

**JOHN FARQUHARSON,
GLENFERNATE,**



JOHN FARQUHARSON.

SPORTSMAN POACHER.

XXXV.

JOHN FARQUHARSON,

GLENFERNATE.

Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her.—WORDSWORTH.

No incident in the career of this remarkable man, whose irrestrainable love of sport and adventure led him to renounce the comfortable commonplaces of life, and adopt a course which was at war with every convention regarding property in *feræ naturæ*, is more extraordinary than his discovery of the long-lost cave of Lonavey on Cairn Righ. The story has been told already by Mr M'Combie Smith in his fascinating "Romance of Poaching," but is sufficiently strange to bear repetition many times. Lonavey was the name given Jain M'Kerracher or M'Farquhar, a noted deer poacher of the Mar and Athole forests about the middle of the 17th century. When pursued by the foresters it was observed that he usually made for a certain spot where he disappeared among the rocks as completely as though he had sunk into the earth, and all attempts to discover his hiding-place proved vain. On one occasion, foreseeing his own capture and imprisonment, he deposited his gun and dirk on a shelf in his cave, in hope of finding them there when he should be released. That never happened, however, as he

Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies:

died in captivity. Search thereafter was made in every likely direction for

LONAVEY'S SECRET CAVE,

but all to no purpose. Year after year, generation after generation kept up the tradition of the cave and its contents, but that was all. Then arose our great deer-hunter of Glenferstate, John Farquharson—in skill, tastes, and even name a true lineal descendant of the great John Farquharson (for that is the signification of Jain M'Kerracher or M'Farquhar) of long ago; and as he grew up he dreamt of emulating the deeds of his predecessor, and perhaps of even discovering his old hiding-place. He was no more successful in the latter respect than those before him. One memorable day about 1875, however, while crouching behind several large boulders to evade three gamekeepers who were after him, he observed an opening low down beneath an overhanging ledge of rock, into which he managed to crawl, and found to his surprise he could stand upright inside. His pursuers came up, were completely baffled, and went off with imprecations both loud and deep, one of the party declaring that the earth seemed to have opened and swallowed up their quarry. Farquharson heard, and was struck by the remark—practically the same which used to be made when Lonavey would disappear so mysteriously. He lit a match, and experienced a thrill on finding he was in a large cave measuring about 12 feet by 14 feet. Lonavey's, beyond doubt! Down in the dark he sat once more to think the matter out. What about the gun and dirk? Was it possible —! With trembling hands he struck another light, and there on a shelf of rock were lying the identical

John Farquharson, Glenfernate.

weapons which the resigned and sad-hearted John Farquharson of former days had deposited two centuries and a half ago, never to be seen or disturbed till that moment, when another John Farquharson was to be the finder. Had all this taken place in India, metempsychosis, reincarnation, would have been the only explanation.

OUR JOHN FARQUHARSON,

anyhow, is not to be regarded as a "poacher" in any ordinary sense of the word. He certainly broke the laws of the land with respect to game, but was as much above an ordinary mouching, slouching poacher as a naval officer is above a pirate. Pure love of sport with a dash of danger in it was the ruling inducement with him to take up the line of life he did, and reject many "tempting" offers made him of positions of trust and profit. Apart from his feats as an illicit sportsman, he displayed mental qualities much above the average. He had received a good ordinary education, was a fervid lover and accurate observer of nature, both animate and inanimate, and could write graphically about things. As a marksman he held the premier position in 1868, when he carried off the international trophy at Brussels—winning the Duke of Cambridge's prize at Wimbledon for rapid and accurate shooting the same year. He also invented an ingenious cartridge-extractor, which he offered to our Government, but after a wearying delay it was rejected in favour of another which turned out not so good. There was a lawsuit between Farquharson and Henry over the Farquharson-Martini rifle, our friend winning his case. In habits he was very abstemious, preferring tea or coffee to

Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies:

work upon; he had usually a little assortment of cooking utensils and provisions secreted in Lonavey's Cave for emergencies. He never smoked; morally he was straight and honourable in every transaction, and a detester of all meanness. Here are a few stories of his exploits. On one occasion, being foolishly nettled by some sarcastic remark of an American he had accompanying him, in a spirit of bravado, he shot seven deer within a minute, firing nine times—the last shot at a hind on a ridge of a hill over 350 yards away. He confessed himself heartily ashamed of such "butchery," and forswore it thenceforth. A companion, Mac, and he shot a deer, and hid the carcass among the heather, intending to return for it in a night or two. They suspected a watch might be put upon it, and on the fourth night thereafter approached the spot very cautiously. Their caution was rewarded with the smell of peat reek issuing from a rude shepherd's hut in the vicinity, and Mac was sent forward to reconnoitre. He reported that the hut was occupied by gamekeepers, and suggested setting fire to it and

MAKING OFF WITH THE STAG

while the watchers were trying to put out the blaze. Agreed. When Farquharson had an inspection down the open smoke-hole in the roof, however, he discovered a burglar's alarm sort of arrangement inside the hut, a string having been attached to a swinging chain near the fireplace, stretched across the room, and passed beneath the door—the other end being discovered fastened to a leg of the stag, so that it could not be shifted without the "gameys'" knowledge. So they imagined; but Farquharson

John Farquharson, Glenferdate.

stuck his walking staff firmly in the ground, and adroitly cut the string, keeping the tension unaltered till he had the string fastened round the stick. The rest may be imagined. The two heavily-laden chums met a man coming up the hill with refreshments for the ingenious watchers, and he gave the alarm, but it was too late, as a pony had been provided for carrying off the spoil. There was some amusement with his American friend already referred to. They had had a grand day, shot as many deer as they wanted, and gralloched and hid the carcasses. Camping ground was fixed, where they dined, supped, and slept, awaking early with the intention of climbing the Glas Mhaol, the highest hill in Forfarshire, in order that the American might have the benefit of the magnificent view it commands. The morning was misty, however, and the project was abandoned. "Let's have a haggis," said Farquharson. "Where's the pot?" "Oh, we'll soon manage that." So, taking the bag of one of the hinds, it was washed in a neighbouring burn, turned outside in, filled with chopped tongue, heart, and kidneys, together with a modicum of water, tied up, and suspended on a stick over a fire, and the "pot" was started to its duty. It began to swell, and nearly exploded, but a stab let the steam out and two or three onions in. Rare scent to a couple of hungry poachers on the Grampians! Things were getting along famously, when suddenly a dog put in an appearance and began sniffing all around in a thoroughly appreciative if not appreciated manner. He was followed by his master, who, to the relief of

OUR TWO ADVENTURERS

turned out to be neither a gamekeeper nor a

Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies:

sportsman. The haggis was a great success. When poaching at night, Farquharson used to put phosphorus on the top of his dog's head and at the root of its tail, so as to enable him to judge exactly the direction in which the birds were. He was continually tricking the gamekeepers. On one occasion he saw two of them stalking him. They took off their shoes at the side of a burn, and came up the hillside where he had been noticed. Farquharson, however, dipped down into a hollow, slipped round a corner, doubled, and carried off the gameys' shoes before they got to the top, only to find their bird flown. A friend and he were shooting on the Glenshee hills one day, and had big bags. They were to cross the Shee to the south side when they espied two watchers approaching on the opposite bank. Giving his bag and gun to his companion, he was instructed to go down the water, keeping close to the riverside. Then Farquharson, standing in full view of the keepers, signalled as if to his companion to follow him up the water. The observers went up the water too. Watching his chance, while passing behind some trees, Farquharson turned his jacket and cap outside in (they were reversible), changing them from grey to blue, and when the enemy came up, ready to pounce upon two poachers with guns and bags, they discovered only an intelligent countryman sitting at the root of a tree absorbed in his newspaper.

HE WAS AN ADEPT AT DISGUISES,

and usually carried several handkerchiefs of different colours, by means of which he made very effective transformations on his own appearance or that of his dog or horse when occasion arose. The reference to disguises recalls

John Farquharson, Glenfernate.

one of Farquharson's most picturesque feats when he and an Edinburgh publican, very anxious to have a real "Twelfth" with the intrepid trespasser, shot over a couple of moors in first-class style as wealthy sportsmen, an ostler named George having been rigged out as gamekeeper, and a brace of splendid Irish setters completing the outfit. The agreement was that the publican was to pay all expenses and any fines which happened to crop up, and in return get all the birds they would bag. They were on the move by three o'clock on a certain Twelfth. About mid-day a gamekeeper with two dogs was seen approaching them, while a little way off a party at lunch were observed. Business looked bad, but Farquharson, who never lost his head on any occasion, kept his eye on the man, and before the latter could speak, shouted out to him in a sharp tone—"Hallo, there! Why don't you keep your dogs in at your heel when crossing any one's ground, especially when it is not shot over?"

THE MAN TOUCHED HIS CAP,

apologised, but explained that Lord A—— had sent him to mention that they were probably a hundred yards over the march and on Lord A——'s ground. "Tell Lord A——," said Farquharson, "that we are very sorry to have trespassed, but the boundary line is so ill-defined. We trust we may be excused." The gamekeeper touched his cap once more, and was moving off, when the Edinburgh chiel gave him a dram for his trouble, and everybody was pleased all round. Thirty brace was the total for the day, and when the publican returned home with his spoil and dilated over the details

Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies.

in this red-letter day in his life, nothing excited so much amusement in his auditors as his description of the vice-versa business between the haughty poacher and the subservient gamey.

One of the cleverest of his escapes was after a good day's sport, in company with two noted poachers, up one of the glens. When they reached the spot where the trap was to meet them for the spoil, the driver informed them that policemen and keepers were on the road, and that he and his horse and trap had been both suspected and closely scrutinised on the way up. There was dismay in the camp, but after some deliberation their plans were laid. Farquharson tied one of his handy white handkerchiefs over the horse's face; the driver produced two lamps from the bottom of his dogcart; and three white hats, which the driver's wife had had the forethought to send, took the place of their dark caps, and thus effected a pretty fair transformation in their appearance. Into the vehicle they jumped, started off disputing with each other, then singing and laughing in chorus, and otherwise doing the uproariously tipsy business—so different from what might be expected from three cautious poachers returning with their booty—in the most approved fashion. When they reached the spot where the watchers were stationed our conspirators were bawling—"He's a jolly, good fellow" at the top of their voice, and had even the cheek to cry out to the gaping policemen—"Can you? can you? can you?" as they flew past.

Farquharson gave up all this in 1891, married, and went to stay at West Ferry. He died in March 1893, over sixty years of age—the last of his race, it is probable—it is feared!