

THE VIEW FROM BEN MORE AND AM BINNEIN.

By WILLIAM BARCLAY.

“On high Ben More green mosses grow,
And heath-bells bud in deep Glencroe,
And copse on Cruchan-Ben”.



AM BINNEIN FROM BEN MORE.

THE Perthshire Ben More (3843) is so situated that it can be approached either from Glen Dochart or from Balquhidder; the former is the shorter and the better route—Crianlarich station being only about three miles from the base. Our rendezvous is Ben More Farmhouse, from which the hill rises in a steep unbroken slope. It is generally advisable not to leave the road until the burn is crossed, as some difficulty may be experienced should it be found in spate. From Luib the ascent is more gradual, but it is considerably longer.

On the first Saturday of July I alighted at Crianlarich at 10.30 a.m., and 11 o'clock found me at the Farmhouse, right under the shadow of the Ben. The lower reaches were extremely soft and grassy; indeed, it was not until I was about half-way up that I could walk with any degree

of comfort. The route followed was up the eastern side of the huge corrie scooped out of the northern face of the hill. Slowly I crept up the side of the hill, every step bringing fresh peaks into view, until I had before me a magnificent panorama of mountain, moor, and loch.

Away down at my feet I could trace the rippling waters of the Tay, right from its source on Beinn Laoigh, past Crianlarich, on through Lochs Dochart and Tubhair, until it was finally lost on the ample bosom of Loch Tay. On the opposite side of the glen, Beinn Dheiceach (3074) and Meall Chuirn (3007) presided over the stretch of low, brown hills lying between Glen Dochart and Glen Lochay, the deep brown of the heather being relieved by the sparkling of numerous lochans scattered here and there over the moorland. The long grassy slopes left behind, ground of a more rocky nature was reached. Two hills on the south-western horizon now demanded attention; these were the distant Paps of Jura. The walk to the summit, which was reached at 12.45, was exceedingly easy.

The western face of the summit is composed of huge rocky protuberances, split here and there into fissures, where one may find shelter in a storm. The cairn is not on the highest part of the hill. Three years ago I was here, but under somewhat different atmospheric conditions—in the midst of a terrific snowstorm. But this is one of those ideal days that one meets with occasionally: clear and bright; not too warm, the heat of the sun being modified by a gentle breeze.

The view on such a day as this is naturally very extensive and varied, partly Highland and partly Lowland, extending from Ben Nevis to the Lammermuirs, and from the Sidlaws to the Island of Mull. Looking southwards, a small part of the prospect was blotted out by the cone of Am Binnein. Away in the distance, over the eastern shoulder of that hill, I could see—with the glass, of course—a town, with many chimneys and spires, which, on consulting the map, I found to be Paisley. A strip of water, corresponding to the Clyde, lay sparkling in its immediate front. Looking over the western shoulder of Am Binnein,

Ben Lomond (3192) occupied the centre of attraction, his scarred and shattered sides having a very inviting appearance. A little farther west, and overlooking narrow Loch Long, Ben Arthur (2891), Ben Vorlich (3092), and the rest of the Arrochar Alps presented a scene truly Alpine in character. Over the summit of Ben Lomond, on the western side, I could discern in the extreme distance the stately head of Goat Fell (2866), 57 miles away. Looking over the break between Beinn Laoigh and the head of Loch Lomond, the distant Paps of Jura rose high and clear beyond the sparkling waters of the Sound. In the nearer foreground were the mountains to the east of Glen Falloch—Stob Garbh (3148), Cruach Ardran (3250), Beinn Tulachan (3099), Beinn a' Chroin (3101), and Beinn Chabhair (3053). Over Crianlarich, Beinn Dubh-Chraige (3204), Beinn Os (3374), and Beinn Laoigh (3708) gave rise to the head-streams of the mighty Tay. A little to the north the high flat mass of Beinn Bhreac-liath (2633) and Beinn Udlaidh (2529) completely filled the triangle between Glen Orchy and the Oban and West Highland railways. Farther on, Ben Cruachan (3611) and neighbours shut out the view in that direction. Away on the horizon, over the summit of Beinn Laoigh, Ben More (3185) in Mull, 55 miles distant, was sharply outlined against the western sky. Northwards still, the great labyrinth of mountains at the head of Glen Etive and Glencoe rose up for inspection; overtopping these, and right over the north end of Loch Tulla, the king of Scottish mountains reigned supreme.

The next stretch, to the north, was one great sea of mountains, ranged one behind the other, as far as the eye could reach. I will not attempt to describe the individual tops in this direction; a far more experienced eye than mine would be required to carry out that task with any degree of accuracy. To begin with, I had the great chain of mountains running up the eastern side of Strath Fillan, and encircling the head of Glen Lyon, starting with Beinn Chaluum (3354), Beinn Chaorach (2655), Beinn Odhar (2948), and running right on to Beinn a' Chaisteil (2897),

Beinn Dorain (3523), Beinn an Dothaidh (3267), Beinn Achallader (3399), Beinn Creachain (3540), and Ben Vannoch (3125). Away in the north I could single out Ben Alder (3757) from amid a whole host of giants. In the foreground, and right opposite, I had Beinn Dheiceach (3074); over Killin were Meall Ghaordaidh (3407) and Meall Tarmachan (3421); next came Ben Lawers (3984), the giant of Perthshire, with Carn Mairg (3419) and Schichallion (3547) peeping over his shoulder. Over these, in the extreme distance, I could see the faint outline of the Cairngorms, nearly 60 miles distant. This was the only direction in which there was the slightest particle of haze, and I learned afterwards that it was a bitterly cold day on Ben Muich Dhuì.

Looking over Loch Tay, a huge mass of mountains, which I took to be Lochnagar (3768), Glas Maol (3502), and neighbours, showed patches of snow still lingering in their corries. To the south of Loch Tay I had the great hump of Ben Chonzie (3048), and right over the hollow of Loch Earn I could see, in the vicinity of Perth, two or three summits of the Sidlaws—Murryshall, Kinnoull, with St. Mary's Monastery, and Moncrieff Hill. Next came the whole range of the Ochils, from Abernethy right on to Stirling, Benacleuch (2363) and the two Dumyats breaking the monotony. Overtopping these were the Lomonds, in Fife, 50 miles distant. In the middle distance, Ben Vorlich (3224), and his rugged neighbour Stuc a' Chroin (3189) presented their well-known figures; a little farther round was Ben Vane (2685), and then Ben Ledi (2875) with its long ridges sloping away down to Loch Vennachar. The Kilsyth and Campsie Hills also showed face over the Menteith Hills. Farther west, Ben Venue (2393) stood guard over Loch Katrine. Looking down the valley of the Teith, I could see Stirling snugly reposing 'neath the shadow of its hoary castle. To the east, Wallace's monument on Abbey Craig formed an imposing pile. A little to the west was a great cloud of smoke, which I found to proceed from the ironworks in the neighbourhood of Falkirk. Beyond Stirling was the

broad bosom of the Forth—bridled by that triumph of engineering, the Forth Bridge—stretching right away to the ocean, the white pillar of the Inchkeith Lighthouse standing sentinel amid its sparkling waters. Looking over the Forth Bridge, at particularly bright intervals, I had disclosed to view the castle and spires of “Auld Reekie”, backed by Arthur’s Seat and the Lammermuirs, and a little to the west, the gentle undulations of the Pentlands.

Between Ben More and Am Binnein there is a dip of 1000 feet, over broken ground, covered with loose stones; at the bottom I came upon good water, so I rested a few minutes and had lunch. The distance, as the crow flies, between the summits is a little over a mile. There is no cairn on Am Binnein, the highest point (3827) being marked by three stones lying together. The view is practically the same as that obtained from Ben More, with the exception of Goat Fell, which is shut out by the intervening peak of Ben Lomond. But a much more extended view is got of Ben More and the other mountains of Mull. Looking backwards, the rocky protuberances on the summit of Ben More are seen to advantage.

From Am Binnein a ridge runs right away down to the head of Loch Doine in Balquhidder. I followed this ridge to Stob Coire an Lochain (3497), then struck eastward to Stob Creagach (2966), thereafter descending to the foot-path in Monachyle Glen, which leads past Monachylemore to the Balquhidder road between Loch Doine and Loch Voil. A pleasant walk in the cool of the evening, by the romantic waters of Loch Voil, brought to a close one of the finest days I have ever experienced on the hills. A visit was paid to Rob Roy’s grave in Balquhidder Churchyard, and the journey continued to Lochearnhead station, where I got a train at 9 p.m.

An iron cross at the foot of Cuidhe Chrom of Ben More marks the spot where, on 3rd January, 1874, Mr. D. Bower Mitchell, merchant, Dundee, was killed. He and Mr. Cannon started from Crianlarich Hotel about 11 a.m. on that day, leaving the turnpike at Benmore farm. They

duly reached the cairn, where they had lunch. The weather at this time was clear on the low ground, but occasionally mist crept over the top, somewhat obscuring the view. After a rest the two friends began the descent, and when about 800 feet from the summit, and while walking on parallel lines twenty paces apart, Mr. Cannon turned to one side and saw that Mr. Mitchell was slipping on the snow. Mr. Cannon warned him not to do this as the place was dangerous; but Mr. Mitchell replied that he could not help it. These were the last words he was heard to utter. Immediately afterwards, on again turning to see how he was getting on, Mr. Cannon observed that Mr. Mitchell had disappeared. The body was recovered the same night at the foot of the precipice.