The Shootings Of Achnaleish

By E. F. Benson

The dining-room windows, both front and back, the one looking into Oakley Street, the other into a small back-yard with three sooty shrubs in it (known as the garden), were all open, so that the table stood in mid-stream of such air as there was. But in spite of this the heat was stifling, since, for once in a way, July had remembered that it was the duty of good little summers to be hot. Hot in consequence it had been: heat reverberated from the house-walls, it rose through the boot from the paving-stones, it poured down from a large superheated sun that walked the sky all day long in a benignant and golden manner. Dinner was over, but the small party of four who had eaten it still lingered.

Mabel Armytage — it was she who had laid down the duty of good little summers — spoke first.

"Oh, Jim, it sounds too heavenly," she said. "It makes me feel cool to think of it. Just fancy, in a fortnight's time we shall all four of us be there, in our own shooting-lodge—"

"Farm-house," said Jim.

"Well, I didn't suppose it was Balmoral, with our own coffee-coloured salmon river roaring down to join the waters of our own loch."

Jim lit a cigarette.

"Mabel, you mustn't think of shooting-lodges and salmon rivers and lochs," he said. "It's a farm-house, rather a big one, though I'm sure we shall find it hard enough to fit in. The salmon river you speak of is a big burn, no more, though it appears that salmon have been caught there. But when I saw it, it would have required as much cleverness on the part of a salmon to fit into it as it will require on our parts to fit into our farm-house. And the loch is a tarn."

Mabel snatched the "Guide to Highland Shootings" out of my hand with a rudeness that even a sister should not show her elder brother, and pointed a withering finger at her husband.

"'Achnaleish,'" she declaimed, "'is situated in one of the grandest and most remote parts of Sutherlandshire. To be let from August 12 till the end of October, the lodge with shooting and fishing belonging. Proprietor supplies two keepers, fishing-gillie, boat on loch, and dogs. Tenant should secure about 500 head of grouse, and 500 head of mixed game, including partridge, black-game, woodcock, snipe, roe deer; also rabbits in very large number, especially by ferreting. Large baskets of brown trout can be taken from the loch, and whenever the water is high sea-trout and occasional salmon. Lodge contains' — I can't go on; it's too hot, and you know the rest. Rent only £350!"

Jim listened patiently.

"Well?" he said. "What then?"

Mabel rose with dignity.

"It *is* a shooting-lodge with a salmon river and a loch, just as I have said. Come, Madge, let's go out. It is too hot to sit in the house."

"You'll be calling Buxton 'the major-domo' next," remarked Jim, as his wife passed him.

I had picked up the "Guide to Highland Shootings" again which my sister had so unceremoniously plucked from me, and idly compared the rent and attractions of Achnaleish with other places that were to let.

"Seems cheap, too," I said. "Why, here's another place, just the same sort of size and bag, for

which they ask £500; here's another at £550."

Jim helped himself to coffee.

"Yes, it does seem cheap," he said. "But, of course, it's very remote; it took me a good three hours from Lairg, and I don't suppose I was driving very noticeably below the legal limit. But it's cheap, as you say."

Now, Madge (who is my wife) has her prejudices. One of them — an extremely expensive one — is that anything cheap has always some hidden and subtle drawback, which you discover when it is too late. And the drawback to cheap houses is drains or offices — the presence, so to speak, of the former, and the absence of the latter. So I hazarded these.

"No, the drains are all right," said Jim, "because I got the certificate of the inspector, and as for offices, really I think the servants' parts are better than ours. No — why it's so cheap, I can't imagine."

"Perhaps the bag is overstated," I suggested.

Jim again shook his head.

"No, that's the funny thing about it," he said. "The bag, I am sure, is understated. At least, I walked over the moor for a couple of hours, and the whole place is simply crawling with hares. Why, you could shoot five hundred hares alone on it."

"Hares?" I asked. "That's rather queer, so far up, isn't it?"

Jim laughed.

"So I thought. And the hares are queer, too; big beasts, very dark in colour. Let's join the others outside. Jove! what a hot night!"

Even as Mabel had said, that day fortnight found us all four, the four who had stifled and sweltered in Chelsea, flying through the cool and invigorating winds of the North. The road was in admirable condition, and I should not wonder if for the second time Jim's big Napier went not noticeably below the legal limit. The servants had gone straight up, starting the same day as we, while we had got out at Perth, motored to Inverness, and were now, on the second day, nearing our goal. Never have I seen so depopulated a road. I do not suppose there was a man to a mile of it.

We had left Lairg about five that afternoon expecting to arrive at Achnaleish by eight, but one disaster after another overtook us. Now it was the engine, and now a tyre that delayed us, till finally we stopped some eight miles short of our destination, to light up, for with evening had come a huge wrack of cloud out of the West, so that we were cheated of the clear post-sunset twilight of the North. Then on again, till, with a little dancing of the car over a bridge, Jim said:

"That's the bridge of our salmon river; so look out for the turning up to the lodge. It is to the right, and only a narrow track. You can send her along, Sefton," he called to the chauffeur; "we shan't meet a soul."

I was sitting in front, finding the speed and the darkness extraordinarily exhilarating. A bright circle of light was cast by our lamps, fading into darkness in front, while at the sides, cut off by the casing of the lamps, the transition into blackness was sharp and sudden. Every now and then, across this circle of illumination some wild thing would pass: now a bird, with hurried flutter of wings when it saw the speed of the luminous monster, would just save itself from being knocked over; now a rabbit feeding by the side of the road would dash on to it and then bounce back again; but more frequently it would be a hare that sprang up from its feeding and raced in front of us. They seemed dazed and scared by the light, unable to wheel into the darkness again, until time and again I thought we must run over one, so narrowly, in giving a sort of desperate

sideways leap, did it miss our wheels. Then it seemed that one started up almost from under us, and I saw, to my surprise, it was enormous in size, and in colour apparently quite black. For some hundred yards it raced in front of us, fascinated by the bright light pursuing it, then, like the rest, it dashed for the darkness. But it was too late, and with a horrid jolt we ran over it. At once Sefton slowed down and stopped, for Jim's rule is to go back always and make sure that any poor run-over is dead. So, when we stopped, the chauffeur jumped down and ran back.

"What was it?" Jim asked me, as we waited. "A hare."

Sefton came running back.

"Yes, sir, quite dead," he said. "I picked it up, sir."

"What for!"

"Thought you might like to see it, sir. It's the biggest hare I ever see, and it's quite black."

It was immediately after this that we came to the track up to the house, and in a few minutes we were within doors. There we found that if "shooting-lodge" was a term unsuitable, so also was "farm-house," so roomy, excellently proportioned, and well furnished was our dwelling, while the contentment that beamed from Buxton's face was sufficient testimonial for the offices. In the hall, too, with its big open fireplace, were a couple of big solemn bookcases, full of serious works, such as some educated minister might have left, and, coming down dressed for dinner before the others, I dipped into the shelves. Then — something must long have been vaguely simmering in my brain, for I pounced on the book as soon as I saw it — I came upon Elwes's "Folklore of the North-West Highlands," and looked out "Hare" in the index. Then I read:

"Nor is it only witches that are believed to have the power of changing themselves into animals... Men and women on whom no suspicion of the sort lies are thought to be able to do this, and to don the bodies of certain animals, notably hares... Such, according to local superstition, are easily distinguishable by their size and colour, which approaches jet black."

I was up and out early next morning, prey to the vivid desire that attacks many folk in new places — namely, to look on the fresh country and the new horizons — and, on going out, certainly the surprise was great. For I had imagined an utterly lonely and solitary habitation; instead, scarce half a mile away, down the steep brae-side at the top of which stood our commodious farmhouse, ran a typically Scotch village street, the hamlet no doubt of Achnaleish. So steep was this hill-side that the village was really remote; if it was half a mile away in crow-flying measurement, it must have been a couple of hundred yards below us. But its existence was the odd thing to me: there were some four dozen houses, at the least, while we had not seen half that number since leaving Lairg. A mile away, perhaps, lay the shining shield of the western sea; to the other side, away from the village, I had no difficulty in recognising the river and the loch. The house, in fact, was set on a hog's back; from all sides it must needs be climbed to. But, as is the custom of the Scots, no house, however small, should be without its due brightness of flowers, and the walls of this were purple with clematis and orange with tropæolum. It all looked very placid and serene and home-like.

I continued my tour of exploration, and came back rather late for breakfast. A slight check in the day's arrangements had occurred, for the head keeper, Maclaren, had not come up, and the second, Sandie Ross, reported that the reason for this had been the sudden death of his mother the evening before. She was not known to be ill, but just as she was going to bed she had thrown up her arms, screamed suddenly as if with fright, and was found to be dead. Sandie, who repeated this news to me after breakfast, was just a slow, polite Scotchman, rather shy, rather awkward. Just as he finished — we were standing about outside the back-door — there came up from the stables the smart, very English-looking Sefton. In one hand he carried the black hare.

He touched his hat to me as he went in.

"Just to show it to Mr. Armytage, sir," he said. "She's as black as a boot."

He turned into the door, but not before Sandie Ross had seen what he carried, and the slow, polite Scotchman was instantly turned into some furtive, frightened-looking man.

"And where might it be that you found that, sir?" he asked.

Now, the black-hare superstition had already begun to intrigue me.

"Why does that interest you?" I asked.

The slow Scotch look was resumed with an effort.

"It'll no interest me," he said. "I just asked. There are unco many black hares in Achnaleish."

Then his curiosity got the better of him.

"She'd have been nigh to where the road passes by and on to Achnaleish?" he asked.

"The hare? Yes, we found her on the road there."

Sandie turned away.

"She aye sat there," he said.

There were a number of little plantations climbing up the steep hill-side from Achnaleish to the moor above, and we had a pleasant slack sort of morning shooting there, walking through and round them with a nondescript tribe of beaters, among whom the serious Buxton figured. We had fair enough sport, but of the hares which Jim had seen in such profusion none that morning came to the gun, till at last, just before lunch, there came out of the apex of one of these plantations, some thirty yards from where Jim was standing, a very large, dark-coloured hare. For one moment I saw him hesitate —for he holds the correct view about long or doubtful shots at hares —then he put up his gun to fire. Sandie, who had walked round outside, after giving the beaters their instructions, was at this moment close to him, and with incredible quickness rushed upon him and with his stick struck up the barrels of the gun before he could fire.

"Black hare!" he cried. "Ye'd shoot a black hare? There's no shooting of hares at all in Achnaleish, and mark that."

Never have I seen so sudden and extraordinary a change in a man's face: it was as if he had just prevented some blackguard of the street from murdering his wife.

"An' the sickness about an' all," he added indignantly. "When the puir folk escape from their peching fevered bodies an hour or two, to the caller muirs."

Then he seemed to recover himself.

"I ask your pardon, sir," he said to Jim. "I was upset with ane thing an' anither, an' the black hare ye found deid last night — eh, I'm blatherin' again. But there's no a hare shot on Achnaleish, that's sure."

Jim was still looking in mere speechless astonishment at Sandie when I came up. And, though shooting is dear to me, so too is folk-lore.

"But we've taken the shooting of Achnaleish, Sandie," I said. "There was nothing there about not shooting hares."

Sandie suddenly boiled up again for a minute.

"An' mebbe there was nothing there about shooting the bairns and the weemen!" he cried.

I looked round, and saw that by now the beaters had all come through the wood: of them Buxton and Jim's valet, who was also among them, stood apart: all the rest were standing round us two with gleaming eyes and open mouths, hanging on the debate, and forced, so I imagined, from their imperfect knowledge of English to attend closely in order to catch the drift of what went on. Every now and then a murmur of Gaelic passed between them, and this somehow I found peculiarly disconcerting.

“But what have the hares to do with the children or women of Achnaleish?” I asked.

There was no reply to this beyond the reiterated sentence: “There’s na shooting of hares in Achnaleish whatever,” and then Sandie turned to Jim.

“That’s the end of the bit wood, sir,” he said. “We’ve been a’roound.”

Certainly the beat had been very satisfactory. A roe had fallen to Jim (one ought also to have fallen to me, but remained, if not standing, at any rate running away). We had a dozen of black-game, four pigeons, six brace of grouse (these were, of course, but outliers, as we had not gone on to the moor proper at all), some thirty rabbits, and four couple of woodcock. This, it must be understood, was just from the fringe of plantations about the house, but this was all we meant to do to-day, making only a morning of it, since our ladies had expressly desired first lessons in the art of angling in the afternoon, so that they too could be busy. Excellently too had Sandie worked the beat, leaving us now, after going, as he said, all round, a couple of hundred yards only from the house, at a few minutes to two.

So, after a little private signalling from Jim to me, he spoke to Sandie, dropping the hare-question altogether.

“Well, the beat has gone excellently,” he said, “and this afternoon we’ll be fishing. Please settle with the beaters every evening, and tell me what you have paid out. Good morning to you all.”

We walked back to the house, but the moment we had turned a hum of confabulation began behind us, and, looking back, I saw Sandie and all the beaters in close whispering conclave. Then Jim spoke.

“More in your line than mine,” he said; “I prefer shooting a hare to routing out some cock-and-bull story as to why I shouldn’t. What does it all mean?”

I mentioned what I had found in Elwes last night.

“Then do they think it was we who killed the old lady on the road, and that I was going to kill somebody else this morning?” he asked. “How does one know that they won’t say that rabbits are their aunts, and woodcock their uncles, and grouse their children? I never heard such rot, and to-morrow we’ll have a hare drive. Blow the grouse! We’ll settle this hare-question first.”

Jim by this time was in the frame of mind typical of the English when their rights are threatened. He had the shooting of Achnaleish, on which were hares, sir, hares. And if he chose to shoot hares, neither papal bull nor royal charter could stop him.

“Then there’ll be a row,” said I, and Jim sniffed scornfully.

At lunch Sandie’s remark about the “sickness,” which I had forgotten till that moment, was explained.

“Fancy that horrible influenza getting here,” said Madge. “Mabel and I went down to the village this morning, and, oh, Ted, you can get all sorts of things, from mackintoshes to peppermints, at the most heavenly shop, and there was a child there looking awfully ill and feverish. So we inquired: it was the ‘sickness’ — that was all they knew. But, from what the woman said, it’s clearly influenza. Sudden fever, and all the rest of it.”

“Bad type?” I asked.

“Yes; there have been several deaths already among the old people from pneumonia following it.”

Now, I hope that as an Englishman I too have a notion of my rights, and attempt anyhow to enforce them, as a general rule, if they are wantonly threatened. But if a mad bull wishes to prevent my going across a certain field, I do not insist on my rights, but go round instead, since I see no reasonable hope of convincing the bull that according to the constitution of my country I

may walk in this field unmolested. And that afternoon, as Madge and I drifted about the loch, while I was not employed in disentangling her flies from each other or her hair or my coat, I pondered over our position with regard to the hares and men of Achnaleish, and thought that the question of the bull and the field represented our standpoint pretty accurately. Jim *had* the shooting of Achnaleish, and that undoubtedly included the right to shoot hares: so too he might have the right to walk over a field in which was a mad bull. But it seemed to me not more futile to argue with the bull than to hope to convince these folk of Achnaleish that the hares were — as was assuredly the case — only hares, and not the embodiments of their friends and relations. For that, beyond all doubt, was their belief, and it would take, not half an hour's talk, but perhaps a couple of generations of education to kill that belief, or even to reduce it to the level of a superstition. At present it was no superstition — the terror and incredulous horror on Sandie's face when Jim raised his gun to fire at the hare told me that — it was a belief as sober and commonplace as our own belief that the hares were not incarnations of living folk in Achnaleish. Also, virulent influenza was raging in the place, and Jim proposed to have a hare-drive to-morrow! What would happen?

That evening Jim raved about it in the smoking-room.

"But, good gracious, man, what can they *do?"* he cried. "What's the use of an old gaffer from Achnaleish saying I've shot his grand-daughter and, when he is asked to produce the corpse, telling the jury that we've eaten it, but that he has got the skin as evidence? What skin? A hare-skin! Oh, folklore is all very well in its way, a nice subject for discussion when topics are scarce, but don't tell me it can enter into practical life. What can they do?"

"They can shoot us," I remarked.

"The canny, God-fearing Scotchmen shoot us for shooting hares?" he asked.

"Well, it's a possibility. However, I don't think you'll have much of a hare-drive in any case."

"Why not?"

"Because you won't get a single native beater, and you won't get a keeper to come either. You'll have to go with Buxton and your man."

"Then I'll discharge Sandie," snapped Jim.

"That would be a pity: he knows his work."

Jim got up.

"Well, his work to-morrow will be to, drive hares for you and me," said Jim. "Or do you funk?"

"I funk," I replied.

The scene next morning was extremely short. Jim and I went out before breakfast, and found Sandie at the back door, silent and respectful. In the yard were a dozen young Highlanders, who had beaten for us the day before.

"Morning, Sandie," said Jim shortly. "We'll drive hares to-day. We ought to get a lot in those narrow gorges up above. Get a dozen beaters more, can you?"

"There will be na hare-drive here," said Sandie quietly.

"I have given you your orders," said Jim.

Sandie turned to the group of beaters outside and spoke half a dozen words in Gaelic. Next moment the yard was empty, and they were all running down the hillside towards Achnaleish. One stood on the skyline a moment, waving his arms, making some signal, as I supposed, to the village below. Then Sandie turned again.

"An' whaur are your beaters, sir?" he asked.

For the moment I was afraid Jim was going to strike him. But he controlled himself.

"You are discharged," he said.

The hare-drive, therefore, since there were neither beaters nor keeper — Maclaren, the head-keeper, having been given this "dayoff" to bury his mother — was clearly out of the question, and Jim, still blustering rather, but a good bit taken aback at the sudden disciplined defection of the beaters, was in betting humour that they would all return by to-morrow morning. Meanwhile the post which should have arrived before now had not come, though Mabel from her bedroom window had seen the post-cart on its way up the drive a quarter of an hour ago. At that a sudden idea struck me, and I ran to the edge of the hog's back on which the house was set. It was even as I thought: the post-cart was just striking the high-road below, going away from the house and back to the village, without having left our letters.

I went back to the dining-room. Everything apparently was going wrong this morning: the bread was stale, the milk was not fresh, and the bell was rung for Buxton. Quite so: neither milkman nor baker had called.

From the point of view of folk-lore this was admirable.

"There's another cock-and-bull story called 'taboo,'" I said. "It means that nobody will supply you with anything."

"My dear fellow, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing," said Jim, helping himself to marmalade.

I laughed.

"You are irritated," I said, "because you are beginning to be afraid that there is something in it."

"Yes, that's quite true," he said. "But who could have supposed there was anything in it? Ah, dash it! there *can't* be. A hare is a hare."

"Except when it is your first cousin," said I.

"Then I shall go out and shoot first cousins by myself," he said. That, I am glad to say, in the light of what followed, we dissuaded him from doing, and instead he went off with Madge down the burn. And I, I may confess, occupied myself the whole morning, ensconced in a thick piece of scrub on the edge of the steep brae above Achnaleish, in watching through a field-glass what went on there. One could see as from a balloon almost: the street with its houses was spread like a map below.

First, then, there was a funeral — the funeral, I suppose, of the mother of Maclaren, attended, I should say, by the whole village. But after that there was no dispersal of the folk to their work: it was as if it was the Sabbath; they hung about the street talking. Now one group would break up, but it would only go to swell another, and no one went either to his house or to the fields. Then, shortly before lunch, another idea occurred to me, and I ran down the hill-side, appearing suddenly in the street, to put it to the test. Sandie was there, but he turned his back square on me, as did everybody else, and as I approached any group talk fell dead. But a certain movement seemed to be going on; where they stood and talked before, they now moved and were silent. Soon I saw what that meant. None would remain in the street with me: every man was going to his house.

The end house of the street was clearly the "heavenly shop" we had been told of yesterday. The door was open and a small child was looking round it as I approached, for my plan was to go in, order something, and try to get into conversation. But, while I was still a yard or two off, I saw through the glass of the door a man inside come quickly up and pull the child roughly away, banging the door and locking it. I knocked and rang, but there was no response: only from inside

came the crying of the child.

The street which had been so busy and populous was now completely empty; it might have been the street of some long-deserted place, but that thin smoke curled here and there above the houses. It was as silent, too, as the grave, but, for all that, I knew it was watching. From every house, I felt sure, I was being watched by eyes of mistrust and hate, yet no sign of living being could I see. There was to me something rather eerie about this: to know one is watched by invisible eyes is never, I suppose, quite a comfortable sensation; to know that those eyes are all hostile does not increase the sense of security. So I just climbed back up the hillside again, and from my thicket above the brae again I peered down. Once more the street was full.

Now, all this made me uneasy: the taboo had been started, and — since not a soul had been near us since Sandie gave the word, whatever it was, that morning — was in excellent working order. Then what was the purport of these meetings and colloquies? What else threatened? The afternoon told me.

It was about two o'clock when these meetings finally broke up, and at once the whole village left the street for the hill-sides, much as if they were all returning to work. The only odd thing indeed was that no one remained behind: women and children alike went out, all in little parties of two and three. Some of these I watched rather idly, for I had formed the hasty conclusion that they were all going back to their usual employments, and saw that here a woman and girl were cutting dead bracken and heather. That was reasonable enough, and I turned my glass on others. Group after group I examined; all were doing the same thing, cutting fuel ... fuel.

Then vaguely, with a sense of impossibility, a thought flashed across me; again it flashed, more vividly. This time I left my hiding-place with considerable alacrity and went to find Jim down by the burn. I told him exactly what I had seen and what I believed it meant, and I fancy that his belief in the possibility of folk-lore entering the domain of practical life was very considerably quickened. In any case, it was not a quarter of an hour afterwards that the chauffeur and I were going, precisely as fast as the Napier was able, along the road to Lairg. We had not told the women what my conjecture was, because we believed that, making the dispositions we were making, there was no cause for alarm-sounding. One private signal only existed between Jim within the house that night and me outside. If my conjecture proved to be correct, he was to place a light in the window of my room, which I should see returning after dark from Lairg. My ostensible reason for going was to get some local fishing-flies.

As we flowed — there is no other word for the movement of these big cars but that — over the road to Lairg, I ran over everything in my mind. I felt no doubt whatever that all the brushwood and kindling I had seen being gathered in was to be piled after nightfall round our walls and set on fire. This certainly would not be done till after dark; indeed, we both felt sure that it would not be done till it was supposed that we were all abed. It remained to see whether the police at Lairg agreed with my conjecture, and it was to ascertain this that I was now flowing there.

I told my story to the chief constable as soon as I got there, omitting nothing and, I think, exaggerating nothing. His face got graver and graver as I proceeded.

"Yes, sir, you did right to come," he said. "The folk at Achnaleish are the dourest and the most savage in all Scotland. You'll have to give up this hare-hunting, though, whatever," he added.

He rang up his telephone.

"I'll get five men," he said, "and I'll be with you in ten minutes."

Our plan of campaign was simple. We were to leave the car well out of sight of Achnaleish,

and — supposing the signal was in my window — steal up from all sides to command the house from every direction. It would not be difficult to make our way unseen through the plantations that ran up close to the house, and hidden at their margins we could see whether the brushwood and heather were piled up round the lodge. There we should wait to see if anybody attempted to fire it. That somebody, whenever he showed his light, would be instantly covered by a rifle and challenged.

It was about ten when we dismounted and stalked our way up to the house. The light burned in my window; all else was quiet. Personally, I was unarmed, and so, when I had planted the men in places of advantageous concealment round the house, my work was over. Then I returned to Sergeant Duncan, the chief constable, at the corner of the hedge by the garden, and waited.

How long we waited I do not know, but it seemed as if æons slipped by over us. Now and then an owl would hoot, now and then a rabbit ran out from cover and nibbled the short sweet grass of the lawn. The night was thickly overcast with clouds, and the house seemed no more than a black dot, with slits of light where windows were lit within. By and by even these slits of illumination were extinguished, and other lights appeared in the top story. After a while they, too, vanished; no sign of life appeared on the quiet house. Then suddenly the end came: I heard a foot grate on the gravel; I saw the gleam of a lantern, and heard Duncan's voice.

"Man," he shouted, "if you move hand or foot I fire. My rifle-bead is dead on you."

Then I blew the whistle; the others ran up, and in less than a minute it was all over. The man we closed in on was Maclaren.

"They killed my mither with that hell-carriage," he said, "as she juist sat on the road, puir body, who had niver hurt them."

And that seemed to him an excellent reason for attempting to burn us all to death.

But it took time to get into the house: their preparations had been singularly workmanlike, for every window and door on the ground floor was wired up.

Now, we had Achnaleish for two months, but we had no wish to be burned or otherwise murdered. What we wanted was not a prosecution of our head-keeper, but peace, the necessaries of life, and beaters. For that we were willing to shoot no hares, and release Maclaren. An hour's conclave next morning settled these things; the ensuing two months were most enjoyable, and relations were the friendliest.

But if anybody wants to test how far what Jim still calls cock-and-bull stories can enter into practical life, I should suggest to him to go a-shooting hares at Achnaleish.