

BEN CHONZIE.

By WILLIAM BARCLAY.

“To sit on rocks, to muse o'er flood and fell,
To slowly trace the forest's shady scene,
Where things that own not man's dominion dwell,
And mortal foot hath ne'er or rarely been ;
To climb the trackless mountain all unseen,
With the wild flock that never needs a fold ;
Alone o'er steeps and foaming falls to lean ;
This is not solitude ; 'tis but to hold
Converse with Nature's charms, and view her stores unrolled”.

—BYRON.

BEN CHONZIE (“the hill of the cry of the deer”, or “the hill of weeping”) was my destination, when on a beautiful autumn morning I left Crieff at 10 a.m. A mile from Crieff on the Comrie turnpike the road for Glen Turrett strikes off to the right, and leads through a fine avenue to Glen Turrett Distillery. A short distance beyond this is the entrance to the charming grounds of Ochtertyre, which, thanks to the present owner, Sir Patrick Keith Murray, are open to the public every day, Sunday excepted. Our road now crosses the Turrett, and follows the left bank of the stream until we come to the falls of Barwick. Entering the small gate, we can view the falls. The large gate is the entrance to Glen Turrett, while the broad road conducts us past some cottages, and thence into Ochtertyre grounds. Immediately on entering the gate the road begins to ascend, and continues so until we are within sight of Loch Turrett.

About half a mile up a small notice board directs us to the Falls of Turrett; and well worthy of a visit they are. A footpath leads us down to the water's edge, just opposite the great boiling cauldron. A small bridge spans the stream just under the falls, by which we can return through the grounds, forming a capital little circular tour for a Saturday afternoon. But it was too early in the day for me to think of turning; so I got back to the road again, and

was not long in reaching the open moorland. Looking backwards a glorious prospect meets the eye. The whole of Strathearn lies spread out before us, with the town of Crieff in the near foreground. As I got higher up I saw that the hills around Loch Turrett were shrouded in mist—not a very promising sight, as I was bound for the highest of them. In another half-hour I had reached the loch itself. Loch Turrett (one mile by a quarter of a mile) has been made classic by Burns in the song “Blythe, blythe, and merry was she”, and in the poem “On Scaring some Waterfowl on Loch Turrett”. A particular rock on the western side of the loch is still pointed out as “Burns’ Rock”.

The loch, from which the town of Crieff derives its water supply, has a situation something like that of Loch Avon, only it has not the wild appearance of the latter. It is surrounded on three sides by towering heights, namely:—Carn Chois (2571), Auchnafree Hill (2565), and Blue Craigs (2535). Glen Turrett Lodge—a castellated shooting lodge—is situated at the north-eastern corner of the loch; and here the road ends. The people at the lodge advised me to follow the burn right up to Lochan Uaine (1523), and then to strike up one of the corries. Once on the ridge, they said, I should have an easy walk to the summit. Taking their advice, I followed a small track until it led me into a piece of soft boggy ground, full of peat holes, in the vicinity of this little lochan. From here I struck up the corrie on the right, and walked along to the cairn on Moine Bheag. From this hill, which forms, as it were, the keystone of the glen, you obtain the finest view of Glen Turrett, being able to trace the burn from its source, right away down the glen, until it is lost in the woods at Ochtertyre. Retracing my steps, I crossed a piece of boggy ground, then, passing a small cairn, I walked along the top of the precipice that adorns the southern face of the Ben, and thence to the summit (3048), which I reached at 2 o’clock. The cairn at one time had been a pretty large one, but part of it has collapsed, and lies in ruins. Two fences, forming, no doubt, the march between the neighbouring estates, meet here.

By this time the mist had all rolled away, and I had a glorious day. Looking down the glen, I could follow the road, winding along the loch side, and over the moorland, until the eye finally rested on Crieff. From here right round to the head of Loch Earn was a blank, everything being blotted out by the all-encompassing heat haze, while from there on to Ben Lawers was one of the finest sights I ever beheld. Nothing was to be seen but the tops of the highest hills sticking up like so many islands in a great sea of mist. The most familiar tops I noticed were Ben More, Am Binnein, Beinn Laoigh, the twin peaks of Ben Cruachan, Beinn Dorain and Ben Dheiceach, while above Killin I had the Tarmachan cliffs. The next stretch, to the north, was entirely free of mist or haze, and was the only direction in which I had an uninterrupted view, comprising Ben Lawers, Carn Mairg, Schichallion, Tarragon Hill, Ben Vrackie, Ben Dearg, and Beinn a' Ghlo, with the great mass of the Cairngorms behind. From Ben Vrackie southwards was another great blank; in fact, I had no view at all to the south. Should the traveller have no desire to return by the way he has come, it is but a step from here down to Glen Almond, through which he may pass on the one hand to the shores of Loch Tay, or on the other to the Sma' Glen. From the Sma' Glen, by turning either to the right or to the left, he may return to Crieff, or go on past Amulree to Aberfeldy or Dunkeld. Leaving the cairn, I kept along the western slopes, and dropped down to the Turrett Burn, a little above the shooting lodge.