

THE BENCHINNANS.

BY THE REV. J. G. MICHIE.

WHERE are these mountains, and whence have they derived their name—a corruption of Bin-chichin—are questions that have lately given rise to various conjectures. Some have contended that the name applies to the semicircular range that bounds the Loch Callater basin, consisting of Cairn Taggart, Cairn Bannoch, Knaps of Fafernie, Tolmount, Cairn na Glasha, and Carn an Tuirc. Others hold that the range is not in Aberdeenshire at all, but wholly in Forfarshire, and lies at the southern base of the higher Grampians, and does not include any of the above-named summits. These seem to be the leading suggestions, but various modifications are also contended for. But only one or two members of the Club would seem to have been successful in hitting on the original Benchichins. It almost provokes a smile to hear some of our recent tourists or mountaineers talk of the Benchinnans as if the name were a well-known designation of some equally well recognised mountain or range of mountains; or it may be that they use the term to show that they are more deeply learned in the Alpine nomenclature of the district than the natives to whom that name has never descended. Or it may be also that they have been misled by some shepherd or forester who would not willingly plead ignorance of the name of any of his native mountains, and when asked about one he has never heard of before, exercises his imagination and speedily finds a locality for it. Seeing there are so many possible sources of error, it is little wonder that much confusion has arisen in regard to the name in question. It may be safely asserted that twenty years ago hardly a single shepherd or forester ever heard of mountains called the Benchinnans. Some may now have heard of them from learned tourists; but however learned none will accuse them

of inventing the name. Where then do they find it? It is not in the Ordnance Survey maps—where almost every known name has a place—nor in any of our modern Deeside maps.

Robert Edward, in his "The County of Angus, 1678", speaks of ". . . the very lofty mountains of Binchichins; and this vast ridge (being indeed the Grampians of Angus) forms the boundary between Angus and Aberdeenshire for the space of 19 [Scottish] miles". This spelling of "Binchichins" agrees with that in Gordon's map, with which Edward was probably familiar. This map was constructed by the eminent scholar and geographer, Sir Robert Gordon of Straloch, and contributed by him to "Blaeu's Theatrum Orbis Terrarum", by the author of which it was published in Amsterdam, in 1654. It comprehends the whole district between the River Spey and the South Esk, and is accompanied by a Latin description in which, however, there is no mention of the BINCHICHINS, for thus the word is spelt on the map, which, as was to be expected, has numerous defects and errors, but gives a representation of the topography of the country that is highly instructive in many respects. Both map and description are given in "Collections of the Shires of Aberdeen and Banff" (Spalding Club). Benchichins, as written in the map, points very clearly to its own derivation. It is evidently an attempt to give as nearly as possible in English the pronunciation of the Gaelic *Beinn-Cichean* or *Cichin*, which means the *mountain with the paps*. This may be held to be sufficiently clear; and if so, no hill or range of hills will less answer to the description than those with which the name has latterly been popularly associated, whether in gazetteers or in maps, such as that of Knox's Basin of the Tay (1831), where "Binchinan Hills" is given as the name of the range separating the counties of Aberdeen and Forfar, between Glas Maol and the head of Glen Mark. There are no features on them that would at all justify their being called paps. In the group that surrounds Loch Callater, there are excrescences and sharp points on several summits that might by a stretch of figurative language be so termed.

But the Celtic mind was particular on these matters ; and while it saw the semblance of a pap on Bennachie, and hence gave the hill its name, it saw only *cairns* on the Tolmount range, and has so designated their summits.

Where then shall we find these paps or papped hills to correspond with the name Binchichins ? We turn again to Sir R. Gordon's map to observe where he places them, and at first glance they seem to lie to the S.W. of Loch Muick. This would place them, as buttresses of the higher Grampians, near the centre of the Braes of Angus. The name in Gordon's map is in the plural number, as it is also in the Gaelic, from which it is derived, but the plural there does not refer to the *ben* or mountain, but to the *ciche* or pap. It is one mountain with two or more paps.

Evidently there is a mistake somewhere, and a closer inspection of the map shows where it lies. There are on it two distinct features, well marked and named, Loch Muick and Loch Garr, *i.e.*, the tarn of Lochnagar, and the mistake consists in placing the latter to the west instead of to the north of the former. But there is no mistake in this, that the Binchichins are placed directly between these two lochs. And what do we find in that locality ? It is just there that the two paps—the Meikle Pap and the Little Pap of Lochnagar—are situated. The old Gaelic name, now obsolete, has given place to its English equivalent, “the Paps” ; and here, without doubt, were the Binchichins of Sir Robert Gordon's time ; and here, *if anywhere*, ought to be placed the Benchinnans of the present day. In this conclusion I am pleased to learn that I am accompanied by the Editor, to whom is due the merit of first seeing, or at least of giving public expression to the fact, that the name Binchichins is, like Bennachie, due to the topographical features which have now received the English designation of the Paps. I think it very likely that in the time of Sir Robert Gordon (1654) Lochnagar was not known by that name, but that the range from its summit southward to Loch Muick, between Glas Allt and Allt na Giubhsaich, was known as the Binchichins, or the ridge or mountain with the paps on it. Minor features received particular names.

It would, however, be most unwise to go back on these old and obsolete names, and try to re-establish them again. Everything noble, grand, sublime, historic, and poetic, is associated with the name Lochnagar, now given to the mountain. Let the old name Binchichins die in peace.

Black
Spout.
Summit.



LOCHNAGAR, FROM THE WEST SIDE OF MEIKLE PAP.