

THREE DAYS IN ATHOLL.

ATHOLL has ever been a notable district in the Highlands, its "Blair" in the neighbourhood of the confluence of the Tilt with the Garry possessing considerable historical interest. Probably that chapter closed with the battle of Killiecrankie; now we think of the vale as one of the most picturesque in Scotland, or as the training ground of the Scottish Horse. Blair Atholl itself is a most insignificant village, but as a centre for leisurely exploration of hill and glen it has numerous charms.

The Fender, a Tilt tributary, is best known from its falls, just above old Bridge of Tilt, but they by no means exhaust its attractions. The stream rises on Beinn a' Ghlo, away to the north of Carn Liath, a popular summit which the good people of Blair generally call Beinn a' Ghlo to the enquiring tourist. In the lower and middle part of its glen the burn cuts deeply into the rock, and the road is of the steepest possible nature; one wonders whence "Fender" is derived. It is really three Gaelic words much corrupted, the key being in the first, "Fe," a contraction (and at the same time the pronunciation) of the frequently occurring "Feith," a bog. As one climbs the long brae, Blair is seen to advantage, and Ben Vrackie, so familiar to visitors to Pitlochry, bulks largely in the prospect. Loch Moraig now looks so natural that there is no suspicion of artificiality, and Carn Liath, with its shapely cone, stands dominant over all. The Fender, with its twists and bends, may be half-a-dozen miles in length, and it comes as a surprise to learn that an erstwhile parish, Lude—absorbed into Blair Atholl before 1632—flourished by its banks. Kirkton of Lude is still a place-name, and the ruins of the ancient church (some twenty-five feet in length) yet mark its individuality.

Much of the high ground between Glen Fender and Glen Tilt was of old under cultivation, as grassy slopes and

silent larachs testify. Now the pasture is devoted to sheep, and so one crosses over Meall Dail-min (1743 feet), descending into Glen Tilt, without seeing a human face. It was in these solitudes—on the Tilt side—that the War Office recently experimented with a flying machine; all that now marks the once jealously guarded region is the shed which gave shelter to the aeroplane. Down below, the Tilt is crossed by Gilbert's bridge, so named from Gilbert Robertson, who after his return from Culloden settled in Glen Tilt, a cottage having been here built for him. A retired shepherd now passes his time at the bridge, and the pedestrian would do well to have an interview with him. He knows much of Atholl, and his remarks on the salmon of its rivers and the deer of its forests cannot fail to interest the tourist. One would fain tarry in Glen Tilt, or trace its lively stream to its source, but that celebrated glen requires a long day and a chapter to itself.

A deep-cutting burn, Allt Slanuchaidh, here enters the Tilt from the west; it should be placed on the left, though we were induced to go by the other side over Meall Reamhar. We observed several goosanders, the greatest trout poachers that scour the streams; our friend told us of his supposed discovery of a nest at the root of a tree, but on putting in his hand there was an otter "glowering" at him! As we crossed Glen Tilt we saw a handsome golden plover dash against a wire fence, with the result that it dropped dead, its beak broken.

The walk—it could scarcely be called a climb—from Glen Tilt to Glen Bruar was made in the most leisurely manner. The temptation to loll on the heather and admire the vale was not to be resisted. A herd of deer, about 250 in number, took quite half an hour of our time as we watched with the glass their disturbed movements on seeing us. The most of them were hinds; indeed we picked out only about half-a-dozen stags, and they were somewhat prominent as they stood apart, higher up on a grassy patch. The bulk of the hinds seemed exceedingly nervous, and moved hither and thither, as apparently aim-

lessly as an alarmed ant colony, though we were at a distance of at least a mile. The stags appeared to ignore their unreasoning terror, remaining steady long after the females became excited. As we descended into the glen of the Bruar a similar herd on the south-western slope of Beinn a' Chait (2942 feet), so frequently mentioned by the inevitable Scrope, called for our attention, but they fed on regardless of our presence.

Thus we entered Glen Bruar and the well known ancient right-of-way, the Minigaig Pass, which, said the Andersons, "should not be attempted by the pedestrian without a guide." A driving road now serves part of the way, and so with an ordnance survey map and a compass the tourist need not now fear danger in ordinary weather. We struck on Allt Hecchan, a tributary of the Bruar, at the upper end of "the Duke's road," where a bothy, $5\frac{3}{4}$ miles from Blair Castle and at an altitude of 1486 feet, is conveniently situated. For the remainder of the distance to Bruar Lodge one has to be content with the almost disused track of the pass, while the glen driving road may be seen on the other side of the stream.

We had intended continuing our journey that afternoon over the hills to Gaick, but our host at Bruar Lodge would hear of no such proceeding, his principal objections being the lateness of the hour and the softness of the snow on the high ground. We were rather disappointed, but gracefully yielded, for the shooting box is at a height of just 1500 feet at the base of the famous Beinn Dearg—the red hill—of Atholl, and there was much of interest to see and hear in such surroundings. A peregrine falcon had built an eyrie a short distance from the lodge, in a position impossible for man without the help of ropes; moreover a guard of long icicles then effectually protected the nest from intruders. A curious and unexplained fatality had just befallen a big heron; our dog scented it in the heather where it lay dead, a broken wing being the only apparent wound. The beak of the heron is one of the most deadly weapons we know, so we carried off the head of this particularly fine specimen as a trophy.

The walk next forenoon down the glen to Struan station was one to be remembered, for we had the company of our host for part of the way. Some grouse feathers among the heather by the roadside suggested a tragedy; "Oh, yes! the other morning I disturbed an eagle as she was feeding on the grouse." Further along a buzzard had recently killed a lamb by tearing open its jugular vein. As we made for the Falls of Bruar, we had the good luck to get within thirty yards of an eight-pointer. We stood still and watched him feeding till such time as he raised his head; after a second or two's surprised staring at us he bolted incontinently. Some score or more of years ago, when we had less appreciation of scenery, we visited the Falls of Bruar; even then we admired them, how much more so now!