

## GLENCOE.

BY GEORGE DUNCAN.

IN a well-known passage, Macaulay describes Glencoe, the Glen of Weeping, as "the most dreary and melancholy of all the Scottish passes, the very Valley of the Shadow of Death. Mists and storms", he says, "brood over it through the greater part of the finest summer, and, even on those rare days when the sun is bright and when there is no cloud in the sky, the impression made by the landscape is sad and awful".

Macaulay's description is, perhaps, surcharged with gloom. Glencoe has its bright days, when the dark frowning precipices look less dark, and the green of the valleys and the hillsides seems greener, and when even Loch Triochatan, that "most sullen and gloomy of mountain pools", lies smiling in the sunlight. But that a certain undefined feeling of melancholy, due as much perhaps to the haunting memories of the awful tragedy of the Massacre as to the actual desolation of the scenery, is apt to steal over one, few visitors to the Glen will, I think, venture to deny.

Glencoe is, indeed, full of historical and romantic interest. Near Ballachulish Pier, on Loch Leven, the landing-place for the Glen, is shown the scene of the Appin Murder, and the site of the gibbet where "James of the Glens" suffered is not far off. It is still told, too, though with some characteristic Highland reserve, how unjust his condemnation was, and you may even be able to find out that the real murderer of Glenure was a Cameron from Mamore. South of Loch Leven is the country of the Stewarts of Appin, redolent of the adventures of Alan Breck and David Balfour. Then, out in the Loch, are the green Eilean Munde, the old burying-place of the Macdonalds of Glencoe, and, at Invercoe, is the hamlet of Carnoch, still inhabited by descendants of the ancient sept. Every-

where, up and down the glen, one finds memories of the Massacre—here the spot where the Chief's wife was outraged and died, and there the side glen by which some of the fugitives escaped. And through all runs the fair Cona of Ossian, most poetical of Highland streams.

As a climbing centre Glencoe is unique. Nowhere will you find finer climbing ground within easier reach of a comfortable hotel. Clachaig, one of the most hospitable of Highland hotels, is, indeed, as a writer on Glencoe has said, almost too comfortable from a strictly moral standpoint. You just step from its door on to the hill; and, after the experience of a holiday in Glencoe, the usual Cairngorm walk of ten miles or so before reaching the base of operations, is apt to breed a distinct spirit of discontent.

The glen is one of the narrowest of Highland glens. Its whole length is only about six miles, but in that narrow compass is to be found some of the finest climbing in Scotland. To the north of the glen lies the Aonach Eagach range, a long serrated and pinnacled ridge, reminding one of the rocky ridges of Skye. Along its full length it is fully three thousand feet high—the glen itself, it will be remembered, being only about two hundred feet above sea level. Everywhere the ridge is deeply indented with gullies. Here and there you may find a stone shoot that seems to run straight from the top of the ridge to the hollow of the glen. But most of the gullies are of a very different nature. Some of them—notably the deep gully of Sgor nam Fiannaidh opposite the hotel—seem to be quite unclimbable. And, by others of them, a descent from the ridge may be a matter of no small difficulty. The writer has a vivid recollection of a descent by one of these gullies in the dusk of an autumn evening. It seemed plain going at the top. But after we descended a few hundred feet, the gully took a turn, which brought us face to face with a perpendicular drop of from sixty to a hundred feet, with a waterfall bounding over it. There was no negotiating this, and we had to climb out of the gully into the next one, down which we worked our way for some time, only to be again faced by another impracticable drop. Another

traverse out had to be made, and so an easier descent was found. In places the ridge is extremely narrow, and the deep indentations of the gullies form the rocks into what, viewed from the foot of the glen, are sometimes most fantastic shapes. "The Chancellor", as one of these rocks is called, from its supposed resemblance to a Lord Chancellor in his wig, is a standing "object of interest" to the coach passengers who pass through the glen, in hundreds almost, every day in the tourist season.

The chief summits of the Aonach Eagach ridge are Sgor nam Fiannaidh, Meall Garbh, and Meall Dearg, each of which is well over 3000 feet high. The view from the ridge, especially to the north, is very fine, Ben Nevis and the surrounding giants being full in view. The prospect to the south is blocked by the opposing mass of Bidean nam Bian on the other side of the glen.

But the finest climbing is to be found on the south of the glen. Most people are familiar, from photographs, with "the three sisters", Faith, Hope, and Charity, as they are called, the three great buttresses that form the southern boundary of the glen. These are outposts of Beinn Fhada and Stob Coire an Lochan. The greatest of them is the dark Aonach Dhu, which overhangs Loch Triochatan, and far up on which is the narrow keyhole-like slit known as Ossian's Cave. The Ossian legend is, indeed, strong in Glencoe. The coach conductor shows the confiding English tourist the very terrace on Aonach Dhu by which Ossian walked from his cave to his shower bath in one of the waterfalls of Corrie Beach! Further east, on the same side of the glen, are the big, burly "Shepherds of Etive", the Buchaille Etive Bheag, and the Buchaille Etive Mhor, which dominate Kingshouse and the dreary Moor of Rannoch.

Behind these ramparts, Bidean nam Bian (3766), the highest mountain of Argyllshire, holds his sway. From the Glencoe Road one can just see, by looking up Corrie Beach, the tops of the rocky buttresses, inky black, even in the sunniest day, which project into the corrie, just below the summit. The easiest route to the top, from

Clachaig, is perhaps by way of An't Sron, a steep, conical hill, right behind the hotel. An't Sron is between two and three thousand feet in height, and its steepness makes the climb a stiff one in a hot day. But when its summit is reached, all that follows is a gradual ridge ascent round Corrie Beach to the peak of Bidean, which lies just at the head of the corrie. Another route is to climb into Corrie Beach from the glen, and thence make the ascent (should one eschew the rocks) by one of the numerous stone shoots by which the dark face of the corrie is everywhere scarred and seamed.

Corrie Beach itself is a magnificent spectacle—one of the finest examples of a purely rock corrie to be found anywhere. As one toils into it from the Glen road, there are on the left the steep slopes and terraces of Aonach Dhu, and, as one gets further up into the corrie, the sharp peak of Stob Coire an Lochan, while An't Sron and the jagged pinnacles of Stob Coire nam Beith form its right-hand boundaries. Then far at the back of the corrie are the great buttresses of Bidean. Everywhere is black rock, there is no vegetation, and, as may be imagined, the walking is of the roughest possible description.

Corrie Beach may be called the paradise of scramblers. At every part of it there is admirable climbing, difficult and easy. The ascent of the buttresses of Bidean, in particular, was for season after season vainly attempted by some of the most eminent members of the Alpine Club; and it is to the credit of Scottish mountaineering that the first, and, as yet, the only ascent of the great right-hand buttress, the "Church Door Buttress", was made recently by a party of members of the Scottish Mountaineering Club. The left-hand buttress, so far as can be learned, has not yet been climbed. Such climbs are, however, for the few. But he would be a curious mountaineer for whom Corrie Beach offers no suitable climb at some point.

The view from Bidean on a clear day is superb. Ben Nevis stands out, of course, most prominent to the north, and, to the south what will probably catch the eye first are the grand peaked outlines of Ben Starav and Cruachan.

Nearer at hand are the Buchaille Etives, Clachlet, and the great mass of Stob Ghabhar, while on the west the combination of mountain and sea views is unspeakably fine.

Such are a few of the *notabilia* of Glencoe. One might speak of Sgor Dhonuill and Sgor Dhearg, the mountains of Appin, or of the fantastic rocky pinnacles—most certainly unclimbable—that line the steep eastern face of Stob Coire an Lochan. But Glencoe is a place to see and to stay in. Its slopes may be severe—the average angle of ascent seems twice as steep as the ordinary angle of a Cairngorm climb—and the walking may not be smooth. The weather, too, it must be confessed, is at its best a trifle uncertain. But, as I have said, there can be no better climbing centre than Mr. Gourlay's hospitable hotel at Clachaig, and, beyond and apart from the unexampled excellence of the climbing, and the varied enchantment of the views, there is always an indefinable fascination about Glencoe, which will draw one back to it again and again.