

LOST ON CAIRNGORM.

THE concluding sentence of a Note under the above title in Vol. I., p. 260 of the *Journal* is: "It would be difficult to imagine a more badly equipped or a more mismanaged hill excursion from start to finish than the above". This was written of the doings of a young Grantown company, but last September another Grantown party risked their limbs and lives in an even more wanton manner. The recklessness of those in charge in these cases is difficult to explain, and can be fully appreciated only by experienced hillmen. The thoughtlessness of the excursionists of 1894 may be excused on account of their youth; but not so that of the more recent adventurers. The amateur mountaineer who undertakes to lead a mixed company to the top of any of the Cairngorms, especially when young girls are in his temporary charge, has a grave responsibility, and must make his dispositions accordingly. We should say that he must make a start from the bottom *before* mid-day, and provide himself with a map and compass, it being of course presumed that he knows how to use each. He is not entitled to assume that mist will not appear till he has conducted his charge to the bottom.*

A party of twenty ladies and gentlemen drove and cycled from Grantown to Loch Morlich on 13th September last. Glenmore Lodge was reached at ten o'clock, but not left till noon—four ladies, however, preferring to remain below. Tea was to be ready for the climbers at 4:30, so they did not under-estimate their capabilities. The top of Cairngorm was reached about three o'clock, mist being entered into in the vicinity of the cairn. Apparently little attention had been paid to the nature of the ground as the cairn had been neared, for they were not able to recognise or remember the side on which it had been approached. The wind was therefore adopted as guide for

* See the last paragraph of page 326.—Ed.

the return journey. Occasionally the wind *does* blow in one direction for several consecutive days even on the summits of the Cairngorms, but it also frequently indulges in rapid journeys round the compass. However, it did lead the party down—but on the wrong side, though they were ignorant of that fact. They only knew that, following running water, they found themselves near the edge of a precipice. They had descended towards Loch Avon at the most dangerous point; had they been more to the west there would have been a safe descent by the Coire Raibert Burn, more to the east by The Saddle. As it was getting dark, the party held upwards again, halting at a shingle and boulder-strewn patch. Their feet were wet, and they had with them absolutely nothing to eat—everything had been risked on the afternoon tea arrangement. A rough dyke was erected as some slight shelter for the night, but the temperature did not permit of a long-continued lack of motion, even though the gentlemen parted with some of their raiment to the ladies—all wraps having been thoughtfully (?) left below. The party marked the close of the “day” by praise and prayer; we would fain hope that the leaders asked forgiveness for the great wrong they had done those dependent on them.

Shouts, whistles, and yells were occasionally indulged in, in the vain hope of rescue; the mist was even worse in the morning, and rain fell. A start was, however, made soon after 5 a.m., but the running water was again found to lead only to precipices. At 7 a.m. one of the party had the misfortune to slip on a boulder, receiving an ugly gash on the forehead. There was, however, help at hand, as there were no fewer than three medical students in the company. This accident, coupled with the general unfortunate position, had a depressing effect, and another night on the hill seemed not improbable. A wounded ptarmigan was captured in case the involuntary fast should have to be prolonged for another day. A consultation was held between eight and nine o'clock, and again prayer was made. Soon thereafter the mist partially lifted, and the lost party imagined they were

alongside the Nethy, but they were soon able to recognise Loch Avon. They estimated they were 300-400 feet above the loch, to which they slowly and carefully descended, probably by the Feith Buidhe of the Stac an Fharaidh. When they had passed the lower end of the loch, and had decided on following the Avon to Tomintoul—an extraordinary resolution—they heard a shout on the slope to their left, and their rescuer appeared.

As hour after hour passed at Glenmore Lodge without the return of the hill party, considerable anxiety was felt for their safety. At 8 p.m., as it was evident that they could not descend without some difficulty, Mr. Hector M'Kenzie, the head forester, sent three ghillies, James Munro, Lewis Grant (1), and Lewis Grant (2) to the top of Cairngorm with a lantern. They returned at 1 a.m. without result. These men, along with Mr. M'Kenzie, had to leave at 5 a.m. for a grouse drive at Dunachton—Mr. Cooper being lessee of that moor as well as of the deer forest of Glenmore. Dunachton was reached at 7 a.m., when Mr. Cooper, whose sympathy was of a practical nature, on being informed of the non-return of the climbers, sent his men back to Coylum Bridge in his motor car. Mr. M'Kenzie and the ghillies started from Glenmore Lodge, accompanied by two gentlemen who had arrived in search of their missing relatives. Two search parties were formed for the rocks above Loch Avon—one to descend to the Shelter Stone and return by Coire Lochan, the other to return by Mam Suim and Rebhoan. The latter party consisted of Mr. M'Kenzie and Lewis Grant (2). Before setting out Mr. M'Kenzie ordered telegrams to be sent to the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar, and to the forester at Inchrory. He sent a man on horseback to W. Cameron, the "Watcher" at Rebhoan, directing him to go up the Garbh Allt (Nethy) to Loch Avon; and also a message for assistance from an adjoining forest—but this request received no attention. Such a plan of campaign was almost bound to be successful, and the Rebhoan "Watcher" had the good fortune to pick out the lost party with his telescope, finding them about a mile below Loch Avon.

His supply of food was eagerly devoured, and stimulants were given to such as required them. A snap-shot was then taken of the group, and thereafter, Cameron leading, Rebhoan was reached, *via* the Garbh Allt, about 6 p.m. The effects of the long exposure were evident, except in the case of the youngest member—a twelve-year-old boy. A waggonette picked up the party near Glenmore Lodge.

Had the weather been stormy the result to the ladies and the weaker members would have been very serious. It is such hare-brained excursions as these that bring discredit on hill-climbing, besides causing anxiety to friends and relatives, and expense to those on whom falls the work of rescue. Cairngorm, though it is over 4000 feet in height, is one of the easiest and safest mountains to climb we know, when the sun shines; but to those lost in the mist it is one of the most dangerous.