

GLEN TILT AND GLEN DEE AS DESCRIBED  
70 YEARS AGO.

THE *Dublin University Magazine* for 1851 contains a rather interesting article under the somewhat odd title of "Slingsby in Scotland." It professes to be by Jonathan Slingsby—possibly a pen-name—and is descriptive of a tour in Scotland made with two companions who are designated Jack Bishop and Absalom Freke, names that look fictitious. Mr. "Slingsby" and his friends appear to have entered Scotland at Glasgow and then to have made their way to Crianlarich by Dumbarton, Balloch, Loch Lomond, and Glen Falloch. Incidentally, on passing the Leven, they saw "a couple of dozen young lassies washing clothes in its stream, with their garments tucked up tidily about them"—a practice, we suspect, which fell into desuetude long ago. There are occasional references also, to what apparently struck the "Sassenachs" as the novel character of the food provided. At one place they partook of venison steaks and salmon "fresh and curly," and at the inn at Crianlarich they were "refreshed upon the flesh of a venerable patriarchal boar, cereal paste-board called 'bannocks,' and blazing hot whisky with the true smell and flavour of the peat upon it."

The greater part of the article is devoted to Blair Atholl and Deeside, and thence through Glen Dee to Aviemore. Blair Atholl was reached by way of Aberfeldy and Dunkeld, and there the travellers found Lord John Russell *en route* for Balmoral. We are told that he had a game of "ducks and drakes" near the inn—flinging flat stones along the surface of the mill-pond—a rather singular revelation of the diversions of a Prime Minister on holiday, particularly of one ordinarily so stiff and "perjink" as Lord John. At the inn at

Blair Atholl our travellers foregathered with an artist who accompanied them through Glen Tilt, on the attempted closing of which the author remarks "One might as well close the Straits of Gibraltar," thereupon bursting into verse—

There's famed Glen Tilt right in our way,  
A path of blood and danger ;  
For Atholl's breekless duke doth keep  
The pass against the stranger.\*

The Queen's Well is thus described—

In lone Glen Tilt a trickling stream  
Steals through the heathery mountain,  
And, gathering on the moss-crowned rock,  
Leaps down—a tiny fountain.  
The mountaineer that stalks the deer,  
From steep Beinn Ghlo returning,  
His thirst allays from out that fount,  
When summer's heats are burning.

The travellers proceed upwards, and fall in with an aged forester, Archibald Macbeth. The author, returning to prose, says :—

On our right Beinn a' Ghlo reared its steep, grassy sides into the heavens, towering high above the neighbouring eminences—meet home for the eagle, which builds her eyrie on its summit ; down its sides, furrowed by the channels of many a winter torrent, the wild deer were browsing, while at the base the kestrel swooped upon her prey.

Not an eagle, however, could they see till the forester came to their help :—

"Weel, there's ane that my auld een can see ower yon mountain . . . See how he hangs richt ower the craig, wi' his wings spread oot like sails ; ye nicht fancy he was asleep in the air. Now, now, man ! Watch what a swoop he'll mak . . ." With a sudden dash, he shot downwards on his victim, and was lost to our sight. I involuntarily repeated Byron's fine lines :—

\* See "The Battle o' Glen Tilt," *C.C.J.*, iii, 185 and "Right of Way in Glen Tilt," *C.C.J.*, vi, 315.

Even as an eagle overlooks his prey,  
 And for a moment poised in middle air,  
 Suspends the motion of his mighty wings,  
 Then swoops with his unerring beak.

“Na, na! sir,” (said Archie), “ye’re wrang there; the eagle clutches wi’ his claws, and no wi’ his beak, ony creature that he pounces upon, but he’ll tear a young leveret or a grouse wi’ his beak, nae dōubt, when aince he has it in his talons.” “But, Archie,” (said I), “the words I spoke were written by a great poet. “I dinna care gin they were writ by Rab the Ranter himsel’,” replied the forester, piqued at having his knowledge questioned; “I tell ye what I hae seen wi’ my ain een mony a time among the hill-tops and in the heather, and ye maunna believe ony sic bletherin’.”

At the Falls of Tarff they parted with Archie, who warned them that they would likely fall in by and bye with his son Donald, a young forester who would demand if they had the duke’s permission for going through the glen; he was not a man, Archie went on to say, to be bribed or threatened with impunity. The bridge had been removed by the duke, and the stream was crossed by the travellers upon the precarious footing which occasional stones in the river afforded.

In the distance we espied a tall, loose-limbed, and heavily-made young man, who at once made up to us, and asked us if we had got the duke’s permission to pass. Bishop immediately proposed to show fight, and I know not what might have been the result, for Donald Macbeth was not the sort of fellow that one could dispose of without trouble, when, to our surprise, Absalom stepped forward and exhibited a written pass signed by the duke. And so we departed shaking the dust off our feet as a testimony against this ungracious laird. I wish, by the way, he could hear the people of the neighbouring properties speak of him with the freedom which we did. He would learn with what mixed feelings of dislike and ridicule his conduct in relation to Glen Tilt is regarded, and might, for shame sake, if from no other cause, abandon the enforcement of a right which, even if it do exist, it is so unworthy to insist on.

The Linn of Dee was passed by without comment; and we have this incident at Braemar:—

As we limped up the street of Castletown of Braemar, somewhat foot-sore and weary, we spied a travelling carriage, which passed

us and dashed up to the door of the principal inn (Invercauld Arms). "There goes the Premier," said I.

The surrounding scenery was much admired :—

Here one sees the perfection of Highland scenery in all its sublimity and its boldness, its beauty of hill and wood and water. The entire stretch of country is densely wooded, chiefly with dark pine and fir, which crown the summit of the mountain range, while the cliffs at various reaches of the road hang beetling above us. Pause a moment now at that break in the plantations by the road-side. What a picture is spread out for your contemplation ! The broad, bright, rapid river, flowing between fertile pasture fields, lies beneath you ; beyond, the ground, undulating in forms of diversified beauty, is crowned with deep, rich woods . . . I never remember to have seen anything finer in contrast or intrinsic beauty than the hues of the trees. . . Amid the still green branches you see here and there a pendant spray, which, blighted earlier than its fellows, has turned to gold and looks like laburnum ; then there is the oak with its bright red leaf, the beech with its burnished copper, the mighty fern leaf, now a beautiful orange, and reminding one of some plant of tropical vegetation.

After a visit to Balmoral, the tour is resumed, Aviemore being the next objective :—

If one were limited to a single day's tour in the Highlands of Scotland, and could have himself placed at any starting-point he might prescribe, I do not know of any day's journey which could afford so many varied exhibitions of the characteristics of Highland scenery as that which conducts the traveller from Castletown Braemar, through Glen Dee, to the inn at Aviemore. Flocks of black-legged sheep were grazing on the green pastures through which the river coiled its lazy length, now hid in groves, now gliding into sunshine ; while, mingled with the gentle bleating of the sheep, came the sounds of the bagpipe from a hunting lodge in the hills above. After crossing the Victoria Bridge, a steep, rugged, bridle road leads by Mar Lodge, over the mountains amongst the roots and stumps of the trees that once formed a mighty forest. A walk of two hours brought us upon Glen Lui, a wide, open valley, bounded by low-retiring heath-covered hills. Another hour along the stream, and we are in a perfect amphitheatre of hills, wild and bleak, out of which are two foot-tracks, one to the right, leading to the sublime solitude of Glen Avon, the other, which we pursued, traversing the base of Ben Muich Dhui by a steep and rugged ascent. . . In Glen Dee, wild, bleak and desolate, a black wall of rock, some thousand feet high, rose right in front, and seemed as if about to topple down upon us. Our path, if such it may be

called, as we wound between Ben Muich Dhui and Cairn Toul, lay over masses of rock, torn down from the mountain tops, which were hid in mists from our sight. I have seldom experienced a more profound sense of utter solitude than when traversing this cold, gloomy, silent region, into which the sun seemed unable to penetrate with light and warmth.

At length we ascend through the narrowing pass over masses of rock, beneath and through which the puny rills of Dee trickle, and winding under the lofty Cairngorm mountain, Ben Muich Dhui, we cautiously scrambled over the piles of rock which, barricading the entrance, are called the Wells of Dee, and soon gained the summit, and saw in the distance the dark mass of what had been once the forest of Rothiemurchus. It cost us yet many an hour of toil through piles of huge boulders, and the tangled forest, till we came suddenly upon Loch an Eilan, a lovely placid lake embosomed in trees, and set as it were, in a cincture of dark rocks. And soon to the oasis in the desert—the solitary but most excellent inn of Aviemore.

The following day a start was made for Inverness, where the party separated.