

TWENTY-ONE YEARS OF OUR CLUB.

· BY JAMES GRAY KYD.

It has been said that Alpine Mountaineering dates from the ascent of the Wetterhorn by Sir Alfred Wills. No doubt the Alps had been the playground and the graveyard of many a climber before Wills made the ascent of the virgin "Peak of Tempests," but the delightful story of his conquering journey was perhaps what enticed our countrymen to the glories of the snows. We are proud to read in the recent address which, as president, the Bishop of Bristol gave to the Alpine Club, that Scotland gave this well known Alpinist his first taste of snow climbing. Our own land has had, and always will have, great attraction for the mountaineer.

In the snowy Alps, in the tropical Andes, in the unexplored Himalaya, the problem which meets the climber is to find the right way up the peaks; while here in Scotland it has been said that climbers are now busily engaged in looking for the wrong way up all our hills. It would be an engaging study to trace in detail the history of Scottish mountaineering. The guide books of the Andersons and the writings of Hill Burton show us that before the days of the Cairngorm Club the hills had their charm for city dwellers. This fact cannot be gainsaid, yet no one will deny that our club has had a great influence in the development of the sport in Scotland. We have lived for the long period of twenty-one years, and our "Coming of Age" was officially celebrated, on 26th June last, by an excursion to Cairngorm, when the following, members and friends journeyed to Nethy Bridge:—C. T. Christie, Collie, Sidney Couper, J. R. Leslie Gray, James G. Kyd, Thomas Kyd, Mrs. Thomas Kyd, A. I. M'Connochie, Mrs. A. I. M'Connochie, John McGregor, George McIntyre, W. M. McPherson, George Reid, James Reid, Miss Reid, and J. D. W. Stewart. The Club was favoured with the

company of Mr. Alexander Carr from Rynettin to the summit.

The proceedings were most successful, and were thus described in the local papers of June 29 by the present writer :

It was in the early hours of the 23rd of June, 1887, when six mountaineers were trying vainly to sleep at the Shelter Stone, near Loch Avon, under the shadow of Cairngorm, that this, the oldest mountaineering club in Scotland, had its birth. Alexander Copland, Rev. Robert Lippe, A. I. M'Connochie, Rev. C. C. Macdonald, W. A. Hawes, and W. Anderson had climbed Ben Muich Dhui on Jubilee Day, and as the darkness came on they awakened the echoes of the hills by exploding fireworks, and astonished the dwellers in Glen Dee and Strathspey by illuminating the midnight sky with showers of rockets. After their loyal task was completed, they wended their way downwards towards Loch Etchachan, and descended cautiously in the dim light of dawn to the Shelter Stone. Before commencing to ascend Cairngorm, this little gathering informally agreed to endeavour to start a club to encourage mountaineering in Scotland; and, as the result of this meeting, we have the Cairngorm Club with all its usefulness. Of the six founders only Mr. Anderson has died, and happily the other five are true to the vows they pledged on that summer morning. The exact spot where the formation took place was Maghan na Banaraich (the Dairymaid's Field); and what more suitable scene could be found? Far up in lone Glen Avon, with the huge buttresses of Ben Muich Dhui looming down and the still waters of Loch Avon in the foreground, we have a spot probably freer from the jar and fret of civilisation than any other in Scotland.

“And hers shall be the breathing balm,
And hers the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.”

These half-dozen stalwarts climbed up the steep screes to Cairngorm, perhaps full of hope for their new idea, but yet probably with little thought that they were to be the founders of a club that was destined to bind mountaineers together throughout Scotland, and which has probably done more in fostering a real love of the mountains than any other club of its kind in Britain. True, nowadays clubs spring up almost yearly—they flourish for a time and then die away; but the Cairngorm Club pursues its course with

that calm dignity that it has gained from the majestic hills themselves.

The next phase in the Club's history was a meeting in the Bath Hotel, Aberdeen, on 9th January, 1889. At this gathering the office-bearers appointed at the Dairymaid's Field were formally re-elected. After this, the Club was governed by a committee, and a set of rules was drawn up. The membership of the club was then about 15, and now it numbers about 150.

The first official excursion was held on 9th July, 1889, to Cairngorm. Nethy Bridge Hotel was the headquarters of the club. Shortly after 7 in the morning of the appointed day, twenty-seven eager hillmen drove off from the hotel to Glenmore Lodge, which was reached at a quarter to 10; and there the club commenced its first official climb. At the Cairn, the Speyside party was met by four clubmen who had come up from Braemar, and there, on the summit of Cairngorm, in the enthusiasm of youth, the club rejoiced in its first conquest. Mr. M'Connochie—to whom the club owes practically everything—lit a fire, and soon regaled the party with a hot luncheon of soup and boiled beef, when it was remarked by some of the more flippant members of the gathering that although somewhat "high" (altitudinally at least) the meat was eaten with avidity. It is interesting to look over the names of some of the climbers who made the ascent:

Charles Brown, Alexander Copland, David Darling, Dickson, G. F. Duthie, John Fleming, T. R. Gillies, George Gowans, Gustav Hein, Thomas Kyd, John M'Gregor, Alexander Macphail, A. I. M'Connochie, W. Todd Moffatt, G. Philip, John Rust, Charles Ruxton, Rev. G. A. Smith, Rev. Robert Semple, Alexander Taylor.

The following members, now dead, were also of the party:—James Allan, J. W. Duncan, Alexander Edmond of Garthdee, Hugh Imlay, W. J. Jamieson, Andrew Macpherson.

After the feast on the summit was over, the main party left the Cairn at three o'clock and wandered over the plateau to Ben Muich Dhui, which was reached at five. Tales have not been allowed to die down of how one of the clubmen got lost in going over to Ben Muich Dhui, and of how he had to return to Nethy Bridge. On the summit of Ben Muich Dhui the party split up into two, one portion going down to Braemar, led by the secretary, *via* Glen Lui Beg, and the other by the more usual Coire Etchachan path, under the care of the treasurer.

Now, after these twenty years of climbing, the Club celebrated its majority on Saturday. Again Nethy Bridge Hotel was the headquarters, and again Cairngorm was the goal of the day. Seventeen members and friends arrived on Friday night, mostly by train, but some came westward from Aberdeen by motor car. Two brakes carried our party up Strath Nethy early on Saturday. The night had been very wet, but the weather soon cleared, and we all enjoyed our drive through the forest in the fresh morning air. The birches were sweet-scented after the night of rain, but we soon left them behind, and got in among the majestic pines of the Abernethy forest and out again on to the bare moorland. At times our secretary had to be held in his place in our "machine," for on spotting a roe-buck or a young "calf" his enthusiasm was intense. All along our drive we got surprises, for the deer were hugging the low ground, being driven from the heights by the severe weather. We saw several curlews, and the note of the oyster-catcher was heard often on our drive. A greenshank and several wild duck added life to the lonely tarn beyond Rynettin. A gray-hen's nest in a juniper bush at the roadside was proof that the Glen is not often visited in these beautiful months of early summer. After Rebhoan, the road degenerates, and on Saturday most of it was little better than a watercourse in spate.

We started the climb at Glenmore Lodge shortly before ten o'clock, and were amused at the notice-board suggesting that all mountaineering be done before September when we considered that, notwithstanding the ample stables here, the gentleman responsible for this notice had made it necessary for us to send our traps back to the neighbouring estate of Abernethy, at Rebhoan, in order that shelter might be got for the horses. The ascent was made at that slow pace born of experience, without rush or spurt, and the summit was reached in about three hours. During the climb we gazed across the peaceful surface of Loch Morlich, surrounded by its fringe of dark pines, to the green hills around Kinveachy Lodge, sparkling white in the sunlight. There had been a great deal of fresh snow, which we struck at the 3,200 feet line, quite a phenomenally low altitude for a mid-summer's day. On the summit plateau we measured new snow to the depth of fifteen inches.

The summit was shrouded in mist, but a meeting was duly held under the genial chairmanship of Mr. M'Gregor,

who mentioned that Mr. M'Connochie and he were the only two of the original climbers who had reached the summit on the majority excursion; Mr. Thomas Kyd, also one of the members of the original party, being at Rynnetin, on the lower reaches of the mountain. After our meeting, Mr. M'Connochie took the party in a south-easterly direction, in the mist, in the hope of having a sight of Loch Avon. We stood for a while on an outstanding rock gazing downward into the abyss of cloud, when suddenly the atmosphere cleared, and in an instant the birthplace of the Club was revealed to us, while across the crags we saw Loch Etchachan in the hazy distance. We visited the Marquis's Well and saw the fireplace where twenty years ago the never-to-be-forgotten meal was cooked. The mist came down just a little lower than this level, and when we got out of it the whole countryside stood out sharp and clear, the canopy of cloud seeming to focus the landscape with extraordinary precision.

Away to the north we gazed across the Moray Firth, to the rounded hills of Caithness, and admired the beauty of the Black Isle tapering eastwards into the sea. Towards Lochaber we saw Ben Nevis, and further south the Buchailles Etive stood out clear. Coming northward the scene was wonderful, and our eyes carried us to

“Where Grampians over Grampians soar,
Where ‘dowie dens’ deep bosom’d lie,
Where ends the long Atlantic roar,
Beneath the savage hills of Skye.”

But we could not stay in the heights all day gazing at this “pictured plan”, so we descended direct to Rebhoan, where we joined our conveyances. The descent was without special incident, save that the disappearance of the geologist of the party caused some consternation, until he was discovered happy among the schists and mica of the rocks with a mind blissfully indifferent to time and tide, to say nothing of carriages.

Those of the party who also attended the first excursion noticed many changes in the glen. Here and there a ruin marks the spot where a score of years ago a shieling brightened the valley. It has been suggested that such uplands are now practically depopulated in order that “a degenerate lord might boast his sheep.” or rather more truly, his deer. What would the members of the meet in 1889 have thought if some of their party had come wheeling away from Aberdeen to Strathspey by motor

car, or if boiling tea had been carried to 4000 feet above the sea in a Thermos flask? Yes; times move slowly, but it is on such occasions as Saturday's excursion that the advances of two decades are brought home to us.

Our Club, although it has reached its majority, is still vigorous. Its Journal—which is probably a unique collection of true mountaineering literature, as opposed to the mere enumeration of rock-climbing feats—is in its sixth volume. It would be invidious to mention any articles specifically, but one in particular—that by Mr. James Bryce, the late member for South Aberdeen, entitled “Some Stray Thoughts on Mountain Climbing”—may be regarded as a classic so long as the hills last.

The Club has published a map of the Cairngorm range of mountains, which is the most complete, as well as the most accurate, plan of this great massif district, the Himalaya of Great Britain. Mr. Copland's charts are monuments of toil and loving labour, and no one knows the trials and disappointments which the veteran had to endure before his great task was so successfully finished.

What will be the future of mountaineering in Scotland one cannot tell. The Access to Mountains Bill is at present before Parliament. It is hard to say whether it would be an unmixed blessing to climbers. However, whatever awaits the Scottish mountaineer of the future, the name of the Cairngorm Club will always stand for what is best in the sport. There is a tendency in these days for climbers to go away in smaller parties and forsake the official organised excursions. This is not altogether to be wondered at. Yet these more solitary climbers would find that by attending some of the Club's excursions they would have their ardour increased and their knowledge heightened by contact with climbers of lifelong experience.

To all mountaineers the Club extends a cordial welcome, and we may hope that, as the Club is now entering its prime, its membership and usefulness may be yet further increased.

In these twenty-one years our club has had official excursions to all the principal peaks within reasonable distance of our headquarters. We have visited hills as near home as Brimmond, and wandered westward to Lochaber to scale the giant of British mountains. Our outings have been generally favoured with kindly weather, and only thrice, I believe, in our history have the elements

been so unpropitious as to oblige us to abandon our climb. At one excursion we had as many as one hundred and sixty present. This was, however, before our present rules in regard to guests were in force, and in fact the number was the cause of these rules being made. For the idea of eight score of people invading the fastnesses of our deer forests was evidently ridiculous. The most scantily attended excursion was to Ben Nevis, when only two members put in an appearance, and curiously enough they climbed singly, neither knowing of the other's presence. Between these two extremes there have been some seventy excursions, attended by kindred spirits with whom the memory of the happy outings will last for all time.

Dr. Lippe gives us in Volume I. of the Journal a racy account of the birth and early days of our Club. He chronicles the various excursions that were undertaken to the end of 1892. Taking up the story where the genial doctor left off, we shall mention the principal events that have happened in our history. The year 1893 was an eventful one to us, for it was then that we agreed that our Journal should be issued, and the five volumes that have appeared are unique in the mass of information they give us of "scientific, topographical and historical" facts about the Scottish mountains. We visited the Hill of Fare and the Barmekin of Echt on May-day of that year, and our excursion provoked the usual futile discussion as to the derivation of the name of the latter hill. On July 11, our Club journeyed to Atholl and ascended Beinn a' Ghlo, while on the autumn holiday we went to Bennachie and found the Don so much swollen with the autumn rains that, like young Lochinvar, we were tempted to swim "where ford there was none;" however, we took the less heroic course and left the train at Kemnay instead of Monymusk.*

In the spring of 1894 Mount Keen was revisited; this time the company was of more manageable extent, so that the duties of our Guide-Secretary were not so heavy as on the occasion of our first visit to this, the most easterly mountain in Scotland where a budding Cairngormer can

* These were the days before the Gregson Bridge.

qualify for membership of our Club. Ben Alder was the goal of our midsummer excursion that year, and the outing was made especially pleasant by the romantic row that our party enjoyed down Loch Ericht. In September we climbed Kerloch, journeying by Stonehaven, from which we drove to Hobseat, visiting the Roman Camp at Raedykes on the way. From Hobseat we had a long heathery walk over Kerloch to Bridge of Dye, whence we drove to Whitestone and then on to Banchory.

In 1895, we visited Sockaugh in spring, Cairn Toul in July, and the Buck of the Cabrach in autumn.

The Spring Holiday of 1896 found our club on the summit of the Broad Cairn. One of Her Majesty's keepers who accompanied us was surprised at the fleetness of our lady members, and remarked "I niver saw a lady on the Broad Cairn afore!" At Midsummer

"With hark and whoop and wild halloo,
No rest Ben Vorlich's echos knew."

for then some of our enthusiasts visited this glorious Perthshire peak. On the Autumn Holiday we climbed Coillebhar and Lord Arthur's Cairn, journeying by rail to Alford and returning by Gartly. Even now, after thirteen years, the memory of the dinner provided by kindly Mrs. Smith, the Lumsden hostess, is still fresh to some of us.

Ben Aigan was visited in the spring of 1897, while some of our patriotic clubmen celebrated Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee by displays of fireworks on Cairngorm, Ben Muich Dhui and Lochnagar. Our mountaineers were more loyal than the weather, and the damp squibs made a rather poor display. Beinn Mheadoin and Derry Cairngorm were the goals of our Midsummer excursion, and Mr. Copland's tale of the trip is one of the many gems of writing that he has given us. We climbed Morven on the Autumn Holiday. A most delightful lecture by our President on "The Preservation of Natural Scenery" was given to our Club on 8th June, 1897.

In 1898 we went south to Bencleuch in spring, and in July we wandered far north to Ben Wyvis. In autumn

we revisited Bennachie, but this time we journeyed by rail to Oyne, returning from Pitcaple.

We visited Corryhabbie Hill on 1st May, 1899, when the fates seemed to be against us. The weather was unpleasant, but worse than that one of our carriages and its occupants were thrown over a bank at Glenfiddich Lodge. Fortunately no serious damage was done, but the occurrence somewhat damped the day's pleasure. Cairngorm and Lochnagar were revisited on the Summer and Autumn Holidays respectively of that year. On 15th November, 1899, we had another lecture from our President; this time his subject was "Types of Mountain Scenery."

For the third time Mount Keen was officially visited by the Club on 7th May, 1900. Mount Blair was the destination of the Summer Excursion, but the weather was not so good as it might have been. An extra summer excursion was arranged to Ben Nevis, but clubmen evidently thought that 'twas "a far cry to Lochaber," as only two bold spirits scaled the monarch of British mountains. On the Autumn Holiday we journeyed to the Hill of Foudland and Dunnideer.

In 1901 we went far afield. Spring found us scaling the Lomonds of Fife, in summer we were on Schiehallion's graceful cone, while on the Autumn Holiday we left Aberdeen in a fog and reached the Bin of Cullen under a cloudless sky.

In the spring of 1902 we visited Clochnaben—one of the "twa lan'marks o' the sea" that figure so much in the life and horizon of Aberdeenshire mountaineers. The Summer Holiday found us on our way to Ben Avon, but the weather was so wretchedly bad that all idea of ascending the mountain had to be abandoned.

Strangely enough the next excursion—to Mount Battock on 4th May, 1903—had also to be abandoned on account of the state of the weather. At the Summer Holiday we went south to climb Ben Lomond, and were well rewarded for our long journey.

In 1904 we inaugurated our Saturday afternoon

excursions, of which up to this time no fewer than twelve have been carried out. In this season we went to Cairn-mon-earn, Bennachie, and Brimmond Hill on Saturday afternoons, besides going further afield—on the Spring holiday to the Coyles of Muick, and on the Summer holiday to Braeriach.

In 1905 we had Saturday afternoon excursions to Cairn William, Ben Aigan, and Ben Rinnes; and in Spring and Summer we climbed Lochnagar and Ben Lawers respectively. In December we held an At Home in Kennaway's Rooms, which was most enjoyable, and gave members the opportunity of each other's acquaintance in the drawing room as well as on the hill side.

Mount Keen was successfully revisited on the Spring holiday of 1906, and at midsummer a glorious day was spent on Ben Iutharn Mhor, at the head of Glen Ey. On the Autumn holiday members had an opportunity of experiencing the sensation of being lost on a hill top, for our guide on Cromdale Hills fairly lost himself. In fact one was tempted to sing, "The Cairngorm Club it rues that ere it came to Cromdale!" We visited Finella Hill on the afternoon of Saturday, 2nd June.

In the spring of 1907 we climbed Morven from Cambus o' May, and at midsummer we climbed Forfarshire's highest mountain—Glas Maol. Ben Aigan was the hill selected for the only Saturday excursion of this season.

We journeyed to Edzell on the May holiday of 1908, and from there we drove up the birch-clad Esk valley to Millden, making the ascent of Mount Battock from this place. At midsummer we climbed our Parent Mountain—Cairngorm, and Ord Bain of Rothiemurchus was ascended on a June Saturday afternoon.

In the spring of 1909 we went back to look for the Cromdale Hills, which were invisible in 1906, and Ben Rinnes formed a pleasant excursion for 5th June. Our great majority meet was held in June as above described, and Carmaferg was "billed" for 31st July, but the weather was unkindly.

The last twenty-one years have seen great changes in

our sport in Scotland. In the late 'Eighties the mountains were visited oftener by elderly people than they are now. I have been told that twenty-five years ago it was not uncommon to see as many as four parties ascending Ben Muich Dhui, each with a guide and ponies. Now-a-days the profession of Mountain Guide has almost died out in our country. This no doubt is the result of greater knowledge of the mountains fostered by our club and the clubs of similar constitution. Further, there is more climbing among young men of the less leisured class than there was twenty years ago; the great frequency of holidays and the cheaper travelling that now prevail have opened the "large religion of the hills" to many that could not enjoy it in years gone by. The great passes now figure less in the lives of the people of the Highlands than they used to do. Were it not for tourists, such passes as Glen Feshie and the Learg Ghru would seldom be crossed.

In closing these notes of the first score of years of our Club, we would express the hope that our membership may increase as our age grows, and that the good work that has been done in the past may flourish as the years roll on.