



HERE'S TAE US

Stories of the Glen

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A SCOTTISH TOAST

Here's tae us!

Wha's like us?

Dom few;

Nane!

They're 'a deid!

Mair's the peety.

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Foreword

Glen Lochan and Dougal McNab are unknown to me, though both doubtless exist somewhere in the Highlands. Indeed all the names and locations in these tales are fictitious, except that the Sergeant o' Braemar did die, or you may think was murdered, on the Hill o' Cristie.

On the other hand all the tales – including the ghostly Cattle Grid – are founded on fact, and could easily have happened in one or another Highland Glen.

My chief object has been to record some examples of the dry, kindly humour of today's older generation of Glens folk, lest, like other delightful things, it should pass away.

Far abler writers than I have had difficulty with the treatment of dialect. Altogether lacking it the salt of these stories would lose its savour. I hope those who know will view my compromise with a tolerant eye, and that all those who read may understand.

A tale of two marrows

Now that the "big hooses" are, for the most part, shuttered and silent, or, at best, turned into hotels or hostels, our local Glen Lochan Show with its varied delights is a thing of the past. An annual pilgrimage to the Dundrochit Show, a poor affair in comparison, we think, is the only alternative.

Dundrochit, eight miles downhill to the southward, is our metropolis. Besides such modern features as a cinema, a Co-op, a Railway Station (lately closed to passenger traffic) and a perennial parking problem, Dundrochit, is chiefly remarkable for the excellence and quite extraordinary numbers of its ironmongers' and chemists' shops. The former are understandably at the hub of an agricultural area, the reason for the latter is more obscure. When we first arrived in the Glen my wife asked our senior resident why it was. Lady X waved her hands and said vaguely, "My dear, I think it has something to do with the climate!" Baffled, we have left it at that.

Another peculiarity of Dundrochit, in our eyes at least, is that the Show Committee insists on presenting the prizes in the Fruit and Vegetable sections, and particularly in the latter, to the "Best Pair" of this or that. Edibility does not enter into the contest. The biggest pair of identical twins (and this is important to my story) invariably wins the day.

My wife and I, with Dougal, our gardener and universal prop, always attend the Dundrochit Show, but we do not compete. The reason is simple. Each of the eight miles back to our home and garden climbs, on an average, one hundred feet, and no prizes are given for classes which we might confidently enter, such as "The Latest Pair of Early Spring

Cabbages". Still, we enjoy walking round with a critical eye, and passing remarks amongst ourselves like,

"If they had ony sense and held their Show a month later, these twa wee scabbit things wadna hae a chance!"

On the memorable occasion with which we are concerned, when Dougal and I met after an independent skirmish, he was bursting with news.

"Man, Major, the finest thing ever!" he opened. "It wad make a coo laugh! Ye ken that Maclean and Donaldson, the market gardeners, hae been tussling for years for the best pair o' marrows?"

I nodded.

"Weel now, this year Maclean had the finest marrow ever he grew, a real Zeppelin, but naething else quite in the same class to pair wi' it.

"' 'What best to do?' he thinks – so he slippet quietly round tae Donaldson's gairden tae see how *he* fared.

"Believe it or no! Peeping ower the fence he saw yin, just yin graund marrow – anither Zeppelin, the pairfect pair o' his! So last nicht – the auld deevil – he creepit round, tippety tap, tae Donaldson's gairden, and nippet the big marrow. This morning fine and early, out he goes to cut his ain. It wasna there."

"Ye've guessed it! Tit for tat! Donaldson had nippet his! Twa auld deevils still wi' yin graund marrow apiece! Whaut they started".'

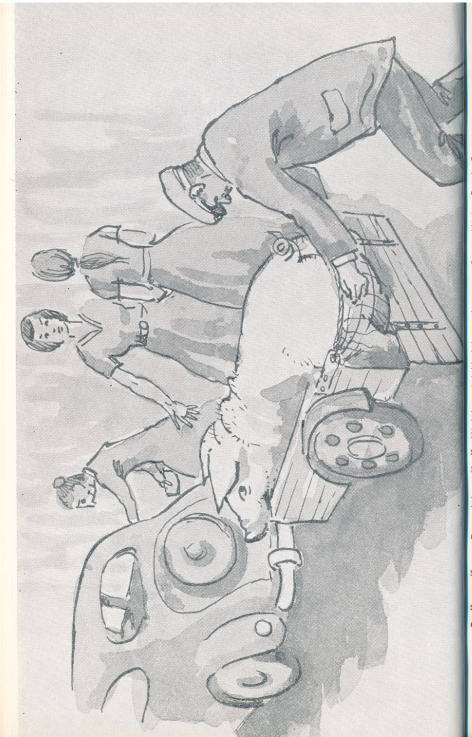
Dougal had been emphasizing each point of his story with a stab of his pipe. Here he stuck it triumphantly in his mouth, swallowed a lungful of smoke, and choked between asphyxiation and mirth.

"What happened then, Dougal?" I enquired with interest when he had recovered.

"Happened Major? Naething! Just naething at all. That's the cream o' the joke! They were baith so dumfoondered that neither entered, and naebody else had worried! A pair o' marroes the size o' sausages could hae carried the prize!"

"There should be a moral to it all," I said later, after delighting my wife with the story in the tea tent.

"Moral, darling?" she smiles. "Don't be silly. What have gardeners to do with morals!"



The soo that went to a Dance

In the days of rations and regulations pigs were, apparently, extinct in Glen Lochan. Yet, and at times pleasantly, we were aware of their presence. No one ever mentioned them of course, except on one occasion when a visiting Police Inspector from Dundrochit was tactless enough to lean back in his chair in Mrs Stewart's kitchen and say,

"A fine side o' bacon you've got there, Missus. Where did you get it, if I may ask?"

He got the answer he deserved.

"Just the same place as you got that twa dizzin eggs in the back o' your car, Inspector!"

Today pigs are visible, though I doubt if their numbers have increased. The best place for pork, so think most Glen farmers is on a plate. There is one notable exception – Hamish Mackay.

We are proud of Hamish. Hardheaded and shrewd, he has gone from strength to strength in the farming world, and is widely known outside the Glen. I got the first hint of his secret passion when we discussed the forthcoming visit of a minister, held in high esteem by Hamish.

"It's a terrible pity it's next Sabbath he preaches," said Hamish.

"I doubt if I'll be able tae gie due attention tae the sermon. Gertie's family's due on Monday and I'll be worrying!"

"Who is Gertie, Dougal?" I later asked innocently. "Is she Mrs Mackay? Or the married daughter?"

Dougal looked amazed. "D'ye no ken? Gertie's a prize soo! Hamish thinks the warld o' his pigs," he added. "He doesna' sell them, he doesna' eat them, he just lo'es them!"

Hamish! But it was true. Shortly afterwards, "How's the family, Hamish?" I enquired. Hamish beamed.

"Fine, Major, fine! A' thirteen o' them! Sockin graund, and a credit tae their mither! Ye see, the way their breeding is this - "

For the next ten minutes I was treated to a lecture on pig genetics. Incomprehensible, of course, but it came easy to me; I had long since learnt that all the breeding enthusiast of any sort wants is to be agreed with, and Hamish later confided to my wife:

"He's got a fine head on him, the Major! He and me see eye to eye on pigs!"

So much for the background to this remarkable story of the soo which went to a dance.

In simpler days in the Glen it was fiddle and song that passed the long winter evenings. Hamish's son still has music in him, more than most. He raised a band, and last spring was invited to take it all the way to Glen Beg.

next" announced Mrs Mackay when she heard the great news. on a horn again hooted insistently behind.

"And we'll take Auntie and Jenny wi' us."

"Friday next? The fourteenth?" ruminated Hamish.

"Ye canna tak a soo tae the dance!" protested his wife. them to stop.

"I'm no takin' the soo tae the dance. She'll stop at Will Stewarts." She's due tae his boar. Wi' petrol its price why Jenny. make twa trips?"

"What will Auntie say, Hamish?"

"T'ell wi' Auntie!" said Hamish firmly.

On the Friday evening with his three ladies on the back Hamish clambered out in silence, went to the back of the seat, a bag of pig meal beside him in front, and his soo in the car and stared unbelievingly. trailer, Hamish set off to the dance. He was a little testy. Emily's ample hinder parts had overflowed the trailer. He and my trailer?" he added, climbing hastily back and starting before departure, had had to let down the back board and to turn the car.

encase them in a net. Single handed. The ladies had flatly refused to help. So when, some miles on their way, a horn hooted behind, Hamish accelerated and dourly held his way.

"You'll hae us killt," wailed Auntie.

"You'll hae Emily killt!" cried his wiser wife.

Hamish promptly slowed, and a green sportscar ranged alongside.

"Your lady passenger's backside's an inch from the ground!" shouted the occupant, and was gone.

"Emily's, not yours Auntie!" soothed Mrs Mackay.

"The young man never saw us."

"So I would hope!" snorted Auntie.

"Out ye get. The lot o' ye!" interrupted Hamish, opening the back door of the car.

"Gie's a hand wi' Emily."

"We will not!" declared Auntie.

"I thocht ye wanted tae get tae the dance?" said Hamish. With the unwilling help of the ladies Hamish heaved Emily "Hamish, we'll go tae Glen Beg tae hear Jamie on Friday up, tightened the net, and again set off. Ten miles further

"Guidsakes, what next? Pu' in, Hamish," begged Mrs Mackay. A motor bicycle shot past into the beam of the "Aye. We'll go. And we'll tak Emily wi' us in the trailer." headlights, the rider turning in his saddle and signalling

"The police, father. The Police! Pu' up father!" shrilled

Constable Jock McLean approached the car.

"It's you, Mr Mackay, is it?" he said. "Are ye aware yer tail lights are oot?"

"T'ell wi' my tail lights!" he shouted, "Whaur's my soo!

"Hamish! What are ye thinking of?" demanded Auntie.

"My soo!" replied Hamish bluntly.

"We'll be late for the dance, Father. And Jamie's band," wailed Jenny.

"Ye can come wi' me, or stay here as ye like," stated Hamish stubbornly. There was silence from the back Constable MaLean decided to assert himself.

"Remember yer tail lights are no' burning yet, Mfirmly. Once again there was silence. Mackay," he said weightily. Hamish turned on him.

were as high as yer whustle! Onyway it's yer duty tae help Hamish drew up. A perspiring farmer peered out to see me recover ma property!"

"It is so!" chorused the ladies, mindful of the hazard o rescue work to party frocks.

"Aweel. The sooner the better. I'm on duty at the dance" said Jock resignedly, turning his bike and roaring off downwas already deep in plans for Emily's future. the road.

Some miles back the car lights picked up the bike parked beside an uptilted trailer. As Hamish drew up, a voice came from over the roadside dyke.

"I hae yer soo, Mr Mackay."

"Is the puir beastie hurt?" cries back Hamish urgently.

"Hurt be damned! She's up tae her neck guzzling in tattie clamp. "That wull cost ye something!" added the lav with satisfaction.

Half an hour later Hamish, seemingly unperturbed by th grim silence behind him, drew up at Will Stewart's farm.

"A' things' dark!" he said in surprise. "I'll gang round the back."

The ladies disdained to comment. In a few minutes h was back. "Willie's awa tae the dance," he announced i wonderment.

"What wad tak auld Willie tae a dance!"

"The widow frae the Mill!" snapped Auntie. "Preserv

What noo?" Hamish had started the engine.

"We're off tae the dance as ye want!"

"Wi' the soo!"

"Wi' the soo! I canna leave her here."

"Hamish Mackay!" thundered Auntie, "Ye cannatak three adies tae a dance wi' a soo trailing ahint them!"

"Ye can come wi' me or bide here," declared Hamish

It was the interval, and the refreshment tent by the door "Jock McLean! I skelpit ye for stealing cookies afore ye of the Glen Beg Hall was crowded with thirsty folk as who came.

> "Guidsakes! Hamish has brought his soo tae the dance!" he cried. "Wha'll dance the eightsome wi' Emily?"

Little cared Hamish for the laughter and the chaff. He

else I couldna' hae sent him to the right-about so quick!"

"Come on Dougal," I urged. "You've got me beat, the pair of you. What's it all about? Will Jock find a bicycle by the river?"

"I doubt it's no' there to find! But what Jock would find if he lookit is fush scales."

"Fish scales?" I queried.

"Aye fush scales, and I suspicion Jock knows it! Somethere twa nights back."

I gazed thoughtfully at the rapidly retreating back of ative sip. the law.

"Surely not?" I said cocking an interrogative eye at it. Frae the Isles I'm thinking?" Dougal.

"No quite! No quite!" chuckled Dougal, "But maybe near enough! His deil o' a nephew posted hauf a fine fish to thing in Scotland today - no fault of ours. a sister in Fife yesterday!"

All's well that ends well

I had asked Dougal in for a well earned dram on an evening when rain threatened, and we had worked late at the hav.

"Good health, Major" toasted Dougal, lifting his glass. body, mind you I'm not saying exactly who, lifted a saumon But he did not toss off the whisky as is his habit. He paused, lifted the glass higher against the light, then took an appreci-

"Grand stuff this, Major! A real smack o' the malt about

"It is, Dougal. Talisker. But how did you know that?"

We were far from the Isles, and a palate for whisky is a rare

"I've met its like before. A long time back but I've aye remembered it. When I served the auld laird." He mentioned a name widely respected in the Highlands.

"We had been on the hill and shot a Royal, a grand beast. The laird was verra' pleased and told McDonald the stalker and me to come ben the big hoose for a dram. I was but a loon, but the laird said I'd handled the pony well.

"The laird poured us a dram all round, and didna spare it. It was his special whisky frae the Isles, no' unlike this, but white. Frae a plain cask. This will be frae a second-fill sherry cask?"

I nodded. "I believe you're right Dougal, but you seem to know more about whisky than I do. Go on."

"We a' knew about the Laird's whisky. He'd talk about mony things on the moor, or in a boat, as freend tae freend. But even McDonald had seldom tasted the special but on big days like that was. So we took our glasses wi' proper respect.

"Not so the Laird's freend, an Englishman wha had arrived that day.

"He twirled his glass round, held it tae the licht and said 'What's this you're giving us, Alastair? Gin?'

"I heard McDonald draw in his breath for the Laird had frae they sharp stones. I dinna think I can move'. temper. But he was always the gentleman and all he said was 'No, George. Whisky. The best. And may the Lord gran suddenly he sings out, you years to learn that it is not the colour that makes whisky!' "

Over another dram we talked of whisky, its history, its making and, of course, its price.

in can seldom afford e'en a smell o' the cork. And some year and striking matches tae look at his hand. back a man in the Glen couldna' find even a cork tae smell tho' wi' the price o' a bottle in his pocket.

"London and Ameriky got it all, indeed they get maist o still! Wha'd vote Socialist or Tory?"

Dougal was in an unusually expansive mood. I was enjoy ing myself. He took another appreciative sip and continued "I'll tell ye a story o' the days o' scarcity. It was just after the war - you were still serving Major - at Hogmanay it was and if ever there's a time in Scotland when a man wants whisky, as ye well know, it's to drink in the New Year. I had gone to the Hotel to see what was what, and it was gey little As I was leaving I heard a motor bike roar up, and in come Wully-the-Post and Tam, his brither frae Glen Tulcan, up on a veesit. It was Tam's bike. Wully is a close freend o' the proprietor, but all he got was a half bottle, and as I left I saw him stowing it awa' very carefully, as if it was eggs, in his hip pocket.

"I expect they got a dram. Anyway I was home when I heard the bike coming down the hill. There's a verra' sharp turn at my cottage, as ye ken, and there was ice on the road.

"The bike skidded and there was Tam in my hollybush! knew that when I heard him swear!

"Then he called out 'Wully, whaur are ye? Are ye hurt?" "Wully groans, 'Man, Tam, I got a sair dunt on my back

"He must have been feeling himself over for damage, for

"'Come to me quick Tam, if ye can! I'm sair afraid. Man, I fear the worst!'

"As I was running to their aid I heard Tam fechting his way through the hollybush, swearing fit to beat the band. "Aye," said Dougal, "There's many in the land it's made When I got up he was kneeling aside Wully, feeling his back

> "Suddenly Tam cries out, 'All's well Wully, all's weel. Nae need tae worry. The wet is only bluid!"

Reverently we sipped our Talisker.



The cattle grid

An old keeper once told me an astonishing tale of our Glen – Glen Lochan. Some day, if he allows, I shall set it down. When he had done, he looked at me and said bluntly

"Do you believe me?"

"Well - " I hesitated. He shook his head resignedly.

"You don't! Naebody ever has. And the queer thing is every word of it is true as daith!"

This, too, is a true tale, but I do not ask you to believe it. Indeed far better not for otherwise the memory might surge back to your sorrow, perhaps one dark day on a lonely moor n the blanket of the mist.

It all began prosaically enough. I had long considered putting in a cattle grid to keep stray beasts out of our ungated drive, so when I heard that a neighbour had gridded a side toad high up the Glen, I decided to drive over to look.

I had as companion one Jock Mackintosh, who had ought in the Argylls in the first war, and done three men's work with hill sheep in the second. A long quiet man, the sort, as men say, to have at your shoulder if things are bad. He had business a few miles beyond Beinn Dearg, my destination, and was to take on the jeep while I examined the grid.

It was a dull, damp, oppressive day in late autumn with solid black clouds squatting on the hill tops, as if consulting for foul weather. Colour and life had fled Glen Lochan, and the curves of the moors unfolded before us in a monotone of browns.

"A queer kind of day", I said to Mackintosh.

"Aye," he replied, "Folk say 'nae day's ill when the wind still', "but I don't trust this one. It's no' natural."

We turned off the main road and drove on in silence t Mackintosh dropped me at the grid. The side glen w narrow here, and the dark capped hills pressed closely the road. The sound of the jeep's engine died away and a was silent.

I turned to the grid, sketched and measured it, and jotte down details of construction. Suddenly I realized it w growing cold, and much darker. Looking up I saw that t cloud caps had broken, and were pouring like dark gre torrents into the glen. At the very moment when the hil sides were blotted out I heard the unmistakable sound of herd of cattle moving fast, the click and slither of the of sticks upon their rumps.

The sound seemed to come from high on my left when I knew a corrie led up towards a cleft on the skyline of Beir Dearg. But strain my eyes as I might I could see nothin but swirling mist.

like any other beasts, may panic - it must be that, for sure there in the Glen might tell ye tales as -" no men in their senses would drive beasts fast down a rock hillside in dense mist? I had thought so far when the workurn is tinged with blood!" of today abruptly left me.

Something invisible hissed over my head, and as I duckwhich I pointed but made no move. a chorus of hoarse shouting broke out on the hill. Gaelic "Beinn Dearg" he muttered, "The Red Mount! I've unmistakable if untranslatable. Gaelic? and the tongue wometimes wondered - " dead, or nearly so, in our parts! Mingled with the shouting Abruptly he turned on his heel and swung open the jeep came the clash of steel and softer thuds as of swords meetin oor. leather or flesh. I had heard the like, years before, Waziristan, and it is a sound one does not forget. The rushir naybe two - is what you need - what we baith need." river of cattle had stopped, and the occasional hoarse bellot. As we drove back through the grey gloaming my thoughts of rage or pain were not those of goaded beasts.

Then my heart stood still for I heard heavy breathing ve Mackintosh startled me with a chuckle. close to me, the brush of dead heather, a clink of metal, as

ne shuffle of feet on the stones. Patches of mist surely were arkening, taking shape, and pressing in on me? I was, I dmit without shame, near panic flight when to my great elief I heard the distant mutter of the jeep's engine and aught the glimmer of its lights. At once I sensed a feeling commotion - of recoil. The shapes and sounds which enaced me were fading, and mingling, fusing is the better vord, into the wet silence of the mist. And this in turn was hinning, and swirling wildly back towards the tops. A half protten phrase came to my mind - The Present is driving ack the Past!

The jeep rattled over the slats of the grid and a moment hooves on rock out-crops and - could it be? - the crackin ater Mackintosh, sane and solid, stood beside me. He stened quietly to my tale, peering up at the clearing, empty illside, where the notch of the pass showed through a veil f cloud.

"Aye", he said at last, "that's the way the caterans came rae distant Lochaber, and the road they drove our stolen I was sorely puzzled though not yet alarmed. Hill cattleasts back - if they could! Take it easy Major, there's

"Look!" I interrupted. "Look, man! I swear the corrie

Mackintosh looked soberly at the rusty trickle of water at

"Let's away' hame, Major. The fireside and a dram - or

urned over and over, and over again, with the engine's beat.

"Man, Major," he said "It's a pity ye didna' chance to see

what these ghaist beasties, and their herds, made o' a ne fangled contraption like you cattle grid!"

The tension snapped. We laughed together. A fine maindeed, Jock Mackintosh, to have at your shoulder – .

A fishy story

thad been a late spring and Dougal McNab and I were hard tit in the garden making up lost time. I had a notion he elt it was high time he straightened his back and had a moke. I was right.

"Will Soutar's awa'" he volunteered. I gave a nonommittal grunt. Not that I was uninterested, but I felt it was high time our early potatoes were in.

"Aye, back to the Lothians whaur he came frae. He'll be setter there," Dougal persisted.

I knew Will Soutar slightly. A plump, balding bachelor armer, seemingly well to do, who sought his amusements outside the glen. A misfit in these parts I had guessed. It eems I was right.

"Aye, better awa" Dougal repeated firmly. "And talking tatties did ye ever hear tell o' Will Soutar and the kippers?" by now Dougal was leaning comfortably on his spade. I ighed. We had not been talking o' tatties, but planting hem. I doubted too if tatties had any special bearing on the fairs of Will Soutar. Still, Dougal – if unprincipled – tells good story. I fished out my pipe, and prepared to listen.

"It was a guid while back. At the time Soutar and Jock Tackintosh were coortin' the same lassie. Ye'll ken Jock, Tajor?"

"Yes, indeed" I said, "the long herd up beyond Kilry with the bonny red haired wife? A fine pair!"

"They're a' that. It was bonny Eliza indeed that Soutar and Jock were coortin'. Ae nicht after a Hall dance, Jock was to give Eliza a lift hame in his auld Austin tourer. They ot in and Jock started up. The engine chuffed and choked,

then black oily reek poured up frae underneath. Tae cut he back whaur I sat quiet as a mouse. Then things got auld car. She seldom gave trouble. Built like the Fortonger. Bridge they were, that sort.

Wully yells 'Goad, I'm shot'."

"Jock stopped the car, which was running fine, and wind o' fashion hunted round for what had hit Wully. We found naethi but a wee bashed tattie and were staring at it when Wul slaps his leg.

I saw him fiddling round the back o' Jock's car when be suggesting, Mr Soutar?' nipped quietly outside for a dram after Broon's Reel. Ma "Just then we ran past my road end. They had clean forexhaust pipe. I've heard tell o' that caper afore!'

"T'was well known that Soutar was after Eliza too, ye so pany!" and there was nae ither Glen body who would play sic a tri "What happened next, Dougal?" I asked with interest. asked her. Eliza couldna well refuse; besides like any la we got what you might call a side licht on events. she wasna unwilling to teach Jock, as she thocht, a lesso "This was the way of it. Wully and I knew that Betsy, be droppit off at my road end. I'd fixed that earlier and lone side and asked if she was ready for a change. couldna get oot o' it.

didna' ken aboot – a fine fat kipper wired tae his engine! Ichance.' ye'll see Montgomery himself couldna hae planned an oper tion better. Wully and I were baith in on it frae the start Dougal coughed modestly.

lang story short Eliza had to get a lift elsewhere, and Jobrisk! I could see Eliza and Soutar fidgeting but neither and some of us were left trying to find out what ailed tiked to say the first word. At last Eliza could stand it nae

"'There's an awfu' queer smell aboot your car!' she said.

"Wully-the-Post and I were pushing and Jock was pum" "Now, folk are aye gey prood about a new car, and maist ing on the accelerator when the engine gave a roar a of a' a stuck up lad like Soutar. He couldna' deny the smell it was terrible strong by then - but he said in an annoyed

"'There's never been a smell in my car afore Eliza!'

"Man, I thocht, ye've cooked your goose! And he had!

"Eliza, who at heart had nae use for the lad onyway, sat "'Got it' he cries, 'The sly beezer! Will Soutar it want straight and says, very cold like, "'And what might you

Did I need it! Soutar maun hae pushed the tattie up t gotten me. I tappit Soutar on the shoulder, thanked him for the lift, jumped out, and left them wi' the kipper for com-

on a well liked lad like Jock. Jock's a quiet yin, as ye ke "A lad would hae tae ask the kipper that, Major!" chuckled but nae fool. He bided his time. At the next Hall dance Dougal. "The other twa hae kept their ain coonsel! But didna offer Eliza a lift early on and Soutar nippet in a besides the fact that Eliza never looked Soutar's way again,

So when the time came we all climbed into Soutar's no Soutar's housekeeper, was clean fed up wi' him and we still saloon and off we went. All, I say, for I was in the back, towed the lad a bit. So soon after the dance we got Betsy on

"'Ready? More than ready!' she cries. 'I'm off at the "Aye, and there was a fourth passenger besides that Sout term anyway but I'd gladly gang the morn if I had the

> "That was that. We told her the plan, and next day, on his rounds, the Post gied Betsy a package.

"That evening when Soutar sat doon fae his supper Betsy "After a bit Mr Kipper warmed up, and I got a whiff brought in a plate, set it afore him, gied a smirk and whippet

off the cover wi' a flourish! A fine fat reekin' kipper it wa Betsy said she was through the door and awa' just aheid the kipper – and the plate!"

"A grand story Dougal," I said truthfully, knocking o my pipe. "A grand story indeed, and talking o' tatties— We bent our backs again in toil.

A matter of training

"The dommed beast's no' come back to the kill!" grumbled Dougal McNab as I tiptoed up. He was crouched, gun in hand, behind a dyke, peering hopefully at a faint white blur in the rushes below.

Dougal had stayed thus, motionless, far into the night. The McNab honour was at stake. His own hands had built the hen run from which, the night before, a fox had dared to claw out its victims!

"Bad luck, Dougal," I consoled. It's too dark to shoot anyhow. Here's something to warm you, even if its no' Talisker!"

Dougal rose stiffly, carefully broke his gun, and accepted the proffered dram from my flask.

"Good health, Major. It's maybe no' Talisker, but it's graund! There's nae drink in the world like guid Scots whisky and I tried maist things, wi' the Argylls in the first waur! It's a fine study, whisky!"

It was a lovely night, so still that I could hear the waterfall on Beinn Lochy a mile, or nearly, across the glen. If Dougal wanted to talk about whisky I was glad to listen. We sat on the dyke and got out our pipes. After a puff or two, Dougal continued,

"There's a great history tae whisky. We've talked o' it before. It's a' set oot in a book I'm reading frae the County Library. The lad wha wrote it knew something o' distilling. should know! Mony a holiday I spent wi' my uncle – a tillman in Glenlivet."

"A very responsible job, Dougal?" I said.

"Responsible's the word! Mak one mistake, just one, and

ye spoil the flavour, or e'en wreck the still. My gran'fathe "Ave. for my gran'father - what's that ye say Major? tho'," Dougal chuckled, "He told me a thing or twa about distilling that's no' in the book!"

"On the hill, Dougal?" I hazarded.

cottage loft."

"Have you ever used them, Dougal?" I asked curioush "There's a story about that I had frae my gran'father, But Dougal perhaps had not heard.

brought up tae it," he answered obliquely.

"Like your grandfather, Dougal?"

Like epples at first, but there's gey few epples in the hill Ye'll see!

After that, like naething in the world but malt! So the excise "The lot o' them emptied the jar and another twa after it! I wished I could draw!)

"But Gladstone, he was the boy! In the sixties he curchis hair!" a' that. He made it legal to hae duty-free malt tae feed cattle My gran'father bought twa stirks, and tae hell wi' the excis men! A graund man Gladstone!

(Is that why the Glen votes Liberal to this day, I wo dered?)

"There was anither trouble tho' in the hill distilling th naething could cure. The malt had to be boiled, and th meant a fire. And the vapour frae the malt had tae be col densed, and that needed cauld running water. So the excl lads looket out for smoke near a burn. Wi' they airyplan it would be terrible hard!"

"For your gran'father, Dougal?" I interjected.

ou're joking! Thank ye kindly." Refreshed, Dougal connued.

"Mind ye, the stuff frae a wee still wasna smooth like this. "Aye, on the hill! His auld worm and pot are still in the twice through the worm, gently over a sma' fire, it still ad a kick tae it. I'm telling ye!

ha had it frae his father, aboot Wade's boys - him that "It's no' ill tae mak whisky, wi' a wee still if ye've bee bee down yonder, and built it weel. How long go is that, Major?"

"About two hundred years," I guessed.

"Aye, like my gran'father! A sack or twa o' guid Sco "It could be! The McNabs are a long-lived lot. Onyway barley, steeped and stacked awa' till it sprouts. Then driewhen the Brig was built, three o' Wades' officers got down over the peat. That gies ye whisky malt." Dougal sucketae celebrate wi' a jar o' whisky and auld Hamish McNab his pipe and ruminated. "Aye, malt! Malt was a sair trouband twa o' his freends, naething loath, for company. The tae my gran'father! It was dutiable, ye see, and it smelofficers werena' bad lads, but they had their leemitations.

men toured round the Glens wi' their nebs in the air Next morning Hamish and freends were up and about, fine sniffing, sniffing, sniffing! (What a lovely picture, I thoughand spry, but the Sassenachs were in a sad way! Yin was paralysed, yin had a terrible fever, and the third had cast a'

"Is that really true, Dougal?" I asked doubtfully.

"True enough Major! As my gran'father used to say, 'It's a' a matter o' training!'."

A purple patch

It was the week of our Glen Lochan Harvest Festival. W Dougal in attendance I was summing up the resources our kitchen garden.

"Brussels sprouts?" I mused. "Not very suitable. Dougal, I noted, had vanished. He is good at that. would take bushels to make a show and they are brutes the labourers are few'."

well washed, would look fine in the chancel?"

dener. Too progressive, or so thinks Dougal, you will det terrible goat!" from his interpolated comments. Following upon dwarf per He waved a hand in farewell and was gone before I could siastical hue-purple of vestment, pure of heart, as beamingly put it.

I recalled now that the Reverend James aspired to fill the niches below our main chancel windows with heap baskets of his treasures. Potatoes then were definitely "of

"Cauliflowers and apples, Dougal" I said firmly. you drop some of them at the church on the way to yo cottage?"

"If you don't mind, Major, I'd rather not. I've no grant wish to meet the Reverend today. Last evening my a

pillygoat got loose and ate the hairvest sheafs in the porch. The Minister was fair wild! He drove him awa' and ran to the Manse to telephone Kindrochit farm for more sheaves. Would ye believe it! The auld deevil of a billy slippit back and ate the Reverend's best surplice! Losh! Here's himself coming doon the hill!"

Our parson was indeed approaching fast on his bicycle. He braked to a standstill and we exchanged greetings.

"Selecting your offering?" he said. "Splendid! Splendid! pick! As the prophet has it, 'the harvest is plenteous, b Cauliflowers and apples? Rosy cheeked apples. You are fortunate to be able to grow them here. He mused. "Rose "Aye, few's the word," agreed Dougal. "Just you and n and purple? We might combine them in the niches. That Aye, Sprouts are sairer even on the back to pick than tatties is to say if my crop of Purple Pilots suffices. I am most "Tatties?" I queried. "That's an idea. Our Kerr's Pir anxious on that score. Every last one must be garnered. I must impress that strongly on Dougal's nephew who is "The Minister's seeing tae the tatties himself," sa kindly digging them for me. I must indeed!" He peered Dougal, "if you can call they purple things o' his tatties!" round shortsightedly. "Dougal himself is not here I think? The Reverend James Mackintosh is a progressive go I would have liked a word with him about restraining his

(Hop o' me Thumbs that fair break yer back tae pick) - speak. I saw him sail round the bend at Dougal's cottage at had introduced spinach-beet (a queer shapit humafrodit a good speed, precariously waving his hat and tinkling his and now the purple tatties, attracted, he said, by their ecc bell to the occupant of a perambulator at the side of the road. The Reverend Mackintosh has a forgiving spirit and a soft spot for all young things.

> "Heech! He's frichtened the goat! That auld billy will be the death of me," exploded Dougal who had re-appeared.

A white object started to its feet from the road ditch "C opposite the pram, the bicycle bucked mysteriously, and the Reverend Mackintosh, with goat, perambulator and bicycle in close attendance, vanished into our whin bush.

"Godsakes! He's killt" shouted Dougal, and set off at a

But our Minister was not killed. We arrived to find hi dazedly examining an overturned perambulator at which terrified goat, tethered thereto by a long rope, persistent tugged.

"Where is the poor, poor little one?" I heard him murm Suddenly he bent and tenderly picked up a bundle, noticed that he had lost his glasses.

in the pram?"

Dougal gasped. "I'll skin that loon! If I'm no' mistake it's a wee baggie o' the Minister's best purple tatties!"

"I think, if I were you Dougal - " I started to say. B Dougal had already vanished!

Rescuing Maggie

It was a wonderful day for early March in Glen Lochan. The sun shone brilliantly in a cloudless sky, and there was "That's not a baby," I whispered to Dougal. "What a only a whisper of wind - due south at that. Until one looked around and saw the bare brown fields and moors, scorched with winter's breath, one might have thought oneself in high summer.

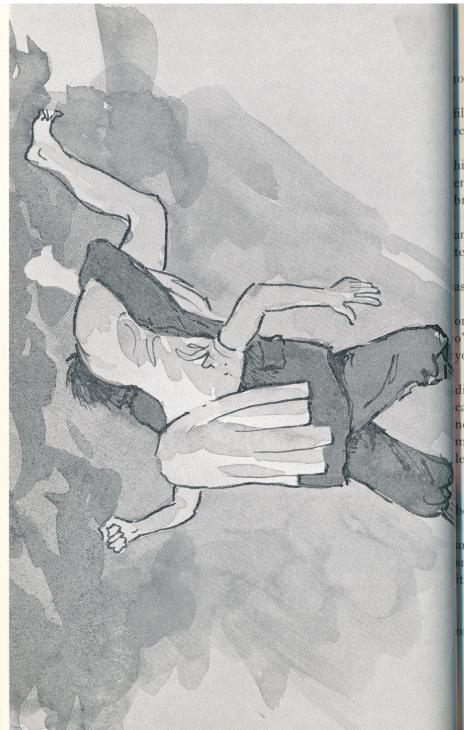
> I was working for the first, and possibly the last time in my life at such a season in Glen Lochan, in shirts and shorts, and even Dougal McNab had cautiously divested himself of several outer layers.

> "Do you ever remember such weather in March?" I asked him.

> "I never do," he replied mopping his brow. "By an' large it's the warst month o' the year in Glen Lochan – ane freezing blizzard after anither as ye know. And I'll tell you what, Major," he continued practically, "We'd better get you bundle o' transplants opened oot quick and their feet intae watter, or the sun will dry them oot! And that's a risk I have never known when planting in March afore."

> We were in fact planting a mixed belt of Sitka and Norway spruce with a row or so of deeper rooted larches at the edges to take the first blasts. Dougal, who had done a bit of beating in his day, had strong views about pure Sitka belts.

> "They fair claw the skin offan ye," he maintained. "The lads winna gang thro' them if they can dodge it - just bang their sticks and mak' noises roond the edges! An' I dinna blame them! On the other hand there's naething like Sitka for a fine safe perch for a pheasant. Try climbing up an' ye're a peencushion! A judeecious mixture is what ye need!"



And a judeecious mixture we were planting, with an eye shelter for both beasts and game.

We carried the transplants over to a nearby burn, and illed some buckets with a thin porridge of loam and water eady to take their roots.

"That's a fine little knife, Dougal," I said as I watched im dexterously cutting the lacing of the first bundle. The ngine-turned silver toy looked oddly out of place in his big rown hand.

"Aye, it's braw," agreed Dougal, snapping the knife shut nd handing it to me for inspection. "I got it frae the miniser for rescuing a lassie in her shift!"

"The Minister? A lassie in her shift!" I repeated in stonishment.

"Just that. But no' the present minister. He wouldna gie onybody a siller knife! Leastways no me since yon dom goat mine ate his surplice! The auld minister I mean, afore your time in Glen Lochan. Wait and I'll tell you!

"Early one morning, just at this time o' year, but far different – bitter cold it was – the auld manse at Erachy caught fire. A'body wha saw the flames ran to help. I lodged nearby then and got there among the first. There was the minister's wife wrapt in a blanket and no' much else, poor leddy, crying 'Save Maggie! Save Maggie!'"

"Whaur's Maggie?" I shouted

"'In her bedroom – downstairs, there!' she pointed. 'Mayes still in bed! Nothing ever wakes that girl!'

"I wrapped a clout roond my head, ran inside the house and kicked open the bedroom door. The room was fu' o' smoke, and the fire roaring outside but – would you believe it? – Maggie was still in bed, sitting up and yawning!

"'Out you come," I yelled. "The Manse is afire!"

"'I canna get oot o' bed in front o' the likes o' you wi'nly my shift' mumbles Maggie, testy as you like.

"'Shift or no shift, oot you come, my lass!' I cries, a picks her up, shift, blankets and a', just as they came. T I claps a towel round her heid - it was getting gey het starts tae stagger ootside. Losh! She was a wecht!

"As I battled on Maggie starts fechting. 'Keep s He can't have been as narrow minded as that!" woman,' I cries. 'Dae ye want tae fry us baith?'

under the towel.

towel intae her mooth tae quiet her and fechts my way o she'd married him!" side. She couldna screech then but man, could she k Through her ain tantrums she was mair or less upside d by now. The Minister sees her bare, fat legs flailing about but he was a sensible man, yon, and he didna' bat evelid.

"'Well done, Dougal lad,' he cries, 'You're a brave m Set her down on the bench to cool!'

"So that is how I got the siller knife. Aye, and my na in a' papers too. Maybe you'd like to see the cuttings so day."

"I would indeed, and well you deserved it all Dougall said warmly.

"Ave, but it was a hard won knife!" Dougal sadly she his head. "Rescuing Maggie made me an enemy, and me a freind intae the bargain."

"How that, Dougal? Who was the enemy?"

"Maggie hersel' no less! When I gagged her wi' the to it seems what she was trying to get oot wasna' 'Stop! Thi as I thocht, but 'Stop! Teeth!' Her set was in a glass by wash basin! She was a hearty eater, that one, and by time she got refitted she had lost nearly a stone in well Maggie nearly went daft watching ithers getting stuck in a steak when a' she could manage was soup and slops! blamed me, the besom! Never a word o' thanks frae her!

"Too bad, Dougal," I said sympathetically, "and who was the friend you lost?"

"Maggie's Fiancy, Jock McKay."

"Really, Dougal," I expostulated. "Surely not the shift?

"No' that ava', Major. No' that ava'!" Dougal chuckled. 'Stop! Thief! Stop! Thief!' she bellows, muffled like to 'At the time Jock ca'ed me a hero, no less, and stood me wa three drams at the Stag. It was later he turned against "I had nae time for sic dom nonsense, so I pushed me for rescuing Maggie. A whiley later, a year maybe after

The laird's bull

We see little of the Laird in the Glen, more's the pity. A fil kindly and humorous gentleman as all agree, he is also a ve "Lord, Annie, is that the time? Heel, you!" poor one. His eldest brother, Duncan, was killed in Waz istan; Ian, the next Laird, at Tobruk a few years later. the Dundara lodges, moors and deer forests are let a Dundara House, ancient home of his family, stands emp

But, on a certain day each year the shutters are hing heard as old Ranald, caretaker-cum-piper, supples his the write to the Postmaster General. At once!" maticy fingers. Then the Glen knows that the Laird coming back - for a brief fortnight - to his kingdom.

I had not known the Laird was with us till, pushing op cottages along it." the door of our tiny Post Office I found it full of Laird a panting labradors sitting on their haunches.

"Well met Alastair," he said. "Push in! Sorry about pack. They're steady to fur, barring Mrs McCandlish's ca starts her round on foot she is not entitled to a bicycle." They've treed the lot!"

"That is no matter!" protested our Post Mistress. "Good of you to say so Annie. Judging by their langua your cats don't agree!"

"I didn't know you were back, Hector," I interjected. "I'm not. Leastways only for two nights. Suspected of rot in the Tower roof. It's not, thank God!"

"Tell me, Alastair," he continued. "What's all this nonsense about Jean the post girl? We'd better see to it."

Mrs McCandlish looked at me appealingly. I took my cue. 'Never mind now, Hector" I said. "Can you sup tonight? 'll tell you about it then?"

"Thanks. I'd like to" he said and glanced at the clock.

When the Laird and labs had gone Mrs McCandlish turned to me. "It's the Inspector, Major. Indeed two of them! The one from Dundrochit and one from the G.P.O. itself!"

"To inspect the Inspector, Annie?"

Mrs McCandlish smiled deprecatingly. "Maybe Major. back, the dust sheets removed, the mahogany and silv I didna' mean to tell the Laird. It slipped out wi' the rest of polished and the portraits dusted. The lilt of the pipes the news. Jean's bicycle! He fastened on to that. Said he'd

> "He would, Annie," I soothed her. "Never mind. I'll explain it all tonight."

Only his closest friends know that he eats his heart out I did when we were settled with our pipes and a glass, the rest of the year in the London club where he is secretar beside the study fire. "It's like this, Hector. By Regulations No one has ever heard him complain - on his own accounthe post girl must deliver to each house on her round in at least. But injustice to one of his folk - and the whole Gl rotation, following the shortest route. Well, the old moor and beyond are that - that is another matter as you will he road is the shortest route and there are still three occupied

> "But the old moor road has been closed for years and the cottages always collect their mail with their milk!"

> "True, Hector, but not by Regulations! As Jean officially

"But she bicycles the whole way round. And must save an hour by it!" expostulated the Laird.

"At her own risk, and expense, contrary to Regulations. When the Inspectors come on Tuesday, Jean will walk!"

The Laird gave his opinion of Postal Regulations, added a few pungent words on Inspectors, and demanded a sheet of notepaper.

"You could, of course, write to the P.M.G." I agree tactfully. "But it's a bit tricky. Remember that Annie is o newsagent too. Jean delivers the papers with the ma old Fergie's stomach powders - "

china shops!" His eye brightened. "Bulls!" he said though realing some object behind her back? fully. "By heaven! Think of old Rusty loose on the mo Suddenly a ringed nose butted forward - the senior In-

Old Rusty is tough. But we'll think of something."

We thought. The decanter ebbed. At last the Laird sa behind the dyke to meet me. "Dougal's the man. And Ranald. Both steeped in origin sin! Can I borrow Dougal?"

"Of course, Hector," I said.

walking the labs on the moor road, I met a freshly paint and she lettered the quarry board. Schooling's a grand thing!" notice by the long unworked quarry

DANGER. BLASTING!

I rang the Laird. "Hector," I asked, "Are you blowir Dougal let them through the gate and slammed it shut. up the Inspectors?"

"Not a bit" he chuckled. "At least I hope not! Ju softening up tactics. Wait till tomorrow!"

Tuesday dawned. I settled down with a stalking glass (a ridge which commanded the old road. At 9.45 precise gate and away before the agitated Inspectors could intervene. a long gossip ahead of her usual time, Jean left the Po Office on foot and, flanked by the Inspectors, turned up t old road. The trio turned in at the cottages, continued the quarry, and halted beside the notice. Seconds later the was a deafening roar. Jean, I observed, had thrown hers headlong into a ditch, to be followed smartly by the t Inspectors. I adjusted my spy glass expectantly.

I had not long to wait. As the procession reformed I saw largish black animal lumber down the hill and fall in chind them. A shaft of light glinted on his nose ring. I Against Regulations! As for the odd packet of cigarettes hubbed my glass and looked again. The two Inspectors were the mail bag, not to speak of notes about Hall Meetings, ar throwing apprehensive glances over their shoulders and noving fast. Jean's shorter legs twinkled between them. I "I see," said the Laird slowly. "You mean no bulls caught the murmur of agitated voices. Surely Jean was con-

road. Inspectorial asses obscured by dust!" he conclude spector yelled and the procession broke in disorder. Jean, While I still digested this the Laird shook his head, "I noted, had dropped her mail bag as she joined in the rout. good. Not their faults I suppose. The Inspectors I mea I snapped shut my glass and cut down the hill to await events at the moor gate near my house. Two figures rose from

> "Whose idea was the Laird's bottle reared stirk?" I enuired with interest.

Dougal coughed modestly. "Ranald it was. But hanging I saw nothing of Dougal the next day. But that evenin on the brass curtain ring was me! Wee Jenny polished it,

I had no time to ponder the ethics of this. Jean and the Inspectors, moving well together, were already hard by.

"Losh! That was a near thing indeed," he greeted them. While the Inspectors still panted and mopped their brows, there came sensation!

"I maun save the mails!" shrilled Jean, and was over the

"Bedam she's a brave lassie," cried Dougal. "Wha will upport her mither and wee brithers if she's killt!" The nspectors exchanged alarmed glances and surged to the gate. Jean reached the bag which the stirk was nuzzling,

natched it away and raced for the gate, casting realistically terrified glances back at her pursuer. As she scrambled over the top bar Dougal murmured rapidly in my ear "The beastie kens his milk bottle's in the bag! Jean did fine! Major, could you draw off the Inspectors? The rine droppit off!"

I had no difficulty in drawing off the Inspectors. Rega tions or not they clearly felt the need of a dram. Over congratulated them on their escape and we agreed that the The northern slopes of Beinn Dearg are as bare of cover as could never trust a bull.

about?" asked the senior Inspector.

at home."

postal employees with helpless dependents!

I rang the Laird and acquainted him with the situation "Splendid, Alastair! They can have their fence, and close the quarry if the Post Office pays! I don't think the will!" He chuckled and rang off. An hour later he rang ba

"Victory! The Inspectors - decent chaps, we are the b of friends - are strongly recommending, providing there sisted the Laird. no local objection, that the postal round be changed."

"To what?" I enquired.

"To what it is now! But - Jean will ride it on a bike p vided, and maintained, by the Post Office. And face traffic at their risk. By the way I am just writing to P.M.G."

"Why in Heaven's name?" I asked.

"He's a man who enjoys a joke. I ought to know! I fage worried the Glen folk!" for him at school!"

The sergeant o' Braemar

a man's hand, and well the ptarmigan knew it! Every now "Surely that road should be fenced if there are by and then as the Laird and I, with Dougal between, breasted the southern slope, a stone came to life and broke over our "Perhaps it should," I replied. "Of course the road heads with a whirr of wings. Tricky shooting on a steep hardly used nowadays except for the postal round. An rocky slope but that's the way of ptarmigan - hard to find, bull-proof fence would cost a mint of money! But why ill to kill - and splendid sport. We topped the ridge and sat discuss the problem with the Laird? It's his land and h down for a pipe and a breather. Far below lay the cattle grid where men and beasts, long dead and gone, had milled round The Inspectors thanked me and departed. I saw Dow me in the darkness of the mist. Or so I still firmly believed.

and Ranald close in on their flanks like wolves. I col The Laird and Dougal knew the story and together we readily imagine their conversation. Bulls, blasting, inju traced the old raiders' road on the now sunlit, innocentdeath. With special application of course to young fem seeming hillside. Suddenly as was his way, the Laird shot a question at Dougal.

"Do you believe in ghosts, Dougal McNab?"

Dougal sucked thoughtfully at his pipe.

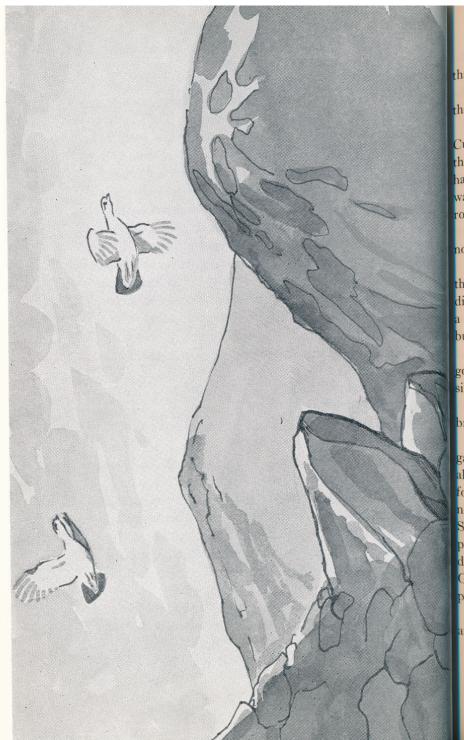
"Well, Sir Hector, I wouldn'a doubt the Major's word!" he answered cautiously.

"Never mind the Major, what about yourself, man?" per-

"Pve never seen a ghaist myself, Sir Hector, since ye ask, but I knew a man wha must ha' done. Years back when I served the Auld Laird ower there," Dougal gestured with his pipe towards the Aberdeenshire hills. "Ye'll ha' heard tell the Sassenach sergeant o' Braemar?"

"I've read of him" I said, but the Laird protested,

"Steady Dougal! The McNabs are a long lived lot I know, but your father wasn't born, let alone you, when that ghost



"The Glen folk? Aye, but there's mair to my story than

"Fine then! Let's have it," urged the Laird. "Right from

the start."

"As ye say, Sir Hector. Well then, in the bad years after Culloden a picquet o' Geeze's Regiment'' (Guise's murmured the Laird) "was set down in a strong-built barn at Dubrach, hard by Braemar. A sergeant and fower privates. Their job was tae round up a' the arms thereabouts. What a job! Nae roads, nae freends, naething!"

"Worse than Waziristan," I interjected. The Laird nodded. Dougal sucked his pipe reflectively, and continued, "Would that be so? Onyway, there was little comfort for the Sassenachs! But the sergeant was no ordinary man. He didna' gie a damn! And a dandy he was! Hat laced wi' sillar, a lang blue coat, and a waistcoat wi' twa rows o' sillar buttons.

"That was no a'! He had sillar buckles on his shoes, twa gold rings, ane wi' a posie on it, a sillar watch, and a green silk pouch wi' fifteen and one hauf golden guineas intilt."

The Laird and I exchanged glances as Dougal drew reath and continued.

"And that was not a'! The lad was a sportsman! When game for maist was but meat for the pot, he ranged the hills, alane, for the fun o't. Not only deer he sought, but muirfowl too. There were folk wha' respected him, Sassenach or no, and warned him. But he didna' gie a damn! So – one September day off he set to meet anither Geeze's picquet patrolling up frae Glenshee. He told his men tae keep their distance and no' disturb the game. This was his way. So at Glenay, the rendezvoos, the sergeant met the Glenshee corporal, alane, and turned back. Never was he seen again-alive!

"But - a year or thereby later, a Glenshee herd, Macgillas, woke - mind ye this is the story he later told and swore by - Macgillas awoke in the night tae see a shape against red o' the peat. My brother, he thinks, and greeted he But this wasna' his brother! A voice like the sough o' wind said, 'I died on the hill o' Cristie, near Glenay, I speace. Come, friend, bury my bones!'

"Macgillas rose in a sweat, fear driven, and went to hill o' Cristie. On the slope, stumbling thro' a bog in licht o' the moon, he tripped – ower a skull! He let oot a and ran for hame! Wha'd blame him!

"Three nichts he slept wi' his brother further down Glen. On the fourth he came back hame. It had turn cold and wet so afore bedding he threw some sticks on thep for comfort. In the dark o' the morning Macgillas awok the figure was by his bed!

"A stick flared. It was a sodger, he saw – lang coat ke breeks and a'. A hand pointed down at him, he caught glint o' the scoured bones, and the same soughing voice sa 'Friend! I died on the hill o' Cristie. Rise and bury bones. Or I must come again – and again!'

"Anither stick flared – but there was naething there! Macgillas drew his plaid round the sweat o' his body, to a spade, climbed to the bog on the hill o' Cristie – and bur the bones.

"Well now! The Auld Laird when I served him lived that far frae Glenay, tho' his big hoose, like Glenay, is not thing now but a rickle o' stones. The folk, big and sma' will filled the high Glens are gone.

"One year a Mr Davies visited the Laird. The gentlem was English, but settled in Edinburgh wi' the firm o' write wha did the Laird's business. A nice gentleman and a grashot, tho' dressy! Knickers, spats, a jacket near a' flaps ken! Still he was no' bad on the hill, and didna' tire matter what.

"Murdoch, Sir Hector will mind him, was head kee

then. A Glenay man born and bred. One day, over a bite in the lee o' a dyke, Murdoch pointed tae the hill o' Cristie and told Mr Davies o' the sergeant o' Braemar. Verra interested the gentleman was. He told us Macgillas and another Glenshee lad had, in time, been charged wi' murdering the sergeant, and had stood jury trial in Edinburgh. They had got awa' wi' it, as indeed we knew, but he told us the way o' things. The jury, it seems, believed Macgillas when he swore the ghaist had tellt him he had deed – no been murdered, mind ye – on the hill o' Cristie. Legal gentlemen argued about the case still for what Mr Davies ca'ed 'spectral evidence' was a queerlike thing to admit in a court o' law! Maist thought Macgillas had invented the ghaist, and should ha' been strung up for murder!

"That's what Mr Davis thocht anyhow. Ghaists were a' dam nonsense! Still, it was an interesting story. He'd walk over tae the hill o' Cristie after denner – .

"I lodged wi' Murdoch and later, as we turned in his cottage gate the black clouds were banking fast against the sun.

"'Early dark,' says Murdoch. 'And the hill o' Cristie! Guidsakes! Rather him nor me!'

"So too, it seems, thocht the Laird. But the lawyer was a verra determined sort o' body, and the Laird couldna' gainsay a guest.

"It was my job to stoke the boiler at the big hoose last thing, so I was still about when the gentleman cam' back. The Laird sent for me tae the library.

"I saw Mr Davies' smart claes were peat-spattered frae the bog. He was shaking, and his face – losh, I thought, he's an auld man!

"'Dougal,' said the Laird quietly, 'What was the name of that English sergeant?'

"Sir, I do not know, I replied. I knew fine wha' he meant! 'Ask Murdoch to step this way.'

"I fetched Murdoch frae his cottage. 'Murdoch,' said to Laird, 'what was the name of the English sergeant who die on the hill of Cristie?'

"Murdoch looked at Mr Davies, crouching in a big chanear the fire, and twisted his bonnet in his hands.

"'His name, Laird,' he said reluctantly 'was Davic Sergeant Arthur Davies.'

'And when did he die?'

'The 28th of September, Laird. There is reason to member that day in Glenay. I'm no sure o' the year.'

"All three of us looked at the big calendar above the Laird desk.

"You wanted to know, Davies,' said the Laird quiet signing tae us tae leave.

"The gentleman said nothing, only huddled doon low over the fire.

"The Laird must hae sat up half the nicht wi' him. V saw the lichts. Next morning Himself drove the gentlem tae the station."

"Is that all?" I asked after a long pause.

"It's a' I know," replied Dougal. "The gentleman new came back."

* * *

"I was glad of the sun on Beinn Dearg today," admitte the Laird later.

"No tale that for a dying fireside in the black o' the mo" ning!"

I was silent and the Laird mused on.

"The Sergeant o' Braemar! It's true of course. I wond what happened to Davies? An Edinburgh lawyer thirt perhaps forty years back? It should not be hard to find out

"Do you really want to Hector?" I said quietly.

He stared at me a moment, then slowly shook his head.

Nae flees on Fergie!

The Saturday bus from Dundrochit drew up and disgorged its passengers, Dougal amongst them. I collected a parcel and we walked up the hill together.

"There's the McPhees ahead o' us wi' their week's rations. Fergie has his in his pooches!" "Dougal chuckled and gestured with his stick. I saw what he meant. While Mrs McPhee bore a shopping basket, Fergie's only visible burdens were two large black bottles, stuck one in each pocket.

"He's aye been that way. And age has no' bettered him!

Did you ever hear the auld tale o' Fergie and the Pledge?"

Dougal paused and looked at me enquiringly.

"No? That surprises me," he continued when I shook my head.

"Well then, mony years back Fergie was a kirk elder, believe it or no', over in Glen Beg.

"The Minister had been a gay enough lad aince, or so they said, but he had foresworn the bottle. It aye taks that kind worst! So he prod prodded awa' at his fower elders tae sign the Pledge.

"Nane o' them was keen, and least of all Fergie! But at long last the minister got the fower o' them round the table in the manse wi' the ink bottle and a pen, and the Pledge staring them in the face!

"The first elder let go a lang sigh, dipped the pen in the ink and signed. Then the second – then the third! A' three o' them and the minister – he maist of all – stared hard at Fergie.

"Fergie took the Pledge, settled his glasses on his nose, and read it through. Next he took off his glasses, polished

them, and read through the Pledge again. The ministe they say, by now was hardly breathing!

"At last Fergie took the pen, cleaned the nib wi' care, an signed wi' a flourish. The minister near snatched the paper frae him.

"Aye, there were fower signatures on the Pledge a' rich but alow the first three Fergie had writ:

'Fergie McPhee. Witness'"

"There's nae flees on Fergie," I laughed.

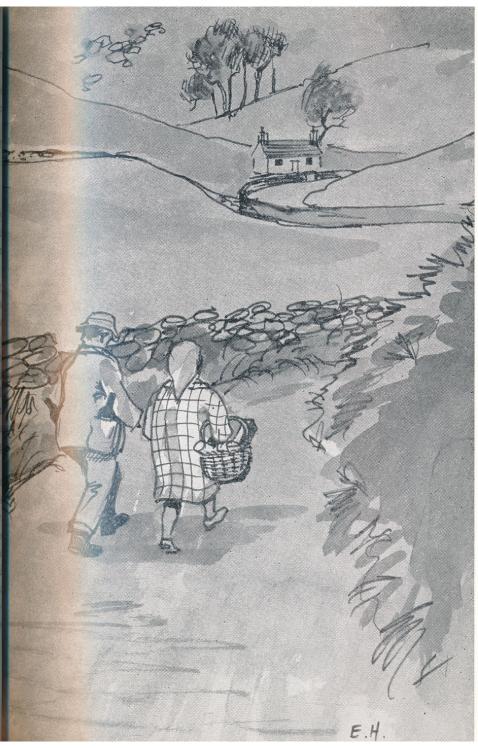
"Indeed. Bottle or no' he had aye a heid on him. Mon a lad has thocht tae catch him out—". By now we had reached Dougal's road end and I settled myself on a dyken the gloaming, lit my pipe, and passed the pouch.

"Thanks, Major. It's fine baccy ye keep! As I was saying mony a lad has thocht tae catch Fergie out! Ane o' them we no less than Hamish Mackay himself. A' the world ker Hamish. Pity the flee wha settled on him!

"Well now, at the time I'm speaking o' Fergie had a we ramshackle cottage near Hamish's farm. The McPhees ha come down in the world even then, thanks tae Fergie's ski wi' a cork, and what they lived on naebody knew for certain tho' mony guessed. Onyway Fergie was in the habit, a Hamish well knew, o' dodgin' intae a field at hairst and lifting a sheaf o' oats for his hens.

"Hamish winked at this. He's a guid lad if close. But can the spring when Fergie went too far. He slippet intae Hamish yard and pu'ed sheafs frae the stacks – no aince but regula

"Hamish knew, an' Hamish was angry, but he bided he time. Came the day he brought in a big lot o' sheep frae the hill, and put them in the field between Fergie's cottage and the stack-yaird. Then Hamish got himself a file and mower blade – he was never one tae sit idle – and hid himself in a loft where he could watch the yaird. A deep one Hamish as ye'll see!



"In guid time along strolls Fergie, as innocent as please! He keeks here, and he keeks there, but he doesn spot Hamish. Then the auld sinner pu'es out a sheaf, dur in ithers tae cover the hole, and maks for hame across the field.

"Hauf way, or thereabouts, twa three sheep closed in a him. Then a' the ithers in their scores melled in after the till Fergie was held as ticht as a tod in a trap! Crafty Ferg was, but he had forgot ae thing — "thae hill sheep had be fed oats tae help them through a bad winter, and went do at the sicht o' a sheaf!

"'I hae ye now, red handed, ye auld rogue,' thinks Hamis – he told me so himsel' – as he jumped down frae the log But Fergie diddled him! And how wad he think?"

"Called up a helicopter!" I suggested. I knew what a pre of hungry sheep is like.

Dougal chuckled. "A fine idea, Major, but easier con than that! Fergie just loosed the sheaf and the sheep ate the evidence!"

Pipes in the glen!

When I picked up Dougal McNab at his road end on our way to market, he was obviously in high good humour. His chuckles gathered volume as the car gained speed. Knowing Dougal I expected something pretty startling in the way of local news, but certainly not what came!

"Phemie McGilp has had the police tae her closet!" he burst out. "Her water closet!" he amplified.

I must leave you baffled for the moment, and give some necessary background. Dougal has long occupied a cottage on a cousin's farm. Whinstone built, grey-slated, with its bee skeps and garden about it, and remarkably neat and cosy inside, yet – it has neither electricity nor piped water. Several times I have offered Dougal a good modernized cottage. Thanking ye, no, he preferred his ain. Sometimes I think Dougal is right. His well did not fail, as did most piped supplies, this summer of drought; his lamps shine like beacons across the darkened Glen when the Grid breaks down (as it does with distressing regularity) in our winter storms.

Still, I suspect Dougal to be domestically on the defensive, particularly over the question of piped water. When other folks' pipes freeze in the winter as, I admit, they frequently do, we never fail to hear of it. Nor, I am positive, does Mrs. McNab.

And yet, I thought, as I changed into top, whatever may be the evils of modern plumbing, it was surely highly unusual, if gratifying to Dougal, for Mrs. McGilp to have had to call in the police.

I expressed my amazement. Dougal chuckled happily. "It was Setterday nicht, ye see, and McGilp was off tae the

Inn. So Mrs. McGilp went off tae her bath. She was lying in the watter twiddling her taes" – Dougal makes the most of a story! – "when she sees the cistern running over.

"Out she jumps, stands on the seat, and tries tae see what wrong wi' the tank, but she couldna shift the cover! By no the watter was a' over the floor, and her parlour wi' its branch Axminster is just alow. So she pu'es the plug, as the on thing tae do, and pu'es the plug. An hour later, or thereby she was still pu'ing the plug, gey cold and near distracted Suddenly she sees, through the window, auld Fergie McPhe doddering alang the lane. She rins tae the window and call out tae Fergie, running back between times tae pu' the plus

"Fergie's gey hard o' hearing, and at his age no' owe sensible! He sees Phemie clad in naething but a towe greetin' sair, hopping about and pointing at something ahir her! And a' he hears is, 'Ca' the police!'

"Indeed, being a Setterday nicht there was naebody element tae ca'. So, putting his ain construction on thing Fergie hobbles off tae the telephone box and tells the constable murder's being done and whaur! The constable, being young and keen is glad tae believe Fergie, rings up the Inspector, and dashes off on his motor bike tae save Pheme

"When he gets there he poundsupst airs an' hears Phemgreeting sair and floundering about in the bathroom.

"'T'm coming, Phemie' he cries, and rattles the dom which was lockit.

"'I canna get tae the door tae open it' wails Phemie, who was pu'ing the plug!

"That decides the constable. He pit his shoulder tae the door, burst in, and there was Phemie – some say wi' he towel, some say no!"

Dougal chuckled.

"While young Jock was still taking things in, back come McGilp wi' his Setterday nicht load aboard; finds the come

stable and Phemie just like that, and sets about the constable!
"In the middle o' that up comes the Inspector, so McGilp
wi' his blood well up, sets about him!

"While a' this was going on naebody had time tae pu' the plug and the water was seeping into Phemie's parlour—though Phemie was near past caring!

"So there ye are! Twa black eyes, Phemie's parlour flooded her reputation gone, an' McGilp arrested for assulting the police!

"And a' that could never happen wi' an earth closet" concluded Dougal triumphantly.

"It could not, indeed!" I agreed.

Deep waters

Dougal McNab had overstayed his statutory "denner hour" by a good forty minutes. As usual on such, admittedly rare occasions he was fully primed to forestall any complaint of enquiry on my part.

"They deevils had left the moor wicket on the swing!" he announced furiously, "That's twice! The twa coos were on and awa' again, lepping ower the hill like stags. I had a terrible chase afore I came up wi' them."

He mopped his brow in proof of endeavour and fannel himself with his cap. I have always believed the two elderly and ponderous matrons in question to be amongst the slowest things existing on four legs. So would you, if you had ever followed them up a lane in a car! Still, I knew Dougal too well to waste further valuable gardening time on argument

"Who left the wicket open, do you think?" I asked.

"Wha could it be but some o' they dommed veesitors?" replied Dougal crossly.

Dougal, I fear, dislikes the summer visitors to Glen Lochran on principle. Over such matters as open gates straying dogs, broken bottles and other potentially lethal litter, he has occasional grounds for complaint as have many of us. But his antipathy goes deeper than that. Some bygone indignity, I suspect, rankles in his tenacious memory. One day, I may find out.

Judge, therefore, of my surprise when a few days after the wicket incident Dougal approached me and said,

"Major, if ye'll be so good, the veesitors biding wi' the McGilps would like the loan of your boat. They greatly fancy an airing on the loch."

"Are they friends of yours, Dougal?" I asked doubtfully.
"Weel, no exactly that, but the fat yin wi' the glasses,
Tamson they call him, asked me to put in a word for them."
"Very well, Dougal," I said. "They can have the boat.
To be left in the same condition as they find it of course."
"I'll see to that, Major."

During our evening small talk I told my wife of Dougal's request.

"Do you think he's mellowing?" I concluded.

"Mellowing my aunt!" said my wife Jennifer, rudely.

"He's up to some devilment. Remember the last time he thought a visitor had left the wicket open?"

I did! Immediately afterwards my grazing tenant (and, incidentally, Dougal's cousin) had moved a herd of skittish and inquisitive young cattle into a field regularly traversed by Dougal's suspects on their daily perambulations. I happened, by chance, to see the herd thundering down the slope towards them – with no evil intent, but what townsman was to know that? Dougal, though invisible, had of course seen the whole incident at close quarters.

"They were over the dyke," he later told me with relish "Auntie in the lead, like a lot o' jets! A' except a wee fat yin wha stuck on the top! A beastie kept snuffing at his troosers. Man, ye should hae seen him kick!"

And yet perhaps we were wrong and Dougal was mellowing. As I reminded my sceptical wife no less an authority than Sir Walter Scott had held this condition to be one of the compensations for increasing years. For one thing Dougal seemed to have taken a fancy to Mr. Tamson's Cairn terrier – a tiresome little dog, the Labs and I thought, whose sole mission in life apparently was to pester humans to throw things for him to pounce on and worry. Indeed my wife herself admitted she had seen Dougal throwing things for the dog.

"You did say for not at?" I remarked idly, glancing up from my paper.

"For, darling," she repeated. "Corks I think!"

Odd, I thought, and dismissed the matter from my mind On the day of the visitors' "airing" on the loch Dougal and I were mending a fence on the hill above – at Dougal's suggestion I remembered when later I came to think of it. So we had a grandstand view when Mr. Tamson with friends and terrier complete – a full boat load – splashed erratically from the shore.

"They don't know much about boats," I remarked to Dougal "Aye," responded Dougal cryptically, "I thocht as much!"

A little later the sound of excited yapping, followed by profane language, caught my attention. I looked up to see the boat rocking violently as one or other occupant snatched with oaths and cries of pain, at some unseen object in the bottom. Presently the oars clattered in the rowlocks and splashed desperately and inexpertly shorewards. The inevitable happened – an oar jerked up, and with a muffled yell a pair of fat legs shot skywards.

"Dear, dear! That's Mr. Tamson himsel'. A terrible cralit was! I'm thinking he'll get his troosers wet!"

"Why should he? The boat's tight enough," I snapped "And what on earth is going on now?" I continued angrily "It sounds like a rat hunt! Good God there's a chap baling like mad!"

Dougal looked at me cautiously.

"I'm terrible sorry aboot this, Major. I shouldna perhaps hae asked for the loan. I didna ken of coorse they were a' sat daft! Maybe if the watter's coming in there's trouble wi' the bung?"

Before I could comment he hurried on in soothing tones "Ony harm canna come tae the boat and they'll no' drool either! They're agroond!"

The boat I saw was indeed aground, not to speak of being nearly awash, some distance from the shore. The oaths and shouts, interspersed by splashing and hysterical yapping, continued.

"Blast that creature!" I said irritably, and went on "There's water in the boat all right! It's full of it! Can the bung have been loose?"

Dougal looked shocked.

"Tight as a drum, Major! But could it be that the wee doggie quietly worrit it oot? He's awful fond o' corks! Aye, and he can nip too if ye try to rob him! Or so I'm told" Dougal finished innocently.

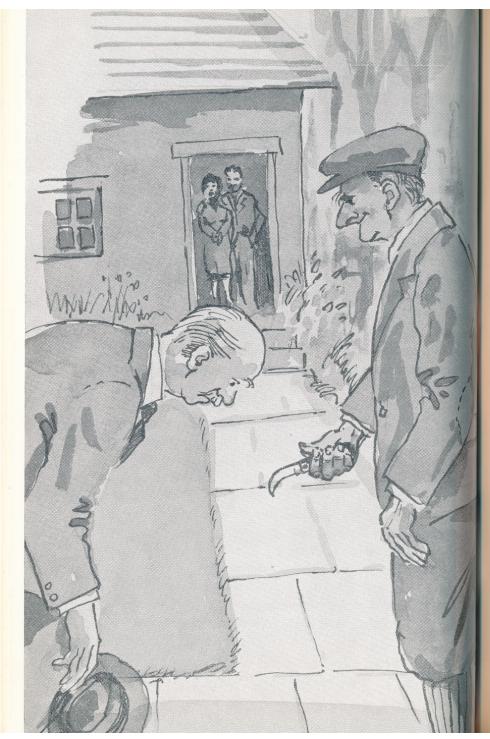
"You had better go down and sort out the mess, Dougal McNab", I said shortly. "And see that the boat's left dry and tidy."

"Aye, Major, I'll see to it." With an expressionless face Dougal started rapidly down the hill.

My wife, of course, rocked with laughter, and when I told her, not for the first time, that women were unprincipled, she simply answered.

"And what about Dougal?!" and laughed the more.

"Poor Mr. Tamson!" she finished. "This is worse than heifers! But you'll never prove a thing. You know Dougal!" "Yes," I replied, "I know Dougal!!"



Wha'd keep bees!

On the point of snipping off a fine Hugh Dickson rose for my wife I saw a bee had business there, deep in its crimson centre. I waited till the insect slowly backed out and took off, grossly overloaded, on its return trip to base.

"Your bee, Dougal", I said, watching the direction of its flight. "It's doing a fine job for you!"

"Dinna talk to me o' bees, Major," replied Dougal McNab crossly. "Them and me are out o' tune. Wha'd keep bees!"

Whatever might be the latest iniquity of Dougal's bees, usually so well beloved, their previous effort a week or so before had been a classic. It concerned Cousin Edward.

On the point of his retirement from a Whitehall Ministry, my bachelor cousin had had a rare and unexpected stroke of luck. An aunt had bequeathed to him her comfortable Mayfair flat, a comfortable couple to run it, and the wherewithal to keep all three, and himself, in the same happy state.

Cousin Edward's life, never adventurous, had accordingly become increasingly cushioned. His face shone with the radiance of good living; his starched collars (which he wore on all occasions) shone too with the impeccable lustre of a bygone age.

Always delighted to shelter us on our annual trip to London, it had taken years to coax Cousin Edward into a return visit to Glen Lochan. His previous Furtherest North – to a rather chilly conference in Edinburgh – had unfortunately resulted in an undignified and painful attack of chilblains – his first since childhood. Cousin Edward was not amused.

But this time his expedition had been in high summer; the

sun, to our relief (for it was, so to speak, under personal guarantee) had shone with unusual ardour for Glen Lochan and, at first, everything had gone very well indeed. For one thing Cousin Edward and Dougal had immediately formed a mutual admiration society. Perhaps my cousin's old world mannerisms, knickerbockers and starched collars stirred some dormant feudal instinct in Dougal's soul; perhaps it was Edward's generosity with his excellent cigars; perhaps (and most probably) it was his diplomatic capacity for quietly listening with at least seeming appreciation while another held the floor. But to be fair, on his side, Cousin Edward had genuinely found a new, and rare delight in Dougal's blend of Scots caution, humour and outspokenness.

Amongst many other things Dougal had told my cousin something of the astonishing ways of bees, (Dougal is in fact a wonderful bee man) and this had led Edward, by special invitation, to Dougal's cottage.

My wife and I had left them there, walked over the moor with our labradors, and returned to find Dougal and my cousin peering closely at a hive. It was sultry. The bees were fanning vigorously at the entrance to their hive; Cousin Edward was fanning himself, less vigorously, with an immaculate black Homburg.

Suddenly a languid, homing bee alighted on his pink and white crown; most unwisely my cousin slapped; the aggrieved bee promptly stung.

My cousin's previous acquaintanceship with bees had in a probability been limited to those well bred insects which occasionally visit Whitehall window boxes. Undoubtedly as an intelligent man he knew that bees *could* sting, but that a bee should sting *him* -!!!

The effect was electric! Cousin Edward leapt in the air bellowed with fury, and frantically rubbed his outraged scale "Dinna do that, Sir Edward," said Dougal calmly. "The

beastie meant no ill, and ye'll only drive the sting in. Bend doon a wee and I'll whip it oot!"

While my wife clutched me and choked in ecstacy we saw my cousin solemnly bend over, keeping an apprehensive eye on Dougal. Dougal meanwhile methodically burrowed through his pockets, produced an enormous and somewhat rusty clasp knife, and slowly opened the blade.

To Sir Edward this was the last straw.

"Dammit," he roared clapping on his hat, "I may be stung but I refuse to be scalped!"

It will be a long, long time, I fear, before we coax my cousin back to Glen Lochan!

The devil's rents

On the Sunday following the Harvest Festival, the Reverend James Mackintosh preached to us at considerable length from the text "Resist the devil and he will flee from you". I observed that he glanced more than once at Dougal's pew, and that Dougal's neck was redder than usual above its Sunday linen. The now famous episode of the "purple tatties" had I fancy, bitten deeply even into our Minister's kindly soul.

It was therefore rather unfortunate that the subject of the devil should have arisen again so soon, being introduced in all innocence a few days later by the summer tenant of our cottage. He, Mr. Cumberland, a London banker, was (a little surprisingly) an enthusiast on folk lore and that led to the trouble.

"Have you ever heard of any elves or gnomes in this district, Mr. McNab?" he enquired.

"What's they?" asked Dougal suspiciously.

My tenant attempted to explain.

"Wee deils?" rumbled Dougal. "There's been more than enough said hereabouts o' deils big and sma', of late."

Before I could intervene Mr. Cumberland plunged on.

"Has any apparition suggesting the devil been seen locally. Mr. McNab?"

"No!" said Dougal sourly.

His interrogator looked disappointed.

"Too bad! I had hoped there would be at least legends Really, Mr. McNab, with your Devil's Elbow, Deil's Brig and that beautiful dark pool below it, the Deil's Pot one might have thought," he smiled, "that Old Nick had acquired quite a lot of property in your Glen."

Dougal drew himself up. "If he has, sir," he exploded, "he maun spend all his rents in London!"

Later I remarked to Dougal, "Dougal you were a bit hard on Mr. Cumberland. He means well enough."

Dougal snorted. "Bluiddy butchers! Aye, they killed and ravished hundreds of better folk than themselves, that lot!"

A fantastic vision of quiet little Mr. Cumberland pursuing that large and formidable spouse with evil intent crossed my mind. I hastily dismissed it.

"Gracious Dougal" I said, "Are you thinking of the Duke of Cumberland after Culloden? That was 200 years ago and our Mr. Cumberland is a highly respectable banker from London, as you know. I don't expect he has even heard of the Duke!"

"My mither was a MacGillivray," said Dougal stubbornly. "The clan was in the line at Culloden and *she* was a wise and truthful woman. She told me all I wish to know aboot the name of Cumberland. It's no' a name we want in the Glen, Major."

That evening I told my wife the story.

"Isn't it remarkable what long memories they have in the Highlands?" I concluded.

"Yes, darling" said my wife soothingly, looking up from her knitting, "But do you really think, poor sweet, that that is why Dougal (who is hardly himself at the moment) dislikes Mr. Cumberland? Don't you know that he – the nice little bank manager – is an artist, or thinks he is? And that he spends every evening painting near the Deil's Pot? And that there's a fine fish lying there? Dougal wants it because – oh never mind! Anyhow you had better head Mr. C. off the Deil's Pot!"

"I see." I said slowly. "And how do you know all that? Committee Meetings I suppose? Anyhow I am on the side of law and order!"

"Never mind how I know, and don't be rude! And if y_{0u} are on the side of law and order, I am on the side of peace and quiet and keeping a good tenant happy who weeds the cottage garden! I'll wheedle Mr. C. away from the Deil's Pot!"

* * *

A few days later I observed Dougal accept a fill of tobacco quite amiably from the blood-stained banker's pouch. The same night I lifted the cover to disclose a prime cut of salmon.

"Still on the side of law and order, darling?" enquired my wife sweetly. I ate my portion in dignified silence. It was, I admit, delicious.

No medal for Wully!

A flurry of frozen snow slapped across my windscreen, checking the sweep of the wiper. A sudden tearing wind, dead out of the North, was sweeping the great drifts from the high tops down into the glen; wreaths were piling up on the road like sugar pouring from a caster. I debated our chances of getting home. It would not have been the first time I had had to shelter overnight in such weather.

Winter travel in Glen Lochan, you see, is always a toss up. I would certainly not have been abroad if I could have helped it, for the day had threatened, but this was a journey enforced; mine was the tumbril, homing after depositing its youthful victims at our main line station on the last, sad, day of the Christmas holidays. I was glad on several counts of Dougal McNab's company.

I had picked him up again, after dropping him off on the way down near Dundrochit to visit an elderly relative of varied occupation, known locally as The Ferret. What Dougal's business had been with this gentleman I did not know, but, I suspected, it had not been carried out over a cup of tea. Nor, I opined, would the pungent camouflage now surrounding Dougal be likely on his return to deceive the experienced Mrs McNab.

"A dirty night, Dougal," I said.

"Aye Major – Hic! Pardon! They peepermints is terrible strong! Godsakes! It's getting gey coorse."

No weather short of a howling blizzard is ever described in our glen as "coorse", and coarse it certainly was. As we turned off the main North road a howling squall hit us sideways on, sheeting the windows and rocking the heavy car.

The snow tearing across our front was no longer the coarse, icy, top dressing of the corries, but fresh, white and fine nearly, as driven mist.

"That's the stuff that can fill a byre half way up to the r_{00f} through an open keyhole," said Dougal.

"True enough" I rejoined, and peered closely at a shape less object stumbling ahead of us.

"Good God, Dougal! What's youn?"

"Its' Wully-the-Post?" hazarded Dougal, blinking uncertainly through the half-moon on the white windscreen. I drew alongside and stopped. Wully-the-Post it was.

"Get you in Wully," I said.

"Weel met, Major," gasped Wully, "But I'll carry in a michty lot o' snow wi' me?"

"Never mind that, man, on a night like this. Anyway, what goes in comes out!"

"So they say! So they say! I hope my van comes out tomorrow!"

"What's the trouble Wully?"

Wully-the-Post, despite his bull-walrus moustache, embedded cutty pipe, and harvest moon face, is in fact our universal aunt. The locker of his mail van, the spare seats at his side, his bulging pockets, and his canny old head between them carry round all the more urgent personal needs, messages, and other exchanges of Glen Lochan. If, consequently, Her majesty's mails are a trifle erratic – well, the Glen likes it that way, and officialdom if it knows, is wisely silent. Few men living would face up in winter, day in day out, year after year, to our twisting ice bound, perilous roads as does Wully.

I could hear Wully scrubbing snow off his face and experimentally blowing through his moustache before answering my question.

"Weel, Major," he puffed at last, "I was roonding a cornel

when I hit a dommed great stane on the road, fresh fallen from the crags, and bedded in a cross drift. I couldna' see much just then, ye'll understand?" I nodded.

"It's no often I'm caught oot, but there it was. By good chance the Kilry herd's cottage was nearby. He's awa at the Sales, but I ken whaur he hides his key, and there's plenty food and firing in the house. So I conductit my twa passengers there, and when we met I was walking hame to telephone a' concerned no' to worry."

"You have walked four miles through *this* – and two miles still to go – to do that!" I said incredulously. Men have died when caught abroad by a sudden, roaring Glen blizzard. Indeed a memorial stone to one of them stands beside the very road Wully had followed.

"Wully, you deserve a medal!"

Wully coughed modestly. We dropped him at the telephone box near his bothy. There was a short silence, then Dougal, his habitual caution a little eased, I think, by the Ferret's potions, volunteered.

"I'm no' sure about that medal, Major! Wully didna' say but I ken fine that his twa passengers were weemen!"

"I don't get it, Dougal?" I said. "You can't mean it was Wully's *duty* to risk his life – he's getting on – in a howling blizzard just because his passengers were women?"

"And you surely don't mean," I continued, "that he'd have been wrong to spend the night with them – two of them mind you – at Kilry? Who'd have given it a thought? I know Wully's a bachelor –"

"You're wide o' the mark, Major" Dougal cackled. "Forbye the Post's no exactly a bachelor. He was marrit once and separated. She was a one she was, and scared Wully for life! He only got awa' after a sair fecht!"

"I think I see" I said thoughtfully.

"Aye, but ye don't!" Dougal chuckled, and hiccoughed.

"Pardon! They dom peepermints! As I was about to say, the news is out in the Glen that Wull's wife has deed in Glasgow! He's unprotectic noo, ye might say!

"And wha were Wully's twa? No less than the lonesome widows frae Gannoch! The Post would rather spend a nicht shut in wi' two hungry tigers than yon! They're bang oot tae get their man! D'ye see noo Major?"

I did! No medal for Wully!!!

Well! Well!

"Gracious! Look at Dougal" said my wife, glancing up from her weeding. "How remarkable!"

Dougal, crook a twirl, was positively bustling back from dinner, well ahead of time.

"Big news!" I diagnosed instantly. "Maybe long in the telling. There's the post to catch. One of us had better beat it."

"Me!" said my wife hastily, and fled.

Big news it was but, for once, brief.

"The auld minister, the Reverend Cameron, is back in the Glen. Visiting at the Manse" announced Dougal, beaming.

I had heard much of the "auld minister" from Dougal and others of his generation.

"I should greatly like to meet him," I said. "Surely he must be very old?"

"Auld! He aince preached to Queen Victoria! But Soond as a bell. A graund, cheery man. Ye'll see!"

Mr. Cameron came to lunch that Sunday, climbing our drive with a hillman's step, and captivating us with his twinkle and zest for life.

When I said something complimentary,

"A crofter's son, preserved in youth from the wet and cold that bide in the bones should keep a hale body," he smiled. "For the rest, a lively family, and ministering to Glen folk, helps to keep the mind supple."

"I heard a story about that," I said. "Once, I was told a Glen minister was reading the lesson. He started:

"'When Noah was 120 years old he took unto himself a wife who was' and here the minister turned the page, '130

cubits long, 40 cubits wide, built of gopher wood, and covered with pitch in and out!'

"Apparently this minister didna bat an eyelid but thoombed the page thoughtfully, keeked down at certain stanes solemn faces in the Manse pew, then round his astounded congregation, and calmly continued,

"'My friends, this is the first time I have read this in the Bible, but just at the moment' – here he had another keek at the Manse pew – 'we may accept it as evidence that we are fearfully and wonderfully made!"

Mr. Cameron chuckled. "Dougal of course! I recognise the touch. I expect he helped my sons to gum the pages together! I owe him one for Noah and his wife, so I'll tell you a story of Dougal and *his* wife – the first one. Really it's a story against myself.

"Jean was a bit of a tartar and, in time, became so house proud that Dougal had to take off his boots on the door step, summer and winter. If he came home early she told him not to clutter up her kitchen; if he came home late he caught it even worse.

"At last Dougal came to me in despair. What was he to do? I gave him the best counsel I could, promised to have a quiet word with Jean – by no means my first – and concluded by advising Dougal to pray daily to God for guidance and help.

"It so happened that I had to leave the Glen, just then, for a considerable time. On the day of my return I met Dougal and thought he looked much more cheerful.

- "'How are things with you, Dougal?' I opened cautiously.
- "'Fine, Mr. Cameron. Fine!' he replied. 'You'll remember advising me in my trouble to ask God's help?'
 - "'I do,' I said, wondering what was coming next.
 - "Dougal looked at me solemnly.
 - " 'Help He did, Mr. Cameron. Jean's deid!' "

"And what did you say to that, sir?" I chuckled.

"Just 'Well! Well! 'Hopelessly inadequate, I have often thought so since. But what else *could* I have said!" What indeed!

"'Miss Soutar's eldest?' repeated my wife, somewhat started.

"'Aye, Mrs. Cameron, that's so. Three fine bairns she has too!"

"My wife was a broad minded woman but this was a bit much for her.

"Really,' she said, 'Do you mean to tell me that this Miss Soutar has three children?"

"She has that,' replied the factor solemnly. 'But, Mrs. Cameron, believe me she was aye verra, verra particular about the fathers!"

"One should not laugh," said the minister apologetically after an interval. "A most reprehensible story!"

"Most reprehensible," I agreed gravely. "And how long did the eldest unfortunate stay with you?"

"The eldest – why, Nellie? How did you know? Nearly twenty years to our great content. A fine lassie she was, and a fine woman she is. Indeed," Mr. Cameron concluded with a twinkle, "as my wife once confidentially remarked, the factor may have been right!"

The third fox

"She's a fair beezer," rumbled Dougal McNab, prodding vindictively with his crowbar. "A taste o' jelly is what she needs."

"She" was an ancient stump, outwardly rotten but with a stubborn heart, and roots of iron. "Jelly," as you may have guessed is gelignite, an explosive for which Dougal cherishes a deep affection. Unfortunately his mind works in terms of Aberdeen granite on which he used it in his carefree youth. So his "tastes" applied to less robust objects are apt to have a devastating effect in the vicinity.

I thought of the glass in my nearby frames, and hastily changed the subject.

"You'll be supporting the dance tonight?" I hazarded, easing my back. Dougal treads a light measure for his bulk and age, and well he knows it.

"I will that – thanks Major, it's fine baccy that! But it's a terrible pity there's nae lassies frae the South tae sweeten the dance floor these days. The keepers and their like we can spare, though maybe they had their uses! That dom fox was round my way again last night!"

Changed days indeed, I thought. No saucy young house-maids up from the South to set our menfolk fidgetting with unaccustomed neck ties at the August dances; no Glen Lochan Show with its mounted events, clay pigeon shooting and side shows. For the most part the "big hooses" which had brought these and other sophisticated delights to the Glen, stood empty and shuttered in their neglected grounds, or lingered on, rather shamefacedly, as road houses and hotels.

True, the hills and moors endured, but the keepers who once ridded them of vermin were nearly all gone. This had its compensations as Dougal hinted; on the other hand the hill foxes took an ever increasing toll of our lambs and poultry.

"That will be nearly seventy hens lifted that we've heard of" I said.

"It will indeed," Dougal confirmed. "Never have I heard the like! There's near as many foxes you'd think as sheep hereabouts! Did you hear there's been anither yin bumpit by a motor? That maks three! Three tods killt on the main road! They maun be hopping round at nicht like fleas on an auld collie's back! You've no heard o' the third fox? Man, it's a grand story!"

I sighed, Oh Dougal I thought! I looked at the excavations round the stubborn stump. Still, we had put in a good days work and, oh well, it would not take us long to finish it off in the morning. I relit my pipe and prepared to listen.

"On Friday nicht it was, in the Stag Inn after the Curling Club Meeting. Wully-the-Post and I were haein' a quiet dram when in comes Tam Cameron and his brither Ian.

"This round's on us, boys,' shouts Tam! We've found a tod, an auld dog, by the side o' the road and the tail still on it!"

"'It would hae been knockit doon by a motor?' says Wullie.

"'Aye,' answers Tam, 'If they towrists only knew!' And he laughed, as well he micht, for, as you well know, Major, a tail is worth good money at ony Polis station in these parts. And this was the third tod in a month wi' tail complete deid aside the road for the picking up.

"There were twa strangers in the bar and I saw them nudging one anither and whispering.

"Excuse me, gentlemen,' says one, very smooth spoken, but may I ask what is the use of a dead fox?"

"Tammy tell't him, and the lad looked very thoughtful.

" 'And was the fox lying about half a mile back by a bridge?'

"'It was' says Tam, winking at us.

"'And you picked it up?"

"'Aye' says Tam, 'It's outside on the back seat of my auld Ford this very minute.'

"The stranger, a slick city lad frae the look o' him, thanked Tam, paid his reckoning, and beckoned his friend outside.

"Twa three minutes later we heard a sharp bark, and then a growling and snarling. 'Guid sakes' says I, 'what's yon?'

" 'Wheesht man' whispers Tam 'and listen!'

"The snarling changed to a worrying and scuffling, and that was drooned in a flood o' the maist terrible profanity ony o' us had ever heard! Ian, what ye ken is an elder o' the kirk, sat there wi' his ears flapping, tut tutting fit tae beat the band.

"Then a door slammed like a gun and wi' a clashing o' gears and a roar, a car shot oot o' the gateway. It was as dark as the Deil's breeks but we could see that much frae the windy.

"'Preserve us' says I 'what's taen the townies? 'Has your fox come alive and savaged them?'

"'Fox be dommed' says Tam, when he could speak frae laughing. 'That was my cross-grained auld collie bitch Meg wha I left guarding my coat on the back seat o' the Ford – they clever lads maun hae found her! She'll be nursing half their coats, and troosers too, ye'll see!'

"'And whaur's the fox?"

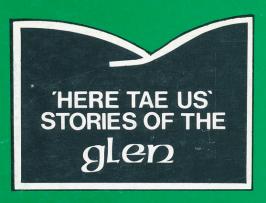
"Fine and cosy in the back locker. And by the same token here's the key. I didna trust that smooth laddies!"

"Man, Major, we had a grand laugh, and anither dram for the road on the strength o' it. Aye, there's nae flees on Tam Cameron!"

We both chuckled, then Dougal pulled out his silver turnip watch.

"Losh!" he said, "It's just on time! I maun be off and help the wife. Ye'll remember we're awa' in the morn till Monday week?"

Dougal's holiday! It had clean slipped my mind. I eyed that infernal stump morosely. Nae flees on Tam? Nor on you either Dougal McNab! But a happy holiday to you all the same! I wished him it, and picked up the crowbar.



These short stories are the embodiment of brevity and wit. The authentic background of the Glen and its folk that lived – and live – in it reminds one of Neil M. Gunn and Neil Munro rolled into one. What an eye Bruce Ross has for the kernel of a tale, and his ability to grip the reader, whether it be about poaching, whisky stills or ghosts of the past, is truly powerful.

The profits from this vastly amusing little volume will be shared between two countryside activities with world-wide appeal. The World Pheasant Association Conservation Project and the Pitlochry Festival Theatre's Appeal for a new building both help to safeguard parts of our rural heritage which an urban-based nation can ill afford to lose. So cherish them – and this book.

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