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A VISIT TO AUCH MELVICH.

BY SIR THOMAS DICK LAUDER, BART.

THE site of the little township of Auch Melvich, in Sutherland, is, perhaps, one of the most singular of the many spots which have been occupied by thriving hamlets and villages around the extensive coasts of that interesting country. It is in the district of Assynt; and although we shall attempt to describe it to the best of our power, yet we have no great hope of doing so with such success as to place it very vividly before the imagination of our readers. It consists of a considerable cluster of cottages, flanking either side of narrow, tortuous, irregular ways, which, as yet, cannot very well claim the title of streets, and which run hither and thither over a gently swelling, sandy piece of ground, chiefly covered with bent grass. This slopes easily towards the north into a flat, formed of the same white calcareous sand, all of which has been accumulated by the wind drifting it inwards from the shelly shore of a bay which bounds it in that direction. To the west the hamlet is sheltered from the sea by a range of high grounds, running from this bay on the north to the entrance of Loch Roe on the south. These present rugged, rocky points to the ocean; and their eastern side, towards the hamlet, affords a perfect sample of the general face of the Assynt country, being very irregular in its surface, and covered with rounded blisters of primitive rock, rising all over it in numerous knolls, and having the intervening hollows all cultivated, in patches of oats, bear, and potatoes, so that not even the smallest portion of soil, of a few feet square, is left without culture. These bright green spots, which are of the most whimsical shapes, some of them being like polypi, and others like stockings, or shirts, or other more unmentionable articles of apparel, give a most extraordinary appearance to the general face of the hill side, whilst they speak well for the industry of the people by whose hands they were erected. To the east of the hamlet the mountain rises in a bold craggy steep, where Nature bids defiance to the efforts of man to put any trace of his dominion upon it. To the south of the hamlet there lies a considerable mossy flat, of a circular form, surrounded by the features we have described. This is the dried alveus of a fresh-water lake, which occupied it until within these few years back, when the Duke of Sutherland, by cutting, at his own expense, through the

low rocky hillocks which shut it in from Loch Roe, to the south, opened a passage for its evacuation in that direction, and thus rendered its broad surface easily available for cultivation, by the inhabitants of the cottages among whom it was lotted out, so that it now forms the most important and valuable part of their little agricultural domain.

Nothing can be more wild, or romantic, than the approach to this retired but populous little place, from the open sea. We had the good fortune to go thither, in company with the noble proprietor himself, whose sole enjoyment, during his annual residence of some months in Sutherland, consists in devoting his time to visiting every village, hamlet, and, we may almost say, cottage, in his widely-extended territories. When we had the honour of meeting him, some little time ago, at Loch Inver, he had already been through all the townships on his northern coasts, doing good wherever he went, and he was now engaged in the same work of love and benevolence with regard to those of his western coasts. Although now somewhat advanced in life, and, we regret to say, with health and a frame by no means very robust, the anxiety and solicitude he displays in inquiring, personally, into the wants of his people, and the pleasure he takes in making provision for all their little requirements, leads him to undergo fatigue upon these occasions which might be supposed to be greatly beyond his strength. When bent on such errands, he not only appears indefatigable, both in boating and in walking, but he seems to care little for stormy weather or weeping skies, and, defended by an oilskin coat, he sits in the stern of his boat, bounding over the billows, or he makes his way over the rugged hillocks and boggy ground, in defiance of all such impediments, and with an activity hardly to be expected from his years. We mean to give a short sketch of that visit to Auch Melvich, in which we accompanied him, for, simple as the narration may be, we are led to believe that it may be gratifying to the philanthropist; and it affords a fair specimen of his daily life during the whole of the time he spends in Sutherland.

Having sailed from Loch Inver in a little yacht, we got into the boat, and rowed into the small haven of Bad-na-brad, just within the southern

horn of the Loch, which we had taken upon us to suggest to his Grace as a fit and proper place for the establishment of a fishing station, and around which some comfortable detached cottages and patches of cultivation had already begun to show symptoms of its aptitude for the formation of a settlement. We mention this place, however, by the way, for no other reason than to enable us to notice a circumstance which occurred as we were rowing in towards its shore. Pointing to one of the cottages at some distance inland, the Duke asked his factor—"Pray, Mr. MacIver, did you give the man who lives in that house," naming him, "the wood I promised him last year, for the roof of his byre?" The circumstance of wood having been promised to another man inhabiting a different cottage having occurred at the moment to the factor's mind, to the exclusion of the other, he pointed to it, and said—"That was the house where your Grace promised the wood."—"True," replied the Duke, "I promised wood there too, but it was for a different purpose; and I remember you afterwards told me that the man had got it. But I likewise recollect promising the man who lives in that house wood for the roof of his byre, and, you know, I like to keep my word." The circumstances regarding this promise then recurred to the memory of the factor, and the Duke was satisfied by learning that it had been duly fulfilled. When we find that three straight lines drawn with a ruler outside of the headlands of the west, north, and south-east coasts of the map of Sutherland, would measure about 120 miles; and when we consider the many large lochs, bays, and inlets which cut everywhere into that wild and picturesque country, it will appear that a chain carried all round the high-water mark of its several coasts would produce a measurement probably four or five times that number of miles; and when we think of the numerous townships, thickly clustered with houses, with which these so extensive coasts are everywhere planted, the little anecdote we have just mentioned will not appear altogether insignificant, when taken in proof of the strong interest which the Duke feels in the welfare of his people, and the wonderful memory he displays in treasuring up every little circumstance that may contribute to their comfort.

As the Duke's visit to the township of Auch Melvich had been, in some measure, expected by its inhabitants, we had no sooner rounded the high head called Ard Roe, and entered the narrow passage that leads into the romantic Loch Roe, than we descried a crowd of the people standing on the rocks near a landing place on its northern side, close to the spot where the cut was made for the discharge of the Auch Melvich lake. They seemed to be in a state of eager expectation. After rowing about for some time, to enjoy the beauties of Loch Roe, and to inspect its interesting shores, during which we visited most of its retired bays, and threaded the narrow channel that runs up among the rocks at its upper end, till we got quite into a beautiful fresh-water lake, there communicating with it,

we returned and proceeded to the place where the people were assembled, and there landed. The moment the Duke put his foot on shore, he was surrounded by men, women, and children, their countenances beaming with joy and delight to behold him, and blessings were poured out upon their benefactor's head from all mouths, both in Gaelic and in English, as they pressed eagerly towards him. His eyes glistened with benevolence as he kindly returned their salutations; and, as they lighted on old friends among those around him, he readily recognised them, and addressing them individually by their names, he shook hands cordially with them, and inquired after their own health, and that of the various members of their families. It has been our lot, in this life, more than once to witness well-performed scenes of interchange of feigned affection, but this was a sight, indeed, most pleasant to behold; for here there was no acting on either side. The outpouring of feeling was general from every breast. The effect was extremely touching, and, for our part, we are by no means ashamed to confess that we experienced a certain grappling at our throat, and a dimness in our eyes, as we stood aside in gratified observation of the pleasing scene.

As the good man—for high as is his rank, this is the well-merited title which does him most honour—as the good man, we say, proceeded over the rugged, rocky pathway, which wound among the hillocks, towards Auch Melvich, followed and pressed upon by the elders of its township, and stopping at every two or three yards of the way, as his unfortunate deafness compelled him to do, in order to listen to their petitions, or to whatsoever they might have to say to him, that he might the more certainly and correctly gather their words, he was besieged by a tall, wiry, scraggy-necked, sharp-visaged, and very impudent-looking woman, who, in defiance of the narrowness and unevenness of the way, forced herself close up to him, and strode, and hopped over the stones and bushes, so as to jostle out every one else, and to maintain her own unrivalled proximity to his side, and with her mouth thrust, every now and then, quite into his ear, she, with a voice that resembled the grinding of flints, shrieked into it, in one continued discharge of impertinent questions, and fulsome compliments regarding him and his family; and especially regarding his two elder sons, who were present, which, without waiting for replies, flew faster from her mouth than the shots from the steam-gun. So offensive an annoyance as this appeared to us to be much more than any mortal, however patient, could have well borne; but although he who suffered under it seemed to feel it to its fullest extent, yet his good nature never gave way under it, and, smiling as he went, he bore his persecution with a meekness and a mildness that was as wonderful as it was exemplary, till the hag was at last indignantly elbowed out of her position by some of the more resolute of the elder men, and he was thus relieved from the infliction of her more immediate and continuous assault.

When the pathway opened on the circular valley we have already described, with the cottages of the quiet and peaceful little hamlet seen clustered on the swelling ground beyond, with their light smoke curling upwards into the clear air, the flat bottom that intervened, once an unprofitable sheet of water, now covered with the richest possible crops, all resulting from his own beneficial outlay, we envied him the feelings that must have arisen in his heart. Here, in this wild and remote corner, he had provided food and comfort for a considerable number of human beings, to an extent which was, individually, much beyond what falls to the share of people in the same humble condition of life, even in some of the richest counties of fair England, and that at rents so small as to be scarcely more than nominal. Our wonder, indeed, might not be much if this were the only settlement of this kind in Sutherland, or if it were the only one so beneficently dealt with. But it only furnishes a fair and true sample of all those that are to be found around its coasts. As he followed the path through the corn, which concealed two-thirds of our height as we passed along, his inquiries were numerous as to the holders of the different possessions; and his remarks on their respective crops, and his commendations on their industry, appeared to give great gratification to their different owners.

We may mention, by the way, that at the period of which we are now writing, the fell potato disease was quite unknown in Sutherland; but in a few weeks afterwards it appeared, and this part of these poor people's crops having perished, want must have arisen among them to a very great extent. But forth stood their protector, and, at an expense probably much beyond that incurred for a similar purpose, which gave to a noble Italian family the well-merited, enviable, and still-enduring name of Frangipani, he has warded off this infliction; so that this season of scarcity will pass away over their heads like a fleeting cloud—its effects altogether unfelt, and altogether unknown, except from the reports they may hear of the miseries of others, who have less reason to bless the beneficence of the landlord.

How the crowd of men, women, and children, increased about him as he reached the site of the hamlet itself, where he was welcomed by showers of blessings! There he was entreated, with great modesty, to enter the house of the patriarch of the township, where he, and all of us who were of his company, were soon seated and hospitably entertained with bread and cheese; and the health of the owner of the cottage, and that of his noble guest, were mutually pledged with the kindest feelings. After this, a familiar conversation took place, in which the economy and comforts of the family were fully inquired into and discussed; and this, as we have reason to know, by no means from any mere idle motive. But this was not the only domiciliary visit that the good man made; for he went from house to house, entering many of them, regardless of the smoke with which, according to the custom of

the country, and the predilection which Highlanders have for it, most of them were filled, rather as a matter of fancied addition to the comfort and warmth, perhaps, of the inmates, than as any evil of which they cannot rid themselves. He sat down humbly and unostentatiously, to converse with their owners, and was searching in his inquiries into their most minute concerns—their marriages and births, their illnesses and deaths, soothing and consoling as he went, and questioning them as to their little wants, and giving substantial proofs of his desire to see them supplied. He was particularly solicitous about the success of the schools which he had established, both for girls and boys, and he called on the master and mistress, and made several new and beneficial arrangements regarding them. Meanwhile his family physician, a most benevolent man, had his head and his hands fully occupied by the swarm of patients, with all the ills that flesh is heir to, who came about him to benefit by his skill. The doctor inquired with exemplary patience into all their ailments—felt their pulses—looked at their tongues—noted down their names, and the prescriptions they required—examined their hurts, and their infirmities of all kinds—administered such immediate relief as he could—and promised to send them, without delay, such other remedies as required preparation. His very presence and words seemed to do them good, and many a pallid and despairing cheek appeared to have the flush of hope restored to it by his kindly manner and expressions.

By and bye, some of the elders of the place besought the Duke to go and look at a boat-creek at some little distance, for which they wanted something to be done in the way of improvement. The fact was, it was a miserable place, incapable of holding more than two or three boats, and with an entrance so narrow and so exposed to the long surges of the open sea, as to be difficult and dangerous either for ingress or egress. The proper haven of the hamlet is Loch Roe, which is one of the finest harbours for small craft that can anywhere be met with, but the pathway to it being rough and rocky, so that it was extremely troublesome to carry fishing gear or fish over it, it was rarely, if ever used, and the little creek in question was preferred, as being of easy access. But the Duke having been fully aware of the great advantages which Loch Roe possessed over the miserable creek, and having been made aware that these might be fully opened up to the poor people of Auch Melvich, though at considerable cost, by carrying a branch road from the Loch Inver road, which should touch at Loch Roe on its way to the hamlet, and which should thus connect the place not only with its natural harbour, but with the rest of the country, by affording it easy access to both, at once gave orders that it should be carried into execution at his own expense.

Before leaving Auch Melvich the Duke invited all the people to come to Loch Inver on a certain day which he named, when he was to give prizes

for boat races, to which they all cordially assented.

The Duke was followed by the whole population to the place in Loch Roe, where the boat lay to receive him, and there we all embarked with him, except the doctor, whose labours being not yet nearly completed, he was left on the rocks, still feeling pulses and prescribing, it being so arranged that he was to return by another conveyance. The Duke was no sooner on board than he received three hearty parting cheers from his people, to whom he made his acknowledgments with moistened eyes.

It is not every great Highland proprietor who can afford to go on, as the Duke does, and as his excellent mother did before him, expending, year after year, the whole of the revenue of this vast estate on the country, and the people who yield it. Neither are there many to be found who could, at their own expense, make some four or five hundred miles of roads, as good as those in any gentleman's pleasure grounds in England, in an

extremely difficult country, that was formerly quite impervious, but which may now be travelled over in every part by carriages of all kinds, without meeting with a single turnpike gate, or being asked for toll—every yard of these roads being kept in repair at the expense of the proprietor. Neither do we elsewhere see numerous inns, elegant in structure, and possessing all the comforts of the best-appointed English houses of that description, start up wherever they are wanted, at the touch of the golden wands of other Highland proprietors, as they have done from that of the Duke, all over the Sutherland territory. But in regard to these visitations of Christian kindness of which we have had the good fortune to witness the example, which we have now attempted, though faintly, to describe, there are few who have it not in their power to bestow them, and therefore we may fairly be permitted to hold up this pattern for imitation, and to call upon others to go and do likewise.

LIFE AND CORRESPONDENCE OF JOHN FOSTER.*

BY GEORGE GILFILLAN, AUTHOR OF A "GALLERY OF LITERARY PORTRAITS."

THERE are two classes of character of whom the biography is likely to be peculiarly interesting. One includes those whose lives have been passed in the glare of publicity—who have bulked largely in public estimation, and who have mingled much with the leading characters of the age. The life of such includes in it, in fact, a multitude of lives, and turns out to be, not a solitary picture, but an entire gallery of interesting portraits. The other class comprises those of whom the world knows little, but is eager to know much—who, passing their lives in severe seclusion, have, nevertheless, given such assurance of their manhood as to excite in the public mind an intense curiosity to know more of their habits, feelings, and history. Such an one was John Foster. While his works were widely circulated, and produced a profound impression upon the thinking minds of the country, himself was to the majority only a name. Few could tell what he was, or where he lived—what were the particulars of his outward history, or what had been the course of his mental training. He published little, he seldom appeared at public meetings, his name was never in the newspapers—when he wrote, it was generally in periodicals of limited circulation and sectarian character, and when he preached, it was to small audiences and in obscure villages. There thus hung about him a certain shade of mystery, shaping itself to the colossal estimate of his genius which prevailed. He appeared a great man under hiding; and while some of his ardent admirers found or forced their way into his grisly den, and ascertained the prominent features of his character, and facts in his life, more were left in the darkness of mystification and conjecture. For twenty years, for instance, we ourselves have been enthusiasts in reference to this writer's genius, and yet, till a few

days ago, we never so much as saw his portrait.

The veil has at length been removed. In the interesting volumes before us we find, and principally in his own words, a full and faithful register of the leading events in his life, and of the more interesting movements in his spiritual history. The book is arranged on a plan somewhat similar to that adopted in Carlyle's work on Cromwell. The biography constitutes an intermitting chain between the numerous letters, and is executed in a modest and intelligent manner. Besides his correspondence, there are large and valuable excerpts from his journals, and to the whole are appended interesting though slight notices of his character, from the pen of Mr. Sheppard.

Reserving a few extracts, and some remarks on his style as a letter-writer, till afterwards, we proceed, in addition to what we have said elsewhere of Foster, to state, while still fresh and lively, the impressions which this work has left upon our minds in regard to his idiosyncrasy. Fortunately, they are not of such a kind as to induce us, in many respects at least, to reverse our previous opinions. Those points in his character, however, on which new light has fallen are of no ordinary importance.

Throughout the whole of these volumes we have been impressed with the idea of a mind imperfectly reconciled and indifferently adjusted to the state of society of which it was a part—to the creed to which it had declared its adherence—to the very system of things which surrounded it. This is true of many independent and powerful spirits; but in Foster's mind the antagonism has this peculiarity—it is united to deep reverence and to sincere belief. It is not the fruit of any captious or malignant disposition—it does not spring from any sinister motive. The guilty wish is

* Edited by J. E. Ryland; with Notices of Mr. Foster as a preacher and companion. By John Sheppard. London: Jackson and Walford. 1816.