

*curraige*  
*from Aunt Carrie*  
*Xmas, 1874-*

RECOLLECTIONS

OF A

TOUR MADE IN SCOTLAND

A.D. 1803

BY DOROTHY WORDSWORTH.

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under steep crags hung with birches: it was like a new-discovered country of which we had not dreamed, for in walking down the lake, owing to the road in that part being carried at a considerable height on the hill-side, the rocks and the indentings of the shore had been hidden from us. At this time, those rocks and their images in the calm water composed one mass, the surfaces of both equally distinct, except where the water trembled with the motion of our boat. Having rowed a while under the bold steeps, we launched out further when the shores were no longer abrupt. We hardly spoke to each other as we moved along receding from the west, which diffused a solemn animation over the lake. The sky was cloudless; and everything seemed at rest except our solitary boat, and the mountain-streams,—seldom heard, and but faintly. I think I have rarely experienced a more elevated pleasure than during our short voyage of this night. The good woman had long been looking out for us, and had prepared everything for our refreshment; and as soon as we had finished supper, or rather tea, we went to bed. William, I doubt not, rested well, and, for my part, I slept as soundly on my chaff bed as ever I have done in childhood after the long day's playing of a summer's holiday.

*Tuesday, 13th September.*—Again a fine morning. I strolled into the green field in which the house stands while the woman was preparing breakfast, and at my return found one of her neighbours sitting by the fire, a feeble paralytic old woman. After having inquired concerning our journey the day before, she said, 'I have travelled far in my time,' and told me she had married an English soldier who had been stationed at the Garrison; they had had

many children, who were all dead or in foreign countries; and she had returned to her native place, where now she had lived several years, and was more comfortable than she could ever have expected to be, being very kindly dealt with by all her neighbours. Pointing to the ferryman and his wife, she said they were accustomed to give her a day of their labour in digging peats, in common with others, and in that manner she was provided with fuel, and, by like voluntary contributions, with other necessaries. While this infirm old woman was relating her story in a tremulous voice, I could not but think of the changes of things, and the days of her youth, when the shrill fife, sounding from the walls of the Garrison, made a merry noise through the echoing hills. I asked myself, if she were to be carried again to the deserted spot after her course of life, no doubt a troublesome one, would the silence appear to her the silence of desolation or of peace?

After breakfast we took a final leave of our hostess, and, attended by her husband, again set forward on foot. My limbs were a little stiff, but the morning being uncommonly fine I did not fear to aim at the accomplishment of a plan we had laid of returning to Callander by a considerable circuit. We were to go over the mountains from Loch Ketterine, a little below the ferry-house on the same side of the water, descending to Loch Voil, a lake from which issues the stream that flows through Strath Eyer into Loch Lubnaig. Our road, as is generally the case in passing from one vale into another, was through a settling between the hills, not far from a small stream. We had to climb considerably, the mountain being much higher than it appears to be, owing to its retreating in what looks like a gradual slope from the lake, though we found it steep

enough in the climbing. Our guide had been born near Loch Voil, and he told us that at the head of the lake, if we would look about for it, we should see the burying-place of a part of his family, the MacGregors, a clan who had long possessed that district, a circumstance which he related with no unworthy pride of ancestry. We shook hands with him at parting, not without a hope of again entering his hut in company with others whom we loved.

Continued to walk for some time along the top of the hill, having the high mountains of Loch Voil before us, and Ben Lomond and the steeps of Loch Ketterine behind. Came to several deserted mountain huts or shiels, and rested for some time beside one of them, upon a hillock of its green plot of monumental herbage. William here conceived the notion of writing an ode upon the affecting subject of those relics of human society found in that grand and solitary region. The spot of ground where we sate was even beautiful, the grass being uncommonly verdant, and of a remarkably soft and silky texture.

After this we rested no more till we came to the foot of the mountain, where there was a cottage, at the door of which a woman invited me to drink some whey: this I did, while William went to inquire respecting the road at a new stone house a few steps further. He was told to cross the brook, and proceed to the other side of the vale, and that no further directions were necessary, for we should find ourselves at the head of the lake, and on a plain road which would lead us downward. We waded the river and crossed the vale, perhaps half a mile or more. The mountains all round are very high; the vale pastoral and unenclosed, not many dwellings, and but few trees; the mountains in general smooth near the bottom. They are in large un-

broken masses, combining with the vale to give an impression of bold simplicity.

Near the head of the lake, at some distance from us, we discovered the burial-place of the MacGregors, and did not view it without some interest, with its ornamental balls on the four corners of the wall, which, I daresay, have been often looked at with elevation of heart by our honest friend of Loch Ketterine. The lake is divided right across by a narrow slip of flat land, making a small lake at the head of the large one. The whole may be about five miles long.

As we descended, the scene became more fertile, our way being pleasantly varied—through coppices or open fields, and passing farm-houses, though always with an intermixture of uncultivated ground. It was harvest-time, and the fields were quietly—might I be allowed to say pensively?—enlivened by small companies of reapers. It is not uncommon in the more lonely parts of the Highlands to see a single person so employed. The following poem was suggested to William by a beautiful sentence in Thomas Wilkinson's 'Tour in Scotland :'<sup>15</sup>—

Behold her single in the field,  
Yon solitary Highland Lass,  
Reaping and singing by herself—  
Stop here, or gently pass.  
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,  
And sings a melancholy strain.  
Oh! listen, for the Vale profound  
Is overflowing with the sound.

No nightingale did ever chaunt  
So sweetly to reposing bands  
Of travellers in some shady haunt  
Among Arabian Sands;

No sweeter voice was ever heard  
 In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird  
 Breaking the silence of the seas  
 Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings ?  
 Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow  
 For old unhappy far-off things,  
 And battles long ago ;—  
 Or is it some more humble lay—  
 Familiar matter of to-day—  
 Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain  
 That has been, and may be again ?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sung  
 As if her song could have no ending ;  
 I saw her singing at her work,  
 And o'er the sickle bending ;  
 I listen'd till I had my fill,  
 And as I mounted up the hill  
 The music in my heart I bore  
 Long after it was heard no more.

Towards the foot of the lake, on the opposite side, which was more barren than that on which we travelled, was a bare road up a steep hill, which leads to Glen Finlas, formerly a royal forest. It is a wild and rocky glen, as we had been told by a person who directed our notice to its outlet at Loch Achray. The stream which passes through it falls into that lake near the head. At the end of Loch Voil the vale is wide and populous—large pastures with many cattle, large tracts of corn. We walked downwards a little way, and then crossed over to the same road along

which we had travelled from Loch Erne to Callander, being once again at the entrance of Strath Eyer. It might be about four or five o'clock in the afternoon; we were ten miles from Callander, exceedingly tired, and wished heartily for the poor horse and car. Walked up Strath Eyer, and saw in clear air and sunshine what had been concealed from us when we travelled before in the mist and rain. We found it less woody and rich than it had appeared to be, but, with all deductions, a very sweet valley.

Not far from Loch Lubnaig, though not in view of it, is a long village, with two or three public-houses, and being in despair of reaching Callander that night without over-fatigue we resolved to stop at the most respectable-looking house, and, should it not prove wretched indeed, to lodge there, if there were beds for us: at any rate, it was necessary to take some refreshment. The woman of the house spoke with gentleness and civility, and had a good countenance, which reconciled me to stay, though I had been averse to the scheme, dreading the dirt usual in Scotch public-houses by the way-side. She said she had beds for us, and clean sheets, and we desired her to prepare them immediately. It was a two-storied house, light built, though in other respects no better than the huts, and—as all the slated cottages are—much more uncomfortable in appearance, except that there was a chimney in the kitchen. At such places it is fit that travellers should make up their minds to wait at least an hour longer than the time necessary to prepare whatever meal they may have ordered, which we, I may truly say, did with most temperate philosophy. I went to talk with the mistress, who was making barley cakes, which she wrought out with her hands as thin as the oaten bread we make in Cumberland. I asked her why she did not

use a rolling-pin, and if it would not be much more convenient, to which she returned me no distinct answer, and seemed to give little attention to the question: she did not know, or that was what they were used to, or something of the sort. It was a tedious process, and I thought could scarcely have been managed if the cakes had been as large as ours; but they are considerably smaller, which is a great loss of time in the baking.

This woman, whose common language was the Gaelic, talked with me a very good English, asking many questions, yet without the least appearance of an obtrusive or impertinent curiosity; and indeed I must say that I never, in those women with whom I conversed, observed anything on which I could put such a construction. They seemed to have a faith ready for all; and as a child, when you are telling him stories, asks for 'more, more,' so they appeared to delight in being amused without effort of their own minds. Among other questions she asked me the old one over again, if I was married; and when I told her that I was not, she appeared surprised, and, as if recollecting herself, said to me, with a pious seriousness and perfect simplicity, 'To be sure, there is a great promise for virgins in Heaven;' and then she began to tell how long she had been married, that she had had a large family and much sickness and sorrow, having lost several of her children. We had clean sheets and decent beds.

~~*Wednesday, September 14th.*—Rose early, and departed before breakfast. The morning was dry, but cold. Travelled, as before, along the shores of Loch Lubnaig, and along the pass of the roaring stream of Leny, and reached Callander at a little past eight o'clock. After breakfast set~~