

FROM THE BEAULY FIRTH TO LOCH DUICH.

BY REV. R. M. CAIRNEY.

WE sallied forth from Beauly one afternoon last July on a good stout touring wheel.

Our kit (packed on a Turner rear carrier) included maps, compass, some strong twine, spirit lamp, cocoa, Pitman's banana biscuits, etc., with toilet brushes on a miniature scale, and a change of underwear. Strapped in front we carried a pair of stout moor boots and a poncho, and felt ready for anything. Not speed, but efficiency and comfort were our aim.

Two miles of tree-lined road through Lord Lovat's well-wooded and well-tilled lands brought us to Kilmorack church, and the deservedly famous gorge and falls of the same name. The Beauly is not a large river, but it is never, even in midsummer, without a fair volume of water, owing to the number of considerable lochs which overflow into it. The view of the lower falls is not the best, but with the farm steading and the mill a pleasing picture is made up. A few hundred yards further on is a notice-board, directing the tourist down a field side to a charming summer-house perched upon a bold bluff which looks down precipitously upon the deep pools of the upper falls in the gorge beneath. Here we sat down to a dainty afternoon tea with buttered bread and cakes. A giant silver fir, that might be a couple of hundred years old, makes a noble roof over the tea tables laid out *al fresco*. The ladies who provide this elegant refreshment are descendants of two generations of ministers of Kilmorack parish, and have been granted the use of this romantic summer-house by the present incumbent. The house is a substantial stone structure like a little tower, and was built by the grandfather of the ladies as a quiet retreat for study. We sat dreamily feasting eyes and ears and all our senses, physical and moral, in that scene compacted of grandeur and luxuriant beauty. The roar of the rapids, reduced by summer drought and subdued by distance beneath,

was like an organ pedal accompaniment to the song of finches and mavis overhead ; and the scent of firs and flowers was sweet. When we resumed our way westwards we found that the sun had run much of his day's race while we worshipped in this sweet temple of nature.

We now ascended Druim Pass. From Teanassie House, where a glimpse of Beaufort Castle roof is seen, to Aigas House, is romantically beautiful, and well worth coming to see for itself. The road is here cut through the old red sandstone conglomerate rock for a considerable distance. The steep banks of the Beaully are thicketed on both sides. Vegetation is luxuriant and varied, and rich colours abound. The Beaully glen should be a paradise for botanists as well as landscape painters. We passed the Eilean Aigas, an island in the Beaully, in which stands a house noteworthy as having been lent as a residence by the Jacobite Lord Lovat to the brothers Sobieski—two grandchildren of the "Pretender." A short run brought us to the entrance to Erchless Castle and then to Struy village. A quaint old village it is! The Catholic Faith is a conservative one, and seems to have cast a spell of old fashioned "content with things as they are" over this little green spot. The peace of still life reigns. Even the children are quiet as well as respectful. The main road here grows its *quota* of grass for the cows to graze in their saunter homewards. The old one storeyed Catholic school, with its diamond-paned windows peering out from its thick mantle of ivy, sits sleepily on a carpet of bright green turf, that through age is springy to the foot. The little inn, which has only a porter and ale licence, is surrounded by a kitchen garden. A few low thatched cottages make up the rest of the village. As we pass out of it, two marks of more modern and much less picturesque life frame the quaint old picture, the new post office and the three storeyed, slate-roofed, new board school for protestants. We pursued our way singing Sir Walter Scott's *Captive Huntsman*, "My hawk is tired of perch and hood."

A run of seven miles along a good and pleasant road brought us to Invercannich Hotel which is called sometimes Glen Affric Hotel. Our river, which for the last seven miles

has borne the name of the Glass, is here augmented by the Cannich, which rises on the north side of Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan and flows through Loch Lungard and Loch Mullardoch. At Cannich it passes between high perpendicular walls of rock in a very picturesque manner. The rock looked, in the distance, like conglomerate. Glen Cannich (glen of the "cotton grass") is, I believe, worth a tramp for a few miles to lovers of glen scenery, but declining soon to bleakness, it bears no comparison with Glen Affric.

Evening was now advancing rapidly, so we pushed on to reach Achagate where we hoped to get quarters for the night. Two miles beyond Invercannich we passed on the left the road which, crossing the Glass, leads to Guisachan House, in the heart of Guisachan Forest. Our road now enters the Chisholm Pass, ascending rapidly from Fasnakyle up the course of the river Affric. We heard the roar, but did not venture far to explore the beauties, of the Dog Falls. Danger boards bearing the legend, "Keep back, rocks undermined, sometimes give way," took away our nerve. As far as Achagate we had for companion a native lad mounted on one of the tall ponies which had been through the campaign in Africa with Lord Lovat's Scouts. When we reached Achagate, ah!—we learned to our chagrin that we had been forestalled by some guests just arrived from England. We were hospitably entertained to a good supper, but had to turn out again, and face the six miles that lay between us and Affric Lodge—the next human habitation.

After Achagate the road becomes merely a well-made bridle path. Horses do not require that the hillocks and the gullies of the mountain torrents should be levelled; nor are bridges absolutely necessary. We therefore did not find any such luxuries; it was a dark ride, and extremely lumpy, though by day and with plenty of time it would have been beautiful. Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin, deeply set among hills, was exquisite even under the stars. Grand old pines and fairy-like ashes and birches, with the sturdy alder, clothed its sides, and it lay among them placid, reflecting the brighter stars. But that stony switchback road, crossed by a score of mountain torrent-beds, required, in the dark,

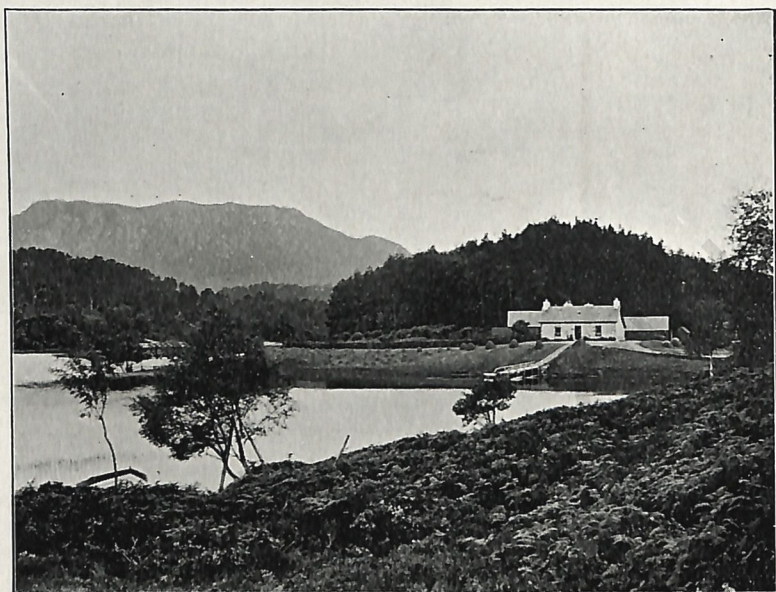


Photo by

AT LOCH AFFRIC.

Arthur Simpson.

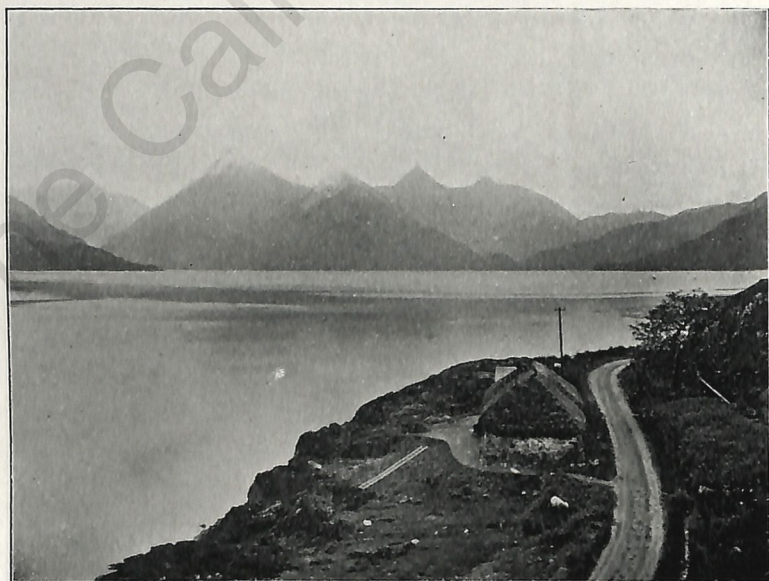


Photo by

LOCH DUICH AND THE FIVE SISTERS OF KINTAIL.

Arthur Simpson.

constant vigilance. We plunged along, alternately laughing and wincing over occasional spills, reaching a cottage at Affric Lodge about ten o'clock. Here, pity for our weary condition, consideration of the fact that the next house is Alltbeath, $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles further, and that the path is a good deal worse than what we had already experienced, opened the door of hospitality. Affric Lodge is a beautiful shooting box, built on a neck of land which almost divides Loch Affric into two near its eastern end. The lodge is on the western side of the peninsula and looks westward up some $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles of the loch; our cottage on the other side of the peninsula faced eastwards. Just below is the boat slip and a little pier, and the eastern section of the loch stretches away for a mile or so in full view. It was near midnight when I looked out, and the large round moon had risen, glowing yellow, above the dark hill range of Guisachan, and fell in a lane of golden beams along the lake. Jupiter shone like a lamp not far from her, and cast his reflection also upon the placid mirror. A few stars twinkled between the floating islands of fleecy clouds, while the silhouette of the dark hills upon the deep blue sky completed a picture of holy calm and rare beauty. After such a scene, sleep came upon me like a mantle of peace.

In the morning we enjoyed the splendid panorama of lake and mountain giants in the west. We readily distinguished Tigh Mor, Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan, Mam Sodhail, Beinn Fhada, and Sgurr Fhuaran, a notable assemblage of Highland magnates.

Breakfast at seven, a Highland farewell, and we were off, having for new companion the Rev. A. E. Robertson. That distinguished mountaineer had been early astir, having ridden that morning from Cannich Hotel. We trundled our machines in Indian file along the switchback bridle path to Allt Coire Leachavie. There Mr. Robertson left us, to proceed to Alltbeath, while we set our faces for the summit of Mam Sodhail. One comfort of these Highland solitudes is their very solitude. You may bathe where you list, and leave your property on the hill side for a day without fear. There are no intruders on one's privacy save red deer and flies, and

no thieves to ride away with one's wheel. From our starting point to the summit of the Mam (3862 feet) is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles as the crow flies, there being a fairly good foot track following the course of the Leachavie on its left bank. We set out from the 1,000 feet level, and found it an easy climb for the first 1500 feet. The steepness of the ridge of Sgurr na Lapaich (3401 feet) causes the Coire Leachavie to be very stony, slabs and boulders being strewn thickly over the whole corrie. Here and there the stream dashes over ledges of white and grey quartzite into deep pools. At about the 2000 feet level, three ledges of gleaming white quartzite make a rather pretty waterfall. A patch of snow still clung to the upper shelf, and, all but covering the water-course, made a pretty reflection in the deep pool below. The day was hot, and the chance of such a shower bath was too tempting. A little higher the track crosses the stream, and thereafter the climb becomes rather stiffer, and the corrie begins to close in all around. At about the 2800 feet level a little well of the coldest water we ever tasted springs up. Here the climb is decidedly stiff, and but for the winding track would be ladder-like. The ridge of the corrie is narrow and strewn with weathered slabs of gneissic rock that look as if they were the tumbled-down remains of a cyclopean building. A patch of strikingly green grass, long and succulent, appears from under a broader patch of snow, some fifty yards wide, at what might be the highest source of the Leachavie. On the ridge, the view both ways was clear. On the south-west the long foot of Ceathreamhnan lay just below, and on the east the corrie of Leachavie stretched out at full length.

A few minutes' climb now brought us to the stone hut, erected for his deer watchers by the late Mr. Winans, the well-known American millionaire, who tenanted this and neighbouring forests for several years. In the ruined hut were a few hundredweight of coals, some rusted pots and kettles, and other relics of camp life.

A few minutes more over bare slabs of schist, and we are at the huge tower-like cairn. A built-in recess commands a splendid view of Carn Eige (3877 feet,) and Glen Fiadhach.

The view north-east is of the ridge that forms the north side of Glen Fiadhach, beginning at Carn Eige, and coming to a bold point in Tom a' Choinich. The bedding of the rocks which form this ridge stands out, and adds to the gaunt appearance of this limb of the Mam Sodhail group. All around, the scene was impressively grand; ridges and peaks were all bare and rocky, and only in the far distance below was there much appearance of wood and verdure. On the north and the west of Carn Eige, a little speck by the side of the stream indicated a keeper's cottage not far from Loch Lungard, which was just hidden by Beinn Fhionnlaidh. Ten miles from everywhere, and shut in all round by mountains, this cottage looked solitary enough for a hermit. A housewife in such a situation must needs develop such a genius for forethought and executive skill as would be a valuable contribution in the boardroom of our War Office.

Away further to the north, the peaks of Monar and Coulin, and the rugged caps of Torridon and Loch Maree appeared in the far distance like solidified waves of a lumpy sea. North-east, over the ridge of Glen Fiadhach, I could make out Ben Wyvis, and beyond it the gleam of the Cromarty and the Moray Firths. Eastwards the whole length of the romantic, wild Glen Affric, with Strath Glass and the Beaully, was stretched out before us—the whole vale, on account of our elevated position and the visual angle it gave, apparently rising as it receded into the eastern distance. Lake and mountain and luxuriant woodland made up a picture whose charm could scarcely be exceeded. South-eastwards the view was closed in by the masses of the Monadhliadhs and the Cairngorms. I thought I made out Ben Muich Dhui, Beinn a' Ghlo, Schichallion and Ben Alder. There, without a doubt, nearly due south, rested Ben Nevis, in soft blue haze, looking the calm giant that he is. The whole land in this direction and round to the west was swathed in the poet's veil of mist, half concealing, half revealing, the beauties of sea, loch, and bold escarpment alternating. Further westward the bold bluffs of the Coolins penetrated the thin haze like the heads of black cattle above the night fog on a meadow. In the foreground the view most attrac-

tive (to me) was the long north-east leg of Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan. The name means a hill of four quarters, and is very descriptive. It is a common formation; four fairly rectangular ridges of one, two, or three miles in length will culminate in a mountain peak. Sometimes there are only three, frequently only two ridges; and, when the latter is the case, the hill generally has the appearance of one long ridge like Beinn Fhada. But there are many in the schistose regions made up of the four. I suppose this formation is the natural result of an upheaval of the strata where the main force has been on a certain point of limited area. As the crust was lifted up at this point it rose in three or four ridges at graduated height and generally yielded to fissure along the line of the ridge summit. Perhaps the process might be illustrated if a padded pole were made to force upwards a thick pie-crust of tough paste, somewhat brittle on the upper surface. If these hills be due to the foldings caused by shrinkage of the earth's crust—as is most probable—the above explanation will apply equally well as local results of the great general movement, the uplifting force being in that case properly a resisting force of concentrated power at these points.

Reluctantly we left the cairn at 5 p.m.—a full hour later than we had intended—and to make up time ran down the hill at our best, reaching our bicycles at 6.5. While heating a cup of cocoa we watched a beautiful little green beetle creep along the bridle path. Its colours were very bright and glanced in the sun, but we had not enough entomological knowledge to name it. After a hurried repast we pushed on to Alltbeath. Our path no way improved; I thought the notice boards forbidding motor cars and motor cycles were scarcely required. Pity the motors or rather the motorists who should attempt this mountain path! We pushed past Alltbeath and made for Camban, where we got a royal reception. Our host had spied us on the way a mile or two before and calmly waited our approach at the east foot of Beinn Fhada. The strains of a pibroch greeted us while yet half a mile from the lonely little cottage, and the curtain of darkness that crept down the gloomy valley of the Fionn ceased to depress.

Our hostess had a huge supper of porridge and thick cream ready for us on the table before we had got the bog wiped off bicycle and clothes and hands. After supper and a chat by the big kitchen fire, a good rub over our motor muscles with embrocation and a pick of salycilate of soda doctored us for as sound a sleep as ever we had. My last recollection was the distant roar of the Fionn among its bare and lonely rocks.

Next morning we bathed in the Fionn and lounged about, drinking in the mountain air till eleven o'clock, when we had lunch and started up Beinn Fhada (Ben Attow). The Ben is 3,385 feet in height, but we were already over 1,100 feet up, that being the elevation of Camban. A pretty stiff climb, frequently on hands and knees, brought us on to the ridge; here the bedding, mica-schist, was seen sharply broken and presenting a rough razor edge along which we walked in full view of the valleys on either hand. We observed many large garnets of remarkably bright colour and lustre in the schist. I succeeded in getting out half of one which was as large as a full sized haricot bean. Its colour and lustre were equal to those of a second-rate ruby. Such indeed it was pronounced to be by a jeweller to whom we subsequently showed it. Mr. Alfred W. Gibb, B.Sc., Lecturer in Geology for Professor J. Arthur Thomson, Aberdeen University, to whom I afterwards forwarded it, kindly analyzed it and pronounced it, on both chemical and geological grounds, only a large and unusually bright garnet. Mr. Gibb was not altogether surprised to learn that there appeared to be many such fine crystals on Beinn Fhada, he having heard before of large crystals of garnet being found on the hills that border Ross-shire. It was an elevating as well as elevated walk for nearly a mile to the highest point of the Ben. Sheer away on the north the precipitous corrie falls down nearly to the lonely Loch a' Bhealach. The actual precipice must be quite 1,000 feet. The slope on the south is also steep and terraced down to the glen, which is some 1,400 feet above the sea level. The Fionn flows eastwards from the watershed. We could trace its waters till they merge in the river Affric and its loch, thence away eastwards through Strath Glass, almost

till they reach the Cromarty Firth. The waters of the Croe of Kintail rush and tumble down westwards by the Allt Granda and then between the bright green sides of Gleann Lichd to mingle with the Atlantic in Loch Duich. But Gleann Lichd is hidden from us between its steep mountains. The clouds, which had been rather low in the morning, were now lifted above the tops of the hills and carried along by a fair southerly breeze. On the south and west were the Five Sisters of Kintail, while on the west and north the mighty teeth of Scotland's harrow showed even more grimly than from Mam Sodhail. On the north-east with the blue patch of Loch a' Bhealaich in the foreground, our big friend of yesterday looked bigger than ever over the shoulder of Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan. Further east the Eden-like Glen Affric with its two turquoises—Loch Affric and Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin—set in dark pine forests and golden grey hill-sides, stretched away till lost in the thickening haze of distance. The effect of this most lovely view was heightened by the frightful crater-like corrie of Beinn Fhada, weird, black and of great width, that swept sheer down beneath our feet. The distant view is very much the same as that from Mam Sodhail, except that the Sgurr Fhuaran group and the western escarpments are of course added to the panorama. Having started so late in the day, we had not time to continue our walk along the magnificent ridge to its western termination, two miles further, nor to scramble down upon the remarkable terraces of rock and scree which mark the bedding of the strata. Under a declining sun we retraced our steps quickly. About a thousand feet down we passed right through a small herd of deer grazing in the moss in a sheltered hollow. Having their wind, we came upon them so suddenly and quietly on the mossy ground that they did not observe us till we were in their midst. Another hearty Highland supper—this time of fresh trout and cocoa—and we tumbled in again to our comfortable and sweet smelling bed, pleasantly tired.

The morning broke rather misty, but with sufficient light to be promising. To-day we intended crossing the moors and the hill-foots to visit the famous Glomach Falls. After

breakfast, to wait developments, we sat on the dais at the west gable of the cottage. Beinn Fhada towered straight up on the right, but only a little of its huge mass was visible, for a feathery mist rose and fell, occasionally reaching within a few hundred feet of us. Ciste Dubh (3,218 feet) and the three legs of Sgurr a' Bhealaich Dheirg (3,378 feet) across Gleann Fionn on our left showed a little more under the mist, for a light breeze came up the glen and lifted it. Sgurr Fhuaran was fast showing his peak, black as ink, through a rift in the pale pinky mist. The Fionn roaring as it runs added its music to the morning song of the birds. Suddenly Beinn Fhada was all aflame—grass patches and heather suffused, through the agency of the mist, with flashes of pink and green light that suggested fairyland. Anon Gleann Fionn became filled with a soft creamy light, and now the very summit of Sgurr a' Bhealaich Dheirg, streaked with snow patches, pierced right through the thin veil. The sun was rapidly gaining the mastery, and we started assured of a hot summer day. We rounded the north foot of Beinn Fhada, for the lone Loch a' Bhealaich, at about 1,500 feet level. Near a huge boulder we passed the carcass of a red deer, the fifth we had come across since we left Beauly, and chancing to look up towards the sun, which had now completely dispelled the mist, we saw, between us and it, a large bird with spread wings high up and motionless as a boy's kite. It came nearer without apparently moving a wing, and we now saw to our delight that it was a golden eagle. We lay down to observe it while it soared in the sun, evidently watching us. When we got up to proceed, it followed, but always in the sun, so we could not get a fair look at it. We again lay down for half-an-hour and rested with one eye upon our magnificent friend. Getting bold, it made a long swoop down, but when about a hundred yards from us it turned abruptly, showed its back for an instant glancing in the sunlight, and flew away out of sight. Neither human habitation, nor any trace of life, beyond a few voiceless insects, is to be seen at Loch a' Bhealaich. Some exquisitely beautiful blue butterflies skimmed the still waters, a great dragon-fly swooped hither and thither, something like water beetles bubbled in the sand of the shallow

reaches, and fat trout, three or four ounces in weight, leaped quietly in the deeper reaches. All else was still vegetation. A sandy bay half covered with pond grass made the clear water look tempting, so we doffed our clothes and had a delicious bathe while the spirit lamp boiled our cocoa for lunch. Half-way along, a picturesque island suggests a fairy castle, and beyond it to the north the land approaches on either side till it makes the loch a narrow strait. Behind us on the south the dark corrie of Beinn Fhada loomed black and precipitous in the shadow of its own brows, its wild proportions heightened by a patch or two of snow. We were in the mood for idle dreams as we lay our lazy length in the sun. Nothing to worry, no appointment to keep, and no destination that *must* be reached! Only to do what inclination prompted. It is true that we had had thoughts of going as far as the Glomach Falls, but our reported foot-track had melted away among boulders, and the loch was, as we lay on its banks, as an enchanted lake. So with half-closed eyes and dream-filled ears we revelled in well earned *dolce far niente*, while the sun went two hours or more on his appointed course. A council with map spread out satisfied us that there was no time now to reach the Falls and be back in a decent time, so we turned our steps homeward, and had an early evening meal of tea, rice and cream, eggs and scones with fresh sweet butter. Mountain air gives an unlimited appetite.

Friday dawned late and dark. A gentle dropping from the eaves warned us that the balmy south-west breeze had brought its full complement of moisture. We dressed in a grey light and went out, only to see nothing but our cottage and the wall opposite. It was not raining, but everything dripped wet; a dense blanket of mist enveloped all. This was disappointing, and put an effectual damper on our plan to ascend Sgurr Fhuaran. We took a leisurely bath in a pool of the Fionn where it had cut a channel for itself through some five feet of hard peat. Several tree trunks protruded from the peat banks and told the strange tale that this high land had once—many centuries ago but subsequent to the great epoch of the Glacier-boulder-till—been clad with a forest. At last,

after lunch, we decided to descend the Allt Granda, and wait for better weather at Shiel Inn.

Such a heavy mist as this meant no good views, and moreover promised a drenching rain when we should get to the lower levels. It is nine miles of hard going—harder a good deal than we anticipated. We had fared better had we not loitered the forenoon away.

For the first mile the bridle-path admitted of walking beside our wheels, but when we came near the watershed it turned and twisted among and over the boulders of terminal glacier moraines, which like colossal mole-heaps fill the bed of the valley at this part. The track here and on to the stalker's cottage in Gleann Lichd became generally so narrow and tortuous, and the rain, which now poured in torrents, made it so slippery in the steeper parts that we had to manœuvre our heavily laden cycles very carefully. A sudden turn of the track to the right, after a mile of this, brought us to the verge of the defile of the Allt Granda—a scene to be remembered. On the left was a wall of some 500 feet of bare mica-schist rock with smooth surface, which a glint of pale light through the rain made to shine like the ghost of silver. This rampart wall is so nearly perpendicular that scarce a blade of green grows upon it. The strata are evidently here tilted almost at right angles to the horizontal. Down in front the Croe tumbles away at a very steep angle. The track clings to the right hand of the defile, following a sharp angle made by a noisy torrent which comes down Beinn Fhada, leaping over the terraces of screes that almost shut out the sky and looking as if it would throw its spray on our heads. This stream is crossed by a strongly made foot-bridge. The track shows in fact some signs of careful making at this point. It sweeps round again by a sharp turn, doubling upon itself as it clings to its side of the ravine, which now approaches the left bank. As we followed it round we had a splendid view up the ravine. The waters of the Croe were seen in full view, leaping and dashing down from pool to pool in the rock ledges and making one long fall of over seventy feet, broken into rushes and pools and mares-tail sprays. The whole scene was exceedingly wild and grand,

and gave just a sensation of giddiness to one of us. In one mile we had made a descent of 900 feet (1 in $5\frac{1}{2}$). Down below the augmented stream finds a more level and a quieter bed, and the gorge opens out into a narrow glen. Cheering is the light green of its little meadows, and sweet the sight of the cottage of the stalker in Gleann Lichd. We crossed the river at the cottage by a neat chain foot-bridge, and, getting on to the cart track, ploughed our way, still through a drenching rain, towards Morvich. Wet to the skin, through waterproofs and all, we passed through the deer-fence gate at Morvich, and, hey presto! on to a sand-papered racing track, the main road round the head of Loch Duich. Just as we did so the clouds began to clear off with astonishing suddenness, and the sun broke out. Luxurious by force of contrast with what we had just experienced was the two miles glide to Shiel Inn.

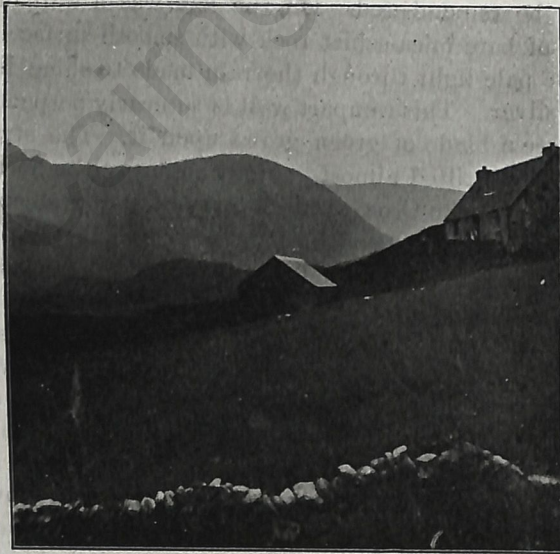


Photo by

AT CAMBAN.

George W. Buchanan.