

## EARL'S SEAT.

BY REV. A. GORDON MITCHELL.

ON 9th August, accompanied by Rev. Mr. Scrymgeour, of the Presbyterian Church, Jersey, I set out for Earl's Seat, the highest of the Campsie Fells (1894). The morning was bright and promising, the air sharp and exhilarating; and although the sky was by no means cloudless, the country was flooded with almost uninterrupted sunshine. Proceeding for some hundred yards or so along that portion of the Balfron road now known locally as the King's Mile from the fact that our gracious King, when Prince of Wales, drove backwards and forwards there for some time admiring the view of Loch Lomond and the heights that form the sky-line beyond it, we left the high road and struck across country to the south. The first part of the walk was easy, being over hay stubble and grass. We paused a moment to admire the floral symbol of our native land as abundantly represented in one of the fields through which we passed. Its "bush of spears", its purple crown of such exquisite softness and beauty, its capacity for disseminating its species over the earth by means of its flying "down" mark it out as a singularly appropriate emblem of a country noted for the valour of its men, the beauty of its women, and the ubiquity of its children. It was no doubt bad farming, but true patriotic sentiment, that made Robert Burns turn "the weeder-clips aside and spare "the emblem dear". Safely escaping from "barbed wire entanglement", we came upon a group of Scots fir, the grass being dotted with a few flowers of the scabious and ragged robin species. Then passing through a field very much overgrown with rushes, we swerved slightly to the east to avoid a field of oats. Emerging from a field in which I noticed the yarrow in flower, we began our tramp through the blooming heather, in which for some distance we waded almost knee-deep. I called the attention

of my friend to the recumbent giant of the Garlocks, as the portion of the Campsie range now before us is locally called. The conspicuous little eminence of Dumgoyne is a little way from the feet of the giant.

One thing that struck us was the scarcity of bird-life. The grouse were sitting close, as if aware of the proximity of the 12th, with its guns and shooters; and we saw not a single covey. We came upon a deserted nest littered with the remains of the sucked eggs. Our eyes were attracted to a pretty little water-course, of which the bright living green was relieved by a border of maroon-coloured moss. We now reached Machar Glen, and having descended into it, were soon fording the waters of the beautiful Machar Burn. On the east a number of little glens, densely wooded, dip down to their junction with the valley of the main stream. Looking up the burn we saw the water of the Spout of Calibae gleaming in the sun. The Machar Glen terminates in a striking cup-like depression, luxuriantly wooded. Having crossed the burn that trots so winsomely over its mossy stones through its glen of birch and hazel, we got into talk about the remarkable absence of birds. This led to Mr. Scrymgeour's saying that the mavis in Jersey has a much richer, fuller note and a more rapturous song than his brother in this country. It has struck me that in turn his note is richer here than in the Orkneys, where I was for some time a minister. Having ascended the eastern slope we looked down on the sun-flooded glen. The twinkle of the birchen foliage contrasted with the quiet green of the hazel. The former reminded one of the "*ἀνὰριθμον γέλασμα*" of the classic poet. The birch appeared to receive the kiss of the sun with exuberant joy. The hazel received it with joy equally deep and genuine, but more sober and sedate. Continuing our walk over the moor we raised at intervals three brace of grouse. Passing over a wide expanse of burnt heather we got fairly into the upland pasture. My foot sank (and a good part of my leg) into a sheep-drain, but I was none the worse of the consequent fall. The same thing happened to me twice thereafter before the con-

clusion of our walk, but with no bad results. Our climb now began in earnest, and, after ascending some little way, we were glad to rest beside a mountain stream and open our parcel of sandwiches. The view on which our eyes now rested is more easily seen than described. Looking northward over Strathendrick our prospect was bounded by "Scotland's northern battlement of hills". We remarked on the excellence of the pasture of the slopes, and our eyes rested for a while on the undulating pastoral scenery in the foreground—rank grass mingled with rushes, shorter grass, some of it bleached, and here and there patches of living green. The Endrick was for the most part concealed in its valley, emerging for a short distance into view as it approached the loch. Directly north of us lay Balfroon village. Fine masses and belts of plantation diversified the aspect of the strath. A little to the north-east rose the towers of Ballikinrain, the seat of Sir A. E. Orr-Ewing, surrounded by the splendid wood planted by Sir Archibald's father. To the north-west we had a fine view of Buchanan Castle, near the loch side, the seat of the Duke of Montrose. Resuming our ascent we were soon walking over an extensive plateau, where there is a remarkable deposit of peat. Directly to the south of us rose a ridge running up a slight eminence at its eastern extremity. We climbed this eminence, and then did a little mild ridge-climbing. Proceeding eastward, leaping over peat bogs when practicable, and going round them when not, we walked over three undulating ridges, the middle one marked by a cairn. We raised a single grouse, its partner rising a little later on; and saw our first and only whaup. I observed specimens of a plant similar to one I saw in flower last June upon Mount Tinto. The flower is like that of wild strawberry. The autumnal-tinted leaves reminded us of those of the vine. There is nothing striking about the summit of Earl's Seat, on which we were soon seated. It is a gradual grassy slope marked by a cairn. East and west along the crest of it runs a wire fence, and stretching up the northern slope is the march fence between the Boquhan

and Ballikinrain estates. We had now leisure to survey the extensive prospect which we commanded. To the south lay Glasgow, of which we could make out little more than the University spire and a forest of chimney stalks, standing out black against a heavy and widespread pall of smoke. The horizon, however, was clear, and, looking over the city, we saw a mountainous outline which we took to be that of the Isle of Arran. To the east we observed the Meikle Bin (1870), the next in height to Earl's Seat of the Campsie Fells. Mr. Scrymgeour thought the distant heights to the east were the Lomonds. From time to time the waters of the Forth glittered in the sun, and we could clearly make out the Alloa Bridge. Further to the west lay the Ochils. The Gargunnoch hills were concealed behind the shoulder of the Fintries. The nearest ridge to the north was that of the Kippen hills. To our right the valley of the Endrick narrowed between the ridges of the Fintries and the Campsie Fells. To the north lay the Lake of Menteith, backed by the Menteith hills, rising to the height of Craigmore (1271). The long, low ridge on the sky-line in the north-east was that of Slymaback. Following the sky-line round the northern to the western horizon we saw the following mountain summits—Uam Var, Ben Gulapin, Craig Dearg, Ben Voirlich, Stuc-a-chroin, Ben Ledi, distant mountains in Glenlyon, Craig Dhu, Ben Venue, Ben A'an, Ben Coira (Loch Ard), Stob-a-choin (north of Loch Katrine), Ben More, Am Binnein, Ben Tulachan, Ben Chroin, Ben Chabhair, Ben Oss, Ben Dhu Chraige, Ben Lui, Ben Lomond, Ben Vrack, Ben Ime, Ben Amon, Ben Arthur, Corrie Hill, Ben Donich, Ben Dubh, Doune Hill, Corrach an Ian, Ben Aich, Ben Verrach, and Ben Torran. Nimmo, in his "History of Stirlingshire" (3rd ed., vol. I., p. 316), says Earl's Seat rests upon sandstone, and is capped with trap. I examined a fragment of the rock. It weathers to a dull red, and the interior is a bluish grey. It is characterised by considerable density. We descended by the "Wee Corrie", the whitish rotten rock of which Mr. Scrymgeour compared to marble. A vast heap of detritus in the middle of the

gully reminded me in appearance of the moraine of a glacier.

Any account of an ascent of Earl's Seat which did not make reference to the view of Loch Lomond from the summit would be incomplete. Other sheets of water one sees—Menteith, Chon, Arklet,—but Loch Lomond is the eye of the landscape, lying there in her majestic expanse, "with all her daughter-islands about her". A striking feature in the neighbourhood to our left as we turned round for a few moments after descending the hill was the Corrie of Balglass, a great semi-circular basin, with apparently precipitous sides.

Reaching the Mount farm we were glad of some milk and biscuits, hospitably provided for us by Mrs. Johnman, wife of the head shepherd. Thence we continued to descend by the farm road, stopping for a little to inspect the remains of the outer wall of Balglass Castle, which is said on one occasion to have sheltered Sir William Wallace. Mr. Scrymgeour mentioned the interesting fact that his family claims to be descended from the Standard-bearer of the immortal hero. Skirting the edge of a wood, and drinking in the delicate fragrance exhaled from flowering limes, we came upon the public road. On our right we passed Old Ballikinrain, where Thomas Carlyle sojourned as the guest of Mrs. Anstruther. The district is not without association with other great men. Napier, the inventor of Logarithms, resided for some time by the side of the Endrick at Gartness. Near the manse of Killearn, where I write, rises an obelisk of millstone to the memory of George Buchanan, a native of this parish. It was dusk by the time we reached Killearn village after a very enjoyable excursion.