

HILL OF THE AITNOCH.

AUTHOR.—See now how innumerable the stumps of the trees are here. They are peeping up through the moss in every direction. Conceive what a thick pine wood this must have once been.

GRANT.—You were certainly guilty of no great exaggeration when you said that a deer could hardly have penetrated it whilst it was standing in all its gloomy grandeur.

CLIFFORD.—It is well for our comfort that we can now pass so easily over its fallen majesty ; and methinks the sooner we escape from so dreary a scene the better.

AUTHOR.—Let us keep more this way, then. A short walk will now bring us to the southern brow of the hill, whence a new scene will open on us.

CLIFFORD (*who first reaches the point.*)—Ha! what have we here? A dark lake,—its waves rolling sluggishly eastward, and breaking gently on a narrow stripe of yellow gravelly beach,—bare rocky hills without a tree,—and an island covered with the ruins of a very extensive castle. What do you call this wild and lonely scene?

AUTHOR.—That is Loch-an-Dorbe, with its ruined castle.

GRANT.—The remains of the castle seem to be very extensive.

AUTHOR.—They are said to occupy a space of not less than an hundred yards square.

CLIFFORD.—This, then, is the very castle whence your Danish Prince escaped with his lady-love. Let me tell you, that if their grey steed had not gone with a somewhat freer pace than your verses do, the old King of the castle would have caught them ere they had covered half the way to Dulsie.

GRANT.—I'll warrant me those huge round towers and massive curtains have many strange and eventful histories attached to them.

CLIFFORD.—Come, Signore Cicerone, prelect to us about it, if you please.

AUTHOR.—Loch-an-Dorbe was one of the few royal or national fortresses which Scotland possessed. When Edward the First traversed this country with his army in 1303, he came to Loch-an-Dorbe in the month of September, and occupied it for some time; and Edward the Third considered it as a place of so much importance, that he and Edward Baliol marched all the way from Perth to its relief in August 1336, when Catherine de Beaumont, widow of David de Hastings, Earl of Athol, and her son, were besieged in it by the brave Sir Andrew Moray, then governor of Scotland. Sir Andrew would have been overwhelmed by the superior force of the English monarch, had he not baffled pursuit, by crossing the river Findhorn at the celebrated pass, the Brig of Randolph; so called, as you know, from Randolph Earl of Moray, regent of Scotland. Another important historical fact is connected with this castle. It was here that William Bullock was confined. After abandoning the cause of Baliol, and after having risen to high honours under David the Second, he was enviously and maliciously accused of treason; and having been thrown into one of the dungeons within these massive walls, he was cruelly al-

lowed to perish of cold and hunger. We also know that the famous Alexander Stewart, son of King Robert the Second, and who, from his ferocious disposition was surnamed the Wolfe of Badenoch, possessed and inhabited this castle. It was from hence he is supposed to have issued when he made his famous descent into the low country of Moray, and fired the cathedral of Elgin, reducing that magnificent structure, that *speculum patriæ et decus regni*, as it was called, and many other religious edifices in the town, to a heap of ruins.

CLIFFORD.—Oh, you have told us enough, in all conscience, about that wild beast ; “ *adesso parliamo d'altro.* ”

AUTHOR.—I am at a stand, so far as the history of Loch-an-Dorbe is concerned, excepting that I may add, that in more recent times it was possessed by the Earls of Moray, and passed from their hands into those of the Campbells of Cawdor. I have seen at Cawdor Castle a massive iron gate, believed to have been that of the castle of Loch-an-Dorbe, which tradition says was carried off from thence by Sir Donald Campbell of Cawdor, who bore it on his back all the way across the moors,

till he set it down where it is now in use, the distance being not less than some twelve or fifteen miles. But this is a story much too marvellous for belief in these matter-of-fact days of ours.

CLIFFORD.—It is incredible enough, to be sure. Yet I have a story, a well authenticated story too, which I think will almost match it.

GRANT.—Out with it then.

CLIFFORD.—No, I promise you you don't get my stories at so very easy a rate; and for this simple reason, that they are by no means so plenty as yours. Besides, I have just been thinking that with this warm breeze, that so gently ripples the surface of the lake, I could kill a handsome dish of trouts this afternoon, if trouts there be within its watery world. Why might we not loiter off the remainder of the day about this lake?

GRANT.—I like the idea much. I perceive a nice-looking cottage on the other side, where I dare to say we may find lodging for the night.

AUTHOR.—That cottage is a shooting-lodge belonging to the proprietor; and were he there in person, we should not lack a kind and hospitable reception. But at present its doors are locked, and its rooms void.

CLIFFORD.—There is a house then, here, on the nearer shore, immediately below us ; why should we not go there ?

AUTHOR.—'Tis but a smoky uncomfortable place ; but it may do well enough for a shelter for one night, and if you are content to abide there, so am I.

CLIFFORD.—Pho ! as to comfort, I am a soldier, and can rough it. I have lain out all night to kill the enemies of my country, and would do no less at any time for a good day's shooting or fishing.

AUTHOR (*addressing Gilly, who was leading a pony with panniers*).—Go down thither then, and see our quarters made as comfortable as may be.

CLIFFORD.—Aye, that will do. Come along, let us to work without more hesitation or talk. I am all impatience.

Having sent round to borrow the proprietor's boat, we embarked on the lake, and were soon intensely occupied in all the exciting anxieties of the angle. Our success was various and unequal, like that of man in the great lottery of human life. It was not always when basking in the sunshine that

we were most successful. Sometimes a warm shadow would cross the lake, and the trouts would rise and hook themselves three at a time on our lines. The bottom of the boat became alive, and shone and glittered with the growing numbers of our golden and silver captives. Anon, every cast we made was in vain; and then, when the foolish fish began again to bite, our eagerness was such, that we forgot each other's lines; and the loss of hooks, the destruction of the finer parts of our tackle, and the fracture of delicate top pieces, became the result of our numerous and grievous entanglements. Poor Clifford could not account for a sudden cessation of his luck, at the very time that ours appeared to be doubled, and he went on in no very good humour, flogging the water unsuccessfully, whilst Grant and I were catching two and three at each cast; till at last, to his great chagrin, he found that he had been all the while fishing without flies, which were uselessly and most provokingly sticking in the rough coat, and around the neck and head of my great Newfoundland dog Bronte, to the poor brute's great inconvenience. He did not fail to make up very quickly for this

bad luck, however. Our evening was altogether most delightfully spent; for when we grew tired of the angle, we landed on the island and wandered among the extensive ruins which cover it. We then sat on the mouldering walls of the castle till we saw the sun sink behind the western hill; after which we returned to the shore, and sought our place of retreat.

It was a small old-fashioned house, once used as a sort of hunting lodge. It consisted of two stories, with little else than one ruinous room in each, the whole being filled with the great smoke that arose from the kitchen fire. But the exercise we had had, added to our hunger, prepared us for being pleased with any accommodation; and after a supper well eked out by a fritto of the delicious trouts we had taken, we drew our stools around the fire, to enjoy a temperate cup of pure Highland whisky, diluted with water from a neighbouring spring.

GRANT.—Now for your story, Clifford.

CLIFFORD.—'Tis of a famous Highlander, called John Mackay of Ross-shire. I got the narrative, with all its nationalities, from an old Scottish brother officer of mine, a certain major of the name of Macmillan, who knew the hero of it well.

GRANT.—I should have hardly looked for such a story from a Sassenach like you.

CLIFFORD.—Tut. You know very well that my mother was a Highlandwoman, and that I have moreover always had a strong feeling for Scotland, and especially for the Highlands, as well as for every thing connected with these romantic regions, where, let me tell you, I have had some wanderings as well as you.

AUTHOR.—We admit your right to tell your story. So now, come away with it without farther preface.

CLIFFORD.—If I tell you anything, I must very nearly tell you all honest John's life. Have you patience for so long a narrative?

GRANT.—We shall give you the full duration of the burning of these moss-fir faggots. Will that serve you?

CLIFFORD.—I think my story will have expired before them. And by that time we shall all be nearly ready for our blankets and heather; for such, I presume, will be our fate to-night.