

THE CLUB'S SPRING MEET.

BY JOHN CLARKE, M.A.

THE Club's headquarters for the week-end, April 30th to May 2nd, were fixed at Dufftown, which is a very convenient centre for the district extending from the Deveron at the Cabrach to the Spey by Aberlour and Craigellachie. The region, though not of the altitude of the Cairngorms, abounds in hills of 2000-2500 ft., and is full of picturesque and interesting scenery. At so early a period of the year the higher mountains do not present very great attractions to those who have but a limited time to spare. They are covered deeply with snow, but in many places the snow is not firm, and the going is in consequence rather treacherous. This state of matters is transitional, having neither the charm of summer nor yet the grand features of the winter scene.

On Saturday, April 30th, a small party of the Club made the ascent of Ben Rinnes, descending by way of Aberlour and Craigellachie. The conditions on the higher slopes, say over 2,000 ft., were wintry in the extreme. Large quantities of snow, mostly soft but partially frozen, lay everywhere, almost forming a continuous snowfield. The peat-hags were filled up and at places difficult to negotiate, and there was an almost total absence of animal and even of vegetable life. A keeper, indeed, from Speyside was on the outlook on one of the peaks for a fox which had been committing depredations on the game, but that animal's intelligence would have greatly belied its reputation had Reynard ventured to show snout in such a blizzard. The views withal were very fine; that over the Moray Firth to Ben Wyvis and the northern hills was particularly impressive.

On Monday, May 2nd, a party of a dozen or so travelled by the morning excursion train from Aberdeen to Dufftown, where they were joined by a few members who

had spent the week-end at the Fife Arms there. A party of sixteen all told drove to Glenfiddich Lodge where they were met by Mr. Donald Lindsay, who was to be guide and conductor for the day. The destination was Coryhabbie—or as the old map has it, Corchabbie, a form more consonant with the local pronunciation—which is reached by an easy path from the Lodge. The ascent was made by thirteen members, but as one of the party remarked, Mr. Lindsay's presence was a sufficient guarantee against ill-luck, had any one happened to be a victim of the silly superstition popularly attached to the number. The company included two ladies who fully vindicated their claims as mountaineers.

The views enjoyed from the cairn of Coryhabbie were wide and varied, all the familiar Donside and Deeside hills being clearly distinguishable, while the central mass of the Cairngorms with their sparkling snowfields dominated the prospect toward south and south-west. The mass of hills to the west was less distinct; north the prospect was also a little blurred. Nothing could exceed the impressiveness of this ocean of mountains, all more or less completely snowclad, with their individual features of shape toned down, it is true, but showing in the sunlight reflected from their mantle of snow like a fairy scene. To leeward of the summit of Coryhabbie a meeting of the Club was, according to use and wont, duly constituted. Though there was no formal business to transact, the meeting was in a sense historic, for the Chairman intimated that Mr. McConnochie, the indefatigable Secretary, who has held that office since the inception of the Club in 1888, had informed him that this was to be the last Spring Excursion at which he could be present as Secretary. The Chairman added that he was confident that he represented the feelings not only of members present but of all the members of the Club, in giving expression to the very great regret that would be felt at Mr. McConnochie's impending resignation. The reasons, it may be added, are

wholly personal, due to Mr. McConnochie's removal of residence to Glasgow.

The descent was made by way of Glen Fiddich, where opportunity was given of observing the source of the Fiddich, or rather the second source, where it issues in force from the ground after a passage of a mile underground; the Elfhouse or Elvecave, a curious subterranean retreat, which extends in cavelike form beneath the rocks for a considerable distance; the remains of an eagle's nest which the shooting tenant, in default of local assistance, had with his own hands pulled down; together with other features of a very picturesque glen. The deer, too, were on all sides, very numerous and very tame. There are said to be 2000 in the forest, which includes the valleys of the Fiddich and the Black Water, and the annual bag is restricted to 60 stags and 70 hinds. At the moment the creatures were all rather out of condition, shedding horns and hair; the "dun deer" seemed a most suggestive designation. At the Lodge opportunity was given of examining some good heads, a curious water clock, and several interesting old prints and plans.

On returning to Dufftown the party dined together at the Fife Arms, and subsequently travelled by the return excursion train, arriving in town about 10 o'clock,

The weather throughout was glorious, the excursion was enjoyable in every respect, and not least in the drive, especially the homeward journey under the westerling sun with the deep sloping shadows of the Glen. Everyone had had a good time, and we felt grateful that the Spring holiday had been favoured with such weather as had made it, not only to the Club but to so many thousands of our fellow townfolk, a recreation and refreshment to both body and spirit.