CHAPTER III.

THE EGLINTON TOURNAMENT.—ASCENT OF GOATFELL, IN ARRAN.

My principal object in visiting Scotland in the autumn of 1839 was to be present at the famous Tournament arranged by the Earl of Eglinton, at the instigation, it was said, of a fair, accomplished, and romantic young lady, whose wishes were his law. My second object was to enjoy a month's holiday, and take a needful rest from the engrossing night-work of the *Morning Chronicle*.

I had only received leave of absence from my duties for a month, on condition that I should describe the Tournament, which was to extend over three days. I should, of course, have preferred the holiday without its accompanying task; but, equally as a matter of course, and of wise philosophy, I made the best of a bad bargain. And a bad bargain it proved to be—not from any lack of pomp and agnificence in the Tournament, and of good-will

to all concerned on the part of Lord Eglinton, but from the persistent malevolence of the clouds, that poured down the rain literally in torrents, by night and by day, during nearly the whole of the time allotted for the grand mediæval revival. Great crowds were naturally attracted to the immediate neighbourhood, and the small town and port of Ardrossan, which owed whatever importance and prosperity it enjoyed to the immediate predecessor of Lord Eglinton in the title and estate, was crammed full of visitors, seeking in vain for accommodation. I was thought to be fortunate when I secured a miserable room in a small cottage, at a princely price, whence I had to turn out in the morning in search of a breakfast, which money was not always able to secure, and which, when secured, was not always palatable, or inclusive of either tea, coffee, eggs, or butter. "Though victuals and drink were the chief of my diet," as the nursery rhyme has it, the victuals that fell to my lot at Ardrossan were oat-cake, and the drink, milk; but both were in abundance, and retailed to me at a by no means exorbitant price. The walk from Ardrossan to the grounds of Eglinton Castle would have been pleasant but for the rain, and the walk was compulsory in the absence of other means of locomotion.

Of all the great or fashionable personages present at the Tournament, I remember, at this distance of

time, the names, in addition to that of Lord Eglinton himself, of Lord Worcester (the present Duke of Beaufort), the Marquis of Londonderry, Prince Louis Napoleon Buonaparte (afterwards Napoleon III.), and last, but by no means least, Lady Seymour (afterwards Duchess of Somerset), who graced the proceedings as "Queen of Beauty." This title was due to her personal charms, though possibly conferred upon her in the first instance on account of her exalted rank and social position, but would have been equally appropriate to her if she had been the beggar-maid who married King Cophetua.

Among all the gallant company who took parts more or less conspicuous in the festivities and performances of the three days, the Marquis of Londonderry stands out most prominently in my memory. Clad in complete steel, with casque and nodding plume on his head, mounted on an unexceptionable steed, that bore his burden bravely, the Marquis, as far as looks went, might have posed to an artist as a veritable re-incarnation of a *preux* chevalier, or knight of the olden time. But *horresco referens!* The rain beat so heavily upon him that his knightly nature could not endure it, and, to shield himself and his finery from the pitiless downpour, he hoisted a large umbrella over his head, and brought the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries into inharmonious and ludi-

crous juxtaposition, and forced the Queen of Beauty herself, and all who beheld the show, into irreverent but natural laughter. The Marquis himself, however, saw nothing to laugh at, but rode unmoved, suggesting, in all except his rubicund and by no means rueful countenance, Don Quixote rather than Amadis de Gaul, or a Knight of King Arthur's Round Table.

On the first day of the Tournament, before the correspondents of the London morning journals had despatched, or even written, their accounts of the performances which they had come so far to witness, a little misunderstanding arose, which threatened to deprive the London public—and, indeed, the whole community—of all except the baldest and most meagre record of the mock prowess of the doughty knights, and the influence rained upon them by the Dulcineas and Queens of Beauty assembled to do them honour. The correspondents were informed by Lord Eglinton's butler, steward, or major-domo, that refreshments were provided for them in the servants' hall.

"Perhaps," said Dr. Richardson, the representative of the *Times*, "the servants will be asked to sit down with us!"

The other correspondents of the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Morning Post*, the *Morning Herald*, and the *Morning Advertizer* (then irreverently called the "Tap-Tub"), followed suit in denunciation of

what was considered a gross affront to their personal dignity, and to the Press generally. I ventured to hint that possibly Lord Eglinton himself was unaware of the want of politeness displayed towards the gentlemen of the Press, who claimed to be gentlemen by as good a warrant as his own, and that an effort should be made to bring under his personal notice the fact that we could not accept of the questionable hospitality that had been offered to us.

It was agreed *nem. con.* that the attempt should be made, and that, if it failed of success, or if his Lordship, being duly informed, refused to interfere with the arrangements of his major-domo, we should refuse to partake of any refreshment whatever at his expense, or to give any account whatever of the proceedings, except the simple statement in one sentence that the Tournament had taken place! without mentioning the name of anyone who had taken part in it, or giving the slightest description of it.

The threat proved sufficient. After the lapse of a considerable time—which was probably occupied in the endeavour to receive his Lordship's instructions on the weighty question, and an interview with him, either in the Lady's Bower, the banqueting-hall, or the tented field—the correspondents were waited upon by Lord Eglinton's secretary, deputed by him for the purpose, who expressed his

Lordship's regrets that he could not personally attend to explain his sorrow at what had occurred, and to repudiate all share in the want of courtesy of which one of his upper servants had been guilty, without his knowledge or authority, and to say that he would have been glad to invite us to his own table, had the space in the improvised banqueting-hall or pavilion allowed. He added that proper arrangements would be made for our comfort that day, and every succeeding day that the Tournament lasted, and that we should, in all respects, be treated as if we were his honoured guests. This was satisfactory. The promise was duly kept; the board was bountifully spread; the servants were attentive and deferential; but the chief butler, or major-domo—if such were his title—was discreetly absent. Full accounts of the tiltings, the mock heroics, the knightly paraphernalia, and the whole proceedings of the day were duly despatched to the London papers, and as duly published. In none of the accounts that I afterwards saw was the description omitted of the brave Marquis of Londonderry, in his panoply of steel, his spear in one hand and his umbrella, held over his head, in the other.

Utterly weary of the Tournament and its frivolous and scarcely picturesque unrealities, I was delighted on the fourth day to look up at a blue sky, scarcely speckled by a cloud, and to know that a little

steamer was to start at 10 o'clock from Ardrossan to Brodick, in the island of Arran, glimpses of which, and the beautiful mountain called Goatfell, I had obtained in the rare and short intervals of fair weather which had prevailed during my stay in Ayrshire. I resolved forthwith that I would ascend Goatfell, or the Hill of the Wind, otherwise Ben Gaoth.

I prefer the Gaelic name to the corrupt Teutonic one, which has perverted the Gaelic *gaoth*, "wind," to the English "goat," and enjoy the grand and stern realities of Nature in preference to the shams of the Tournament. It was the first time in my life that I had had the opportunity of seeing, much less of climbing, a real mountain, a veritable Highland Ben, and worthy of the name. The passage across the estuary of the Clyde is but fifteen miles; and, after a short stay at the little cottage that nestles in the shadow of Brodick Castle—the residence of the Dukes of Hamilton—I inquired of the landlady of the inn the way to the mountain from whence the ascent was most easy. She looked at me with evident surprise, as if she thought I was demented; and, on my questioning her whether she herself had never been to the top of the Ben, she answered very emphatically, "No; never!" She added that she had no desire to "fash hersel', or wear out her shoon in ony [illegible] feckless undertaking!"

"Does nobody who comes to Brodick," said I, "ever think of climbing the mountain?"

"Oo, aye," she replied; "a wheen Glasgow or Edinbro' lads, and London bodiès, who dinna ken what better to do wi' themsels."

Seeing there was no other help to be got from the landlady, I borrowed a stout walking-stick from the hall, and started alone. Thanks to the directions given to me by a labouring man whom I met on the way, I managed to reach an open space at the foot of the Ben, whence the ascent was plainly visible. The way, however, was hard and rugged; a steep climb often led to a deep morass, from which return was imperative; or as often to a crag, which might be flanked but could not be scaled. There were other difficulties and impediments new to an inexperienced mountaineer, but familiar and of no great account in the estimation of all who have learned to ascend mountain peaks, and to thread the mazes of the upward way with patient feet, and eyes that know how to measure distances and to see clearly before them. Every step was both a labour and a joy, and when I at last reached the summit, after a battle with gravitation that lasted three hours, or more, I was as proud of the achievement as any military chieftain might be after his first dearly-bought victory. I have never forgotten the delightful sensations which I experienced when I stood on the top, and

beheld all Arran, and a great part of the Scottish mainland, and a wide expanse of sea, stretched beneath my feet. Since that early time, when life was new, I have ascended many Scottish and English mountains: Goatfell thrice, Ben Lomond thrice, Ben Nevis twice, Ben MacDui, the highest of the Grampians, once, Skiddaw twice, Helvellyn once, the Langdale Pikes once, and been sorely tempted to try Mont Blanc, the monarch of mountains, himself. I was forced by circumstances to relinquish the last great achievement, and to content myself with his very formidable spur or shoulder, the *Tête noire*, which I ascended from Chamouni. For forty years I have never looked upon a mountain, in my own or any other land, without a strong, and often an irresistible, desire to climb it; and never on any occasion, in storm or sunshine, or driving mist, felt unrewarded for the effort I made, in the great and sometimes unspeakable delight it afforded me.

> O wild sublimities!
> None can imagine you but those who 've seen;
> And none can understand man's littleness,
> Who has not gazed from some dread altitude
> Upon the world, a thousand fathoms down,
> O'er precipice of perpendicular rock,
> Which but to look at makes the brain to reel,
> And fills it with insane desire for wings,
> To imitate the eagle far below
> And free itself of earth. And here I 've stood,

Awe-stricken and delighted, great yet small;
Great that my soul might dare aspire to God,
To Whom the mountains and the universe
Are but as sands on the eternal shore.

My remembrances of the Eglinton Tournament remain blurred and indistinct, and scarcely worth recalling, while those of my first ascent to the peak of the sublime Goatfell remain clear and delightful.

A Holiday in Edinburgh.

After leaving Eglinton Castle, I proceeded to Edinburgh. The dearly-beloved country was new to me when I thus revisited it in my young manhood. My mind was fully stored with the incidents of its history, its poetry, and its romance, and the beauty and grandeur of its scenery were enhanced and sublimated in my sight by the legendary lore with which my memory was imbued and my imagination fully laden. The first sight of Edinburgh, one of the most picturesquely beautiful cities of Europe, or, indeed, of the world, surpassed all I had dreamed of it in my youthful enthusiasm. Every step that I took in the old town and the new, especially in the old, evoked reminiscences either of the great and good who had once trodden its pavements, or of the greatly wicked whose deeds

of guilty ambition had contributed to the eventful and tragic history of the turbulent Middle Ages.

I was well provided with letters of introduction to the literary notabilities of the venerable city; but I scarcely needed them, inasmuch as I was already acquainted with Mr. Robert Chambers of the great publishing firm of W. and R. Chambers. These gentlemen were the earliest pioneers of popular literature in Scotland, and their well-known *Edinburgh Journal* had been long engaged in the task of educating the youth of that generation in a knowledge and love of letters and of science. Mr. Robert Chambers was the literary partner of the firm, and an author of high and well-deserved repute.

On the second morning after my arrival, I found myself engaged to breakfast at the hospitable board of that gentleman, preparatory to spending the day in a ramble through the historical and legendary portions of the city. The guests, besides myself, were the venerable George Thomson, the well-known correspondent of Robert Burns, and Hugh Miller, author of *The Old Red Sandstone*, a famous geologist, who had raised himself from the humble position of a journeyman stonemason to be the equal and the associate of the principal scientific and literary notabilities of the time.

George Thomson, born in 1759, the same year as Robert Burns, possibly a year or two earlier or

later, had, at the time I met him, attained the venerable age of eighty. He was a hale old gentleman, known by name and reputation, to every reader of the immortal poems of the Ayrshire bard, as the projector and editor of the famous collection of the national melodies of Scotland, to which Burns contributed many of his best songs. He was also known to a smaller circle as the grandfather of Miss Hogarth, who, a few years previously to the time at which I met him, married Charles Dickens, the author of the *Pickwick Papers*, the forerunner of a score or more of equally popular and infinitely better novels.

The worthy gentleman had a grievance, on which he had doubtless expatiated to my two companions at the breakfast table, his fellow citizens, and familiar friends, and which, I was told, he took all proper occasions to discuss with every new literary acquaintance with whom he might be brought into the contact of conversation. Of course I did not escape all allusions to a subject which had lain near his heart for nearly half a century.

Burns and Thomson were in constant correspondence for four years, from September 1792 to June 1796, and between them both had investigated, with most interesting results, the history and genesis of the old songs and pathetic music for which Scotland was then, and is now, famous. Burns, in his last fatal illness, only nine days before

the close of his career, imagined, it appears erroneously, that a ruthless creditor was threatening him with legal process, for the recovery of a debt of five pounds, and, in his distress of mind, wrote to George Thomson, for whom he had done so much, without fee or reward, to advance him that small sum. "After all my boasted independance," wrote the dying man, "curst necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds. A cruel wretch of a haberdasher, to whom I owe an account, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process, and will infallibly put me into a jail. Do, for God's sake, send me that sum by return of post. Forgive me this earnestness, but the horrors of a jail have made me half distracted. I do not ask this gratuitously, for, upon returning health, I hereby promise and engage to furnish you with five pounds' worth of the neatest song genius you have seen." Thomson replied immediately to the urgent, but modest and touching appeal to his generosity, or, rather, to his sense of justice, and told the poet that he had often thought of offering him a pecuniary recompense for the work he had done, but was afraid lest he should hurt his proud spirit, as manifested in a previous letter on this very subject. In enclosing the five pounds as requested, he added that it was "*the very sum he had proposed* [illegible]*ing*, and wished that he were Chancellor of the [illegible]equer, if only for one day, for the poet's sake."

The passage, "the very sum he had proposed sending," brought down upon the head of poor George Thomson all the vials of the critical wrath of a succession of editors and commentators, who all united in accusing him of meanness and ingratitude, in hinting, though inadvertently, that he valued at exactly five pounds the priceless assistance that the poet had rendered him. "Nothing," said Mr. Thomson to me, "was further from my intention. In the first letter which I wrote to him in 1792, introducing myself and explaining the objects of my proposed work, I offered to pay him any reasonable price that he chose to demand for his assistance. He indignantly rejected the offer, as all the world knows, stating that in the 'honest enthusiasm with which he embarked in the undertaking, he considered that any talk of money, wages, fee, hire, &c., would be downright prostitution of his soul.' Nearly a year afterwards, when I ventured to send him what he called a 'pecuniary parcel,' which he accepted, 'lest its refusal should savour of affectation,' he swore that on the least repetition of any such 'traffic,' he would indignantly spurn the by-past transaction, and from that moment drop all intercourse with, and become an entire stranger to me. What was I to do? I knew his proud and sensitive nature. I wanted to keep on the most friendly terms with him. I desired, above all things, a continuance of his in-

valuable assistance to my work, and dreaded to offend him. I did not know that he was on his death-bed, neither did he know it himself; for, had I known it, I would have hurried from Edinburgh to his side, to be of what comfort I could to him, both pecuniarily and otherwise. I might further urge, on my own behalf, that with every desire to be liberal or even generous, I was a poor man at the time. I published the Melodies at my own risk, and the book was not successful until after the death of the poet whose genius had enriched it. But these considerations had in reality no influence on my mind or actions, and, had Burns asked me for five times five pounds, I would have procured it for him, at any inconvenience to myself, even if I had had to pawn my watch to procure the money. I own that, by the light of after occurrences, the phrase the 'precise sum,' which I used in my letter, was awkward and unfortunate, and I have never ceased to regret that I used it."

To my mind this explanation was satisfactory, and I said so, with hearty emphasis, to the evident pleasure of Mr. Thomson. I had not thought much on the subject before, and was gratified to find that my hastily-formed opinion had been shared long previously by Mr. Hugh Miller and by Mr. Robert Chambers, and that the latter had already given in print the weight of his authority and critical judgment to this effect.

There was at this time in Edinburgh a small association of kindred spirits, lovers of literature and song, who met once or twice a week at each other's houses in the evening, and who called themselves the "Egg and Toddy Club." The members were strictly forbidden to incur any expenses for convivial gatherings, beyond a frugal supper of eggs, oatcake, and fresh butter, moistened by temperate libations of whisky and hot water, which the Scotch call "Toddy."

The next meeting was appointed to be held at the house of Mr. Thomson, and I had the honour of an invitation. I went accordingly, spent a pleasant evening, and made the acquaintance of several agreeable persons, and speedily discovered that the members were not only lovers of poetry, but most of them aspirants to poetic fame, and authors of books of poems in the Scottish language. The dialect of the Scottish lowlands lends itself more easily than English does to the exigencies of rhyme and rhythm and poetical expression, in consequence of the great number of affectionate diminutives which it employs, and of its copious vocabulary, which not only includes every word in the English, but many hundreds, if not thousands, of expressive and forcible words that have become obsolete in the English of the South, and of London more especially, and which still retain their literary and colloquial beauty in the North. I was

not surprised to find so many poets (perhaps poetasters) in the "Egg and Toddy Club," not professional authors, but gentlemen engaged, for the most part, in business, or in the exercise of the legal and medical professions. I knew, as has been said elsewhere (*The Book of Scottish Songs*), "that not only the scholar in his study and the professed rhymers and authors, but the tradesman behind his counter, the weaver at the mill, the ploughman in the field, and the fisherman in his boat, had written and composed songs, and that even tramps and vagrants, from the days of Allan Ramsay and Burns to our own, had been the authors of no contemptible compositions, and emendations of old songs and ballads. These bards, many of them nameless, made no pretence to be refined, yet amid their modest snatches were often to be found the happiest thoughts expressed in the happiest phraseology." Three of the gentlemen present on the occasion achieved eminence in literature. Mr. Henry Glassford Bell, Sheriff of Lanarkshire, author of a life of Mary Queen of Scots, and several lyrical poems of great beauty; Mr. Alexander Smart, a printer, author of *Rambling Rhymes*; and Mr. William Anderson, author of *Landscape Lyrics*, and of a Biographical Dictionary of eminent Scotsmen.

After breakfast, Mr. Robert Chambers volunteered to act as my guide in a ramble through the

city of Edinburgh. On his part, Mr. Hugh Miller undertook to escort me, on the morrow, to Arthur's seat and Salisbury Crags, and explain, as we went, the geology of the mountain. Nothing more agreeable could have happened than both of these arrangements. Mr. Chambers was familiar with every stone in the pavement of the old city, and with all the history, tradition, romance, and poetry of every nook and corner of it; and Hugh Miller, though a learned geologist, was not a hard and dry man of mere science, but a poet, who brought to the study of scientific facts a richly-stored mind and a fertile imagination.

As the record of the scenes and conversations of a single day, passed in the streets of Edinburgh with Mr. Robert Chambers, would fill an interesting volume, it would be useless to attempt in this place, even an epitome of the subject. Mr. Chambers himself has well performed the task in his excellent *Traditions of Edinburgh*, a work that has gone through several editions, with ever increasing favour. Suffice it to say that in the walk from the Castle to Holyrood, down the long, steep street that assumes the several names of the Cowgate, the High Street, and the Cannongate, scarcely a house or the narrow entry of a "wynd" or "close" was passed, of which Mr. Chambers had not something to say of historical, antiquarian, legendary, or literary interest. Squalid for the most part in

their accessories, grimy and ill-favoured and ill-odorous, teeming with life in its vulgarest and most forbidding aspects; this great historical thoroughfare, seen in the adorning light of memory which Mr. Chambers threw over it like an aureole, became picturesque as the portrait of a ragged beggar when painted by a great artist, who turns the very squalor of his model into grace and beauty, on the canvas.

The conversation of Hugh Miller, though agreeable and instructive, was not equal in charm to that of Robert Chambers. The mind of Hugh Miller was so wedded to the study of geology as to leave him but little inclination to diverge into the wider fields of history, philosophy, romance, and poetry, where he might have roamed to his own advantage, and that of the world, had time allowed and preoccupation not prevented. The no-wise related subjects of geology and the politics of the Free Church of Scotland occupied him fully; geology for the love he bore it, and Free Church politics for the discussion and dissemination of which he had become dependent for the daily bread of himself and his household. The clerical and other supporters of the movement which ended in the disruption of the venerable Church of Scotland and the establishment of the Free Church, differing from its parent in no point of doctrine, but solely on the question of patronage and the appointment

of clergymen by any other than the congregations to whose spiritual instruction and comfort they were to administer, came to the conclusion, while yet the controversy was in progress, that they required a newspaper to support their views before the public. The result was the establishment of the *Witness*, a weekly and afterwards bi-weekly journal, published in Edinburgh. The next want of the party was that of an editor, and, fortunately, as it appeared at the time, for Hugh Miller, the choice of the shareholders fell upon him. He had acquired a great reputation for sound sense and discretion, and the possession of a literary style of unusual force and elegance; and he gladly accepted the appointment, which secured him not only bread, but the certainty of a rise in the social scale, and a chance of fortune. He entered upon the duties of the post with zeal and ability, never admitting to himself, nor allowing the world to suspect, that the task was an uncongenial one, at which he chafed, but which he could not abandon, under the heavy penalty of a too possible penury. Little, and that little precarious and uncertain, was to be earned by the literature of geology; much, comparatively, was to be earned, and that, whether much or little, was certain, by the able advocacy of Free Church principles; so he wisely, as it appeared at the time, stuck to his newspaper. But "thereof came in the end despondency and

madness." But of the tragic ending of a seemingly bright and promising career there appeared at this time neither trace nor presentiment; and when, in pursuance of our previous agreement at the breakfast table, he acted as my guide, geological and poetical, to the picturesque heights of Salisbury Crags and the summit of Arthur's Seat, he was in the enjoyment of robust health, and full of spirit and animation. Dressed in a suit of "hodden grey," with a geological hammer in his hand, he skipped rather than walked up the hill, or it might well be called the mountain-side, from St. Anthony's Well to the summit, discoursing as we went

> Of mica-schist,
> The old red sandstone and the great fire mist,
> Of nebulæ—exploded—and the birth,
> Myriads of ages past, of a young earth,
> Still new and fresh, though venerably old,
> And of the wondrous tale in "Cosmos" told.

The geological lessons, which I learned on that day from the lips of one so pre-eminently qualified to teach them, I have either forgotten or allowed to mingle in the stream of my general knowledge of the subject. But the recollection of his conversation on the natural beauties of the noble panorama of land and sea, that spreads before the eyes of the delighted visitor who stands on the summit of "Arthur's Seat," remains as vivid as ever. The

scene is one which, once beheld, is never likely to be forgotten. To the east is the Firth of Forth, with the Isle of May, and the Bass Rock, and beyond them the great German Ocean; while along the shore stretch the villages or towns of Musselburgh, Preston Pans, North Berwick, with the conical hill of Berwick Law, Dunbar, the castled crag of Tantallon, and the plains of Lammer Muir, all renowned in poetry and romance, as well as in history. In front, to the north, is the low-lying country, sometimes called by the Edinburgh people the "Kingdom" of Fife, every square mile of which is of historical interest. To the west is the narrowing river, flowing from beyond the picturesque rock and city of Stirling, almost as romantic in situation and in history as Edinburgh itself, while still further to the north-west are the entrances to the Highlands, dominated by the noble hills of Perthshire, and the magnificent range of the Grampians. Among the most conspicuous of these hills is Ben Ledi, or the Mount of God, more perfectly the Mount with God, a memorable hill in pre-Christian and pre-historic times, sacred to the great annual festival of the Scottish Druids, where every year, on the first of May, the Druidical priests, in their three orders of judges, bards, and prophets, followed by the multitude, marched to the top of the hill, and kindled the holy fire, direct from the rays of the sun. The broad

pathway from the base of the hill, commencing near Callander, to the summit, is still plainly trace-able by the grass that grows all the way on the soil, trodden into comparatively fertile earth, more than two thousand years ago, by the feet of the annual multitudes that wore down the rough and rocky way, into the smoothness and pulverisation which permitted the growth of the all-pervading grass. Mr. Miller was not particularly acquainted with Druidical history—who is? but the fact of this annual procession on the morn of Beltain, or the fire of Baal, or the sun, was familiar to him.

It was not till many years after this visit to Arthur's Seat with this eminent philosopher and amiable man, that the world heard of his lament-able death by his own hand. Wide-spread sorrow was felt—far beyond the boundaries of Edinburgh—at the sad catastrophe; and among the mourners, none mourned more sincerely than the writer of these slight remembrances.