


WITH THE ROD ON LOCH LOMOND.

“HE sun has gane doon ower the Lofty Ben Lomond,” sings one of our party, as we sit in the main room of the hotel at Balloch, and look out upon the Queen of Scottish Lakes, and the slow-running Leven, which carries off its surplus waters to the Clyde ; but, in truth, the sun has gone down in a totally different direction, for the Lofty “Ben” lies to the north-east of us. Poor Tannahill, the most charming of Scottish song-writers, Burns included, sang of his Jessie, the Flower of Dunblane, from the hills of Renfrewshire, and saw the brow of the favourite, if not the loftiest of Scottish mountains, in his walks at sunset away against the gilded horizon ; while, sad to think, he never knew the scenic beauties of the loch beneath, or the Braes of Balquither, which he celebrated in one of his most popular lyrics. Further up the loch we cannot get this evening, and so we settle down to make a night of it with what Burns calls “sangs and clatter,” the “clatter,” or “jabber,” which is good English (or is it Irish ?) for the same word, consisting of hard bouncing about big fish and big baskets, finishing up with an exhibition “o’ the wonderful wee flee that did it”—this production of the flee that did it being considered as evidence which cannot well be rebutted. But it matters not ; the biggest fish that ever were caught are those that *escaped*—if an Irish bull may be here perpetrated ; the biggest bags of grouse those that are shot after they are eaten ; and the biggest fences that are ever jumped in a long hunting run are those which have grown hard and high during the few hours between the time they were crossed and the post-prandial cigar in the evening. Of course it is needless to state that every angler swears that there is no sport like fishing, just as every golfer claims that golf is the finest game in the world and far before cricket, and so on, the “knurrist and spellist” possibly putting in his claim for his favourite pastime, whatever it may be like. So we sung the “Bonnie red hackle” for a change from the

“Bonnie woods of Craigielea,” and the praises of the sport by loch and river generally.

They may sing o’ their gunning, and a’ ither funning,
 But give us the rod when the water’s in ply ;
 When the wind wi’ a swirl it puts on the right pirl,
 And whirls off full nicely the bonnie bit fly.
 Wi’ the best o’ guid tackle, a hare-lug or hackle,
 Or maybe by times the wing o’ a teal,
 Or something kenspeckle that makes our hearts keckle,
 When a trout sings a bonnie bit tune on the reel.

Sae wading and swinging, our line we are flinging,
 Of care we ne’er have a thought, man, awa ;
 We re gay weel content aye, when fish they are plenty,
 Wi’ a rise now and then to ilka bit thraw.
 Though could be the watter, it disna e’en matter,
 We couldna be better ; we ne’er were sae weel ;
 There’s a drap in the flask yet, a trout in the basket,
 And anither is playing a tune on the reel.

So awa wi’ your yachting, your bowling, your batting,
 Awa wi’ your hunting, your coaching, and a’ ;
 We’ll na have your racing, or e’en steeplechasing,
 Your quoinin’, your curling, your games wi’ the ba’ ;
 E’en for a week’s sailing we’d no gie a grayling,
 Or e’en gie a saumont for ship, mast, and keel ;
 Wi’ plenty of fishing, nae mair we are wishing
 Than a bonnie bit tune, man, betimes on the reel.

But late to bed and late to sup, makes a long lie and a slow get up ; and so there is a general rush for candles just as McVicar commences that story which we all have heard so often, and know the length of. Familiarly known as the “Yawner,” it starts in the Scotch style—“If any of ye ever happened to fish the Clyde at Abingdon, ye would ken,”—and then follows an account of an adventure with a Clyde trout as big as a Clyde-built ship, which, of course, was never landed and weighed. The would-be story-teller took the hint, and one and all retired, hoping for a favourable fishing morning and good luck.

Breakfast over by eight next morning, we found our way across the wooden bridge which spans the Leven, and, crossing the railway, passed down to the pier, which is about 300 yards

or so from the railway station. In due time the Glasgow train steamed in, with, of course, a crowd of tourists on board, all for the Highlands, bound either inland by Loch Katrine and the Trossachs, seaward by Loch Long, or away across to Inverary by coach, and thence to Oban, from which place they can, of course, get into any part of the north-west of Scotland. Keeping the right side of the loch as far as Balmaha, we leave the picturesque residence where was reared Smollett, the novelist, and, skirting the lovely island of Inchmurrin, have a view to the right of Buchanan Castle, the residence of the Duke of Montrose, and of his Grace's private training grounds. From Balmaha we steam to the left through a narrow pass, and in past the island of Inchtavannach, where our eyes are gladdened by the sight of a good-sized trout being lifted into a boat by the landing-net. We pass almost across the water in which Sir James Colquhoun, together with his head keeper and four others, were drowned ten years ago on returning from a deer-shooting expedition to the island of Inchloanig. The gloom of that disaster hung for a long time round these lovely wooded shores—in fact, it has scarcely yet lifted away. The lovely-situated mansion—from the drawing-room window which faces us, the Queen had one of her first and most impressive views of the lake and Ben Lomond—we can see through the trees, and in amongst the dark yews discern the little mortuary chapel, where we recollect seeing the late baronet laid to rest that wild, wet, windy day in the Christmas week of 1873. But we are soon at Luss, on the little pier at which are assembled many fishers, most of whom report as to having experienced fair sport. Our cry, however, is "Northward ho!" for we mean to fish the upper side of the Loch. Rowardennan, at the foot of the mountain, is our next stoppage, but the "Row," or Ferry, is not a great fishing point; so, after gazing at the "Ben," and the beautiful lodge of Rowardennan, occupied by Mr. Mair, of London, at its foot, the more wildly-situated lodge of the Ptarmigan, tenanted by Mr. Alston, but which, when we last fished the shore, was occupied by Sir Beaumont and Lady Dixie—who took a good many fish out of the waters—we get to Tarbet, on the other side, then cross again to find ourselves at our rendezvous at Inversnaid, with our boats and boatmen awaiting us. As we have had a nice "snack" on board the steamer, we lose no time in getting to

work, the best part of the day, of course, being well gone by this time. As the boatmen know exactly what *is* taking, we are soon spinning the coin for choice of guides, one of these worthies being known not only as a champion at working the oars, but as a keen and successful fisher, who knows the whole geography of the upper stretches. We win—take our seats, and are soon, with pipes aglow and a trolling-rod astern, making for the Dumbarton side, leaving our companions to whip the troubled water underneath the fall at the boat's landing-place.

“They might as well fish in an old coal-pit for Finnan haddies,” is the remark of Donald, “there’s no ane in the place but has had its mouth jagged by somebody.”

Donald, however, was scarcely right this time, for in a minute or two afterwards we saw clearly one of our friends, who was fishing from the bow, hook a trout, and the boatman safely take it on board with the landing-net.

“He maun either have been a fule o’ a fish, or ane that has come in to feed at the freshet, for there’s a lot of water coming over the falls from last night’s rains,” was his further remark; “but here ye are at the other side, gentlemen, and I’sc warrant ye’ll get fish here if they are to be got in the Loch.”

Reeling up the trolling-rod, as the water was shallow and the bottom rough, we let out our lines, and commence flinging from bow to stern, as our boatman, with his eye over his left shoulder, pulls with easy strokes from off the land.

“Just missed him, sir; he’s a good fish; be canny and try again,” is his caution; “it’s the green and teal he’s after, I’ll wager.”

In the third cast I cross the water he broke, and, *whirr*—have him. A good fish, too, and no mistake, so must handle him cautiously. In he sweeps almost under the boat, while Donald backs water, and off on the other side; but he comes gently up to the reel, and, after one little squirm, finds himself in the landing-net carefully handled by the Highland boatman. Two or three more drifts in and out of the same bay, and we set off further up the Loch again to more likely ground. A sea-trout gives us some fun, and as night’s shadows cast themselves across the Loch we pull homewards in convoy, having for our share thirteen fish—scaling the full basket $5\frac{1}{2}$ lbs—by no means

bad work for a short day, our friends scarcely being so lucky by about a pound.

With the harvest moon shining out red on the Loch below, and the waterfall purring away as it did when Rob Roy was accustomed to bridge the torrent by leaping from rock to rock, we enjoy a nightcap of our landlord's favourite blend, determining to have a long day's work before the sun sets next evening.

