



The following pages are a wonderful insight in to the early days of the Overscaig as a “fishing hotel” and what it was like to travel around the northern highlands in the middle of the 19th century.

Extracts from the fishing journals of Edward Charlton M.D.

The journals were written by Edward Charlton MD and his great grandson, Mr William Charlton, has given his kind permission for these extracts to be published on our web-site.

Edward Charlton’s journals have been published before. In 2007 his Shetland journals for the years 1832, 1834 and 1852 were published in paperback by the Shetland Times in 2007 at £10.99 with coloured illustrations by the author under the title ***Travels in Shetland 1832-52*** by Edward Charlton. This is still in print and can be ordered via the following link:

http://shop.shetlandmuseumandarchives.org.uk/product.php/3746/2/travels_in_shetland_1832_52

The cover of the book shows a drawing of the author. Unfortunately he didn’t do any illustrations for his Sutherland journals.

OVERSCAIG 1854-8

Extracts from the fishing journals of Edward Charlton M.D.

1854

Monday July 31st I left Newcastle at five a.m. and reached Edinburgh by nine. In the train was a young officer on leave from his regiment in York, and now on his way to the Highlands. He was very anxious that I should accompany him to the west of Argyleshire, but my inclination took me towards Sutherlandshire again, and I had marked out a new route to that country. The Duke of Roxburgh's eldest son, a fine boy of fourteen, was also on the train, returning from Eton, and we saw his happy meeting with his mother and sisters at Dunbar. On arriving at Edinburgh I found that I had some hours to spare before the steamer started for Thurso, and availed myself of this to walk round the noble drive that has recently been constructed on Arthur's Seat. The day was particularly fine, and I already felt better, and enjoyed the glorious view from the different points on the Queen's Drive.

At half past one, having purchased a few additional flies, I proceeded by omnibus to Granton Pier and was soon on board the Duke of Richmond. After the usual bustle and delays we got away from the pier at half past two, just as the Duke of Clarence steam boat, crammed with passengers at 15/-, 10/- and 5/- a head from London, came in and took our berth. All were strangers to me on board the Duke of Richmond, indeed I felt myself completely a stranger in the once familiar streets of Edinburgh. Our boat was to touch at Aberdeen and then to cross the Moray Firth to Wick before it ran through the Pentland Firth to Thurso. We had a beautiful run down the Firth past the now to me well known villages and towns of Fife, and before dark we were almost in sight of Stonehaven and the Bell Rock. I gradually got into conversation with the passengers, and the time passed pleasantly enough, diversified only by a shoal of porpoises that gambolled for some minutes around the ship. I did not stay longer on deck than an hour after sunset, and a gorgeous scene that was of red and purple clouds, but I noticed that to the north and east there was a dense wall of mist, portending a change of weather.

Tuesday August 1st. We ran into Aberdeen about 3 a.m. and left it soon after. I slept badly, the cabin was close and well, perhaps, it was so, for my bedclothes were desperately damp and the porthole on my berth was left open, and ere the morning came I was sensible of a great change in the temperature. At eight a.m. there was a heavy mist all round us, and this continued without interruption the whole day. We did well enough till we approached Caithness coast about midday, but the Captain declared that he dared not continue on his course, as Wick harbour was not easy to hit even in fine weather. For twelve long hours we lay to, sounding occasionally to make out our distance from the

coast, till about one a.m. it cleared up and the vessel was found to be lying off about two miles from Sarclet, a little to the south of Wick. A cold wind blew all this day from the north but we had no rain, though England and Wales were deluged on this day.

Wednesday August 2nd. It was a severe disappointment to me that we were detained by the fog in the Moray Firth, for it obliged me to alter, on my arrival in Thurso, the whole plan of my journey. I had calculated on arriving in Thurso at about ten or twelve p.m. on Tuesday, and I should then have been in good time to catch the mail to Tongue at six this morning. As the mail only runs three days in the week, it would have necessitated my remaining in Thurso till Friday morning, and out of a fortnight this was a serious loss of nearly a week. At eight a.m. we were steaming past Sinclair's Bay, with a bitter cold north wind, but a clear sky, and we were already in sight of South Ronaldshay in Orkney. About half past nine we rounded Duncansby Head and saw before us the Pentland Firth. A few vessels were making their way through its strong and perplexing currents, and we passed a fine brig on her way from Quebec to Aberdeen. Between Duncansby and Dunnet Head the shore is low and bare, the only edifice of importance that we saw was Barragill Castle, the seat of the Earl of Caithness, but I could not make out the details of the building. We passed, too, several boats full of fishermen from the western coast, making their way to the this year very unproductive herring fishery of Wick. Dunnet Head, which we rounded before opening the Bay of Thurso, is a magnificent promontory about 350 feet in perpendicular height. We sailed so close to it that we could almost have reached the birds on the rocks with a rifle bullet, and could hear the sound of the waves reverberating like thunder in the caverns at its base. The cliff a little further on is divided midway by a broad ledge on which for many years a hoary old patriarch of a goat found a scanty subsistence in a place inaccessible to the human foot, but this venerable denizen of the rocks had disappeared during the last twelve months. As we entered Thurso Bay the view to the north was magnificent. The sun was shining brightly on the huge precipices of Hoy Head in Orkney, and to the west we saw dimly shadowed forth the outlines of Ben Hope and Ben Loyal in Sutherland.

It was eleven a.m. before we landed at Scrabster Pier, close to the ruins of the castle of the Bishops of Caithness. Of that stronghold scarcely a vestige remains, but a green level to the west along the Banks still retains the name of the Bishop's Walk. Here I parted from the friends I had made on board of the steamboat, and went up to Dubar's inn in Thurso. It was 21 years since I had been in this small and clean-looking town,¹ and so far as I could recollect it seemed to have undergone little change. The town was as dull and dreary as the country around it was treeless and bare. The Thurso River, so

¹ Charlton visited it in 1834 on his second visit to Shetland.

famous for its salmon fishing in the early part of the year, was now a diminutive stream, and I soon learned that it contained but very few trout. My prospects of escaping from the dilemma I had been placed in by the late arrival of the steamer seemed small indeed.

Dunbar was not at home, but they expected him to return in an hour or two, and meanwhile I wrote my letters and wandered over the bridge of the Thurso River for a little distance. The country was miserably bleak and the outline of the hills low and ridgy, indeed I have hardly even seen an uglier district. Dunbar came back about two p.m., a fine rough healthy-looking man, with a hearty address which won my confidence in a moment. I asked him about the chance of sport in the Thurso River. He said there was none, but that if I liked I might try and he would charge me nothing for it. The day, however, was bright and bitterly cold, with a keen north wind, and I felt anxious to get out of my difficulties at once. After some consideration he said he was going southward that afternoon by a cross road to Latheron, and he advised me to go with him, and to push on from thence to Golspie and Lairg. I considered awhile and resolved to avail myself of the opportunity, as I should at least pass over an unexplored part of the country, and it mattered little to me in what way I reached the Assyntt district.

After a light dinner Dunbar came to the door with his gig, and we drove off over the Thurso bridge along the road towards Wick. Though bare of trees the country bore evidences of considerably advanced cultivation, but there were no hedgerows, only huge dikes of dark earth and stone walls. A little further on, when we came upon the slate district, there was a novel kind of enclosure abundant enough. Huge slabs of the fine Caithness slate were set up to form rails and fences, and very solid enclosures they were, calculated to resist for a long time the rain and wind of this desolate country. We proceeded along the high road to Wick for about three miles and then turned off to the right to strike across the angle of Caithness, and to rejoin the sea again at Latheron. To the west of our road we saw the Thurso River winding its way in long reaches from the south. Castle Braal and the residence of the old Bishops of Caithness at Halkyrk were on its banks. There too were a few trees, but the rest of its course was through bare and open land. Dunbar said that I might possibly have got a salmon today on some of the pools, as the north wind would raise a fine ripple. We fell into converse about Norway, from which country Dunbar had just returned. He was loud in praise of that magnificent land. He had been fishing principally on the rivers that run into the Skager Rack in the south of Norway, and had had most excellent sport, often killing 15 or 18 salmon in one day. It had disgusted him with all fishing in Scotland, he said, there was not a river in this country big enough for him and for his gigantic 20 foot salmon rod. He said that he felt determined to make Norway his home if he could only master the difficulties of the language.

The road we now traversed, though only a cross route, was as level and free from stones as the best of the Scottish turnpikes. The material, the close grained hard slate, is at hand; the very road is

made upon it, so nearly does it approach the surface. As we drove along, a fine Peregrine Falcon flew over our heads and Dunbar shouted with delight. He was a thorough sportsman and shewed me with some pride the immense extent of moor that he had on lease and which he parcelled out to Londoners who came down to shoot. He was now on his way to purchase some dogs, for those that came from England were seldom, he observed, good for anything but partridges, and partridges are very scarce in Caithness, though they are to be found in the cultivated lands. We stopped twice to bait the horse, and about seven in the evening we ascended a hill and saw before us the bright blue sea studded with fishing boats.

We drove on towards Latheron after rejoining the main road, and I found that Dunbar was not quite certain about the position of the inn. We accosted a dark-haired Celt on the road, but he shook his head and said 'Ha niel Sassenach,' whereupon Dunbar, who is a Glenmorrison man, accosted him to his great surprise in the choicest Gaelic. He directed us to the inn, where Dunbar was most cordially received and it was evident that he was well known in the country. The inn unfortunately was a newly built and only half finished house and the walls were so fresh and so redolent of damp that I did not dare to sleep there. 'Then,' said Dunbar, 'you shall sleep at the Chief's! And I will send you on there in my gig while I get off at Captain Dunbar's, half a mile from hence.'

Immediately after leaving the inn we met the mail going to the north, and then, ascending from a wooded cleugh, we arrived at Captain Dunbar's gate. I then drove on the Chief's with a boy I took from the inn. About a mile further we stopped at a low whitewashed house on the roadside, from the interior of which resounded rude merriment. One end was fitted up as a shop or store, and this was the Chief's dwelling. I opened the door and entered a room where a dozen rough looking men were drinking. However I soon found my way upstairs and was shown into a decently furnished attic room, and at the other end of the house was an excellent bedroom. A neat little waiting girl brought me a luxurious tea with plenty of fish, and the noise and merriment downstairs soon died away. The coach was to pass the door at five a.m., so that I went to bed early, well pleased that I had advanced so far on my journey.

Thursday August 3rd. My careful little attendant duly called me at four a.m. and while waiting for the mail I strolled out along the road and mounted one of the cairns that stood at a little distance from the turnpike. From hence I enjoyed an extensive view over the coast of Caithness, which here is the termination of the tableland of that county. I was much struck with the steepness of the sea banks, there were only a few ravines where a landing could be effected or where a person could climb up into the cultivated band level ground above, which was at least 200 feet above the sea. The fishing boats were going out and returning, and far off were some brigs and schooners shining in the bright sunshine of this beautiful morning. Soon I heard the rumble of approaching wheels and the mail came up, and

fortunately one place outside was vacant. In an instant I was on the top and was heartily greeted by Dunbar, and we rolled on towards Berriedale. I well remembered the impression produced on me in my former visit by the beautiful view of this singular and secluded defile. The sun shone brightly on the dense woods and the sea that looked in through portals of gigantic rocks at the eastern end, while at the very bottom was the pretty little inn nestling amid woods and surrounded by flowers, and altogether so unlike what I had hitherto seen.

I here walked on while they were changing horses and ascended the steep hill towards the Ord of Caithness. A stout drover's man came up to me on the way and I found that he knew all about Sutherland. I particularly questioned him if there was any inn at the head of Loch Shin, on the new road to Loch More. Dunbar assured me that there was, but he had never been there. My new acquaintance, however, confirmed his statement, and told me that it was at Ogskaig, a little beyond the Fiag River. It was a poor house, said he, 'but you may get a bed and he's an honest man that keeps it.' I determined therefore to go on to Golspie and from thence to Lairg, and to make my way from the latter place to Ogskaig, or, as it was pronounced, Overskeg [Overscaig]. I knew that there was good fishing at the head of Loch Shin, and in Loch Griam and Loch More, and I almost gave up the idea of proceeding to Assyntt, as I felt sure that the inn would be full of travellers at this time of the year.

The mail soon came up and we traversed at a rapid rate the dreary moor of the Ord of Caithness, where, however, I saw several broods of moorgame and numbers of Alpine hares. Of the latter I counted nearly a dozen close together, they seemed much tamer than our English hares, and gazed curiously on us as we passed. Passing a deep defile by a very dangerous angle and bridge we descended again towards the coast, and some time afterwards reached Helmsdale, a place redolent of herrings and swarming with gulls of every species. They sate in flocks on the banks watching the fishermen laying out their nets to dry, and then skimming over the net to pick out the remnants of fish that adhered to the meshes. The road was excellent and our team of horses good, so that we reached the good inn at Golspie by ten o'clock in excellent humour for our breakfast. Out of the coach came a stout old military man, Colonel Barry, with his daughter. He had, I believe, just returned from Shetland, whither he had proceeded on a tour of inspection of the defences of the coast, and deep were his execrations against my favourite, though desolate, country in the far north. There was no inn, he said, and nothing to be got to eat at the lodging house, nothing but fish. I had often been glad to get a fish dinner in former times, but as we grow older we perhaps become more particular. Here I parted from Dunbar, who went on to Dornoch, while I had to spend the hours from eleven to four p.m. as I best could, for the mail to Lairg did not start till that hour in the afternoon.

My first visit was to the churchyard, for I had heard of an Ogham stone being there, and I soon discovered it. It was a fine large slab, richly sculptured with various singular devices on both sides, and

at the edges of the stone were the Ogham letters distinctly carved. I thought them different from the Shetland Oghams, but I am very imperfectly acquainted with these letters. I believe that the stone will be figured in the forthcoming work on the Monumental Stones of Scotland.

From hence the postmaster's son conducted me to Dunrobin Castle. Passing the bridge we went through the new gates, which are peculiar in design and yet I think appropriate enough to this wild country. On each pillar there is a polished ball of Peterhead granite of great size and of a rich flesh red colour. At present the balls are brilliant and smooth, but the feldspar is so abundant in this granite will surely soon whiten and decay, leaving the surface rough and dull. Through a broad walk and a deep cutting we reached the front of the castle. It is indeed an imposing pile, partaking quite as much of the fashion of the old French chateau of the sixteenth century as of the Scottish architecture of that period, but was not the latter copied almost entirely from the former during the time that French influence was paramount in Scotland? The sea view is really fine, and the flower garden below is well laid out. The trees around the castle are well grown and the whole is far beyond what might be looked for in the extreme north of Scotland. We went along the walk to the north of the castle to look at two pillar stones set up there, and which had been discovered in digging the foundations for the newer part of the castle. Only one of them had any carving on it and this was of the rudest kind, but there were the same mystic symbols which have hitherto puzzled all the Scottish antiquaries.

It was now two p.m. and I resolved to spend the remaining two hours in walking leisurely along the road towards Lairg. At the inn I met with Mr Strickland of Yorkshire, whose relatives I had formerly known at Swinburne Castle in Northumberland. He had taken some shooting in the parish of Rogart but intended to go to Lairg for the night. Passing through the rather neat village of Golspie I turned off the main road near the little ferry, and skirted the base of the hill upon which stands the colossal statue of the late Duke of Sutherland. Passing through some flourishing pine woods I soon arrived at the River of Fleet and saw the long stretch of still water which at this season of the year is swarming with seatrout. The valley of the Fleet is well cultivated and on the north it is protected by almost perpendicular hills from the violence of the winter storms. There appeared to be a good deal of boggy and in the haughs, but it was all in tillage and the crops of oats and barley looked healthy and abundant. I saw a field of wheat, too, near Dunrobin, but it looked sickly and poor. For a short distance I got a cast in a gig from a servant who was going up to Rogart, but the wind was so bitterly cold that I preferred walking. I thought once of waiting at the inn at Rogart for the mail gig, but it was then only four o'clock, so I pushed on and by half past six I had reached the head of the valley, where the stream took its rise in a wild moor enclosed by lofty hills without a vestige of cultivation. The road grew wilder and wilder, and it seemed as if the ascent would never end, till I caught sight of the corner of a wall which looked as if it enclosed some

tilled land. I hurried on, and soon the expanse of Loch Shin with its wooded banks about Lairg and the great Sutherland hills in the background, burst upon my view.

The mail gig had not yet appeared, and I fairly beat it into Lairg, arriving at Mr Mackay's most excellent inn at seven p.m. Mr Mackay was at the door in great wrath at the non-arrival of the gig, but he soon cooled down and I persuaded him to give me a bed, which at first he said he could not do. I dined in company with Mr Hobson, the Superintendent Inspector of the mails in Sutherland, and found him a most intelligent young man, with a thorough knowledge of all the nooks and byeways of this wild country. The mail gig came in at half past seven with my luggage, and it was no wonder it was so much behind time, for it was overloaded in a fearful manner. I was indeed glad that the poor horses were spared my additional weight. Though the inn was fearfully crowded with anglers and travellers Mr Mackay found an excellent bedroom for Mr Hobson and myself.

Friday August 4th. After a most delicious sleep, unbroken for the first time for four nights, I rose at five a.m. and having breakfasted took my seat in the mail gig for Scourie. It was rather an exciting scene to see four mail gigs starting at the same hour from this remote little spot. One was destined for Scourie by Loch Shin and Loch More, another for Tongue by Loch Naver, a third went to Assynt by Oikel Bridge, and the fourth proceeded southwards to Tain. My journey was entirely confined to the banks of Loch Shin, a narrow sheet of water, fully 24 miles in length, but seldom more than a mile or a mile and a half broad.

Almost immediately after the inn we passed the pretty little Gothic parish church and entered a long range of natural birch wood. The heat here was rather oppressive, and the road somewhat sandy, so our poor little steed soon exhibited signs of distress. We soon came to the point where the Tongue road branches off to the north, and here we crossed the Tirry, one of the feeders of Loch Shin, but now shrunk by the summer's heat to very insignificant dimensions. Far in the distance to the north were the ranges of Ben Loyal and the hills of Strath Naver, but from Loch Shin to the base of these hills, a distance of at least 20 miles, the country is a desolate flat moor, broken only by the white line of road which can be seen ravering the wild expanse of brown heathery plain. To the west the scene was fine, the giant mountains of Ben More and the ranges at the head of Kyle Scow forming a grand outline with the irregular banks of Loch Shin for a foreground. Our progress was slow, the road was new, it had only been completed this year, and the vehicle was heavy for the single grass-fed Galloway that drew it. On the car were four passengers and an immense quantity of stores and luggage going up to the shooting quarters about Loch More. At half past eight the car stopped at a new blue-slatted stable and coach house with a small thatched cottage on the other side of the road. This was Ogskaig (pronounced Overskjeg), where I was to take up my quarters. The landlord, a tall good looking Highlander, came up and I asked

him if I could have a bed. He looked perplexed at first, and then said he could give me one. This was enough, I was certain that I could get my dinner with my fishing rod, and there would be plenty of oat cake, milk, eggs and whisky. He led me to a little room in the cottage, in which I was immediately installed. It contained two beds, placed ranged against the wall and occupying the whole length of the chamber, while a space of about 8 feet intervened between the beds and the window, and the fireplace, for grate there was none, was so close to my bedstead that I could replace the peats without getting up at all. The chamber was neatly boarded all round, and the ceiling, too, was of boards roughly planed. The window was only about two feet square, but there was abundance of chinks in the walls to admit fresh air. A table, two or three chairs and a small washstand completed the furniture. But the great charm of this place was its loneliness, a condition not easily to be obtained at this season of the year, when the Highlands absolutely swarm with tourists and sportsmen.

The mail gig in the meantime had changed horses and had proceeded on its journey. The loch lay temptingly before me, and I soon learned that Mr Mackay had a boat and that he could supply me with two stout rowers for the afternoon. There was a light breeze upon the water, but the sun was very powerful as I walked down to the loch to get some bait for trolling. I found the trout rather shy, as they often are at this time of the year, but by using a very small fly I soon captured enough for the purpose along the little inlets of the loch. The water appeared to become deep a few yards from the shore, but the black peat with which much of the bottom is covered perhaps deceived us in this respect. I believe that the loch is not nearly so deep as Loch Assynt, nor are its shores so precipitous. It is scarcely possible to imagine a more desolate scene than that presented to the eye from Mr Mackay's house. Only a single house is in view, the cottage of Lord Ashburton on the opposite side of the loch, and yet the eye ranges to the eastward over an extent of at least thirty miles to the hills east of Lairg, and to the west the view is bounded by the gaunt precipices of Ben More and its continuous chain of mountains. The only wood in sight is a small patch of birch and alder on the opposite hill, and a jutting point, which I strongly suspect to be a cairn, projects into the loch about half a mile or a mile west of the house at Ogskaig. I have hardly even in Shetland seen a more barren hill as that on which we looked from the house, it hardly seemed capable of producing a blade of grass and yet it is said to support some large flocks of sheep.

About one p.m. I returned to the house and told Mackay that I should go out trolling that afternoon. There was but little breeze on the water and my hopes of success were but slight, but I should at least obtain a certain knowledge of my fishing grounds. The two carpenters who were working at the new coach house and stable were my crew, and in time they turned out pretty good boatmen, though the art of trolling for the *salmo ferox* was evidently unknown to them. The boat was old and somewhat rotten, but it had been well built originally, and was not remarkably leaky. Pushing off from the shore we coasted down the north eastern bank of the loch along its prettily wooded shore. The wood was wild

birch and alder, it merely covered the bank, but it was thick enough to form a pretty good cover for Black Game. Of weeds I saw but few and of trout none, though we tried one or two likely bays. Crossing the loch with the two trolling lines towing out behind we looked out anxiously for a 'tug', as Angus Murray used to call it, but the loch was still and glassy and the sun, for the first time since I left England, felt intensely hot. We coasted all the way up, keeping about 30 yards from the shore, till we passed the shepherd's hut opposite to Overscaig, and were abreast of the wooded point that juts out from the north side into the lake. I here tried the minnow, and soon succeeded in hooking a small well-fed *salmo ferax* about a pound and a half in weight. A little further on a sharp pull at the line and a rapid bend of the trolling rod made my heart bound with expectation of a struggle with one of the monster trout of Loch Shin, but the line came up loose and, on reeling it up, I discovered that the whole of the tackle was gone. To say the truth it was none of the strongest and had undergone some rough usage last year on Loch Assynt. There was no doubt, however, that it had been broken by a large trout.

We continued to pull upwards, in order to land at the head of the loch. Nearly a quarter of a mile from the top we found our boat aground in about two feet of water on a beautiful bright sandy bottom. I took in the lines and walked ahead of the boat to point out the narrow passage by which at length our craft was brought to the shore. The south side of the loch retained its desolate character but here, where the stream from Loch Griam ran into it, was a group of pretty islets covered with birch, alder and mountain ash, and thickly clothed with long heather amid the heaped up rocks. The stream divided a few hundred yards further up into five streamlets and brawled away under the overhanging bushes and over the tiny waterfalls till it reached the lake. The most western stream was the largest and here only was there anything like a channel. It fell over a ledge of rock about ten feet high into a deepish little pool, and from thence coursed rapidly away to the lake in a channel about four feet deep and swarming with trout. Here I had some excellent sport. The river from Loch Griam was slightly swollen and the trout had congregated in great numbers at the foot of the fall. At every throw I had one or two rises, and among the trout I killed were some of goodly size, half pounders and upwards, and a half pound trout is a very handsome average fish for the basket. Among the rest I killed with a light Professor fly one of the *feroxes*, a small one to be sure, for he was not a pound in weight, but there was no doubt of the species, it is totally distinct from the common trout.

After an hour's excellent sport here I proceeded up the burn a few hundred yards towards Loch Griam, to the point where in its descent from that loch it divides into five branches ere it falls into Loch Shin. The burn was slightly swollen and the trout took eagerly, but they were most of them small. About four o'clock I returned with a full basket to our boat. We baited the trolling lines afresh and pulled down the north side of the loch to explore that side of the loch. At the mouth of a small burn about half way down I felt an undoubted 'strike' of a fish at one of the trolling rods. It was but for an instant and I

pulled up the line rather hastily so that he had not time to gorge. Across the bait, which was a trout about six inches long, there were the plain marks of deep and large teeth, and it seemed that the fish had struck it and bitten it once and had then let go his hold. We now tried carefully round the wooded promontory where the water seemed very deep, and then rowed slowly for home, for it was getting late. I had killed about five dozen of trout, but they were not in such good condition as in the month of June.

Late at night I came down again to the loch and set six or seven night lines near the boat. I had but double hooks and hardly any surplus of lines, but still hoped I might get something by morning.

Saturday August 5th. I had my bedroom to myself last night, but had to use some diplomacy to effect this. The two carpenters who composed my boat's crew had previously occupied one of the beds in my room, and the landlady at supper time came to ask me to allow them to retain it, as there was not another bed in the place. However, after some conversation, they agreed so sleep in the hayloft of the new stable, as the nights were warm and there were plenty of blankets. A glass of whisky for each of them settled the matter greatly to their satisfaction.

As I well knew the dietary habits of the Highlanders I did not expect to get my breakfast before nine o'clock, but it was nearly ten before it was on the table. Some of the larger trout that I had killed yesterday were in a fine condition and of deep pink colour, but I still thought them far inferior to those of Loch Awe or Loch Assynt. At eight a.m. I went down to the night lines, but there was not a single fish upon them and I came to the conclusion that my lines were too short and that they hardly reached the edge of the deep water. I baited three or four of the afresh, after having doubled their length, and took them far out by means of the boat.

About half past twelve we were again upon the lake and with a more favourable prospect as regarded the weather. There was a pleasant rippling breeze, though the day was bright and very warm. We pulled across to the cottage and from thence up the south side of the loch. I landed at the foot of the burn that comes down by the cottage and fished along the side of the loch for about half a mile, but with very indifferent success. We noted that the loch had fallen considerably in the last 24 hours, the water was at least ten inches lower than it had been yesterday. This we knew by the two large stones that rose out of the water opposite to the woody point. A third stone made its appearance today and the landlord remarked that it was never seen but when the loch was very low. On the largest stone, to my great surprise, I observed an Oyster Catcher perched, a bird I did not expect to see so far from its usual habitat on the sea shore.

We had no success in trolling as we pulled up the lake to the mouth of the river from Loch Giam. Here I found the water a good deal lower, but it was still pretty full, though the trout were decidedly shy than yesterday. We left the boat here again and walked up the stream to the point where

it issues from Loch Griam, a distance of about a third of a mile. Loch Griam is a sheet of water not more than a mile and a quarter in length by half a mile in breadth. It is said to be of great depth, and to swarm with fish, but as there is no boat on it it has never been trolled. I have no doubt however of the salmo ferox being found in its waters. I was told at Overscaig that trout of enormous size had been seen passing up the river from Loch Shin during the spawning season. At the point where the river issues from it it is possible with care to wade across, but immediately above the banks go down very suddenly. Here I found that good trout, about three to the pound, took very readily at the edge of the deep water. We then descended the river, fishing all the way, and had good sport. There was a succession of rapid streams swarming with fish, and among these I killed a few of goodly size and shape. I hardly threw in once without getting a rise. About three or four o'clock we reached the bottom of the stream again and betook ourselves to the boat and to trolling down the loch.

We had reached the mouth of the little burn, or nearly so, where the fish rose the day before, when my small trolling rod got fast in some shallow water, and in endeavouring to lift it I broke the rod about the third joint. However I determined to persevere with the broken remnant and, as we pulled off into deep water again, I threw the line out again and held the broken top in my hand, remarking that if a fish took the bait now I should be in a difficult position, as my reel was on the other part of the broken rod. Just then I saw the top, and felt it too, give a slight sharp jerk and then another, both of which I noticed to the men, but really thought that it was occasioned by some weeds that had caught the bait. I had turned my face to the prow and was hauling in my line, giving directions to pull out into deeper water, when the younger boatman gave a shout of 'There! There! See! See!' and I heard the furious whizzing of the reel of my large trolling rod behind me. In an instant it was in my hands, while it bent and shook with the force upon the line as I raised it and, with a beating heart, found that I had hooked a noble fish. His first run was truly terrific, he had run out in a few seconds thirty or forty yards of line, going straight away from the boat. The other line was hauled in hand over hand and the boatmen rushed to their oars. I was myself far more cool than they, the sport was absolutely new to them but I knew that my tackle was strong and would hold a fish of forty pounds weight and upwards, if any such existed in the loch. At forty yards from the boat the fish slackened its speed, while my men backed water towards him at the top of their strength. 'Hold on! Hold on!' I shouted, 'don't go too near or he may dash under the boat,' as he seemed for a moment to be heading towards it. 'He's down,' I cried, 'steady now,' and I held on for the downwards rush, such as I had so sharply felt in Loch Assynt.

Down he went, but not with the tremendous speed of my former captures, and the reel soon stopped, for the loch, I suspect, at this point was not more than ten yards in depth. I now expected him to sulk for some minutes at the bottom, but in two or three minutes he was rising and soon I had the satisfaction of seeing his huge black fin on the top of the water. Here he moved uneasily backwards and

forwards for some minutes and then shewed his whole length on the surface. I felt his struggles growing weaker and weaker, and tried if he would bear towards the land. He followed easily, it was evident that he had exhausted all his energies in the first tremendous rush. We pulled for a little bay where I thought I could jump ashore, and I told the younger boatman to take the landing net and to follow me out. The boat grounded about three yards from the shore, I leaped out and ran along, shouting to the remaining boatman to get the boat out of the way as quickly as possible. He did so, and meanwhile his companion had stripped off his shoes and stockings and, turning his trousers up to the knees, followed me with the landing net.

I drew in my prize cautiously, for I dreaded that he would yet make another rush out into the loch. At length I got him fairly within reach, and called to my man to put the landing net under him and lift him quietly out of the water. It was evident that he had never done anything of the kind before, he trembled with excitement and, wading into the water, struck directly with the landing net at the fish, which was then lying in water so shallow that his back fin was above the surface. The lad had got outside of the fish, between it and the loch, and as a matter of course when thus rudely assaulted the fish struggled desperately and attempted to regain the deep water. In doing so he rushed against the boatman's bare legs and, turning round them, some of the loose trolling hooks caught his bare ankles. With a loud yell the lad dropped the landing net and, bending down, seized the fish in both his arms and brought him out as a nurse carries a baby, with the additional pleasure of having two of the hooks buried deeply in his hands. I soon released them and we laid our prize on the shore. He was of an uniform copper hue, with very few spots, and much inferior in beauty both of colour and form to the fish I took the year before in Loch Assynt. He was longer, thinner and had a much larger head, and besides, was out of season, as was plainly shown by the 'Krok' or hooked condition of the lower jaw, which is, I believe, peculiar to the male fish of this and the salmon species. His weight, in spite of his great length, was only eight pounds and a half, but I have no doubt that in the month of June this fish would have weighed eleven pounds at the least. As it was, I was well satisfied, but the exultation of the boatmen knew no bounds.

We rowed down the loch and landed about six p.m. A heavy dog cart loaded with children and ladies was leaving the door of the inn as I came up with my prize, which excited great commendation. The party was the children of Evanda McIvor of Scourie, returning from school for the holidays, and a more riotous, joyful set of beings could hardly be imagined. After tea I walked down to the loch again, in spite of the midges, which are in August a veritable plague here, and examined the night lines. On one of them I felt a fish rolling heavily. I concluded he was nearly exhausted and hauled in quickly. It was nearly dark and I looked hard for the flashing of his scaly sides, but at length the line was brought in and I drew onto the stones not a *salmo ferox* but an enormous eel. The creature was as thick as my arm and

about three feet long, but it was excellent eating. Eels are not common in the Sutherland lochs, I never got one in Loch Assyntt, but Mackay said he occasionally caught them in Loch Shin. One story he related required much faith to believe it. The shepherd at Overscaig two summers ago set a long line with eight hooks, baited with small trout, in the loch. In the morning he found that six of the eight hooks had two trout on each, besides the bait. Trout of a pound weight and upwards had swallowed the bait and, becoming caught, had been in their turn swallowed by the larger feroxes that abound in the upper waters of Loch Shin!! I do not vouch for the truth of the story, but fourteen trout on eight hooks was not a bad day's work. At night I walked about the road smoking my cigar and brushing the midges with impatient hand. In June the midges have not appeared, the nights have no darkness and the air resounds with the cries of breeding birds.

Sunday August 6th. A quiet and deliciously warm day I asked Mackay if he ever got to church. He said no, only once a year at the most, for the nearest kirk was at Lairg, sixteen miles from Overscaig. After breakfast I went to the loch side and sate there reading and basking in the warm sun for an hour or two. About two o'clock I set off with Mackay to walk to Loch Merkland. We followed the recently made road to Scourie and soon reached Loch Griam. Near Altnacardoch begins the river, which falls into Loch Griam, and the road follows it in its course up to its source from Loch Merkland. It seemed to be the very model of a trout stream, full of pools headed by sparkling streams and overhung in a few places by scanty alder bushes. The old bridle road or track kept close to the bank of the river, but at Altnacardoch it rises onto the hill above the house of old Thomas Ross, a hale veteran of 80 years of age, who still perambulates Ben Hee two or three times a week to keep his limbs, as he says, from growing stiff!! We continued our walk half way up Loch Merkland, a fine expanse of water, abounding, it is said, in excellent trout. There is only one habitation on the loch, and that, I was told, was tenanted by a Northumbrian shepherd, Thomas Batey by name. The hills towards the head of the loch in Lord Elcho's deer forest are very fine and bold, and far beyond we saw the summit of the peaked mountain Stack, rising abruptly above all others. Near the head of the loch the new road had been washed away on the previous Thursday by a thunder spate, in fact a veritable waterspout, which had descended by a narrow watercourse onto the road. It was this spate which had slightly swelled the rivers and loch here on the two following days.

Returning leisurely down the loch we stopped from time to time to look at various fishing pools, and reached the inn about five p.m. On the way back Mackay pointed out to me the spot where a cart with furniture for Loch More Lodge had been blown over by the violence of the wind in the month of November last. A little further, where the road passed through a deep moss, a pair of horses and a carriage belonging to Lord Robert Grosvenor at Stack Cottage had got off the road and immediately

sank in the moss. When Mackay got to them he said that one horse was so buried that only his head and neck were out, but both were extricated without serious injury.

The want of good water at Overscaig I felt to be a serious inconvenience, there were no fine springs here as at Loch Assynt, where every brook is the purest and coldest spring water. The best water here was in a moss about a mile from the house. It was a sulphur spring, but the water was delightfully cold. I dined as usual upon eels and fish, for the Scotch think eels to be rather serpents than fish, and do not think of eating them. Along with them I had a very young chicken and abundance of eggs, with small pats of butter floating in a tumbler glass of water, and brown sugar for my tea. I soon got accustomed to the latter and at last quite liked it. Late in the evening I saw a carriage on the road from Lairg, and a gentleman descended from it at the inn in high wrath. He was a genuine specimen of an English traveller in the old sense of the word, in truth he was as far from being a gentleman as he well could be. His anger was excited by the post boy having insisted on feeding his horses and resting at Overscaig before proceeding to Loch More, whither he was bound to his friend Mr Reid, one of the great brewers of that name in London. It took me a quarter of an hour to pacify this irascible old gentleman, but I succeeded at last.

Monday August 7th. About nine o'clock this morning I set off on foot for Loch Griam, and followed the road till I came to the foot of the loch. Here I put on my fishing stockings and heavy wading shoes and, having concealed my walking boots beneath a stone, I reached the banks of the loch. I found some difficulty in wading across the head of the stream where it issues from the depths above, but at length I reached the other side and soon found employment for my rod. The trout were not particularly greedy, but they gave very fair sport along the little bays on this side. I had often to wade out a considerable distance before I reached the edge of the deep water where the trout always lay. I continued on till I came to the stream which descends from the fine glen of Allt Sgialach. Here I had to make a considerable detour to get round the still water of the burn, and in this I found multitudes of black burn trout, very inferior in appearance to the silvery denizens of the loch.

At the top of Loch Griam there is a most extensive bed of fine sand with water to the depth of about two feet, and so perfectly level that the water did not deepen an inch for five or six hundred yards from the shore. At length I came to the fine stream that issues from Loch Merkland. Here the fish rose well, just where the stream falls into Loch Griam. I got hold of one or two large trout, but lost them and I did not kill a single fish above half a pound in weight all the day. I am satisfied, however, that Loch Griam contains trout of great size and as it has never been fished from a boat, I have no doubt that careful trolling would be well rewarded. After fishing at the foot of the stream for about three hours I crossed it and returned by the road to the foot of Loch Griam.

It was now about five p.m., but I thought of the beautiful bit of river between this loch and the head of Loch Shin, and determined to try it once more. The evening was excessively close and warm, and when I reached the water I found the trout upon the feed. But the midges were also out for their evening meal and I was awfully persecuted by them as I waded down the river. I had a rise to almost every throw of my line and once, when a very diminutive trout scarcely larger than a minnow had taken my fly, it was seized by a large fish and I landed both. It was nearly dark when I gave up. I could not leave the beautiful stream, and I acknowledged to myself that, though loch fishing produces a better basket and often heavier fish, yet the charm of change of scene and locality in the river renders the latter infinitely more enjoyable. As I was returning I met my two boatmen coming full speed along the road. They had been sent by the landlord to look for me, for he feared from my long stay that some accident had befallen me.

This morning a gentleman with his family stopped at Overscaig on his way to Scourie. I still had my large trout, for I could not bear to eat the fish, and he had never seen a trout of this species. He was a naturalist as well as a sportsman, and it was delightful to see the reverence with which he examined the monster fish. We had a long and pleasant conversation till he left me to pursue his journey.

Tuesday August 8th. At half past eight o'clock this morning the mail car came to the door from Lairg. I took advantage of it to go as far as the foot of Loch Merkland, in order to fish the stream between that loch and Loch Griam. At that point I found a fine burn running out of the clear depths of loch Merkland, forming a stream for about 20 yards till it fell into a deep basin or small lake below. As I went down to the lochside I put up a flock of wild geese and these birds kept flying over my head within pistol-shot often of the place where I stood. I saw them alight on the other side of the loch and could easily have reached them with a gun. I believe they are the Grey Lag species, but the Bean Goose is said likewise to breed in Sutherland.

I tried Loch Merkland for a time and was well pleased with my success. The trout here were of very fine shape and size, averaging about half a pound and remarkably thick at the shoulder. Loch Merkland has, I believe, been very little fished and I have no doubt of its containing very large fish. It is a much larger lake than Loch Griam, and is surrounded by high and steep mountains. In the river the trout, though smaller, rose freely to the fly and the beautiful pools that it forms on the way to Loch Griam shewed me that excellent sport might be had here in June or July. I regret that I did not try the worm today, as the stream was in a most favourable condition for it.

About midday I retraced my steps to Overscaig to try one more troll for the salmo ferox. The afternoon seemed favourable, as there was a light breeze on the water. I trolled down the loch to the bottom of the wooded bank and then up to the top without success. We landed as usual at the head of the

loch and, after killing a few trout at the foot of the fall, I wandered up the stream that descends from Coire Kinloch and got some dark muddy-looking trout in its deep gloomy pool, which extends for half a mile from the head of the lake without a single interval of running water. When these burns are swollen by rain these pools are often alive with large fish, but I have never fished in the Highland streams after a shower of rain. We came down the other side of the loch and tried hard to find the mate of the giant trout we had killed on Saturday. Then we rowed up to the wooded point where the water was said to be deep, and from these we pulled round the two large stones in the centre of the loch, but all in vain. Twice I got my tackle fast on a stone at the bottom, for my boatmen knew no more than myself the 'soundings' of these dark waters. At length about six p.m. I was rewarded with a tug, and a tug it was and no more, the fish had missed the bait and it would soon be dark. We returned to the shore and set our night lines before leaving the boat. I had unfortunately only four or five double hooks with me, and single hooks had never proved of much use. Several parties passed up this road today on their way to various shooting quarters, even this quiet district was not exempt from travellers, but I believe that I was the only fishing visitor at Overscaig during all this season. When the new inn is built there will be few better positions for the angler and especially for the troller for the giant trout that frequent these lakes.

Wednesday August 9th. My fishing excursion of this year had been brief and not very satisfactory. Still I had enjoyed new scenes and had entirely regained my health, and I had made myself acquainted with one of the best trout fishing districts in Sutherland. I had at one time thought of crossing the mountain range of Ben More from the head of Loch Shin and descending upon Assynt. The herd at Overscaig offered to conduct me over the mountain passes in six hours to Inchnadamph. The distance by the map is probably not more than fifteen miles, but as we have to cross a very elevated and rugged mountain range we may allow it to be at least ten miles more. The mail gig from Scourie was to be here at twelve o'clock, so I walked up to the hill above the inn with my telescope to study the passes of the mountain range of Ben More, which shone bright and clear in the morning sun. I sat there for an hour or two examining every point and pass and could trace plainly the route the herd at Overscaig had described to me.

In the morning before breakfast I went down to the loch to draw my night line for the last time. I got nothing on three of them and the fourth was completely fast. Mackay went down afterwards to release it and returned with a face of unutterable dismay. On rowing out to the line he found a trout of about five pounds fast to it, but it was twisted round a stone. By some mismanagement he got hold of the wrong end of the line where it was twisted round a stone and, breaking it short off, the trout escaped.

The mail gig came up with my friend Mr Hobson and, after paying my very moderate bill, I left this pleasant place where I had enjoyed true solitude and very excellent fishing. By three p.m. we

reached Lairg. The inn was perfectly full, Mr Mackay could not really give us a bed, so we determined to go on to Ardguy Inn, near Bonar Bridge. At Lairg I met a Mr Biden from Derbyshire, a most enthusiastic trout fisher, and we forthwith became sworn friends. He had been five weeks at Altnacharra fishing in Loch Meadie and Loch Naver, and had in previous years fished much in the Assyntt district. The previous summer he had spent in Norway and was full of admiration of that magnificent country. From Mr Biden I learned many hints concerning our gentle craft, he had all the kindness of heart and generous spirit that distinguishes the true angler.

A young lad with a small pony offered to convey Mr Biden, Mr Hobson and myself with our luggage to Arguy. We almost doubted the power of the little animal to draw the vehicle with such a weight, but we found ourselves completely deceived. The road from Lairg to Bonar Bridge is full of beauty. We kept above the river, and so could not see the falls of the Shin, but the scenery about Achany is beautiful in the extreme. Passing Inveran, the scene of Montrose's defeat in 1650, we soon came to the Oikel River and, crossing the fine arched bridge at Bonar, reached the excellent inn at Ardgay at seven p.m. The fishing in the Oikel has not been good this year, though in June Mr Whiteside had had excellent sport, killing twenty salmon in a few days. The Carron water, so famous for grilse, seemed to have been very little fished. What a contrast the excellent accommodation at Ardguy was to the inn at Overscaig.

Thursday August 10th. At half past six this morning, after a true Highland breakfast, we set off by the mail gig from Lairg for Tain. Our road led us along the shores of the Dornoch Firth, with fine views of the Sutherland hills. The country was rapidly being converted from bleak moorland into arable ground, patches of heath surrounded by smiling cornfields and potatoes were still to be seen, but in another year or two they will have disappeared. At Tain we had to wait four hours for the mail coach from the north. I walked out with Mr Biden about three miles to the west in a broiling sun, till we reached a pretty little rivulet flowing from the hills above. We then returned to Tain and got places in the mail, and once more I had the pleasure of sitting behind a team of four thorough-bred horses, at the side of one of the genuine old coachmen, who are now banished by the railway to this remote part of our islands. At Invergordon, after a beautiful drive over a fine road, we parted from Mr Hobson, who pursued his journey to Inverness. In the evening we walked along the shore towards Alness and witnessed a beautiful sunset behind the high mountains of Ross-shire. The whole road was alive with parties travelling northward for the shooting season, the quiet repose of the Highlands was entirely destroyed, the inns were overcrowded and I felt quite glad to get away. At nine p.m. the steam boat came round from Inverness and we went on board and slept there in peace and quietness.

1857

[**Saturday June 6th**.]After a remarkably wet month of March and a chilly backward April, fine weather came in May and as early as the first week in June I had made arrangements for my holiday excursion, and determined this year to make almost exclusively a land journey to the north, taking the Scottish North Eastern to Aberdeen and thence by rail and coach to Inverness. Rising at three a.m. on Saturday June 6th I left Newcastle at a quarter past four for Edinburgh. By eight we reached that town and had just time to step from the one set of carriages to the other when we were whirled off again to Stirling, to the great regret of some parties who calculated on having ample time to breakfast in the Scottish Metropolis. The journey to Stirling was over well known ground, the railway running close past the gates of Westquarter, where I could see the well known walks and trees of former times, but not one familiar face.

The day was oppressively hot and dusty, and beyond Edinburgh everything was burned up by the drought, as the fields there had not been favoured with the general rain which had fallen in England. Beyond Stirling the scenery was new to me altogether, and a prettier railway route than that between the above town and Perth it is scarcely possible to conceive. The view up the Teith towards Callander is magnificent. I got a hurried glimpse of the fine old cathedral at Dunblane, and then the engine hurried us on through that fine valley towards Perth, while the highlands of Perthshire rose grandly in the north. Of Perth I saw little beyond the railway station, and then in a burning sun, which beat directly into our carriage, we sped along towards the east coast, the country growing uglier and uglier every minute. The descent towards the coast between Brechin and Stonehaven is a very steep incline, winding amidst precipices of the most fearful character, and we had this day on our engine the most daring and skilful driver in all Scotland. The pace was absolutely tremendous as we shot in and out of the dark tunnels hewn in the grey rocks, or skirted the sea some two hundred feet above the water. Far away out to sea all was calm and bright, though as we came near Aberdeen a heavy shower rushed down from the hill and laid the dust at least, if it did not much benefit the thirsty ground.

By two p.m. exactly we were in Aberdeen and a smart omnibus took me to the hotel. After lunching there I set off by the North of Scotland line for Inverness. The number of passengers astonished me, but the east of Scotland is populous as compared with the West Highlands. The line ran up the valley of the Don for some distance, and then we changed for the Ury, up which we crept till its stream had dwindled to an absolute rill. The old turnpike road ran alongside of us almost all the way to Inverury. The scenery was generally bare, with plenty of ugly black fir plantations. Three fourths of the land seemed to have been reclaimed from the moors during the last ten years. At Keith the railway

ceases for the present and two coaches conveyed the passengers on to Nairn, a distance of about forty miles. Some part of the scenery here was very pretty, and all of it was new to my eyes, though I had traversed the same road in 1853 at night. After passing over a desolate moor we came to the beautiful woods about Fochabers and sped at a rapid rate through the pine forest, with a mountain torrent's stony bed showing in the valley below, in strong contrast to the dark green hue of the trees and the red soil. Of the quiet town of Fochabers I saw little and of Gordon Castle nothing. The Spey beyond the town is a wide torrent-like river, and no doubt one of the principal obstacles to the completion of the railway, from the fearful floods to which it is constantly subject. From hence we went on through a tolerably well cultivated country to Elgin, and beyond that town we passed through some very pretty oak woods, where the foliage was in all the luxuriance of spring. Near Forres, too, I caught sight, though only for a moment, of the so called Sueno's Pillar, one of the finest sculptured stones of Scotland. Beyond this we crossed the Findhorn by a handsome chain bridge, with a most preposterous Gothic gateway at either end. It was now getting late and as we climbed the next eminence we saw the setting sun and, beneath, the grand outline of the Sutherland hills, while the yellow and crimson of the clouds above was mirrored again in the calm waters of the Moray Firth.

At a quarter before ten we reached the station of the Inverness and Nairn railway, I stepped into a carriage, fell asleep directly and awoke at Inverness. We had reached Inverness by eleven, and an hour was allowed for supper. At twelve o'clock I got into the mail again, and a splendid team of four grey horses whirled me along to Beaulieu, and here ended the long journey of this day. After some delay I got admission to the little inn, and was soon asleep.

Sunday June 7th was a glorious day, bright and sunny, and all around me was such a contrast to the grimy streets of Newcastle, which I had left only 24 hours before. Accustomed as we are in these days to be transported with such rapidity from place to place, it is always difficult on waking from your first sleep in strange locality to realise the fact of your being thus distant from the accustomed daily scenes and routine of life. A strange bed is not strange to me, however, and I sleep equally well on any couch. It did, however, seem strange today to look out on the old abbey of Beaulieu, shaded by fine ancient trees, and beyond it the Beaulieu Firth and the Black Isle, all illumined by the sun in a cloudless sky. After a hearty Scotch breakfast I ordered a gig to take me to Eskdale Chapel, where I hoped to meet my old friend Dr Macrae. Meanwhile I walked through the village, but all the inhabitants seemed to be as yet sound asleep, and the only person I met was the Catholic priest going to the temporary chapel which has been fitted up here by Lord Lovat.

At ten a.m. I set off in the gig along the level road that leads back to Beaufort, and thence mounted the hill on the western side of the woods to the Falls of Kilmorack. These are rapids rather than

falls, but the scenery about them is pretty and the river view from the wooden bridge is most exquisite. Beyond the Falls we mounted up through Lord Lovat's plantations till we came again on the open hill and could see far up into the valley of the Beauly, over the isle of Eilean Aigas and up towards Erchless Castle. The outline of the hill was good, but it was only in the distance that we could see the mountain ranges. The yellow broom grows here in wondrous luxuriance, and I never saw it anywhere in such perfect flower, forming a fine contrast to the dark green pine woods. Below us was Eskadale House, a recent purchase of Lord Lovat's, and now to be let with a part of his lordship's moors. Passing this we drove along a lovely fir wood, close to the river's bank, till my conductor pointed out to me a very pretty cottage, with neat flower gardens and embosomed in wood, as the residence of the priest of Eskadale. At the next turn we saw the chapel, built in a spot cleared out of the forest but with the trees still almost touching the walls on one side. The building in design exhibited an approach to the Gothic of a very composite character, but the effect upon the whole was decidedly good, though much, perhaps, was owing to the beauty of the situation. Inside it was really an imposing structure, with a chancel and aisles separated from the nave by massive Norman pillars. All the interior was of a uniform greyish white, but the glare of this was materially deadened by the long shadows the branches that bent almost into the windows. In a dark day the church must be positively gloomy. The great charm of the building was undoubtedly its position in the forest, and today the groups of people in gaily coloured dresses, most of the men being in kilts, assembled on the green plot around the church, formed a picture often represented in paintings but rarely to be found in nature. Primitive vehicles were hitched up under trees, the horses standing contentedly by, while the women chattered Gaelic at the highest pitch of their voices.

On entering the church I went up to the seat belonging to my friend Dr Macrae, but he did not appear on that day in his own place. The chancel was plain, but there was a good Munich statue of Our Lady, presented by the late Lewis Mackenzie of Findon shortly before his lamented death. We had prayers in Gaelic and a long sermon in Gaelic likewise and, at Mass, I was really puzzled at first to say whether it was not in Gaelic too, for the priest's Latin sounded so strange to my ears. Subsequently I learned that he had been educated at the Scottish College, and had retained a strong German dialect to counteract all Gaelic tendencies.

On leaving the chapel I met my old friends and was kindly invited by them to spend the day at their house. We drove back in the direction of Beaufort, and then turned past some old trees to a strange little cottage amid the sweetest scenery in the world. It was a long low building, evidently added to at different times, and situated in a sheltered nook of the burn, while close beside it were fine cherries and walnut trees and a beautiful old garden with immense yew hedges and two or three acres of apple trees. The size of the timber here was as remarkable as the luxuriant growth of the chestnuts and walnut trees.

Before dinner Dr Macrae and I had a long ramble up the burn through beautiful scenery and then we returned over the hill to the house. We saw many acres of ground covered with the rich yellow broom and, far beyond, the eye wandered over the Beaully Firth and towards the rocks of the Black Isle which, I thought, looked particularly clear and close to the eye for such a burning hot atmosphere. Mr Macdonald joined us at dinner and in the evening we strolled out again, for I was never wearied of such an enchanted scene. As we passed a small thicket at the side of the path a woodcock rose out of it and flew easily away towards a large wood.

It was nine p.m. when I left the house and walked through Lord Lovat's grounds towards Beaully. A change of the weather was evidently impending, for a warm soft rain was falling gently, making a light murmuring noise amid the trees and as yet hardly sufficient to lay the dust at one's feet. Suddenly in the dusk a roedeer bounded into the road and seeing us, turned and sprang back into the woods. My friend accompanied me back to the gate of Lord Lovat's grounds at the Falls of Kilmorack, and from thence I had a delightful 'eerie' sort of walk of three miles through a dark pinewood, with no sound save the occasional heavy pattering of raindrops amid the trees or the rustle of hares and roedeer in the under wood and the loud flapping of the wood pigeons roused by my step beneath their resting place. I reached the inn at ten thirty p.m. and sate up till one writing letters. During that time the wind rose from the eastward, and the rain plashed furiously against the casements. It was not an encouraging night to go on, but I persevered.

Monday June 8th. At one in the morning I heard through the howling of the storm the sound of the old familiar mail coach horn, and, to my great joy, I found that the inside of the coach was empty. On the roof were about half a dozen half drowned passengers, some wrapped in cloaks, others without any protection against the weather, but all evidently resolved to brave its utmost fury rather than pay the additional high fare for an inside place. In England everybody would have paid double to get under cover on such a night. I slept soundly for the first twenty miles as far as Invergordon, but here a hearty Jack tar got into the vehicle, who had evidently been keeping himself awake for the coach by copious libations. He had just landed from Mr Hogarth's yacht, which had been in imminent danger the night before from the storm which then so suddenly arose. Of course it was impossible to sleep any longer, for Jack opened both windows of the coach, and kept up a constant volley of small talk besides.

At five a.m. we reached Tain, where the rain was still pouring down, and a gale from the north east with heavy dark clouds was threatening to turn it into snow. After a good wash and a hearty breakfast I felt quite refreshed and at six got on the mail car that runs to Lairg to complete the last part of my journey. We had now turned to the westward along the shores of the Dornoch Firth, so that we had the wind and rain practically at our backs, and I had a douce Scots minister at my side to keep me warm.

Before we reached Kinghorn's inn at Bonar Bridge the rain had nearly ceased and the sun shone out for a minute or two and threatened to disperse the cold heavy clouds that still hung over the Sutherland hills. Oh, how delicious was the glass of raw whisky that I drank at Kinghorn's inn, and then fell straightways into a discussion with the worthy minister on the virtue of temperance by way, I suppose, of illustration of what I had done. As we turned up the valley towards Lairg we were met by a most biting cold north east wind, which effectually chilled us ere we reached Lairg. The scenery of the rocky valley of the Shin was more or less lost on us, for we kept our faces muffled closely up in our plaid to shelter ourselves from the cutting blast. On arriving at Lairg I was enabled to get a good repast of whisky and milk with bread and cheese, such as I could not expect to find higher up the loch.

At a quarter past ten I set off to Overscaig, the last stage of my journey, and only sixteen miles distant from Lairg. The wind had now shifted a point or two to the north so that I met it again as we drove up the valley of the Lough over the black open ground beyond Shinness. By the time that we reached Overscaig my limbs were so benumbed that I could hardly get off the car, and the day was so dark from the lowering clouds that I believed it to be the evening twilight when it was in reality only one o'clock in the day. The good people were much delighted to see me, and I was soon at home in my little room, which had received no addition since my last visit. Mrs Mackay piled the peats on the fire till the smoke, which never did go up the chimney, caused the water to stream from my eyes, and she heaped the table with all the edibles in the house. I observed with regret that civilisation was advancing here, for they had ivory-handled knives and the butter was no longer served up in a tumbler glass. The bed, however, were still in the same primitive condition, and I could still punch holes in the damp plaster with one hand while lying in bed, and poke the fire with the other. The sheets used to be absolutely hot when I got into bed on the side next to the blazing peats, but this vegetable fuel throws out very few sparks, and fires are very rare here, where there is no such thing as fire insurance. I was so cold when I arrived that neither tea nor whisky could impart any warmth to my frame, so I got out my fishing tackle and, dressed in my warmest clothing, went down to the loch. Here I waded and fished more for exercise than for pleasure, but eventually I succeeded in killing a dozen or two of pretty good trout.

I observed that a handsome farmhouse had been erected on the site of the miserable shieling that formerly stood about half a mile to the east of Overscaig Inn, and next year, as Mackay informs me, his own little clachan is to be swept away and its rude accommodations will be numbered among the things that were. It was about seven o'clock when I returned to the house, the rain had ceased but the biting north wind still continued. I had lost all count of time and I required a good night's sleep to collect my scattered thoughts. It was so dark that at half past nine I could not read without a candle.

Tuesday June 9th. The morning was cold and misty. By nine o'clock there came on a drizzling rain but it had no effect on the rivers. Mackay drove me in a dog cart as far as the foot of Loch Merkland, a lake I had long wished to fish. The day cleared up a little as I began to fish and improved gradually, till at twelve o'clock the sun actually shone out for some time. I sent my gillie up to the shepherd's house to beg his boat, and meanwhile I had very good sport along the shore. The trout were almost all of good size, and very strong. After the boat came I trolled a little, but had very little success, as the day was too bright and cold. Near the head of the loch a mountain burn comes down from Lord Elcho's forest. It is the beau ideal of a hill burn, stealing away under dark masses of crag and heather and then opening out into deep, dark and silent pools. I went up this burn a little way to get some small parr for bait. The water was exceedingly low and clear as crystal but, by throwing on the surface gently, I was always sure of a rise. On returning to the boat I tried the trolling tackle with the trout that I had captured in the burn, but all in vain. Probably if I had waited till evening I might have done better. My gillie told me that the burn was an awful place to pass on an autumn night, when the stags were rowting in it they made a noise therein 'like speerits of darkness.' The burn must at times be greatly flooded, for the quantity of debris brought down it has formed a bank which extends some hundreds of yards into the loch and then suddenly ceases, the gravel bed going sheer down into the depths of the loch. I once or twice narrowly escaped slipping down the yielding gravel bed as I walked along, and once too I got out at the head of the boat, after having got in at one side, and found that I was stepping into water of unknown depth, though fortunately I saw my mistake in time. The banks of the loch were high and bare, but there were no crags or precipices directly impending over it.

Towards the afternoon a fresh breeze got up from the eastward and the fish rose well. I could easily have killed fourteen or fifteen dozen here if I had been so inclined. They took the large loch flies well and indeed were not particular about the bait. In weight they averaged two and a half to the pound, but they were well fed and fairly shaped and deeper in colour than any other trout except those of Loch Shin and Loch Assyntt. About seven p.m. Mackay came up for me in his gig and we drove home in a chilling east wind. Taking a walk in the evening I found a brace of Moorgame sitting within gunshot of the door, and immediately beyond the 'fauld dyke' a Golden Plover was whistling plaintively, while some Curlews kept up a shrill concert above our heads. It is strange to think of such a place within thirty hours' distance of Newcastle, but I could point out some dwellings quite as wild and with very little better accommodation in some parts of Northumberland.

Wednesday June 10th. It was so dark this morning that I thought the day would never come, but that we were doomed to exist in perpetual twilight. Beyond the lee of the house it was impossible to stand, for the east wind seemed charged with icy particles, while heavy dark clouds hung close above

out heads. Mackay told me of two lochs on the hills where some marvellous large trout had been taken. He described them as lying about a mile north east of the house, and as being mere round holes, but that Angus Murray had got some fine trout from them last winter. The day however seemed so bad that I gave up all idea of going to them and as it had begun to rain rather heavily I resolved to spend the afternoon trolling on the loch. I borrowed the shepherd's coble from the cottage on the other side, and we trolled from three till eight p.m. with very indifferent success. The burn was so low that I could not get any trout for bait and I was therefore obliged to trust entirely to the artificial minnow which I had constructed out of gutta-percha, and had silvered over as my first attempt. To my great delight it succeeded admirably, I killed with it nine fair sized trout from a pound to a pound and a half, all well coloured and well fed fish as deep in hue of flesh as the finest salmon. One large trout made a run at my large bait and left the marks of his teeth on its sides. Though it rained heavily and was the fiercest and wildest day I have seen for a long time, I yet enjoyed the sport greatly and the more so perhaps as I was so thoroughly well protected from the weather by waterproof garments from head to foot.

Thursday June 11th. Last night the peat smoke resolutely refused to go up the chimney and accordingly dispersed itself throughout my bedroom, causing my unaccustomed eyes to smart with the pungent vapour. Still I slept well and in the morning felt extremely loth to rise, for the cold penetrated even through the blankets. On going out I saw that Ben More to its very base was white with snow and on all the neighbouring hills a heavy sprinkling had fallen. Still the rain was quite insufficient to raise the waters, so I determined at once to cross over to Scourie on the west coast, and from thence to make my way across Badcall Bay to Lochinver. The mail gig from Lairg to Scourie was to come up at one, so I packed my things, paid my bill and bid adieu to Mackay and his wife. As he handed me his very moderate account I remarked on casting my eye down it that he had made no charge for my bed during the three nights I had occupied it. 'Indeed sir,' answered he, 'the bed was such a bad one that I had no face to charge for it.' At one o'clock I left Overscaig with a promise to return when the new house was built, but from what I have since heard, it will be long ere that is accomplished.

A road engineer and a Scotch minister were my companions on the mail car, and we trotted along at a pretty fair rate past the banks of Loch Griam and Loch Merkland, till we reached the head of the latter loch. Here we crossed a short and desolate ridge or rather elevation between two hills and immediately the scene was totally changed. From the desolate long sweeping outline of the moors around Loch Shin we passed at once into scenery of wood and crag ornamenting the sides of precipitous hills, while before us stretched the fine lake of Loch More, with grand precipices on its north eastern banks and pretty wooded crags on the opposite shore. In the pass alluded to we saw numbers of red deer

and, on the opposite banks of Loch More, in Lord Elcho's forest, we saw them in herds of tens and twenties, looking almost like a drove of brown kyloes in the fitful light of this stormy day.

1858

The fine and unusually hot weather in the early part of June, when the thermometer reached nearly 90 in the shade, made me long for the cool Highland hills and lochs, but I resolved not to start for the north quite so early this year. On or about the 20th of this month seems to me quite soon enough for so high a latitude.

Tuesday June 22nd. At half past four this morning I left Newcastle and reached Edinburgh by 8 for breakfast. By then I was at Granton Pier and was greatly amused at the sharp opposition that prevailed between the rival boats. On my way down in the railway carriage I was seated opposite to a gentleman who, after asking me what boat I was going by, informed me that he was on his way to Sutherland likewise. He was evidently an angler, and I directly guessed his name and his destination. It was the Revd Edward Otto Trevelyan, incumbent of Stagumber, and who was on his way to the Gualin House upon the Dionard, which salmon river he had rented with the neighbouring shootings for some years past. We had never before met, but he had sent me a kind invitation through his cousin Lady Trevelyan of Wallington to visit him in his mountain retreat. This invitation he immediately and most kindly renewed, and I as promptly accepted, though I had not come prepared for salmon fishing in any way. I had indeed two light grilse rods of about sixteen feet long and a pretty fair assortment of reels and lines, but of flies I possessed not more than half a dozen and these had been partially in use three years before. Mr Trevelyan had engaged his berth on board the Dundalk, while I had taken my place in the Commodore. We parted therefore on the pier, amidst the shouts and hurrying of the porters, and fortunately I met with an old friend on board of my own vessel in the person of the Revd Mr Snowdon, incumbent of Mitford.

Precisely at half past ten a.m. we moved off from the pier, the Dundalk following about a hundred yards behind us. Our voyage down the Firth of Forth and along the eastern coast was extremely pleasant, the sea was smooth as glass and the excitement of racing with the opposition boat prevented all feeling of weariness. At ten p.m. when I retired to rest we were off Peterhead. Far away in the west I could see piled up upon one another, huge dark portentous looking clouds that seemed to betoken rain, while the captain maintained that they were only occasioned by the heat. Our boat was beautifully fitted up and the steward had kindly given me a cabin all to myself, and this is invariably a great luxury to a sailor. The sunset was less brilliant than usual, the bank of clouds obscured completely the western sky,

so that only a faint redness marked the closing of the day. We saw porpoises, Solan geese and black Guillemots on our voyage today and after the short rest of the previous night I thoroughly enjoyed repose on the hard mattress of my narrow berth.

Wednesday June 23rd. Another fine day, but the threatening clouds still hung in the west. We were nearly off Burgh Head when I came on deck, the sea was deliciously smooth and with the telescope I could study all the country about the mouth of the Findhorn, that wondrous waste of sand and heather and whin so graphically described by St John in his *Highland Sports*. But we had one cause for annoyance, ours was now the beaten boat, and the Dundalk, which we had kept ahead of all yesterday, was now seen crossing the Moray Firth towards the Sutors of Cromarty. It was true that we had more cargo and therefore were detained longer at different places during the night, but still it was rather galling to find our triumph of yesterday converted today into defeat. By eleven o'clock, however, we passed the entrance of the Cromarty Firth and I felt what a new interest had been given to the rocky coast by poor Hugh Miller's charming narrative of his early days. On the south side of the Sutors the Hill is particularly bold, and clothed with greensward and heather, out of which rises a grove of pines which cast their long shadows beautifully down the steep incline.

On arriving at Invergordon at half past eleven the Dundalk had already got possession of the pier, so that we had the trouble of being landed in a heavy lumbering boat after a delay of more than an hour. I found Trevelyan at the Inn, and we agreed to take a chaise at once to Ardguy so as to reach Lairg in the evening. By one o'clock we set off with a pair of excellent horses and Snowdon followed in a gig. At Stittenham he came up quite overpowered with the heat, so I immediately offered to take his place in the gig which he took mine in the carriage. Mr Matheson of Ardross's improvements assume everywhere more importance, the plantations are slowly rising above the heather and the fences no longer have the bare new look they previously exhibited. Before we reached the Dornoch Firth it began to rain and by the time we arrived at Ardguy it was a perfect downpour. Here Snowdon left us for Invercarron House, and Trevelyan and I went on to Lairg up the beautiful valley of the Shin.

At Lairg the inn was by no means full but we met a brother of the late Sir Humphrey Davy, Dr John Davy, an author and an angler and a very quiet pleasant man withal. He had been fishing in the preserved Lochs Douglas and Craggie, and at ten we had some of the produce of his sport, beautiful red fleshed trout of exquisite flavour and above a pound weight each. Dr Davy had fished last summer in the Isle of Lewis and had killed there several hundred sea trout. But there was another party at the inn, evidently the original of old Briggs in Punch and bearing the same very plebeian name. He was a stout good-tempered man, with about a hundredweight of tackle of all kinds, and had been busily fishing the northern lochs and streams since the beginning of April. He had fished a good deal in Loch Luichart and

the chain of lochs leading to the west along the road from Dingwall to Loch Maree, but did not appear to have been remarkably successful. He was evidently fonder of trolling for the great trout than anything else and had had at times wonderful success in that way, though he did not seem inclined to exaggerate his exploits. I looked into his box of artificial minnows, he had nearly a hundred of these of all shapes and sizes, indeed it was the most extraordinary collection I ever saw. The evening continued wet, so that we could not go out for a walk, but still, even when wrapped in a mackintosh, it was delightful to move out and listen to the rain drops pattering amid the birch trees, or to watch them plashing in the lake. Excepting Dr Davy the fishing parties had had very poor sport this day, probably the trout were shy from the approaching rain, but we little anticipated such stormy weather as subsequently overtook us.

Thursday June 24th. The departure of the mail gigs for the north has been accelerated in consequence of the earlier arrival of letters at Inverness and they now leave Lairg for Tongue, Lochinver and Scourie at 9 a.m. We occupied the whole of the little cart in which Mackay of Overscaig, who acted as driver, conveyed us and our heavy luggage, and all this was drawn for 16 miles in drenching rain by a little pony which I afterwards saw in the plough the same day at Overscaig. The latter place we reached at twelve o'clock, and here I resolved to stay until the following Monday in order to allow Trevelyan time to prepare all at Gualin House for my reception. I would have done better, perhaps, to have gone at once to Rhiconich, but Trevelyan gave so unfavourable an account of the accommodation there that, hard as they were at Overscaig, I thought I might get into even worse quarters. Moreover at the latter place there was always trout fishing to be got, and I did not know what sport could be obtained at Rhiconich. I found the new house already built at Overscaig but no signs of its being inhabited. From what I afterwards heard there is little prospect of poor Mackay ever entering it, as he is said to be nearly bankrupt and to be sinking fast into confirmed habits of drinking. I had, therefore, to put up with the old house and its wretched bed, but, as regards food, I had nothing to complain of.

Trevelyan went on to Gualin all alone, while I made enquiries about a boat, but found that as usual Mackay had nothing of the kind. This was a sad disappointment, though as it proved I could never have made use of it. At two p.m. I set off for the head of the loch, followed by a young lad, Sandy, who seemed as fond of fishing as I was myself. Crossing the low ground I was soon at the bridge which now crosses the river towards Corry Kinloch. The water was slightly swollen by the recent rain, and I anticipated good sport, for at the very first throw I killed a fine trout of a pound weight. I then fished up the river, but with little success, there had been too long a drought and the green weed was very abundant on the stones. At the head of the river, where it issues from the loch, I had better sport, the trout were about half pounders or oftener three to the pound and very vigorous. I fished for four hours along the south-western bank, killing plenty as usual in the lower part, but found them scarcer as I went

higher up the loch. At length I reached the outlet of the river that comes down from Loch Merkland and here I got one or two good fish, but it was now late and they did not appear to be so keen as usual. I got home about eight p.m. with 51 fine trout in my basket. Almost all of them were red-fleshed thick fish, and of exquisite flavour.

Mackay had had no visitors that year, indeed he told me sadly that he had not expected any, and he evidently did not feel anxious about getting into his new house. He had lost, he said, a lot of money by the post-master at Lairg, who had recently been convicted of embezzling money sent through the Post Office, and had been sentenced to 14 years' transportation. The whole place looked much neglected, the dikes were broken down and both he and his wife had a wearied and careworn look. The evening closed in, dark and gloomy, the heavy clouds rolled down the hills from Ben More and, ere I went to bed, the wind was sweeping in fitful gusts over the dark surface of the loch. Far to the east, however, the day was still fine so that I did not lose hope of fishing on the morrow. I heard, however, the warning cry of the Black-throated Diver from the loch, and the next day shewed me that this harbinger of bad weather had not been wrong.

Friday June 25th. Early this morning I was awakened by the howling of the wind and the pattering of the rain against the casement. I had slept well enough but the straw mattress of the bed was so fearfully rotten that it required much fortitude to lie down upon it, and proved a powerful incentive to rise early in the morning. All this day I was an absolute prisoner to the house. The lake was lashed into a stormy sea, the spray from it blew wildly over the shores, while great pillars of rain swept across the dreary landscape. Fortunately I had with me two of Scott's novels, *The Abbot* and *The Monastery*, and with these I managed to beguile the time. Indeed under other circumstances I never could have got through the ineffable dullness of the latter of these volumes. I also sorted my fishing tackle, tied on flies, wrote a letter and smoked, and at times I struggled through the storm to the kitchen to enjoy a little conversation. About the middle of the day I cased myself in waterproof and went down to the loch to lay some nightlines, but the fury of the winds and waves rendered my attempts to throw in the lines almost a failure. Once or twice, too, I was nearly hurled into the loch by a sudden blast. Within doors the wind blew the peat smoke down the chimney to such a degree that I could only stay in the room half an hour at a time, but I found a place of refuge at the end of the house, where, sheltered from the furious gale, I could stand clothed in waterproof and look out upon the storm.

Saturday June 26th. If yesterday morning was bad this was absolutely worse, except, perhaps, that the fury of the wind had somewhat abated. About midday there was a slight improvement, so, rendered desperate by confinement and with my eyes smarting from the peat smoke, I determined to go

to some small lochs in the hill above Overscaig, of which I had heard much the year before. These lochs have been very rarely fished, and the fish in them were said to be of great size but very shy. We² soon reached these pools, and found them to be larger than we had anticipated. However, likely as they looked, I tried them in vain during the intervals between the heavy showers. I walked today in my mackintosh coat and fishing boots, the latter, which were of Cording's make, I found easy, light and perfectly watertight. In no other boots could I have gone with comfort over those rugged wet hills.

After fishing three of the lochs without a single rise I determined to make my way by Strath Duchary [Duchally] down to the Fiag River, which falls into Loch Shin. On enquiring at Overscaig about this stream no person could give me any information about it, no one had ever fished there, and yet it ran out of a large loch, Loch Fiag, into another still larger, the great expanse of Loch Shin. The latter, I knew, abounded in large trout, and why should they not run up the Fiag? Our way lay over a desolate moss and from thence we descended rapidly to the burn of Duchary. We could make nothing of the distant scenery, all was so enveloped in mist and driving clouds, but we could see the Duchary burn like a tiny thread of silver below us, and we knew that a little further on it ran into the Fiag.

I fished a little in the burn but without success, and then pushed on to the Fiag. I soon caught a sight of the river running in streams intersected by deep and likely pools, amid brown stony hillocks exactly like some of the trout streams in the south of Scotland. Higher up its character becomes more Alpine, there are deep pools black as ink from the mossy water, and some fine rushing streams. At first, perhaps from the stormy weather, I had but indifferent success, but as I went further up I got hold of some fine fish, though the general run of them seemed to be but small. When nearer the lake they assumed a better size, and were evidently loch fed trout that had come down into the river. The day grew finer and once or twice the sun actually shone. Loch Fiag is a fine piece of water, nearly square in shape and bounded by high hills at its upper extremity. The trout here are said to be large, but no one has ever fished it from a boat. There are some pretty wooded islands in the centre of the loch, but no trees on the banks. The wind here absolutely prevented my throwing a line into the loch, so I fished again down the Fiag and at half past seven, with a full creel, we set off to walk back to Overscaig. We soon arrived at the Duchary burn, and though it was somewhat swollen with the floods we found a crossing place where a huge stone had fallen into the bed of the torrent, forming a kind of natural bridge over a hideous gulf of black water beneath. Guided by the compass we bore straight away over the hill for Overscaig, and at nine o'clock, just as it began to rain in torrents, we came right down upon the house. We had walked about twenty miles over deep and mossy ground, but though I had my fishing boots on I did not feel in

² Charlton perhaps again had Mackay's son with him.

the least fatigued. The night closed in dark and stormy, but as this was Saturday we did not feel particularly anxious about the weather on the morrow.

Sunday June 27th. The morning was ushered in with a perfect hurricane of wind and rain. It was long before I rose and longer still ere I could venture out of the house. Towards the afternoon the weather partially cleared up, and the summit of Ben More became for a short time visible, so I took good heart and set off for a walk to Loch Merkland. The river between that loch and Loch Griam was in splendid order, perhaps indeed a little too deep, but still I could have killed many a good fish in it today. On my return, after walking up Loch Merkland till I had caught sight of the top of Stack, I called on my old friend Thomas Ross at Altnacardich. The old man most courteously invited me into his house and set before me oatcake, cheese, butter and delicious curds. I found him intelligent and enquiring, though somewhat dulled by age. He told me that he had in old times driven cattle from Sutherland into England, and that he was born on the Oikel, a little below Rosehall, about 77 years ago. His house was the model of an old Highland cottage, dimly lighted by a single small window and crowded with clothes chests and a large wooden box bed. He told me he had two sons in America, who were doing well. His wife, a wrinkled old Highland 'Caillach', was unable to join in the conversation, as she spoke no English. It was a beautiful evening as I returned down the banks of Loch Griam and listened to the sweet notes of the thrush in the patch of wild copse wood far upon the hill. The sun set red and angry, dark grey rain-like clouds sped across the sky from the north, but the wind had partially died away, so that I resolved to rise early and to go up and fish the river between Loch Griam and Loch Merkland before the mail gig should come up tomorrow.

Monday June 28th. The storm during the night had come on heavier than ever and at five o'clock, when I got up and looked out, the loch was white with driving squalls and the rain beat so furiously on my little window that I thought it would dash it from the single hinge that yet held it in its place. I was disappointed, for I had intended to have gone off to Loch Merkland and to have fished there until the mail gig came up about twelve o'clock, but I rejoiced at the rain, for it would swell the rivers and make good fishing for a week after. We lounged about the end of the house, smoked and speculated dreamily on the weather, till about twelve o'clock or nearly an hour after its time, the mail gig drove up. Today was the first trip of the new machine, a handsome double dog cart most gorgeously painted. It was not, however, complete, for it was drawn only by a single horse and, as it was well loaded with passengers and luggage, the poor creature had twice as great a load as it could draw. However, on we went and I bid adieu to Overscaig with a firm resolve not to return there till the new house was in good order and till I learned that a boat had been put upon the loch.

We crawled slowly up the side of Loch Merkland and after getting over the pass into Loch More our pace was somewhat better and we reached Achfary about three p.m. Here we got a fresher horse, but one with many vices, not the least of which was a tendency to jibbing which several times put us in some peril. As we neared Loch Stack the day cleared up a little and shewed the grand cliffs on the side of Stack mountain, which looked higher and more awful in the veil of floating mist. From Stack Lodge our progress was so slow that I beat the mail gig to Laxford Bridge on foot. Here we got an excellent gig and pony belonging to Mr Mackay of Rhiconich, and Captain Mackenzie of Keoldale and I were soon driving rapidly along Lawson's road, for so the curious line skirting the worn beach is called. A large ship of war, the Hogue, was lying at anchor in Loch Laxford, and we could see her tall masts over the rocks. She had come in to get sailors for the fleet, but not a man could be induced to enter, and the country people were afraid to go near, as the old idea of impressment is still current here.

The country over which we passed was a wilderness of huge abraded rocks, but the deep colour of the large granite veins that traversed the gneiss formed a very pleasing contrast to the bright green succulent grass that grew between the stones. It was exactly 25 years since I had walked over this road, but I still remember a loch which wound curiously back again to the road, and the site of the old inn at Rhiconich seemed quite familiar to my eyes. The old inn is still standing, but has been degraded into a shed for cattle, and indeed it was never fitted for anything else, while a small house has been erected on the other side of the road for the accommodation of travellers. I got off here for a moment to look at the house and found it comfortable enough, especially so after Overscaig, and then we pursued our journey to the Gualin.

After mounting the hill above Rhiconich we lost sight of Loch Inshard and came down on the water of Achriesgill, a pretty little stream winding through a green valley bounded on the south side by wild rugged hills. Higher up the river forms a pretty little waterfall of perhaps forty feet, and this was now filled by a boiling torrent. Lower down, about three hundred yards from the sea, there is another fall which hinders salmon from getting up the stream. Passing this fall we entered on a gently rising and most desolate moor, which led us past a large mountain loch, Loch Taravie [Tarbhaidh], and at half past seven I was kindly welcomed by Mr Trevelyan at the door of his house at Gualin. The evening was grey and wild, the base of the great mountain of Foinaven rose before the windows, but its top was shrouded in impenetrable mist. Within doors there was every comfort, a blazing fire, and excellent meal and perfect good order and cleanliness.

[The above extracts have been published with the kind permission of Mr William Charlton, great grandson of Edward Charlton, M.D.]