

GLEN FESHIE.

BY ROBERT ANDERSON.

GLEN FESHIE forms the most westerly of the passes that intersect the Cairngorms and lead the pedestrian from Deeside to Speyside or *vice versa*—to speak absolutely correctly, it does not intersect the Cairngorms, but is just outside the range, skirting the western base of the Western Cairngorms. It is an exceedingly attractive glen. It lacks the stern grandeur of Glen Dee and the Learg Ghruamach, with their massive enclosing mountains; its solitude does not possess—that, at least, is the writer's feeling—the eerie loneliness of the Learg an Laoigh. But it has a picturesqueness all its own, with which nothing in either of the Larigs can compare—neither the Rothiemurchus Forest at the end of the one, nor the Nethy Valley at the end of the other. The river Feshie, which traverses the glen, is the main contributor to its scenic features, just as its lively presence saves the glen from the stigma of desolation and loneliness. A splendid specimen of the highland burn is the Feshie, especially in its middle portion, where the process of its “making” is unfolded. You follow it down or trace it up the glen with pleasure and admiration, so varied are its characteristics. Linns, falls, rapids, pools—you have them all by turns; a perfect wealth of them. Now the river is brawling over a rocky bed; now it is flowing dark and sullen through a ravine in the hill-side; anon

“Foaming strang, wi' hasty stens,
Frae lin to lin”.

Walking along the Feshie, you are instinctively reminded of Professor Blackie's “Song of the Highland River” :—

“From the treeless brae,
All green and grey,
To the wooded ravine I wind my way,
Dashing, and foaming, and leaping with glee,
The child of the mountain, wild and free.

Under the crag where the stone crop grows,
 Fringing with gold my shelvy bed,
 While over my head
 Its fruitage of red
 The rock-rooted rowan tree blushfully shows,
 I wind, till I find
 A way to my mind,
 While hazel, and oak, and the light ash tree
 Weave a green awning of leafage for me.
 Fitfully, fitfully, on I go,
 Leaping, or running, or winding slow,
 Till I come to the linn where my waters rush
 Eagerly down with a broad-faced gush,
 Foamingly, foamingly, white as the snow
 On to the soft green turf below,
 Where I sleep with the lake as it sleeps in the glen,
 'Neath the far-stretching base of the high-peaked Ben".

The Feshie sleeps in no lake or glen, however; its rushing waters ultimately commingle with those of the swift-flowing Spey. The "meeting of the waters" is not by any means a particularly romantic spot; the most beautiful portion of the Feshie is at Ruigh-aiteachain—alternatively termed "The Huts" and "The Islands"—on the right bank of the river, opposite Glenfeshie Lodge—"a most lovely spot", the Queen writes, "among splendid fir-trees, the mountains rising abruptly from the sides of the valley. We were quite enchanted with the beauty of the view".*

From Braemar, Glen Feshie is reached by walking up the valley of the Dee to where the river is joined by the Geldie, and by then taking the path through Glen Geldie (this path is marked by one of the posts of the Scottish Rights of Way Society, indicating a road to Insh). The path through Glen Geldie (a driving road) goes to Geldie Lodge (Sir Horace Farquhar's); but the pedestrian in quest of Glen Feshie must leave it a little short of the Lodge and just before it crosses the Geldie. He will find himself on a broad expanse of moorland, over which he must make his way as best he can. There is said to be a path, but, if it

* The Queen visited Glen Feshie twice—on 4th September, 1860, and 8th October, 1861. (See "Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands".)

exists, it is exceedingly indistinct and elusive; the failure of two attempts to strike it has made the writer sceptical of its existence. The only direction to be given is to walk in line with the Geldie, but gradually moving away from it—the higher up the better, to avoid the boggy ground near the Geldie, which soon becomes attenuated to a mere stream. (Once on the reverse journey up Glen Feshie from Kingussie to Braemar, I made a bee-line across this moorland by walking steadily in the direction of Lochnagar, here a prominent feature in the landscape.) The surrounding scenery is comparatively unattractive—moorland and bare hillsides; but the distant hill prospect is good, and the bold outlines of one range far away on the left (presumably the hills enclosing the Forest of Gaick) arrest attention. The Geldie diminishes more and more, until, finally, it is traced—a thin streak—descending a hillside on the left. A little distance further on you come suddenly in view of the Feshie—already a considerable stream—rushing down a wide valley, also on the left, and making a very sharp turn in its course—from an easterly to a northerly direction; and somewhere in this neighbourhood the county march between Aberdeenshire and Inverness-shire is crossed. The direction here is to get down to the Feshie, by the side of which a path will soon be struck. The Eidart Burn, which runs into the Feshie, has then to be crossed. There used to be a rough bridge over the Eidart, consisting of a couple of planks and a wire for a hand-rail, a few yards above the junction; but the last I heard of it was that it is down, in which case fording will need to be resorted to. Before crossing the Eidart, one should walk up along it for a little distance to see a picturesque fall—refreshing was the sight of it one very warm day on which I walked through the glen. The Eidart crossed, an excellent footpath runs down the glen, on the right bank of the river, to Ruigh-aiteachain and on to a bridge below Glenfeshie Lodge.*

* It is almost unnecessary to say that Glen Feshie now constitutes part of a large deer forest of the same name, the following particulars of which are given in Scrope's "Days of Deer-Stalking":—"Glenfeshie Forest, in

Ruigh-aiteachain, as already mentioned, is the loveliest part of Glen Feshie. The glen—a narrow one all the way down to this spot—here opens out into a well-wooded haugh or meadow, not unlike a bit of English woodland scenery. The lower slopes of the adjacent crag-tipped mountain sides are abundantly wooded, a number of fine old pine trees being conspicuous, with which are interspersed birches and large clumps of juniper bushes.* And a huge mountain mass projects itself prominently into the scene, separating the glen from a valley beyond, the end of which is just visible. The spot is a lovely one—an oasis in a desert. The haugh is cut into strips, or sections, by former channels of the river, hence the term, "The Islands". Another name for the place is "The Huts". The "huts" are now represented by bits of gable walls, all that remains of a series of wooden buildings occasionally occupied by a former Duchess of Bedford (a daughter of the celebrated Duchess of Gordon), when lessee of Glenfeshie. Amongst her most favourite guests was Sir Edwin Landseer, the painter, who, it is said, "obtained in the locality sketches for some of his most famous paintings".† On the plaster above the fire-place of one of the huts Sir Edwin drew a picture, part of which is still extant, showing three antlered stags and a hind. The Mackintosh, to whom "The Huts" belong, has, in order to preserve this interesting memorial of the great animal painter, erected a building over the ruined fireplace—a building that looks like a mission-hall (has, indeed, been used for that purpose), and that, in consequence, is often passed without notice by the pedes-

the parish of Kingussie and county of Inverness, is bounded on the south and south-east by the forests of Mar and Atholl, on the west by the forest of Gaick, and on the south by the estate of Invereshie; by survey in 1770 it contained 13,706 Scots acres. It was let in 1752 to Mr. Macpherson of Invereshie, and continued to be rented by that family until 1812, when it was purchased from the Duke of Gordon by Mr. Macpherson of Invereshie and Ballindalloch. It has been pastured by cattle and sheep since 1752".

* "Ruigh-aiteachain may possibly be a corruption for Ruigh Ait-neachain, the Stretch of the Junipers". ("Badenoch: Its History, Clans, and Place Names". By Alexander Macbain.)

† "Kingussie and Upper Speyside (Badenoch) as a Summer Resort".

trian. The numerous windows, however, enable the passer-by to view the picture with ease, without the trouble of getting the door opened.*

Crossing the Feshie at a wooden bridge below Glenfeshie Lodge the pedestrian follows a road on the left bank, and after passing through a deer fence two or three miles lower down arrives at cross-roads with a Rights-of-Way post indicating the road to Insh. Insh will be gained by keeping the road in the line of the one you have been following; the road that turns off to the left leads to Kingussie. Insh is decidedly the nearer of the two (particularly if you can manage to strike a short cut; but how few people one meets here from whom to ask a direction!) The fact is, however, that the walk through Glen Feshie to any destination is a long one. According to the best estimate I have been able to form, aided by more or less reliable information, the distance from Braemar to Glenfeshie Lodge alone is 21 miles, made up thus:—Braemar to Linn of Dee, 6 miles; Linn of Dee to Glen Geldie, 3 miles; Glen Geldie, 3 miles; Geldie Lodge to the Eidart, 3 miles; the Eidart to Glenfeshie Lodge, 6 miles. The distance from Glenfeshie Lodge to Kingussie is 10 miles; from Glenfeshie Lodge to Insh, 8 miles.

To this general description of Glen Feshie I may add some detailed notes of an interesting "circular tour" in the region, undertaken in August, last year, by several members of the Club and myself. Starting from Loch an Eilein, we drove by Polchar, the Doune, and South Kinrara to Lagganlia, and then to Glenfeshie Lodge by the right bank

* The name of another painter, Rev. John Thomson of Duddingston, is associated with Glen Feshie. Thomson on one occasion paid a visit to Sir David Brewster, while the latter was residing in Badenoch, "and was, of course, taken to see Glen Feshie, with its wild corries and moors, and the giants of the old pine forest. After a deep silence, my father was startled by the exclamation, 'Lord God Almighty'! and on looking round he saw the strong man bowed down in a flood of tears, so much had the wild grandeur of the scene and the sense of the One creative hand possessed the soul of the artist. Glen Feshie afterwards formed the subject of one of Thomson's best pictures". ("Home Life of Sir David Brewster", by his daughter, Mrs. Gordon.)

of the Feshie, crossing the river at Achlean. Crossing the river again at the Lodge, we walked up the glen. After passing "The Huts", the path skirts the base of a series of precipitous crags, wooded on their lower slopes. The Feshie here flows through a narrow valley, walled in on the opposite side by the projecting mountain mass already alluded to, which is literally scored and streaked with what had evidently been not water courses merely, but torrent courses. Several burns come tumbling down the steep hill-sides on our left, forming many miniature waterfalls; and every now and again we cross "shoots" of stones and detritus discharged from the hill-tops—"shoots" of immense length, width, and depth; the depth often indicated by the "buried" condition of the standing trees in their track. Strange it was to find wild strawberries and rasps growing amid this wreck of matter; cranberries, blaeberrys, and juniper berries were also plentiful along the slopes. Animate nature, too, was not awanting. Two eagles were observed circling leisurely in the air far above the summit of the crags, and suddenly one of them darted off in pursuit of a passing bird. The swift flight of a hawk was also noted, and three or four goosanders were seen skimming along the Feshie. When we got out of the wood we had to skirt the edge of a row of immense screes, extending probably for about a quarter of a mile. This accomplished, the path descends to the river-side and crosses a grassy plateau. The frowning torrent-torn wall on the left bank of the river is now replaced by a hill covered with birches and aspens, the picturesque effect of which is heightened by two or three burns, each descending the hill in a series of waterfalls. From the grassy plateau the path gradually ascends up into a region of brownish hills, bare and treeless, save for a few alders and aspens along the bank of the river, which here descends rapidly over linns and through gorges, many of them very fine, particularly one deep gorge immediately below the spot where the Allt Coire Bhlair rushes into the Feshie—not flowing into it, but tumbling into it, in cascade form, over a shelf of rock.

An examination of the Allt Coire Bhlair was the real

order of the day. This burn crosses the Glen Feshie path at an interesting spot, flowing out of a steep, narrow gorge, at the further end of which is discerned a high waterfall. The spot is otherwise interesting, as in the immediate vicinity are the remains of some walls which at one time formed part of a hut frequently resorted to by Sir Edwin Landseer. We wormed our way up the gorge by the burn-side, as far as was possible, climbing over projecting ledges, clambering along the sides of ugly-looking gullies and deafening linns, and securing a foothold not always the most trustworthy, owing to the wet and rotten condition of the rock. But it was all to no purpose. Very soon a gap faced us that there was no getting round—the burn flowing fast and deep between two sheer walls of rock; and this gap, too, was placed obliquely, so that we had no proper view up the gorge. We had simply a partial view of a huge cleft in a mountain; precipitous rock faces on each side of us, with ferns sprouting from their interstices and a dwarf birch, or aspen, or fir occasionally showing on some of the higher ledges; and at the upper end a tantalising glimpse of a bit of waterfall. Reluctantly we had to retrace our steps—the descent, at one point, proving not quite so easy as the ascent; but with due caution the difficulty was surmounted. There was now no other course open to us but to attempt to find the waterfall from the ridge above the gorge. Ascending the ridge accordingly—the ridge on the left bank of the burn—we, in a short time, came in view of a magnificent waterfall; a fairly large body of water making the descent by three separate leaps, so to speak—first, a transverse fall from right to left, then a straight descent for a considerable distance, and then a transverse fall again, but this time from left to right. Each of us made an estimate of the total height of the fall (including all three branches); the average of five separate estimates was 166 feet. It was unanimously resolved to name them the Landseer Falls.

Leaving the Landseer Falls and the Allt Coire Bhlair, we trended away to the right and made for a summit called Diollaid Coire Eindard (3184). A good-natured dispute

arose—not infrequent on similar occasions—as to whether it would be preferable to take the hill right in front or gain it by means of a projecting shoulder. The upshot of the dispute was that it was resolved to give both plans a trial, two of us making straight for the hill, the other three making for the shoulder, all “racing” being barred. The trio gained the summit first, whereupon the couple, as a matter of course, protested that they had encountered the worser walking-ground, having to cross a long boggy moor intersected with natural trenches. Excuses for delay are as fertile on a mountain-top as anywhere else! From the summit we had a fine view of Beinn Bhrotain, Monadh Mor, Cairn Toul (with its two cairns), Braeriach, Ben Muich Dhui, and Sgòran Dubh. A brief view it was, however, for, almost immediately, down came the mist, followed by rain! Meall Tionail (3338) was then made for, and duly gained. Diollaid Coire Eindard and Meall Tionail are connected by an extensive plateau of grass, which spreads around for a considerable distance, and on which a carriage and pair could easily be driven; while in a hollow to the north lies a huge moss, called the Moine Mhor, having an area of several miles. Large quantities of porphyritic granite are to be observed on Meall Tionail; and, on descending from the plateau, the ground is found “grooved” in a peculiar fashion, bare-swept stretches of gravel alternating with grassy mounds. A sudden rise of the mist revealing Glenfeshie Lodge due west of us suggested recourse to tactics which enabled us to perform what was really a “circular tour”. Instead of returning to Glen Feshie, as had been our original intention, we struck northwards for the Coire Garblach. This corrie is of great height—looking down from its crest to the plain below, as we did, one is apt to call the height stupendous. It has four or five facets (if such a term is allowable) or separate gullies, and formidable gullies they are. They are composed of screes for the most part, with rocky escarpments, the weathered and jagged edges of which protrude in fantastic forms; yet, viewed from varying points, the entire corrie assumes a contour of form that is grand and

imposing. Seated on the verge of the corrie, and looking beyond it, we had a magnificent view of Strathspey, from Loch Insh to Loch Laggan, with the Monadh Liath range backing the strath and mountains innumerable in the south, while away northwards could be seen the Moray Firth, Ben Wyvis, and even the Paps of Caithness.

A path we struck a little below the Coire Garblach took us down the Coire Caol to the bridge at Glenfeshie Lodge. The return journey to Loch an Eilein was made by the left bank of the Feshie and Feshiebridge.