

GLEN FIDDICH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD.

BY ROBERT ANDERSON.

THE Spring Excursion (1899) of the Club to Corryhabbie was the means of introducing members to the beauties of Glen Fiddich and to some of the historical—and legendary—features of the neighbouring region. For the benefit of non-attending members—and perhaps of members attending the excursion as well—it has been deemed advisable to set down a few notes on Glen Fiddich and the neighbourhood, more especially as the excursion—as is recorded elsewhere—resulted in disappointment, no view being obtained from the summit of the hill.

CORRYHABBIE.

Corryhabbie is a hill at the head of Glen Fiddich, in Banffshire, on the border of the parishes of Mortlach and Inveravon. It is, to speak colloquially, “a long stretch of a hill”, and it practically forms one of the “walls” or sides of Glen Rinnes, while Glen Livet lies away to the west of it. The river Fiddich rises on its south-eastern slope, at an altitude of 2,300 feet; and the Corryhabbie Burn, rising on the western side of the hill, unites with the Favat Burn and forms the Dullan, which flows through the lower part of Glen Rinnes. The Dullan is absorbed in the Fiddich at Dufftown, and the Fiddich joins the Spey at Craigellachie, after a total course of about 19 miles. The ascent of Corryhabbie from Glenfiddich Lodge is easy, there being a bridle-path to the ridge of the hill. Alongside the lower part of the bridle-path (the part, *i.e.*, nearest Glenfiddich Lodge) runs an old road, now little better than a track, leading from Glen Rinnes to the Cabrach; and it was along this road—so goes the story—that the Earls of Huntly, Angus, and Erroll marched their army to the battle of Glenlivet, fought against the Earl of Argyle at Alltacoil-eachan, on 4th October, 1594. The bridle-path ultimately

turns sharply to the left (or south), and the ascent becomes much steeper. When the ridge is gained, it is seen to consist of a long and wide plateau rising gently from north-east to south-west, a similar long ridge—that of Cook's Cairn—running parallel to it, but separated by the valley of the upper waters of the Fiddich. There are two cairns on the summit of Corryhabbie—a western one (called the Duchess's Cairn), 2393 feet, and an eastern one (dubbed for the nonce, when the "Cairngormers" were there—whether correctly or not—the Duke's Cairn), 2563 feet. Despite the comparative inferiority of this altitude, an extensive view of mountain tops is gained from the summit of Corryhabbie; and Mr. Alexander Copland prepared for the use of attending members a detailed list of the principal mountains observable, which will be found on the following page.

The following interesting statement relating to the refraction on Corryhabbie is given in the "Account of the Principal Triangulation" of the Ordnance Survey:—

"The heights of Corryhabbie, as deduced from Knock, Cowhythe, and Ben Muich Dhui, separately, are 2582, 2559, and 2571, the mean differing by 3 feet from the most probable height . . . [2568·9]. Yet on comparing this with the height of Ben Nevis, a very large discrepancy is brought out. The true difference of height is 1837·4 feet, whereas nineteen observations at Corryhabbie give 1957·4 feet for the difference of height, and fourteen observations at Ben Nevis give 1948·4, either of which, notwithstanding the number of observations, must be more than a hundred feet greater than the truth: the distance is very nearly 80 miles. A similar effect is observed in comparing Corryhabbie with other distant stations, all tending to show an unusual amount of refraction at Corryhabbie. This extraordinary refraction may perhaps be satisfactorily explained by the circumstance that the top of the hill is an extensive flat".

This plateau consists of loose fragments of quartz rock, very imperfectly covered with vegetable matter. The survey station was on the highest part of the hill, about 2 miles south of Glen Rinnes Kirk, and about 1.5 miles south-east of Cook's Cairn, and was indicated by a stone pile 13 feet high and 46 feet in circumference at the base. The centre

Mountains and Hills to be looked for from the summit of Corryhabbie in Glenfiddich Forest—elevation above sea level 2563 feet. The directions in which the mountains and hills may be seen are true polar, as derived from Bartholomew's maps, 2 in. to the mile; the distances from Corryhabbie are measured in straight lines from its summit.

Compass Direction	MOUNTAIN.	COUNTY.	LOCALITY.	Height, in Feet.	Distance, in Miles.
0	Letterach	Banff	Inveravon	2583	5
1	Driesh	Forfar	Glen Clova	3105	34
4	Lochnagar	Aberdeen	Balmoral Forest	3768	26
7	Carn Mor	Abd--Banff	Inveravon	2636	7
11	Glas Maol	Forfar	Canlochan Glen	3502	33
15	The Cairnwell	Abd--Perth	Glens Cluny and Beag	3059	33
18	Carn Geoidh	"	Glen Thalnich	3194	33
21	Carn Liath	Aberdeen	Glen Slugain	2821	21
24	Glas Thulachan	Perth	Glen Lochy	3445	35
28	Ben Avon	Abd--Banff	Cairngorms	3843	19
32	Beinn a' Bhuird	"	"	3860	21
43	Ben Muich Dhuid	"	"	4296	26
48	Cairngorm	Inv--Banff	"	4084	23
52	Ben Alder	Inverness	Loch Ericht	3757	61
62	Ben Nevis	"	Fort William	4406	78
68	Carn Maing	"	Monadh Liath Mountains	3087	44
76	Sgor na Ciche	"	Glen Dessary	3410	88
84	Meall Fuarvounie	"	Loch Ness	2284	52
87	Mam Sodhail	Inv--Ross	Glen Affric Forest	3862	72
92	Sgurr na Lapaich	"	Glen Cannich Forest	3773	70
103	Sgurr a Mhuillin	Ross	Strath Conon	2778	66
108	Sloch	"	Loch Maree	3217	84
115	Ben Wyvis	Ross--Crom	Wyvis Forest	3429	57
118	Beinn Dearg	Ross	Braemore Forest	3547	72
123	Suilven	Sutherland	Loch Veyatie	2399	90
132	Ben More (Assynt)	Ross--Suth.	Glen Cassley	3273	83
136	Ben Leoid	Sutherland	Glen Coull	2597	88
140	Ben Hee	"	Reay Forest	2870	86
144	Beinn Cleith Bric	"	Strath Naver	3154	76
148	Ben Laoghal	"	Tongue	2504	86
152	Ben Smeoral	"	Strath Brora	1592	58
157	Beinn Dobhrain	"	Glen Loth	2060	58
158	Ben Rinnes	Banff	Glen Rinnes	2755	4
164	Morven	Caithness	Langwell Forest	2313	64
167	Scaraben	"	"	2054	62
174	Ben-a-Cheilt	"	Latheron	942	68
208	Bin of Cullen	Banff	Cullen	1050	25
218	Lurg Hill	"	Grange	1028	23
223	Knock Hill	"	Ordiquhill	1409	23
236	Bin Hill (Huntly)	Aberdeen	Cairnie	1027	17
247	Mormond Hill	"	Strichen	769	47
260	Tillymorgan Hill	"	Culsalmond	1249	23
268	Tap o' Noth	"	Rhynie	1851	13
282	Bennachie	"	Garioch	1619	25
295	The Buck	"	Cabrach	1588	9
298	Coreen Hills	"	Auchindoir	1588	16
290	Cairn William	"	Monymusk	1489	25
296	Blue Hill	"	"	467	44
305	Hill of Fare	Kincardine	Banchory-Devenick	1545	30
314	Kerloch	Aberdeen	Midmar	1747	36
328	Mount Battock	Kincardine	Strachan	2553	32
332	Hill of Cat	Kin--Forfar	Forest of Birse	2435	29
338	Morven	Abd--Forfar	"	2662	16
342	Mount Keen	Aberdeen	Tullich, &c.	3077	27
353	Ben Tirran	Abd--Forfar	Glens Mark and Tanner	2860	34
357	Boustie Ley	Forfar	Glen Clova	2868	32
360	Carn a Bhacain	"	"	2442	15
		Aberdeen	Glen Gairn		

was marked by a large, flat block of quartz, of about 4 cwts., with a hole 4 inches deep and 15 inches in diameter bored in it, and by the frame which supported the instruments being left in position. The observer was Corporal Jenkins, R.S.M., who was on duty at Corryhabbie from 6th September to 21st November, 1850.

GLEN FIDDICH.

Glen Fiddich, as its name implies, is the glen of the Fiddich, and the road—a good carriage road—from Dufftown to Glenfiddich Lodge, a shooting-box of the Duke of



GLENFIDDICH LODGE.

Photo. by

Rev. R. Semple.

Richmond and Gordon, follows the course of the river (on its left bank), and, for the greater part, runs close to the stream, accommodating itself to its windings—has perforce to do so, owing to the abrupt rise of the adjacent hillsides. The distance is about six miles. Half-way up the glen, where the road to the Cabrach deflects to the left, is the entrance to the deer forest of Glenfiddich, the road up the glen from this point being private. From this point, too, the scenery becomes very picturesque, the glen narrowing, the river winding, and the enclosing hills being abundantly covered with birches and pines, while masses of the higher

and barer hill-tops show themselves beyond. Given summer—bright sunlight and the trees in foliage—and the glen is charming; and even on a cold, bleak day of an exceedingly late spring it is by no means devoid of attractiveness. The scenery, however, though essentially Highland, is of a milder character than that ordinarily associated with the Highlands; and one readily concurs in the remark—which, indeed, would naturally occur to an observer given to noting distinctions—that “Nature in Glen Fiddich does not clothe herself in rugged grandeur; but the scenery is nevertheless peculiarly impressive”. This rather limited specification is to be found in an Elgin volume, “The Round Table Club”, written by the late Mr. James Brown, editor of the *Elgin Courant*, who, however, made up for any lack of enthusiasm it exhibits by the following description, which is certainly not wanting in exuberance:—

“I have seen the Glen in summer, and its impressive features yet abide in undiminished freshness in my memory. In imagination, I see endless fringes of silver birches on my right hand and on my left, their green foliage opening up before me, and reaching still further on, as I walk up among the endless windings of the Glen. Here tumbles one brawling burn into Fiddich; there another, skirted by bracken-covered banks, and, leaping over a rocky bed, the water glittering like crystal in the mid-day sun. As one stands on the carriage drive, staff in hand, looking up the courses of these burns, clumps of birches and green spots are to be seen, making a charming contrast with red-blooming heather. The trees, planted by Nature, become more stunted as they rise higher above the bottom of the Glen. They seem to creep up the hill-sides as if to steal a march on the winter's storm. But they are arrested. The spirit of the tempest says to them—‘Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther’. The trees, dwindled down to mere shrubs, show the limit above which nothing but heath and Alpine plants can live. At last, even the heather dies out, and a carpet of moss is found, which becomes broken up in fragments, leaving bleached masses of granite exposed to the severity of the climate. But the bare scalps of mountains are not seen from the bottom of Glen Fiddich. Above, and stretching away beyond the natural forest, the mountains seemingly bear the heavens above one's head”.

Glen Fiddich is, in its way, famous for a visit paid to it by the Queen in the autumn of 1867—a visit described in “More Leaves from the Journal of a Life in the Highlands”. Her Majesty, who was accompanied by Princess Louise and Lady Jane Churchill, left Balmoral on the morning of Monday, 24th September, journeying by Gairnside, Tornahaish, Cock Brig, the Lecht, Tomintoul, Glen Livet, and Tomnavoulin. From this last point the record of the journey proceeds:—

“We drove on for an hour and more, having entered Glen Rinnes shortly after Tomnavoulin, with the hills of Ben Rinnes on the left. There were fine large fields of turnips, pretty hills and dales, with wood and distant high hills, but nothing grand. The day became duller, and the mist hung over the hills; and just as we sat down by the roadside on a heathery bank, where there is a very pretty view of Glen Livet, to take our tea, it began to rain, and continued doing so for the remainder of the evening. Lindsay, the head keeper, fetched a kettle with boiling water from a neighbouring farmhouse. About two miles beyond this we came through Dufftown—a small place with a long, steep street, very like Grantown—and then turned abruptly to the right, past Auchindoun, leaving a pretty glen to the left. Three miles more brought us to a lodge and gate, which was the entrance of Glen Fiddich. Here you go quite into the hills. The Glen is very narrow, with the Fiddich flowing below, green hills rising on either side with birch trees growing on them, much like to Inchroy, only narrower. We saw deer on the tops of the hills close by. The carriage-road—a very good one—winds along for nearly three miles, when you come suddenly upon the lodge, the position of which reminds me very much of Corndavon, only that the Glen is narrower and the hills just round it steeper. It is a long shooting-lodge, covering a good deal of ground, but only one story high. We reached it at half-past six, and it was nearly dark. Sir Thomas [Biddulph] received us, but we had missed the Duke [of Richmond and Gordon]”!

More was missing—the luggage; and it did not turn up even at one o’clock in the morning, when Her Majesty was compelled to go to bed under unpleasant conditions. “My maids”, she writes, “had unfortunately not thought of bringing anything with them, and I disliked the idea of

going to bed without any of the necessary toilette. However, some arrangements were made which were very uncomfortable, and after two I got into bed, but had very little sleep at first; finally fatigue got the better of discomfort, and after three I fell asleep". The Royal party remained two days in Glen Fiddich. On the Wednesday the Queen and Princess Louise went down the Glen, and had a look at Auchindoun, and on the Thursday they went up the Glen (on ponies) for about four miles. Her Majesty says:—

"The scenery is not grand, but pretty; an open valley with green and not very high hills, some birches, and a great deal of fern and juniper. After about three miles the Glen narrows, and is extremely pretty; a narrow, steep path overhanging a burn leads to a cave, which the Duke said went a long way under the hill. It is called the Elf House. There is a small space of level ground, and a sort of seat arranged with stones, on which Louise and I sat; and here we all lunched, and then tried to sketch. . . . Then we rode up to the left, another very steep and narrow path, for a short while on the brink of a steep, high bank, with the Fiddich below. We emerged from this ravine and came upon moors in the hills (the whole of this is "the forest"), and rode on a mile and a half, till near the head of the Livet, on the right of the Suidhe, a high, bare, heathery, mossy hill; Cairnna-Bruar to the left. Here we had a fine view of Ben Avon and Beinn a' Bhuid, and this was the very way we should have ridden from Tomnavoulin".

The return journey to Balmoral—by precisely the same route—was made on the Friday. There is a funny account in "The Round Table Club" of how the Glen Rinnes people turned out to see the Queen, and the feelings they experienced when Her Majesty "booed graciously":—"Fin Her Majesty fixed her een on's an' nodded her heid" (says "Saunders Macgregor") "I didna fin' the grun' anaith my feet, an' Eppie, puir creatur', maistly sat doon a'thegither. Fin she cam' till hersel', she said, 'Ay, ay, man, an' that's the Queen, is't?—jist like ony ither 'oman, a little wifie like mysel', nae muckle better dressed'".

AUCHINDOUN.

On the walk or drive up and down Glen Fiddich an ex-

cellent view is obtained of the ruins of Auchindoun Castle. They form, indeed, a prominent feature in the landscape, occupying, as they do, a commanding site—a limestone rock, 200 feet high, overlooking the Fiddich. The grim, gaunt walls, with their gaping windows, towering above all surroundings, have a somewhat startling effect, the contrast with the placid landscape of cultivated fields and wooded slopes being peculiarly strong; and this pictorial contrast enables one to realise how far we have travelled—and improved—since “the Gordons had the guidin’ o’t”. For

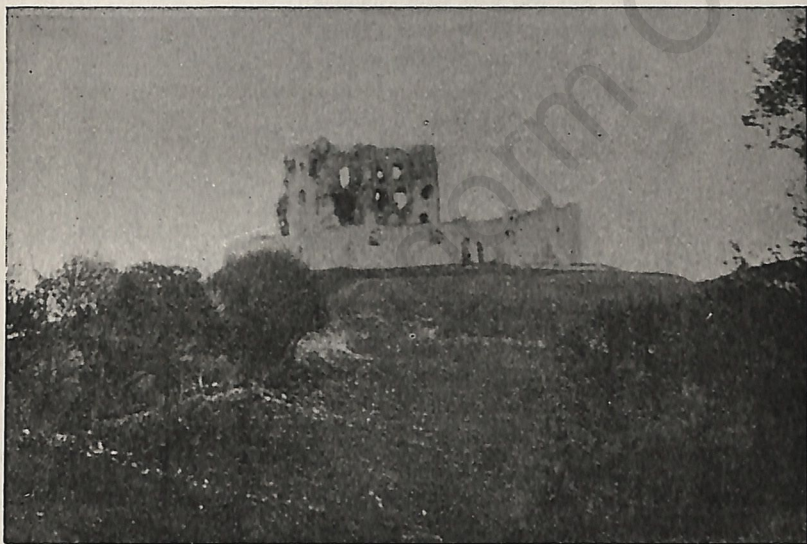


Photo. by

AUCHINDOUN CASTLE.

Mr. W. G. Melvin.

Auchindoun, after several vicissitudes of ownership, ultimately became a stronghold of a branch of the Huntly Gordons, and it was from this castle that Sir Adam Gordon, the sixth son of the fourth Earl of Huntly, sallied forth in 1571 to burn Towie Castle, in Strathdon. The story is told in the well-known ballad of “Edom o’ Gordon”, which the late Professor Veitch described as “one of the most natural and human-hearted ballads possible in the circumstances of the old wild life” :—

“It fell about the Martinmas time,
When winds blaw sharp and cauld,
Says Adam Gordon to his men,
‘ We maun draw to some hauld ’.

“What hauld, what hauld, my merry men,
Shall our encampment be ?
I think we’ll go to Towie house,
To see the fair lady ’ ”.

The dramatic incident of the tragedy that followed is, of course, familiar:—

“Then loud cried out the daughter dear—
She was both neat and small,
‘ O row me in a pair of sheets,
And let me o’er the wall ’.

“They rowed her in a pair of sheets,
And let her o’er the wall ;
But on the point of Gordon’s spear,
She got a deadly fall ” !

Auchindoun Castle itself was burned some twenty years later, it is said, in 1592—though the precise date is matter of dispute; and the burning is recorded in a rather poor ballad, the alleged antiquity of which is open to doubt:—

“ As I came in by Fiddich-side,
In a May morning,
I met Willie MacIntosh
An hour before the dawning.

“ Turn, Willie MacIntosh,
Turn, turn, I bid ye ;
If ye burn Auchindoun,
Huntly he will head ye ’.

“ Head me, or hang me,
That winna fley me ;
I’ll burn Auchindoun,
Ere the life lea’e me ’.

“ Coming o’er Cairn Croom,
And looking down, man,
I saw Willie MacIntosh
Burn Auchindoun, man.

“ Light was the mirk hour
At the day dawning,
For Auchindoun was in a flame
Ere the cock crawling ”.

Auchindoun is mentioned in a ballad, titled "The Battle of Balrinnis", descriptive of the battle at Alltacoileachan in 1594, already referred to:—

"Those Lords* kept on at afternoon
With all their weirmen wight,
Then sped up to the Cabrach soon,
Where they bade all that night.
Upon the morn, when day was light,
They raise and made them boune,
Intil ane castle that stood on height;
They called it Auchindoun".

The battle resulted victoriously for the "Lords", but disastrously for Auchindoun—

"This deed sae doughtilie was done,
As I heard true men tell,
Upon a Thursday afternoon,
Sanct Francis' eve befell.
Good Auchindoun was slain himsel',
With seven men in battell,
So was the laird of Lochenzell,
Great pitie was to tell".

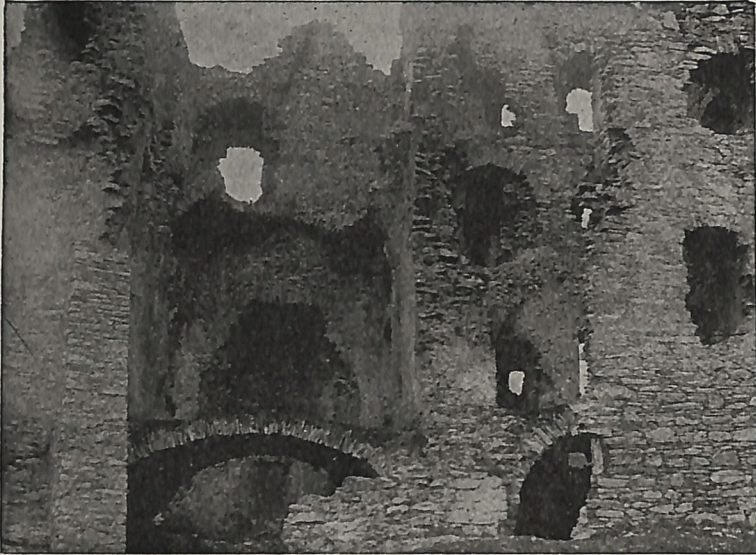
Mention is also made of Auchindoun in the ballad commemorative of the battle of Cromdale in 1690:—

"As I came in by Auchindoun,
A little wee bit frae the toun,
When to the Highlands I was boun',
To view the Haughs o' Cromdale,
"I met a man in tartan trews,
I speered at him what was the news;
Quoth he, the Highland army rues
That e're they came to Cromdale".

Auchindoun Castle, by the way, has a connection with a sensational episode in the history of Aberdeen—the "kidnapping" of the civic dignitaries in the Covenanting times (1644), when the lairds of Haddo and Gight and other "young Royalists" of the day carried off the Provost (Patrick Leslie), a Baillie, and the Dean of Guild. "Surely it is to be marked", the worthy Commissary Clerk Spalding wrote, "the like seldom has been seen, that so few

* Lords Huntly and Erroll.

men so pertly and publickly should have disgraced such a brave burrow, by taking away their provost and the rest,



AUCHINDOUN CASTLE—INTERIOR.

Photo. by

Mr. W. G. Melvin.

men of note, without any kind of contradiction or obstacle" ! The unfortunate city representatives were "taken and had to Strathbogie" (the Marquis of Huntly's seat) and "transported therefrae" to the Castle of Auchindoun, where they were kept close prisoners for five weeks until Argyle's march westwards made it prudent for the Gordons to set their captives at liberty.

DUFFTOWN.

Dufftown is conveniently situated for pedestrians who desire to ascend Ben Rinnes or Ben Aigan, to explore Glen Fiddich, Glen Rinnes, or Glen Livet, or to make excursions to the Cabrach or Speyside. Although it claims to be a "city", on the preposterous (and quite erroneous) notion that the parish in which it is situated, Mortlach, was a bishopric eight centuries before the town itself was called into being, it is little more than a village. It is pleasantly situated on a hill-top, with plenty of hill-tops around it,

notably the Meikle and the Little Convals; and it consists, in the main, of two cross streets, an old-fashioned tower, once used as a jail, standing at their intersection. Dufftown, in fact, dates only from 1817, being then founded by James Duff, fourth Earl of Fife—hence its name. Keithmore, two miles east of the town, was the property of Alexander Duff, whose eldest son, Alexander Duff of Braco, became the ancestor of the Fife family and the founder of its once extensive landed estates; they show you the tomb of this Duff—"Creely" Duff as he was called—in the Parish Church of Mortlach. The church is redolent of history of the legendary sort. A loyal Dufftownite will have you believe that this church was the "mother" of the Cathedral Church of St. Machar, Aberdeen, a Bishopric of Mortlach having preceded and subsequently been absorbed in the Bishopric of Aberdeen, the first Bishop of Mortlach having been appointed by Malcolm II. in 1010, and the fourth occupant of the see transferred to Aberdeen in 1136. The whole story is a fiction of Hector Boece, and has been completely demolished by modern investigation, antiquarians of acknowledged repute declaring that there never was Bishopric or Bishop of Mortlach. The church itself, however, is said to be—and probably with perfect accuracy—the oldest place of worship still in use in the north of Scotland. Its walls are believed to date from the eleventh century, and a mark on one of them is said to indicate the point from which, in accordance with a vow made by Malcolm, the church was extended "three spear-lengths". This pleasing story, too, rests solely on the authority of Boece. The Scots, according to this veracious chronicler, were engaged in a conflict with the Northmen or Danes on Dullanside, just below the church, and "being likely to be beaten, Malcolm looked up to the chapel dedicated to St. Moloc, and lifting up his hands prayed to God for aid, vowing that if it were granted he should erect there a Cathedral Church and found a Bishop's see". A Runic stone—the Stone of Mortlach—in a field below the church, is said to commemorate Malcolm's victory. In the neighbourhood of the church the Dullan flows through a pretty ravine;

there are curious rock formations known as the Giant's Chair and the Giant's Cradle, and a little waterfall called the Linen Apron. Near Dufftown, and particularly observable as the train approaches the railway station, are the ruins of Balvenie Castle, on an eminence a little below the confluence of the Fiddich and the Dullan. This edifice is said to have belonged successively to the Comyns, the Douglasses, and the Stewarts of Athole; the motto of the



BALVENIE CASTLE.

*Photo. by**Mr. W. G. Melvin.*

last-named family—"Furth Fortuin and Fil thi Fatris"—is inscribed on a scroll on the front of the building.

BEN RINNES.

Ben Rinnes is the one "mountain" of this region. A Club ascent of it was made on 28th September, 1891, and the following general description of the hill was given in a "monograph" issued at the time:—

"Ben Rinnes attains an altitude above sea level of 2755 feet—the highest hill in the district for many miles round. The summit culminates in a rocky protuberance known as the Scurran (or Sgoran) of Lochterlandich—Lochterlandich being the name also

of a farm about a mile and a half south-east of the "Scurran" in Glen Rinnes, the glen drained by the Dullan. Besides these "Scurran" there are one or two of note—the Scurran of Morinsh, fully half a mile to the west-north-westward; and the Scurran of Well, fully three quarters of a mile north-westward of Scurran of Lochterlandich. The mass of Ben Rinnes—sometimes called Bel Rinnes by the natives—is considerable, while the outline viewed from most points is graceful, the three rocky tops named giving variety to it. These tops are all composed of disintegrating granite, and resemble in that respect the rocky summits of Ben Avon and Bennachie".

The view from the summit is one of the finest and most extensive in the north of Scotland. According to one of the interlocutors in "The Round Table Club", it embraces eleven counties—Caithness, Sutherland, Ross, Inverness, Nairn, Moray, Banff, Aberdeen, Perth, Kincardine, and Stirling—and extends from the Pap of Caithness to Ben Nevis; and another of them describes it thus:—

"We can see here from Schichallion to John o' Groats--at least one hundred and twenty miles north to south. From east to west our view extends from Ben Alder to Buchan Ness, almost across the kingdom. What a vast and varied prospect! Hills, hills! Bennachie, the Buck of the Cabrach, Morven, Ben Aigan, the Knock Hill, the Tap o' Noth. Hills, hills! It were an endless task to name all we see in that grand panorama of mountains. Here one feels an elevation of soul, as well as of body. We look down upon the world—upon sea and land, and hill and dale—upon the works of nature, and upon those of men".

Reference should be made to an interesting article on "Sunrise on Ben Rinnes", by the late Mr. Allan Cameron, in a previous issue of the Journal (II., 233); and it only remains to mention the weather forecast associated with the hill—

"A mist on Ben Rinnes may wear awa',
Wi' a mist on Ben Aigan we're sure o' a fa'".