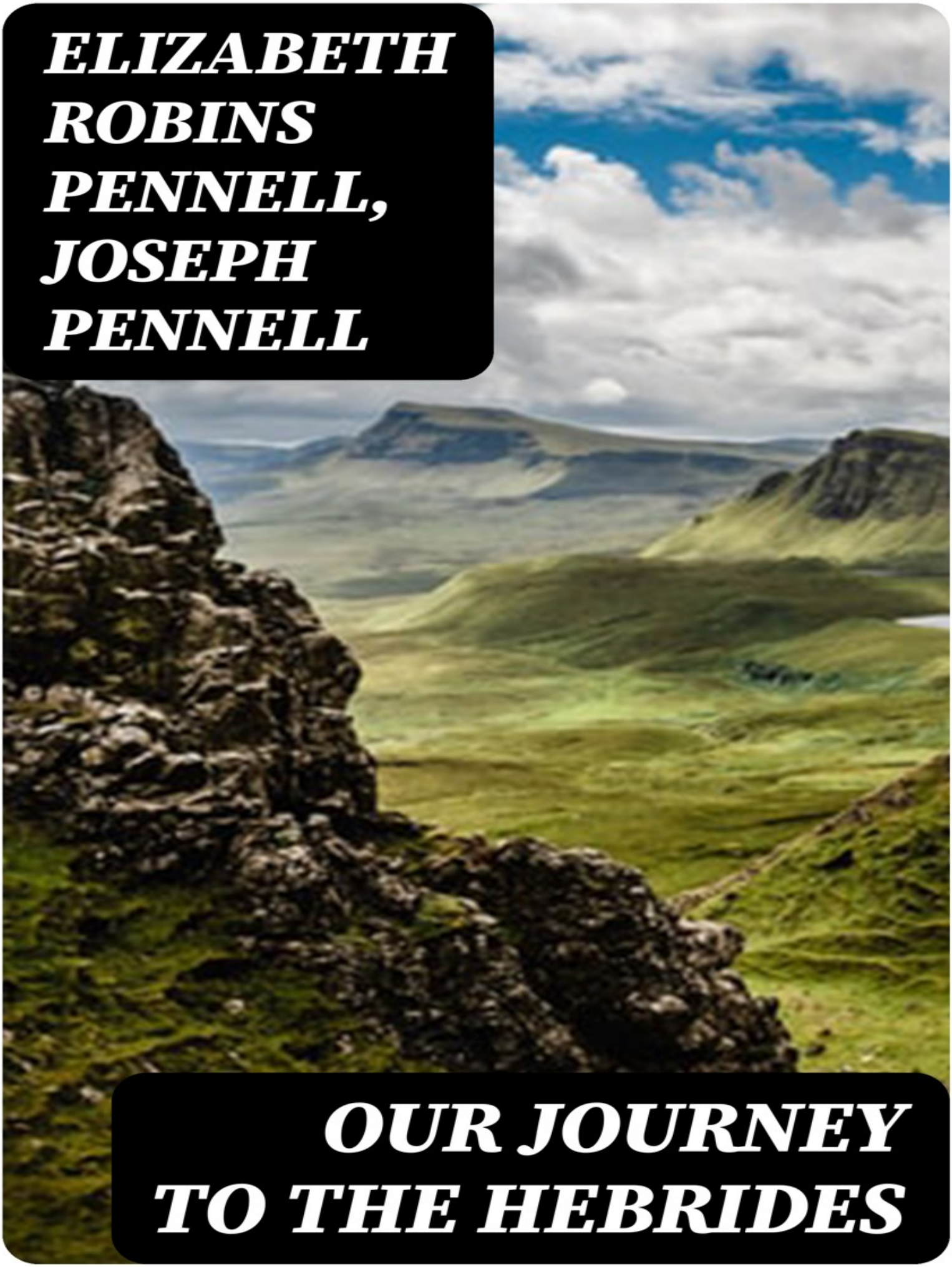
ELIZABETH ROBINS PENNELL, JOSEPH PENNELL
OUR JOURNEY TO THE HEBRIDES

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Our Journey to the Hebrides

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PREFACE.

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THE greater part of "Our Journey to the Hebrides" was published originally in HARPER'S MAGAZINE. When it appeared it was severely criticised, and we were taken to task for not discovering in Scotland and the Scotch what has been made the fashion to find there—for not giving second-hand descriptions, which are the stock in trade of Scotch guide-books, whether romantic or real; in a word, for not staying at home and manufacturing our journey in the British Museum.

It is gradually dawning upon us that this is what is wanted by the majority of critics. To go to a country and tell what really happened to you—to dare to say, for the information of future cyclers or travellers, that one small piece of road is bad, that on one day out of ten or fifteen it rained, that at one small hotel you were uncomfortable or turned away, is enough to make the critic declare that you have found everything in that country to be awry. This was our fate when we attempted to describe the most enjoyable trip we ever made—our ride across France. We have no hesitation in saying that our trip to Scotland was the most miserable. We undertook to walk, owing to the misrepresentations of people who we do not believe ever in their lives walked half as far as we did a year ago. As we have shown, when tramping became unendurable we went by coach or train, by steamer or sail-boat; but we walked far enough to see the country as, we venture to think, it has seldom been seen by other travellers. For, with all its

drawbacks, walking has this one advantage: not only do you stop at the correct show-places on your route, but you go slowly over the unknown country which lies between them. That the weather in the Western Highlands and Islands is vile is a fact which cannot be denied, though to mention it is held to be a crime. But, for the benefit of those who, because we speak of the rain and of the fatigue of walking, think we shut our eyes to everything else on our journey, let us say here, once and for all, that we found the whole country BEAUTIFUL and full of the most WONDERFUL EFFECTS; but we must also add that it is the most abominable to travel through, and its people are the most down-trodden on God's earth.

This is the best and most concise description of the Western Highlands and Islands that could be given.

Because we saw and described the actual condition of the population, and ignored the pleasures—in which we might have joined—of a handful of landlords and sportsmen whose fathers brought about this condition, and who themselves are fighting to maintain it, we have been asked what is the use of digging up ancient history? Thank Heaven, it is now two years since the Crofters' Act was passed by Parliament; but when we were in the Islands the first test case of a tenant pleading against the landlord who wished to evict him was tried, and gained by the tenant. While we were in Barra, the disenfranchisement of the entire island was accomplished by a trick which the most unscrupulous American politician would not have dared to play. The Crofters' Commission had then just begun to reduce rents—fifty-seven per cent. is the average reduction

—and to cancel arrears. It has raised rents on certain estates, is an argument used by landlords, who forget to tell you that where rents have been raised they have been compelled to give back pasture-land to the crofters. It was but a few weeks after our return to London that a rebellion broke out in the Island of Lewis, and was quelled only by the decision of the Edinburgh Court, which declared deer not to be protected by law; so that for the rest of the winter crofters and cotters ate venison with their oatmeal. It was this decision, and not the war-ships, which prevented open insurrection in all the Islands.

Some of our critics have been good enough to inform us that crofters were never turned off their crofts to make room for deer. With those who refuse to accept the testimony officially published in the Blue-books there is no use to enter into a discussion. For those who know little of the subject, and for whom Blue-books would necessitate long study, here are the facts—facts which no one can question—in a nutshell. We quote from an article on "The Crofters of the Highlands," published in the *Westminster Review* for February, 1888:

> "In addition to these many injustices" (injustices, that is, suffered by the crofters), "there is one which in certain districts almost overshadows them all; namely, the absorption of vast areas, embracing much fertile land in deer forests. It matters little whether crofters were actually evicted to make room for deer, or whether sheep farms have been converted to this purpose; both have happened very largely, with the result that, according to the Royal

> Commissioners, about two million acres are now devoted to deer forests. Large as this figure is, it is considerably below the mark, as has been shown by even better authorities on the subject. Nor must it be supposed that deer forests consist merely of barren and worthless land. Unless there is a large amount of good grass-land in a forest the deer would starve, and all this good land in times past supported a large population, whose descendants are now suffering destitution in the bare and unfruitful regions near the coast."

To their shame be it said, the American millionaires who are beginning to rent these deer forests are the men who are now doing the most to encourage the continuance in their present position of the sons of the land-grabbers, or, we should say, the heroes of the ancient history and romance of the country.

There is another evil of these great deer forests which should not be forgotten. A crofter, after working all day, often has to sit up all night to keep these beasts, which were supposed to be private property, out of his little croft. For if the deer eat all his crops, he had no redress; if the crofter shot one of them, or hurt it in any way in driving it out, you may be sure the factor made him suffer for it—at one time he would most likely have been evicted. We want it to be understood that in these vast tracts of deer forest none but sportsmen and game-keepers are allowed to go. If your house were to lie on one side and the village on the other, you would have to go miles around to reach it. Nor can you go near streams which run in the open country, for fear you

may disturb the fish, which are preserved for English or American sportsmen.

Just as we are writing this Preface we have begun to receive, for the first time in our lives, anonymous letters. Hitherto we did not believe there were people stupid and imbecile enough to write such things. One of these creatures, who is ashamed of his own identity, encloses, with an amusing letter written on Kansas City Club paper—which, however, does not reveal whether he is the president or the hall porter of the club—an article of a column and a half from the *Scotsman*, which calls our "Journey to the Hebrides" "sentimental nonsense," "culpable misrepresentation," "amazing impertinence." And then, without attempting to show in what the misrepresentation or nonsense or impertinence consists, the writer of this article goes on to give his own ideas on the subject of the crofters, quoting statements made from other sources, and attributing them to us, misrepresenting us, and yet not attempting to contradict any one fact brought forward in any one of the articles, but taking up space in the paper to contradict the reports of the *Scotsman's* own reporter, printed but a few months before. We are accused of exaggerating the misery of the people. We have lying by our side as we write, column after column, amounting to page after page, from the *Scotsman*, which is by no means the crofters' friend, giving detailed pictures of this misery, which we, in our generalizing, could not approach. Here is a specimen taken at hazard from the pile of clippings. "A Tale of Poverty" it is headed, and it was published January 17, 1888:

"Quite a typical case of poverty was that of Donald Mackenzie, a middle-aged man, who occupied a half croft at a rental of £2. He was married, with five young children, and they had been living exclusively on potatoes, occasionally with fish, for three months, until they got a half boll of meal from a destitution fund. That was now done, and he had that day borrowed a bowlful from a neighbour. He had fished at Stornoway in the summer, and had kept the family alive; but his wife assured the stranger that he had not brought home a single shilling. She added that she herself had not had shoes for four years, and the children were no better off. A very similar case was that of Norman Macmillan. He was a cottar and fisherman, having a half lot from another tenant. He had also not taken home a shilling from the fishing last year; and, except working on his lot, he could find nothing to do until the fishing season came on again. He had seven children, the eldest twelve years. They had eaten up their potatoes by the beginning of winter, and now they had but a little barley-meal left. He did not know what to do now, he said, unless Providence opened the way for them. They had often been without food, he said, although they had kept it. There was none to relieve them. He stated that formerly they used to get credit from the merchants while they were engaged at the fishing, but that they did not get now. One of the houses visited in this township was that of the wife of

> Donald Macmillan, one of the men now standing trial in Edinburgh on a charge of having taken part in the Park deer raid. Macmillan lived in a very small cot at the back of his father's house, which his father had used as a barn. It was very poorly furnished even for that locality. There was a family of five small children, and there was only one bed in the house, with one blanket. Three of the children slept out with a neighbour. Macmillan cultivated the half of his father's croft, and had one cow. He was also a fisherman, having a share in a boat of forty-one feet keel; but, though he had attended the Barra fishing last summer, he had made nothing. His wife had got a boll of meal from the destitution fund, but besides that, she had only two barrels of potatoes. Previous to getting that meal, they had lived exclusively on potatoes. She stated that when her husband went out to the deer raid, there was but one barrel of potatoes; but since then, she explained, she had fallen back upon the seed."

Here is another, from January 20th of the same year, when four columns were devoted to crofter affairs:

> "From here a drive of about four miles brought the visitors to Arebruich—a township fixed in a spot which was surely never intended for human beings. As one passes onwards from Balallan, the soil gradually sinks lower and lower on the north side of the loch until, when Arebruich is reached, it is almost level to the water's edge. The result is that

the land is literally a floating bog, and it is a miracle how the poor people, who labour away at the barren scraps of earth which show some signs of cultivation, manage to get any food raised out of them. A rude, clayish pathway extends for some little distance from the main road, but it soon stops, as if the builders had thrown up the work in disgust. There are sixteen crofts, such as they are, in the township, and these are occupied by twenty-six families. The first house visited was that of John Mackinnon, a stout, good-looking man in spite of his surroundings. He lives on his mother's lot, which is rented at £2.15*s.*, exclusive of taxes. His mother, who is eighty years old, lives, along with an unmarried daughter, in an adjoining house. He paid 35*s.* two years ago to the factor, but since then he has been able to pay nothing. He fished as a hired man last year at Lybster; but his earnings were so small that when his season's board was paid he had only 9*d.* left. A friend had to lend him his passage-money. At present he has three barrels of potatoes left, but neither meal nor money. He has two of a family, besides himself and wife. They have to live on potatoes. His mother never got any parochial relief, and she and her daughter have to struggle along as best they can. He has one cow and eight sheep. When the destitution meal was being distributed he got three stones, and his mother an equal quantity. He does not know what to do, and has no prospects whatever. The next house

presented a worse case. It was that of Widow Murdo Macleod, a sister of Mackinnon. She said her husband was drowned at Loch Seaforth seven years ago, when they were only ten months married. She had one daughter, who was born shortly after her husband was drowned. She has made her living all these years by knitting and sewing and odd jobs, but never got any help from the Parochial Board, though she applied several times. She has neither land nor stock, and never had any. She generally gets a few potatoes from her brother at harvest time. She has half a barrel on hand at present, and about a stone of meal, the remains of what was got from the destitution fund. She always tried to be industrious, and therefore was never actually in absolute want. She always enjoyed good health, and felt very thankful for it. The hut in which this woman and her daughter live is wretchedly poor, and the single bed is barely covered with a thin blanket."[A]

On January 20th, in a leader, the same paper declared that the facts which we have given are "distressing," and ought to excite "interest" and sympathy. There is no talk here of sentimental nonsense! Distressing we should think they were. One cannot help saying that it is nothing less than infamous that a mere handful of landlords should have controlled the destiny of, and extracted every penny from, the population of these Islands—the people whom they have kept for generations in poverty, not that they might improve the land, but that they might pass their own time in useless idleness and cruel sport. It is not a question of over-

population. The real evil is that the Islanders have been ground down and tyrannized over simply to gratify the amusements of their masters. We have heard again and again that the position of a landlord does not pay; if it did not, the landlords would sell their estates to-morrow.

For weeks, early in this year (1888), every Scotch and English paper, even to the *Times*, had columns about the misery of the crofters—that is, columns of extracts similar to these we have quoted. Whatever reasons were given for it, no one questioned their destitution. And yet within a year all these reports are forgotten; and for generalizing and not going into details—heart-breaking details—we are called sickly sentimentalists. So glaring is this complete forgetfulness and contradiction that we cannot help taking some notice of it, and calling the attention of these papers to their own reports.

As to the rest of our critics, they did not even know enough to contradict themselves, except in one case, which we have pointed out elsewhere, and their other criticism is not directed against our facts.

In dwelling upon the misery of the people, we do not pretend, as has been suggested, to give an off-hand settlement of the economic problems of the Islands. We merely state what we saw, what it was impossible to avoid seeing, wherever we went. It must be remembered that it is not merely a minority, or even a majority, but the entire population who exist in this condition of absolute wretchedness and semi-starvation. With the exception of a few small towns on the coast for the convenience of tourists and landlords, you find throughout the Islands but the

occasional beautiful castle or shooting-lodge, or great farm-house, and the many crowded stone piles politely called cottages. And it was because we were more struck with this misery than with the romance of the past that, our journey over, we interested ourselves in learning something of the immediate reasons for the present condition of the Western Highlanders and Islanders, rather than in reading about the murders and massacres of the MacGregor and the Macleod, the Mac this and the Mac that. We were not blind to the beauty, the sternness, the wildness of the country; but the sadness and sorrows of its people impressed us even more than the wonder and beauty of their land.

JOSEPH PENNELL.

ELIZABETH ROBINS PENNELL.

WESTMINSTER, *November 20, 1888*.[B]

ILLUSTRATIONS.

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IN THE HIGHLANDS.

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We never looked forward to a pleasure trip with so much misery as we did to our journey to the Hebrides. We wanted

a holiday.

"Go to Scotland," suggested the editor of HARPER'S.

"Let us rather wander through unexplored France," we proposed, in a long letter, though we had already explored it for ourselves more than once.

"Scotland would be better," was the answer in a short note.

"But why not let us discover unknown Holland?" we asked, as if it had not been discovered a hundred times already.

"Scotland would be better," was still the answer, and so to Scotland we went.

It was a country about which we cared little, and knew less. We had heard of Highlands and Lowlands, of Melrose and Stirling, but for our lives we could not have pointed them out on the map. The rest of our knowledge was made up of confused impressions of Hearts of Mid-Lothian and Painters' Camps in the Highlands, Macbeths and Kidnappers, Skye terriers and Shetland shawls, blasted heaths and hills of mist, Rob Roys and Covenanters; and, added to these, positive convictions of an unbroken Scotch silence and of endless breakfasts of oatmeal, dinners of haggis, and suppers of whiskey. Hot whiskey punch is a good thing in its way, and at times, but not as a steady diet. Oatmeal we think an abomination. And as for haggis—well, we only knew it as it was once described to us by a poet: the stomach of some animal filled with all sorts of unpleasant things and then sewed up. We recalled the real dinners and friendly peasants of France and Italy, and hated the very name of Scotland.

It will easily be understood that we could not plan a route out of our ignorance and prejudice. It remained to choose a guide, and our choice, I hardly know why, fell upon Dr. Johnson. Every one must remember—I say this though we did not even know it until we looked into the matter—that Dr. Johnson met Boswell in Edinburgh, and in his company journeyed up the east coast as far as Inverness, then across the Highlands to the west, and so to the Hebrides, coming back by way of Inverary, Loch Lomond, and Glasgow. It looked a long journey on the map, and seemed a weary one in the pages of Boswell and Johnson; but as if this were not bad enough, we made up our minds, for the sake of novelty, to walk.

Of our preparations for the journey I will say nothing. We carried less than Stanley and more than the average tramp. We took many things which we ought not to have taken, and we left behind many things which we ought to have taken. But this matters little, since our advice to all about to start on a walking tour is, *Don't*.

On the 28th of July we arrived in

EDINBURGH,

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"a city too well known to admit description." If Dr. Johnson thought so a hundred years ago, it is not for us, who propose to be his followers, to differ from him. Indeed, during our stay in that city, so eager were we to be faithful to him in all things that we should have allowed ourselves to be dined, teaed and suppered, even as he was, but for an obstacle. The only person whom we knew in Edinburgh was