

**THE LAST GLIMPSE
OF THE GROUSE OF
1880**

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The last glimpse of the grouse of 1880 by L. A. S.

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OF THE GROUSE OF
1880**

The Last Glimpse
or
The Grouse of 1880.

By L. A. S.

Durfee:

PRINTED BY JOHN LEAG & CO., BANK STREET.

—
1880.



The Last Glimpse of the Grouse
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Violent gales of wind almost as fierce as those of the Tay-Bridge storm, with occasional drenching showers, terminated the week; but the second last day of November dawned under more favourable auspices, and before reaching Perth the morning sun had already tinted the rich fields and finely wooded slopes of Glencarse and Kinfauns, and lit up the old grey rocks of Kinnoull, as the train swept through the highly favoured landscape. The lordly Palace of Scone, in the midst of its extensive parks and woods, with the noble river in front; Murthly, with its now secluded walks and vigorous young trees; the romantic glimpse of Murthly Castle; the unrivalled beauties of Dunkeld; Pitlochry and its massive Hydropathic Establishment—were all passed in quick succession. How altered the latter place is since the distinguished

Principal Forbes resided in Dysart Cottage, and, under the skilful advice of his friend and physician, Dr Irvine, restored his energies for the pursuit of new investigations and new scientific discoveries! Yet it seemed as if but yesterday the kind and accomplished philosopher sunned himself in his garden or sheltered himself in his arbour. The multitude of new villas and houses that has sprung up in this quiet place is astonishing. We then course through the Pass of Killiecrankie and past the old Castle of Blair, with its magnificent background of woods and hills, amongst which Ben-y-Gloe and Ben Vrackie tower conspicuously. Stretches of brown heather and grey rocks—rendering the scenery both barren and wild—become more frequent till Struan Station is reached. The latter is comfortably shrouded in fir woods, with clumps of birches here and there, amongst which are groups of the pretty little siskins or blackheaded thistle-finches. If we may also judge from the array of skeps, the adjacent moors and meadows produce ample stores of honey.

From Struan to Kinloch-Rannoch, a distance of about fifteen miles, the journey is made in a comfortable 'bus, as our kind friend had the foresight to warn the postmaster, and thus secured us against the vicissitudes of the weather—as it proved, a wise precaution. The conveyance is under the guardianship of the intelligent and obliging Donald, and his

steeds are both active and hardy. Leaving Struan and its pretty new Free Church behind, the first mansion to the left is that of Kindrochit, the property of an able minister of the Church of Scotland. The road, which at this part has an elevation of about 600 feet, is both romantic and lonely. It winds along the southern slope of a wild range of heathery hills, while flowing through the glen beneath is the Erichdie water, which the recent rains have converted into a foaming torrent that seethes round its tiny islets, blots out ford and boulders, and invades the low ground in its neighbourhood. From the bed of the stream the fine grouse-moors of Auchleeks slope upward on both sides to a height of about 1500 feet above the sea-level, their sides being seamed with numerous silvery streamlets and cascades, all rushing to the water beneath. Even the sheep-drains on the lower slopes were full to overflowing. The bracing though chilly western wind blew right in the teeth of the bus, and by-and-by the heavy clouds on Schiehallion broke into icy showers that compelled us to take shelter in the interior of the conveyance. Animal life—with the exception of the hardy Highland cattle and blackfaced sheep—was scanty. All but the rooks and a solitary heron near the stream beneath sought the cover of the woods and heather. The whole aspect of the country was pastoral and wild—a fit solitude (so much needed in this populous country) for harassed nature. The

limekilns alone reminded one of the busy scenes left behind.

The road winds up hill and down dale, past the finely sheltered mansion-house of Auchleeks—where it attains an elevation of 700 feet—to Trinafour Inn, a sudden curve at each of these places being a caution to drivers, though at Trinafour the angle has lately been modified. The thaw following the late severe frost has tested the roads very much, and here and there the surface is cut into deep ruts. The bridge at Trinafour is peculiar, having apparently been built in longitudinal halves. The view of the Eriohdie as it bursts through the bridge and forms a boiling cataract over the dam is very fine. No halt was made at the inn, but our wiry steeds—in the face of wind and rain—toil up the steep slope above the Allt an Ruidh Fhluich, which, like the other streams, is in full flood. Instead of 800 feet or thereabout, as at Trinafour, we have now reached an elevation of 1150 feet, and are in the midst of splendid grouse-moors. On both sides of the road beyond Trinafour the grouse are comparatively tame, for, like other wild animals, they know when they are safe, and have not yet learned to fear carts and other conveyances. The telegraph-wires, however, at the side of the road are sometimes disastrous to them, and, like the wire-fences put down by a friend, stand in need of tufts of heather and white paint to warn the grouse and blackcock, which otherwise are occasionally stunned or de-

capitated. Here and there a black-cock occupied a knoll, or an old cock-grouse marshalled his brood and warily guarded their safety. All along the high ridge and down the western slope the grouse were dotted at intervals, either singly or in broods, and, though by no means shy, were adepts at hiding behind ridges, mole-heaps, and stones. A fine covey of partridges were also observed scampering down a slope.

The first glimpse of the vale of the Tummel—before reaching Auchtersin—showed that the river had overflowed its banks, and converted the flat fields of Lassintullich and Tempar into a huge lake, the border of which laved the very margins of the road towards Kinloch-Rannoch, and encroached on the arable lands on the south. It seems that the failure of a contractor to excavate a rocky barrier has prevented an anticipated improvement in regard to floods. Lines of partly submerged birches and fences marked the surface of the temporary loch, which also was tossed into waves by the violence of the wind. Floating wreckage of various kinds and crowds of hungry rooks—which frequented the margin—completed the unusual picture. The main track of the river became more evident on approaching Kinloch-Rannoch, as a surging, yet deep and rapid, torrent. The effect of this deluge on the meadow-land is doubtful, since the continued moisture might subsequently encourage the development of the

snails, which the sheep greedily eat, and thus favour the introduction of the young flukes into their bodies, and cause the dreaded "rot."

We continued our descent, after depositing the mail-bag for Dun Alistair at Auch-tarsin, and, before reaching the pretty cottage of Dr Crerar at Tom-Clahach, we have lost 200 feet. A word of greeting to our worthy friend, and we again speed onward—past the picturesque slope of Creag a Bhara, the steep sides of which form one of the most striking features in the landscape—to the Post Office at Kinloch-Rannoch. Whilst the mail-bags are attended to we have time to view the village, and stroll on the bridge over the Tummel, as it breaks with a wide sweep from the loch (very much as takes place on a larger scale in the case of the Tay at Kenmore), and scan the extensive and troubled sheet of water embayed by the wild hills of Rannoch. In the centre of the village square is a handsome granite obelisk erected to a former schoolmaster (Dugald Buchanan), who was poet as well as teacher. Groups of fine healthy children have just escaped from school, and both they and the building are a credit to the School-Board. A handsome Episcopalian church (with vaults), the Free Church and the inn on the north side of the bridge, and the *quoad sacra* church on the southern side are its chief structures. The trees around the latter bear too evident traces of injury caused by sheep—a feature not un-