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MY INTRODUCTION TO THE CAIRNGORMS.

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PART II.

WE were early risers. On getting out of bed on the morning following our arrival at Ballater, the stiffness of our limbs indicated that a walk of about 24 miles plus diversions on a turnpike road, under a blazing sun, at midsummer, was a pretty stiff initiatory lesson in tramping for untrained pedestrians. We therefore determined to spend that day in recuperation at Ballater, and to profitably occupy the time by visits to the lead and silver mines at Abergairn, and the mineral wells at Pananich. As a substitute for Holloway's celebrated ointment—as much worth a guinea a box as certain pills which we could name but won't, because we decline to gratuitously advertise patented “droggeries” while newspaper proprietors are handsomely paid for doing so—we liberally lubricated the soles of our stockings with honest household soap, and felt so much refreshed thereby that we were induced to make for the Pass of Ballater before breakfast. We were much impressed by the features of this romantic pass, and, being dabblers in botany, we carefully searched among the rocks and screes for rarities in the fern world but failed to find any, though, two or three years afterwards, *Asplenium Septentrionale* was found among the rocks at the north side of the west end

of the Pass, as recorded by Dr. Dickie who obtained specimens from the lucky finder.

From the Pass we proceeded to the farm of Abergairn to inspect the lead mines said to exist there. Not far from the dwelling-house on the hillside we saw that several excavations or test-pits had been dug, but although a small quantity of lead had been got and silver sufficient to supply a set of buttons for a vest to a laird of Monaltrie, it was found, when a practical test was made by expert miners from Cornwall, that neither lead nor silver existed in sufficient quantity to pay anybody except company promoters floating but not working the mines. According to Dr. MacGillivray, the granular quartz containing the lead ore has dispersed in it small cavities containing crystals of fluor spar (fluoride of calcium), mostly of a beautiful wine yellow colour, but also of various tints of blue and purple.

Having exhausted the lead and silver mines, we made for the summit of Craigendarroch (Rock of the Oaks). The oaks were a disappointment, a delusion, and a snare. In place of patriarchal Anakims, girthed like the stump of an oak which, during the process of harbour improvement at Aberdeen, was resurrected from its peaceful bed near the site of the ducking stool for scolding wives, we saw nothing of the nature of oak except diminutive shrubs fit only for the manufacture of besoms or birch rods. We expected to see material suitable for building Dreadnoughts of the type of Nelson's "Victory." But Ichabod! Ichabod! Our reverence for the old stump mentioned, which now enjoys its *otium cum dignitate* in the Duthie Park, and still girths eighteen feet in circumference at four feet above ground, was therefore greatly increased by the comparison, and remains unabated. And we thankfully remember its providential preservation from cremation by the timely aid of a water engine when, to the consternation of a colony of Norwegian rats which abode therein serenely, it had caught fire from a conflagration in a neighbouring shipbuilding yard on the Inches.

The magnificent views obtained from the summit of

Craigendarroch, or Creag-an-daraich, compensated in some measure for our disappointment at the scraggy appearance of the oaks. To the south lay Glen Muick, bounded on the west by its picturesque serpentine Coyles, behind, above, and beyond which towered and stretched the serrated outline of "dark Lochnagar," splashed with snow in its precipitous north-eastern corrie above the lochs. A crowd of hill summits continued the range of the horizon west and by north, while east and west in the near foreground lay the valley of the Dee, its meandering stream glittering in the bright sunshine and smilingly reflecting the brilliant cerulean sky. The landscape was a revelation of Alpine grandeur and beauty. But revelling in admiration should always be done after a comfortable breakfast. We were recalled to a sense of our mortality by the circumstance that we had not had breakfast and the conviction that attention thereto must in no wise be neglected. We therefore hastened our descent from the summit of the Rock of the Oaks, and purposely dispensed with the formality of inspecting the guard of honour at the barracks, confident that that duty would not be neglected by some royal personage passing through Ballater on the way to Balmoral.

After breakfast, we strolled towards the celebrated Wells of Pananich. We crossed the Dee by the wooden bridge, successor to the bridge swept away by the flood of 1829. The road thence to the Wells was bordered by well-grown pines, which thickly clothed the steep rocky side of Pananich Hill on our right, and afforded a grateful shade from the too ardent rays of a midsummer sun. Among the rocks and pines a large flock of goats was feeding. These goats supplied milk for invalids who required recuperation, but the smell of the goat and the "wersh" taste of its milk perverted one of us into an unbeliever, and he became convinced that a draught of hot milk from a non-tuberculous cow, mixed with a dash of rum such as Powis imported from his West Indian plantations for the use of himself and his friends, is a morning libation fit for the gods and a perfect annihilator

of all the ills that flesh is heir to. It is fair to say, however, that Powis' rum was guarded like the golden apples of the Hesperides. The wooden floor of his entrance lobby was uncarpeted and polished to glacial perfection, and he maintained a pack of barking terriers who vociferously announced the entrance of the visitor and tried to sample his trousers or shins. Unless, therefore, the visitor had graduated in skating—as, fortunately, I had done on the Aberdeenshire canal—between the dogs and the slipperiness he ran some risk of getting floored.

At length we reached the Wells. These Wells were the creators of Ballater. According to "Chambers Gazetteer of Scotland" (1832), Ballater was the most fashionable watering-place in the northern part of the kingdom, and was at that time the resort, in the summer and autumn months, of an immense concourse of persons who flocked thither to enjoy the benefit of the mineral waters, to indulge in match-making and innocent flirtations, or to recuperate in pleasant country lodgings. We found that the Wells were four in number; and, although all near to one another, they were said to have some differences in their properties. They all, however, contained carbonates of iron and lime, which, of course, were believed to be efficacious in building up iron constitutions. We drank from each of the four wells, but, truth to say, did not detect any difference in the taste or quality of the water. It is fortunate that there are only four wells at Pananich, because if, like the famous black marble fountain to the Virgin at Einsiedeln, in Switzerland, there were fourteen spouts, and the pilgrim had to drink from each of the fourteen in a sort of merry-go-round perambulation, and if the water was peremptorily purgative, like that of Airthrey at Bridge of Allan, catastrophes might occur, as they are said sometimes to do at Airthrey.

Our good fortune, so far as regarded the weather, continued on Wednesday morning, when we made an early start for Braemar. There were then two public roads from Ballater to Braemar, one on each side of the river. We travelled by the road on the left bank of the

stream, via Creag-an-daraich; and, passing the Water of Gairn, skirted the long range of the Geallaig Hill, which extends from Bridge of Gairn to a point opposite to Balmoral. Between Bridge of Gairn and the inn at Coille-na-criche (Wood of the boundary)—misnamed in the Ordnance maps *Kylacreich*, but always recognised by coach horses and “drouths” travelling that way—the road appeared to have been cut through a succession of moraines. Beyond the inn for a mile or two the road runs through a birch wood which clothes the bottom of the valley, and the lower slope of the Geallaig range, above which, to the sky line, the steep slope is mantled by screes and heather, sparsely dotted with pines of perfect symmetry nature-planted. The lichens in variety of colour tinting the screes, the bloom on the heather, and now and then broad stripes of bright green grass and golden sphagnum, where water is trickling downward, delight the eye. The birches are well grown and most of them have pendulous foliage, the tresses swaying in the breeze and weeping when washed by the gentle shower or evening dew, but when kissed by the rising sun the tears sparkle like diamonds. “Weeping may for a night endure, at morn doth joy arise.” Here the river, glittering in blue and gold, winds along the bottom of the valley, and, circling widely, has formed two pine-clad islands, where the oyster-catcher enjoys unmolested connubial bliss and the otter makes his lair. Perchance you will observe, waist-deep in the river, an angler tempting the “monarch of the tide,” with a Jock Scott or other attractive lure. Some say

“The silver trout in speckled pride,
The salmon, monarch of the tide,”

snap at the lure for fun, not for food, like a kitten playing with a feather or ball of worsted, but I “ha’e ma doots.” They say the salmon does not feed in fresh water. Again, I say, I am not quite sure of that. As an example, while dining with a well-known and generally successful angler on a fine Ythan-caught sea trout at Ellon, he told me

that one day fishing in the Don between the two bridges near Aberdeen he was very unsuccessful, while every now and then he heard flopping in the water and saw another angler landing fish. Curious to know what lure his rival was using and the cause of his success, he interviewed him, and found that the successful angler was a blind quarrier fishing with substantial bait, in which he was assisted by a boy. My angling friend, as anglers will do, told his experience and views, when he received this home-thrust: "Ach! some folk fush for fush, and ither folk fush for fun." The fisher for fun went home with an empty creel, but he got a wholesome practical lesson. Another incident. A young lad, a shepherd's son, lolling on the parapet of the Brig o' Turk, happened to see an unfortunate "gorblin," ejected from the nest of a sand martin, placed in a hole in the bank of the river, flutter and fall into the stream. Suddenly a lordly salmon arose and swallowed the unfortunate bird. That was a revelation to the boy. He immediately went for tackle and another young sand martin, which he fluttered on the stream, and forthwith he caught the gourmet, who evidently had acquired a taste for young sand martins.

Proceeding on our way, Abergeldie Castle and its cradle, suspended by and travelling on a wire rope attached to a tree on the south bank and to a strong post on the north side of the river, were objects of surpassing interest. There is a tradition that, by the breaking of the rope while the cradle was crossing the flooded stream with an exciseman of the name of Bruce in it, on the hunt for smugglers hereabout, he was dropped into the river and was carried off by the flood instead of by the "deil." The next edifice which attracted our attention was the old parish Kirk of Crathie, a building outwardly and inwardly as devoid of architectural beauty and ornament as our Chapel of Ease at Gilcomston was in the time of the renowned Dr. Kidd. In these backsliding days, however, the simple structure which we beheld has been demolished and replaced by a church which, although somewhat short of the glory of Solomon's Temple, has occasioned agony in

the mind of Parson Jacob Primmer. Jacob's righteous soul, aflame against altars, has compelled him to make a journey from a coal-mining district in Fifeshire to Kincardine O'Neil, to warn and purge the Presbytery thereof from participation in the iniquity of allowing to be placed in Crathie Kirk an ornate communion table of marble in place of timber in memory of our late sovereign King Edward VII.

We crossed the Dee at this point in order to look at the castellated building which then occupied part of the site of Balmoral Castle, and to proceed westward to Braemar through Ballochbuie Forest. When we reached Glen Gelder, however, the sight of Lochnagar was so attractive, and it was, seemingly, within such easy distance, that we determined to deviate and climb that mountain. As a preliminary, and as the water of the Gelder was so clear and sparkling and so refreshingly inviting, I stripped and had a delightful bath; my companion ought to have joined me, but refrained. Lochnagar, we supposed, was only two or three miles at the most south of us, so we confidently walked on, keeping along the east bank of the stream. By the time we had walked a couple of miles, however, we began to doubt the accuracy of our estimation of distances among "the Hielan' hills," as Lochnagar did not appear to be much nearer than when we set out for the top. But our ardour was still unabated, and we pushed on, and incidentally had the good fortune to see a large herd of red deer—although at some distance—in a valley trending westward between two high hills immediately to the north of Lochnagar. Shortly thereafter we heard a voice in the wilderness calling to us and we halted until the owner of the voice reached us. He proved to be one of Her Majesty's foresters; and having disclosed to him our intention, he very civilly directed us how to proceed. We were instructed to keep a track (pointed out to us) which runs along the west side of Conacheraig Hill till it is joined by a pony track from Alltnaguibhsaich Lodge in Glen Muick, and from that junction we were told we would have no difficulty in following a foot track westward,

passing on our right hand the Meikle Pap and so on to the summit of Lochnagar.

The track pointed out we reached and loyally followed for some time, but, tempted by what we supposed to be a near cut, we diverged from it to the right, crossed the Gelder, and landed in a hollow among large blocks of stones and too luxuriant heather struggling through which quite exhausted us. Here the conviction was borne in upon us that the Cac Carn Beag was beyond our reach, and that, perforce, we would be obliged to camp among the heather for a night, our only consolation being that the weather was dry and warm. Had rain or thick mist come down upon us, lightly clothed as we were, the consequences might have been serious, unless we had found our way back to Balmoral, for we were without map or compass. We lay among the heather for a considerable time, and, feeling refreshed, we resolved to try and reach the saddle between Creag Liath and Meall Coire na Saobhaidhe, and ultimately accomplished that. The sun by this time was declining in the west, but our course being now downward along the grassy bank of a burn which takes its rise near the summit of the hill last mentioned, and joins the burn from Lochan an Eoin of Lochnagar about a couple of miles above the Falls of Garbh Allt, we strictly kept along the course of these burns, in the hope that they would ultimately lead us to human habitations. The "snorl" in which we were landed by disregarding the instructions of the Glen Gelder forester gave us a never-to-be-forgotten lesson to avoid near cuts unless their terminations are visible from their beginnings.

By the time we reached the "Garrawalt"—the curiously corrupted Gaelic name of the Garbh Allt—(Rough Burn) and rough it is in all conscience—we were fagged out. Yet the picturesque falls and the enormous granitic boulders rolled down from Lochnagar in the channel of the stream attracted our attention, and we rested there sometime, admiring also the grand old pines in the forest of Ballochbuie. Strolling along the path from the Falls

towards the stately old bridge thrown across the Dee at Invercauld by General Roy and soothed by the silence and aroma of the forest and the gathering gloom of the aisles formed by the lofty pines bounding the path, whom should we meet but our touring Earl and his factor, apparently on their way to the Falls and both looking spick and span and as cool as cucumbers. Unfortunately for the temper of my companion, we attracted the attention of his lordship, who appeared to recognize us with a disdainful smile, which called forth from my fellow-tramp what I may term a democratic observation of the "Limehouse" order. His passion evaporated, however, when we came within view of the rocky promontory bristling with pines, called the Lion's Face, as mentally puzzling to us as was the skye terrier to the Englishman, who failed to make out which was the head and which was the tail of the animal. Similarly, we had to give up the problem of discovering the leonine likeness.

By the time we rounded Craig Coinnich the shades of evening were falling, and Braemar Castle looked an old grim fortalice of greater strength than it really is. Then, as now, there were two inns or hotels, the Invercauld Arms on the east bank of the Clunie, and the Fife Arms on the west or Auchindryne side of the stream; both then much smaller in size than the palatial buildings which now display the Farquharson and the Fife emblazonments respectively. We got shelter at the Invercauld Arms, then managed by Mrs. Clark, a most kindly, motherly lady, who at once put us at our ease and made us feel as if we had known her all our days. The dining-room, or at all events the room in which we had our tea—it was long past dinner-time—was upstairs. But such a high tea as we had!—chops from black-faced wedders, scones, cakes, honey, cranberry jam, "averin" jelly, and other accessories, and we dowered with appetites sharpened by keen mountain air! Never to be forgotten! Had anyone had the indiscretion to ask us then if life was worth living, we would have counted him a lunatic.

(To be continued)