

## A FORTNIGHT AT INVEREY.

BY ROBERT ANDERSON.

“EVERY place is sanctified by the eighth sense, Memory”, says Robert Louis Stevenson in one of his letters, referring to a district he was revisiting; and, to be quite candid, I am afraid that during a fortnight’s holiday at Inverey in the recent summer-time I was more under the influence of this sentiment than of any other. I recalled memories instead of making additions to memory’s store; I was content to revel in recollections of former visits, and was not at all inclined to create a new series of reminiscences. Some readers will probably shrug their shoulders and suggest that I am getting old and lazy. There may be something in that. At any rate, I went to Inverey tired and a little depressed, bearing with me a troublesome “summer cold” which I had found it impossible to shake off. For nearly a week I simply rested—just lolled about, I may admit to my too candid critics—visiting spots within easy reach and leisurely reading Charles Reade’s “The Cloister and the Hearth”—a “solid” novel, of the good, old-fashioned type, containing reading enough to suffice for the period indicated. By the time I had finished it, I had got rid of my cold, and my lethargy too, and before I left Inverey I made one or two excursions in the neighbourhood, which may be sufficient excuse for jotting down the following rambling notes.

Many years, alas! have elapsed since I previously stayed for any length of time at either Braemar or Inverey; my more recent visits have been “flying ones”—visits of a day or a night, or of a week-end’s duration, *en route* to or from some excursion in the hills beyond. Latterly, indeed, I have taken a fancy for Speyside and the western side of the Cairngorms—nay, ’tis more than a fancy, I doubt; it is becoming a very decided preference.

But the old love for Deeside, I find, rapidly revives; due, in large measure, of course, to its inherent beauties, but stimulated, doubtless, by the associations that memory recalls—mountain excursions in the hey-day of youth, when life was probably brighter, the heart lighter, and the spirits more exuberant: excursions with friends most of whom are now removed by death or distance. Perhaps I feel, in the lines of Matthew Arnold—

“The foot less prompt to meet the morning dew,  
The heart less bounding at emotion new,  
. . . . .

And long the way appears, which seem'd so short  
To the less practised eye of sanguine youth;  
And high the mountain-tops, in cloudy air”.

But, nevertheless, I repeat a familiar and favourite walk—that delightful one from Ballater to Braemar, taking the south road to Balmoral; and I soon swing in to the four miles an hour pace, despite the excessive heat of the day. This is a walk of which it may be confidently said “Age cannot wither it, nor custom stale its infinite variety”. Small is the perception of beauty in the man who fails to appreciate the wealth of loveliness unfolded in the sixteen miles traversed. What a succession of charming landscapes!—hillsides clothed with graceful birches and odorous pines, picturesque stretches of river and valley, magnificent views of Lochnagar, and, finally, the tree-lined road by Invercauld, with its sheltering slopes on one side, the river and its meadows on the other, and Ben Avon and Beinn a' Bhuid in the distance. Then, as a *bonne bouche* before reaching your final destination, there is the walk from Braemar to Inverey. This, surely, is one of the loveliest roads to be found anywhere—most certainly in Aberdeenshire. Three-fourths of it is practically an avenue, gradually rising high above the Dee and then descending to its level, the summit yielding an exquisite and well-known view of the valley, with its enclosing hills and the mountains in the background; the red-tiled roofs of Mar Lodge form a new feature in this landscape.

But the idea of walking—walking from Ballater to Braemar, or even from Braemar to Inverey! By most people, apparently, it would be dismissed as supremely ridiculous. Nobody seems to walk nowadays. The ubiquitous bicycle has penetrated even to these remote regions; and I and my companion, who have not yet succumbed to the ruling passion, are regarded as “cranks”—two eccentric individuals obstinately adhering to a quite exploded form of locomotion. Gamekeepers and ghillies cycle as well as their masters, the gun or fishing-rod slung across their backs; and I believe the general recourse to cycling has seriously affected the drawings of hotel-keepers and hirers. Judging from the stream of cyclists to and from the Linn of Dee on a fine day, one can very well believe it. This feature apart, Inverey is little changed. In Gibb & Hay’s book on “The Scenery of the Dee” (descriptive of the scenery as it was between 1850 and 1858) the villages or clachans of Muckle and Little Inverey are characterised as “with the exception of two or three more comfortable-looking dwellings, a pair of miserable little places, mainly consisting of mere hovels, built after the rudest fashion”; and a couple of illustrations enable us to realise the appearance of “these forlorn proofs of poverty and its attendant wretchedness”. Tomintoul to-day, I understand, resents the constant citation of Queen Victoria’s scarification of it as “the most tumble-down, poor-looking place I ever saw”; and probably the Inverey people will not care to be reminded of Mr. Andrew Gibb’s description—it is now so out of place. The “hovels” had disappeared long before my time, and I note little change in the aspect of the comfortable, albeit humble, cottages by which they were replaced. The proprietor’s curious prohibition of windowed rooms in the upper story—the feudal decree that upper rooms (if any) shall be lighted only by a skylight—this still remains in force. There is one well-known exception, which dates, however, from before the enforcement of this law. Several of the houses have been considerably improved of late, and one of them is actually fitted with electric bells. Inverey is progressing! Mr.

Andrew Gibb, were he living, would note progression—or would it be retrogression?—in other directions. He observed that at the Inverveys the kilt was the fashionable dress. Now, hardly a kilt is to be seen, not even on Sundays.\* But the people are still the same kind, simple, good-hearted folks, with long memories, recalling incidents which one had well-nigh forgotten, and recalling them with a minuteness of detail that is quite wonderful. I had once more a chat with a venerable old lady who remembers the Moray floods of 1829; who readily furnishes particulars about the successive Duffs and Farquharsons who have reigned since that time, including that really great sportsman and shot, the Hon. George Skene Duff; and who describes for me the Braemar Gatherings of former days, when Atholl men attended from beyond Glen Tilt and Forbes men from Newe and Strathdon. I mention to her casually that I recently came across a tombstone in the churchyard of Old Deer to the memory of two young men drowned below the Linn of Dee in 1868, and I open a flood-gate of recollections of the incident.

From Inverey we made a number of excursions to well-known "sights" within easy reach—the Linn of Dee, the Falls of Lui, the Colonel's Bed, and the Falls of Corriemulzie. These, of course, are very minor excursions, not ranking as serious "walks", and any description of them would be entirely out of place in this *Journal*—besides, they are amply described in the guide-books. The Linn of Dee I find as reminiscent as the walk from Ballater to Braemar. You stand on the bridge and look westward,

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\* Since writing the above, I noticed that, in a paper read to the Gaelic Society of London on 17th October, Mr. J. S. Stuart-Glennie "bemoaned the decay of the Gaelic language in Braemar". Twenty-five years ago, he said, at the crofters' houses in Braemar, all the people spoke Gaelic. That was changed now. If he asked a question in Gaelic, it was answered in English, when the person addressed understood Gaelic. In the families of crofters where there were a dozen children, not a word of the old language was spoken. In Mr. Stuart-Glennie's opinion, this state of things is "very disheartening"; but then he is an advocate of "The New Celtic Movement"—the "Celtic Renaissance" it is sometimes called.

and lo! you feel as at the entrance to an enchanted region. You realise something of the sense of space and distance on a large scale. Before you stretch leagues of moor and hill and mountain—a comparatively unknown land, exciting all the pleasureable uncertainties of the unknown. Behind you are civilisation, population, culture, all the amenities of life; in front, wildness and desolation. The slavery of conventionality on the one side, freedom from all trammels on the other. It requires no great boldness to shake off—once in a way—the fetters of ordinary prosaic life and make an excursion into this tempting unknown land. You will have to cover long distances, you will incur bodily fatigue, you may have to endure rain, or tempest, or heat (and it is hard to say which of these is the most trying), but you will have your reward—in health, if in nothing else; in appreciation of Nature, if you are sympathetic enough. You will find in this apparently trackless forest before you three tolerably well-defined tracks—one by Glen Dee and the Larig to Aviemore, one by Glen Geldie and Glen Feshie to Kingussie, and one by Glen Tilt to Blair Atholl. Memories of walks along all three routes (along some of them more than once) rise before me—but suddenly my musings are interrupted, and I am brought back to the present and the practical by the discovery of my companion that the supporters on the Fife coat of arms on the bridge have been decapitated! This outrage may have been the work of storms, but I am disposed to attribute it to what the criminal authorities define as malicious mischief—the ineradicable propensity of youngsters to throw stones at any available mark; witness the damage done to most guide-posts. The mutilated figures, at any rate, present a sorry spectacle. The inscription on the other side of the bridge, recording the fact that the bridge was opened by Queen Victoria on 8th September, 1857, remains undamaged.

To a party of visitors who descended into the Colonel's Bed while we happened to be there I owe an apology—though I am afraid the *Journal* is about the least suitable medium for conveying it. I was asked the customary

questions about who "the Colonel" was and the meaning of his "bed", and I replied off-hand that the ravine was named the Colonel's Bed after John Farquharson of Invercauld, who was "out" in the '15, and took refuge here when a search for him was instituted by the Hanoverian troops. I was at the moment reading Mr. Terry's recently-issued book on the Jacobite rebellion of 1715, and the allusions there to Farquharson of Invercauld had led me to make this unwarranted assumption. The ordinarily accepted story is that John Farquharson of Inverey, the "Black Colonel", lay in concealment in the "Bed" for some time after the battle of Killiecrankie, though I see Mr. Andrew Gibb says—"Local legend avers that a Farquharson of Inverey, being pursued by his inveterate enemies, the Gordons of Abergeldie, found a refuge for several weeks within its dismal recesses"—an incident, I suppose, in the feud mentioned in the ballad of "The Barrone of Braickley"—

"Inverey came down Deeside whistlin' and playin',  
He was at brave Braickley's yetts ere it was dawin'".

I daresay most readers who know the Inverey district are familiar with the little stream, the Connie, that runs into the Ey, after tumbling over a series of pretty little falls. Perhaps they have observed a small granite tablet on the face of the rock above the lowest fall, on which is inscribed—"William Roger died here 17th Sept. 1858, aged 16 years." Curiosity led me to investigate the history of the incident thus memorialised. William Roger, it appears, was the second son of Mr. John Roger, then a partner of Messrs. Pratt & Keith; but how the accident occurred by which he lost his life at this spot is not quite known—it was supposed that, walking on the ridge above, he had stumbled into the pool and been drowned. Wandering about the Connie-side one day, and having got beyond the plantation on its left bank, it occurred to me that we could return to Inverey by a "short cut", by simply ascending the ridge on our right, crossing it, and descending the other side,

which must inevitably land us on the Inverey road. "Short cut! Humph!" derisively snorted my companion, who from bitter experience has come to know the fallacy oft involved in the phrase; but we essayed it all the same. Well, the day was very hot, and it was a bit of a pull up the ridge, but we were amply rewarded when we reached the summit, for there lay before our gaze a magnificent panorama of the Cairngorms—Cairn Toul, Braeriach, Ben Muich Dhui, Ben Avon, and Beinn a' Bhuid. We returned to this admirable view-point more than once during our stay.

Gradually we went farther afield. One day we walked to Loch Callater, and another day to the Falls of the Garbh Allt—both guide-book excursions of which nothing need be said here, except to mention that, coming back from Loch Callater, you have a good view of the tors or knobs of rock on Ben Avon; we counted eight or nine of them. As to the Falls, I incline to the view that one waterfall is very much like another; certainly, after a week of viewing falls of all kinds, you do not "enthuse" over the Falls of the Garbh Allt, beautiful and beautifully-located though they be. The mention of waterfalls reminds one that A. H. Clough in "The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich" declares that

"At Castleton, high in Braemar, were the clippingest places for bathing;

One by the bridge in the village, indecent, the Town Hall christened",

and also that there were

"Up the water of Ey, half-a-dozen at least, all stunners".

The absorption of water from the Clunie to drive turbines to make electric light for the Braemar hotels has, I suspect, destroyed these "clippingest" bathing-places, just as it has impaired the beauties of the erstwhile pleasant little stream. The Linn of Dee, however, remains unaltered; but one may be a little sceptical about the bathing experiences there described in Clough's hexameters—

"So was it told, the Piper narrating, corrected of Arthur,  
How under Linn of Dee, where over rocks, between rocks,

Freed from prison the river comes, pouring, rolling, rushing,  
 Then at a sudden descent goes sliding, gliding, unbroken,  
 Falling, sliding, gliding, in narrow space collected,  
 Save for a ripple at last, a sheeted descent unbroken—  
 How to the element offering their bodies, down-shooting the fall,  
 they  
 Mingled themselves with the flood and the force of imperious water.  
 And it was told too, Arthur narrating, the Piper correcting,  
 How, as one comes to the level, the weight of the downward  
 impulse  
 Carries the head under water, delightful, unspeakable; how the  
 Piper, here ducked and blinded, got stray, and borne-off by the  
 current  
 Wounded his lily-white thighs, below, at the craggy corner”.

I was anxious once more to see Glen Feshie and the waterfall on the Eidart, so we made an excursion thither one day. I have already described the route in the *Journal*.\* It takes you along the Geldie, the bed of which is strewn with rectangular blocks of stone, looking as if they had been quarried to order, so regular is their shape and so white do they appear in the strong sunlight. Then you cross a wide moorland, keeping your eyes very wide open for the track which the Club's map of the Cairngorms properly defines as “Indistinct”, and which, in all probability, you will never hit. You strike this moorland near Geldie Lodge, a Mar Forest shooting-box, situated in as lonely-looking a spot as one could well conceive, with nothing but moorland and mountain around, and not a tree to be seen—and you have to go far before you lose sight of it. Then, as you go on and on, you will see a stream emerge from the hills on your left and make a very sharp bend, at a very acute angle, flowing in the direction for which you are making. That is the Feshie. A little farther on, you will come to a stream in front of you, running into the Feshie. That is the Eidart. You cross the Eidart in a fashion that will try your nerves a little. A couple of rough timbers—tree trunks very rudely planed—are lashed together and thrown across from bank to bank a few feet above the level of the stream. There is

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\* See “Glen Feshie” (*C.C.J.*, I., 350).

no support, not even a bit of wire to hold on to (as I rather think there once was); you have to "walk the plank" as steadily as you can and as steadily as an intolerable number of protruding nails (flattened, but none the less disconcerting) will permit. Having safely accomplished this feat, we wended our way up the right bank of the Eidart by a footpath we discovered, soon reaching the waterfall, which I am inclined to think, however, is seen to best advantage (as I have hitherto seen it) from the left bank, from which also you can easily get to the edge of the basin into which the waterfall pours. Pursuing the footpath, we walked farther and farther up the burn-side, to find that there are more waterfalls above—quite a succession of linns and cascades and pools as the burn forces its way down through a tortuous ravine.

"Whyles owre a linn the burnie plays,  
As thro' the glen it wimpl't;  
Whyles round a rocky scaur it strays;  
Whyles in a wiel it dimpl't".

This diversion, of course, was leading us away from Glen Feshie, so ultimately we resolved to cross the Eidart and make for an adjoining hill-top, from which we might have an extended view over the region. This hill-top (2450 feet) is on the county march, the intangible but none the less real line separating Aberdeenshire and Inverness-shire and dividing the Glenfeshie deer forest from the forest of Mar. By the time we reached it, however, the day was far advanced, the bright sunlight had vanished, and the Glenfeshie forest and the hills of the Gaick forest were only dimly visible; but still an idea could be formed of the extent and variety of mountain scenery which here meets the eye. But indications of an impending rain-storm induced us speedily to quit our elevated position, and by the time we got out of Glen Geldie the storm burst—burst with such fury that we were glad to take shelter for a little time in one of the forester's houses at the mouth of the glen. When we set out again, the first fury of the storm had spent itself, but the rain was still heavy, the valley of the Dee between the Geldie

and the Linn being completely shrouded in gloom, nothing being visible beyond a few yards. With all the suddenness and capriciousness of a rain-storm in the hills, the rain ceased before we reached the Linn, the mist rose, and our "last lap" was walked amid the delightful freshness that follows a heavy rainfall.

Our principal excursion, however, was one made to Loch Avon, my companion having expressed a desire to see the Shelter Stone and also the river Avon. I pointed out that the one is at the head of the loch and the other at the outlet, and that, despite the comparatively short distance between them—a mile and a half or so—a good deal of difficult walking is involved in getting from the one to the other, while the route to either end of the loch is a particularly arduous one. But my companion was insistent, so one very fine morning we set out. I cannot remember walking up Glen Derry on a finer day—the sky a deep blue, without the slightest cloud; the hillsides bathed in glorious sunlight; Cairngorm of Derry and Beinn Mheadhoin outlined with remarkable vividness. But oh! it was hot—so hot that the idea of clambering up Corrie Etchachan at high noon was abandoned. We decided to make Loch Avon at its outlet instead of its head, and so proceeded to tackle the Little Larig (Learg an Laoigh). I do not think anything was gained by the change of plan, for the "pull up" to the col or watershed between the Derry and the Avon is well-nigh as stiff as that up Corrie Etchachan. The path is intermittent—very intermittent—on the Derry side, and when you strike it on the Avon side, you find it as rough and stony as the path through the Larig Ghru. But "it's dogged as does it"; and in mountaineering as in other things, patience and perseverance overcome all difficulties. In due time we passed the Dubh Lochans and came on the river Avon, and then followed it up to where it emerges from the loch. I need not expatiate on the walk up the loch-side, at the base of the precipices and screes of Beinn Mheadhoin, with the massive bulk of Cairngorm on the other side of the loch, and the waters of the Feith Buidhe tumbling down

the rugged slopes in front; the stern grandeur of this wild and lonely spot has been frequently described by other and more facile pens. We duly walked into the recess under the Shelter Stone. It was untenanted, but a kettle and a can at the entrance, let alone a number of empty preserved provision tins scattered around, betokened occasional occupation. We discovered a most unusual "empty"—a Stephens's Fluid Ink bottle! Well, I have been here before, and I have slept—or tried to sleep—under the Shelter Stone, but I never carried an ink-bottle here, neither, I am quite sure, did any of my companions; but, then, there is no accounting for tastes. Our inspection over, we climbed up on to the ridge in a hollow of which Loch Etchachan lies—and a stiffish climb it is, too—and descended Corrie Etchachan into Glen Derry, and "so home", in the words of immortal Pepys. Glen Derry is supposed—and truly—to be a very lonesome place, yet I picked up sundry scraps of paper which, when pieced together, constituted the draft (I presume) of a telegram in the handwriting of a member of the Club, ordering a trap to be waiting him at the White Bridge! Darkness overtook us before we got out of Glen Lui, but a brilliant full moon lighted us on the remainder of our way; and we duly reached Inverey without further incident, content and happy with the day's excursion, despite all its exertions and fatigue.

These rambling notes have spun out to an inordinate length, so I will forbear saying anything of my final excursion, regarding which, moreover, there are other reasons—and, to those who know the locality, obvious reasons—for remaining silent.