

CYCLING IN THE HIGH- LANDS.

[By PROFESSOR IVES—No. III.]

Fitz. had become possessed of a great yearning to reach Skye. The road, we were told, lay over two high hills, 1,200 and 900 ft. respectively. In addition to the rain we had still a strong head wind to face, so I suggested hiring a farmer's cart and lying down therein covered up with straw. But Fitz said that would not be manly, so we continued riding for a bit. Then the first hill was reached, and our slavery began. It was no use; we could not ride, so we walked. And we pushed at those machines over a road never made for cycling, while the wind increased in violence with every step we took, until, as we neared the top, its force absolutely stopped us, and a friendly shepherd, catching us up, good-naturedly hooked his crook on my machine, put his hand on the saddle of Fitz.'s, and thus, pulling one and pushing the other, assisted us over the crest. How it blew on that ridge, and how we hugged the inside of the track, afraid of being blown over the cliff! Worst of all, we had to walk down the other side, the road being quite unrideable. But the good shepherd trudged along with us for some miles, and tried to cheer us by telling us how much worse the next hill would be.

Glenelg was reached at last, and we learned that there was a steamer leaving for Skye that afternoon, so we elected to go by it. In the meantime we sheltered in a crofter's cottage. What a den—two rooms, nothing on the floor, one table, one bed, two broken chairs, an old clock (stopped), and an open peat fire. Here, sharing the place with pigs and fowls, lived a man, his wife, and six children, who, on this wretched day, were going about barefooted, and on the faces of two of whom could be plainly seen the fingermarks of man's grim enemy, Death. How they existed I know not. Their food, we learned, was chiefly oatmeal porridge and such milk as a wretched cow, standing outside, could give. Oh, the abject poverty that everything bespoke! What a romance the novelist could weave out of the threads of the woman's life's story which she gave us—a story of a short life of service in a Scotch town, the atmosphere of which did not agree with her health; of a return to her native place; of a marriage that only added more burdens of want to both; and of a struggle with sickness and poverty in their worst forms, without hope of improvement in the future.

When the steamer arrived it was so stormy that the boatmen would not attempt to take us on board (there was no jetty), and it left us. So we wheeled through the rain to Kyle-Rhea Ferry, and at last got over to Skye, and through a valley whose desolate and dreary aspect made our hearts sink, and over that terrible hill and—well, I don't like to think of all we went through that day, and I'll say no more about it. Sufficient that we at last reached Broadford more dead than alive. And as this Skye trip was all Fitzjames's foolish idea, I didn't speak to him any more that night. As I lay awake next morning I framed a solemn resolution. Hitherto my easy-going, genial disposition had permitted my companion to have the plan of route just as he wished, and my good nature had been imposed upon in consequence. But "even a worm will turn." So when he addressed me at breakfast with a remark that if the rain stopped we ought to go to some place a few miles off, which Sir Walter Scott has thus described—

Many a waste I've wandered o'er,
Clombe many a crag, cross'd many a moor,
But, by my halidame,
A scens so rude, so wild as this,
Yet so sublime in barrenness,
Ne'er did my wandering footsteps press. . . .

Here, above, around, below,
On mountain or in glen,
Nor tree, nor shrub, nor plant, nor flower,
Nor aught of vegetative power,

The weary eye may ken;
For all is rocks at random thrown,
Black waves, bare crags, and banks of stone.

—I told him that this folly had gone far enough; that we had seen enough of gloom and desolation; that it was quite time we

gave up travelling in the direction from which came all this wind and wet, and turned towards civilized districts; that I, at any rate, had some taste for refinement and comfort left; and that we had better get across to the other side of Scotland, away from this wet west wind, and then we should be more likely to get fine weather and cheerful sights. I was glad to find that my arguments bore due weight, so we left Skye with well-concealed regret, crossed the Strome ferry on the steamer, and started to ride for Inverness, some seventy miles away. My meteorological predictions proved to be wonderfully correct. The further we went the clearer became the sky and less the rainfall. What beautiful spots we saw that day! Pretty little Plocton had been passed, on the steamer, and on our bikes we passed cosy Strathcarron, chiefly inhabited by apparently comfortable crofters. We saw Auchnashellach, a lovely little village hidden amid deer forests; Loch Luichart, of dreary, desolate position; and Loch Garve, where I got off my machine to unsuccessfully chase a pretty young squirrel, and nearly got caught trespassing by a game-keeper, which I suppose would have meant transportation for poaching. Strathpeffer, the Spa of Scotland, with its well-planted streets, its mineral springs, and its fine houses; busy Dingwall, near where we obtained a splendid view of Cromarty Firth; and Kessok, where we took a wrong turning and went some miles astray, were also passed through. Finally Inverness was reached at 10 p.m. in broad daylight, with dry clothes, both of us feeling fit for further riding. I must not omit to mention the magnificent Rogie Falls near Garve, which we had stopped to photograph, and which, unlike many other so-called falls about which guidebooks raved, were really worth seeing. At supper Fitz-james said—

“The geological structure of the greater part of the country through which we have ridden to-day is of crystalline and metamorphic rock, consisting chiefly of gneiss and mica-slate, with granite, porphyry, and trap-rock.”

I said, “I beg your pardon.”

He repeated the observation. Then I looked at him in a pitying sort of manner, and mentioned that hitherto I had borne a blameless character, and that I wished to preserve it, and that I trusted that he would not use more language of that kind in my presence.

Inverness, capital of the Highlands, is composed of a gaol, a modern cathedral, a town hall, some fine Banks, hotels, and other buildings, and is beautifully situated on the River Ness. Macbeth, Queen Mary, Montrose, and other famous Scots are connected with its history. Six miles out we found the battlefield of Culloden, where the hopes of “Bonnie Prince Charlie” were finally extinguished—a bleak bit of moorland enclosed by a circlet of dark firtrees. Our guide-books told us that the ground was marked by mounds showing where the poor Highlanders were buried together in clans. But the mounds have now sunk to the level of the rest of the ground, and only rude stones are to be seen amid the gorse, upon which are carved “Clan Macintosh,” “Clan Fraser,” “Mixed Clans,” and the names of other clans who now lie united in death. In a corner near a spring of water a larger stone bears the inscription, “The Chief of the Macgillivrays fell at this well,” while in the centre of this sad ground of buried hopes is a very large cairn, on one side of which is written words something like these, “On this moor was fought the Battle of Culloden, where many brave Highlanders fell fighting for their prince and their country. April 27, 1746.” For some time we wandered amid these sad memorials of bravery and devotion. Then we took photographs of the cairns, plucked some of the gorse, and went sadly on our way to Inverness, musing upon the strangeness of human nature. For though later history has shown Prince Charlie to have been unworthy of such devotion as his brave followers showed, I suppose each of those lying in that lonely spot, could he rise again, would still sing:—

I swear and vow by moon and stars,
And sun that shines so early;

If I had twenty thousand lives,
I'd die as aft for Charlie

That afternoon we went out to take views of the lovely little islands in the river above Inverness, and out to "Tom-na-hourish" (Hill of the Fairies), Fitzjames telling me on our way the origin of the name. It seems that in the old days of fairies the little folks took a strange fancy for this spot, and used to bring earth on their backs and pile it here until a great hill was formed, on the summit of which they delighted to hold their midnight revelries. The hill is now overgrown with dark pine-trees, which make a fitting sombre background to the cemetery at its base. That night we went to a Gaelic concert in the Town Hall. The room was draped with all kinds of tartans, relieved by deers' heads and antlers. A patriarchial Highlandman with long white beard occupied a chair on the platform, and introduced the various performers. Highlanders in full kilts played bagpipes and others danced the Highland fling, the sword, and other dances, while songs, violin and piano solos, and a Gaelic speech made up the rest of an interesting programme. Some of the songs were in Gaelic, some in English. A fair maid of some forty summers amused her hearers by singing:—

"I'm owre young, I'm owre young,
I'm owre young to marry yet;
I'm owre young, 'twad be a sin
To tak' me frae my mammie yet."

The last line in particular seemed to tickle the audience greatly. The piano solo consisted of a string of Scotch dances, but imagine my surprise when five men and a boy, all dressed in black, stood up to play the item announced as a "violin solo." Five played violins and one a double bass. The violins played *in unison* another series of strathspeys, reels, and other dances, while the man with the bass solemnly scraped out a sort of Faux-bourdon, or drone bass, in which consecutive fifths played an important part. How droll it sounded, and yet the audience were delighted, beating time with their feet upon the floor in quite an excited manner. Then the Gaelic speech—how funny it was, and what a rich vein of humour the speaker had, or seemed to have, for I don't understand Gaelic! But the audience laughed often, and I followed suit. Over in the reserved seats I saw the shepherd who had helped us with his crook on that high hill near Skye. Was he a shepherd, I began to wonder, or was he a Highland chieftain who had travelled so far to the gathering of his clan? A mere shepherd could not afford to do this.

Some kinds of people are never satisfied with their positions. Here we were in a decent civilized city, with good hotels, battlefields, and concerts all handy, and yet F. must needs talk of starting early next morning for Blair Athol, through the Pass of Killiecrankie, on to Perth, thence to Edinburgh, Stirling, and Glasgow. I asked what time the train started for these places and what the fare would be. He replied that we were to ride the bicycles, "of course." Then I spoke to him, quietly but impressively, and told him that even in my childhood the greatest care had to be used to bring me safely up to man's estate, that the family physician often warned me that too violent exercise might bring on heart disease, and that I thought my family were entitled to some consideration. This led to a discussion, but finally we made a compromise and started by next morning's steamer for Fort Augustus, and thence we were to go by bike if the weather permitted.

I should imagine that the scenery from the Gondolier's deck as she steams down the Caledonian Canal would be very fine in good weather. We did not have any. Before we had gone very far along Loch Ness the wind blew quite a hurricane, and 'twas so cold that, having no greatcoats,