

THE ARGYLL STONE.

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ON the summit of the mountain ridge running parallel to the Spey, between Glen Eunach and the Spey valley, may be seen a large boulder, or block of stone, known as the Argyll Stone. It is situated on that part of the ridge which at present goes by the erroneously applied name of Inchriach, and is a conspicuous object in the landscape as seen from the strath below. How this mass of rock came by the name of "the Argyll Stone" is a problem not readily solved by one who is a stranger to the country and unacquainted with the incident from which the name originated, especially as it is many miles away from the nearest portion of Argyll territory. The rock, however, has borne the above designation from the time of James VI., and obtained it, as told hereafter, in connection with one of the political troubles of that monarch's reign, in which the then Earl of Argyll took an active, though not very successful, part. This event was an alleged attempt by the Earl of Huntly and one or two other noblemen to restore Catholicism as the recognised religion of the country, when the Earl of Argyll was sent at the head of a large force to check the movement, and, if possible, to secure the arrest of Huntly and the Earl of Erroll, the leaders of the rising. History records how that Argyll, with a vastly superior force, was completely routed by Huntly and Erroll's men at the Battle of Althochlachan, in Glenlivet, in October, 1594, and compelled to retreat with all possible haste to his own dominions. The Highlanders on being defeated, in order to escape pursuit by Huntly's cavalry, sped westwards through the mountain passes, keeping the high ground to avoid all danger of pursuit by the enemy. There was little inclination to halt until they felt themselves comparatively safe on friendly

territory as they approached Badenoch. Travelling all night, hunger and fatigue constrained them to rest a little and partake of some refreshment to enable them to prosecute their journey. Their first halt since quitting the battle-field was on the northern portion of the Sgoran Dubh ridge, wrongly called "Inchriach", its proper name being "Creag Dubh". There, beside this block of stone, they partook of such a humble repast as the scanty means at their disposal afforded. From this ridge they could easily keep a look-out on all sides of them, and readily discern signs of danger from pursuit at a great distance; and could thus make their escape betimes, should the foe be on their track. But Huntly was unable to follow up his advantage, and allowed the fugitives to retreat without molestation. Such of the Argyll Highlanders as rested on Creag Dubh, finding that they were now in comparative safety, resolved to rest for a time and breakfast at their leisure. It was usual with every Highlander, when engaged in any warlike expedition, to carry a little oatmeal rolled up in a piece of cloth, or small bag, to use as occasion required; and sometimes a bannock or two of home-baked bread formed part of their equipment, on which they could at any time make a hurried repast. Of such materials they made their homely breakfast on this occasion, sitting or lying around the stone, which, in memory of that incident, has ever since been called "The Argyll Stone."

Their frugal meal had, no doubt, a very refreshing, invigorating, and cheering effect upon the fatigued and worn-out Highlanders. After resting for a time they leisurely descended the hill towards Glen Feshie, where they further enjoyed such hospitalities as the cottagers of the glen could bestow on them. Indeed, so pleased were they with the reception accorded them that not a few of their number stayed behind in the glen for several weeks after the greater portion had taken their departure for their homes in the west. They were probably made to feel, through the kind attention and good offices bestowed upon them by the native population, that they were as comfortably situated

as if among their own kith and kin in Argyllshire. Not having much to lose, and having had no real interest in the enterprise in which they had been engaged, they speedily forgot their cares and troubles, and were soon quite at home amongst their new-made friends and acquaintances. In company with the native residents of Glen Feshie, the evenings were devoted to mirth, music, and dancing, and other pleasing festivities. The place of meeting was the old Black Mill of Invereshie, where many happy evenings were spent. One of the Argyll Pipers, who had stayed behind with his clansmen, composed in honour of their place of meeting a "Strathspey", known by the name of the *Muileann Dubh*, or Black Mill—a piece of music which to this day retains its popularity among all lovers of Highland music and dancing. The Mill itself has been celebrated in song, the verses setting forth its merits associating it with many things curious, fanciful, and uncommon.

[The Argyll Stone can be seen from Aviemore railway station. It should be shown (writes Mr. Cash) in my sketch (Vol. II., p. 367) between 21 and 22, half-way down from the top of what is there called Cadha Mor (really Creag Dubh), to where the Sgoran Dubh Mor slope meets it.]