

14/2/5
original in box

FROM A SCOTTISH STUDY

SNOWSTORMS ALLURING IN RETROSPECT

Our Grandfathers Had a Weary Time

MOST of us, looking back on the past, remember the sunny days. The rain is forgotten. I am thinking of the weather rather than of the vicissitudes of our personal existences, although it applies to them too. This, however, being intended for a meteorological article, private history may be left to take care of itself. As regards the weather, we are optimists. In making arrangements ahead, do we not almost always assume that the weather will be fine?

It is because our recollections of the weather tend to concentrate on the bright side that we are so interested in storms. They are the exceptions to the rule, the blots on the page. They represent for humanity a striving against irresistible forces, a war in which we can only win through by sitting siccar. Our climate may have its faults, but it is not prolific of serious storms.

Mixed Weather

There may be ice floes in our rivers occasionally; in places which specialise in frost the temperature may dip for a day or two below zero; a sudden gale may turr the countryside of a few presumed fixtures; we may be ankle-deep in snow in the city streets once in a while. We have wrecks and auroras and spates, and thunderstorms that turn a summer's noonday into a January gloaming. But these phenomena do not occur often, and because they are infrequent we remember them.

In the winter old men's fancies lightly turn to thoughts of storms. Let us have a couple of days of snow and a road or two blocked, when we of the younger fraternity begin to complain, grandfather shakes his head in pity at our decadence, and orates:

"Storm! Ye ca' this a storm! I mind on aughteen-seventy-nine, fin the Tay Brig was blawn doon. And we are regaled to a confection of snow, wind, hail, frost—none of your transitory blufferts, but long-continued like the three months' freeze of 1895. The tale inevitably points the moral. "We have nae winters noo like fut there was fin I was a loon." Where are the snows of yesteryear?

On the Dykes

Well, I have walked to school on the dyke-heids myself, and have skated on the Don and seen snow-wreaths level with the tops of houses, and have excavated roomy caves in these same wreaths. And I have seen snow in summer, for the coldest day I was ever out in was the eighth of June three years ago when we

in 1838

REFLECTIONS

By "A. K."

nothing of the old-fashioned severity in the lifetime of any save the non-agenarians.

The last great snowstorm, one of the heaviest and most prolonged in history, was in 1838. But it was only the last and worst of a series, which began in 1795. Here is a little table for farmers:—

Winter	Plough stopped	Sowing finished	Harvest home
1813-14	Dec. 11-Mar. 29	Apl. 19	Oct. 17
1815-6	Nov. 15-Mar. 2	May 3	Nov. 27
1817-8	Dec. 14-Mar. 16	Apl. 23	Oct. 8
1822-3	Jan. 15-Mar. 21	Apl. 10	Oct. 20

In all cases the land was under snow. The dates were recorded in the Garioch, which is not a late district. Lack of modern drainage may have been responsible for part of the length of the idle period, but even so the table indicates that at the beginning of last century the climate of the Garioch in winter was as severe as it still is in the Cabrach and Strathdon.

Worst of All

Those who remembered these winters and the still wilder one of 1795 were unanimous that 1838 "cowed a'." It was a mild and open winter until after the New Year. Then on January 7 the wind veered and the temperature dropped. Next day the snow began to fall steadily over the whole country. After a week of it the editor of the "Aberdeen Journal" took refuge in poetry. Winter, he said, has at last come.

Sullen and sad, with all his rising train—
Vapours and clouds and storms.

Long before the storm was over, what he was thinking would not have been printable. For seven weeks scarcely a day passed without an addition to the fall. Frost and thaw alternated, with frequent gales which howled with dreadful fury, and piled the snow into wreaths fifteen feet high. Buchan was covered with from four to five feet of snow. In the Howe of Alford the thermometer fell below zero.

Up to the middle of February road overseers and toll-keepers, assisted by farmers with snowploughs, succeeded in keeping the main roads open. But in the second week of February there was a continuous fall for three days and the Turnpike Trustees advertised their helplessness. Mails were late. In some places the postboys actually walked over the roofs of houses.

Belated Mails

Saturday till noon on Monday to reach Dundee. They did not arrive at Montrose until 11 the next forenoon, and it was Wednesday afternoon before they reached Aberdeen, men and horses utterly worn out, despite a change of horses at Stonehaven. The party had left Bervie at six in the morning, and for three miles at Stonehaven and four south of Aberdeen the road was cast. Elsewhere they had had to flounder across fields and cut their way through fences and hedges. In some parts they found the snow fifteen to twenty feet deep.

The poor cottar and crofter folk in their low thatched cottages had a terrible time. Unless their gurnal was full they were on starvation diet. If they could reach a mill, it was only to find that the lade was full of snow, and where it was possible to grind the corn, only small quantities could be milled in a day for lack of water. The cattle were in worse plight, but it was characteristic of our douce Lowland folk that their first care was for the beasts.

Prisoners of Storm

In one case a widow and her family at Tarland were imprisoned in their home. The snow came down the lum and put out the peat fire, which had doubtless been unextinguished for generations. In the morning the widow's brothers shouted down the lum to ascertain if the inmates were alive. Then they told them they would have to wait in the darkness till next day, because the cattle had to be rescued first.

That day the household existed on drammach and cold sowens. Next day a pole was put down the lum, and the widow opened her door and shoved the pole through the snow to let the rescue party know where to cast the tunnel. In another case a man opened his door and could not get it closed. The draught between it and the chimney resisted all his efforts, and he and his family were almost smored by the snow that drifted into the house. They were eventually taken out by way of the chimney.

Hidden Landscape

The countryside must have presented an extraordinary spectacle. For miles and miles nothing was to be seen but snow. A wood or a big house might have broken the monotonous surface, but hedges, dykes, steadings and cottages were obliterated, and the rivers frozen over. One observer mentioned that, looking across at a hillside where there were several crofts, the only trace of human habitation he could see was wisps of smoke rising from the

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But we may concede to our forebears the palm for endurance. Winter is not what it was. The Elliot Junction disaster made the storm of 1908 rather more serious in retrospect than it was in fact. The three months' frost of 1895 certainly was outstanding, but apart from it there has been

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On February 28 the south mails arrived much behind time. They were brought in on five horses, the coaches having been discarded somewhere in Fife. "The appearance of the cavalcade," says the "Journal," "was amusing, each horse bearing a ponderous bag dangling on either side, and surmounted by a rider muffled up as if he had emerged from the backwoods of America."

It took the Edinburgh mail from

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Even in London there were "ferlies." The intense and prolonged cold afflicted the wildfowl of St James's Park with chilblains, and some humanitarian ladies quite idiotically started a fund to provide the birds with worsted socks. At least so a contemporary newspaper stated, but perhaps the socks were a leg-