

## SOME UNADVENTUROUS RAMBLES.

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I CANNOT remember a time when I was not a lover of the hills. Although a town boy, I was much in the country in my early days, and the mere sight of a great, if even somewhat distant, summit always stirred my blood. And yet it was not till I was over thirty that I climbed any of our greatest hills. I had to be content with Cairn-mon-earn and Bennachie and the Tap-o'-Noth, and others of similar altitude, delightful all of them, but all of them only stirring longings for loftier heights. Speaking of the difficulty not seldom experienced in reaching foreign scenes which one fain would see, Professor Blackie quoted the quaint old lines :

“For want o’ the siller and the wee pickle cash  
There’s mony a gallant lad must want his bonny lass.”

And even for mountain climbing the “wee pickle” (or “wee puckle” as being an Aberdonian I should say) “cash” is needed, unless one has the good fortune to be living beside the great hills. Now the “siller” was never very abundant with me, and I had to wait for the acquaintance of the big Bens till circumstances brought me near them. But no hill climbing is without its delights. The mere physical exertion is itself a pleasure, and the views to be had from many of our less lofty summits are often delightful. It is of some very unambitious and very unadventurous climbing that I would write now.

One hill that used to be familiar to me is the Clashmach, Huntly. This hill, which at its highest point is 1229 feet above the level of the sea, and thus of

CLASHMACH only moderate elevation, is still conspicu-  
HILL. ous. A long brown ridge, it is well seen from the railway as one approaches Huntly from Gartly. It lies roughly north and south, or, to speak more accurately, from the west of north to the



east of south, its northern end skirted by the road from Huntly which is or used to be known as the Craighead road, and its southern termination near Edindaich, a farm not far from the Huntly and Gartly road. Perhaps the most convenient way to ascend it is from the Craighead road, at the point marked on Bacon's map as "Queels," but as a matter of fact I have climbed it from any point at which I happened to be when the desire to climb took possession of me. I have ascended it in summer and in winter, and even with the snow lying pretty deep upon it, I never found the ascent other than pleasing. That it is not too exacting may appear from this that the Huntly school children, or some of them at any rate, used to climb to the top on May-day. I remember seeing them there on the first of May, nearly forty years ago, and hearing them sing very heartily the May-day song,

"Spring's delights are all reviving"

The Clashmach is not in any part, so far as I can remember, rugged or rocky, and in parts at least it is cultivated to a considerable height. But it has fine heathery slopes, and the view from the top is capital. Looking northward and to the west of north one sees the Moray Firth spreading out its blue expanse, and if the weather is at all clear has the Caithness Morven and its neighbouring hills in sight. In whatever direction one turns he sees something of interest, well cultivated land, dark firwoods, fine hills, some of them like the neighbouring Bin, wooded to their summits. But, best of all, looking to the west of south, he sees Lochnagar, and still further to the west the grand masses of the Cairngorms. The last time I climbed the Clashmach was in 1877, a year in which the snows on the Grampians were very late in melting, and although it was about the end of June or the beginning of July that I crossed the hill I could see great patches of snow on the far off slopes. One can surely appreciate a hill which is neither very lofty nor very difficult to climb, when there is such a view from the summit to delight him.



Another hill which I climbed very long ago was in a quite different region. It was my lot to live for some ten years in the North of England, and the brief holi-

SIMONSIDE. days which I had from time to time during these years were mostly spent at the sea-side or on the continent. But once having a few days to spare I betook myself to the banks of the Coquet, in the neighbourhood of Rothbury, in the hope of enjoying a little trout fishing. The Coquet is a beautiful little river, and the trout fishing on it is generally regarded as good. I cannot say that I coaxed many fish out of the stream; probably the atmospheric conditions were unfavourable, as so often happens when one goes fishing! but it was exceedingly pleasant to loiter by the river banks. One day, however, I laid the rod aside and enjoyed a pleasant climb. The hill I climbed was Simonside, which lies two or three miles south-west from Rothbury. It is a heathery hill, neither very high nor very rugged nor very steep, but fairly isolated and commanding from its long flat top a wide and interesting prospect. Some twenty-five miles in a direct line from Newcastle, it cannot be seen, I think, from any point in the immediate vicinity of that city, but it is well seen from near Ponteland, a village some six or seven miles from Newcastle. I fancy that Simonside is geologically interesting. As is the case in many of our Scottish hills, the rock does not show much, but it has sufficient character of its own to bear the name of "Simonside grit," and belongs to the Bernician series of sandstone rocks in the Lower Carboniferous formation. From the nature of the underlying rocks, as is noted in Mr. H. G. Woodward's fine work on the Geology of England and Wales, wide heathy and boggy moorlands overspread the surface of that part of Northumberland from which Simonside raises itself. Yet at no great distance from Simonside one finds the beautiful house and grounds of Craggside, the residence of the late distinguished Lord Armstrong, better known to North of England folks as Sir William G. Armstrong. It is truly wonderful what skill and money judiciously used can do. I love moorland, however, especially when the heather is in bloom, and to a Scotsman there is always, wherever he



may be, something in the brown hills and the heather that speaks to him of home. It would burden this paper too much to tell of all that one can see from the summit of Simonside. I can mention only one magnificent sight, that of the Cheviots, some sixteen or eighteen miles away. It was a splendidly bright day when I made my ascent, no cloud in the sky, glorious sunshine everywhere. I think I like the great hills best when there are wisps of cloud drifting about their summits, but it is also something fine to see them when brilliant sunlight is revealing their every cleft and hollow. Once from the shores of the Solway Firth I saw Skiddaw, at a distance of nearly twenty miles, so splendidly irradiated by the golden light that there was not a feature of the mountain that was not as distinct as if one were looking to it, only across a narrow valley, from some neighbouring hill. And it was thus that I saw the Cheviots on that bright day so long ago. They were not the "Cheviots' mountains blue" of the sweet Scottish singer, for a golden light suffused them from summit to base. But there they rose before me in all their splendid sweep, and seemed so near that only a few hurried steps would bring me to them. I have never climbed Simonside since, but more than thirty years have not effaced the memory of that glorious vision. Even as I write it seems to rise before me once more.

The last of the little climbs which I would mention was a comparatively recent one, but far, not only from Central North-umberland, but even from Strathbogie.

**WIDEFORD HILL.** Early in March, 1903, I happened to be at Scapa pier in the Orkney Islands, seeing some of my folks who had been north with me sail for Scrabster. The weather was cold and rough, but for the time being it was fair, and having nothing particular to do, I sauntered across the beach to where the Scapa burn falls over shelving rocks into the bay. The fall is really a fine one, though it is not of great height. I had often noticed it when arriving at or leaving Scapa, but it is a mile away from the pier and it is worth crossing the sands to see it. After I had inspected the fall, I wandered on by farm roads and the edges of fields till I came to a road running from Kirkwall



to Firth past the south side of Wideford Hill. From this road I made the ascent of the hill. Wideford Hill is not lofty, its height is only 741 feet, but from its situation it commands an admirable view of the Orkney Islands. In sailing through the islands one seldom loses sight of it for any length of time, and as it is seen from so many points it must offer a very fine outlook. It stands just opposite Kirkwall, at a distance of two miles or so westward. It is a plain brown hill, shapely enough, and, as it stands well apart, looking a good deal higher than it really is. I climbed it of course quite easily, and was hopeful to get a fine view from its summit. But alas! the evil fortune which so often befalls one on the greater hills, the evil fortune which I have experienced on Ben Nevis, Ben Muich Dhui and Ben Wyvis, not to speak of others, overtook me on Wideford Hill. I was scarcely at the top when a fierce hail-storm assailed me and driving sea mist hid everything. I tried to get shelter on the lee side of some friendly big stones, but soon grew weary of my position, and hurried down the hill towards Kirkwall. There is on Wideford Hill a Pict's house which I had intended to visit, but it did not come in my way, and I did not search for it. I simply fled from the hail and the sleet, and arrived in Kirkwall in sorely draggled condition. But I was not at all sorry that I had made the not trying ascent. I only saw, as I climbed, hills with the sight of which I was fairly familiar, the neighbouring hills of Orphir, and the more distant but singularly fine hills of Hoy, one of these latter, the Ward or Wart hill being over 1500 feet. But although I saw little, nothing, indeed, which I had not seen before, I had at least made a beginning in the climbing of the Orcadian hills. The hills of Hoy, towering finely from the sea, and with their sides forming in part great bare precipices, I hope I may be able to ascend some future day.