

AN EXPEDITION TO CAIRNGORM

This charming, and typically Victorian description of an early ascent of Cairngorm, was written by William Grant Stewart. It appeared in his (now rare) "Lectures on the Mountains" published in 1860. Stewart was a native of Strathspey who, following in a family tradition, became factor to the Earls of Seafield and latterly county Clerk of Inverness-shire. His "Popular superstitions... of the Highlanders" (1823 and 1851) and keen interest in ghosts and witchcraft earned him the title of 'Bogles'. SANDY ANTON

Among the fashionable crowds of amateurs, artists, and tourists, who lately wended their way to the Highland mountains, a gay party of tourists, bound for the far-famed mountain, Cairngorm, arrived opposite to it on the Highland road, on the forenoon of a fine summer day. A few straggling clouds hovered about on its sides; but the summit of the mountain was then clear, the sun shining brilliantly on its crowning peaks. The party, youthful, gay, and energetic, and of the order of English and Irish nobility, consisted of a gay colonel (Cadogan), a son of the emerald isle; a gallant major (Strutt), who had served with the colonel at Sebastopol, as their hirsute appendages indicated; and two lively and lovely young ladies, the Hon. Misses Juliet and Matilda Strutt, sisters of the major; with a lady's-maid and coachman or groom. The love of fame is as strong in the breast of woman as that of glory in the heart of man; and the ladies were seized with an eager desire to ascend Cairngorm, as a feat which might astonish and amuse the old governor and family at home, having along with them photographic and drawing apparatus for taking views, which would enable them to give graphic sketches of "the land of blue mountains, green forests, and heroes," and hoping to find, and take along with them a lot of the brilliant Cairngorm crystals, as trophies. And gillies and ponies accustomed to the expedition were in instant requisition. Two such men, with shelties sure and steadfast, were open to engagement for a "customary consideration"—a class of men far superior in respect of education and intelligence to the common gillies of other countries. "Pray," says the colonel, "how many miles do you count it from here to the top of the mountain?" "Cannot say exactly," answered the guide, "as the road is not measured; but it is a good many miles." "Half-a-dozen miles?" says the major. "Ay, it is all that, and a bittack" (Note: A Highlandman's bittack may be several miles, according to considerations). "How may the weather be on the mountain?" says Miss Juliet. "Oh, that is hard to say, Mattam, he is so near the clouds," says Donald. The ponies and saddles being provided and examined, and, along with the photographic apparatus, creature comforts such as could be supplied at the good little inn of Alvie, being packed into a basket, John the groom, a burly specimen of the English footman, full of beef and beer, was appointed the commissary; and the lady's-maid lively and frisky, volunteered to accompany John, who was not a married man, with

shawls, etc., for the ladies. Crossing the Spey in a boat, the ladies, with wide-rimmed hats on their heads, to protect them from the sun, mounted their ponies, and, under the guidance of their guides, took the way to wild Glenmore and Cairngorm. Arrived at Glenmore, its magnificent basin-like form attracted their artistic admiration. To quote the language of an eloquent author, Dr. McCulloch, which has been often quoted "Everywhere is seen rising young woods of various ages, promising, when centuries shall have passed away, to restore to the valley its former honours. But it is the wreck of the ancient forest which arrests all the attention, and which renders Glenmore a melancholy—more than a melancholy—a terrific spectacle. Trees of an enormous height, which have escaped alike the axe and the tempest, are still standing, stript by the winds even of their bark; and, like gigantic skeletons, throwing far and wide their white and bleached bones to the storms of heaven. While others, broken by the violence of the gales, lift their split and fractured trunks in a thousand shapes of destruction, or still display some knotted and tortuous branches, stretched out in sturdy and fantastic forms of defiance to the whirlwind and the winter. It is one wide image of death, as if the angel of destruction had passed over the valley." A scene of such picturesque grandeur, the party felt disposed to have photographically sketched; and the ladies called for their apparatus. But it appeared that John, and Martha, the lady's-maid, had already evinced symptoms of the fagging order. It was some time before they appeared; and when they did appear, their flushed faces and "heaving flanks" gave unmistakable signs of considerable distress. The rough outlines of a sketch of Glenmore having been taken, the parties lubricated, according to their needs and inclinations, from the contents of the basket; and new dispositions were made for ascending the mountain.



A stout staff, to assist in maintaining his vertical equilibrium, was cut for John the commissary, who, for various reasons of expediency, as well as humanity, was eased of the drawing apparatus and basket by the guides. "Jack Falstaff," as he was now facetiously designated by the colonel, and his companion Martha, whom the colonel designated Mrs. Ford, were cautioned, as likely to be in the rear, to mark and follow the newly-made tracks of the horses, from which they were not to diverge, for fear of swamps and precipices. The party, continuing to ascend about midway to the top, entered into a zone or belt of mist, which gradually ascended from the vale below. The phenomena

presented by this investiture were strikingly picturesque and beautiful. The cambric-like veil which enclosed them reflected prismatic colours like those of the rainbow, produced by the rays of the sun; while here and there, large rends, like tears in a large veil, occasioned by the action of currents of air in passing over air—producing gorges—disclosed, as it were, at a large window, a magnificent view of the winding silver Spey, the wooded cone of Kinrara, the rugged rock of Craig Ellachie, (the crest and ward-hill of the Clan of Grant) and, in the far west, Craigubhie, (the ward-hill of the Clan Chattan Macpherson) exhibiting a map-like view of the far-famed and romantic countries of Strathspey and Badenoch—“land of mountains, glens, and heroes.”

A view taken out of this “castle in the air” was deemed a valuable acquisition; and the delighted party held on, and soon alighted at the highest pinnacle of Cairngorm, where, as time was short and the day far spent, sketching operations were immediately entered on by all hands. Scarcely had they done so, however, when the sun was obscured by a dark, dense cloud, which hung over the north-west shoulder of the mountain; and the eyes of the guides and gentlemen were attracted towards another cloud, of a whitish, lurid colour and castellated form, the resemblance of which to various forts—such as Edinburgh and Stirling Castle—attracted the fancy of the warriors. The cloud, slowly moving from south to north, seemed to occasion to the gillies considerable anxiety and uneasiness; and when questioned on the subject, said that the white was a thunder-cloud, and the dark one in the rear was a rain-cloud, and that if the two met there would be dreadful thunder and rain. The officers, from their experience of tropical thunder, concurring with the gillies, and seeing the contingency, apprehended by the lads an imminent one warned the ladies of the coming calamity, and urged them to pack up their alls, and prepare for an immediate flight to the lower world. Just as the ladies were mounted, and the parties commenced their march, the foremost limb of the approaching lurid cloud came into contact with the dark cloud over the gully which divides Cairngorm from the Badenoch range of mountains, and suddenly a flash of lightning flared on the eyes of the party, instantly followed by a Grampian peal of thunder, which must be heard to be described. From the spectator’s proximity to the warring elements, his ear was assailed by a loud crash, of a metallic sound, as if a thousand hammers were simultaneously struck on a sheet of iron, in one awful crash—followed by a roar resembling the pouring of a torrent of water on a huge burning furnace—accompanied by rumbling and roaring, as if tearing to pieces the heavens and the earth; and this awful explosion finds echoes in the rocks, corries, and caverns of Glenavon, rolling and reverberating along, like a naval salute at a grand review (such as greeted our gracious sovereign at the French fort of Cherbourg), until the sound declines into growling groans at the extreme point of the mountain range. “By Jove,” says the colonel, “that is equal to Sebastopol, Harry.” “It is so,” says Harry. But this peal which we have

described was a slight one compared to the others which followed—for the said two clouds, having fully joined battle, like two giants or gladiators fighting in mortal strife—the lightning flew about in all directions; and the explosions and reverberated continuations thereof, for a time dwelt on the ear, in one continuous roar. Presently the rain, which, like a waterspout, poured down from the first point of action, had its area widely extended. Our party was soon overtaken; not by a shower of rain, for there was no wind or sufficient fall to disseminate the broken clouds into particles or drops—it was just a waterspout, in proof of which the ladies' stirrups and feet gushed water like the leaden spouts of a house under a heavy fall of rain. The water foamed gurgling out of the shoes of the officers and gillies; but, noble spirits all, not even the tenderly brought-up ladies gave way to useless fears or lamentations. Committing themselves to the Great Shepherd, who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb (presiding over the thunder-storm, and directing its bolts, so that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without Divine permission and consent), they trusted implicitly in Divine providence and protection, exhibiting, even in this extremity, an interest in the fate of the two servants. As they descended, the gentlemen kept singing out and reconnoitering, as well as they could, through the misty, dark atmosphere; and at last they heard a faint responsive shout, and soon they came on two objects resembling "two bundles of wet fish," as John Falstaff afterwards described himself and companion. "Halloa," says the colonel, "what made you and Maddy stop here?" "Oh," says John, "we thought we were both done for. Martha tumbled down and nearly broke her harm, and I busted my clothes a-helping her. Please God, master, if I get out of this 'orrid ills,' I shall never again try such a 'controversy.'" On a personal inspection, it was found that neither John or Martha could maintain a vertical position. Chilled with wet and fear, they were quite incapable of locomotion. In this perplexity, one of the gillies, fertile in expedients, and accustomed to such difficulties, suggested that the two ladies should allow themselves to be carried on the backs of Hemish and himself. That the "monkey" (meaning John, the "flunkey"), on whom he darted a contemptuous look, and the maid should be placed on the ponies, and that the gentlemen should keep them from falling off. That, by this plan, they would take a more abrupt and direct road to a farmer's house at Druiside, at no great distance. To this plan the ladies gently demurred, on the ground of cruelty to the gillies, and doubting the decency and propriety of the proposed mode of conveyance for themselves. But to the first objection, as to the "weights and measures" of the ladies, the gillies declared that "light ladies" were nothing to them; and the second objection was obviated on the part of the officers, by stating that Miss Nightingale, of Crimean celebrity, and others of the lady nurses, were carried on men's shoulders.

In making arrangements for this new procession, there was much matter for the artist and the moralist. In respect of the dresses of the parties, the heavy rain had, as far as regarded the head-gear, levelled all distinctions. The

hats of the gentlemen had assumed the cut and figure of the steeple hats of Charles I. The broad-brimmed felt hats of the ladies had assumed the shape of a *sac-de-nuit*, or Canterbury bells, the rims hanging down to the tips of their noses, to the great detriment of their visual faculties; and as to the camp followers, their Golgothas were entirely fitted to the figures of their skulls; and it was observed that the personal habiliments of John and Martha had suffered much dilapidation at the parts used by persons walking "on all-fours." The party being now put in their respective positions—ladies strapped on gillies' backs by their plaids, and the monkey and the maid placed on horseback—reminding us forcibly of the revolution in the social order of things expressed in the tenth chapter of Ecclesiastes, verse 7 ("I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants on the earth")—the party, led by the sure-footed guides, followed by the goat-footed ponies, descended zig-zag, General Wade's kind of traverses, which evoked many squeaks from Martha, and exclamations from John, as the ponies sidled along, sagaciously following their master's footsteps. At length, from an eminence overlooking the Drui, those who could see, observed the signs of a human dwelling. This cheering sight revived the colonel's poetical and vocal powers, singing "I knew by the smoke which so gracefully curled," &c.

In view of the humble dwelling which must form for a night the ladies' quarters, they anxiously inquired of the gillies as to the landlady's character, manner, and habits; and they were well pleased to learn she had been for a long time a servant of the Duchess of Bedford, (a sister of the great and good Duke of Gordon), who for many years had resided at the Doune of Rothymurchus, and whose active benevolence, kind and charitable disposition, diffused habits of civilization and morality among the people of the place, so that, as Hemish said, she knew how to behave to "high ladies," being a cleanly, kindly, clever woman.

Arrived at the domicile, a peal of dogs announced the arrival of the strangers, summoning to the doors the inmates of the house. Donald and Heumas, led by the good wife into the best apartment of the house, deposited each his precious little burden in arm-chairs by the fire-place. Miss Matilda, who had been a silent sufferer from spasmodic pains, occasioned by her hydropathic treatment, suddenly became pale as a lily. Her heart, like a piece of over-strained mechanism relieved from the undue pressure, stopped its motions. Her head fell on her bosom in a fainting condition; but she was in the hands of a good physician. Producing a crystal bottle of whisky, full of lemons, cloves, and other cordials, the good wife insisted on the young ladies taking each a portion of the contents, which they, under cogent reasoning, consented to do. Committing the maid to the care of her girl, to be treated in a closet, the good wife proceeded to operate on the ladies. Raising a blazing fire of dry peats, and brushwood, she drew from a chest of drawers a pair of clean white blankets, which she toasted at the fire, placing them and clean pillowslips on the bed in the apartment. Barring out intruders and eaves-

droppers, she next proceeded to divest the ladies of their dripping habiliments, the drippings from which were flooding the apartment. With many ejaculations of pity and sympathy at the soaked state of the ladies' clothing, as "hoot—hoot—oich—oich—O the poor dear lambs"—and such like comments, she consigned those two blushing mortal angels "naked as to the earth they came," into the warm fleecy blankets, and in respect of Miss Matilda's internal pains, of which she got a hint from her sister, she next introduced from another chest a milk-white fleece of wool, which had lately been washed and dried by her own hands, and which, toasted to the fire, she wrapt around the loins of Miss M., who was neither able or willing to offer resistance to the landlady's salutary operations. Having then got the girl to hand in to her at the door of the "sanctus sanctorum" a kettle of boiling water, and other materials, she produced a canister of bohea and a black tea-pot, and by toasting the pot by the fire, to aid the process of infusion, she administered cup after cup of the reviving beverage to her patients, and all pains and penalties speedily gave place to pleasant feelings and sensations. In the but end of the house, the warriors, the gillies, and the monkey, as the gillies called him, were making merry over the remains of Falstaff's commissariat, consisting of a bottle of whiskey, some meat, and bread and cheese. Falstaff's reviving faculties favoured the company with his picture of the "great eruption and volcanar of the ill, which he said was like mount Hetna, of which he had seen a picture,—vomiting thunder, fire, and brimstone,—at the spot where he and Maddy lay." At length the colonel and his messmate, the major, presented themselves at the casement of the ladies' bower, to talk of war and glory. "Pray, ladies," says the gallant Hibernian, "may I take the liberty to ax if you are alive, of which Falstaff has great doubts." "O yes, and well," responded the piano voices within. "Well, by Jove," said the colonel, "you are bricks, as we say,—two noble brave-hearted heroines whose courageous conduct in the field to-day entitles you to the Victoria cross, and at any rate, in the mean time, Harry and I have conferred on you honorary titles, commemorative of this day's proceedings. Juliet is henceforth to be known and called by the style and title of Lady Glenmore, and Tilda by that of Lady Cairngorm, names in which you were baptized by holy water from heaven, by Jove." A burst of joy from the ladies expressed how much they appreciated those Highland honours—memorials of the most romantic incident in their lives, and which were hailed by them with joyful feelings of satisfaction. Both the colonel and major enjoined on them not to sleep in their Cairngorm sac-de-nuit, or any part of their mountain garbs; admonitions which the cherubs assured them had been fully attended to by the kind hostess. But they said nothing about the order of the Golden Fleece conferred by her on Miss Tilda. Promising to return to them early next morning, with ample supplies of outward and inward creature comforts, and wishing them a long sleep and pleasant dreams, the warriors, with many hearty cacchinations, evoked by colloquies betwixt the gillies and the monkey, (who, full of exclamations, expressive of pains and casualties,

was placed upon one of the shelties,) wended their way to the inn of Inverdrewrie, leaving it to the landlady to complete her operations in peace.

Her next process was to prepare her patients for a long sleep, by administering to them a sleeping potion, which she assured them was superior to any of Doctor O—d's medicines. A cup of "athole brose," composed of mountain honey lubricated with mountain dew—the Highlander's nectar, was prepared for each of the ladies, who were partly persuaded and partly compelled, to swallow the ambrosial food; and having combed and thoroughly dried the ladies' hair, and wrapping their heads in snow-white mutches, the landlady left her patients merry and amused in their place, to prepare the person of Martha, the maid, in her closet. Worthy Martha was a different patient from the ladies. From the crown of her head to the sole of her foot, she averred herself to be full of wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores, which the landlady proceeded to dress *secundum artem*, and having without objection, administered to her a large dose of the "ambrose," well lubricated with the mountain dew, the landlady next proceeded to her laundry operations to get the ladies dresses washed and got up for the morning.

It was long of the day next morning before the eyes of the ladies were opened to a sense of their situation; and when they did awaken, it was to a sense of lively buoyancy and refreshed feeling, with no achings or sense of mortality. A cup of bohea completed this agreeable sensation, and the dresses, got up to perfection by the hands of Mrs. M. and her sister, who had received beneficial lessons at the laundry of the Doune, were put on tables at their bedside, and Martha, having been made up by Mrs. M. and her sister, with many ejaculations, expressive of her personal ailments, proceeded to assist the young ladies at their toilet, presenting to them a lively personification of Kate Dalrymple, in the old song—A "wriggle in her walk had Kate Dalrymple," &c. As she with a hirple ambled along, she exclaimed,—“Glory to the Almighty, ladies, that I see you to-day both alive.” “That we are, and well, Martha; how do you do?” “Well,” responded Martha, “if my poor mother knowd what I suffered yesterday, I am sure the poor woman would have cried her bellyful. I am sure, my ladies, going to the top of them ‘orrid ‘ills is a temptation of Providence and evil spirits; and so John and I thought, for he said a volcaner had bust out, pouring out thunder-fire, like mountains in foreign parts, and so John and I got quite spifflicated at your being all swallowed up, and trying to escape down the ‘ill we got vast tumbles, and my knees and helbows, and other parts of me are scorified black and blue, and would have been mortified, had not the good woman rubbed them with honey and spirits, which she said would stop petrification. And then, all my pours (pores) shut up—I cannot draw my breath thro’ my nostrils. “O,” says Matilda, “take courage Mat; you will soon get over all that, and you will look back on your affair of yesterday as good sport.” “A jaunt of pleasure, indeed, Madam—very like a whale. Well, expected pleasure often turns out pains, and I suppose that is what prevents so many, high and low, from marrying.” “Well,” says

Juliet, "I suppose you and John talked a good deal on that subject yesterday, for you had a good opportunity." "O Lord, forgive you, Miss Juliet,—hih' hih' I think we soon got another subject to think on,—not where we was to be bedded, but where we was to be buried, for we thought we was to be buried among those 'orrid 'ighlanders," said Martha. "Aye, and 'buried' you would be," responded Juliet, with some ire, "if it were not for those noble Highlanders, who rescued you from a watery grave. But the Highlanders are so proud, you would not be buried among them, but in the strangers' corner, in the church-yard." "Marry-come-up," said Mat "what makes Highlanders better than other folk, I wonder; is it their kilts and brimstone?" "No," responds



Miss Juliet, "it is nature's gift, giving them courageous hearts and noble minds, brave as lions, and meek as lambs." "Well, well, ladies," says Mat, "you know better; it is no for me to argufy the pint in this place, but if I am spared to see my old mother, and Auldworth church, where I was christened, I will make a vow I will never leave old England again."

While their toilet operations and the foregoing conversation were going on, in the ladies' apartment, Mrs. M. was busy cooking the breakfast, the component parts of which were gathered at an early hour in the morning. Two tables of the cottage size were covered with spotless linen, on which were placed solids and liquids of a Highland breakfast in profusion, comprehending game, kippered salmon, fresh salmon, burn trouts, venison collops, eggs, honey, wild berry jelly, fruits from the mountains of various kinds, and on the side-table the morning bitters of three kinds waiting the field-officers. To breakfast the ladies addressed themselves, and had fared sumptuously, when a peal of the dogs brought out the inmates to witness the advent of the officers—Falstaff, the monkey, doing duty over piles of ladies' boxes, baskets, &c., and faithful Donald and Heumas, with their not less faithful quadrupeds. The gallant colonel's favourite song, "Lesbia has a beaming eye," prevailed over the canine salutations; and the officers and ladies met with a joyous and cordial embrace. There was no occasion for asking for healths; for the colonel declared the ladies' eyes, cheeks, and dimples never appeared so killing and bewitching. While this agreeable badinage was going on the party took side notice of a pantomimic scene going on between John and Martha, in which each by manual signs indicated the seats of their personal damages, both before and behind. Proud of their quarters, the ladies invited the warriors to inspect their canteen and their fare, of which Mrs. M., with many curtseys, begged of them to partake; but having breakfasted in their own quarters, they accepted only a bumper of Mrs. M.'s "Balm of Gilead" and some beautiful mountain berries, called averans, or cloudberries. Here the officers observing a fishing-rod, jocularly proposed to go and catch some fish and Cairngorm stones, till the ladies had

finished their toilets, and were ready for the march. "O, gentlemen," says Mrs. M., "you dare say a few could be got if you wish for them." "Oh, delightful," exclaimed Lady Cairngorm; "a few of them will make me a happy woman." Several of the natives in the neighbourhood having such to dispose of, soon found a ready market for them.

In the preparations for departing, the ladies were profuse in their thanks, and each pressed a sovereign on Mrs. M.'s acceptance, which she decidedly declined, saying she never took money from gentle or simple for any hospitality in her power to offer, adding that the pleasure of relieving the ladies in their predicament was to her a sufficient reward. The ladies, finding her resolute, took another way of effecting their ends. They each insisted, in spite of the sinister looks of Martha, to press upon her acceptance a valuable shawl as keepsake, which she reluctantly received, saying she was too highly honoured, and doubly rewarded. The officers freely distributed 'bucksheesh' among the natives and children; and Lady Glenmore having taken the address of Mrs. M., parted from Inchdruie with feelings of sincere gratitude and affection. Mounting the cart, the monkey and Martha took the road to Inverdruie. The ladies mounted their favourite shelties, and the party, crossing the Spey in boats, arrived at Alvie Inn, where the horses and carriage were in a state of readiness, and the luggage stowed. The gillies, over and above their stipulated wages, having received from each of the ladies a sovereign, protested they were paid too much by far. John and Martha took their places in the driver's box, and the officers and ladies in the open carriage, starting for Inverness amidst the cheers of the gillies and spectators. The day was clear, and Cairngorm clearly open for inspection. The colonel insisted upon John's pointing out the place of his own and Mat's misfortunes; but no persuasion could induce them even to look at the 'horrid 'ill,' to which the warriors, by hand and hat, paid a parting salutation, to the great amusement of the ladies, and the horror of the 'monkey' and his companion.

