

## LETTERS FROM THE GLENS AND THE BENS.

WHAT a day was yesterday! It looked well at first, so very well. Mac was to call for us at 8 a.m., and we were ready by that hour, but as a matter of fact it was 12.15 p.m. when we set out in his boat. The weather threatened to go to pieces, and did so ultimately. Mac had various boxes and bags of provisions for the season—so much indeed that he had to leave some things for another boat.

Well, we started for a row of thirteen miles *in a straight line*, but as we could not go right ahead, several miles were added to that distance. The voyage took us eleven hours, so you can fancy how rough we found the narrow loch. Mac had his boy with him. I mostly lay in the stern sheets on a bag of sugar; it was even said that I fell asleep! Mac and B. did the most of the pulling; they appeared to like it and I did not wish to seem selfish! The wind steadily rose and there were "white horses" on the loch, so we shipped some water. At times it was quite impossible to make any headway, we had even enough to do to prevent the boat losing ground—so now and again we went ashore and had rest and lunch, and occasionally baled out the water.

At such times I felt particularly jolly. We generally contrived to find shelter under the trees. We passed several boats with fishermen; one had the ladies with whom we had breakfasted. A big boat overtook us; it was loaded with furniture for a shooting-box. The last time we went ashore owing to the weather we landed at a shepherd's cottage. We had spoken to him as he walked along the loch side; he had three dogs. The little household seemed so pleased at our call, and the daughter gave us a welcome glass of milk. Then followed a characteristic Highland incident—the shepherd embarked with us and rowed for  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles. Was not that hospitable?

His dogs walked by the loch-side, evidently not pleased at the arrangement.

When the shepherd left us, night began to fall, but there is no real darkness at this season. The water was now smooth and even. I took an occasional pull, but the last mile seemed so long! The mist was lying on the hill tops on both sides of us; we saw a few deer and a fox. At last came our little haven, so we took ashore the goods, leaving them to be carried up to the house the following morning. Madame had gone to bed!—the weather had been so rough that she thought we would not set out. What a supper we had! trout and fried eggs, followed by a single tumbler of punch and several stories of the hills.

Next day the weather was unsettled (to put it mildly); we had rain and mist. All the same we did the Ben by a new route, and generally had a good time up a gully, where we had to take shelter from rain and hail for an hour under a big boulder. We spent little time on the summit, as we had arranged for an early dinner. The *piece de resistance* was freshly caught trout. In the evening I put Mac through his catechism—as B. called it—on certain natural history points, so I had a pleasant time.

We climbed "Hell's Peak" (an appropriate name) the next day; it was a memorable ascent. There was no hurry, our base being so convenient; B. indulged in the luxury of a bath in the burn as I leisurely wrote up my notes. The outstanding non-climbing incident of the day was our happening on a fawn.

The third day was devoted to the "Hill of the Goat," but we saw none! The three children came with us, and though rain bothered us not a little we had a good time. The youngsters seemed delighted to get out with us; the boy is his father's son, and the girls see far more on a hill than I can.

How we have fed on trout since we came here!—eggs, bacon, milk, tea, but neither meat nor poultry, nor bread. I feel in the best of health now, quite recovered, and so is B. The burn in front of our little window never ceases to

brattle. The noise seemed so loud at first; now it is more of a lullaby *when we hear it at all*.

The last day came and we did not like the idea, and the household seemed in no hurry to part with us. The weather began badly, but we had a grand day on the mountains. Met two botanists, but they were too suspicious of us to be very communicative. After dinner we all (Madame excepted), went out in the boat and caught some trout.

Of course when we started for our long walk up the loch-side the weather was at its best; we lingered by the trees and made slow progress. I doubt if we enjoyed the elaborate hotel lunch half so well as the simple fare at Mac's.

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“The stars in their courses fought against——” So says, I think, the Bible. They have certainly fought against me; I was wise enough not to contend with them—just slipped round the corner. When I left the train I made at once for the glen, making no halt till I came to my artist friend's. He must agree with the old saint who wailed (in Gaelic),

“Far is France from the head of Loch Long!”

The glen is brown and hard; no snow now. Grouse are beginning to pair, and a few oyster-catchers may be seen, also plovers. Heather was being burned, but not a soul did I meet. How solitary was the loch! The path became rough and there were burns to be crossed, but that was in the programme. When I came in sight of the historic valley I knew my tramp was nearly over, but I do not know that I rejoiced. I called at the lodge, but, alas, the old housekeeper had been buried the previous week. All I could do for the kindly old woman in temporary charge was to speak to her of her beloved Badenoch, and set her clock going.

My host had another visitor shortly after I reached his house. My host was just returned from the low country—as he called it—with two cart-loads of meal, but little makes a load for such roads and cattle. The

visitor was rather interesting to me, as you can understand, for she was an undoubted descendant of the Shaws. Many questions are asked when one has the good fortune to land at a house where the post only troubles once a week.

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The loch reached, there are trees and I had their shelter. Lunch No. 1. was now eaten, and others followed when wanted. Oh, why did Jane forget the drinking cup? The hills looked magnificent, for at times the storm paused and there were blue bits of sky. Then there would be an inferno on the tops—big snow patches with clashing clouds of mist. Of course I had rain, the drops like hail, and even hail itself followed by and by. I had a good road, latterly a decent path, and minded these things not—in fact rather revelled in them. I was wet and dry over a score of times. One stream took me *an hour* to cross, and another landed me, first in a bog, then in a swamp. Seemed as I should never get there, but at 6.15 p.m. I did arrive. What a solitary place! yet it is kept in such style that the buildings looked to me as though I were coming down on an important village. My host had met Mac in the train and told him, among other things, that I could *not* cross the hills in such weather—and so Mac went on to Spean Bridge, where there is an hotel, to wait for a wire the following morning.

The loch surges continually, and all seems so strange and weird—even to me, accustomed to violent changes. After breakfast F. and I went by the steam yacht—everything is done by water here, though at last they have begun to make a road. I telephoned for Mac, and he duly arrived, and we went off in the yacht. Then came lunch, and we started over the hills to our old quarters at C.'s. The walk was no small matter—just four hours. The view of the loch as we first sighted it quite took my companion's fancy. Alas! I put my foot on a young chick of a grouse and killed it.

We were put up in a little wooden shanty, the walls covered with illustrated papers. One of the girls with whom B. and I did a hill three years ago is married in

D.; the other is at home, and her beautiful Highland accent is good to hear. The dog, a poor mongrel fellow, is rejoiced to see me, and evidently wants to go off with me to see the world—and so is tied by a string to the bed! The burn at the door—how ceaselessly musical it is; so accustomed to it have we already become, we hear it not unless listened for. We sit at breakfast with the door open, and rejoice in the bright sunshine and the snow patches on the mountains.

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M. showed me a motor-car rug, cost £20, for it was made of a dozen wild cat skins. Then I saw two wild cats in a big cage; what demons! A goods train is to pick me up.

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Here we are—in the “last” house in Inverness-shire; our nearest neighbour is in Ross-shire. Friday was a scorcher, yet we did thirty miles, knapsack on back. I know not when I did so much on a road, but then the scenery was nowhere tame, at least to our ideas. The house where we roosted has a charming position—looks up one loch and down another. The day promised well, but on the tops there was dense mist; indeed we were lost for ten minutes, but the compass put us right. The Mam was steep, and took it out of us with our knapsacks. I called to mind, “the earth brought forth frogs,” for the hill-side at one place seemed to swarm with young frogs. The descent was very steep and toilsome for a bit, but we came at last on a pony path, and so reached a house where we had hopes of quarters. But no, for it overflowed with road repairers, and so, refreshed with milk and scones, we were sent on to the “last” house.

Our cottage is not much to look at, but the little parlour with bed is all right, and our host and hostess are both likeable folks—young; she buxom, he smart. I have sent him away to catch trout for our breakfast. The pony recently caught a chill, so every night gets gruel, *coming half into the house for it*. I saw its head in the lobby a little ago and was quite startled.

I forgot to mention that on the hill I saw the remains of a fawn which an eagle had eaten up. Evidently from the hoofprints the hind had remained for some time at the fatal spot. The dogs sleep *above us*, in an attic, as happened when we were in Glen Roy. B. could not understand the noise in the morning!

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We found a gillie waiting for us at the station—"Mr. B. sorry etc., etc., had just come from Skye fishing; was now fishing in one of his own lochs. So I am ordered to show you the glen." We had several hours of a competent guide; the scenery may be truthfully described as both picturesque and magnificent. By and by from afar we saw the boat cross the loch for our host. Dinner (though there was no meat), was perfect, and nicely served by a maid—soup, trout, chicken, sweets, cheese, fruit, coffee and cigarettes, followed by whisky and soda.

We had such a pleasant walk before breakfast; waterfalls seemed to be everywhere, and there was much rhododendron in bloom.

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The mail cart started without me, for I waited at the station—as a porter told me—while it sneaked away direct from the P. O.! But little cared I for an extra ten miles; the scenery was wild and mostly new, and my host just imagined the train had been a little later than usual. Dinner that evening smacked of the traditional Highland character, for the salmon was his own catching, the mutton his own killing, and the rhubarb his own growing. The rookery is small, but the cawing never seems to cease. Hills all around; in front the river and the head of the loch, the latter with the white walls of several cottages reflected in the water.

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A lovely drive, a dream; the loch sides are dotted with beautiful houses. The climb was steep, stiff and interesting; what views! Mountains and lochs were to be seen; two of the latter were being crossed by steamers. After descending we had such milk. Not the milk of commerce,

for the cows there are fed on natural grass, on untilled and so unmanured land. So the milk is rather cream, "double cream" as S. says our dairy people call it. It was exquisite; I have had nothing like it since I was in Shetland.

A pretty little cottage I have, all by itself, close to the "Water." Madame fixed 9 o'clock for breakfast, though I thought of 8. But I was by no means too late for D. and S. We duly climbed the Ben, in spite of the heat and the flies, and were of course delighted. Then down to the loch on which we spent two or three pleasant hours. I sat in the stern, the others were so anxious to pull. We all declared that these boating hours were the most enjoyable of the holiday. As in the morning, when we passed the hotel, many of the guests were sitting in the verandah, on the lawn, and under the trees; some lolled, others read, and not a few I fear were flirting. I took my two friends to the cottage for tea, for which they had been longing. Then I showed them past the hatstand, and led them forth to a point whence their road lay open like a book.