



THE PASS OF GLENCOE.

curling along the ascents of the hills, there to sit enthroned when darkness should draw on. Again by the shores of Lorn and Appin, districts famed for conservatism, which resisted Bruce and the house of Hanover to the last. Back to Oban between eight and nine, just as a great yellow moon rose over the waters: and so ended our trip up Glencoe.

One great recommendation of these excursions in the Western Highlands is the cheapness and comfort with which they can be performed. No longer, as in Dr. Johnson's time, when an open fishing-boat was his conveyance from island to

island, and he had to trust the hospitality of neighbouring lairds for lodging, and afterwards wrote concerning the Hebrides in the style that would now be adopted in a description of Patagonia; but the tourist of 1860 has every appliance of ease, and even luxury, at his command: lines of perfectly-appointed steamers suiting his convenience, and comfortable hotels on the sites of former Highland shielings. Why go to the be-praised and exaggerated Rhine for beauty, when freshness of æsthetic sensation lies so close to us in the unique loveliness of Staffa, the grandeur of Ben Nevis, the "gloomy raptures" of Glencoe?

REMINISCENCES OF AN OCTOGENARIAN.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

SOME years ago, a periodical was projected, to be called "The Grey Friar," to contain principally matters relative to Christ's Hospital, and an application was made to me for an article on the *youth* of Coleridge. The work never came to maturity. I had, however, written the following for its pages.

As you wish for something relative to my old satrap, S. T. Coleridge, permit me to inform you that in my early days I performed the onerous duty, among others, of cleaning his shoes; and well do I remember that they were too often for my comfort very dirty, for he was not very nice in his person or in his dress. He seldom had two garters at one time, in consequence of which his stockings used to drop into a series of not very elegant folds.

I have a pleasing remembrance of even Coleridge's old shoes; for, as he was not very particular *how* they were cleaned, and I was not very particular *how* I cleaned them, the Grecian and myself agreed pretty well on that matter; but woe to my head if he caught me taking the liberty to read in his study. There was not much there to tempt me, however, for my taste was then quite in another direction. Instead of Homer and Virgil, I much preferred "The Seven Champions," or even "Jack the Giant-killer." Unluckily, as it happened, he had an odd volume of the "Arabian Nights' Entertainments," in the vulgar tongue, and one day he caught me very cozily reading this work; on which discovery he most unceremoniously, or perhaps I should say very ceremoniously, kicked me out, prefacing the act with an animated speech. Yes, I well remember his wrath at my impudence, as he angrily called it. What may have increased his indignation on the occasion was, that he found me in the act of eating a remnant of mince-pie, which, in my juvenile innocence, I fancied to be my perquisite as his study boy. Well do I remember the furious look he assumed as he put back his long black curls from his face, and the wrathful curl of his lip in the disappointment of his lost mince-pie, when he hurled the empty plate after me as I quickly retreated from his presence.

I remember his entering his study one afternoon in a state of great irritation against Dr. Bowyer, the head master, who had deeply offended his majesty by sneering at his definition of some Greek word, which I have forgotten, and then sending me for a rush candle (the night light of those times). After lighting it, he desired me to go to the doctor's house, immediately opposite, and present it to him with Coleridge's duty, particularly informing the doctor that Coleridge had lighted it. I did not much relish the task, but on presenting myself to the doctor and delivering my message (lighted rush in hand), he laughed most heartily, and replied, "Tell Colly (he always called him so when pleased) that he is a good fellow." As, from my ignorance of Greek, I never could comprehend this, I must leave the solution thereof to those learned Thebans who may be competent to unriddle the enigma.

Although Coleridge was somewhat of a hard task-master, yet I parted from him, on his leaving for the university, with as deep a regret as a boy could feel for one so superior to himself. In person he was a tall, dark, handsome young man, with long black flowing hair; eyes, not merely dark, but black and keenly penetrating; a fine forehead, a deep-toned harmonious voice; a manner never to be forgotten, full of life, vivacity, and kindness; dignified in his person, and, added to all these, exhibiting the elements of his future greatness. Yet there was something awful about him, for all his equals in age and rank quailed before him. No wonder, therefore, if I did, who was selected to be his "boy," or attendant; he was to me the very impersonation of majesty, and stern indeed he could be when offended.

JOHN WILKES.

On leaving Christ's Hospital, which I did soon after Coleridge, I attended with my uncle at the

Guildhall, to be apprenticed before the chamberlain, the celebrated John Wilkes. On this occasion, a youth of the age of nineteen or twenty was summoned before the chamberlain by his master, on a charge of "being out late and returning drunk." John Wilkes was a most remarkable man in person; he squinted with both eyes in a very odd manner, and when displeased his countenance expressed a mixture of viciousness and droll ugliness, and his tongue in such cases protruded a little from his mouth, which appeared to crush his words to a mumble as he uttered them. This made him look savage, and at the same time ridiculous, and left an indelibly unfavourable impression on all who saw him.

This boy was the son of some public man, with a singular unpronounceable name, so that his lineage was easily recognised, and Wilkes, as we saw, had evidently some strong personal reason for being severe with him, probably on his father's account; for on hearing the charge, and again asking his name, he turned upon the youth in a most undignified and bitter manner, and asked how he dared to commit such — excesses (for gentlemen swore in those days). The youth replied rather faintly that "he was sorry, but that they compelled him to drink." "What!" said the chamberlain, "did they pour it down your throat with a horn?" The culprit, exasperated at the sneer, imitating the squint, the lolling out of the tongue, and so the voice of the great man, replied, "No, they didn't pour it down my throat with a horn, neither." This impudent reply, however, produced a roar of laughter from all the persons in attendance; and Wilkes, in a paroxysm of passion, quite unbecoming his high office, but quite consistent with his well-known character, ordered the mimic to be taken to Bridewell, and there to be flogged, and imprisoned for a month. In the interim we saw the youth put into a place in the Guildhall called "Little Ease," a dark hole about four feet square, in which it was impossible for even a boy to stand up or lie down; and there it probably may be now, though we hope it is not used for any such cruel purpose.

"This chamberlain," said my uncle on our way home, "to whom is intrusted the morals of the apprentices of this great city by the citizens thereof — for they possess the right of election — this John Wilkes, whose seeming virtuous indignation was excited by the vice and impudence of this juvenile, was only a few years ago the principal of an infamous society of dissolute individuals, who used to meet for the perpetration of every excess of debauchery at Medmendam Abbey. Nor has the worthless man any redeeming quality to fit him for the important station he holds." The place is now shown as one of the lions of the Thames, and is a sad memento of the character of the once celebrated John Wilkes.

THE IRON MASK.

Some years after the above event, my uncle, who was a major in the army, invited me to accompany a party on an excursion up the Thames, to see, among other places of note, Medmendam Abbey. There we saw the abbot's parlour, in which John

Wilkes and his associates held their filthy orgies. On returning, we landed at Walton, near Otlands, to take some refreshment, where we heard of an extraordinary mask kept in the church. We accordingly proceeded there to see this curiosity, and found it affixed by a strong iron chain to the clerk's desk. On it was inscribed, "This bridle was presented to the parish of Walton by —, to keep women's tongues from speaking idle." (I write from memory). It was made of an iron open sort of trellis work, in the form of a helmet, with a slip of steel in the interior to put in the mouth, and so press on the tongue as to prevent the wearer from speaking at all. The back opened with a hinge, and fastened by a spring clasp. The tradition is, that the giver, on riding through the place, heard a woman violently scolding her husband, and being told that the women of Walton were remarkable shrews, he had this mask made and presented it to the parish. On examining this head-piece, a dispute arose between us as to its power of altogether preventing speech, so it was determined to make a trial thereof; and as the major was the minority, he alone denying its power, it was agreed that he was to make the first trial, as that might decide the question. Now the major was a large, stout-made, soldierly man; he had been selected to teach George III the manual exercise; and the king, who never forgot this or any other agreeable act of service rendered by another person, gave him his commission, thus promoting him from a sergeant-major to a full majority, and the king was very gracious to him also on several occasions. This royal notice made the major very apt to take offence at the slightest intrusion on his dignity. Well, the mask was carefully put on by the clerk, and the snap fastened. As it closed, the result soon appeared, for the major could only roar and point with his finger to unclosethe helmet and release him; but, alas! the head proved too large to admit a finger between the mask and the head to unfasten the snap, and so there the major stood chained to the desk like a bear, roaring and dancing in great anger. At so ridiculous a figure, it was impossible not to laugh most unseemly, until we were obliged to run out of the church to prevent the scandal, leaving him in the hands of the little clerk, who was standing on a form to reach the tall man's head, looking all the time most dolefully at the difficulty, and considering how it was to end. Ultimately the blacksmith had to be sent for, and the prisoner was released; but the laughter, I am afraid, was never either forgotten or forgiven.

THE BLACK COUNTRY.

CHAPTER I.—STRANGERS IN THE BLACK COUNTRY.

THE Black Country! I had read of it, talked of it, speculated about it, even dreamed of it; and now, on a hot day in June, 185—, I entered it, for the first time.

My sister was my companion on the journey, and I believe that the ideas of each, respecting what might be in store for us, were about as clear, in their own way, as the atmosphere by which we

found ourselves enveloped. We were content to feel, however, that we were on the verge of a mysterious region, and resigned ourselves accordingly. The train moving at a rate which a lively donkey cart might have felt tempted to emulate, ample opportunity was afforded for minute inspection of surrounding objects. And here I may remark that the following considerate warning had previously been held out to us by a Black Country resident:—"Follow these directions," wrote my sister's correspondent, "and the shock to your nervous system may be in some degree mitigated. On leaving the Birmingham terminus, shut your eyes, and under no pretext be induced to open them till you arrive at the L. R. Station. In the meantime, conjure up a vision of everything that is frightful and appalling. Let your mind's eye look steadily on the perfection of ugliness in the abstract; and when you, at last, look out upon us as we are, you will perceive that the imaginary has faintly indeed shadowed forth the actual!"

I must confess, then, that I was prepared for a display of the terrible upon a grand scale. "The Land of Fire" was in itself a suggestive title to a lively imagination. I had read of travellers, in the venerated mail-coach days, passing through it by night, and waking up midway from quiet slumber, being overwhelmed by a terror which baffled all description. I had been told of burning fiery furnaces till my fancy had pictured a succession of Etnas in eruption, through which, with difficulty, one might pass unscathed! And now I looked out upon the reality with feelings of intense disappointment. There was nothing grand; nothing terrible; nothing that even merited the appellation of frightful. I gazed upon a wide expanse of dreary ugliness, where, to quote from a description intended for very different scenery, "all the stretching landscape into smoke decayed."

The country had, if I may so speak, a *blasted* look, as though, under the blighting influence of a curse, its beauty had withered and vanished away. Nature! we had a few hours since seen her smiling and vigorous; herself rejoicing in the light of early summer, and gladdening their hearts who looked upon her; but it was a dead Nature that met us now. It is true that here and there a melancholy tree, leaning over a muddy rivulet, gazed with desponding looks upon its disreputable reflection; or a patch of something meant to represent grass, was languidly cropped by a cow apparently discharged incurable from the consumptive hospital; but even these varieties were few and far between. To make use of the term "desolation" in connection with a neighbourhood teeming with population, both above and below ground, may well appear paradoxical, yet it was the one word which forcibly impressed itself upon my mind as the scene passed before me; and there may be not a few who would recognise the expression of their own first feelings in the assertion that it looked like "a land which no man passed through, and where no *man dwelt*."

The effect was depressing; we both felt it so, and for some time neither of us spoke. Presently, however, I looked across at Carry, and, meeting her eyes, she laughed and shook her head. "Not