

BALLATER TO LYNWILG.

BY WILLIAM SKEA.

It was in lovely July weather that the forenoon train from Aberdeen set us down at the familiar little terminus at the foot of Craighendarroch. We had partaken heartily of the Athenæum's well-served "golfers' luncheon" before leaving the city, so all we had to do in Ballater was to sling satchel on shoulder, "shape our course", and "put our best foot foremost", to use the phraseology of the united services. Our preliminary spin was from Ballater to Inverey—a fairly effectual leg-stretcher. But then we had all that travellers could desire—high spirits, good weather, Highland air, and congenial company. It being one of the "objects of the company" (*vide* all prospectuses) to break ground wherever possible, we chose the south road, this leafy switchback highway being new to some of us.

To anyone in love with Nature the south Deeside road offers absorbing tit-bits at every step. There is always the invigorating scent of pine trees, overborne for a moment only by the redolence of birches and limes, while passing that ancient seat of a Gordon sept, now a demesne of Queen Victoria—quaint old Abergeldie. In the higher underwood that skirts the road, heather, juniper, blaeberry, bracken, and thorn-rose are everywhere prominent. Lichens cling to every dyke and stone. Now and again the delicate swaying streamers of the pendulous birch touch our bonnet as we pass under them, and the mountain-ash with its load of newly-formed berries presents a contrast to the deep green of the foliage. Wild flowers, grasses, and ferns grow close up to the path, and here and there form a beautiful carpet for the traveller's feet. Of feathered game we saw pheasant, partridge, black cock, and snipe. The song of every variety of native bird may here be heard, from the rasping staccato of the homely rook to the tender trill of the robin. We stopped to drink from a spring at the foot of a stone fence—evidently a recognised drinking-fountain for the wayfarer—when out of a mossy

joint of the dry-stone dyke there popped a wren, no bigger than our thumb. We examined the hole, which was just head-height above the well; it contained a tastefully built nest, in which, doubtless, Jenny had reared a little family.

Daylight was waning when we left the hostelry at Inver, after partaking of a well-earned meal. It was too dark to distinguish the Clunie Stone, and the Lion's Face was lost to view as we pushed along. "The visitors" in Castleton and Auchendryne were beginning to put out their lamps for the night when we passed westward. The last five miles of our journey might meet the Biblical description of the mortal years that exceed three-score-and-ten, being accomplished by labour and sorrow. We were glad, towards midnight, to throw off our shoulder-straps in our tiny "digs"; and we went to sleep "without rocking". The man who has tramped 26 miles of Highland road has earned a night's repose as honestly as any village blacksmith.

Just before five o'clock we rose refreshed, but with our muscular system in a rather dissatisfied mood; nor was this revolt of Nature quite reduced to the *statu quo ante bellum* when we had passed the Linn on our second day's journey. Our programme for the day included Glen Dee, Cairn Toul, Braeriach, the Larig, and a drive through Rothiemurchus to Lynwilg.

By the way, the woods about the Linn—indeed, all the woodlands from the Linn to the Quoich—form a happy hunting-ground for the entomologist. We have netted a great variety of winged creatures in these woods, including several dragon-flies of handsome proportions. And the botanist will find many treasures in the corrie of Allt an Leum Uisge. The Glen Dee road bridges this burn, about two miles beyond the Linn. The burn, which rises between Carn Mor and Leachd nan Uidhean, has its source at an altitude of 2000 feet in the boggy plateau out of which rises Sgor Mor, from the summit of which a glorious view of the Cairngorms and Beinn a' Ghlo is sometimes obtained. But, tell it not in Gath—at anyrate, not at Mar Lodge—when you ascend these heights, for they are the

“sanctuary” of Mar Forest. Besides being rich in ferns, lichens, and every variety of mountain plant, this corrie and its surroundings are exceedingly picturesque in the features formed by rock and falling water.

After passing the Chest of Dee there is not much that is striking in the scenery of Glen Dee, and it is not until a turning of the glen brings the Devil's Point into view that the pedestrian's interest revives, after the dull monotony of the preceding hour or two. At mid-day we were abreast of Glen Geusachan, and Charlie Robertson saluted us from the door of his hut (Corrour) as we passed on the opposite side of the Dee. We thereafter made tracks across the glen, and, fording the Dee, prepared for the ascent of Cairn Toul. The weather was still favourable, and we chose the line of the Soldier's Corrie for our ascent, perhaps the most direct, if not the easiest approach to the cairn. The work proved stiff enough, and, between heat and sheer fatigue, one of the party had to lie prone on the mountain side for fully half-an-hour. Of heat, however, we had not long to complain, for, on reaching the “stone region” (2500 feet), the temperature suddenly fell, and in a few minutes, notwithstanding that it was the 15th of July, we were buffeted by a violent snowstorm. Later, when climbing among the huge stones near the summit, the snow gave place to hail, which lashed our hands and faces.

We could not see beyond a few yards; to consult our chart was to destroy it, and only by “dead reckoning” did we succeed, after some difficulty, in finding the cairn, in the lee of which we found some shelter from the storm. Happily, we had not stood here for twenty minutes when the storm abated, and for some time the sun shone out with great brilliancy, and so clear was the atmosphere that we could see the mica shining in the stones on the top of Carn a' Mhaim on the opposite side of Glen Dee. Alas! this happy state of affairs meteorological was not of long duration. In a few minutes mist clouds came surging up the mountain sides and blotted out every bit of ground except that on which we trod. Once upon Cairn Toul summit we had

intended to follow the winding crest to Braeriach, there to descend into the Larig. But the mist brought with it bewilderment, and, after several vain attempts to carry out this programme, we were obliged to "cut" Braeriach, and get down into the Larig as quickly as possible. In our descent we made many stumbles, the first landmark that we recognised being the pale green water of Lochan Uaine, into which we had almost stepped unawares. We scrambled down to the Garchory, and ultimately found ourselves in the Larig late in the afternoon.

In passing between Ben Muich Dhui and Braeriach we left the mist behind us, and now there opened up before us an expansive glen, rich in verdure, and evidently most prolific in red deer. We must have seen a thousand head ere we reached the end of the path. At this point came the greatest disappointment of the day. It was here we had arranged for the Lynwilg conveyance; but instead of 9 o'clock it was now 10.30, and we saw the fresh wheel-marks where the conveyance had waited. Now, however, it had gone, and we "were left lamenting". Darkness fell on Rothiemurchus Forest; here and there there are clearings, and at one of these we were brought up by a sudden exclamation from one of the party—"Hullo! here's Coylum Bridge". We all looked, and in the indistinct light believed we saw something resembling the roadway and parapets of a bridge, though the scene was unfamiliar. Two of the party set out in the direction of the so-called bridge, but the white parapets and road were only openings among the trees. But the real Coylum was at last reached, and we stepped out with renewed vigour towards Aviemore. We arrived at Lynwilg, wet and footsore, not to say thoroughly exhausted, at 1.30 a.m. We knocked loud and long at the inn before getting any response; at last a window-sash was lifted, and a lady *en déshabillé* asked us what we wanted. In silence we were admitted to a back parlour, and there regaled with milk and scones. We slept that night—or rather what was left of it—as only weary travellers can sleep.