynt, about 1600 feet above the sea-level, a loch which he says contains some of the finest trout (the gillaroo) for the table that can be found in Sutherland. If the shrimps will do there, and at that altitude, their cultivation here should be easy enough. Find a weedy loch in which there are no trout, put a few buckets full of shrimps into it at the weediest parts, and such is the reproductive power of the lower animalculæ, a power which seems to increase

as you descend the scale of creation, that a year will probably suffice to stock the whole loch, and of course the neighbouring lochs can be supplied from it.

But another question then arises. No doubt the introduction of the shrimp, if successfully effected, would provide a vast amount of extra food of the very best quality, yet the late Frank Buckland, writing upon trout culture, referred to the shrimp as "vermin," on account of the havoc which it works among the ova, and advised its destruction. This fact *may* be a serious objection to it, when regarded as food for fish existing under natural conditions, though it is one which could not hold good in a breeding establishment, where the ova are taken and impregnated artificially, and cared for afterwards in hatching troughs or trays, which are to the shrimp as Paradise to the Peri. Or, on the other hand, it may turn out to be a positive advantage in the case of lochs that swarm with small trout and thus come under my third heading. For, if Buckland's idea be correct, the shrimp, if it prospered, would ultimately combine the two desiderata at which we are aiming, viz., the thinning of the existing stock, and the provision of additional food for the survivors.

Of course this is all speculation of a somewhat wild character, a counting of our chickens not only before they are hatched, but before we have procured our parent poultry. It must, however, be remembered, that we are dealing with the inhabitants of an element foreign to ourselves, creatures of whose existences we have in all probability only partially mastered the habits and conditions: and we must calculate all the chances as we go.

The fresh-water snails form the next item of fish diet. Against them no indictment has been preferred, and they therefore appear to be the safer food. How are they to be procured? Mr. Andrews was good enough to offer me a bucket of snail-spawn which he thought would probably stand the long journey from Surrey to Sutherland. Mature snails he considered would not be likely to survive the forty-eight hours' transit. Unfortunately the season when this spawn hatches out is so imminent that he expected to find his own supply all hatched out by the 16th of May, on which day I proposed to go north and take them with me, personally conducted on their long journey. If I were to send them at once I could make no preparations for their reception or disposal, and in

addition to all this there is the further difficulty of temperature to be considered. This, Mr. Andrews says, is an important factor in snail cultivation. The experiment must I think be postponed.

Mr. H. R. Francis, in his contribution to the "Fishing" volumes of the Badminton Library, mentions other kinds of food besides the shrimp and the snail—minnows; leeches; gentles; wasp-grubs. Of these, minnows would be too great and expensive an undertaking; wasp-grubs with us are few and far between, I don't suppose I see a dozen wasps in the course of a year; gentles, dropping from vermin hung to rot over a loch, I had thought of, and indeed suggested to my friend Mr. Cholmondeley-Pennell; but I agree with his remark, "all very well as far as it goes, but for your purpose it is merely a drop in a bucket." The leeches excite my curiosity and I must find out more about them. Mr. Francis speaks of them as follows: 'A certain very small leech, never I believe found in rivers but abundant in sundry lochs. I must confess myself utterly ignorant of the laws which determine the habitat of these delicate crawlers, but I have found trout literally gorged with them who were far above the common standard in colour and

flavour, and were I about to establish a normal training school for *Salmonidæ*, I would stock my lake or reservoir with a few hundred of these hirudines." I don't suppose that there would be any difficulty in moving leeches over even the longest distances; with the snails and shrimps it undoubtedly is otherwise.

After some consideration and much envy of Mr. Andrews's magnificent stock of fish and food, I have determined, for the present at all events, to confine myself to the investigation and if possible the adaptation of local resources. In this I am much encouraged by the growth of the trout mentioned above, from three or four ounces to about one and a half pounds in twenty-five months. Surely there must be good food in that lochy if we can only find out what it is. And this I hope to do. I mean to examine thoroughly the weed in all neighbouring lochs in which good trout are to be got, and see whether on it I can find any signs of shrimp, snail, or leech. I notice that, according to Mr. Watson Lyall, some very excellent trout in Loch Mulach-Corrie, near Inchnadamph, are believed by careful observers to feed on molluscs, and that the white slug has been found to be a good bait for them. This seems to argue that snails, as

well as shrimps, are indigenous to Sutherland, and gives me great hopes of success. Beyond that, I shall overhaul the contents of all the trout I catch. Dissection will tread on the heels of capture. Surely somewhere I shall find something.

Then by means of digging and damming I propose to make some little shallow ponds below certain springs near the house. In these ponds I hope to cultivate the food whatever it be that I find in the locality. If I do find some, that which will do in the lochs will do in my ponds; if I don't find any, the ponds will be ready for the reception of some snail spawn next year, when I shall venture to remind Mr. Andrews of his kind offer.

The fourth class of loch is very easy to deal with. These are however not numerous. Being, so far as we can judge, empty of fish, the first thing to ascertain is whether they are supplied with food. If they are, they can be stocked at once with trout obtained from other lochs near them, or from one of the great breeding establishments. Either are pretty sure to do well, though I should prefer to get a few Loch Leven trout for the purpose of crossing the breed in other lochs. If they are not, so far as we can see,

supplied with food we must delay matters. I must breed my food at home, introduce it into the loch, give it a year in which to increase, multiply, and stock the water, and then turn in some trout.

Another interesting question arises. Mr. Cholmondeley-Pennell lays it down in the Badminton Library that "we have only one really distinct species of yellow trout common to both running and still waters, viz., *Salmo fario*." Dr. Günther of the British Museum, he goes on to say, recognises Loch Leven trout as another distinct species, *Salmo levenensis*. And Dr. Parnell, in a critique upon them, remarks that "they do not appear to be peculiar to Loch Leven, as I have seen specimens that were taken in some of the lakes in the county of Sutherland with several other trout which were too hastily considered as mere varieties of *Salmo fario*. It is more than probable that the Scottish lakes produce several species of trout known at present by the name of *Salmo fario*, and which remain to be further investigated." Here I believe Dr. Parnell to be in the right. Putting out of question certain beautiful silvery fish, almost like sea-trout in appearance, which I have caught in a small

loch, Loch na Heig, or Houigh, near Gairloch in Ross-shire, and the gillaroo trout from Assynt, I find in our Sutherland lochs two apparently distinct species: one covered with dark spots, having little or no red colour, the other with few spots, all more or less crimson. And amid all the variations of colour, produced by the surroundings of that particular part of the loch in which the individual trout chances to reside, these distinctions of spots I have always been able to recognise at once. For some time we used to believe that the many spotted were pink-fleshed, the others white, on being cooked. But this rule, if it be one at all, has very numerous exceptions to prove it. Still I have rather a prejudice in favour of the many-spotted variety. They appear to me to be firmer, and crisper, and to have more curd when on the table: gamer, and more active when on the hook. I am not prepared to argue that these trout are distinct varieties, but I think that the contrast of their appearances does afford a subject for the closer investigation of the naturalist and pisciculturist.

Such then are the vague ideas with which I approach the improvement of the angling on the

Borgie shooting. I hope that this plain unvarnished statement of what I propose to attempt may interest some of my readers to such an extent as to induce those of them, who have in these matters that practical experience in which I am lamentably deficient, to give me the benefit of some hints and valuable advice. For the present it appears to me that even if the salmon-fishing on the Naver turn out as badly as it did last year, and, I regret to add, promises to do this year also, I shall not be in a position to complain of want of occupation during the summer months.

# APPENDIX

## Note A

As these two warnings may possibly interest somebody, I append them in the form of a Note. They occurred to us during the season of 1874 at Glentromie Lodge in Inverness-shire. The house was new, had been built since the previous season, and we were the first family that inhabited it. The road from Kingussie, our station, lay on the other side of the little river Tromie. The present bridge had not then been built, nor the carriage drive, which leads from it to the house, made. All carriages had to cross by a ford, drive about a quarter of a mile up some sward, and so to the gravelled space in front of the house. There was an approach to this passing close under the window of the sitting-room but it was a mass of deep ruts, sometimes a foot or eighteen inches in depth.

On the morning of August 21, we expected Lord L.

to breakfast. He didn't arrive then or during the day. In the afternoon we sped two parting guests, Mr. H. G—— and Mr. H. R——, and they, as they went, promised to inquire on their way south for our missing friend, and if they chanced to meet him hurry him on his journey. There were no signs of him up to dinner time. In the middle of dinner, however, as we were seated, a party of six or seven, at the table, we each and all heard, as distinctly as it is possible to hear anything, a carriage drive sharply up to the door and stop there. My brother and I exclaimed simultaneously "Here's Jacko" (our friend's old Eton soubriquet), and the servants went to the door. Hardly had my father said, "I wonder what could have detained him, and why he should come now when there is no train?" when the butler re-entered the room. He was as white as a sheet, and said, "There's nothing there." None of the party would be convinced until they had been outside, and seen with their own eyes that there was neither a carriage, nor the fresh marks of wheels upon the gravel. The Scotch superstition was somewhat uneasily alluded to, and all expressed hopes that we should soon be in a position to refute it.

This occurred on August 21. On the 29th, I received a letter from Mr. H. G——, written in the best of health and spirits. On the 1st of September I received the news of his death—from malignant scarlet fever.

The next warning was in October. Every one had gone south except my wife and myself. It was about six p.m. and dark. We were sitting in the morning-room, she working over the fire, I making up some accounts at the writing-

table in the window. Suddenly I heard a cart pass slowly by the window. I heard it as distinctly as we had done the carriage. I could hear the wheels creak, grate, and then slide into the ruts with a jerk. It did not surprise me. Some dead stags were to have come down from the forest in a cart that afternoon. They should have been down earlier and been taken to the larder (some 200 yards off), instead of being brought up to the house. So leaving my accounts, I went out to tell the ghillie to take them down there. On opening the hall door there was nothing to be seen. This time we were seriously uneasy, but very shortly after our departure one of the keepers, Allan Campbell, who, so far as we knew or as I could afterwards ascertain, was perfectly well at the time, died suddenly from apoplexy.

I make no comments on these facts. I merely relate them exactly and literally as they happened.

On October 20, 1887, I saw what is, no doubt, the origin of another superstition, the corpse-candle, which in Scotland is sometimes called a "fye-token," and is considered to be a sure fore-runner of death. Happily my solitary experience leads to an opposite conclusion. I was going south, and driving by myself in a pony-trap as far as Altnaharra. There is a long hill sloping gently for some two miles or even more down to the Inn there. It was pitch dark as I passed over the top. Soon after beginning the descent, I saw what I took to be the lights of the Inn. I was surprised to see them so soon, and at such a distance. They seemed to dance about, but this I thought was caused by the motion of the pony-carriage, and to wander to and fro, which I attributed to the windings of the road. There

were two of them, very bright and rather reddish in colour. They disappeared simultaneously; then, three hundred yards farther on, one reappeared for a few moments, but soon went out. I saw nothing more for about a mile, when the real lights of Altnaharra came in view, much fainter and paler in colour. The others were no doubt the Will o' the Wisp, or Jack o' Lantern, of which one has often heard, but which I had never before seen.

THE END

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