

ALL ABOUT OBAN.



IF Doctor Samuel Johnson were only alive in this eighth decade of the nineteenth century, and could again take his famous "journey" from Holborn to the Hebrides, he would have to considerably revise his recorded opinions concerning the Western Highlands. The world has moved on since the literary dictator of Bolt Court set out with James Boswell from London to the Land of Lorne. Instead of tedious coaches and perilous pack-horses, behold! express engines and Pullman cars; instead of open boats, a splendid fleet of steamers that are hotels afloat. There is no telling how long it would have taken Doctor Johnson and "James Boswell, Esq.," with their impressive negro servant, to get from London to Oban when they made their celebrated "tour." "It's a far cry to Lochow," was the boast of the Breadalbane Campbells in the olden time; but since the 1st of July of the present year it has been possible to leave London after nine o'clock at night and, without change of carriage, be in Oban in time for a late breakfast the next morning. On the date mentioned, the beautiful Highland watering-place was for the first time placed in direct railway communication with the rest of the world. Previously, the "iron horse" had halted, frightened at the gigantic obstacles of nature; and the journey from the South had either to be made from Dalmally by coach, or all the way from Glasgow or Greenock by water. But neither the jolting headlong experiences of a Highland coach and four, nor the sensation of steam-boat travel, agrees with the aged and the weak. Oban was, therefore, by reason of its isolated remoteness, a closed place to many people who were recommended its pure mountain air, and whose imagination had been quickened by Mr. William Black's descriptions of its land-locked bay, its mountain surroundings, and its glorious archipelago of lonely islands in a magical sea. This inaccessibility is ended now that the Callander Line is extended to Oban. A new and direct highway of travel is thus opened between England and the Western Highlands. Oban now becomes to Glasgow and Edinburgh what Brighton is to the metropolis; and, while this important railway extension will have much to do with Oban's future as a watering-place, shrewd business men are of opinion that the little Argyleshire town will develop into a great trading port, since it is the nearest harbour of any magnitude to the

American continent; and the depth of its anchorage, the sheltered situation of its bay, and its immunity from fogs are all in its favour for transatlantic traffic. But this paper has rather to do with Oban as a holiday-ground for people "in populous city pent," than as a commercial situation.

The project of a railway to Oban was not a new idea. In the mania of 1844, when companies were being formed to carry railways to the moon, a line was proposed to be constructed between Edinburgh and Glasgow and Oban. The thing was then regarded as so wildly Quixotic, so utterly Utopian, that it supplied the *raison d'être* of Professor Aytoun's satirical skit on the Glenmutchkin Railway. But what the professor deemed madly impracticable has since been successfully accomplished. The engineering genius of this Victorian era which conceived the "corkscrew line" of the Semmering, which has pierced Mont Cénis and Mont St. Gothard, which has sent steamships through the Sahara sands of Suez, which has despatched the "iron horse" over the "sky-scraping" ridges of the Sierras, and which has made the Settle and Carlisle Railway, was not to be beaten by the geographical opposition of a Scotch county. The engineer's motto is the maxim of Calonne's: "If it is difficult, it is done already; if it is impossible, it shall be done soon." Twenty years passed; then, in 1867, was cut the first sod of the line from Callander to Oban, a distance of seventy-one miles. In 1877 the line was opened to Dalmally, which brought the Callander Railway within twenty-four miles of Oban; and in the summer of 1878 the tremendous engineering obstacles—apparently insuperable—which then opposed the engineer in carrying the line to its destination were boldly faced. Now the engineer may say, "*Veni, vidi, vici!*" For the "iron horse" sends its shriek of triumph high above Loch Awe, through the awful pass of Brander, and along the flinty haunches of Ben Cruachan, and by the side of Loch Etive, till Kerrera hears it, and the green shores of Lismore are startled, and Mull and Ossian's Morven mountains echo the sound.

The line from Dalmally to Oban is certainly a big achievement, even for this scientific age, and it is carried for the whole twenty-four miles without the dimness of a single tunnel. But the line is a single one, the curves are sensational in their sharpness, the gradients are of great severity, the embankments are small mountains, and the bridges, spanning deep gaps down which roar fierce mountain torrents, and supported by piers cut out of granite boulders carried into the valleys by primeval glaciers, are seemingly without number.

The scenery along the route makes the new line one of the most striking railway rides in the world. The artistic eye that can see "pictures in trains" has a continuous gallery of beautiful landscapes framed by the carriage windows—for the traveller is carried

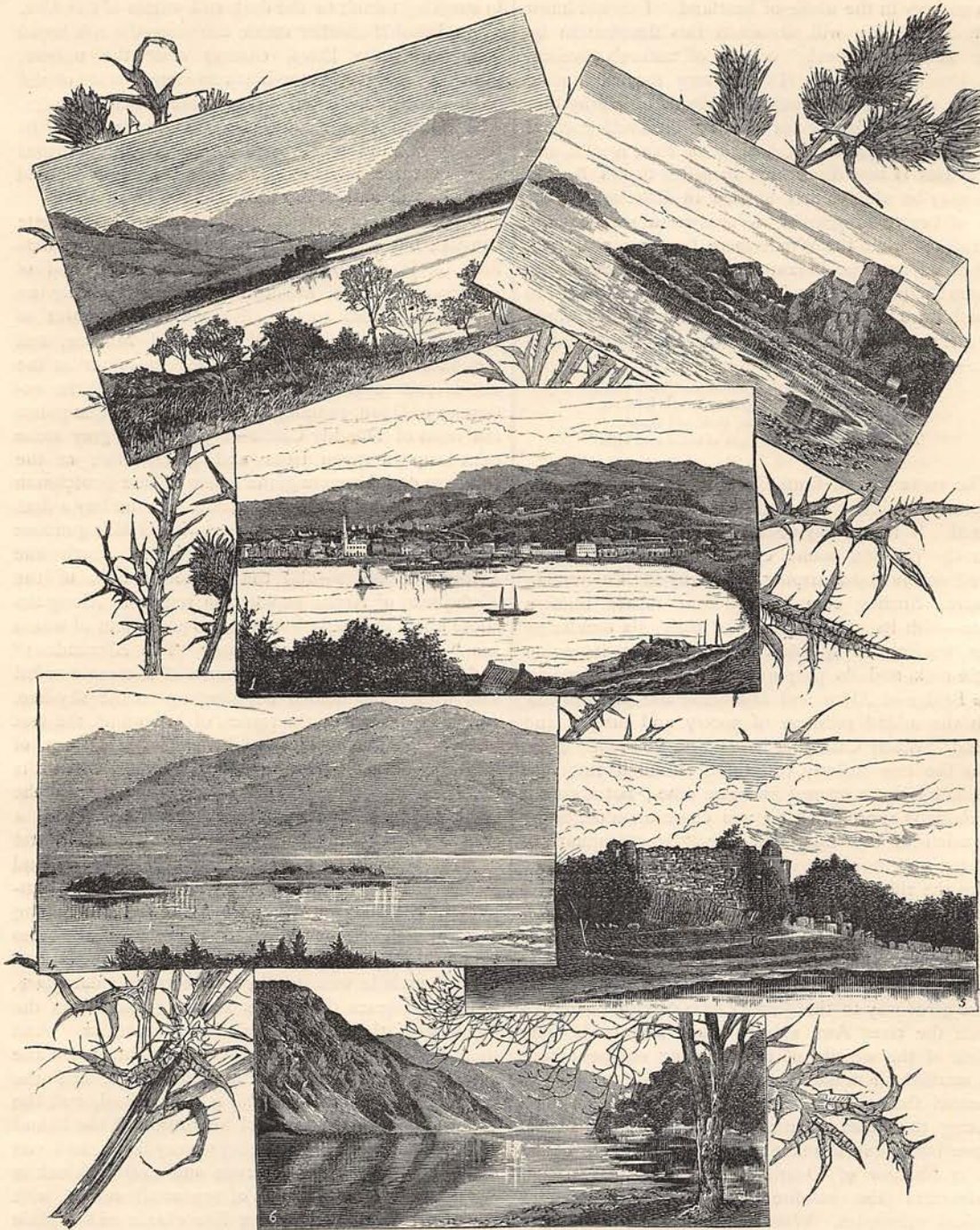
through some of the most impressive loch and mountain scenery in the whole of Scotland. I do not know what Mr. Ruskin will say about this desecration by "the kettle on wheels" of one of nature's loveliest and loneliest haunts. He was very incensed when the line was carried through the Peak of Derbyshire to Buxton, and did he not write: "That valley where you might expect to catch sight of Pan, Apollo, and the Muses is now desecrated in order that a Buxton fool may be able to find himself in Bakewell at the end of twelve minutes"? Wordsworth was equally aggravated when the Windermere line was projected, and called on "the mountains, vales, and floods" to "share the passion of a just disdain." But the utility of both lines is patent; and Ruskin and Wordsworth are answered admirably in the words of Lord Houghton:—

"But thou, the Patriarch of these beauteous ways,
Canst never grudge that gloomy streets send out
The crowded sons of labour, care, and doubt,
To read these scenes by light of thine own lays."

The route by rail from Glasgow to Oban does not become artistically interesting until Bannockburn is passed. It is a funny sensation to Southern ears to hear the thrilling name of the historic battle-field called out in hard rasping Scotch by the Caledonian porters. Stirling comes—a picture rather than a place—with its great breadth of plain, its wandering river winding in splashes of liquid light, its noble castle-rock, and its purple perspective of mountains. The Bridge of Allan and Dunblane are pictures too, with the added richness of poetry and history and legend. When Callander is reached, you really enter upon the new railway to Oban, although this first section has been opened for some time; but not until Dalmally is approached do you come upon the latest extension of the line, and the "hurrygraphs" of scenery you now get through the carriage-window make the ride a railway romance. The train skirts Loch Awe, with its wooded islands—on one of which stands Kilchuirn Castle—and soft green shores, ancient ruin, and leafy islands look lovingly at their own tranquil beauty in the broad mirror. This gentle scene gives way to the gloomy pass of Brander, down which the river Awe shivers black and cold. The shriek of the whistle of the hurrying engine taking the startled air wakes echoes that in days gone by repeated the wild scream of pibroch and slogan summoning the fierce clansmen of Bruce and Lorne, whose burial-cairns make this rocky defile a Valley of the Shadow of Death. The law of association consecrates the sombre pass with historic and poetical memories. Wordsworth and Wilson have cast over it the spell of their genius; and Sir Walter's Highland widow, sitting at the foot of the oak-tree by the river Awe, is as much linked with the landscape as is the historic conflict when Macdougall won the Brooch of Lorne from Robert the Bruce. The line is carried on a terrace of rock along the granitic slopes of Ben Cruachan. The massive mountain dips almost sheer into the deep bed of the river. Ever and anon a bridge spans a wild gorge in the gloomy

hill; a brown torrent steams underneath, hastening in smoking tumult to the dark still waters of the Awe. Then, behold! another scenic contrast—the soft broad beauty of Lake Etive, coming after the narrow, precipitous, riven, raven-black mountain-sides of the pass. The poetical old castle there is Dunstaffnage. The traditions of 2,000 years are mingled with its time-stained towers. Presently there is a simultaneous view of three lochs—Loch Linnhe, Loch Nell, and Loch Etive; and all too soon is Oban reached.

Oban deserves a special article—a broad, elaborate canvas; but I have only space for a vignette in outline. A land-locked bay with the green island of Kerrera, a natural breakwater in front, giving an outlet north and south. Beyond, the pastures of Lismore, the mountains of Mull and Morven, and the peaks of Appin, ever changing in colour as the clouds pass over their slopes. At the northern extremity of Oban, running out on a picturesque point, the ruins of Dundilly Castle—a picture of grey stone mixed up in green trees and glossy ivy; at the southern end Altnacraig, the house of that Scotchman to the backbone, Professor Blackie. In the bay a fleet of white-sailed yachts, together with H.M.'s gunboat *Jackal*—whose mission it now is to watch the northern fisheries—and the anchored hulk of the *Enterprise*, of Arctic exploration renown. Along the shore a line of stately hotels, most prominent of which are "The Great Western" and "The Alexandra;" and above the graceful green curve of a steep wooded hill, with white houses climbing up to the sky-line, which is broken by the turrets of Ardconnel, the seat of Mr. William Gillies, and the Castle Osprey of "White Wings." But to people who know Oban it is the splendour of the sunsets that appeals with the most charm. The sight of the westering sun, a shield of lurid flame, when it expires in a wild burst of light behind the masses of Mull and Morven, and brings out the points of Appin and the dark outlines of the Glencoe hills; when the bay is a shining sheet of rich colours; when the mountain peaks seem in the ruby light red and molten as forged metal, and when the whole western sky is one spectacular glare, is an experience that is not readily effaced from the memory of the most unemotional spectator. And then the beauty of the magic after-light, when the sky has cooled to a vivid metallic green, and the moon comes up in the south, a disc of red, and the yellow planets burn low and lustrous, and the Sound of Kerrera is full of changing silvery lights, and you can see to read up till eleven and twelve o'clock in the open air, with the spirit of repose all around, with the silent mountains resting like clouds on the plain of placid water, with the boats rocking themselves to sleep in the bay, with the light on Lismore Point, nine miles or more away, glancing at the little lamps hanging at the bows and up in the rigging of the yachts at anchor, and the tide whispering to the silent and listening shore, and the night wind coming with a cool, soft caress to the cheek! And then the wonder of the sunset at two or three o'clock in the July morning, when the golden mist has lifted, and



2. KILCHUIRN CASTLE, LOCH AWE.

3. DUNDILLY CASTLE, OBAN.

1. OBAN FROM THE SOUTH-WEST.

4. LOCH AWE AND BEN CRUACHAN.

5. DUNSTAFFNAGE CASTLE, LOCH ETIVE.

6. PASS OF BRANDER, LOCH AWE.

there is another of nature's transformation scenes—an effect of pink sky, pink sea, pink mountains, pink islands—which seen in a picture would be pronounced by the critics as unnatural and impossible!

If you reach Oban by train, by all means return by steam-boat, or *vice versâ*. However expeditious the railway may be, the water-way has charms against which no other route can compete; while a voyage on such stately steamers as the *Lord of the Isles*, the *Iona*, and the *Columba* is in itself a delightful experience. The *Iona* is an institution in Scotland; and while the study of life and character on her decks is diverting and instructive, the appointments of the ship challenge admiration. The present *Iona* this year has been taking a subordinate route, running between Oban and Fort William. She is the seventh of a series of superb steamers of that name, each a development of its predecessor. An eighth boat was launched in 1878, still more improved. The old appellation was departed from, and the new *Iona* was christened the *Columba*, after St. Columba, who Christianised the island of Iona. The boat is worthy of the name of that good apostle. She is 316 feet long, and 50 feet in breadth, attaining a speed of 22 miles per hour. The upper saloon is a Belgravian drawing-room afloat, with the windows carried down the sides and round at the stern, framing fine scenic prospects. The dining-saloon is a model *salle-à-manger*, in which decorative art has been carried to perfection. There is a hair-dressing and shampooing establishment on board, and a bath-room, affording passengers who have travelled during the night the refreshment of salt-water baths. But perhaps the greatest novelty on board is the floating post-office, where letters, telegrams, &c., are received, stamped, sorted, and distributed at every calling-place along the route, for transmission to all parts. It is stated that this institution was so successful that the official Post Office Report for the month of August last year records the fact that over 17,000 letters passed through this office in one week; while 300 telegrams were handed in on board, and upwards of £43 was received for postage and telegraph stamps during the month. So much for the *Columba*. A word as to her route. I will take it for granted that you accompanied me to Oban by train from the South, and will now do me the pleasure of returning by boat. Picturesque enough at eight in the morning is the sight of Oban quay, with half a dozen red-funnelled steamers taking in passengers and goods: the *Clydesdale*, off to Shiela's home in far-away Stornoway; the *Staffa*, ready for Inverness; the *Mountaineer*, bound for the caves of Staffa and the cathedral of Iona; the *Iona*, advertised for the Caledonian Canal. There is a busy and curious throng on the pier—hard-faced Highlandmen, English tourists, Celtic sailors, a gillie in kilts, one or two collie dogs, and a consignment of those picturesque, long-horned, black Highland cattle that artists love—as we take our places on the *Chevalier*, which will convey us to Crinan. And a pleasant sail it is by the swift steamer as Oban fair and beautiful fades away, and

there is the broad blue space and freedom of the Atlantic all around, with only Scarba, Islay, Jura, Colonsay, and other wild islands of savage beauty intercepting us and America. We pass at no great distance the whirlpool of Corryvreckan, which swirls through the rocky straits between Scarba and Jura—

“As you pass through Jura's Sound,
Bend your course by Scarba's shore,
Shun, oh! shun the gulf profound,
Where Corryvreckan's surges roar.”

At Crinan we are transferred from the *Chevalier* to the *Linnet*, to make the passage of the Crinan Canal. The latter is a water-way of nine miles, which, connecting Loch Gilp and Loch Crinan, avoids the long, circuitous, and dangerous voyage round the Mull of Kintyre. Leave we the *Linnet* as she is getting tediously through the fifteen locks, to walk along the grassy banks of the canal. Canal! Be not deceived by the expression. This is no stagnant water-course, connecting hideous towns, which is dirty as to colour and disagreeable as to odour, and the monotonous ugliness of which has emphasis given to it by the dingy wharves, full of coal-dust and refuse, and by dingy barges that creep guiltily through the reeking water. Canal! Behold a trout-haunted channel, the home of wild water-fowl, in the sylvan seclusion of Highland scenery. Contemplate a series of natural little lochs, strung together like pearls on an artificial band. See the tall fox-gloves and green ferns that fringe the right-hand bank, and the wild roses and woodbines that look at their own loveliness in the liquid looking-glass. Regard the dwarf oaks and birches that are duplicated branch for branch and leaf for leaf in the clear brown water, and note how above them the Knapdale Mountains press down through the verdure to the verge of the canal. On the left hand is a far grey plain, diversified with wood and water, and wild rocky outlines. And all around is the spell of the mountains, the scent of the near sea, and the sound of voiceful streams in the cool depths of little mossy glens. Celtic children—bonnie wee lads and lassies, blue-eyed, brown-faced, bare-legged, and shaggy as Shetland ponies—come up with tin cans and ask, “Are ye for any mulk, sir?” or “Is it any nits, sir?” Some of these little merchants in milk and hazel-nuts are very pretty, and one miniature Highland lady, with modest ways, and a voice that is as the soft cooing of a dove, bribes us into purchases by her innocent beauty. The plain children don't do so well, which shows the advantage of having pretty eyes, even away in the wilds of Argyleshire. But it is a great injustice to give all to the comely and none to the common-place, and if the tourist would aim at a redistribution of rights among these peasant children, let him single out all the plain little people for his special patronage. Why, oh! why, for instance, did your Excellency bestow a silver coin upon that girlette with the flowing flaxen hair, almost white in its fairness? “Because she has such speaking eyes.” Precisely. But see, yonder is a shrinking

little child who is blind of one eye. You give her nothing.

At Ardrishaig we are transferred from the little *Linnet* to the great *Columba*, and the voyage from Loch Gilp, down the broad reaches of Loch Fyne, and through the fairy scenery of the Kyles of Bute, by Rothesay to Greenock, is a sail that presents a new picture every few minutes, one engrossing point in the landscape becoming quickly subordinate to another, and apparently land-locked water suddenly opening out an entirely unexpected sea-

path to fresh scenic charms, that come in such rapid succession that the views never become monotonous. But the trip demands a special paper all to itself.

The water churned by the swift paddles of the *Columba* between Greenock and Glasgow will not be health-inspiring until the western city has solved the problem of the purification of the Clyde. Suppose we go down into the dining-saloon? An Englishman's heart is reached through his stomach. It is to the Englishman's stomach, as well as to his eye, that the Scottish *Columba* appeals.

E. B.



GARDENING IN NOVEMBER.

STRANGE as it may sound, it is perhaps in this the first of our dark and dreary winter months—a month of short days and long nights, of fog, and wet, and gloom—that our heaviest work is often done in the garden. We do not mean quietly taking the rake over the beds, or wandering happily among them with the watering-pot, but good *bonâ fide*

hard work—labour with the pick and the spade, and perhaps with the axe—labour that, despite the cold fog, will make our forehead moist, our hands horny, and our muscles strong. Indeed, if we were asked which month of the year we would choose to take possession of a new garden we should certainly say November, and for this reason—November is the month of the year best adapted for making any great or radical change and alteration in a garden. For instance, we are wishing to make a shrubbery or to remove some shrubs into other parts of the garden, to prune our orchard or to cut down large trees, to lay in new raspberry canes or to get new stocks for our rose garden. All such operations as these, and others akin to them, we carry out in the mild and open winter weather (not in the frost), for the sap is all down, everything is in a dormant state—nature, in fact, has gone to bed for the year, and we can move our large shrubs, &c., now without waking them up. We all of us know the almost certain result of attempting to move bulky evergreens from one spot to another in July or any hot and dry

weather; probably all the watering that we could then and there give them would not save them from dying. In moving shrubs, then, have first of all dug a good pit or hole, amply sufficient for the reception of the roots and ball of earth surrounding the roots of the shrub that you are removing. Nor is it merely necessary to have this hole exactly large enough, but let all the surrounding soil be loosened as well, for this surrounding soil should not be in a consolidated state. Trench it well over, then, so that the roots of your shrub will strike the more readily. In moving the shrub be careful to get away, without breaking them as far as possible, all the roots; some few very likely you will find it difficult to avoid sacrificing, but the fewer these are the better chance do you give your shrub. After it has been got up, by the way, if you have some considerable distance to carry or wheel it to its new abode, it is as well to bind round with some matting the ball of earth which is about the roots, as the mere motion of your wheelbarrow or cart, or even the jolting as you walk along with it—supposing it to be portable—is liable to detach some of the soil, and this means the breaking off of many of the fine roots, or spongioles, as they are called, and these it is most important for the wellbeing of your plant to preserve. Before re-planting your shrub or evergreen, notice first carefully the size and depth, &c., of the "ball;" then, when it has been placed in its required position, throw in soil and ram it down all round the lower part of the ball, so that the whole plant stands of itself at once upright. Spread out next the roots as it