

CHAPTER XV. LOCH LOMOND AND LOCH KATRINE

HARRY bore Nell carefully down the steeps of Arthur's Seat, and, accompanied by James Starr and Jack Ryan, they reached Lambert's Hotel. There a good breakfast restored their strength, and they began to make further plans for an excursion to the Highland lakes.

Nell was now refreshed, and able to look boldly forth into the sunshine, while her lungs with ease inhaled the free and healthful air. Her eyes learned gladly to know the harmonious varieties of color as they rested on the green trees, the azure skies, and all the endless shades of lovely flowers and plants.

The railway train, which they entered at the Waverley Station, conveyed Nell and her friends to Glasgow. There, from the new bridge across the Clyde, they watched the curious sea-like movement of the river. After a night's rest at Comrie's Royal Hotel, they betook themselves to the terminus of the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway, from whence a train would rapidly carry them, by way of Dumbarton and Balloch, to the southern extremity of Loch Lomond.

"Now for the land of Rob Roy and Fergus MacIvor!--the scenery immortalized by the poetical descriptions of Walter Scott," exclaimed James Starr. "You don't know this country, Jack?"

"Only by its songs, Mr. Starr," replied Jack; "and judging by those, it must be grand."

"So it is, so it is!" cried the engineer, "and our dear Nell shall see it to the best advantage."

A steamboat, the SINCLAIR by name, awaited tourists about to make the excursion to the lakes. Nell and her companions went on board. The day had begun in brilliant sunshine, free from the British fogs which so often veil the skies.

The passengers were determined to lose none of the beauties of nature to be displayed during the thirty miles' voyage. Nell, seated between James Starr and Harry, drank in with every faculty the magnificent poetry with which lovely Scottish scenery is fraught. Numerous small isles and islets soon appeared, as though thickly sown on the bosom of the lake. The SINCLAIR steamed her way among them, while between them glimpses could be had of quiet valleys, or wild rocky gorges on the mainland.

"Nell," said James Starr, "every island here has its legend, perhaps its song, as well as the mountains which overshadow the lake. One may, without much exaggeration, say that the history of this country is written in gigantic characters of mountains and islands."

Nell listened, but these fighting stories made her sad. Why all that bloodshed on plains which to her seemed enormous, and where surely there

must have been room for everybody?

The shores of the lake form a little harbor at Luss. Nell could for a moment catch sight of the old tower of its ancient castle. Then, the SINCLAIR turning northward, the tourists gazed upon Ben Lomond, towering nearly 3,000 feet above the level of the lake.

"Oh, what a noble mountain!" cried Nell; "what a view there must be from the top!"

"Yes, Nell," answered James Starr; "see how haughtily its peak rises from amidst the thicket of oaks, birches, and heather, which clothe the lower portion of the mountain! From thence one may see two-thirds of old Caledonia. This eastern side of the lake was the special abode of the clan McGregor. At no great distance, the struggles of the Jacobites and Hanoverians repeatedly dyed with blood these lonely glens. Over these scenes shines the pale moon, called in old ballads 'Macfarlane's lantern.' Among these rocks still echo the immortal names of Rob Roy and McGregor Campbell."

As the SINCLAIR advanced along the base of the mountain, the country became more and more abrupt in character. Trees were only scattered here and there; among them were the willows, slender wands of which were formerly used for hanging persons of low degree.

"To economize hemp," remarked James Starr.

The lake narrowed very much as it stretched northwards.

The steamer passed a few more islets, Inveruglas, Eilad-whow, where stand some ruins of a stronghold of the clan MacFarlane. At length the head of the loch was reached, and the SINCLAIR stopped at Inversnaid.

Leaving Loch Arklet on the left, a steep ascent led to the Inn of Stronachlacar, on the banks of Loch Katrine.

There, at the end of a light pier, floated a small steamboat, named, as a matter of course, the Rob Roy. The travelers immediately went on board; it was about to start. Loch Katrine is only ten miles in length; its width never exceeds two miles. The hills nearest it are full of a character peculiar to themselves.

"Here we are on this famous lake," said James Starr. "It has been compared to an eel on account of its length and windings: and justly so. They say that it never freezes. I know nothing about that, but what we want to think of is, that here are the scenes of the adventures in the Lady of the Lake. I believe, if friend Jack looked about him carefully, he might see, still gliding over the surface of the water, the shade of the slender form of sweet Ellen Douglas."

"To be sure, Mr. Starr," replied Jack; "why should I not? I may just as

well see that pretty girl on the waters of Loch Katrine, as those ugly ghosts on Loch Malcolm in the coal pit."

It was by this time three o'clock in the afternoon. The less hilly shores of Loch Katrine westward extended like a picture framed between Ben An and Ben Venue. At the distance of half a mile was the entrance to the narrow bay, where was the landing-place for our tourists, who meant to return to Stirling by Callander.

Nell appeared completely worn out by the continued excitement of the day. A faint ejaculation was all she was able to utter in token of admiration as new objects of wonder or beauty met her gaze. She required some hours of rest, were it but to impress lastingly the recollection of all she had seen.

Her hand rested in Harry's, and, looking earnestly at her, he said, "Nell, dear Nell, we shall soon be home again in the gloomy region of the coal mine. Shall you not pine for what you have seen during these few hours spent in the glorious light of day?"

"No, Harry," replied the girl; "I shall like to think about it, but I am glad to go back with you to our dear old home."

"Nell!" said Harry, vainly attempting to steady his voice, "are you willing to be bound to me by the most sacred tie? Could you marry me, Nell?"

"Yes, Harry, I could, if you are sure that I am able to make you happy," answered the maiden, raising her innocent eyes to his.

Scarcely had she pronounced these words when an unaccountable phenomenon took place. The Rob Roy, still half a mile from land, experienced a violent shock. She suddenly grounded. No efforts of the engine could move her.

The cause of this accident was simply that Loch Katrine was all at once emptied, as though an enormous fissure had opened in its bed. In a few seconds it had the appearance of a sea beach at low water. Nearly the whole of its contents had vanished into the bosom of the earth.

"My friends!" exclaimed James Starr, as the cause of this marvel became suddenly clear to him, "God help New Aberfoyle!"