

## EASTER AT AN TEALLACH.

BY GEO. T. EWEN.

NOT many Sassenachs get so far afield as Wester Ross for the short Easter holiday, but those who brave the discomfort of long railway rides and coach drives thither will be abundantly rewarded. Neither E. A. Baker nor I had paid a winter visit to Scotland, and one very wet day last October whilst on the way to a certain cave in Derbyshire the project was discussed and carried unanimously. After two hours in the aforesaid cave, which contained its maximum quantity of water, thoughts of crags, gullies, and snow slopes gave place to the more mundane considerations of dry clothes and tea, and further discussion was adjourned *sine die*. Until a few days before Easter I thought I should be unable to make the trip, but the unexpected happened, and at the unholy hour of 1.30 a.m. on Wednesday, the 30th March, I met Baker at Carlisle *en route* for Dundonnell. After leaving Perth we had glorious views of the Grampians, and as the sun was shining brilliantly I grew unduly optimistic. But when Baker solemnly assured me that during ever so many trips to Scotland he had never had really fine weather, I began to "hae my doots". From Garve we intended to coach to Braemore, sleep the night at the lodge, and then have a long day on the Fannichs on the way to Dundonnell. On inquiry at Garve, however, we learned that the lodge at Braemore had been uninhabited for a couple of years, and not being able to make certain of other accommodation we wired for a trap to meet us at Braemore, and reached Dundonnell early in the



evening. The outstanding features of the drive were the magnificent views of Ben Wyvis, which carried a huge quantity of snow, of Ben Dearg (3547), and of the whole range of An Teallach, which when seen shortly after leaving the "Junction" is one of the finest mountain pictures in the British Isles. We spent half-an-hour viewing the falls of Measach, which should on no account be missed.

Baker's evil genius had evidently accompanied him as usual. The weather broke in the night, and when we turned out next morning a terrific wind was blowing, and there was every prospect of snow, and plenty of it, on the hills during the day. The only information we had regarding An Teallach was Messrs. King and Munro's article in Vol. III. of the *S.M.C. Journal*, which gives a most accurate account of the range, and was of great assistance to us. Having decided to make for Glas Mheall Mor (3176), the most northerly peak, we followed the capital path which leads from Auchtascait almost to the foot of the mountain. The rocks of the north-east ridge by which Messrs. King and Munro ascended in 1893 were badly iced, and we decided therefore to ascend by the north face, and a start was made upon an apparently easy snow slope. The snow hardened as we went upwards towards a small buttress of rock, the leader cutting steps most of the time. The rocks here were also badly glazed, but at the third attempt a likely route was found, though a small pitch of unusual difficulty was only surmounted after sundry gymnastics by Baker. Half-an-hour's careful going brought us to the north-east ridge, about 400 feet below the summit. On the ridge the wind was terrific, and blew the now rapidly falling snow in all directions. We got a glimpse of the grand ridge between Bidein a' Glas Thuill and Glas Mheall Liath, but the details thereof, dear to the heart of any cragsman worthy of the name, were obscured by the blinding snow. We saw them from below a day or so later, and were much impressed by the climbing possibilities the north face of this ridge offers. After a short halt for lunch, during which I sat on the



lee side of my companion, we pushed on to the summit over easy snow slopes. The small cairn had evidently seen better days, and had eventually reached the bed rock of misfortune, for its component parts were scattered over a wide area. Sgurr Creag an Eich (3475), the most westerly peak of the Teallachs, looks grand from this point, and will undoubtedly afford great sport for enterprising climbers. The clouds to the north lifted a little, and we could make out Ben More Coigach (2438), Cul Beg (2523), Cul More (2786), and Suilven (2399), the latter very disappointing as it is seen broadside on.

A short, rocky ridge leads to another summit (3001), which has not yet received the dignity of a name. Seen from the west it is uninteresting, and scarcely deserves the distinction of being marked a separate mountain, but from the corrie below appears a sharp, conical peak. Whilst we were descending to the next col some 200 feet below, the snow again came on, but it was decided to try and reach Bidein a' Glas Thuill, the summit of which was some 600 feet above us. Under ordinary conditions and in ordinary weather the ascent would be perfectly easy, but we found it far from being so, loose, irregular blocks lying at a steep angle, and here and there short, rock ridges, the whole thickly plastered with hard snow and ice, whilst the covering of new snow was not yet deep enough to give a decent foothold. Utilising the rocks whenever possible, cutting a step every now and again, and keeping away from the heavily corniced ridge, we made fair progress, and soon after four o'clock stood by the side of a very respectable cairn on the highest point of the group, 3483 feet above sea level. The wind blew the snow in every direction, and made the top anything but a desirable place for a halt. We waited some time, however, being anxious to obtain a near view of the other peaks of the range and of an alternative route down, but fate was against us, and we had to depart without seeing anything. There was never any question of going on further, as the weather was about as bad as it could be, and neither of us cared to descend by any of the



gullies, which we could make out from time to time. The descent to the col took longer than the ascent, both of us having slight falls, owing to the new snow covering the icy slopes of older material. In trying to get across a wide patch of snow the upper layer gave way, and by means of a "stomach" glissade I reached a point 80 feet below. The next moment Baker joined me by means of a similar performance, for in leaning over to cut a step his foot slipped and down he came. Two bruises, both acquired by Baker, were the whole of the damage, though the changing mechanism of my camera, which was in Baker's rucksack, was put out of order, but this was not found out until later. We crossed the ridge leading west from the unnamed peak close to its summit, and ran down easy snow slopes until we reached the stream. A tramp along an old moraine brought us to the path again, and the comforts of the Inn were reached about seven o'clock. The route we followed in our descent is much the easiest line of ascent, whether Glas Mheall Mor or Bidein be the objective. Had we kept more to the right when starting to climb the former we could not well have overlooked it, and should have probably missed the most interesting part of our climb.

Next morning the wind was blowing harder than ever. In the glen it was raining hard, and everything over 2000 feet was covered with a mantle of fresh snow. Serious climbing being obviously impossible, it was decided to explore the resources of the lower levels, and in particular the gorge marked on the map Corryhallie, which our host assured us was quite out of the common. Leaving the high road at the third milestone from the Inn, we descended a steep, heathery slope for a short distance, and found ourselves on the top of the gorge, at this point only about a dozen feet wide. A rickety plank bridge gave access to the other side, and enabled us to look down into a narrow vertical passage about 200 feet deep, at the bottom of which the Strathbeg River flowed at a tremendous pace. In places we could see the water white with foam, but so much do the walls of the gorge over-



hang that from no point is it possible to get a complete view. A huge rift at right angles to the main passage contained a waterfall which would make the fortune of any so-called glen in a tourist centre. The rock is a gneiss, and is moulded into most fantastic shapes. It reminded me somewhat of the gorge of the Aar at Meiringen in Switzerland, though it is of course on a much smaller scale. In a dry season it might be possible to enter the gorge a mile lower down and get into its highest recesses, though great difficulty would be experienced in negotiating the water-worn pitches.

We renewed our acquaintance with An Teallach next morning, making for the south end of the range. A capital though little used cart track to Strath na Shellag leads almost to the foot of Sail Liath (3104 feet), the only peak of the range which cannot boast of beauty of outline. We left the track too soon and crossed the burn, and in consequence had some rough scrambling over a quartz outcrop before the foot of the south-east ridge of Sail Liath was reached. This ridge is very uninteresting, and, being exposed to the wind, we took the north-east face, which was an unbroken snow slope and likely to provide us with a good sporting route. Steps had to be cut the whole way as we traversed upwards towards a tiny ridge. Rejoicing in the possession of freshly nailed boots, I'm afraid the steps I cut were rather small, and Baker, who was not the fortunate owner of new nails, had to re-cut most of them. It was a nasty place in case of a slip,

“For if we had blundered  
We had shot down five hundred,  
With never a stop  
To a thousand feet drop”.

The credit of being the author of so picturesque a rhyme belongs solely to my companion, who spent most of his evenings at Dundonnell in turning out numberless verses of a similar character, which were carefully transcribed into the visitors' book, in order (as I suppose) to harrow



the feelings or enlist the sympathies of other patrons of the Inn.\*

The worst part of the climb was not the step-cutting or the possibilities in case of a slip, but the wind, which generally came from the least expected quarter and almost blew us bodily from our foothold. The only thing to do was to dig the axe well in and hold tight, and both of us were glad when the main ridge and then the summit was reached. The former had a splendid cornice, which in some places was quite eight feet broad. We were rewarded for our exertions by the finest view during our visit. To the north Ben More of Assynt (3273) looked splendid, as did also the lesser peaks surrounding him. Canisp (2779) could be plainly seen, but we were doubtful whether we saw Suilven or not. Ben Dearg (3547) and Eididh nan Clach Geala (3039) were the features of the

\* Baker did not confine himself to the visitors' book, for a Dundonnell post card told us:—

“ The S. M. C. J.  
 Arrived safe yesterday,  
 Shewing Baker and Ewen,  
 The short road to ruin.  
 Right up from the balloch  
 To the peaks of An Teallach,  
 Snow storms and blizzards  
 Blew right in our gizzards.  
 We cut up the face  
 At a rather slow pace ;  
 Wind and snow at the top of it  
 Made a cold shop of it.  
 We took off the rope  
 To come down the snow slope,  
 But the ice-covered rocks  
 Took much skin off our houghs.  
 The snow was so hard  
 That we could not glissade,  
 And we tramped down together  
 Thro' wet bogs and foul weather,  
 Till we came to the glen  
 A pair of bruised men,  
 With only a bag of  
 Three Munros to brag of”.

—Ed., C. C. J.



eastward view, but best of all was the panorama of snow-clad peaks to the south. Skye was hidden in the clouds, but Slioch (3217), Sgurr Ban (3194), and Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair (3250) looked thoroughly Alpine in their mantles of fresh snow. Ben Dearg Mhor (2974), however, was the finest of the lot. The grand precipice face on the north of this peak reminded me greatly of Lliwedd on Snowdon, though it is much higher, and the solemn effect of the crags was heightened by the dark clouds of a storm which was quickly gathering behind. If ever a peak deserved to be over 3000 feet that peak is certainly Ben Dearg Mhor. The Fannich Hills, topped by Sgurr Mor (3637), completed a mountain picture of rare beauty, though the heavy clouds gave the scene a somewhat sombre tint. We descended a little towards Corrag Bhuidhe, but the certainty of a heavy storm and the high wind counselled prudence, so we turned tail and made for Coire Toll an Lochan by means of a snow gulley. Neither Baker nor I had seen anything quite so fine as this corrie presented, nor did we imagine that such a wealth of climbing remained to be done even in Scotland. There are at least a dozen first-rate buttresses in this corner of An Teallach alone, all of which will give a thousand feet of continuous rock work, and one or two, such as the Corrag Bhuidhe buttress, nearly fifteen hundred feet. What the gullies are like in summer I do not know, but I should imagine they will provide most excellent sport for the most hardened rock-climber. The buttresses we adjudged to be difficult, that of Sail Liath exceptionally so, but until a party has actually been on them it is perhaps unwise to prophesy. Loch Toll an Lochain was half frozen over, and with the dark rocks and dazzling snow made a fine picture. This corrie, we learned, was the sanctuary of Dundonnell forest, and any climbing must be done before the end of June. The evidences of ancient glaciers are very distinct, *roches moutonnées* and moraines being numerous. The terminal moraine is especially well defined. On leaving the corrie we kept fairly high, hoping to avoid the boggy ground, following



the route recommended by Messrs. King and Munro. Very little is gained, however, by so doing, and the route we adopted in the morning would, I think, be the quickest and best to take when returning to Dundonnell from Sail Liath or from Coire Toll an Lochain.

Thus ended our wanderings on the Challich Hills, which delighted us as much by their beauty as by their climbing possibilities. It is already settled that we shall go again and try some of the climbs, which we are firmly convinced will be found almost equal to the Coolins or Ben Nevis, and probably more difficult than either, since Torridon sandstone is not so good as, say, the Skye gabbro. We marked down one or two special "tit-bits" we hope to subdue—that is, if the members of the Cairngorm Club do not get there before us.

Dundonnell Hotel affords most comfortable quarters for anyone visiting the district, and we received every attention from Mr. and Mrs. Urquhart.