A FAREWELL SHOT.

THE invasion is over, and the Highlands of Scotland are again in possession of the Celts. The last Cockney has recrossed the Border, the last fisher has hauled up his line, and the last loch coble has been drawn up on the beach. The coaches are no longer running, the steamboats have ceased to ply, the grey reek no longer floats from the chimney of the lodge in the glen, and the land of brown heath and shaggy wood is brown, shaggy, and indeed shorn. The corn harvest, the grouse harvest, and the hotel harvest are over, and it is satisfactory to report that they have been most bountiful ones. The oats have been well secured, the grouse rents well ensured, and the hotel bills well endured. No one possibly but the poor crofters of the northern lands are dissatisfied, and, as the Duke of Sutherland says, you may as well expect gratitude from crofters as generosity from a railway company. The only thing one is forced to ask is, where is all this interest on £12,000,000 of capitalised sporting wealth, all the money that the sportsmen have spent, all the money that the tourists have spent? Has it all gone away like the ewigkeit that floated on de mountains' brow when Hans Breitman gave dat barty? It does not do, however, to be too particular about money matters in the Highlands, for if you argue about your bill you are invariably reminded of the shortness of the season, and that a certain percentage must be put on for nine months' climate, and a small amount for rainy weather in the early part of the summer, when the tourists, "wass ferra scarce, and there was waitters to pay for, and nothing else to do whatteffer."

"Ay, ay," said one of the latter worthies to us a few days ago. "It's my plessed opinion that this Meteoroshical Sossiety on the top of Ben Neevish will be a great curse to the Hielands; ay, that it will, whatteffer, and Her Majesty should be petitioned 'gainst it. Every day they will be sendin' off tellekrammers, saying that there's snow on Ben Neevish, or that there is ferra pad weather whatteffer, and that a kret gale of wind is going to

be plowing, and there will not be one single customer come py the coach or the steamer. Pless you, there should never be no news of weather but coot weather effer sent at all." Possibly he may have truth if not reason in his argument, as his hotel commanded a view of the mountain. Still, it is not likely that the observers will couch the "tellekrammers" to suit his business.

But although the Highlands are generally deserted by tourists and sportsmen by the middle of October, it by no means follows that the good weather has all gone, or that the sporting season is over. Dusk falls early certainly, and there is an unmistakable bite in the breeze, while the showers which come scouring up the glens have a taste of ice-water in them. With heather fast browning, the rowan-berries shining red and bare, the hazel nuts scattered on the ground ready for the squirrel to hide, and the oak on the loch sides just beginning to yellow on the edge of the leaf, one feels, if a sportsman, far fonder of the Highlands than he could possibly do in August, when the tangle trips you up, and you land on your face, likely on the top of an ant-heap or a hornet's nest. In October the Highland air is so clear that you can hear the echo of the click of your gunlocks in the valley, let alone that of the report of your gun. It was, therefore, with pleasure that I followed my host to the loch edge on the brightest of October mornings, and took my seat in the boat, wherein already were seated the keeper and his son. Taking our seats in the stern, the two soon gave way to the "ashen breeze," and in the bright sunlight we pulled along the edge of the shore, the water being without a ripple, while the air had scarcely as much movement in it as would blow the smoke from the cigars clear of the wake of our coble.

"You will find our scrub here pretty close," said my companion, breaking the silence which the stillness of the scenery induced; "there are no rides cut, and you will have to do your best at what you see as smart as you can amongst the hazels. In the thin bits you will have a chance, but where it is thick it will take you all your time to get forward gun and all. The best way for you to do is to push a little bit ahead at these places, making yourself heard in case of danger, and then on a thin commanding spot keep a good lookout for a time."

"No chance of getting a stray pellet in the eye—eh?"

"Well, it is very hard to say. I saw a man lose an eye once from a pellet of No. 4, glancing at an angle of 45 degrees off a wire fence. However, there is only myself out with you, and I will not put a shot after ground-game where I cannot see clearly in front of it and before me, and take nothing on the wing low in the cover in your direction.

As he spoke the boat grated slowly on the beach, and Ben, the big black retriever, accompanied by the two Scotch terriers, a clumber and a Sussex spaniel, leaped ashore and sat upon their tails and awaited our disembarkation. The boat was pulled well up on the gravel, the keepers donned their bags, and filling the chambers of our guns we were ready. Passing up a little pathway alongside of a rivulet we found at a wicket a couple of stout lads, who had been asked to act as beaters. Both thoroughly knew the woods, being engaged as beaters upon the property, and, indeed, from experience at their daily vocation knew the haunts of most of the game in the covers. After a short conversation in Gaelic, in which the elder keeper seemed to be interested, the latter, turning round, said, "They have watched three-roe deer into the far end of the larch-wood this morning. So if we take a beat back down the loch-side here, up the young belting a bit, and cross over the turnip-field on the other side, we will be able to keep them between the loch and ourselves." This proposal was acquiesced in, and, shoving a pair of cartridges into the chambers of our guns, we plunged into the thick, natural cover which, as my host had explained when coming down in the boat, was without a ride or a roadway of any kind. In a few minutes we had almost lost sight of each other, though the occasional call of "shoo-cock—cock—cock" let us know our positions. The beaters rattled their sticks merrily against the trunks of the trees, and the whole loch-side rang with the noise. As we advanced our beat widened, and, being in the centre, I had sometimes very little idea as to where I stood. Occasionally one of the little Scotch terriers would come running past as if in roading a rabbit, but I had gone fully a couple of hundred yards before I had seen anything else possessing life. I was about to condemn the laird's lax system of pheasant-preserving, and warm my heart even with the thought of a hot corner at a battue, when *whirr* went away right in front a grand old cock. With two bounds

I smashed through the intervening thicket, and on to a rock, where, balanced on my left foot, I was just able to snap at him through the opening. Falling back on to both feet, I hearkened for the sound of his wings, but heard them not. Had I stopped him? Welcome sound! "Here, Ben—here, good dog, fetch him," I heard the old keeper mutter, and I knew I had just pulled on him in the last available second. Loading, I held forward again, and to the cry of "mark" on the left side, had a second cock, falling with a crash amongst the coppice in front of me. In clearer ground the terriers put up some rabbits, and with half a dozen pheasants all naturally reared we found we had a very good bag when we came to the top of the belting. Crossing the turnip-field my host stationed himself at a pass or gully in the larch-wood, and the keeper placed me in a most likely spot behind an old oak, with instructions to keep out of view and let all pass but the roe. It was tempting at times to see brown hares hopping past you that you could have killed easily, and grand old cocks rocketing away over the tree-tops, and steadying themselves for a long flight to some outlying cover. At last was heard the loud yelping of the Scotch terriers, followed by the call "Roe-deer away on the right." I could feel a pulse beating in my forefinger as I pressed it lightly on the trigger and looked past my shelter with my left eye. There was a slight rustling of the trees, and then the leader, a young buck, trotted gaily into view. At thirty yards off, and opposite, I let him have the right barrel and then the left, and had the satisfaction of seeing him roll slightly and fall just as my host's right and left rung out clearly. While the young keeper was unsheathing his clasp-knife with his teeth his father dashed past to see what the laird had done, and fifteen minutes afterwards we were seated, flask in hand, admiring the plump doe and gentle little fawn as they lay at our feet. After beating another cover successfully, we went down to the loch-side, and awaited the boat. In the dusk we pulled home, tired out, and thoroughly well contented with our day's farewell shot in the rough covers.