

SOME EARLY NOTICES OF THE AVON
AND UPPER DEESIDE.

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IN the January, 1907, number of this journal were printed some early notices of the Spey, etc., taken from some of the Sibbald Manuscripts in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh. I did not then know the name of the writer of the two first passages—Rothiemurchus and Glen More—but I have since found that in his Repertory of Manuscripts, Adv. Lib. press-mark 33·3·16, Sir Robert Sibbald has this entry, "Mr. Geddes, minister, wrotte for me ane descriptione of Strathspey, a sheet," and this obviously refers to the description from which the two passages were taken.

Here I present some passages descriptive of the River Avon and the district of Upper Deeside, taken from the folio volume, press-mark 34·2·8, of the Sibbald Collections previously referred to. Among the documents contained in this volume are several in the script of Robert Gordon of Straloch, one of the Editors of the Scottish Volume of Blaeu's Atlas (see Scot. Geog. Mag., August, 1901), written in the course of his editorship. One of the articles is entitled "Adnotata ad Descriptionem duarum praefectararum Aberdoniae et Banfae in Scotia Ultramontana"; this, as its name signifies, is a draft of a description of these districts. Another article is entitled "Descriptio duarum praefectararum Aberdoniae et Banfae," and seems to be a further elaboration of the same material, though in the passages here dealt with the changes are rather small. The corresponding article as it was published appeared with the title "Praefectararum Aberdonensis et Banfiensis, in Scotia ultramontana, Nova Descriptio. Auctore Roberto Gordonio" in the second edition of the Scottish Volume of Blaeu's

Atlas, 1662, apparently not having been prepared in time for the first edition, which appeared in 1654.

The two manuscript articles, along with other contents of the volume, were copied into the second of the three volumes of the Macfarlane Geographical Collections, now also in the Advocates' Library. These volumes have recently been printed by the Scottish History Society, under the editorship of Sir Arthur Mitchell and Mr. J. T. Clark, and the Latin passages are there accompanied by English versions by Mr. Alexander Gow.

From the three forms of these early descriptions I have selected the passages that may be considered to come properly within the cognizance of the Cairngorm Club, and have made close translations into English. Some of the place-names used differ from their present forms:—Avin, Awen, Ballindallach, Scairsach, Scairsoch, Benivroden, Bini-vroden, Galdy, Galdi, Innerey, Innercald, Crag Gewis, Gardine, Abirgeldie, Abirzeldie, Abiryeldie. One word used in connection with the Dee is possibly of special interest: it is said that Innerey is "septem à scatebris milliaribus." The word "scatebra" is not a common Latin word; it means a place where water bubbles or gushes up, and I have ventured to translate it by "Wells," with a capital. Of course it is not correct to say that Innerey is only seven miles from the "Wells of Dee," even if one uses that name for the "Pools," the real distance being about double as far, and from the Braeriach "Wells" at least a mile more. In the manuscript descriptions Gordon makes much of Crag Gewis, but this does not appear in the account in Blaeu. The trees in the low ground there are said to be limes and birches, "tiliarum et betularum," but it may be questioned whether limes were common there; one would rather expect a reference to alders. Somewhat naturally, perhaps, the Avon is said to start "among the ridges of Binawen," and it is certainly interesting to have one of the earliest testimonies to the clearness and pureness of its waters from a man so widely travelled in Scotland as Timothy Pont.

Strath Avinia or Stra Down, from Robert Gordon's MS. "Adnotata ad Descriptionem duarum praefectararum Aberdoniae et Banfae in Scotia Ultramontana."

All this small inland district, the family estate of the Marquess of Huntly, lies along the valley of the River Avin, which Timothy Pont, who had surveyed all of it, told me is the clearest and of the purest waters of all in the whole of our kingdom. But in this there is no indication of a good soil, for it is extremely lean, the crop scanty and in some years scarcely ripening, so that the chief reliance of the inhabitants is always on pasture, which never fails them.

The Avin or Awen, flowing out of a small loch among the ridges of a very rugged and snow-clad mountain call Binawen,—for Bin in the ancient tongue signifies a high and rugged mountain—after a few miles receives on the right the Bulg Burn, issuing from a loch of the same name. Then, having been dashed like a torrent down a rocky and broken glen, receiving many tributaries from each side, it receives in the lowest part of the glen the river Liffet, again from the right hand, bringing with it many burns. And, flowing northwards in all its course except its headwaters, it mingles with the Spey at Ballindalloch Castle, beyond Strath Avin. At the junction of the Avin and the Liffet are the ruins of the ancient castle of Drimmin, and higher up the Liffet stands Blair Findie. Country cottages occupy the remaining sites here and there in the straths of these rivers, and although the ruggedness of the mountains may seem to forbid it, nevertheless below the junction of the Bulg Burn they are not few.

Strath Avinia or Stra-down, from Robert Gordon's MS. "Descriptio duarum praefectararum Aberdoniae et Banfae."

Strath Avin, a small inland district, now called Stra-down, the family estate of the Marquesses of Huntly, lies along the valley of the River Avin, which Timothy Pont, who surveyed all these parts, told me is the clearest and of the purest water of all the rivers of this kingdom. But in this there is no indication of a good soil, for it is extremely lean, the crop scanty and in some years scarcely ripening, so that the chief reliance of the inhabitants is always on pasture, which never fails them.

The Avin, flowing out of a small loch among the ridges of a very rugged and snow-clad mountain called Bin Awen, after a few miles of its course receives the Bulg Burn, issuing from a loch of the same name. Then it struggles rather than flows through rocky and broken places, receiving many tributaries from each side, until it receives the River Liffet, both this and that other from the right hand. Now increased in volume, flowing northwards in all its course, it discharges into the Spey. At the junction of the Avin with the Liffet are the ruins of the ancient castle of Drimmin, and a short distance thence . Country cottages occupy the remaining sites.

Strath Avinia or Strath Down, from "Praefectararum Aberdonensis et Banfensis, in Scotia Ultramontana, Nova Descriptio. Auctore Roberto Gordonio," in Blaeu's Atlas, 1662.

All this small inland district, the family estate of the Marquesses of Huntly, lies along the valley of the River Avin, which Timothy Pont, who had surveyed all these parts, told me is the clearest and of the purest waters of all of our kingdom. But in this there is no indication of a good soil, for it is extremely lean, the crop scanty and in some years scarcely ripening, so that the chief reliance of the inhabitants is always on pasture, which never fails them.

The Avin or Awen, flowing out of a small loch among the ridges of Awen, after some miles receives on the right hand the Bulg Burn, from a loch of the same name. Then, having been dashed like a torrent through a rocky and broken glen, receiving many burns from each side, it receives in the lowest part of the glen, from the right hand, the River Liffet with its many tributary burns. And flowing northwards in all its course except in its headwaters, it mingles with the River Spey at Ballindalloch Castle, which is not reckoned in Strath Avin. At the junction of the Avin and the Liffet are the ruins of the ancient castle of Drimmin, and higher on the Liffet stands Blair-Findie. Country cottages occupy the remaining sites here and there throughout all these straths, and although the ruggedness of the mountains may seem to forbid it, nevertheless below the junction of the Bulg Burn they are not few.

Marria or Mar, from Robert Gordon's MS. "Adnotata ad Descriptionem duarum praefectararum Aberdoniae et Banfiae in Scotia Ultramontana."

The lower part of Mar near the sea is contracted by the rivers Dee and Don ; in its upper parts it widens out beyond these rivers. It is notable for its length, but its width is variable. He who shall have described these two rivers and their tributary burns will have told almost all things that belong to it, so much do the interior parts abound in mountains and moors. For the Dee, cutting the Grampian Mountains from its sources to its mouth, where they sink down into hills, flows swiftly in its whole course among these mountains, so that the greatest part of this district is unsuitable for crops ; but what it yields in harvests is of the best repute, and is always reaped in favourable autumns. These mountains are rich enough in herds of cattle, in flocks of sheep of the best breeds, yielding excellent mutton, in horses suitable for country service, and also in goats in the higher regions. The wool and fleeces are by far the best of all the districts described by me, being praised for whiteness, softness, and fineness of fibre, and are eagerly sought after. But these things do not compensate the evil of a useless soil. The air is wholesome, the inhabitants are vigorous, healthy, and temperate people. The dry soil, and, as I have said, its unfruitfulness in so many places quicken the intelligence of the inhabitants.

The Dee has its sources not far from the range of low mountains called Scairsach, which divide upper Mar from Badenoch, at the foot of a very lofty mountain called Beni-vroden, and, having received the Galdy Burn and flowing a little to the south-east, but turning immediately to the east, hindered by almost no windings, though shut in by lofty and rugged mountains on each side, swift, clear, free from mud, always over

gravelly bed, and crossed by a bridge at the second milestone above New Aberdeen, it mingles with the ocean close to the town.

At Innerey, the name of which comes from the Ey Burn, seven miles from its Wells, it first meets cultivation. Then, increased by waters that many and large streams supply from the neighbouring hills, it passes on the right hand Castletoun, the castle of the Earls of Mar, with the church of Kindrochit in the neighbourhood. On the opposite bank is Innercald, so named from the stream by which it stands. Then follows Crathly, a parochial village. A little lower, on the right hand, is Abirgeldie Castle, where this valley receives the name of Strathdee. After this comes Glengardine, to the north, whence flows the river Gardine, richer than the other streams. About these parts the river is shut in by mountains, but there are not lacking woods notable for tall pines. Here a very high mountain raises itself, as if cut off from the others, and entirely clothed on all sides by trees. A fine wood of huge evergreen pines covers its peaks, its crags, and the very summit, and the pleasant verdure of limes and birches covers the slopes of the mountain and the flats near the river. The name of the mountain is Crag-Gewis, crag signifying mountain, and gewis pine-tree. Among the very many woods through which the river passes, especially in the higher parts, this mountain is notably pleasant to see. Next follows Glen Muick, a narrow glen, getting its name from a stream, which, flowing out of a loch of the same name, after a few miles joins the Dee on the right hand bank, almost opposite to the Gardine.

Marria or Mar, from Robert Gordon's M3. "Descriptio duarum praefectararum Aberdoniae et Banflae."

Mar—of which name no one can give the origin—in its lower part near the sea is contracted by the rivers Dee and Don, on the south and north respectively; in its upper parts it widens out beyond either. It is notable for its length, but its width is very variable. He who shall have described these rivers and their tributary burns will have told almost all things, so much do the interior parts abound in mountains and moors. For the Dee, cutting the Grampian mountains from its sources to its mouth, where they sink down into hills, and leaving a wide tract of them on the right hand, renders this district mountainous and utterly unsuited for cultivation; nevertheless what it yields in harvests is of the best repute, and is always reaped in favourable autumns. These mountains are rich enough in herds of cattle, in flocks of sheep of the best breeds, yielding excellent mutton, in horses suitable for country service, and also in goats in the higher regions. The wool is by far the best of all the districts described by me, being praised for whiteness, softness, and fineness, and is eagerly sought after. But these things do not compensate the evil of a useless soil. The air is wholesome, the inhabitants are vigorous, healthy, and temperate people. The soil dry and insufficiently fruitful quickens their intelligence.

The Dee has its sources close to the range of low mountains called Scairsach, which divide upper Mar, Bra of Mar, from Badenoch, in a very lofty mountain called Beni-vroden, and, having received the Galdi burn, it flows a little to the south-east, turning immediately to the east, hindered by almost no windings, though shut in by rugged and lofty mountains on

each side, swift, clear, free from mud, always over a gravelly bed, passing under a bridge at New Aberdeen, it mingles with the ocean close to the town.

At Innerey, so called from the Ey Burn, seven miles from its Wells, it first meets cultivation. Then, increased by waters that many and large streams carry down from the mountains, it passes on the right Castletoun, the residence of the Earls of Mar, built in the form of a castle, with a church in the neighbourhood. On the opposite bank is Innercald House, and a little lower the church with the village of Crathy, whence still lower on the right hand is Abirzeldie Castle, where this valley receives the name of Strath Dee. Unless you include Glengardine, so named from the river on which it lies, the remaining sites are occupied by country cottages. Here the crop is scanty, the valley of the Dee being shut in by mountains, but there are not lacking woods of tall pines, which could be sold for much money in the lowlands. One mile below Abiryeldie there is a very high mountain on the bank of the river, attached to no other though very many are close to it, and clothed on all sides by trees. A fine wood of huge evergreen pines covers its peaks and its crags, and a wood of limes and birches covers the slopes and the flats down to the river, with trees so tall and close together that nothing of the whole mountain can be seen except the wood. The name of the mountain is Crag-Gewis, crag signifying mountain, and gewis pine-tree. Next to this is Glen Muick, a narrow glen, getting its name from a stream, which, arising from a loch of the same name, after a few miles enters the Dee, on the right bank almost opposite to the Gardine river.

Marria or Mar, from "Praefecturae Aberdonensis et Banfiensis, in Scotia ultra montana, Nova Descriptio. Auctore Roberto Gordonio," in Blaeu's Atlas, 1662.

The lower part of Mar which is nearer to the sea is contracted by the rivers Dee and Don; in its upper parts it widens out beyond them. It is notable for its length, but its width is variable. He who shall have described these two rivers and their tributary burns will have told almost all things that refer to this place, so much do the interior parts abound in mountains and moors. For the Dee, cutting the Grampian Mountains from its sources to its mouth, where these mountains sink down into hills, flows swiftly in its whole course among them, so that the greatest part of this district is unsuitable for crops; but what it yields in harvests is of the best repute, and is reaped seasonably enough. These mountains are rich enough in herds of cattle, in flocks of sheep of the best breeds, yielding excellent mutton, in horses suitable for country service, and also in goats in the higher regions. The wool is by far the best of all the districts hitherto described by me, being praised for whiteness, softness, and fineness, and is eagerly sought after. But these things do not compensate the evil of a useless soil. The air is wholesome, the inhabitants are vigorous, healthy, and temperate people. The dry soil and its unfruitfulness in so many places quicken the intelligence of the inhabitants.

The Dee has its sources not far from the range of low mountains called Scairsoch, which divide upper Mar from Badenoch, at the foot of a very

lofty mountain called Bini-vroden, and having received the Galdy burn, flowing a little to the south-east, but turning its course immediately to the east, hindered by almost no windings, though shut in by lofty and rugged mountains on each side, swift, clear, free from mud, always over a gravelly bed, it mingles with the ocean at Aberdeen.

At Innerey, the name of which comes from the Ey Burn, seven miles from its Wells, it first meets cultivation. Then, increased by many and frequent streams, it passes on the right hand Castell-toun, the castle of the Earl of Mar. On the opposite bank is Innercald, with the parochial village of Crathy. A little lower is Abirgeldie Castle, where this valley receives the name of Strath Dee. Below this, on the opposite bank, is the river Gardine, richer than the other streams. Here the Dee is shut in by mountains, but there are not lacking woods notable for tall pines, even from its very sources. Next follows Glen Muick, a narrow glen, getting its name from a stream flowing through it, which comes down to the river from a loch of the same name, after a few miles, a little below the mouth of the Gardine, but on the opposite bank.