

A CASE OF FORBEARANCE.

By J. C. ORMEROD, M.A.

IT had been raining in Braemar day and night for six days, but now on the seventh the floods had been called off, and the Sunday was perfect. We were bound for the Cairngorms, and as we swung up the glen he would be a poor sort whose heart didn't rise up inside him. It was good to see the river still in spate, all foaming white and amber, good to hear the wind in the firs, and to pick up the scents the hot morning sun was drawing out of the blaeberreries. As we rounded the last bend of the stream and the high ground came into view and our way up it showed out clear, we called a halt and sat down on the heather. We lighted our pipes and I told him how it surprised me to find an Auld Kirk elder in sic a place at sic an hoor, and he replied that he made it a rule to be out of his pew just the two Sabbaths in the year—it kept a man from getting narrow-minded, he said. I was wondering whether a change had come over Scotch theological views, or whether he was only having his little gibe at the Englishman, when he added, "Besides, it's only on the Sunday you're sure of being safe from Donald Grant's gillie." At that, there was nothing for it but to ask him who Donald was and who the gillie was; and as we sat there under Beinn a' Bhuid, he told me.

Donald Grant, it seemed, was a schoolmaster who had been kept back from entering the ministry by

theological difficulties. He was on holiday in Braemar, and they had been having our kind of weather, the usual thing in August, but on the very last day of his holidays the change had come, and Grant had set off on this same walk. He'd made an extra early start so that he might get well ahead of any deer-stalking parties, and he was just saying to himself that a man could have even the Highlands to himself, if only he would get up early enough, when as he sighted the bothy at the top of the glen, he saw a gillie standing on the very same spot that we were sitting on. He knew him at once by the hideous pinky tweed with the brown check in it. It was Ian Macpherson, a character familiar to folk down the valley. So it looked as if Donald Grant was in for trouble after all.

Macpherson strode across and put himself right in front of Grant, blocking his way—he was a big fellow too—and for a minute or so they sized each other up without saying a word. At last the gillie said it was a braw morning they'd got, and where did he think he was going the day? Grant told him, and in detail. He was going round An Diollaid there, up the stalkers' path, and then on to the top of the Ben, and he would be for a look at the corries there, and a fine sight they would be sure enough with the sun bringing all the green out of them. Then he would make over the North Top, and if his legs lasted out, he wouldn't be surprised if he finished up with Ben A'an. One of the finest walks in the Cairngorms, too—he knew every inch of it. Macpherson listened to all this, and then told Grant he was of a mind he was mistaken, and was thinking he wouldn't be going there at all. "Mind ye," he said, "it's no what I would call exactly safe. They're oot shooten o'er they hills, and ye'll maybe be getting a bullet in your wame." To which Grant had answered that he'd take his chance of that all right—of course it was a pretty remote one—and he'd better be moving on.

But the gillie never moved a step out of the way, not he. "Ye'll ken Davie Ogilvie?" he said after a while. "That's the head gamie as is over all the Duke's gillies. Well, he's put me here from Monday morning to Saturday night, and it's my job, by fair means or foul, to stop you or the likes of you, from going up any of them hills yonder." Now Grant was a chap whose temper wasn't his strong point, and he asked the gillie what he thought his little game was. Was he after stopping him? Then let him try it. He knew as well as he did that there was no law of trespass, not in Scotland, and if he just dared to lay a hand on him, he'd be hanged if he wouldn't have him up for assault. He was well within his rights, and he was going on. Hadn't he been waiting down in Braemar there for a week on the watchout for a day like this, and it had rained for twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four, and now he'd got his day and he was taking it. And he moved a step forward, and told the gillie he'd thank him to step out of the way.

Well, this time Macpherson did move out of his way right enough, and Grant marched past, the law on my side in every stride of him. He'd gone some twenty yards or so up the hill, when the gillie called after him, "Come you down alongside o' me till I tell you," he called out. "I want a word wi' ye." Grant came half of the distance back, and the gillie went the other half forward. "Man," he said; "it's this way. Dae ye no see yon hoose yonder doon the glen?" And he pointed to a house standing on a little rising ground at the end of the valley, so placed that it commanded a view of the approaches to all the mountains round about. "Well," the gillie continued, "Davie Ogilvie is just now sitting in the front room of yon house. And he's got his telescope to his eye, and he's seen you and me talking. Now if you go up that hill yonder, this is what'll happen on Saturday night when he hands me o'er my siller:

'Ian Macpherson,' he'll tell me, 'last Wednesday you let a man through on to Beinn a' Bhuid, and there's you paid up. I'll no be requiring your services ony mair. Man, ye're sacked.' That's just the way of it," the gillie wound up. And now, you must just please yourself. Go on up yon hill if you like."

Donald Grant had been meant for the ministry, and if there was one thing he disliked, it was being put in the wrong on a question of conduct. He weighed the case up for a full minute. This was his last morning, and wouldn't the green corries with the little black lochan lying at the bottom be a bonny sight just now? But he turned his back on it all, and without another word but just one—"Damn Davie Ogilvie"—he set off down the glen the way he had come.

And that was the gillie my friend didn't want to meet on the way up Beinn a' Bhuid. As we slipped our shoulders through the straps of our rucksacks again, I told him that though we'd missed the morning service, I was obliged to him for a sermon. "And a better one than most," he replied. "And now for the best foot forward, and at the cairn on the top we'll have the psalm."