

THE CAIRNGORM CLUB.

BY THE REV. ROBERT LIPPE, *Vice-President.*

IT is a remark trite and ancient—as ancient, in fact, as human observation—that great events often arise from small beginnings. This was the case with our Club, which came into being from the casual meeting of a few individuals at a time, and at a place, and under circumstances, which must be all indelibly impressed upon the memories of the survivors. The time was the morning after the Queen's Jubilee; the place, the upper shore of Loch Avon, where it receives its chief feeder from the Feith Buidhe; the circumstances, simply these. The present writer, shortly before leaving home for a brief holiday among the Braemar mountains, had come to a sort of agreement with his old scholar and friend, our present indefatigable Secretary, to have an exploratory tour for a day or two among the more inaccessible heights which girdle and “guard the infant rills of Highland Dee”. This expedition was never fully accomplished, from no want of will on either side, but from my having to succumb to the irresistible attack of an old enemy, lumbago. Utterly disgusted at the turn of events, crestfallen, and literally prostrated in body and mind, I wrote, as the trysting day drew near, to my intended companion, to explain how matters stood; but my letter crossed one from him to me intimating that he and a couple of friends were just starting for the Loch Builg district, and that a few of our common friends in Aberdeen, under the guidance of our future first Chairman, were to pick me up at Inverey during the afternoon of the Jubilee day on their way to Ben Muich Dhui. The intention was that the two parties should unite in Glen Derry and proceed to the top of the mighty Ben, and there, at midnight, aid the general illumination by a grand display of fireworks. The prospect of such a midnight march to such a place and on such an occasion acted on me like the distant sound of the battle trumpet on a worn-out war-horse, and so, to make sure of being in time at the rendezvous, and without waiting for the arrival of my friends,

I hirpled off, bending nearly *twafauld* over my staff like an aged pilgrim. At length assembled at the appointed spot, though in smaller numbers than expected, we set out on our evening tramp, carrying, among other impedimenta, several large packets of fireworks of various kinds. The evening was, notwithstanding the proximity of large patches of snow, sultry and almost suffocating, but we toiled on and managed to reach Loch Etchachan in good form. Leaving our baggage by the side of that loch, and carrying nothing but our contribution to the illumination, we commenced the last stage of the ascent, and reached the summit of Ben Muich Dhui shortly after midnight. Here we found an ample reward for all our toils and anxieties. Around us on all sides, but chiefly towards the north and east, the country was lit up with blazing bonfires—"peak beyond peak in endless range like twinkling points of fire". To us, far removed from these centres of merriment and revelry, and in utter silence, broken only now and then by a sough of wind and the occasional muffled sound of falling water borne by the intermittent breeze from the distant corries, the whole had a most mysterious, solemn, and weird-like effect. The sudden flaring up, dying away, and starting up again of the blazing fires gave one the idea of being in an invaded country with its beacon fires lighted up to warn the inhabitants of the enemy's approach. After enjoying the grand panorama for a short time, we unpacked our cases and added to the general enlightenment by a continuous discharge of rockets and other fireworks of various kinds. The effect, to the bystanders at least, was curious and grand in the extreme. The rocks and boulders of Ben Muich Dhui, the dark rift of the Learg Ghruamach, and even the distant corries of Braeriach and Cairntoul, were lighted up for an instant with fitful brilliancy. These discharges, as we afterwards learned, surprised and perplexed various belated denizens in Aviemore and along the upper reaches of the Dee. They were also seen and admired by a number of our friends spending the night on the top of Lochnagar. Our stores of artillery were, however, soon exhausted, and we retraced, in the increasing light, our steps to Loch Etchachan; and

shouldering again our left luggage made for the Shelter Stone. This we reached just as the rising sun was beginning to gild the tops of the surrounding mountains. The accommodation for passing the night, or rather early morning hours, though improved from what I found it ten days earlier, was still far from luxurious. On the previous visit I found "the Stone", and several of his smaller neighbours, standing out of an immense field of snow, and under it water and black-looking, half-liquid mud. On the present occasion the snow had retreated to the shelter of the various precipices, the water under "the Stone" had disappeared, and the mud consolidated into a dank floor, so that we were enabled to spread our mackintoshes without fear of actually *lairing*. Here we six lay down, and, drawing a plaid over us, sought, or attempted to seek, a few hours' sleep and rest. The writer, however, could do neither, partly from the novelty of his surroundings, and partly from the fact that his pillow was a courier bag, whose chief contents consisted of a can of "tinned meat", and partly that he found the softness of his couch not improved by a large stone under his part of the mackintosh. Accordingly, after sundry turnings and tossings about, to the inconvenience and utter disgust of his bedfellows, he found it advisable to quit his quarters, possessing, as he found them, only one recommendation—thorough ventilation; and passed the rest of the night, or rather morning, in solemn and solitary rumination along the banks of Loch Avon. The situation was awe-inspiring; for Nature never before seemed so near and so real. The silence, broken only by the sound—softened, however, through distance—of waters tumbling over the various surrounding precipices; the savage, black, blasted, and tempest-torn rocks; and, above all, the utter loneliness of the situation produced on my feelings such a sense of sacred solemnity that I dare not secularise these feelings and musings by any attempted description. By-and-by the rising sun, mounting higher and higher, began to reach and brighten up the hitherto dark-looking loch, and show the recently fallen hoar-frost glistening in all its pearly purity. The flies now became not only visible but painfully present, as one can realise

who has experienced the pertinacious atrocity and blood-thirstiness of Scottish midges, by the side of loch or river. The trouts, too, began to rise in shoals, breaking with a constant ripple the hitherto placid surface of the water. Without much locomotion I could easily take in at a glance the dimensions of the loch, and ascertain how far it fell short of the Ettrick Shepherd's glowing account. By the aid of good Glenlivet, and with genial companions in full accord, Hogg was accustomed to extend the length of Loch Avon to twenty or even thirty miles, and dilate on its wooded promontories and beautiful islands. The poet has, however, made us all his debtors by what he has told us in that most beautiful, but it is to be feared now little read, poem of "The Queen's Wake", of Cairngorm and his neighbours, and the dread inhabitants of these elevated regions. A worthy D.D., who cannot claim the Shepherd's defence of being overborne by an overmastering poetic imagination, and who hails from Edinburgh, the habitat of the Scottish Geographical Society and the home of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, tells us, among other wonderful pieces of information, that Loch Avon "is 2,000 feet above sea level, and is encompassed by the precipitous sides of Braeriach, Ben A'n, and Ben-na-main"!! The author referred to seems never to have thought it necessary for writing his description, either to visit the locality or even to consult the really excellent map which he appends to his Handbook.

In point of stern, wild grandeur, Loch Avon may be said to occupy the third rank among Scottish lochs, Loch Corruisk in Skye and Loch Eunach in Rothiemurchus disputing the pre-eminence. The frightful, black, and gloomy-looking precipices of Braeriach and Sgoran Dubh, the highest in Britain, hanging over Loch Eunach, give, in our opinion, the first place to that loch, though the approach to it, through the flattish and rather uninteresting head of Glen Eunach, detracts somewhat from the effect on the visitor from that side. However, as Loch Avon will doubtless in the future frequently form the goal of many of our Club's excursions, and thus fall to be fitly and fully described, I leave it for the time; and as eight o'clock was

now approaching, I returned to my late companions, and roused them, still silent, if not slumbering, in their airy chamber. The camp being fairly astir, and after due performance of the morning ablutions in the crystal springs and tiny rills so plentifully at hand, and all as cold and clear as sparkling ice, breakfast had to be prepared and dispatched. Time and tide, as the saying is, will no man bide, and as a good day's tramp still remained before us, the encampment was broken up, and we descended in a body to the head of the loch. There, at a place which, surely in grim irony, is designated *Maghan na Banaraich* (in plain English, the Dairymaid's Field), a short halt and a separation took place, five electing to cross Cairngorm and proceed, *via* Loch Morlich, to Boat of Garten, the remaining one, the writer of this notice, to return alone to Deeside. Before finally taking our several ways, we spontaneously and unanimously agreed to form ourselves into the Cairngorm Club, the name being naturally suggested by the monarch mountain so full in view in the foreground, and calmly looking down on our meeting. Office-bearers were elected by acclamation, and with that generous and genial absence of exclusive selfishness which has always characterised our society, we resolved to open our ranks to the admission of men and women of heroic spirit, and possessed of souls open to the influences and enjoyment of nature pure and simple as displayed among our loftiest mountains. The Speyside contingent then scrambled across the Garbh Uisge, and I started in the opposite direction, and, as I solitarily plodded on, frequently for a time turned round to watch my late companions slowly winding their way, often in Indian file, round the upper end of the loch, till they were finally lost to view as they ascended Coire Raibert. For the sake of variety, I chose in returning, not the way of our approach by Loch and Coire Etchachan, but the more circuitous and rougher one down Loch Avon side, along the foot of Beinn Mheadhoin, and round the shoulder of this mountain into the basin of the Dubh Lochan, from which Abernethy is reached from Braemar by the Learg an Laoigh. With a tropical sun blazing down in all his fierceness, and being for long without any track over the extremely rugged surface,

my progress was slow and laborious. I was thus afforded ample opportunity for examining the landscape. This, I may confidently affirm, is not surpassed, if indeed approached, by any portion of Her Majesty's British dominions for loneliness and harsh, stern, gloomy-looking sterility. Though not wanting in a certain kind of sublime grandeur, the general aspect is depressing, no evidence of man's presence, or even man's existence, being visible for miles and miles. After a considerable downward progress from the skirts of Beinn Mheadhoin, I struck the Braemar and Abernethy path, and, following it in a southerly direction over a low ridge, by-and-by found myself in Glen Derry. My way was now comparatively easy, and in due course I was restored to civilisation and the converse of man at Derry Lodge. Here I passed several well-known Aberdeen faces, all beaming with joyous excitement and pleasure. Ladies and gentlemen were picnicing and junketing around a stranded carriage or two on the green sward in that most romantic and delightful spot where the Derry unites with the Lui Beg. Forging the Dee near the mouth of the Lui with considerable difficulty, which arose, not from the depth or force of the current, but from the exceeding slipperiness of the stones at the bottom of the river, I soon reached grateful refreshment and rest.

Such, then, were the occasion and circumstances under which our Club was ushered into being; but, like other bantlings, it required for a time nourishment and nursing, all which were liberally supplied by its progenitors; and with such effect that the youngster was soon in a condition to be presented to the public. The formal introduction took place on 9th January, 1889, when our Club passed from infancy into active manhood, as a corporation thoroughly equipped with President, two Vice-Presidents, Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, and Managing Committee of ten members. Terms for admission and rules for future guidance were drawn up and adopted, and thus the Club was fairly launched upon its prosperous career.

The district, as defined in our rules to be chiefly embraced in the Club's operations, is one not only of magnificent grandeur and picturesque beauty, but also of great historic

interest. Its West and North witnessed the advance of the young English king, Edward III., with his army of archers, hobblers, and men-at-arms, on his romantic expedition to relieve the widowed Countess of Athole, beleaguered in the crannoge Castle of Lochandorb, the return home of which expedition, by the way of Fyvie and Kildrummy, brought no romance to Aberdeen but the severest calamity the city has ever undergone. The various glens of the district were also often traversed by the gallant Grahams, Montrose and Dundee, in their frequent marchings to and fro through the Highlands, memorials of their encampments being still preserved in the names of two places—Delavorar (the Lord's haugh), one on the Avon two miles above Tomintoul, the other about a mile above the Linn of Dee. Indeed the whole country is redolent of story, every corrie and glen having its own history and legend, alas! too often of violence and bloodshed. Owing to the paucity of population these traditions are fast passing into oblivion, but many of them are happily preserved in the by no means inconsiderable local literature of Upper Deeside and Strathspey, while not a few floating in the district still remain to reward the industry of the sympathetic gleaner. But this is a subject to which my past prolixity prevents me from doing anything further than giving a passing glance—a matter, however, of small account, as doubtless these romantic regions will be repeatedly and thoroughly explored by the Club, which, as is well known, contains a host of members of pent-up literary talent, whose pens are eager to leap into their inkstands to trace with fulness and felicity the events of the successive jaunts.

I conclude with simply chronicling the various meetings held and outings already enjoyed. The first expedition, as in duty bound, was to Cairngorm and Ben Muich Dhui, and extended over 8th and 9th July, 1889, the members commencing their walk at Nethy Bridge, and terminating it at Castleton of Braemar. The Aberdeen autumn holiday of that year was taken advantage of for a trip to Lochnagar, the start being made from Ballater along Muickside, and the return by the same route. The jaunting of the year 1890 was auspiciously opened by a few of the Club's more

adventurous spirits crossing Ben Muich Dhui on January 3rd, there enjoying the exquisite pleasure of witnessing the Cairngorms in all their winter glory. The next event in the Club's existence was its first annual meeting, which was held on 20th February. The first regular outing of that year was on 5th May to Mount Keen. This was the most numerously attended of all our meets, upwards of 160 being present. The great annual event took place in July, and extended over the 14th, 15th, and 16th of that month. On this occasion the party, starting from Boat of Garten, went up Glen Eunach, thence ascended to the summits of Braeriach and Cairntoul, when a separation took place, some members proceeding to Braemar, others preferring to return to Speyside. The Buck of the Cabrach and Tap o' Noth were the goals of the autumn excursion on 22nd September. The second annual meeting took place on 1st April, 1891. The trips of that year were, as usual, three: 1st, May 4th, to Morven; 2nd, July 13th and 14th, to Beinn a'Bhuird and Ben Avon; and 3rd, September 28th, to Ben Rinnes. The third annual meeting was held on 29th February, 1892. Then followed the spring outing on May 2nd to Lochnagar, by a route different from that followed on the previous trip to this mountain. The Club's great expedition of that year was from Derry Lodge as a starting point, across the summits of Ben Muich Dhui and Cairngorm to Loch Morlich and Glenmore, and came off, July 11th, 12th, and 13th; the year's outings being brought to a close by a visit to Mount Battock and Clochnaben on September 26th.

For all these various mountaineering enterprises, the Club received the most courteous facilities from the various proprietors and lessees and their dependents. In return for these favours the Club hereby records its most grateful thanks to all these benefactors, and more particularly to Sir William Cunliffe Brooks, Bart. of Glen Tanner, Sir Algernon Borthwick, Bart., the lessee of Invercauld, and Mr. Findlay of Aberlour, for their truly Highland welcome and splendid hospitality. With this pleasing duty of expressing our gratitude discharged, it remains for me now to offer for garrulous egotism the humble apology of an enthusiastic veteran hill-climber, and make my most respectful parting bow.