

OUTLYING NOOKS OF CAIRNGORM.—No. IV.

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THE GAELIC words for a well are “fuaran” and “tobair”. They are usually regarded as synonymous, but a difference may be marked between them. “Fuaran”, from the root “fuar”, cold, is the well in its natural state, as it springs sweet and pure from the bosom of the earth. “Tobair” marks the well where there has been the choice and handiwork of man, or some association of ideas with names and incidents of human life. There is a somewhat similar difference between the English words “well” and “fountain”, which Wordsworth brings out with his usual delicacy of touch in his poems “The Fountain” and “A Complaint”.

The names of wells are often descriptive. Thus we have in the parish of Abernethy “Fuaran buidh”, where the iron gives the water a yellow tinge. Another well is called “Fuaran romach”, from its rough, shaggy border. On the west shoulder of Carn Rynettin there is a well with the curious name of “Fuaran ghoile” (boiling). The water lies on a bed of fine sand, and from the centre there rises a little jet to the height of a few inches above the surface. It is a miniature geyser.

The names of wells are also commemorative, or connected with incidents in social life. We have “Fuaran Ealasaid” and “Fuaran Catair na dalach”, not far from the Green Lochan, but nothing is known of the Elizabeth or the Kate whose names are thus handed down. On the east side of Ben Bynac there is a fine well, which is called “Fuaran nan Grandach”—the Well of the Grants. Tradition says that early in the history of the clan a party of Grants on an expedition to Deeside halted here, and that this gave rise to the name. Another well south of the Green Lochan is called “Fuaran Ghamhain”. It is some

16 feet deep, and got its name from a stirk having been drowned in it. Near Rebhoan there is a well which bears the name of "Fuaran nam poit", which takes us back to the days when "summering" was still the practice, and when at leaving the "sheiling" the pots were buried in the bogs till the next season came round. There is a well at Sleighich, on the old drove road to Castletown, which is said to have crossed from one side of the stream to the other. The explanation given of this strange phenomenon is that the well had been polluted by some hides having been steeped in it, and had therefore shifted to a purer site. Similar stories are told of other wells in the Highlands. Hugh Miller, in his "Legends of Cromarty", mentions one, and says:—"We recognise in this singular tradition a kind of soul, or naiad, of the spring, susceptible of offence, and conscious of the attention paid to it". In the Garbh Allt, near the Eagle's Rock ("Stac na h-Iolaire"), there is a well notable for its size. It is some ten feet across, and the rush of water from it is like a mill-stream. Some regard it as the source of the Nethy, but this is a mistake. The source is higher up—at Ciste Mhairearaid. To mark its distinction it is called "Fuaran mor glaic-bhothain"—the big Well of the Bothy Gorge. There is another well lower down, at the foot of the cliff, called "Fuaran mor leac an Iorganaich"—the big Well of the Tracker's Slab. It is said there was formerly a sort of cave in the cliff above, where trackers and hunters used to find shelter, but that it was destroyed by the Glenmore foresters.

Cairngorm proper—at least on its west face, with which I am best acquainted—is deficient in springs. Streams rise from the corries and lochans, but there are few wells. On the track up Cairngorm, a few yards beyond Clach Barraig, may be observed "M'Connachie's Well": the original name has been lost, and so, in compliment to the Secretary of the Cairngorm Club, it has received his name. The most notable spring is the "Marquess Well". From its position, near the top of the mountain, it is well known. It is a favourite place for parties resting on their way to or from

the summit, and for luncheon. Some five and twenty years ago a friend and myself spent half an hour in fencing the well with flag-stones, and perhaps part of our handiwork may remain to this day. [It does.—ED.] On the same occasion we found a small thermometer lying on the turf, which some visitor had left behind. Probably he had been testing the temperature, but if so, he left no record, and I regret that I cannot supply the omission. This well is probably the highest in Great Britain. There is a spring on Ben Nevis, 3602 feet above the sea, and one on Ben Alder, 3650 feet, but the "Marquess Well", which is only about 150 feet lower than the summit, must be nearly 4000 feet. The water from the "Marquess Well" falls into Allt na Ciste, but in times of strong thaw and flooding part is said to find its way into Ciste Mhairearaid. The well is called after a Marquis of Huntly, but which? This is hard to say. It may have been the first Marquis, who won the battle of Glenlivet in 1590, and who pressed the Marquis of Argyle so hard on his flight over the hills. Or it may have been the second Marquis, who made the chivalrous reply to the Covenanters—"You may take my head from my shoulders, but not my heart from the King". Most probably it was the last Marquis, who frequently resided at Kinrara, where he entertained Prince Leopold right royally in 1819; and who was fond of resting at this well on his expeditions to the hills. However it be, the name is now fixed, and will remain as a link with the past, and a dear reminder to many of visits to Cairngorm, and happy hours spent with friends who may never meet again.

"Time's wasting hand has done away
 The simple Cross of Sybil Gray,
 And broke her font of stone :
 But yet out from the little hill
 Oozes the slender sprinklet still :
 Oft halts the stranger there".

—*Scott.*