

## A HIGHLAND GLEN IN SPRING AND AUTUMN.

BY ALEX. INKSON McCONNOCHE.

IT was a cold March afternoon as we walked down Glen Monadh. The ground was black or brown by the banks of the river, but white on the hill slopes, and lifeless save for the grunting ptarmigan. It had been a day on which the thoughtful farmer took care to set loose the prisoners from their stalls for an hour or two. Not that the cattle could find aught to eat, for what grass showed had months ago been cropped bare, as clean shaved as though a barber had plied his art on the pastures of the fields.

We stumbled through mire here, over snow-wreaths there, and as we had left the deer ground a mile behind unexpectedly found ourselves faced by the slimmest of gates fastened in the rudest manner. A herd of black cattle had, however, watched our coming with evident interest; their expectant and disconsolate appearance was plain to any one who had made animals a study. They had wearied of the cold outside as they had wearied of the noisome atmosphere of their byres, and they would be back again.

The brains of a bullock have been literally weighed in the balance—are they not sold by the pound? But evidently weight is not a measure of capacity, otherwise they would have pushed against the frail barrier and opened the way to their winter prison. Accustomed, however, to depend on others, the cattle had come to the conclusion that relief had now arrived, that we had opened the gate for them, not for ourselves. We had some difficulty in making them aware of their blunder; indeed, our hazel stick had reluctantly to be applied so as to impress the truth on their dull minds and bodies. Thus we cleared a passage through them, and, heedless, went on our way. We heard an unusual sound, and we fortunately looked back; there was a wild young fellow, head down, about to charge us. The steadfast look of the

human eye, which is said to appal the king of beasts, is powerless against a stupid ox; we thought discretion the better part of valour. The champion had the good wishes of the herd, for all heads were turned so as to witness the punishment that probably they considered we richly deserved. As it was, their cries of disappointment and rage were audible for some time as we held on our way.

Some thirty sheep had disappeared from the low ground and made their way into the recesses of the deer forest. The stalking season was at hand, and so they must needs be brought down, otherwise they might render fruitless more than one long patient stalk.

We set off with the head stalker and a collie, rejoicing at the opportunity of spending an autumn day in the wilds of Glen Monadh with such intelligent company. We had not gone a hundred yards from the cottage when we saw our first bird—a solitary snipe. The snipe is a rare fellow in these parts, and seems so out of keeping in every way with the aggressive grouse that its appearance was a marvel and a delight to us. In the short time it remained in sight we were reminded how plentiful is animal life, to the trained eye, in a Highland glen. True, nine out of ten people will probably return from a long walk, reporting that they saw nothing but rock and heather, tarn and hillock; but not so he who has been taught to use his eyes. We envy the man who had the good fortune to see, as he rested for a few minutes on a grassy knoll, a fox, two eagles, three hares, several grouse and ptarmigan, and a parcel of stags and hinds, at the same time hearing a curlew in the distance. Our luck was not, however, to be despised. We had just cleared the wood and sat down to take the usual spy, when a great herd of deer was picked out on the far slope. There was nothing for the naked eye, but the telescopes revealed many stags, hinds, and fawns, feeding all unconscious of our proximity—a sight on which we could have lingered for an hour. But our plans did not permit of such leisurely enjoyment, and so, as we had to cross that slope, we were allowed to make a little experiment on the deer. We gave a

long shrill whistle with the dog call, and all the deer stood at gaze, then with one accord they trooped down hill. Evidently they had seen nothing alarming, but they took warning from their ears, and sought safety in the wood, just as the stalker had told us to expect.

Higher up, the glass was again brought into requisition. Without it there was nothing to be seen, with it the distant ground was crawling with deer, but still we saw no sheep. At over 2,000 feet of altitude we rested and searched the hill sides, and were rewarded with a glorious sight across a ravine. There in the long heather lay a small parcel of stags; in some instances only antlers, in others the whole head and a bit of the back were visible. We did not intrude on them; it is just as reprehensible to needlessly disturb resting deer as to rouse cattle when they chew the cud. A few other stags by and by joined the party, but kept their legs as they fed, though one lazy fellow lay down and nibbled at the grass within range of his lips.

We next reached a zone where new weather was in the making. Below all was fair and still, here we had promise of change. Further up in the gullies we could see a patch or two of last winter's snow, but it was the beautiful clouds that sounded the note of alarm. Here and there they were of magnificently brilliant colours, some difficult to name by the non-artistic, but gold and green predominated. This wealth of colour in such circumstances has generally a significance that demands attention as being the precursor of a storm. Several mountain hares fled from before us, suggestive of lost stalks the following month, for a frightened hare is sufficient warning to a wily stag. Roes too, had wandered to these heights, and went off on our approach at the rate of over twenty miles an hour. A roe makes excellent speed for a short distance, and as it moves forward by its own peculiar bounds, is a most attractive animal. We were in a little garden of white heather, and the second bloom of the cranberry was unusually abundant.

But still we saw no sheep. The silence could be felt; it was complete save for the melody of a burn or two hurrying

down to the glen stream. We traced the musical rills to their very sources, and there found our missing sheep, to their evident astonishment. Fain would they have gone over the march and into the next county, but Rover would have none of it. When at last he had them all herded together, the troublesome return journey was commenced. For the sheep had enjoyed their mountain freedom, and every now and again broke away, so the dog had a rough time and much running. But he seemed accustomed to rebellious charges, and when a direction from his master was necessary, he carried it out promptly and unerringly. As we descended lower, the sheep seemed to return to their former docility and gave no further trouble, even submitting to being penned without remonstrance.

---

THE WALKER'S SONG.

Out of the pris'ning house,  
Out of the city's tangle,  
The library's death and dust,  
The market's heat and wrangle.

The cheer of the open road,  
The noble lust of travel—  
These are goodlier goods of the soul  
Than the lecture's froth and cavil.

The spoil of the hard-won hill !  
The bare brown miles of heather !  
The tang of the salt sea air,  
And whip of the wet, wild weather !

Shelter from God's own sky ?  
A straight, cramped yard of breathing ?  
Who is content with these  
With blood in his veins a-seething ?

Let prig and precisian skulk  
And whine for the lee and the tether,  
While we, unfettered and glad,  
Shall roam through the earth for ever.

K.