

EASTER ON BEN CHONZIE.

BY WILLIAM M. DEAS.

ON the afternoon of Easter day 1910, the friends who had kindly motored me to the Inn of Amulree left me there with my knapsack. The early part of the day was unpromising, not so the evening. There was a keenish touch of frost, and as Amulree Hotel stands 900 feet above sea-level the "ingleneuk" was decided to be the most comfortable place at which to spend the evening. (*En passant*, Glenquach is undoubtedly the Glennaquoich of "Waverley," and "Amulree" sounds very like Uaim-an-Righ). About 8 o'clock, and just before moonrise, I was called outside, and had the good fortune to see a wonderful display of the Northern Lights—a display which called forth much comment from the following week's newspapers. This phenomenon is supposed, in autumn at least, to presage a storm which occurs as a rule three or four days later. On this occasion, however, it was followed by a week's beautifully dry and sunny weather.

Next morning there were eight degrees of frost and the ground was white. "Mine Host" had departed early in the morning for market at Perth, but I got the "weather" from a shepherd, and one can nearly always rely upon a shepherd's twelve hours' prognostication. His pronouncement cheered me much. The morning was bright and clear, with a sky only slightly flecked with filmy clouds. At 10.15 I left Amulree, and taking the road which runs westward along the southside of Loch Freuchie (resuscitated trout loch), I passed the old and now rather pathetically empty village of Auchnafauld. Immediately beyond the U.F. Church I left the "broad road" and took to the "narrow path," and to the hill, my aim being Auchnafree farmhouse in Upper Glen Almond. The wild and beautiful pass between the corries of Meall nam Fuaran (2361 ft.)

and Beinn na Gainimh (2367 ft.) contains two lochans. A fearsome and treacherous morass lies between them, by which I should not care to journey on a dark night. The first view of Auchnafree, $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles distant, is obtained from the narrowest mountain cleft that I have ever seen. The day had become very hot, and Glen Almond in the hollow looked drowsy, with the smoke rising lazily from the farmhouse chimneys. Beyond, and to the southwest of Auchnafree, stands Ben Chonzie, 3048 ft. high, almost midway between Crieff and Loch Tay at Lawers. After getting directions from a shepherd, I took to the right at Glen Almond and splashed across the ford at the cottage $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Auchnafree. From this point up to the ridge, marked 2231 ft. on the survey map, the climbing was easy. Indeed Ben Chonzie is at any other time a very easy climb, but the last 800 feet of mountain were on this day for the most part covered with snow. The shepherd at Auchnafree had informed me that on the cold side of the hill the snow was hard and would bear my weight. I proved the truth of his words as I passed over the final ridge about 100 yards from the sharp snow crest, which, judging from the dip of the fence, here and there showed a depth of ten to fifteen feet or even more.

The view from the top of Ben Chonzie was one I shall never forget; it was on a spring morning unspeakably beautiful. There was not even sufficient wind to blow one's cap off, and I did not need to sit at the lee side of the cairn to eat my sandwiches nor afterwards to light my pipe. But for the endless number of heather burnings, the panorama of snow-covered mountains would have been perfect; nevertheless, the straight columns of smoke arising from them made the picture rather weird and fantastic. It seemed as if I could have tossed one of my biscuits on to Ben Lawers. The two twin peaks of Ben Voirlich and Stuc-a-Chroin and those of Ben More and Am Binnein were exquisitely outlined in sunshine and shadow. The view down Glen Turret towards Crieff finally drew my attention; but time was passing, and wishing to rejoin my friends at

Crieff I struck off down the spur to the west of Loch Turret. At this point it seemed to me strange that there should be so much snow on the south side of the mountain. The shepherd had made no mention of it. It struck me afterwards, however, that he must have thought that I should return to Auchnafree, or take the north side of Ben Chonzie till I got down towards Lochan Uaine, whence I might conveniently reach Glen Turret. Neither of these routes appeared to me attractive, and, but for a long and inconveniently broad snow slope of uncertain depth and certain softness and rottenness, the best way seemed that on which I had decided.

To test the narrower parts of the snow belt was tedious. There were treacherous murmurings of hidden brooks, and the snow offered no secure foothold, so seeking a part of the slope whose extent might be estimated with some certainty, I strapped my knapsack on my chest, and lying flat on my back glissaded rather moistly but withal merrily down the slope. The trough I cut was quite six inches deep, and was distinctly visible from a considerable distance. After a scramble over rather steep ground, during which the upper of one of my fishing brogues gave way, I reached Loch Turret.

By the shore of this picturesque loch I sat down to rest and watch the sunlit ripples of the water. But the sun was sinking behind Carn Chois, and unwillingly, and with many a backward glance, I left this charming place. For over six hours I had seen but one human being. Near Crieff I met the Glen Turret gamekeeper, who upbraided me with my folly, "forbye being alane," in trusting to the snow on the warm side of the hill.

Be that as it may, the small spice of adventure added to the pleasure of a well remembered day among the hills.