

◉ AT HOME AND ABROAD,

OR

THINGS AND THOUGHTS

IN

America and Europe.

BY

(Sarah)

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PART II.

THINGS AND THOUGHTS IN EUROPE.

LETTER V.

Perth. — Travelling by Coach. — Loch Leven. — Queen Mary. — Loch Katrine.
— The Trosachs. — Rowardennan. — A Night on Ben Lomond. — Scotch
Peasantry.

Birmingham, September 30th, 1846.

I WAS obliged to stop writing at Edinburgh before the better half of my tale was told, and must now begin there again, to speak of an excursion into the Highlands, which occupied about a fortnight.

We left Edinburgh by coach for Perth, and arrived there about three in the afternoon. I have reason to be very glad that I visit this island before the reign of the stage-coach is quite over. I have been constantly on the top of the coach, even one day of drenching rain, and enjoy it highly. Nothing can be more inspiring than this swift, steady progress over such smooth roads, and placed so high as to overlook the country freely, with the lively flourish of the horn prelude every pause. Travelling by railroad is, in my opinion, the most stupid process on earth; it is sleep without the refreshment of sleep, for the noise of the train makes it impossible either to read, talk, or sleep to advantage. But here the advantages are immense; you can fly through this dull trance from one beautiful place to another, and stay at each during the time that would otherwise be spent on the road. Already the artists, who are obliged to find their home in London, rejoice that all England is thrown open to them for sketching-ground, since they can now avail themselves of a day's leisure at a great distance, and with choice of position, whereas formerly they were obliged to confine themselves to a few "green and bowery" spots in the neighborhood of the metropolis. But while in

the car, it is to me that worst of purgatories, the purgatory of dulness.

Well, on the coach we went to Perth, and passed through Kinross, and saw Loch Leven, and the island where Queen Mary passed those sorrowful months, before her romantic escape under care of the Douglas. As this unhappy, lovely woman stands for a type in history, death, time, and distance do not destroy her attractive power. Like Cleopatra, she has still her adorers; nay, some are born to her in each new generation of men. Lately she has for her chevalier the Russian Prince Labanoff, who has spent fourteen years in studying upon all that related to her, and thinks now that he can make out a story and a picture about the mysteries of her short reign, which shall satisfy the desire of her lovers to find her as pure and just as she was charming. I have only seen of his array of evidence so much as may be found in the pages of Chambers's Journal, but that much does not disturb the original view I have taken of the case; which is, that from a princess educated under the Medici and Guise influence, engaged in the meshes of secret intrigue to favor the Roman Catholic faith, her tacit acquiescence, at least, in the murder of Darnley, after all his injurious conduct toward her, was just what was to be expected. From a poor, beautiful young woman, longing to enjoy life, exposed both by her position and her natural fascinations to the utmost bewilderment of flattery, whether prompted by interest or passion, her other acts of folly are most natural, and let all who feel inclined harshly to condemn her remember to

" Gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman."

Surely, in all the stern pages of life's account-book there is none on which a more terrible price is exacted for every precious endowment. Her rank and reign only made her powerless to do good, and exposed her to danger; her talents only served to irritate her foes and disappoint her friends. This most charming of women was the destruction of her lovers: married three times, she had never any happiness as a wife, but in both the connec-

tions of her choice found that she had either never possessed or could not retain, even for a few weeks, the love of the men she had chosen, so that Darnley was willing to risk her life and that of his unborn child to wreak his wrath upon Rizzio, and after a few weeks with Bothwell she was heard "calling aloud for a knife to kill herself with." A mother twice, and of a son and daughter, both the children were brought forth in loneliness and sorrow, and separated from her early, her son educated to hate her, her daughter at once immured in a convent. Add the eighteen years of her imprisonment, and the fact that this foolish, prodigal world, when there was in it one woman fitted by her grace and loveliness to charm all eyes and enliven all fancies, suffered her to be shut up to water with her tears her dull embroidery during all the full rose-blossom of her life, and you will hardly get beyond this story for a tragedy, not noble, but pallid and forlorn.

Such were the bootless, best thoughts I had while looking at the dull blood-stain and blocked-up secret stair of Holyrood, at the ruins of Loch Leven castle, and afterward at Abbotsford, where the picture of Queen Mary's head, as it lay on the pillow when severed from the block, hung opposite to a fine caricature of "Queen Elizabeth dancing high and disposedly." In this last the face is like a mask, so frightful is the expression of cold craft, irritated vanity, and the malice of a lonely breast in contrast with the attitude and elaborate frippery of the dress. The ambassador looks on dismayed; the little page can scarcely control the laughter which swells his boyish cheeks. Such can win the world which better hearts (and such Mary's was, even if it had a large black speck in it) are most like to lose.

That was a most lovely day on which we entered Perth, and saw in full sunshine its beautiful meadows, among them the North-Inch, the famous battle-ground commemorated in "The Fair Maid of Perth," adorned with graceful trees like those of the New England country towns. In the afternoon we visited the modern Kinfauns, the stately home of Lord Grey. The drive to it is most beautiful, on the one side the Park, with noble heights that skirt it, on the other through a belt of trees was seen the

river and the sweep of that fair and cultivated country. The house is a fine one, and furnished with taste, the library large, and some good works in marble. Among the family pictures one arrested my attention, — the face of a girl full of the most pathetic sensibility, and with no restraint of convention upon its ardent, gentle expression. She died young.

Returning, we were saddened, as almost always on leaving any such place, by seeing such swarms of dirty women and dirtier children at the doors of the cottages almost close by the gate of the avenue. To the horrors and sorrows of the streets in such places as Liverpool, Glasgow, and, above all, London, one has to grow insensible or die daily; but here in the sweet, fresh, green country, where there seems to be room for everybody, it is impossible to forget the frightful inequalities between the lot of man and man, or believe that God can smile upon a state of things such as we find existent here. Can any man who has seen these things dare blame the Associationists for their attempt to find prevention against such misery and wickedness in our land? Rather will not every man of tolerable intelligence and good feeling commend, say rather revere, every earnest attempt in that direction, nor dare interfere with any, unless he has a better to offer in its place?

Next morning we passed on to Crieff, in whose neighborhood we visited Drummond Castle, the abode, or rather one of the abodes, of Lord Willoughby D'Eresby. It has a noble park, through which you pass by an avenue of two miles long. The old Keep is still ascended to get the fine view of the surrounding country; and during Queen Victoria's visit, her Guards were quartered there. But what took my fancy most was the old-fashioned garden, full of old shrubs and new flowers, with its formal parterres in the shape of the family arms, and its clipped yew and box trees. It was fresh from a shower, and now glittering and fragrant in bright sunshine.

This afternoon we pursued our way, passing through the plantations of Ochertyre, a far more charming place to my taste than Drummond Castle, freer and more various in its features. Five

or six of these fine places lie in the neighborhood of Crieff, and the traveller may give two or three days to visiting them with a rich reward of delight. But we were pressing on to be with the lakes and mountains rather, and that night brought us to St. Fillan's, where we saw the moon shining on Loch Earn.

All this region, and that of Loch Katrine and the Trosachs, which we reached next day, Scott has described exactly in "The Lady of the Lake"; nor is it possible to appreciate that poem without going thither, neither to describe the scene better than he has done after you have seen it. I was somewhat disappointed in the pass of the Trosachs itself; it is very grand, but the grand part lasts so little while. The opening view of Loch Katrine, however, surpassed expectation. It was late in the afternoon when we launched our little boat there for Ellen's isle.

The boatmen recite, though not *con molto espressione*, the parts of the poem which describe these localities. Observing that they spoke of the personages, too, with the same air of confidence, we asked if they were sure that all this really happened. They replied, "Certainly; it had been told from father to son through so many generations." Such is the power of genius to interpolate what it will into the regular log-book of Time's voyage.

Leaving Loch Katrine the following day, we entered Rob Roy's country, and saw on the way the house where Helen MacGregor was born, and Rob Roy's sword, which is shown in a house by the way-side.

We came in a row-boat up Loch Katrine, though both on that and Loch Lomond you *may* go in a hateful little steamer with a squeaking fiddle to play Rob Roy MacGregor O. I walked almost all the way through the pass from Loch Katrine to Loch Lomond; it was a distance of six miles; but you feel as if you could walk sixty in that pure, exhilarating air. At Inversnaid we took boat again to go down Loch Lomond to the little inn of Rowardennan, from which the ascent is made of Ben Lomond, the greatest elevation in these parts. The boatmen are fine, athletic men; one of those with us this evening, a handsome young man of two or three and twenty, sang to us some Gaelic

songs. The first, a very wild and plaintive air, was the expostulation of a girl whose lover has deserted her and married another. It seems he is ashamed, and will not even look at her when they meet upon the road. She implores him, if he has not forgotten all that scene of bygone love, at least to lift up his eyes and give her one friendly glance. The sad *crooning* burden of the stanzas in which she repeats this request was very touching. When the boatman had finished, he hung his head and seemed ashamed of feeling the song too much; then, when we asked for another, he said he would sing another about a girl that was happy. This one was in three parts. First, a tuneful address from a maiden to her absent lover; second, his reply, assuring her of his fidelity and tenderness; third, a strain which expresses their joy when reunited. I thought this boatman had sympathies which would prevent his tormenting any poor women, and perhaps make some one happy, and this was a pleasant thought, since probably in the Highlands, as elsewhere,

" Maidens lend an ear too oft
To the careless wooer;
Maidens' hearts are *always soft*;
Would that men's were truer!"

I don't know that I quote the words correctly, but that is the sum and substance of a masculine report on these matters.

The first day at Rowardennan not being propitious for ascending the mountain, we went down the lake to sup, and got very tired in various ways, so that we rose very late next morning. Then we found a day of ten thousand for our purpose; but unhappily a large party had come with the sun and engaged all the horses, so that, if we went, it must be on foot. This was something of an enterprise for me, as the ascent is four miles, and toward the summit quite fatiguing; however, in the pride of newly gained health and strength, I was ready, and set forth with Mr. S. alone. We took no guide, — and the people of the house did not advise it, as they ought. They told us afterward they thought the day was so clear that there was no probability of danger, and they were afraid of seeming mercenary about it. It was, however, wrong,

as they knew what we did not, that even the shepherds, if a mist comes on, can be lost in these hills; that a party of gentlemen were so a few weeks before, and only by accident found their way to a house on the other side; and that a child which had been lost was not found for five days, long after its death. We, however, nothing doubting, set forth, ascending slowly, and often stopping to enjoy the points of view, which are many, for Ben Lomond consists of a congeries of hills, above which towers the true Ben, or highest peak, as the head of a many-limbed body.

On reaching the peak, the night was one of beauty and grandeur such as imagination never painted. You see around you no plain ground, but on every side constellations or groups of hills exquisitely dressed in the soft purple of the heather, amid which gleam the lakes, like eyes that tell the secrets of the earth and drink in those of the heavens. Peak beyond peak caught from the shifting light all the colors of the prism, and on the farthest, angel companies seemed hovering in their glorious white robes.

Words are idle on such subjects; what can I say, but that it was a noble vision, that satisfied the eye and stirred the imagination in all its secret pulses? Had that been, as afterward seemed likely, the last act of my life, there could not have been a finer decoration painted on the curtain which was to drop upon it.

About four o'clock we began our descent. Near the summit the traces of the path are not distinct, and I said to Mr. S., after a while, that we had lost it. He said he thought that was of no consequence, we could find our way down. I thought however it was, as the ground was full of springs that were bridged over in the pathway. He accordingly went to look for it, and I stood still because so tired that I did not like to waste any labor. Soon he called to me that he had found it, and I followed in the direction where he seemed to be. But I mistook, overshot it, and saw him no more. In about ten minutes I became alarmed, and called him many times. It seems he on his side did the same, but the brow of some hill was between us, and we neither saw nor heard one another.

I then thought I would make the best of my way down, and - I

should find him upon my arrival. But in doing so I found the justice of my apprehension about the springs, as, so soon as I got to the foot of the hills, I would sink up to my knees in bog, and have to go up the hills again, seeking better crossing-places. Thus I lost much time; nevertheless, in the twilight I saw at last the lake and the inn of Rowardennan on its shore.

Between me and it lay direct a high heathery hill, which I afterward found is called "The Tongue," because hemmed in on three sides by a watercourse. It looked as if, could I only get to the bottom of that, I should be on comparatively level ground. I then attempted to descend in the watercourse, but, finding that impracticable, climbed on the hill again and let myself down by the heather, for it was very steep and full of deep holes. With great fatigue I got to the bottom, but when about to cross the watercourse there, it looked so deep in the dim twilight that I felt afraid. I got down as far as I could by the root of a tree, and threw down a stone; it sounded very hollow, and made me afraid to jump. The shepherds told me afterward, if I had, I should probably have killed myself, it was so deep and the bed of the torrent full of sharp stones.

I then tried to ascend the hill again, for there was no other way to get off it, but soon sunk down utterly exhausted. When able to get up again and look about me, it was completely dark. I saw far below me a light, that looked about as big as a pin's head, which I knew to be from the inn at Rowardennan, but heard no sound except the rush of the waterfall, and the sighing of the night-wind.

For the first few minutes after I perceived I had got to my night's lodging, such as it was, the prospect seemed appalling. I was very lightly clad,—my feet and dress were very wet,—I had only a little shawl to throw round me, and a cold autumn wind had already come, and the night-mist was to fall on me, all fevered and exhausted as I was. I thought I should not live through the night, or, if I did, live always a miserable invalid. There was no chance to keep myself warm by walking, for, now it was dark, it would be too dangerous to stir.

My only chance, however, lay in motion, and my only help in myself, and so convinced was I of this, that I did keep in motion the whole of that long night, imprisoned as I was on such a little perch of that great mountain. *How* long it seemed under such circumstances only those can guess who may have been similarly circumstanced. The mental experience of the time, most precious and profound, — for it was indeed a season lonely, dangerous, and helpless enough for the birth of thoughts beyond what the common sunlight will ever call to being, — may be told in another place and time.

For about two hours I saw the stars, and very cheery and companionable they looked ; but then the mist fell, and I saw nothing more, except such apparitions as visited Ossian on the hill-side when he went out by night and struck the bosky shield and called to him the spirits of the heroes and the white-armed maids with their blue eyes of grief. To me, too, came those visionary shapes ; floating slowly and gracefully, their white robes would unfurl from the great body of mist in which they had been engaged, and come upon me with a kiss pervasively cold as that of death. What they might have told me, who knows, if I had but resigned myself more passively to that cold, spirit-like breathing !

At last the moon rose. I could not see her, but the silver light filled the mist. Then I knew it was two o'clock, and that, having weathered out so much of the night, I might the rest ; and the hours hardly seemed long to me more.

It may give an idea of the extent of the mountain to say that, though I called every now and then with all my force, in case by chance some aid might be near, and though no less than twenty men with their dogs were looking for me, I never heard a sound except the rush of the waterfall and the sighing of the night-wind, and once or twice the startling of the grouse in the heather. It was sublime indeed, — a never-to-be-forgotten presentation of stern, serene realities.

At last came the signs of day, the gradual clearing and breaking up ; some faint sounds, from I know not what. The little flies, too, arose from their bed amid the purple heather, and bit me ;

truly they were very welcome to do so. But what was my disappointment to find the mist so thick, that I could see neither lake nor inn, nor anything to guide me. I had to go by guess, and, as it happened, my Yankee method served me well. I ascended the hill, crossed the torrent in the waterfall, first drinking some of the water, which was as good at that time as ambrosia. I crossed in that place because the waterfall made steps, as it were, to the next hill ; to be sure they were covered with water, but I was already entirely wet with the mist, so that it did not matter. I then kept on scrambling, as it happened, in the right direction, till, about seven, some of the shepherds found me. The moment they came, all my feverish strength departed, though, if unaided, I dare say it would have kept me up during the day ; and they carried me home, where my arrival relieved my friends of distress far greater than I had undergone, for I had had my grand solitude, my Ossianic visions, and the pleasure of sustaining myself, while they had only doubt amounting to anguish and a fruitless search through the night.

Entirely contrary to my expectations, I only suffered for this a few days, and was able to take a parting look at my prison, as I went down the lake, with feelings of complacency. It was a majestic-looking hill, that Tongue, with the deep ravines on either side, and the richest robe of heather I have seen anywhere.

Mr. S. gave all the men who were looking for me a dinner in the barn, and he and Mrs. S. ministered to them, and they talked of Burns, really the national writer, and known by them, apparently, as none other is, and of hair-breadth escapes by flood and fell. Afterwards they were all brought up to see me, and it was pleasing indeed to observe the good breeding and good feeling with which they departed themselves on the occasion. Indeed, this adventure created quite an intimate feeling between us and the people there. I had been much pleased with them before, in attending one of their dances, on account of the genuine independence and politeness of their conduct. They were willing and pleased to dance their Highland flings and strathspeys for our

amusement, and did it as naturally and as freely as they would have offered the stranger the best chair.

All the rest must wait a while. I cannot economize time to keep up my record in any proportion with what happens, nor can I get out of Scotland on this page, as I had intended, without utterly slighting many gifts and graces.