

## THE CLUB ON GLAS MAOL.

THIS article is to be like none other in or out of our *Journal*. Assembled in Castletown, (or was it at the precise moment in Auchendryne of Braemar) on the evening of 19th July, there seemed a general feeling in the minds of the zealous members then present that scant justice had hitherto been done to reports of the Club's outings. The present description of the last year's summer excursion is therefore a very composite contribution, and according to special promise—and the rules of good journalism—neither horses nor motors can ever draw from the editor the names of the authors of any gems, Cairngorms or otherwise, with which it sparkles.

Let us then start fair, at Aberdeen. The hour was 4.35 or thereby on the afternoon of 19th July, 1907, when the Deeside express, "the Husbands' train," was due to start. As it happened, however, more than one wife was left behind, and the platform was said by a certain confirmed bachelor to be damp with the ladies' tears!

Nothing eventful happened between Guild Street and Ballater. There were of course the usual demonstrations at each stopping station, and many tall stories—but none exceeding 3,502 feet—were told. A Tarnty Ha' dignitary, who unfortunately found himself temporarily squeezed into the Club's company, was glad to escape at Ballater—for sure such blood-curdling tales of mountain dangers cunningly evaded had never been equalled even at an Alpine Club symposium. At Ballater a choice was offered the daring hillmen by the G.N.S.R. Co., ever ready to encourage the Cairngorm Club to go north or west—but not south or east. There were two motors in waiting—in one suffocation was possible, but the dust fiend would not trouble! in the other there was the open life and dust *ad lib.* and even beyond. Both vehicles found victims, and it was certainly ominous that the conductor collected all the fares before he

approached the 42nd milestone. Yet nothing happened, though a dust was undoubtedly raised. No dogs lost the number of their kennel, and even the King's park stags stood at gaze. A squirrel boldly beheld the advance from its particular tree, but an adder on holiday on the road through the Muir of Inver gave one wriggle—and no more.

The well-known "Bridge over the Clunie" was ready for us, its widening a *fait accompli*, though even yet it is scarcely equal to that of the bridge over the Den Burn. Mrs. Macdonald welcomed us at the "Fife Arms," and a very comfortable room was found for each member, soon, however, deserted on the sound of the dinner "horn." There was no undue lingering over the walnuts and the wine, all longed for the road, the lounge, the smoking room, or the golf course that glorious evening. A novice discovered an ice-axe hidden among the numberless umbrellas and sticks in the hall, and enquiry was at once made as to the owner. He was soon found to be Mr. A. Ernest Maylard, a distinguished Alpinist, but better known in Scotland as an ex-president of the Scottish Mountaineering Club. He smilingly informed some of us that the implement was useful for picking up plants, etc., on the hill. It, however, was capable of other useful work, as was seen later on the "glacier" at Canlochan. Our chairman, Mr. James A. Hadden, welcomed him in the Club's name, and asked for the pleasure of his company the following day. Mr. Maylard was delighted, and said he quite expected to be associated for the day with the Cairngormers when he heard of their meet in Braemar. Early arrived members both in and out of the hotel next received attention. There was Veteran Smith, already at home in the smoking room, who warned the younger bloods that he was to take time as he climbed on the morrow. Visions of numerous delays at once vexed their impatient spirits, but he it here said the veteran quite disappointed them on Glas Maol, for the rearguard was brought up by a younger member. Then there was the other Mr. Smith, who confessed that he was to desert the Club when it should leave the summit "Where three Counties meet," having found two other spirits as adventurous as himself. One of these spirits had established himself as a regular

Braemar visitor and mountain explorer—in the Club (and we believe out of it) he is known as Dr. Levack. (At this point we intrude to explain that “spirits” in this paragraph has neither the popular nor the ghostly meaning.—Ed.) Dealing with spirits once for all, it may be mentioned that the other was Mr. George Duncan, then and for some time back in residence at the Spittal. He had been raiding the surrounding hills, with an occasional descent on Braemar itself. Another distinguished member sojourning in these parts was our friend Mr. Couper. True, he was not promptly recognised, for, as he confessed, he had parted with his dreadful alpenstock—an implement so long that its place in the train was on the foot-board of the longest corridor carriage of the Great North. There was, however, no mistaking Sidney: the geologist’s hammer was much in evidence, and he it said that he owed on the descent to having added not a few specimens to his collection. The novice recently referred to innocently asked the use of the hammer, only to receive the knock “to drive you up!”

Among other notabilities we met in the Square were our own Lord Provost on holiday at “Invercauld,” who on being questioned said that the Town House was locked up till Thursday. Sir Alexander was resting, and did not feel that he should join his fellow members on the morrow, but we might take his son and offer him as a sacrifice to “use and wont.” Another arrival was the Rev. Mr. Cairney, who had bridged the space between Ballater and Braemar on his bicycle. He complained of the dust the motor buses raised; when he saw one coming he promptly dismounted, taking shelter in a convenient field till the dust cloud ceased to trouble. Postmaster Chree, a candidate for honours on the Glas Maol, along with Mr. Robert Lyon, confirmed from personal experience the parson’s statement, so most probably it is true—no reflection, of course, on our reverend brother’s veracity, but hillmen are mortal!

“Our Clerk” has so far escaped notice here, but between his short pithy stories and the marvellous yarns of the Chairman and the interruptions of the Secretary dinner was no silent festival, nor was pleasant intercourse ever

allowed to flag. Honourable mention should also be made of McPherson's critical remarks on bread and bread-making which were much appreciated; but his repertoire was not confined to the staff of life. Much associated with him then and later was Mr. Macintyre—a couple with many minor differences but two particularly strong bonds. Speaking of bread and iron suggests education—we found that our Mr. John Clarke had been in possession of Braemar for some weeks, and on our meeting he promised to join us in the morning. He fully redeemed his pledge, and the Club rejoiced to see with him two daughters and a son, one of the ladies giving us a lesson in botany.

A call was made on a local medico with the view of securing his company next day. However, even the eloquence of our Chairman and Secretary failed to withdraw him from the field of duty; in other words the then health of the Highlanders, spite of the salubrity of Braemar, was such that Auchendryne dared not be left to itself!

All were promptly at the breakfast table the following morning. A very good meal was disposed of though mist lay low on the hills. However, hopes rose high as we set out about 8 o'clock, some on bicycles but the most of us in a waggonette. A start was hardly made when a halt had to be called—the Blairgowrie coach (which we had graciously allowed to start first) in turning the corner at the bridge had a difference with a cart. The coach did not overturn, though the pole snapped, and only the promptitude of the "Invercauld" host averted a serious catastrophe. The drive up Glen Clunie would have been more enjoyed but for the fact that the nearer we got to the county march the closer came the mist to us. Ere the top of the long brae was reached the substituted coach for Blairgowrie passed us after an accident, trifling as it happened. It was overtaken by a motor, which safely passed, but the chauffeur continued to hug the ditch on his right and there became fast. With some little help, the motor was lifted out and the journey resumed. This was thought to be the last of untoward events for the day—but no. One of our cyclists, allowing himself to be overtaken near the march, made a disparaging remark as to our speed;

and so momentarily forgot his machine and his "creed." The former apparently resented the inattention, and rider and bike had a little collapse on the bank—sufficient to create a laugh when Cairngormers go on holiday.

On dismounting we found Mr. Duncan in waiting, and truly his appearance bore ample evidence that he had been leading the open life. He was, however, recognised by those of the members best acquainted with him. A start for the Maol was made at once; it seems to come down to the road-side, but in the then dense mist it looked more bog than hill. A sheep fence leading eastward was said with authority to be the direct route to the summit, and very likely even the climbing experts were glad of its direction. Certain it is, however, that those who knew the hill least were on the top first, for once independent of the recognised leaders.

Glas Maol is an exceedingly easy climb by the route selected; moreover, as the mist never moved, no delays were experienced through enquiries as to the prospect. As for the mountain itself—what need is there for the present scribes to say anything? Did not *The Aberdeen Free Press* of that morning thoughtfully tell its story as follows:—

#### WHERE THREE COUNTIES MEET.

No great Scottish mountain has a better defined position than Glas Maol, which the Cairngorm Club visit to-day, nor is the prospect from it surpassed for interest by summits even 250 feet higher. The position is at the junction of three great counties—Aberdeen, Forfar, and Perth—the corresponding parishes being Crathie-Braemar, Glenisla, and Kirkmichael. While the height is only 3502 feet its commanding situation gave it preferment over higher mountains as a station during the "Great Triangulation" of the United Kingdom. Thus we have on official record the exact position and distances of a good few summits seen from its cairn. It would be uninteresting to give the entire Survey list, but the following deserve mention, and should delight the heart of the Laird of Kemnay—for if Edinburgh is not visible points are seen even beyond the Scottish capital—Benleuch (the Ochils), 50 miles off; Meikle Bin; Ben Lawers, 40 miles; Ben Alder; Mam Sodhail, 72 miles; Ben Muich Dhui, 18

miles; Corryhabbie Hill, 33 miles; Mount Battock, 24 miles; Says Law (the Lammermuirs), 76 miles; East Lomond, 44 miles; and Carnethy Hill (the Pentlands).

It is almost hopeless to expect such an extraordinary and distant prospect on any one particular visit. Moreover, the mountains named suggest that there are many omissions, for the Royal Engineers were content to note only such points as were necessary in the triangulation. The view of the Cairngorms is a remarkable one, including as it does Beinn Bhrotain, the Angel's Peak, Cairn Toul, Braeriach, Devil's Point, Cairngorm, Beinn Mheadhoin, and Beinn a' Bhuid. The great group of mountains known as Beinn a' Ghlo is well seen, and the more famous Schiehallion may also be observed. Nearer at hand are Cairn na Glasha, Tolmount, and Broad Cairn.

The prospect at one's feet is a remarkable one, for Canlochan and Canness, the head glens and head streams of the Isla, are scenic paradises. Botanists come to them from afar, and many a southern tourist seeks them out—all such visitors receiving, of course, little welcome from the deerstalkers. The mountaineering parson, Grierson, missed the Glas Maol, and these lovely glenlets on its eastern side, but several writers speak of them with much favour. Queen Victoria calls Canlochan (disguised as Cairn Lochan in "Leaves") "a bonnie place. . . a narrow valley, the river Isla winding through it like a silver ribbon, with trees at the bottom. The hills are green and steep . . . there are fine precipices." Carl Haag's drawing of the royal luncheon on the occasion is familiar to many, but when are Her Majesty's (so-called) "hasty sketches" to see the light?

How often have readers of that now very rare local booklet "Our Tour," the production of "Dryas Octopetala and Thomas Twayblade," well-known veteran mountaineers, bemoaned the necessarily brief description of Glas Maol! The little party literally found themselves "under a cloud" when they reached the top. Yet they "got a fitful glimpse or two of the magnificent view towards the south," breakfasting near the place where the Queen and the Prince Consort had lunched. The variety and beauty of Canlochan glen and its surroundings have impressed everyone who has made a pilgrimage thither." How Macgillivray delighted in Canlochan, almost raving over its beauties and its many rare plants! Nor is Macmillan behind him in his charming "Holidays in High Lands." Glas Maol and its marvellous slopes are, alas, better known to those south of the Mounth than to

Aberdonians ; but let them thenceforth seek an occasional holiday at the head of Glen Isla.

Glas Maol, "the bald-headed hill," is easily reached from Braemar, the Cairnwell road landing one within two crow-fly miles of the top. The turnpike may be left at the county march at an altitude of about 2200 feet, then follows a short climb over Meall Odhar to the summit. An old right-of-way, an erstwhile favourite with smugglers, connects Glen Clunie with Glen Isla ; by it the "climb" is longer, but is ridiculously easy. The "sporting" route is up Glen Callater and over Carn an Tuirc and Cairn na Glasha, descending direct to the Cairnwell. It is to be observed that the three counties meet at a point marked "3483 feet," about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  furlongs north-westward of the cairn : why it is so is by no means evident. The general appearance of the summit of Glas Maol quite entitles it to its name. When one is there, however, the abundance of the Least Willow, our smallest "tree," is most remarkable.

Little time was spent at the cairn, for there was no water there. Still business is business, and so the Chairman presided—chairmen generally do. Chree and Lyon were admitted *nem. con.*, and then and there initiated according to use and wont—and they are none the worse, indeed some say they are even the better. Then a Saturday afternoon climb of Ben Aigan was fixed, and the members made towards Canlochan where Duncan had a spring in waiting. It was duly found despite the mist, as was a great snow-field where glissades were indulged in, but the bottom of Canlochan had to be imagined. Luncheon and glissading over, the leaders were ordered to the front, and were directed to make a bee line to the gate in the fence where it crosses the old right-of-way from Glen Clunie to Glen Isla. Thence they were to proceed to Cairn na Glasha—an easy task, as a sheep fence gave no excuse for diverging from the route.

Ah! we forget—not all who lunched on the snowy slope of Canlochan proceeded to Cairn na Glasha. Several more adventurous members went in the direction to Creag Leagach, and we saw them no more that day.

From Cairn na Glasha a course was made for Carn an Tuirc, which reminds us of another omission in this veritable

narrative. Mr. Clarke and his family had followed us up Glen Clunie on bicycles, which they cached by the wayside. To reclaim them they descended to the road by the cairn of the Boar's Hill. We, the main body, were content with "doing" the shoulder, all the more so that the parson had to be in Aberdeen that evening, taking care however to have a peep at Loch Ceanmor. Very probably this was the most wild and picturesque sight we had viewed that pleasant day, a lone tarn, mountain-girt, at a height of 2,196 feet. Thereafter we came on a well, and refreshed the inner man. Loch Callater now lay before us, so the parson was directed to hurry down, meet the conveyance, and from it disinter his bicycle. That part of the programme panned out all right; as for the party, it sauntered leisurely to the loch. There not a few visitors were evidently spending a very quiet afternoon, the Lord Provost among them. Half an hour was given to the scenery, while Jock's Road and others were discussed. McConnochie (who at this point declined a guide) quietly disappeared; it was afterwards stated by some disappointed members that he had been drinking milk with a dairymaid, discussing grouse prospects with an old lady of 85, and talking forest "shop" with a stalker. Then came our conveyance, and we had a glorious run down the two glens. As we waited in our hotel for the sound of the great gong, a motor arrived, and added another clubman to dinner in the person of Mr. James Reid. It was suggested that he was a day late for the fair, but it turned out he was one of a quartette that had "something up their sleeve."

Then came dinner, our last formal sederunt at the "Fife Arms" for a season. Every one was in the best of form; certain it is that the Club never had a happier day together. After coffee some went to the golf course, their appetite for fresh air not even yet satiated, while others crossed the Clunie and visited their civic head.