

EXTRACTS FROM NOTES

—OF A—

TOUR THROUGH THE NORTH OF SCOTLAND,

IN 1838-39.

Oct. 23.—At Inverness.—Spent the evening with Mr. MacInnes, a self-taught artist of great merit. A very lovely girl, just entering her teens, his only child. Addressed a complimentary verse to her picture—one painted by her father, and in which she is represented in the attitude of caressing a favorite dog. MacInnes is an enthusiast in his art, and one of the most intelligent men I ever met with.

Oct. 24.—Visited the Moor of Culloden, on my way to Nairn. Grieved to find the graves in which rests the dust of so many heroic spirits most shamefully desecrated by burrowing tourists. It seemed as if a herd of swine had been lately digging there. Nearly as bad is the “reclaiming” work going on all around, and threatening soon to bring the whole battle-field under the dominion of the plough—graves and all!

Oct. 25.—At the Manse of Croy. My reverend host, a warm-hearted, hospitable soul; his wife, a very superior woman and an enthusiast in Celtic literature.

Oct. 26.—Visited Kilravock Castle and also that of Calder in company with Miss Campbell, their daughter. Calder Burn, exquisitely romantic. According to a tradition very prevalent in the north, Calder Castle is the scene of King Duncan's death. The room where he is said to have slept, and where Macbeth slew him, is yet shown to visitors; so is also a curiously concealed chamber, in which the unfortunate Lord

Lovat secreted himself for six weeks during the reign of terror succeeding the battle of Culloden. Some of the rooms are hung with tapestry in which several scriptural characters are very artistically portrayed.

OCT. 28.—At Nairn. Had an interview with Mrs. Grant, Duthill, a most intelligent, venerable lady—the author of a work on education and also of several poetical “flights” in the Ossianic style.

OCT. 30.—Met the Nairnshire poet, William Gordon—the most self-important, egotistical specimen of the doggerel class of rhymers ever seen by me.

NOVEMBER 4.—Attended a little evening party at the house of the Misses Carmichael—three delightful maiden ladies from Strathspynie and occupying the very house in which Prince Charles is said to have slept on the night preceding the battle of Culloden. In a fit of Jacobite enthusiasm I proposed, and was cordially welcomed, to sleep in the identical room where Charlie stretched his own royal limbs—the privilege of which I gladly availed myself.

NOV. 6.—Met Mr. Priest, gardener at Kinsterrrie, the author of several clever poems and songs in the Scottish dialect.

NOV. 8.—Left Nairn for Forres. Village of Auldearn on the way. Quite close to it the celebrated *Blar Ault-Eirinn* of our Celtic ballads was fought—Montrose and Alastair MacColla, with 1,500 men, gained a complete victory over the Covenanting clans, 3,000 strong. Of the latter, about one half the number were slain, while Montrose is said to have lost only twenty men! In the village churchyard are the tombs of many of the principal men who fell on that day. Over one of the tombstones a dial is erected with a suitable inscription—perhaps the very one that suggested Hugh Miller’s beautiful address “The Dial in a Churchyard.” There it indeed stands, “in mockery o’er the dead! the stone that measures time.” Three miles further east is the “Har-Moor,” where the “Weird Sisters” met Macbeth. Here stands preserved by the good taste of Lord Murray, as a mark and memorial of the scene, a clump of fir trees, the sole remnant left now of an extensive fir wood lately given to the axe. The road to Forres passes within gunshot distance of the very spot where that celebrated meeting is said to have taken place. In selling the wood in question, Lord Murray forgot to make an exception as to these trees; and I have been told that it was not till that nobleman had agreed to pay the measureless souled purchaser thrice their value did he consent to spare the

Visited, a little further on, Brodie House, a very interesting mansion. Beautiful suspension bridge over the Findhorn, which I crossed on my way to Forres, where I took up my quarters for the night.

Nov. 9.—Visited the Clunny Hills in the vicinity of Forres. On one of these stands Nelson's tower, built by the spirited people of Forres in commemoration of that naval hero's victories over the French, etc. Most extensive view from it of the surrounding country—the Moray Frith with the "Sutors" of Cromarty seen in the distance, and Ben Wyvis, further off, rising in cloudy grandeur to terminate the westward prospect. Many other hills of lesser note, from Benvaichard, in Strathglass, to Morvern, in Caithness, conspire to make the view altogether a magnificent one.

Nov. 15.—Dine with the Macleans of North Cottage—a fine family from my own native county. Gaelic—music—very happy.

Nov. 16.—An excursion up the banks of the Findhorn to Relugais—lately the property and favourite residence of Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, who here wrote his "Wolf of Badenoch," and who, by a happy blending of art with nature, left Relugais a scene altogether worthy of fairyland. Immediately below the house, the river Devine joins the Findhorn, where they embrace, like lovers in the greenwood, never more to part company till lost in the Moray Frith. Near by, are the remains of a vitrified fort. Two miles further up the Devine is seen Dunphail, the charming home of Major Cumming-Bruce. An old romantic ruin—once a feudal residence of great strength, and connected with much that is wild in the traditions of the country—overlooks the river, at a few hundred yards' distance from the Major's house. Called on him—had a very kind reception and the pleasure of being introduced to his wife, a great-grand-daughter of Bruce, the celebrated traveller. Dined at the house of a very worthy gentleman, Mr. Simpson, of Outlaw-well—one of Sir William Gordon Cumming's sons being the only other guest present. Had a distant view of Darnaway Castle and its surroundings on my way back to Forres.

Nov. 17.—Waited on Lady and Sir William Gordon Cumming, of Altyre—an invitation to dine at Altyre House next Monday, the consequence of the interview.

SUNDAY, NOV. 18.—Attended parish church. Heard a good discourse from the Rev. Duncan Grant. Dined with him at the Manse after-

wards. Mr. Grant is the author of several pretty hymns and other pieces of poetry.

Nov. 19.—Dined and passed the night at Altyre House. Sir William a most humorous man, a strange compound of great good sense and drollery. Lady Cumming a very charming woman, supremely accomplished, and even talented—paints beautifully, sings well, and is a splendid player on the piano. Miss Cumming and her younger sisters all very graceful. Sir William's son and heir dressed in the Highland garb and looking every inch a chief.

Nov. 21.—Accompanied Captain Maclean (North Cottage) to Burgie House, the seat of General Macpherson, the Captain's brother-in-law, and a very worthy man. Partridge shooting—good sport. Dined and pass the night at the General's.

Nov. 22.—Visited a remarkable plane-tree in the General's garden; ascended the old tower in the vicinity—splendid view of land and sea; and, after diverging two miles off the road to have a peep at the ruins of Kinloss Abbey, return in the evening to Forres.

Nov. 23.—Visited the "Sands of Culbin," a bank of that material extending to a considerable distance from the mouth of the Findhorn, and covering (as tradition has it) several hundred acres of what was one hundred years ago the best arable land in Morayshire. It was then the property of some "wicked Laird of Culbin," who in one tempestuous night lost both his life and estate in these sands driven by wind and wave over his head! Dined in the evening at Altyre House, where I had the honor of being introduced to the Hon. Colonel Grant, M.P. for Morayshire, and also his accomplished daughter,—Major Cumming-Bruce, his wife and daughter,—Mr. Macleod of Dalvey, and other notables also present. Sir William a most genial host, full of life and soul, and making all around him happy. Miss Cumming-Bruce a very delightful girl, an exquisite singer, and having the good sense to prefer Scottish airs to any foreign music.

Nov. 24.—Dined again at Altyre House, Colonel Grant, his wife and daughter, still there.

Nov. 27.—Dined at Dalvey House. Bonfires all over the country in course of the evening, on account of Brodie of Brodie's marriage. Wrote a song for the occasion at Mr. Macleod's request.

Nov. 30.—Proceeded to Elgin. Magnificent cathedral in ruins. It was stripped two hundred years ago of all the lead on its roof, by

the then Town Council of Elgin, with the mean object of making a little money by its sale! The Lossie, a rather sluggish stream, flows by its walls. Its precincts were for a long time a favourite place of sepulture with the chiefs of the Clan Gordon and many other once distinguished northern chiefs "of high and warlike name." Elgin's other principal buildings are a huge barn-like church, surmounted, however, by a rather elegant dome, an infirmary or hospital, and an academy—the two last-named being both very handsome structures.

DEC. 2.—Visited, in company with Mr. Brown, editor of the *Elgin Courant*, the Lady's Hill, a little "cnoc" rising immediately behind the town to the west. It was at one time surmounted by a castle, part of the walls of which are still seen. A nunnery once stood close by it. A monumental column in honor of the late Duke of Gordon is intended soon to ornament this little Calton Hill of the north. Dined at Mr. Forsyth's, the bookseller, a brother to Forsyth whose "Travels in Italy" has gone through seven or eight editions, and whose remarks upon the Fine Arts in that country have drawn high encomiums from Lord Byron and other distinguished critics.

DEC. 5.—Dined at the house of Mr. Shearer, late Postmaster-General of the North of Scotland, a worthy, hospitable old gentleman. His wife a very intellectual woman, and must have once been quite a beauty. She is a daughter of the "Black Captain" of Badenoch, whose death in a snow-storm, when on a hunting excursion, is connected by his countrymen with so much of the marvellous and mysterious, and by the Ettrick Shepherd made the foundation of one of his most romantic tales.

DEC. 6.—Read Mr. Brown's "Poetical Ephemeras." Love and friendship almost entirely his themes. Melancholy the prevailing tone of his lyre—very delicate health the probable cause of this. His rhymes are always harmonious, yet, being all pitched in the same sombre key, they are to me rather dull reading—a mere "monotony of sweet sounds."

DEC. 16.—Went to hear Mr. McLaren, of the Episcopalian Chapel. Shown many of his poetic productions in MS., and thought them beautiful. He is an occasional contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine*—a great Jacobite and a good singer.

DEC. 17.—Breakfasted with Mr. McLaren, and went with him afterwards to see one of the only two existing original portraits of

Claverhouse. It is, along with another of the great Montrose, in the possession of a maiden lady living in the vicinity of the town.

DEC. 24.—Visited the old Priory of Pluscardine. The devastation made on it by the hand of time is scarcely more to be regretted than is a wretched attempt on the part of its proprietor, Colonel Grant, at something like a renovation, with a view to its being used as a school-house, I believe. The effect is to greatly mar the veneration and interest with which we always gaze on real ruins. It was once tenanted by a colony of White Friars, but is now the favourite haunt of a colony of crows. Had an interview with the venerable father of the Church of Scotland, Mr. Lesslie. He is ninety-two years old, and yet hale and hearty. He walks to Elgin, a distance of three miles, every other day, and preaches long and loud twice every Sabbath in the year!

DEC. 26.—Bade adieu to Elgin; and after passing by the castle and lake, or rather *marsh*, of *Swiney*, reached Lossiemouth at night. Fine new harbor—much needed. Speymouth and the woods around Castle Gordon seen in the distance.

DEC. 27.—Set out for Burghead, the most northerly Roman station in Britain. Called at the Manse of Drynie, on the way,—visiting afterwards a field close by it, where, amidst the foundations of what some conjecture to have once been a bishop's palace, and others a fortification, the Rev. Dr. Rose lately discovered a stone coffin and some urns, fragments of both of which were shown me. Three miles further west, on a mound forming at one time an islet in the now drained Lake of Spynie, stand the ruins of the Castle of Duffus. Reached Burghead in the evening. Find it a most shabby-looking village, and determine upon leaving it; not, however, until having a look at the Roman well discovered there, deep hid in earth (or rather sand), about twenty years ago. Till then the inhabitants of this sterile little promontory must have been very ill off for water. The well is well worthy of the antiquarian's notice. Made my way back to Forres, arriving there about 8 p.m.

DEC. 28.—Left for Grantown, Strathspey, which I reached about 10 P.M., weary enough, and much needing a good glass of "Glenlivet" after so long a walk.

DEC. 29.—Visited the celebrated "Haughs of Cromdale," four miles down, on the east bank of the river Spey. Kindly invited to pass

the Sabbath at the manse with Mr. Grant, which I declined doing owing to a prior engagement.

DEC. 30.—Heard Peter Grant, author of the “Dain Spioradail,” preach. His discourse most edifying, and wondrously well arranged, though delivered *extempore*. His diction and delivery are alike poor, but he is rich in matter, and argues his point with great clearness. Without much mental power, but with a deep religious feeling, and persevering industry to make the most of the talent given him, he has been enabled to take a deep hold of the minds of his Gaelic-speaking countrymen, both as a poet and a preacher. He is fifty years old, has a numerous family, and lives on the very farm on which his father and grandfather lived before him.

JAN. 1, 1839.—Had an interview with Mrs. Mackay, a granddaughter of the celebrated Flora Macdonald, lately come from Nairn to Grantown. Here I was presented with a breastpin worn by her mother (Flora’s daughter)—a gift which I am proud to possess. Mrs. Mackay is a widow with three daughters, and enjoys a pension from the Government of £50 a year. It was procured her through the interest of Sir Walter Scott, when George IV. was at Edinburgh in 1822. There never was a farthing of public money more worthily bestowed. Mrs. Mackay had been a widow for many years previously; her husband, a respectable shop-keeper in Nairn, having been drowned while bathing, and that in her own sight. It was a brother of hers—a particularly fine young fellow, holding a lieutenant’s commission in the army—who was killed many years ago in a duel forced on him by the then Chief of Glengarry. The affair arose from a trifling misunderstanding between them at one of the Northern Meeting balls. Elizabeth, her youngest daughter, has set up a sewing and reading school, which is attended by several pretty little girls. She is a very pious, amiable girl, and is the author of several sweet pieces of poetry.

JAN. 2.—I this day received the very highest compliment ever paid me as a minstrel. This was in the shape of a visit from a young lad who came several miles through the snow to see me and solicit a lock of my hair, bringing with him, as an offering, a copy of the “Lay of the Last Minstrel.” He came three several days upon the same errand, but having no one to introduce him, he went home twice without having seen me. On the third occasion of his coming, his courage was equal to a self-introduction. Though so young and modest, there

seems to be scarcely a poem in the English language that he has not contrived to read, and, to a very great degree, committed to memory. Having quickly undecieved him as to the awful dignity with which his imagination had invested me, we soon learned to enjoy each other's company immensely.

JAN. 3.—Dined and spent the night with the Rev. Mr. Stewart Abernethy, a most kind-hearted gentleman, and the author of two or three capital bits of English poetry. A splendid group of hills, among which *Cairngorm* stands the chief, seen from the manse.

JAN. 4.—Proceeded up Speyside to Rothiemurchus. The scenery here charming beyond description, its beauties being chiefly of an Alpine character, with forests of pine and birch spread in the most splendid profusion far over hill and dell. Nature herself is the only planter, and nobly does she accomplish her task! Between the river and the hills that rise sublimely grand to the south and south-east *Loch-an-Eilein* sleeps in its mountain cradle. Beautiful it is, with its little castellated islet, and its banks thickly studded with pine trees of gigantic stature gazing upon their own dark forms in its ever placid bosom.

JAN. 6.—Left Rothiemurchus early this morning. Road much blocked by snow. Visited the Rev. Mr. Macdonald, of the Parish of Alvie, on my way further west. Mr. Macdonald has written some pretty fair poetry in his younger days. His manse and church are most picturesquely situated on the banks of a little lake whose name I forget, and close by Kinrara, long a summer residence of the late Duchess of Gordon. Seven miles still further west is Belleville, the romantic birthplace of Macpherson, the celebrated translator of Ossian's poems. A monument on the north side of the road reminds the traveller that he is on classic ground; and base is he indeed who can pass by it and bless not the memory of the man who had done so much to wrest from oblivion these glorious productions. Two miles further on to Kingussie, where I now write, and from the window of my room can gaze on the Castle of Ruthven, a very picturesque ruin on the opposite side of the river. It was here that the little hurricane cloud which, the *Forty-five*, gathered in Glenfinnan, and carried distraction and d

*John Grant MacIntosh—afterwards for some time an employee in the Inverness "Courier" office, and more recently an officer of excise—was the person here alluded to.

may in its course towards England, melted at last into "thin air." After the battle of Culloden, the muster of scattered clans at the Castle of Ruthven might amount to about 8,000. Although in this gathering there was found many a chief whose voice was "still for war," it was ultimately agreed upon that any further attempt on their part to prolong hostilities would be altogether in vain.

JAN. 8.—Proceeded towards Laggan. Snow very deep. A lake on the left hand side; its scenery about the most romantically beautiful I have ever gazed upon. It was night, but the waste of snow around, with a star here and there peeping through the skirts of the snow-clouds hanging over-head, made it appear less like night than a "day in absence of the sun." It required no small effort to tear myself away from a spot so very bewitching, notwithstanding all that Mrs. Grant, the author of "Letters from the Mountains," has told us of its haunted character! About two miles farther on, on the right, is Cluny Castle, the residence of the chief of the Clan MacPherson. Two miles still farther on, stand the manse and church of Laggan, which I passed, making my way, "weary and worn," to the little inn near to them, on the south side of the river (Spey), where I took up my quarters for the night.

JAN. 9.—Visited the parish minister, the Rev. Mr. Cameron, by whom I was hospitably received, and much blamed for daring to pass his manse on the preceding night to take up my abode in less comfortable quarters. But a promise to pass a whole week of next summer with him made matters all right. After sufficiently admiring this region of grace and grandeur both, and amid which the gifted Mrs. Grant lived so long and sung so sweetly, I bade farewell to Badenoch; and after breasting the hill of Drumuachdrach, spent the night at Dalwhinnie, on the road to Perth. Capital inn; very kind landlord. Scenery around wildly grand beyond description. Close by, is the eastern termination of the far-famed Loch-Errochd, which, before the arrival of the mail of to-morrow morning for the south, I am determined to visit. In the meantime, however, I shall go and dream of its beauties in bed.

JAN. 10.—It was scarcely dawn this morning when the mail arrived, and I was forced to leave Loch-Errochd unseen. Why should I, or how can I, describe my journey to the "Fair City?" It was done in too much hurry, and the snow all along far too deep to admit of my

“takin’ notes” with any degree of comfort or correctness. Suffice it, in the meantime to say that our road lay through scenes of such wonderful beauty as I can scarcely ever expect to see equalled. Reached Perth late at night *minus* my portmanteau, which I found to have been taken off the coach during our halt at Dunkeld, likely through a mistake on the part of somebody.

JAN. 11.—Traversed the city. Think it hardly worthy of its flattering title. Its suburbs, however, are sufficiently fair and romantic. The Tay glides, or rather rushes, by it—a majestic flood which, taken all in all, has not its match in Scotland. Waited the arrival of the evening mail, and traced my portmanteau to safe hands. Started about eleven o’clock at night with the mail for Glasgow, where I arrived safely this morning (Jan. 12) at ten o’clock.