



Photo by

SPITAL OF GLENSHEE.

D. R. Thom.

A TRAGEDY IN THE FOREST.

It was somewhat late in the season when three of us resolved to spend a few days among the hills in the wild and mountainous region where the counties of Aberdeen, Perth, and Forfar meet. A service of mail motor cars running from Blairgowrie to Spital of Glen-shee—a distance of twenty miles—breaks, to some extent, the isolation of these outlying parts, and brings the inhabitants into closer touch with what is going on in the outer world, and more especially in these days, with the great events that are being brought to an issue on the battlefields of the Continent. The weather conditions were perfect, and we had delightful walks through smiling valleys and up high, heather-clad rocky ridges, climbing several respectable peaks of 3000 to 3500 feet elevation, from whose summits fine views of the giant Cairngorms and the mountains of Perthshire and Inverness-shire were obtained. The sunshine was priceless—none the less so from its also being abundant.

One evening, in the Hotel smoking-room, we came across, in an old magazine, an account of a remarkable murder case tried in the High Court of Justiciary in the year 1754, in which a ghost played a leading part. The murdered man, Sergeant Arthur Davis, was in command of one of the numerous small pickets of soldiers which were stationed by the Government all over the disaffected areas of Scotland after the "Forty-five," for the purpose of checking any attempt at another rising. He was an active and intelligent soldier, and a bit of a dandy as well, for we are told that he generally went about with silver buckles on his shoes and silver buttons on his waistcoat, a gold ring on his finger, and a silver watch in his fob. Besides this, he was frequently heard to boast of his wealth in the shape of a store of golden guineas, which he carried about with him in a fine green silk purse. The double motive of plunder and the removal

of a hated enemy at last led to the undoing of the Sergeant. One day towards the end of September, 1749, he set off with a party of soldiers from Glen Ey to Glenshee on some official errand, and, on his return journey, broke off from his party in order to enjoy some shooting on the hills, for he was a keen sportsman. Never again was he seen alive, and though hill and dale were searched for weeks no trace of his remains was found. A considerable time afterwards, suspicion fell on two Highlanders as the murderers of the Sergeant. They were arrested and tried, but were acquitted by a sympathetic jury, who apparently distrusted the evidence of two witnesses who solemnly swore that in visions of the night they had seen and conversed with the ghost of the unhappy Sergeant Davis.*

The perusal of this ancient tale afforded half-an-hour's amusement, but what impressed the story on our minds was that our next day's ramble led us to the neighbourhood of the alleged murder, in the wild and rugged district lying between Glenshee and Glen Ey. We had descended from Glas Thulachan (3445) feet in the early afternoon, pursued by a fierce gale with flying mists, which had suddenly come sweeping up from the west, and we were wending our way towards the small sheet of water known as Loch-nan-Eun. We had for the time forgotten all about the murdered Sergeant and his ghost, although, doubtless, in some moss-hag or under some unsuspected cairn of stones in this desolate region, his mouldering bones are still lying. We were tramping steadily across the moor, when suddenly one of the party gave an exclamation of surprise, and pointed to a peculiar object a few hundred yards off our line of route. The shape and appearance were so remarkable that we at once diverged and made for it. As we got nearer,

* The ghost was said to have disclosed to one of the two witnesses the spot where its body was buried—a spot between Glen Christie and Glen Clunie, two or three miles from Dubrach; and there, at any rate, the remains of the Sergeant were ultimately found.

speculation as to what the thing could be got keener, for it looked as if it might be anything in the world. It seemed to project above the surface of the moor—a crumpled, twisted mass, partially covered with brown hair; and the whole entangled in what appeared to be a bundle of fir stakes. Presently we reached a scene of tragedy. It was not the skeleton of Sergeant Davis, but the decaying body of a splendid stag, which had been caught by the horns in the wires of a sheep fence, and had surrendered its life only after a desperate and prolonged struggle.

It was not difficult to conjure up the terrific scene. From the torn heather and turned-up ground, extending a dozen or more yards along the line of the broken fence; from the length of wire wound round and round the horns in a twisted wisp; from the iron stanchions of the fence wrenched from their places; and, above all, from the piteous position of the head, with upturned face and open mouth, the forelegs stretched as in a final effort to escape—one could see that the majestic creature had made a wild and desperate struggle for liberty against overwhelming odds. Yet, withal, there was something of grandeur in the final pose, in keeping with the character of the stag as Monarch of the Forest. Dignity and strength were clearly indicated by its attitude, although it had been baffled in its last grim fight; it was of the same stuff as the fighting men of the hills and glens of Scotland.

The stag had a striking head; we counted eleven points, but there may have been twelve—indeed, there should have been, for the animal had a royal look about it.

As we turned from this weird and unique sight, we heard the “roaring” of a stag in a distant corrie, while a large herd of hinds could be seen trooping along a ridge of the mountain.

We soon reached the little loch, which makes quite a pretty picture with its boat-house and bright blue water in a setting of brown heather. It is included in

the ample territory of the Farquharsons of Invercauld, and lies in the county of Perth, but the county march with Aberdeen and the Duff territory is distant only a few hundred yards beyond the loch.

Our day ended with a rough scramble along the steep, rocky banks of the Allt Easgaidh, which comes tumbling down from Loch-nan-Eun, and then a long tramp down the pleasant grassy meadows of Glen Tatnich. As we rounded the end of the Glen, a splendid harvest moon was flooding Glenshee with golden light, and crowning with a halo the venerable moss-grown stones on Diarmid's tomb.

M., T., R.

[The sensational story of the murder of Sergeant Davis, who was quartered with a party of eight soldiers at Dubrach, near Inverey, and of the alleged appearance of the Sergeant's ghost to two of the witnesses, has attracted much attention from time to time. Sir Walter Scott, for instance, was greatly interested in it, and the ghostly visitation has been dealt with by Hill Burton, Andrew Lang, and others. An account of the trial appears in "The Black Kalendar of Aberdeen," and the "Singular Ghost Story" formed the subject of an article in the "Aberdeen Magazine," 1831-2. The notorious case made its appearance once again in the "Twelve Scots Trials," by Mr. William Roughead, W.S., published in 1913.—EDITOR.]