

A WEEK-END IN GLEN MUICK.

“ Lands may be fair ayont the sea,
But Hielan' hills and lochs for me ”.

LOCHNAGAR, Cairn Bannoch, and Broad Cairn have received not a little attention from Club members, but their glories are inexhaustible, and a long day on these heights admits of numerous and pleasant variations. We were fortunate in having Inschnabobart for headquarters; its situation as a base for negotiating the White Mounth leaves little to be desired.

As time was limited and impedimenta heavy, Sluie-vannachie was induced to hand over—possibly not without a certain misgiving—to a hill quartette, on a certain afternoon last August, a decent horse and an irreproachable dog-cart. The reins were presented to the Magistrate, who did not, it may be mentioned, quite disgrace himself on the box-seat, but the animal had evidently been in Glen Muick before, and was no stranger to the ford. “The merciful man” hurries no man's cattle, at least going up a glen; the pace, however, on the return journey was not quite so deliberate, for we had to catch the first train. But even then there was no cause for alarm, as seven stags we passed, just outside the south end of the Linn wood, did not think it necessary to move from a succulent patch scarcely thirty yards off the road.

The prospect of a long day on the hills generally entails a lengthened sederunt the previous evening; the present occasion was no exception to custom. After dinner a modest bowl of punch was brewed by the Accountant, and soon thereafter smoke and conversation filled the little parlour. We discussed the Gaelic language—perhaps the more freely as none of us understands it; we revelled in Highland lore; and as for mountaineering experiences, an outsider might have taken us for Alpine guides who had not confined their professional feats to their own country! We varied our

enjoyment by a late walk to the head of Strath Girnock, for the evening was tempting, and the perfume of pines and birches irresistible. The bloom of the heather, too, quite captivated us. The world seemed very good then, and the recollection of that walk is a pleasant memory of our little holiday.

We were up betimes the following morning, and discussed leisurely and seriously a sumptuous breakfast, the foundation of the day's work being oatmeal in one shape or other. The hillman climbs on his breakfast, for, as a rule, he has given up carrying meat sandwiches. Jam sandwiches, cunningly made, are now preferred for lunch—a function which need not be completed at one halt. We entered the Lochnagar path in the best of spirits. The Eagle's Eyrie passed, a bee-line was made across Clashrathan, and we feasted on blae- and crow-berries—the former an exceptionally rich crop. Nor were we without a good many tufts of white heather, which seemed more abundant than usual.

Making for the Saddle between Cuidhe Crom and Meikle Pap, we descended to the loch—mist coquetting with the summit of the crags the while. A pleasing incident was afforded by a little herd of hinds with fawns as they picked their way over the boulders on the right shore of the loch. We had unwittingly stalked them to pretty close quarters, and so had an excellent opportunity of admiring their grace and nimbleness. Across scree and over incidental crags, we rounded the head of the loch, and made for the mouth of the Black Spout. There was much to look at and admire. The Botanist was in clover, finding great spoil. Parsley Fern has surely a nursery here: it looked so temptingly beautiful that we plucked more than we carried home, its delicacy being partly lost when the plant was torn from its mountain setting. We also observed with interest "London Pride", all the more so when the Botanist told us that it is known in Ireland as "Dublin Pride"—Scotland being most unaccountably left out in the cold! Fortunately (as the Advocate reminded us) there are several Scottish M.P.'s in the Club, so doubtless this grievance will in due time receive proper attention. The trenches and gullies were eloquent

to us, while higher up the weathering of the rocks afforded matter for speculation. The Magistrate picked up a fair specimen of a smoke-coloured Cairngorm among some recently-fallen *debris*, and as the others were not so fortunate, they naturally suggested the virtues of Socialism—but in vain!

Near the top of the Black Spout a jutting rock is encountered; here our party divided, taking right and left respectively. The rock seemed insignificant enough, yet it sufficed to keep the one half of us in doubt for several minutes as to the safety of the other. For suddenly those on the right heard a rumbling and a roaring, succeeded by a fall of *debris*. No answer was returned to their shouts of inquiry—as they were not heard; so there was a certain relief when the *debris* was not followed by a man or two. It appeared that the “explorers”, finding themselves faced by a bank of wet clay, had retraced their steps, with the result that they sent down stones and gravel which had been loosened by the recent rains.

The plateau gained, we held across to the Poacher's Well and lunched. A man with a spade would be welcome there, and in half an hour would materially improve the outflow of the spring. As we rested we saw that the Cac Carn Beag was holding a reception, a large company having just come up from Ballater. The weather was not propitious for a perfect prospect from the summit, but we had hardly turned our faces Braemar-wards when the sun came out, and the day really began. Our programme had not been firmly drawn out, and so we accused the Accountant, who had now taken the lead, of simply following a shepherd who was on his way to Glen Callater with half a dozen lost sheep, which we had assisted in finding. So a halt was called, and the strolling hillmen took counsel together on the heather. As we sat we looked towards the head-streams of the Muick, and the Advocate referred to the grim tragedy which—if tradition is to be believed—took place there. One of these burns is known (in Gaelic) as the Burn of the Two Birch Trees; there a laird of Abergeldie overtook two caterans with some of his cattle. He dealt out summary justice to

the reivers, for the trees were suggestive to one who had the power of pit and gallows.

We now came down from our 3250 feet of elevation, and, as the spirit of the mountains was on us, four big boys let loose from school, scampered to the Dubh Loch Burn, and lolled on its banks, or lay in its broad, rocky channel, where it is uncovered by water. But Cairn Bannoch had to be ascended, and so with fresh vigour we soon started on a go-as-you-please climb to its summit. Some of us kept as long as possible by a lively runnel, for the sun was broiling, and cooling drinks were grateful. The shadow of the cairn was appreciated, while numerous cloud-berries and other trifles (such as the Least Willow) in the immediate vicinity seemed to excite the Botanist.

The walk thence to Broad Cairn is over an excellent golf course, smooth enough in many places for "a coach and four". We kept pretty much by the county march—on our right the head-streams of the South Esk, on the left the Dubh Loch (not visible here). The precipices, "stark and grim", of this tarn are not, of course, seen to advantage from the south; we had to indulge in backward glances for them, as well as for a peep of the loch itself. We were not favoured with an appearance of the Spectre Stag; the day was yet young:

" And to this hour, old shepherds say,
When moon and star succeed to day,
Is seen upon the Dubh Loch's scaur
The Spectre Stag of Lochnagar".

We made short stay on Broad Cairn, but if time had permitted we should have crossed over to Loch Esk, which lay so temptingly a "lang mile" to the south. The first part of the descent towards the east is over boulders, but that accomplished, it may be taken at a run. But when Loch Muick first came into view, far below us, we had to halt, for the remembrance of such a scene must be well secured in the treasure-house of one's memory. The Journal, however, has already described this neighbourhood; we content ourselves, therefore, with saying that the first glimpse of Loch Muick was the grandest feature of a notable day. As

we neared the end of our circular mountain tour we were the better able to enjoy the magnificence of nature, for we felt "fitter" than when we started, and the buoyancy of our spirits astonished even ourselves. Verily, mountaineering is something more than a pastime.

In the stillness of the evening the Allt an Dubh Loch and the Glas Allt made a pleasant noise as we made for the Black Burn by the Bachnagairn path. The Glasallt Shiel looked charming—that goes without saying; it is nowhere seen so well as from the upper track on the south side of Loch Muick. The loch was without ripple, and as the sun settled down in the west the home-stretch was glorious.

We raced down the zig-zag to the Black Burn Bridge, the Advocate leading, the Accountant a good second; but the former occasionally left the course, ignoring the path—a circumstance which brought the Botanist to the front with a little anecdote. An Englishman, with his stalker, was returning to Glen Muick after a day's sport at Bachnagairn. The gillie had naturally had a severer day's work than the sportsman, who, as it happened, was a capital walker. The two kept closely together in the homeward walk, and the Highlander soon began to realise that he was being challenged. Darkness was coming on, and so he bided his time. When the zig-zag above the Black Burn Bridge was reached the gentleman was allowed, apparently, to get in advance; nevertheless, when he got to Lochend, he was astonished to find his stalker sitting at the door of the little shiel. Donald had, favoured by darkness, dispensed with the zig-zag, and thus was able to get ahead of the Sassenach.

We kept "a trot for the avenue", spite of our long day. Indeed, as is generally the case with hillmen, we returned at a smarter rate than we had cared to use in the morning; but, then, we wanted dinner, and Miss Cooper knows how to cater for hungry men.

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