

A MOUNTAIN JOURNEY.

BY COLIN LIVINGSTONE.

THE west of Inverness-shire, as is well-known, has some of the finest mountain scenery in Scotland. It is now within a year or two of the half-century since I was able to gratify a youthful ambition in making some acquaintance with it, by climbing Ben Nevis and passing by steamer through the Caledonian Canal. I fancied at the time that I might say "Lochaber no more." But fate willed it otherwise; and during the last forty years I have had ample opportunity of becoming familiar with the bens and glens of this part of the country, many of them famed in song and story.

The journey which I am about to describe was taken some years ago in the company of a Professor at one of our Universities, who was a mineralogist of high standing. He has joined the majority, and I would hesitate now to undertake the journey which we both then greatly enjoyed.

It was before the time of the West Highland Railway. On a Friday afternoon we joined the mail conveyance from Fort William for Arisaig, and went with it as far as the Glen Finnan Stage-house, where we passed the night. It is now converted into a hotel. Here we were in what is often called "Prince Charlie's Country." Adjoining, at the head of Loch Shiel, is the spot where in 1745 he raised his standard, at the commencement of the enterprise which terminated so disastrously next year at Culloden. The tourist is familiar with the column which marks the spot. The statue of the Prince which surmounts it faces towards the head of the glen, in the direction from which he awaited the approach of Lochiel with his Camerons. Battered by the storms, it forms a sad reminder of an undertaking, from the beginning utterly hopeless, which has given a romantic interest to the localities connected with its chief events.

The valley is now crossed by the railway. A fine curved viaduct of 21 arches conveys the line across. The centre arch

is 110 ft. above the stream, which makes its way to the head of Loch Shiel, about a mile distant.

On the Saturday morning we commenced our mountain journey by climbing Fraoch Bheinn (2489 ft.) N.W. of the Stage-house. On the summit there are many boulders, differing considerably in composition from the rock of which the mountain is for the most part formed. From Fraoch Bheinn we proceeded by the mountain summits towards the head of Loch Morar. To our right we had the upper part of Glen Finnan, and before us a succession of peaks which we climbed, culminating in Sgòr-nan-Coireachan (3133 ft.). It looks down on the head of Loch Morar, one of the finest of our Highland lakes, and the deepest in Great Britain. Our destination was the farm-house at the head of the loch. The farmer was non-resident, but I had arranged with him for quarters, and he had given the shepherd in charge instructions accordingly. Here we spent two nights with the Sunday between. The day was one of the wettest, and we were confined to the house till late in the afternoon, when it faired a little and we were able to venture out. The house was falling into a state of disrepair, and the roof was leaky. Water found admission to the parlour and to our bedrooms; and the constant dropping added to the discomforts of a dismal day.

But the Monday which followed made more than atonement for all. A sky without a cloud and bright sunshine made the remainder of our journey an enjoyment to be long remembered. We set off early, intending to climb Sgòr-na-Ciche and to find our way from it to our night's quarters in Glen Dessary. In the first part of the day's journey we passed the somewhat remarkable mountain known as Sgòr-na-h-Aide (2818 ft.). The summit resembles a hat—hence the name. Our way was by Màm-na-Cloich-Airde (1000 ft.), which is the highest point of the pass between the head of Loch Arkaig and Loch Nevis, an arm of the Atlantic off the Sound of Sleat. The pass is connected with the wanderings of Prince Charlie. From the Màm we had a pretty stiff climb to the summit of Sgòr-na-Ciche (3410 ft.). As the name (sharp rock of the Pap) indicates, this is a fine conical

mountain. The view from the summit can hardly be surpassed for grandeur. Westward is the wide Atlantic with its islands—Eigg and its unicorn horn, the Sgùrr, and the picturesque group of peaks that cluster in Rum. North of these was Skye with its Coolins, and in the further distance the outer Hebrides. To the north of Sgòr-na-Ciche was the group of mountains round the head of Loch Houra, the highest of which is Sgùrr-a-Mhoraire (3365 ft.). Further north were to be seen the mountains at the head of Loch Duich, many of them over 3000 ft. The points were too numerous to be disentangled, but among them were Sgùrr Fhuaran (3505 ft.) and Beinn Fhada (3383 ft.).

South-eastward were to be seen the Nevis group. Prominent among them was Ben Nevis itself (4406 ft.) free from cloud. Its summit looked like a huge ship with inverted keel, bulking large among the adjoining sharper points.

To the south-west were the Moidart mountains of lower elevation. Among them might be recognised Frois-Bheinn (2876 ft.); and further off was the Mull Ben More (2185 ft.). These are but a few of the numerous summits in sight.

The descent of Sgòr-na-Ciche we made by a rather difficult part, again towards Màm-na-Cloich-Airde. On the Màm were three small cairns close together at a point where three lairds' lands meet—those of Locheil, Lovat, and Knoidart. The name of the Màm—the Hill of the High Stone—would indicate the existence there of a stone of unusual height. But such is not actually the case. Quite adjoining to it, on a slope towards Sgòr-na-Ciche, is a mass of large blocks of stone, piled above each other, dropped there evidently by a glacier. Several of the blocks are of notable size, but no stone so far surpasses the others in height as to account for the name. They may have been taken collectively in giving the Màm its designation.

By the time we left the Màm the shades of evening were closing around us, and before we reached our destination in Glen Dessary it was quite dark. Here we found comfortable quarters in the house of one of Lochiel's shepherds.

Next morning we resumed our journey. Our route lay

past the mouth of Glen Pean and by the side of Loch Arkaig. In Glen Pean there are the ruins of a barracks connected with the Forty-Five. But more interesting in connection with that period is the tale of that part of Prince Charlie's wanderings which occurred under the guidance of the trusty Donald Cameron. A silver "cuach" used by the Prince when sheltering under Cameron's roof remained till lately in the possession of the faithful guide's descendants. It was used by Prince Albert 101 years after, on his visit to Glencoe in 1847; and the writer was indirectly the means of bringing it under the notice of the Queen when she visited the glen in 1873. Her Majesty refers to the incident in her "Journal."

At Murlaggan, near the head of Loch Arkaig, on the 8th May, 1746, a meeting of the leading men of the Prince's party was held, with the view of deciding whether they should renew the efforts which had met with such disaster at Culloden. They resolved to give up their attempt and to disperse. Six casks of gold, valued at £38,000, had lately arrived from France. Part of this treasure was reserved for use; part was concealed at the head of Loch Arkaig, and another part was sunk in the loch, it is believed at the foot of Glen Mallie. Many unsuccessful efforts have since been made to discover this treasure.

Looking towards the head from near the lower end, Loch Arkaig has the appearance of a noble river. A curve hides the upper end from view and gives imagination scope. The cone of Sgòr-na-Ciche forms a picturesque point in the distance.

Achnacarry, at the lower end of the lake, is a place of great interest. Of the old house burnt by Cumberland after Culloden, one gable still remains. On Tòrr-a-Mhuilt, on the other side of the river, the Prince was for some time in hiding with Lochiel; and on the left bank of the Ci-aig, a little way off, is one of the many Prince Charlie caves.

Our journey from Sgòr-na-Ciche was thus in a way through a historic country. The events connected with it bulk but little among the great transactions of the world, but to those taking part in them they were fraught with

fate; and they are a matter of no small interest to the dwellers in this part of the country still. They even awaken a slight interest in the mind of the passing stranger.

Nor was that part of our journey from Achnacarry to Fort William altogether unconnected with historic incident. Down Glen Loy the Prince led his army on his way to the south. Below Mucomer he crossed the Lochy. Near High Bridge was the first fight in connection with the Rebellion. Here Captain Scott with his detachment from Fort Augustus was captured by Macdonald of Keppoch; and hence they were brought to the Prince at Glen Finnan, in this way inspiring confidence in his enterprise at its commencement.

Near the close of our journey was the battlefield of Inverlochy, the scene of two celebrated fights. The earlier was the defeat, in 1431, by Donald Balloch of the troops of King James the First under the Earls of Mar and Caithness. The later was the defeat of Argyll by Montrose on the 2nd February, 1645. And there were later still the siege of Fort William in 1715, in connection with Mar's rebellion, and the siege in 1746 by General Stapleton acting for Prince Charlie.

The journey thus briefly sketched was through a little frequented part of the country to which the tourist has no good means of access. The extension of deer forests which has since taken place renders access still more difficult, as the owners and tenants of deer forests have decided objections to intrusion upon their fastnesses. But a sail on Loch Morar from the lower end is unhindered, and the scenery of the loch itself is very fine. Permission to fish may also be obtained, and the successful angler will be much pleased with the size and beauty of his captures.

He may be thankful if he escapes the fear of capture himself. For the lake is the haunt of a remnant of the old-world monsters that till recently—if all tales be true—frequented our lonely lakes and streams. Mòrag—little Sarah, though why I do not know—seldom shows herself, and, so far as I have ever heard, has always been satisfied with frightening the intruder out of her realms. The best authenticated tale that has come to my knowledge was given me

by a man who had made Mòrag's acquaintance. He was rowing across the loch, in going from Meoble to Tarbet on Loch Nevis. Glancing over his shoulder to see if he was nearing the shore, he saw between him and the landing-place the apparition of which he had so often heard, in the guise of an island under the surface of the water, where he knew no such island existed. But, evidently believing that Mòrag was as shy of the company of human beings as they were of hers, he held on his course and landed without skaith.

On an island in the same lake the celebrated Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat, was captured; and from thence he was conveyed to London to expiate on Tower Hill the share which he had taken in the Rebellion of Forty-Five. When his capture in the Loch Morar island is recalled, it may be well also to recall his coolness on the scaffold. One of his friends, who looked dejected, he clapped on the shoulder, saying, "Cheer up man, I am not afraid; why should you?" He felt the edge of the axe, and said he believed it would do; looked at his coffin on which was inscribed: "Simon Dominus Fraser de Lovat, decollat, April 9, 1747, aetat. suae, 80." And, among other signs of composure, he quoted from Horace:

"Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori."