

TALES AND ANECDOTES OF THE  
PASTORAL LIFE.

No I.

MR EDITOR,

LAST autumn, while I was staying a few weeks with my friend Mr Grumple, minister of the extensive and celebrated parish of *Woolenhorn*, an incident occurred which hath afforded me a great deal of amusement; and as I think it may divert some of your readers, I shall, without further preface, begin the relation.

We had just finished a wearisome debate on the rights of teind, and the claims which every clergyman of the established church of Scotland has for

a grass glebe; the china cups were already arranged, and the savoury teapot stood basking on the ledge of the grate, when the servant-maid entered, and told Mr Grumple that there was one at the door who wanted him.

We immediately heard a debate in the passage,—the parson pressing his guest to *come ben*, which the other stoutly resisted, declaring aloud that “it was a’ nonsense thegither, for he was eneuch to fley a’ the grand folk out o’ the room, an’ set the kivering o’ the floor a-swoomin.” The parlour door was however thrown open, and, to my astonishment, the first guests who presented themselves were two strong honest-looking collevs, or shepherd’s dogs, that came bounding and capering into the room; with a great deal of seeming satisfaction. Their master was shortly after ushered in. He was a tall athletic figure, with a black beard, and dark raven hair hanging over his brow; wore elouted shoes, shod with iron, and faced up with copper; and there was altogether something in his appearance the most homely and uncouth of any exterior I had ever seen.

“This,” said the minister, “is Peter Plash, a parishioner of mine, who has brought me in an excellent salmon, and wants a good office at my hand, he says, in return.”—“The bit fish is naething, man,” said Peter, sleeking down the hair on his brow; “I wish he had been better for your sake—but gin ye had seen the sport that we had wi’ him at Pool-Midnight, ye wad hae leughen till ye had burstit.” Here the shepherd, observing his two dogs seated comfortably on the hearth-rug, and deeming it an instance of high presumption and very bad manners, broke out with—“Ay, White-foot, lad! an’ ye’re for being a gentleman too! My eerty, man, but ye’re no hlate!—I’m ill eneuch, to be sure, to come into a grand room this way, but yet I wadna set up my impudent nose an’ my muckle rough brisket afore the lowe, an’ tak a’ the fire to myself—Get aff wi’ ye, sir! An’ you too, Trimmy, ye limmer! what’s your business here?”—So saying, he attempted, with the fringe of his plaid, to drive them out; but they only ran about the room, eyeing their master with astonishment and concern. They had never, it seemed, been wont to be separated from him either by night or

by day, and they could not understand why they should be driven from the parlour, or how they had not as good a right to be there as he. Of course, neither threats nor blows could make them leave him; and it being a scene of life quite new to me, and of which I was resolved to profit as much as possible, at my intercession matters were made up, and the two canine associates were suffered to remain where they were. They were soon seated, one on each side of their master, clinging fondly to his feet, and licking the wet from his dripping trowsers.

Having observed that, when the shepherd entered, he had begun to speak with great zest about the sport they had in killing the salmon, I again brought on the subject, and made him describe the diversion to me.—“O man!” said he, and then indulged in a hearty laugh—(*man* was always the term he used in addressing either of us—*sir* seemed to be no word in his vocabulary)—“O man, I wish ye had been there! I’ll lay a plack ye wad hae said ye never saw sic sport sin’ ever ye war born. We gat twalt fish a’ thegither the-day, an’ sair broostals we had wi’ some o’ them; but a’ was naething to the killin o’ that ane at Pool-Midnight. Geordie Otterson, Mathew Ford, an’ me, war a’ owre the lugs after him. But ye’s hear:—When I cam on to the craigs at the weil o’ Pool-Midnight, the sun was shinin bright, the wind was lown, an’ wi’ the pirl<sup>o</sup> being away, the pool was as clear as crystal. I soon saw by the bells coming up, that there was a fish in the auld hauld; an’ I keeks an’ I glimes about, till, faith! I sees his blue murt fin. My teeth were a’ waterin to be in him, but I kend the shank o’ my waster† wasna half length. Sae I erics to Geordie, “Geordie,” says I, “aigh man! here’s a great chap just lyin steeping like a aik clog.” Off comes Geordie, shaugle shauglin a’ his pith; for the creature’s that greedy o’ fish, he wad venture his very saul for them. I kend brawly what wad be the upshot. “Now,” says I, “Geordie, man yoursel for this ae time. Aigh, man! he is a terrible ane for size—See, yonder he’s lying.” The sun was

\* Ripple.

† Fishspear.

shinin sae clear that the deepness o' the pool was a great cheat. Geordie bait his lip for perfect eagerness, an' his een war stelled in his head—he thought he had him safe i' the pat; but whenever he put the grains o' the leister into the water, I could speak nae mair, I kend sae weel what was comin; for I kend the depth to an inch.—Weel, he airches an' he vizies for a good while, an' at length made a push down at him wi' his whole might. Tut!—the leister didna gang to the grund by an ell—an' Geordie gaed into the deepest part o' Pool-Midnight wi' his head foremost! My sennins turned as suple as a dockan, an' I just fell down i' the bit wi' lauchin—ye might hae bund me wi' a strae. He wad hae drowned for aught that I could do; for when I saw his hoels flinging up aboon the water as he had been dancin a hornpipe, I lost a' power thegither; but Mathew Ford harled him into the shallow wi' his leister.

“Weel, after that we cloddit the pool wi' great stanes, an' aff went the fish down the gullots, shinin like a rainbow. Then he ran, and he ran! an' it was wha to be first in him. Geordie got the first chance, an' I thought it was a' owre; but just when he thought he was sure o' him, down cam Mathew full drive, smashed his grains out through Geordie's and gart him miss. It was my chance next; an' I took him neatly through the gills, though he gaed as fast as a shell-drake.

“But the sport grew aye better.—Geordie was sae mad at Mathew for taigling him, an' garring him tine the fish (for he's a greedy dirt), that they had gane to grips in a moment; an' when I lookit back, they war just fightin like twae tarriers in the mids o' the water. The witters o' the twa leisters were fankit in ane anither, an' they couldna get them sindrie, else there had been a vast o' blude shed; but they were knevillin, an' tryin to drown ane anither a' that they could; an' if they hadna been clean fore-foughen they wad hae done't; for they were aye gaun out o' sight an' comin bowdin up again. Yet after a', when I gaed back to redd them, they were sae inveterate that they wadna part till I was forced to haud them down through the water and drown them baith.”

“But I hope you have not indeed

drowned the men," said I. "Ou na, only keepit them down till I took the power fairly frae them—till the bullers gae owre coming up; then I carried them to different sides o' the water, an' laid them down agroof wi' their heads at the inwith; an' after glathering an' spurring a wee while, they cam to again. We dinna count muckle o' a bit drowning match, us fishers. I wish I could get Geordie as weel doukit ilka day; it wad tak the snoddum frae him—for, O, he is a greedy thing! But I fear it will be a while or I see sic glorious sport again."

Mr Grumple remarked, that he thought, by his account, it could not be very good sport to all parties; and that, though he always encouraged these vigorous and healthful exercises among his parishioners, yet he regretted that they could so seldom be concluded in perfect good humour.

"They're nac the waur o' a wee bit splore," said Peter; "they wad turn unco milk-an'-water things, an' dee awaya' thegither wantin a broolzie. Ye might as weel think to keep a alvat working wantin harm."

"But, Peter, I hope you have not been breaking the laws of the country by your sport to-day?"

"Na, troth hae we no, man—close-time disna come in till the day after the morn; but atween you an' me, close-time's nac ill time for us. It merely ties up the grit folk's hands, an' thraws a' the sport into our's thegither. Na, na, we's never complain o' close-time; if it warena for it there wad few fish fa' to poor folk's share."

This was a light in which I had never viewed the laws of the fishing association before; but as this honest hind spoke from experience, I have no doubt that the statement is founded in truth, and that the sole effect of close-time, in all the branches of the principal river, is merely to tie up the hands of every respectable man, and throw the fishing into the hands of poachers. He told me, that in all the rivers of the extensive parish of *Woolenhorn*, the fish generally run up during one flood, and went away the next; and as the gentlemen and farmers of those parts had no interest in the preservation of the breeding salmon themselves, nor cared a farthing about the fishing associations in the great river, whom they viewed as monopolizers of that to which they had no

right, the fish were wholly abandoned to the poachers, who generally contrived, by burning lights at the shallows, and spearing the fish by night, and netting the pools, to annihilate every shoal that came up. This is, however, a subject that would require an essay by itself.

Our conversation turned on various matters connected with the country; and I soon found, that though this hind had something in his manner and address the most uncultivated I had ever seen, yet his conceptions of such matters as came within the sphere of his knowledge were pertinent and just. He sung old songs, told us strange stories of witches and apparitions, and related many anecdotes of the pastoral life, which I think extremely curious, and wholly unknown to the literary part of the community. But at every observation that he made, he took care to sleek down his black hair over his brow, as if it were of the utmost consequence to his making a respectable appearance, that it should be equally spread, and as close pressed down as possible. When desired to join us in drinking tea, he said "it was a' nonsense thegither, for he hadna the least occasion;" and when pressed to take bread, he persisted in the declaration that "it was great nonsense." He loved to talk of sheep, of dogs, and of *the lasses*, as he called them; and conversed with his dogs in the same manner as he did with any of the other guests; nor did the former ever seem to misunderstand him, unless in his unprecedented and illiberal attempt to expel them from the company.—"Whitefoot! haud aff the woman's coat-tails, ye blockhead! Deil hae me gin ye hae the mense of a miller's horse, man." Whitefoot instantly obeyed.—"Trimmy! come back aff the fire, dame! Ye're sae wat, ye raise a reek like a cottar wife's lum—come back, ye limmer!" Trimmy went behind his chair.

It came out at last that his business with Mr Grumple that day was to request of him to go over to *Stridekirton* on the Friday following, and unite him, Peter Plash, in holy wedlock with his sweetheart and only joe, Jean Windlestrac; and he said, if I "would accompany the minister, and take share of a haggis wi' them, I wad see some good lasses, and some good sport too, which was far better." You

may be sure I accepted of the invitation with great cordiality, nor had I any cause to repent it. I have, since that time, had many conversations with Peter, of which I have taken notes; but the description of a country wedding, together with the natural history of the Scottish sheep, the shepherd's dog, and some account of the country lasses, I must reserve for future communications. H.

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