

THE TULCHAN HILLS.

BY REV. GEORGE C. WATT, B.D.

It cannot be said that the name of Tulchan is unfamiliar. The royal visits to Tulchan Lodge have made the name well known to the general public. But while most newspaper readers know the name of Tulchan, the Tulchan hills themselves are, I fancy, not specially well known, save of course to sportsmen and shepherds. I have crossed them often; I have on different occasions traversed them from end to end, but only on one occasion, and that years ago, have I met any one upon them. On that occasion one of my sons and I met a party of three hill climbers, so we were five in all, a quite unwonted assembly on these heights. The Tulchans are fairly high hills, roughly between 1700 and 1800 feet, but they are not so high as to attract the lover of great mountains seeking a new scene for putting forth his energies, nor are they so steep and rugged as to invite the attention of those who like a spice of danger in their climbing. They are not wooded hills now, although I have found traces of old woods on them; but yet they are fine hills from which one has splendid views, and where the climber can spend hours in wandering without undue fatigue from summit to summit. They are within a few miles of my home, and when I cannot get away to the great mountains I find that they afford a wonderfully pleasing substitute. A rather bright little boy of the wandering class to whom I once gave a halfpenny to buy a "piece", remarking that I was sorry I had not a penny, observed, "A ha'penny's aye a ha'penny". It was a sage remark, and in the spirit of it I may say, "A hill is always a hill". Time has been when I have climbed with considerable delight the Broad Hill at Aberdeen and played at its being a mountain. If one cannot get Cairngorm it is something to get Cairn Kitty.

The Tulchan Hills, if one is to speak very precisely, are of course just the hills between which the Tulchan burn flows. But these hills themselves form part of an elevated tract of country, roughly triangular in form, whose southern angle may be said to be about Easter Dellifure in Cromdale, two miles east by north of Castle Grant, whose eastern angle is well towards Black's Boat in Knockando, and whose northern angle is just north of Loch Dallas, through which the boundary between Edinkillie and Dallas passes. From south to north this elevated tract extends for about ten miles, while its breadth at its broadest part is about seven miles. The longest side of the triangle is the western one. To this elevated tract, with its many summits, it is customary and convenient to give the name of the Tulchans or Tulchan Hills. The Tulchan range is, I fancy, an extension towards the north or north-east of the Monadh Liadhs, with which it is connected by the high land lying east and south of Lochandorb. It is largely the watershed between Spey and Divie, but it contains also the sources of the Lossie, which takes its rise in Loch Trevie, a lakelet in the northern portion of the range.

Perhaps the best view of this hilly region can be got from the top of the Knock of Braemoray, but it can be seen to much advantage from many other points in Edinkillie. A very delightful view is to be had from the side of the Highland Railway at the Divie Viaduct, which is a mile or so south from Dunphail station. There one looks up the valley of the Divie, with its abundance of graceful birches, and over the quaint old Bridge of Bantrach, beloved of artists, over one or two upland farms, to the range of heathy slopes, rising up, not indeed into rocky heights, but into softly swelling rounded summits. On an October day, with the rich colours of autumn on the trees in the foreground and in the background, the fine chain of hills standing out clearly against the eastern sky, one could wish no fairer sight. I am a lover of great hills, and no hill of the Tulchan group reaches to the height of quite 1800 feet. Yet there is a grace about the range as

seen from the west that always fascinates me, and that no familiarity renders less attractive. And when the heather is in bloom, and the mountain sides are rich with its purple glow, one approaching them would have a dull eye indeed were he blind to the beauty before him.

There are many routes by which access to these hills can be had. One very good way of approaching them is from Advie station on the Great North of Scotland Railway. Quite near this station there is a bridge across the Spey, and one has only to cross this bridge and make his way to the Tulchan burn, which falls into the Spey a little below it, and begin his ascent. The burn—a picturesque rapid streamlet, coursing down its rocky bed—is itself a sufficient guide, but there is a track right along the side of it up to its sources. On the north side of this burn towers the fine hill known as the Larig, 1783 feet high, its sides gashed and scarred by winter torrents. One may, of course, select the point from which he would prefer to ascend this hill, but it is best to go right to the head of the burn before doing so. By going to the head of the burn one is on a kind of plateau, from which one can conveniently visit several of the summits. The ordinary climber will not find it hard to visit at least the Larig and Carn Ruigh-an-uain, and to return to Advie station in four or five hours. Living as I do in Edinkillie, I usually make my ascents from the westward, although I have climbed them from the other side on many occasions. One coming from Dunphail station, and passing near Edinkillie manse, would find the way to the hills a trifle long perhaps—it is about four miles—but there are houses along the route, and one can consequently get directions how to go. After proceeding from the station about a mile on the road to Grantown one turns sharply to the left, passes under the Divie Viaduct, goes past the farms of Beachans and Dallasbraughty, turns to the right, keeps on past the high-lying farm of Tomcork and the moorland farm of Berryburn, and finds oneself at the foot of the range. The road ends at Berryburn, but there are paths leading up through the glen, of which Cairn Kitty forms the southern side.

This is a heathery glen, with one or two lochans, leading to Loch Trevie; one does not need to go as far as this tarn, but I often do so, and climb the hill from its side. Cairn Kitty is 1711 feet high, and three parishes, Dallas, Edin-killie, and Knockando, meet on its summit. There is a fine view from the top of Cairn Kitty. Ben Rinnes, one of the most conspicuous of our northern mountains, is seen towering away to the south of east, and ranging north from it the Convals and Ben-Aigan are in full view. Looking westward one has before him the Knock of Braemoray, the Cawdor and other Nairnshire hills, and the lovely valley of the Divie. To the north he has the Moray Firth and the hills beyond it, not to speak of the lochs and the lower heights which are close at hand. Near the top of Cairn Kitty the cloud-berry is fairly abundant.

From the summit of Cairn Kitty it is a walk of nearly two miles to that of the Larig, from which also there is a fine and somewhat different view. One looks well down the Tulchan glen to the valley of the Spey, and on among more distant hills, one of which is, I think, Corryhabbie. One evening in the past autumn I was on the top of the Larig when the sun went down over the Nairnshire hills. It was somewhat cloudy in the west, and there were no brilliant hues of sunset, but there was a certain grandeur in the great red disc as it sank away amid the vapours. Fortunately the moon was up before the sun went down, for the surface of the plateau, although not rocky, is rough and broken, and walking in the dark would have been sufficiently disagreeable, not to speak of the uncertainty of it all. It is told of a worthy Edin-killie man long ago that, having lost his way in these hills, and having wandered about all night, he found himself early in the morning beside a cottage, and asked the mistress, an early riser evidently, where he was. "Ye're jist here, sir", was the laconic and truthful, if somewhat unsatisfying, reply.

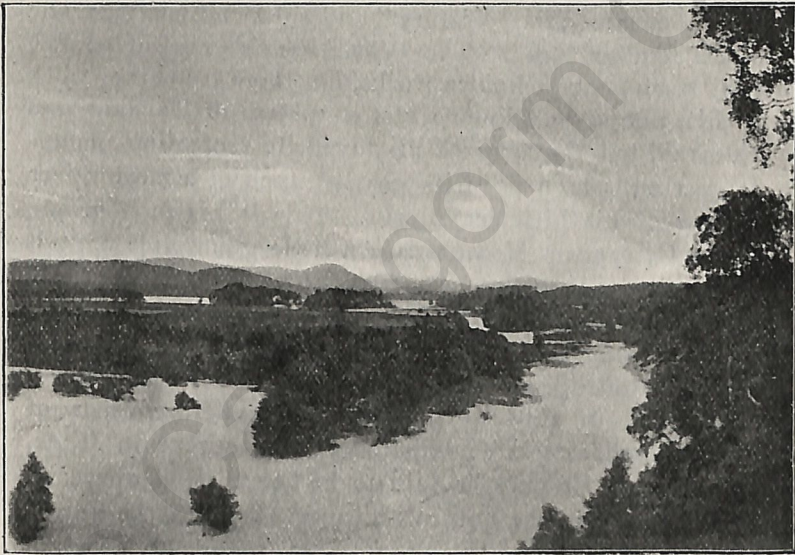
From the top of the Larig one should pass to the top of Carn Ruigh-an-uain (1784 feet), about two miles to the south-west. From this hill top there is a splendid outlook,

both on Speyside and on the Divie Valley. Between the Larig and Carn Ruigh-an-uain is a fine little mountain tarn known as the Black Loch. It is upon the eastern side of the watershed, and lies in a deep basin whose sides are somewhat rocky. It is somewhat hidden, and one coming upon it suddenly is almost startled as he looks down the steep sides of the hollow at the little pear-shaped sheet of apparently very dark water. The water may be really clear, but lying as the loch does in a deep basin among the hills it quite justifies its name.

From Carn Ruigh-an-uain it is well to continue one's walk southward to another summit, which is not named on Bartholomew's map, but from which also there is a fine prospect, and thence to the top of Carn-an-loin (1798 feet), from which one has the finest view of all. From this summit one sees, looking eastward, Ben Rinnes, the hills about Corryhabbie, and, just across the Spey, the fine Cromdale Hills. Looking westward he has before him the Monadh Liadhs and many nearer hills which are connected with them, while turning to the south he has, as it were, beneath his feet Carn-an-Fhradhairc (1648 feet) with its twin cairns, the fine country around Grantown, rich in field and forest, and a long stretch of the Spey coming gliding southward by the green haughs of Cromdale. It is a stretch of miles over rough uplands from Cairn Kitty to Carn-an-loin, but the long rough way is more than compensated for as one looks out on the grandly diversified scene which spreads itself out before him from the latter summit.

I have never continued my walk over the hill tops beyond Carn-an-loin, which is the highest of the Tulchans, but it would doubtless be pleasant to do so, and to descend at only a few miles from Grantown. Meantime I have written of the Tulchans just as I know them, and I commend them to all who love little-beaten tracks, pure air, and views of things grand and beautiful. And, in closing, I must not forget to say that from many points in these hills there may be seen towering in all their grandeur the magnificent masses of the Cairngorms. I

remember one most glorious view. I had walked up the Tulchan burn from Advie one autumn evening, and being in the hollow had not an extended view. But when I had just come out into the open there suddenly burst on my sight all the great summits, quite free from mist and cloud and, in their deep purple, clear cut against the evening sky. I had yet miles of rough walking, but that splendid vision sent me home rejoicing. Such visions ever make the Tulchans delightful.



THE SPEY AT LOCH INSH.

Photo by

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