

BY GLEN DOLL AND THE CAPEL:

A SATURDAY-TO-MONDAY TRAMP.

BY W. J. JAMIESON, M.A.

THE only apology the writer has to plead for submitting the following notes of an excursion over ground that has been already often described, is the hope that they may bring home to some of his fellow-members and others, whose purses are light and leisure scanty, the amount of genuine satisfaction that may be derived from even so brief a holiday as that indicated in the title. A perusal of the inspiring narratives by two prominent members of the Club of wanderings among the Benchinnans had awakened a desire to see something of that mysterious region, and a longing, of ancient date, to explore the beauties of Glen Doll—so happily preserved to the mountain-lovers of Scotland by the energies of the Scottish Rights of Way Society—had also, if possible, to be gratified. A little study of the map and of the narratives referred to showed that both these objects could be attained between mid-day of Saturday and the afternoon of Monday following, and the plan of campaign was laid accordingly.

The walk in the golden afternoon of early autumn along the picturesque road from Ballater to Braemar served to get the desk-cramped limbs of the city worker into something like form for the next two days' programme. Braemar was crowded, as it always is in September, but ultimately accommodation was secured for the night, which, if strictly limited in extent, was quite sufficient for the modest wants of a solitary pedestrian.

The village was left next morning about half-past seven, just as the first signs of life among the cottages were becoming apparent. The weather was perfect for walking, though not very promising for distant views, the air being cool and pleasant, with a faint haze blurring the outlines of the horizon. Two human figures were descried a little way ahead on the road by the babbling Clunie, but they dis-

appeared in the vicinity of Auchallater, and not another living soul was encountered all that day till the public road was reached in the late afternoon at Braedownie in Glen Clova. The charm of solitude alluded to by Mr. Bryce in the first number of the Club's Journal can be realised to perfection in this upland region—the change from town bustle and din is absolute and complete.

The lower part of Glen Callater is tame and uninteresting; the scenery becomes picturesque only above the Loch—a desolate little sheet of water with one small solitary cottage by its margin. From the form of the basin in which it lies, and the stretch of flat marshy ground at its southern end, it seems probable that its area has been at one time more extended than at present. After passing the loch, the track runs along the side of the burn that feeds it, distinct enough in places, in others scarcely to be detected. There is no possibility of going astray, however, all that has to be done is to follow the course of the stream. By-and-by this leads into a sort of *cul-de-sac*, or hilly amphitheatre, with no visible outlet save the way by which we have come. Here the stream forks, and the western branch can be seen at no great distance falling in a ribbon of foam sheer over the precipitous northern front of the Tolmount. The eastern branch descends more gradually, running at one point through a very pretty little gorge, quite a cañon in miniature. The traveller can walk straight up the bed of the stream if he wishes to inspect this bit of scenery more closely, or may find easier going by bending a little to the left. A short pull up a steep, grassy slope brings him to the top of the ridge at the scarcely noticeable depression between the Tolmount proper and the Knaps of Fafernie. Curving round to the south-westward, the cairn on the Tolmount is soon reached, with the ruins of a small hut in close proximity. A wire fence runs along the summit of the Benchinnans for miles, and would prove an invaluable guide to the wayfarer who might find himself overtaken here in mist. There is no peak on the Tolmount, only a slightly rounded elevation; the bold north corrie is the only feature that gives it dignity as an individual mem-

ber of the chain. Notwithstanding this, there is, in clear weather an extensive view in all directions; but on the particular day in question, the prospect to the north and west was obscured by cloud and haze, the Cairngorm group looming up as a shadowy mass upon the horizon. The rolling country to the southward was much clearer, and the well-marked cone of the Broad Cairn was very conspicuous to the east.

On the advice of an enthusiastic admirer of the Benchnans a detour was made to the neighbouring summit of Cairn na Glasha. The distance between the two tops is trifling; but the hollow between them presents a bit of particularly nasty going. The ground consists of peaty mire—not deep moss hags like those on the ridge between Clochnaben and Battock, but a uniform deposit of black ooze interspersed with grassy tussocks which afford at best a precarious footing. If you miss one of these, or slip off it after a jump, you plunge into this sticky mixture to the ankle, or, it may be, to the knee. Sometimes for a few yards together there are no tussocks, and in such cases, presuming that you have judiciously followed the line of the wire fence, you may escape “lairing” by doing a little “Blondin” business, which, if laborious and a trifle undignified, is probably the lesser of two evils. Once out of this slough of despond, the ascent of Cairn na Glasha is very easy. Near the cairn the wire fence is replaced by a “dwarf stone wall with neat iron railing on top” (as the architects’ specifications say with regard to villa residences) which looks incongruous enough on this remote peak, some ten or a dozen miles from anywhere. The haze here had the same blurring effect on the distant view as at the Tolmount, but the fine ravine of Canlochan, with the precipitous cliffs of Monega, forms a picturesque feature in the foreground, and the wild solitudes that stretch around in all directions as far as the eye can see give a sensation of buoyancy and freedom as refreshing as the ozone of the pure untainted mountain breezes.

Glas Maol, a little to the south-west of Cairn na Glasha, could be very easily visited from this point, and by the tourist making for the Cairnwell road or the Spital of Glenshee

would be taken as a matter of course; but the writer resolved to leave it for some future occasion, and to strike back at once for the head of Glen Doll. Repassing the region of bog, the line was taken by the left shoulder of Tom Buidhe direct for the sources of the White Water, which trickles quietly for a mile or two through a grassy country with a very gentle fall. An immense herd of deer was seen here on the slopes of Tom Buidhe, high up on the sky line. As the tourist strolls through this comparatively tame tract, wondering, perchance, to what Glen Doll owes its reputation, and when the fine scenery of which he has heard so much is to appear, all of a sudden a strange thing happens. The stream along which he has been sauntering disappears—"takes a flying leap into space", as one writer has well described it. The chasm into which it vanishes is not perceived until it is at one's very feet, and, owing to a peculiar elbow in the cliff, the bottom is not visible from the brink of the precipice. Skirting along the edge to the westward, another cleft is found yawning in front almost at right angles to the first, through which the Fialzioch Burn tumbles to join the White Water. A slight detour up stream enables this to be crossed, and then a steep descent leads to the foot of the fall. A fine view of the rugged gorge is to be got from a flat rock in mid-stream, and a pause was made here to admire the beauty and unusual character of the surroundings. A scramble up the crumbling bank on the other side, brings us out at the top of Jock's Road, as the old bridle-path through Glen Doll was called. This track is now hardly visible, but a good pony road has been made by the proprietor at a higher level on the hillside, which, however, unauthorised visitors are probably not expected to take advantage of. The beginning of Jock's Road could perhaps be more easily reached by keeping on the left bank of the White Water; but it is not lost time to make the circuit above described, as the view from the foot of the fall should on no account be missed.

The picturesque grandeur of Glen Doll can now be fully realised; and it was certainly well worth the long and expensive fight it cost the Rights of Way Society to pre-

serve this fine bit of Highland scenery free and open for the tourist and the mountaineer. Glen Doll proper is only some three or four miles long, but those three or four miles are magnificent. On the left the steep sides of Craig Mellon bound its whole extent; while on the right the frowning precipices of Craig Maud, the mural rampart of the Dounault, and the grand corries of Craig Rennet, Mayar, and Driesh seem the giant escarpment of a vast natural fortress.

Some two and a half miles below the fall, the White Water turns sharply to the left, and thereafter the Glen gradually becomes more open in its character, till at length it debouches into Glen Clova at Braedownie. Here the romantic part of the day's walk is at an end. Four miles of good and comparatively level road brings to view the little wayside inn at Milton of Clova, now known as the Ogilvy Arms, where very comfortable quarters are to be had for the night. Even this out-of-the-way hostelry, however—only a few years ago quite primitive and unpretentious—is keeping abreast of the times, and now boasts many modern conveniences. It has also its due and regular complement of summer residents, who seem to form more of a united happy family than can be the case in the larger caravanserais of better known tourist centres.

Nine is the *table d'hôte* breakfast hour on Monday morning; but this is rather too late for the pedestrian who wishes to make Ballater by mid-afternoon; so, perforce, an earlier meal has to be disposed of in solitary state. The day breaks cool and grey, but the light haze soon disappears, and by nine o'clock the sun is shining in a sky of cloudless blue. The four miles of prosaic road has to be retraced; but now the route, instead of turning aside into Glen Doll, lies for about a mile further along the east bank of the South Esk, till the ascent of the Capel Mounth is commenced. The beginning of the track is not very discernible; it strikes off about the streamlet marked as the Cald Burn on the one-inch map. The writer went on a little too far on the Bachnagairn path, but caught up the proper route at the Capel Burn. The ascent of the Mounth from the Esk

valley is not so trifling an affair as might be supposed from the mere height of the plateau—at least, not in a broiling sun, with no vestige of cloud in the sky and no available shelter of any kind. There is an excellent zig-zag path; but the steady, unrelenting pull of some 1400 feet, without so much as a couple of yards on the level, and in the sweltering heat, takes it out of one a bit, and the summit is very welcome when it comes. It is certainly hard to realise that, within three short weeks after this experience, there must, by all accounts, have been two or three inches of snow on these very heights—but such is the glorious uncertainty of our British climate!

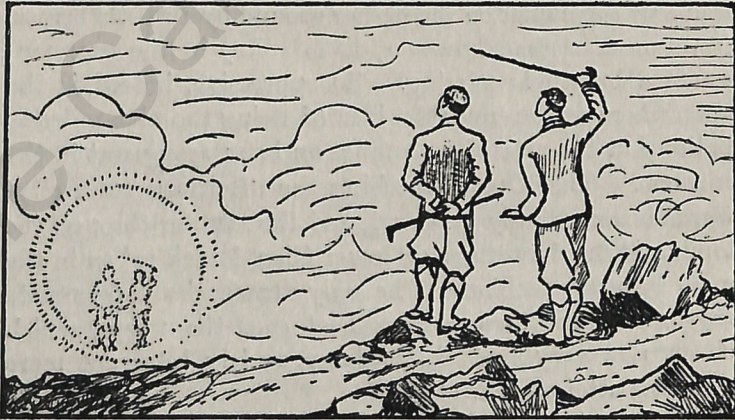
It is advisable before turning one's back upon the Esk valley to halt for a little to view the rocky sides of Craig Mellon and Driesh from this elevated standpoint. The former presents as precipitous a front to the Esk as to the White Water; large slides being visible here and there where masses of crumbling rock and detritus have quite recently fallen sheer away under the disintegrating influence of frost and rain. The west side of Glen Clova, too, is quite steep and rugged enough to form an effective background to the picture. Facing about to the north, the traveller, bound for Ballater, finds his road lie for four or five miles on almost a dead level. Poles are planted at short intervals, to serve as guides when the hills are covered with the winter snows, but just now such landmarks are superfluous, for there is not the slightest possibility of going astray. The upland is a complete solitude save that it is dotted over with a multitude of blackfaced sheep, the boldest of which stop for a moment to survey the unaccustomed stranger with an inquisitive and somewhat supercilious stare, then with a stamp of the fore-foot and an indignant toss of the head, scamper off, obviously in high dudgeon at the intruder's presumption. The walk along the Capel Mounth would be tame enough, were it not for the excellent view that is to be had from it of the whole of the Lochnagar range. Away to the left, the Broad Cairn on the near side of the dividing valley again becomes a conspicuous object; but it is the fine group of Lochnagar peaks that constitutes

the main attraction, standing out sharp and clear in the brilliant sunlight. The panorama is ever shifting, and the relations of the various summits to each other change continually. From nearly every point of view, however, the twin Paps are specially prominent, and very graceful the delicate outline of the Meikle Pap, in particular, appears against the sky. From no other point can these elegantly-shaped tops be seen to greater advantage than from this opposite ridge. Between the Meikle Pap and the Cac Carn Beag can be descried, far in the distance, the dark mass of Ben Avon, easily recognisable by its row of rocky protuberances.

Presently Loch Muick comes into view, the white buildings of the Glasallt Shiel at its upper end gleaming in the sun. Half the surface of the loch itself is silvered by the noon-tide beams, while the other half is thrown into dark purple shadow by the overhanging flank of Lochnagar, rising abruptly from its very edge, barely leaving space for the Queen's carriage drive along the margin. Soon the long winding descent commences. Spital of Muick is reached, and, to all intents and purposes, the traveller is again in the lowlands. All this time the heat has been intense, though tempered somewhat on the higher ground by a gentle breeze. Down in the glen, however, it is sultry in the extreme; scarce a breath is stirring. So oppressive, indeed, is the atmosphere as to render the idea of doing the nine miles to Ballater at the rate of four miles an hour repugnant in the extreme. The idea of catching the afternoon train citywards is accordingly given up, and the saunter through the birch and fir plantations of lower Glen Muick taken in the most leisurely fashion. The only drawbacks to complete enjoyment are the excessive heat *and* the wasps, which latter, now very much in evidence, rudely interrupt more than one attempted siesta.

Ballater is reached with an hour or two to spare ere the departure of the last train; and had the day been cooler, or the start been made a little earlier in the morning, it would have been the easiest thing in the world to arrive in Aberdeen in good time for afternoon tea.

The small charges for bed and breakfast at Braemar and at Clova, plus return railway fare to Ballater, represent all the necessary outlay. A packet of sandwiches and a flask suffice for the tramp across the hills; and a trifle over forty-eight hours gives ample time for the whole excursion. These things considered, with the variety of wild and magnificent scenery—crag and precipice, loch and pine forest, dark ravine and breezy mountain plateau—all to be admired and enjoyed at liberty and at leisure, in the most stimulating and exhilarating of atmospheres—it may be safely maintained that in few more pleasant ways can a Saturday-to-Monday holiday be spent than in a ramble over these remoter uplands.



THE SPECTRE OF THE BROCKEN.

*See page 88.*