

CHAPTER XIV

LAST DAYS AT ARROCHAR

ARROCHAR, which had been my dear parents' first Highland home, was to be their last. A sad and tragic event had occurred to make their future residence in the county of Dumbarton a matter of expediency, and though there are many still living to whom details of this will not be new, I may perhaps be forgiven for recalling them.

All who have ever sailed among the thickly-wooded islets of Loch Lomond will remember, amongst the group at the lower end, one of the largest, named Inch Lonaig, covered by a fine natural forest of old yew trees. It lies on the right as the steamer bears away to the north after leaving Luss pier, and on a calm day its reflections in the lake are singularly beautiful.

Nearly all the islands belong to the Colquhoun family, and Inch Lonaig has been used as a deer-park by them for generations. A couple of foresters reside there ; otherwise it is uninhabited.

It was the custom of my uncle, Sir James, to make a deer-stalking expedition to this spot just before Christmas every year, in order to provide venison for an annual distribution to the poor people on his lands, and, albeit an old man in 1873, he set forth one December day early in the forenoon, accompanied by my younger uncle, who lived with him at Rossdhu, and who, like himself, was a first-rate shot.

With them they took four keepers and a boy, and remained for some hours on Inch Lonaig, having excellent sport ; after which they proceeded to load the larger of the two boats in which they had come, with the dead bodies of the deer, and Sir James took his seat at the helm.

As the sky looked dark and threatening, and squalls from the hills were flying about, he urged his brother to accompany him, and leave the skiff to be fetched home at another time. My uncle William replied, however, (as he told us afterwards), that he did not think there was any danger, and would prefer to warm himself, for he was chilly, by rowing home alone in the skiff.

The two boats left Inch Lonaig at the same time, the larger, with its four stalwart oarsmen, taking the lead.

But presently as the dusk fell, the squalls grew stronger, and the solitary occupant of the skiff decided to avail himself of the shelter of Inch Conachan, another well-wooded islet, which lay on his right hand. He last saw the big boat as he entered what are known as "The Straits" at this point. Whether it was caught in a gust then and there, or attempted to round Inch Conachan on the other side, can never be known, for it was never seen again.

Not without difficulty either did the skiff make the shore, and then only did the sole survivor of the fatal expedition realise that he was not followed.

Search was made instantly, but to no purpose ; the first traces of the missing boat did not appear till two days afterwards, when the hat worn by Sir James—a high white felt hat—how well we knew it ! he always wore a bunch of bracken in front to hide it from the deer—was cast ashore on the other side of the loch.

The boat itself followed ; floating in bottom upwards,—and next, the dead bodies of two deer. But of the other dead, the human dead, two still lie hid in the dark depths

where they sank, for all efforts for their recovery proved unavailing. The bottom of Loch Lomond is by weed and wood entangled, and it is thought these must have caught and held fast their prey.

And my father never spoke of that terrible time when day after day, the woeful search went on—between thirty and forty boats taking part in it—until at last the dear familiar features, peaceful and unaltered, were drawn to light.

He was silent, too silent, about the whole scene. He altered. For the first time we saw grey in his hair. And although after a while the first shock wore off, and the grief and the loss became less keen, we noticed there were things he never did, and places he never went to, after that dread period, that agonising ordeal in the home of his childhood.

Perhaps it will not be intruding on his inner feelings now that so many years are passed and that the two so fondly affectioned on earth have been so long re-united above, if I append part of a letter he wrote to his second daughter at this time, which to us who knew him so well was very touching :—

“We had need of your comforting letter, dearest child, for your poor uncle’s body was found last evening, by the Duke’s¹ boat of trawlers. Finlayson asked us to see him, as he was so little changed. William and I therefore went in to where he lay, and there were no marks of suffering or struggle—but he looked calm and peaceful as if only asleep. I gave my adieu to his poor body till I meet him on the resurrection day. I could not help kissing his forehead. We have never had one rough word between us, and he has always been to me the kindest and most loving of brothers. The funeral takes place to-morrow, and we have to-day summoned by telegraph all your brothers for it.

¹ The Duke of Montrose.

I need not say how much William and I were gratified by the Queen's sympathy,—Ever your truly affectionate old
FATHER."

Arrochar not being on Loch Lomond, nor sufficiently near Rosisdhu to be fraught with harrowing associations, my parents were content to go there when it was desirable that they should reside for a time on the Colquhoun territory.

By his brother's death my father had again become heir-presumptive to the baronetcy and estates of Luss ; and as these were left in trust and he was also one of the trustees, he was obliged to give time and attention to business matters connected with the management.

His nephew, the new Sir James, had been delicate all his life, and was wintering in Egypt for his health, when news of the accident reached him. His immediate return was not to be thought of—and, indeed, at no time then or thereafter was he able to live permanently in the humid climate of the west of Scotland.

This, his father had foreseen ; and on this account alone he had made a will which was fully as great a surprise to his nearest kith and kin as to the world at large. I mention this because of some misapprehension on the subject. No slight was intended, no offence was taken ; and my cousin was on the most cordial and intimate terms with us all to the day of his death only a few years ago.¹

To return to Arrochar. Things being as they were, we could not but lead a very quiet life there throughout our first summer sojourn. Our mourning was shared by all around us ; there was not a house within reach which had not lost a kind landlord and a good friend ; there was not

¹ He was succeeded by my second brother, who, as Sir Alan Colquhoun, died in March of the present year, 1910. He is succeeded by his son Sir Iain, a lieutenant in the Scots Guards.



JOHN COLQUHOUN

a poor working man or woman who had not something to say, some tale to tell, of one who had truly dwelt among his own people, and whose sterling worth was perhaps known to them alone.

No doubt this was a good thing ; I fancy it soothed and cheered my dear father, whose devotion to his brother dated from boyhood ; but it constituted a period of monotony which yields nothing to memory, and I shall therefore take the opportunity of reverting to something else which has not perhaps been hitherto made clear.

It may have seemed that in the old Scottish home which overflowed with such joyous life wherever it was implanted, time was mainly spent in sports and pastimes, interwoven by pursuits of a higher order, but still ministering only to our own pleasure or happiness.

This was not so ; and I should be doing injustice to all, but especially to those dear ones who are gone, if I left standing so false an impression. Wherever my parents went, wherever they pitched their tent for the time being, they made it their first business to know and visit the poor around them. To relieve their wants and brighten their lives was a matter-of-course with both my father and mother, and though naturally the latter was to be found most frequently at cottage doors, they often went together, he carrying her basket, in which were medicines and delicacies.

My mother was a great doctor. She had a passion for doctoring. She could not move without an army of bottles and pill-boxes to which an entire cupboard was assigned—and the cupboard often resolved itself into a small room. She would have shelves put up all round the room, and only when these were stacked from end to end was she satisfied.

Of course on this being spread abroad whenever we went to a new place, patients were not slow to appear. Whether they liked their physic or not, they liked what was pretty

sure to follow in the shape of chicken-broth and beef-tea, with possible flannel shirts, or waistcoats.

Now and then a sick person would be taken into the house and nursed, and on one occasion this gave rise to a diverting piece of impudence. A shepherd lad threatened with consumption—indeed it was more than a threatening—had been taken in hand by my mother, who put him under Aiky's charge, and the combined efforts of both did eventually result in a cure.

One of poor Hector's colleagues on the hill, however, cast an envious eye on the coddling and comforting, the snug corner by the fire in Mistress Aitken's own room, and the easy jobs about the garden which took the convalescent into the open air without fatigue.

It all seemed very nice and pleasant to Donald. Why should he not have a turn at the same?

Accordingly he presented himself, coughing. And hearing that Hector had spat blood, and that it was this which had worked the charm in the first instance, he had his story pat. "Awfu' it was, maist awfu'. To be spittin' bluid a' nicht lang! An' it cam up as cauld, as cauld"—shivering at the recollection.

"Cauld?" ejaculated Aiky, eyeing him. "Did ye say 'cauld,' man Donald?"

"Jist cauld—cauld as ice," responded the infatuated Donald, thinking the trick was done now. "Cauld—cauld," and he sighed delightedly.

"Then ye may tak yersel and yer cauld bluid awa' wi' ye," was the unexpected response; "tak it whaur ye'll get fowks to believe in it. But anither time when ye're makin' up a likely tale, I wadna mak the bluid *cauld* till ye hae dippit yer finger in't to see! Awa wi' ye!"—and the impostor was driven from the door.

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My parents had also their winter work among the poor. For thirty years my father had a district in the Grassmarket—part of the Old Town of Edinburgh—and never once failed to take this up directly he arrived from the country.

Every Tuesday he held a religious meeting in a small room which he rented for the purpose; and this meeting was carefully prepared for, though none of us ever knew how it was conducted.

Simply enough, I daresay. He had his Bible by him, and was to be seen busily writing and transcribing on certain mornings of the week; but as he did not confide in anyone his method of procedure, nor whether he gave his humble audience an extempore address or one from a written paper, we forbore to pry. Either way, I am sure the substance was his own, and that it was well pondered over beforehand.

A distribution of coal and bread tickets followed each meeting, and no doubt gave it a little extra flavour—but whether or no, he had always a good attendance. His own personality would, I think, have ensured this at any time.

“Slumming,” as practised by young ladies in these days, was not regarded in a favourable light by our forefathers—indeed it could hardly have been carried out with safety under the conditions that then prevailed.

We visited cottagers in the country—unless the house were prohibited by our elders, as occasionally happened; but in Edinburgh personal ministrations in early youth had to cease. One of my sisters, however, who was earnestly concerned at this, and has since become known as a leader of religious and philanthropic work, prevailed on our parents to place at her disposal a Biblewoman, whom, when older grown, she sometimes accompanied on her rounds—and on returning from these, she often had odd tales as well as pathetic ones to relate.

Having a gift of humour, like our aged friend the

large-hearted and lovable Miss Marsh, (author of *Memorials of Hedley Vicars*, etc.), my sister could also enjoy a laugh against herself, when her district days provided it ; and on one occasion she told in her own inimitable manner a story of an old woman to whose wants, spiritual and bodily, she was endeavouring to minister. Having unpacked a basket of good things, she took no notice as a wrinkled hand went and came between them and the wrinkled lips, but talked of higher things, trusting from the silence with which she was heard that an impression was being made. On and on she talked ; and on and on the old creature ate. She had found something much to her taste.

At length she heaved a sigh, and her visitor paused hopefully. A meditative eye was raised as it were in deep reflection ; there was another sigh, and a pensive voice murmured, "*What a lot o' that cheese I hae eaten !*"

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With respect to the same subject, I should like to add one word more. It often happened that the remote parts of Scotland in which my parents took up their temporary residence were unfortunate as regarded religious observances.

"We do seem *always* to have a poor minister, and a neglected parish," my mother once lamented to a friend in my hearing.

"For that very reason, perhaps, you and your husband are sent there," was the calm reply.

It sank in ; from that time forth there was an increased sense of responsibility, and desire to be blessing and blessed wherever my father and mother went. In many and many a lonely spot they did veritably leave a name not soon forgotten.

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The summer of 1874 being exceptionally dry and warm,

we lived a more out-of-doors life during that, our first year at Arrochar, than is usually possible in a climate whose conditions are well described as being "shoery—shoery—and rain between." The little straggling village, delightfully situated in its picturesque basin at the head of Loch Long, would seem to have a special attraction for clouds, doubtless drawn thither by the rugged and precipitous mountain-peaks around.

Of course, no one minds a "Scotch mist"—no one to the manner born, that is ; but one cannot sit in it, read in it, work in it, and when July and August, the two wettest months in the west, do transform themselves for once, how beautiful, how enchanting is the scene !

Although debarred from gaieties, we took advantage of the long spell of fair weather to go about a good deal in a quiet way. Nearly every afternoon we boiled our kettle on the shores of the loch, some driving, some rowing to the selected spot ; and if no more distant excursion suggested itself, there was always the "Buttermilk Burn" at the entrance to Glencroe, where the foaming waters came down from the hills in a series of falls white as milk—hence its name.

We were sitting there one day—the fire smoking, the kettle hissing, everybody waiting—when the post-bag was brought across from the house, and there was in it a letter for me, which was not exactly like any other letter I had ever had before. It accompanied my first cheque from Messrs William Blackwood & Sons.

This may seem inaccurate, as *Mr Smith* was now ten months old ; but payments for that book did not begin till the year was up, and in the meantime I had written a short magazine story, and perhaps may here venture to tell a little about that story.

The success of my first novel did not at first have a

stimulating effect on my energies—rather it numbed them. I felt like many another young writer, as though I had said all I had to say, and there was no more to be got out of me.

By-and-by, however, chancing to come across Miss Yonge's simple little magazine, *The Monthly Packet*, and noting that its standard was not superlatively high, I thought I might manage a few thousand words without undue mental strain, and in easy fashion set to work. No sooner had a beginning been made, however, than the pen flew like fire, and the story was written with scarce a breathing-space.

Forthwith it was despatched to Miss Yonge—and forthwith it came back again. "It is," wrote that esteemed editress, "a pretty tale, but not quite in the tone of *The Monthly Packet*."

To own the truth, that stung me. I felt mortified, yet put on my mettle. I re-read the MS., and then and there without alteration of a word, despatched it the same day to Mr John Blackwood.

Of course it would come back ; I told myself a dozen times a day that it would come back ; and yet I hardly anticipated seeing the large envelope turn up as soon as it did, for a week had not transpired when there it was, with the Edinburgh postmark.

However—I opened the envelope. Out came the little MS. certainly, but something else came too. Proofs ? Could they be proofs ? "Kindly let me have corrected proofs by return," wrote Mr Blackwood, "for we are just about to go to press for the August number of *Maga*, and have displaced another story for yours."

It was to be in *Maga*, and *Maga* at the height of its fame ! Wonderful ! Incredible !

In the first volume of the new series of *Tales from Blackwood* there re-appeared *Nan : A Summer Scene* ; it was re-

produced in various forms again and again ; some of my happiest memories are connected with it.¹

And not the least of these was the reception of the cheque by the Buttermilk Burn. Thirty-five pounds ! I could scarce believe my eyes. Always generous in his dealings, I cannot but think the great publisher had special pleasure in sending a sum so much overstepping its merits to the author of so slight a contribution—and if so, I would he had come up the burn-side that day.

Shall I be thought malicious if I relate what happened fifteen years later in connection with this same little tale ? It chanced that I had a letter from Miss Yonge, whom to my regret I never met, but who wrote to me on some business matter, and after disposing of it, subjoined : “ I have just read with the greatest pleasure such a charming story of yours called *Nan*.”

Just read !

Well, I never enlightened her, for worlds I would not have done so ; and the mystery, if mystery there were, remains one to this day.

The following January *Pauline* began to run as the serial for the year in *Maga*, to be followed before very long by *The Baby's Grandmother* and *A Stiff-necked Generation* in the famous pages. But my dearest mother, my kindest sympathiser, my most invaluable counsellor, only lived to see the five first parts of *Pauline*, for she died after a few days' illness on the 27th of May 1875.

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The only incident of any note I recall during our second year at Arrochar, (where my father for the last time as-

¹ So general a favourite is this little tale, that, as it is now out of print, I have obtained the kind permission of Messrs Longman to reproduce it as an appendix at the end of this volume.

sembled his children and grandchildren round him in a Highland home) was a visit from General Ulysses Grant, who, with his wife and son, and several other relations, was touring in Scotland that autumn.

As the party was desirous of seeing Loch Lomond, it behoved them to be conducted and entertained by the Colquhouns, and the head of the family being still an absentee, the duty of doing so would have devolved on my father, but for his recent bereavement.

The American general, however, was not to be denied an interview. He was very willing to accept the escort and hospitality of my eldest brother, who was now married and also resided on the estates; but after lunching with him and his charming young wife at Ben Cruach, near Tarbet, he announced that he would still like to see his father, if it would not be thought intrusive.

Several of us from Arrochar were of the party at Ben Cruach, and the general turned to us: "There's a question," he said, "I want to ask him."

It was then arranged that though all the strangers could not be received at Arrochar, General and Mrs Grant were to go over next morning, taking us *en route* for Inveraray, where they were to be the guests of the Duke and Duchess of Argyll.

My father was anxious to know what the famous soldier was like? It was a somewhat rough-hewn face, we told him, ruddy and sunburnt, with a beard. "Not unlike Lord Seafield," said one, pointing to an engraving of a former Earl of Seafield which hung on the drawing-room wall.

But we little expected that the "question" to be asked by the Grant from over the water, related to this very resemblance.

Out it came, almost immediately after greetings had passed. "You are Grants, aren't you?" quoth the general,

with frank disregard of ceremony. "I know you are, for the heiress of Luss married a Seafield, and that is why you Colquhouns had to get a new creation. I know all about it; and now tell me"—he looked a little self-conscious, actually a little shy—"people say it, but I don't know if it is humbug or not; am I like the late Lord Seafield?"

"You are his living image," replied my father—and took him up to the picture.

He spoke the simple truth, and I think I never saw a man more pleased than this American descendant—for he was a descendant, albeit through several generations—of the ancient Scottish family.

He stayed a long while and talked of many subjects; he was in a more genial and expansive humour than at the luncheon party of the day before—doubtless social entertainments were not in his line,—but always his eyes kept wandering back to the Seafield portrait.

Presently my brother accompanied the elderly couple to the verge of the Colquhoun lands, and came back smiling. "I believe they would have turned back if they could," said he; "they said they were more sorry than they could express to leave behind the beauties of Loch Long and Loch Lomond."

"He said that?" My father knew human nature. "Those are the sort of things people say, but"—and he laughed a little—"the general was more taken up with being a *Grant* than with all the beauties of Loch Long and Loch Lomond."

And probably this shrewd opinion was correct, for in a letter which I had subsequently the honour of receiving from Ulysses Grant, he did not refer to the "beauties," but reiterated his intentions of looking into the genealogical tree of the Seafields.

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Inveraray is twenty-three miles from Arrochar. I record the distance with elation, for I walked it. It is perhaps a pardonable weakness on the part of my own sex to boast of our feats in this line ; and alas ! that I should say it, but too often our estimate of their extent is based on no surer foundation than the word of a Swiss innkeeper or Highland ghillie.

They of course see which way the cat jumps, and what more easy than to oblige a lady who eagerly asks for an opinion of her prowess ? But a good coach road, with mile-stones all the way, is a witness to be depended on, and surely to traverse on foot three-and-twenty miles of this was a creditable performance on the part of a Mid-Victorian lady, brought up at a time when hockey (for women) was not, and golf was not, and hunting and skating were looked upon askance. *N.B.*—Hunting, the most daring and dangerous of forbidden sports, was oddly enough the first to be admitted to favour when a reaction set in ; but I never had an opportunity of trying it, much as I should have liked to do so.

However, that walk—how beautiful, how glorious it was ! I had a delightful companion in my brother-in-law, Dr Norman Macleod, and we set off one brisk September morning while yet the dew was glistening and the cobwebs flying. The long ascent of Glencroe had first to be traversed—and how clear were the wimpling tarns beneath a cloudless sky !—then on over moor and fell to lonely Cairndow, where we halted for food and rest, and where began, if I remember right, the descent.

But how many little worlds we seemed to find, how many snug little villages, each nestling in its own sea-creek, we seemed to pass through, before, on rounding the bend of Loch Fyne, we sighted our goal ! Welcome to me was that sight, I own—and as the coach had brought

thither others of our party, we had a merry evening, and all returned together to Arrochar the following day. Personally, however, I did not see much of Inveraray!

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Nor did anyone stay late that autumn at Arrochar. The sojourn there on the whole was a failure, and was never repeated.

And although my father survived his widowerhood for ten years, he took no more moorland homes after finding that they could never again be to him what they once had been.

There is always something of sadness in approaching the last phase of a long and honoured life, and I need not dwell on this one, save to say that while my dear father felt his sorrows keenly—and others were to follow in the loss of his dearly-loved eldest and youngest sons within six months of each other—his health was not affected thereby, and he retained to a very remarkable degree the vigour of his younger days.

His fine physique enabled him to repel the advances of old age, and surmount various attacks of illness. To the last his eye was as keen and his tread as firm as ever, and at eighty-one he eluded precautions and despised luxuries. To this was due perhaps the fact that he did not live even longer than he did.

One chilly day in spring, seeing that the sun was shining, he took no heed that the wind was in the east, slipped out by himself without his greatcoat, and caught a cold. A bronchial attack set in; and eventually on the 27th of May 1884 he followed his beloved wife to the grave on the same day of the same month that took her from him.