

CHAP. XXX.

A CANTER THROUGH CANTIRE.

A wet Prospect. — The Glass low; Spirits ditto. — Proverbial Philibegs. — Fortune's Favourites. — On the Road. — Rhunahourine Point. — Kilcalmonell Parish. — Clachan. — Dunskeig Hill. — Vitri-fied Fort. — West Tarbert Loch. — Its Scenery. — Ard Patrick. — The Land of the Campbells. — The King of Trees for the Painter. — Ruskin and Turner. — Whitehouse. — Laggavoulin. — The Hill of Love. — Tarbert. — An End at the Beginning.



STEWART'S open car from Tarbert has come to Shedden's Inn, at Barr, the over night, in readiness to carry us away from Glencreggan to Tarbert. The morning is wild and stormy; there have been torrents of rain all through the night; and the Atlantic, as far as can be seen, is a troubled sea of waves crested with snowy breakers. At breakfast time, everything looks as unpropitious as possible for a twenty-six mile drive in an open car. An umbrella would be torn to shreds in such a gale of wind; and, though my wife can envelope herself in a water-proof cloak, yet this protection does not ensure that "perfect comfort in a storm" of which the advertise-

ments boast, when that storm is blowing off the Atlantic and must be braved for at least five hours. But our car must return on that day to Tarbert, and the inexorable programme of our engagements demands that we should reach Glasgow by the next evening. Rooms have been taken for us at Tarbert, and there is nothing left for us but to prepare for the worst and to resist all the temptations that are so kindly held out to us to extend our stay at Glencreggan.

Old Rudd is consulted about the weather, so are the Paps of Jura, so is the barometer, so are the peacocks' screams. They one and all pronounce the weather to be "varra coorse," but old Rudd's meteorological experiences throw a gleam of hope over the prospect. His prophetic eye can discover a glint o' the sun aboon; though, for all that we can see, there is no prospect that we shall discern those proverbial philabegs in the sky to-day. The glass and our spirits are in harmony, for both are very low; but pleasant visits must come to an end, and portmanteaus must be packed, and we must start on our way, although

"It rains, and the wind is never weary."

But travellers in the Highlands must look for a little "coorseness" in the weather, as a foil to the many pleasures conferred by the natural beauties of the scenery.

Twelve o'clock comes ; Old Rudd is right ! He has (probably) never studied Longfellow, so he does not come up to us about mid-day, and exclaim —

“ Be still sad heart ! and cease repining ;
Behind the clouds is the sun still shining ;”

but he expressively says, “ Wha’s richt noo ? ” and points to a break in the cloud, where there is sufficient blue sky wherewith to construct the proverbial philabegs. The rain has ceased ; the wind gradually drops, and only delays until it has helped the hot sun to dry the roads ; and, in an hour’s time, by one of those sudden changes that occur in the West Highland weather, we have a glorious autumn day. Again do we find ourselves fortune’s favourites.

It is half-past two ; the last adieus have been made ; the old Scotch toast “ Happy to meët, sorry to part, but blithe to meet again,” rises to our lips ; and, as we trot down the hill by Ballachagbaochan Cave, Glencreggan is lost to sight. We pass our ideal watering-place at Muasdale — the Manse — the fishing village — the bridges over the river at the mouth of Clachaig glen — the winding road through the detached rocks — Killean and its two churches — Tayinloan Village and Largie Castle, where we reach the point beyond which I had not conducted the reader. I will therefore beg his (imaginary) company in the car,

while I point out to him the most noticeable places between here and Tarbert, in this our "Canter through Cantire." It is a warm and sunny afternoon; the distant landscape is unusually sharp and clear after the storms of the morning; and it is the very day of all others for a long drive through a lovely and romantic country; for the scenery between Glencreggan and Tarbert is more varied and picturesque than that between Glencreggan and the Mull of Cantire; and, whatever differences of opinion there may be, as to the peculiar charm of the scenery of the Mull, there is an agreeable unanimity of sentiment regarding the enchanting shores of West Loch Tarbert.

Passing on from Largie and Tayinloan, we come to Killean mill, and then to the little village of Rhunahourine *, where a narrow neck of mossy land, about a mile in length, projects into the sea. Rhunahourine Point is the northern boundary of the parish of Killean and Kilchenzie; and we now enter upon the parish of Kilcalmonell, which extends from here sixteen miles to Tarbert, and which is united to the parish of Kilberry on the opposite shore of Loch Tarbert. "Kilcalmonell," says the Rev. J. M'Arthur, "rises sometimes with a gentle acclivity, at other times with greater abruptness, from the sea to its highest elevation.

* Thus spelt to me; elsewhere called Runahaorine, and (in Johnstone's large map) Runahuran.

The general altitude of the range of the hills in which it terminates on the south-east, does not exceed 1500 feet," a loftier range than the Malvern hills, "whilst the few valleys by which the uniformity of the acclivity is disturbed, rise not more than 100 or 150 feet above the level of the sea." Kilcalmonell, — in Gaelic *Cil-calman-eulla* — signifies the burial-place of Malcolm O'Neill.

Next we pass over a pretty stream through the hamlet of Ballure and then by Beallachroy mill, standing beside a stream that flows from Loch Garasdale. Then, seven miles beyond Tayinloan, we come to Ronachan House, beautifully situated by the sea-side, and the residence of Allan Pollock, Esq., a wealthy and extensive proprietor in Scotland and Ireland. We now descend to Clachan, a large and pretty village in a valley, with a church and manse, inn, post-office, shop, grain-mill, and smithy. *Clachan* means "a village;"* but this is *the* village, *par excellence*; and is also called "The Kirktoon of Kilcalmonell." Here is Balnakill House, the residence of Alexander Morrison, Esq., Dean of the Faculty, Glasgow. It lies in a thickly-wooded

* Mr. Campbell says, "The Gaelic language is essentially descriptive, rich in words, which, by their sound alone, express ideas;" and instances "the hard, sharp knocking of stones in *clach*, a stone; and thence all manner of compound ideas follow, as *clachan*, a village; *clachair*, a mason; *clacharan*, a stone chat."—*West Highland Tales*, vol. i. p. 131.

glen, surrounded by well-kept grounds and gardens; at which we had a peep, and which we found luxuriant with flowers. Here, again, we were struck with the great size and beauty of the fuchsias. Clachan glen is watered by streams flowing from Loch-nan-gad, Loch-an-Cuilan, Loch Ciaran, and Loch-na-Crine; they unite near to the church, and passing under the high road, fall into the sea at the foot of Dunskeig hill. Bealachruadh glen is also close by; and the fishing and shooting is very good. "A good many inhabitants resided in this glen fifty years back," writes a local authority; "but, at present, it is almost depopulated, in order to leave space enough for the sheep and heather fowl. Can the bleating of the sheep, the dogs' bark, and the chatter of the moor-hen, delight the ear of the philanthropist more than the joyful sound of the children amusing themselves with their innocent play in this glen?" The writer leaves the question unanswered, but evidently anticipates a "No," not thinking it possible for philanthropists to be found among sheep-farmers and sportsmen.

Clachan inn offers rather superior accommodation; and, as it is midway between Barr and Tarbert, here is the baiting place for man and beast. The high road leaves Clachan by a very formidable ascent over the side of the hill of Dunskeig*, on whose lofty summit

* Also written *Dunsguey*, and *Dunscaith*.

are the remains of a vitrified fort. It is one of those ward hills, where beacon fires blazed, that are common on the western coast; and, besides its vitrified fort, there are the remains of walls and entrenchments. It commands the entrance to Loch Tarbert, and is admirably adapted by nature for a place of defence. Having told our driver to pick us up a mile or so along the road, we cross the bridge and toil up the hill. After a while, leaving the high road, we thread our devious course over peat bogs, marked by their rough shag of dark green, and are presently rewarded by a magnificent prospect, rendered the more beautiful by the excessive clearness of the atmosphere and the full splendour of sunshine. The coast of Cantire stretched in long perspective to our left, bounded by its monarch of mountains, Beinn-an-Tuirc. Rathlin Island, and the coast of Ireland, lay like a blue cloud on the distant sea. Before us studding the Atlantic waves, were the half dozen of the Hebrides, — their chiefs, Islay and Jura, overlapping each other, and appearing as one long island, that occupied no small share of the horizon of our view. At our feet was the entrance to West Tarbert Loch.

This loch is about eleven miles in length, and of an average width of three quarters of a mile. It more resembles an inland lake than an arm of the sea, and indeed has very much the character of many of the

English lakes. Macculloch's description of this loch is a very true one, if we bear in mind that he reserves the epithet of the picturesque in scenery to those places where the combinations of wood, water, and hills are on a larger and grander scale than at West Loch Tarbert. "The navigation of Loch Tarbert is exceedingly beautiful, without being strictly picturesque. The ground is neither high nor bold; but the shores are varied in form and character, often beautifully wooded, and in many places highly cultivated; while a considerable rural population, and some houses of more show and note, give it that dressed and civilised air which is by no means an usual feature on the shores of the Highlands. It is a great addition to the beauty of this inlet that, owing to the fall of the tide being exceedingly trifling, it is never subject to that display of mud at low water which renders the Wye, among many other rivers, so often an object of deformity rather than of beauty. I know not what Loch Tarbert may be at other times, but when I made its circuit, it was with sunrise on one of the loveliest mornings of June. The water was like a mirror; and as the sun reached the dewy birch woods, the air was perfumed by their fragrance, while the warbling of ten thousand thrushes on all sides, with the tinkling sound of the little waves that curled on the shore and the gentle whispering of the morning air among the trees, rendered it a perfect

scene of enchantment.”* Another writer, who soars into bolder and more auctioneering flights, says: “Over all its extent it has the calm and smiling aspect of a fresh-water lake, and is picturesque and lovely. Three islets stud it in its progress; soft and moderately high hills recede in gentle and waving ascents from its margins; woods and inclosures, and cultivation fling their images upon its waters; and a profusion of cottages, farm-houses, villas, and mansions, with the villages of Laggavoulin and Kilcalmonell, sit joyously upon its banks.”

Over against Dunskeig, on the opposite side of the loch, with the little island of Trien lying between, is the headland of Ard Patrick, where tradition affirms Saint Patrick to have landed on his way from Ireland to Icolmkill. On the further side of Ard Patrick Point is Storoway Bay. Magnificently situated on the high ground about a mile from the very extremity of the Point, is Ardpatrik House, the residence of Captain Campbell, R. N. This is the land of the Campbells, as is but fitting in Argyleshire. At Kilberry is the residence of John Campbell, Esq., and farther on is Drimnamucklach, the property of another John Campbell. A little way up the loch, on its western side, is Estcairt House, and the beautiful house and estate of Dunmore, the residence of W. Campbell, Esq., which is opposite

* Highlands and Western Isles, vol. ii. p. 85.

to Stonefield House on the eastern side of the loch, the property of John Campbell, Esq., "of Stonefield," the laird of Tarbert, who lives at Barmore castle, about two miles north of Tarbert, leaving Stonefield for the residence of his factor, D. Sinclair, Esq. Along the eastern shore of the loch are also the pretty villa residences called Kilhanmaig, Grassfield, Kintarbert, and Dippen, with Gartnagrenach House, the residence of General Cunningham. Woodside House and other villas are on the western shore; so that the number of the better class of residences seems to prove that the attractions offered by the pleasing scenery of West Loch Tarbert have been appreciated.

By and by, when we have descended Dunskeig Hill (where we have vainly endeavoured to make a scrambling sketch), and our carriage has picked us up, we shall see all these houses as we advance to Tarbert; they assist in forming leading points in those varied pictures that pass before our eyes as the beautiful panorama of West Loch Tarbert is unrolled to our view. It is an excellent road all the way, though some of the pitches and zigzags remind us of the descent to Bonchurch, and of that to Ventnor from the Carisbrooke road. Our driver takes us down them at a sharp trot, and we are thankful when the horse has quickened his pace into a gallop on the level. Every now and then the loch is shut out from our view by woods of birch,

firs, oaks, ash, and beech; or by towering masses of rock, its sternness softened by heather and wild flowers. Corn-fields and their reapers and gleaners stud the landscape on every side. At one point we pass some deer in a little park, where there is a very strong and neat fencing composed of stone in the lower part, and thick wire in the upper. At another point we canter along by the side of a wood fringed with remarkably fine beeches; and the road winds down under shady boughs to a bridge crossing a mountain stream, where a bevy of bare-legged children are paddling in the water, and leaping from boulder to boulder. At another point we come upon grand masses of Scotch firs, their trunks blazing out a fiery orange in the light of the setting sun, and their dark crowns appearing almost black against the calm September sky, save where the twisted stems seem to leap out of the darkness with limbs of fire. No wonder that our greatest landscape painter so loved to introduce this tree as a leading feature in the foreground of so many of his pictures! for picturesque purposes it is a very king of trees,—*the* king, Ruskin used to say; but in the last volume of his “Modern Painters,” with that bold inconsistency and dogmatism that distinguish “Professor Dusky’s opinions on Art,” he has dethroned his former arboreal monarch, the stone-pine, and has proclaimed the aspen king in its place; and has had his head so

turned by the unapproachable glories of his new sovereign, that he has brought himself to the conclusion that not even Turner could paint an aspen-tree, and that it could only be described by Keats. As Keats was stung to death some years ago, it therefore follows that the aspen tree is not only more easily to be imagined than described, but is one of those things that must be seen to be believed.

Sir Walter Scott's praise of "the ever-green pine" will be remembered by all readers of "The Lady of the Lake,"* but his description of the tree in an essay in the "Quarterly Review" (No. 82), may not be so well known.

"A noble tree growing with huge contorted arms, not altogether unlike the oak, and forming therein a strong contrast to the formality of the common fir. The appearance of the Highland fir, when planted in its appropriate situation amongst rocks and crags, is dignified and even magnificent; the dusky red of its massive trunk, and dark hue of its leaves, forming a happy accompaniment to scenes of this description."

Sir Thomas Dick Lauder thus defends the picturesqueness of "the ever-green pine."

"When its foot is among its own Highland heather, and when it stands freely on its native knoll of dry gravel or thinly covered rock, over which its roots

* "The Boat Song," canto ii. xix.

wander in the wildest reticulation, while its tall, furrowed, often gracefully sweeping red and grey trunk of enormous circumference raises aloft its high umbrageous canopy, then would the greatest sceptic on this point be compelled to prostrate his mind before it with a veneration which perhaps was never before excited by any other tree."

About midway between Dunskeig and Tarbert, we pass through the village of Whitehouse, which boasts an inn. Close by, are the two burial-places of Kilchamaig and Claogh Mhichail. In the latter lie the remains of the Rev. Donald M'Keich, of Campbelton, and Miss Lucy Campbell, of Campbelton, a lady of great wealth and charity, who built and endowed two schools at Campbelton and extended her kindly deeds to Glasgow. Now we have a pleasing view of the little village of Lagga-voulin, or "the Mill in the Valley," whose name characterises its situation, and is as grateful to the ear and tongue, as is the reality to the eye. Now we sight, on the opposite shore, the lofty hill of Sliobh-ghoil, "the Hill of Love," the scene of the death of Diarmid, Fingalian Achilles, and ancestor of all the Campbells, of whose prowess with the wild boar we had an account in our eighteenth chapter. It is fitting that the burial-place of the *Camshuil*, or "one-eyed" hero, should be in the midst of the land of the Campbells, though our previous legend would have it

that Beinn-an-tuirc was not only the scene of Diarmid's exploit, but of his death also. But these Fingalian heroes, like Homer, were not only born in ever so many places, but terminated their legendary existence at various times and places, and in divers ways, a circumstance which in no way detracts from the poetic mystery in which they are shrouded.

The road at one time bears us at some distance from the loch, and soon after, turning sharply to the left, brings us close upon its waters. From this point, the view up the placid loch, and out to the open sea and the Hebrides, was exquisitely beautiful. Then we lose sight of the loch again, and pass by a fir plantation, and up a steep hill, the pheasants running and flying at our approach, and the rabbits swarming everywhere, as indeed had been the case for the last twenty miles. The rocks appeared to be alive with them, while the hill-sides were dotted everywhere with flocks of sheep and herds of the shaggy Highland kyloes.

At length the loch narrows amid the encircling hills, and we approach East Tarbert, and the end of our canter through Cantire, ending at the beginning, for at Tarbert is the commencement of the peninsula of the Land's-end of Scotland. As we descend the hill that leads down into the town and come upon an angle of the quay that forms three sides of a square, the lofty Castle Rock, crowned with ruins, makes a fine back-

ground to the scene ; herring-busses and various vessels crowd the harbour, boats pass across, the three lines of white houses are reflected in the water ; and with the last rays of sunset to gild the scene, the town of East Tarbert presents a picturesque appearance, and fitly closes that picturesque drive of twenty-six miles, which has formed our canter through Cantire.