

THE CLUB ON SGORAN DUBH.

BY JOHN CLARKE, M.A.

THE twenty-second annual summer outing of the Club was carried through during the week-end, June 24th-27th. On Friday the 24th members taking part in it travelled from Aberdeen and other points to Boat of Garten, and a fairly numerous party of hill-men assembled in the evening at the comfortable hotel there, the rendezvous for the meet. The delightful weather exhibited Speyside, decorated as it still was with bright splashes of colour from the broom, and the village and surroundings of Boat of Garten in their most attractive dress; what was even more important, it gave promise of a glorious morrow. A quiet stroll, a talk over the anticipated pleasures of the climb, together with a smoke for those so disposed, filled in the hours which passed all too quickly until the golden sunset had faded and prudence dictated early withdrawal to night quarters.

The destination for Saturday was Sgoran Dubh, which was to be approached from the Glen Feshie side and thence over Carn Ban. The morning was promising, and the weather prophets prophesied smooth things. An early start was accordingly made, and the party, which included one lady, set out in carriages to drive by way of Aviemore and Kinrara to Achlean, which lies four or five miles up Glen Feshie. The only noteworthy incident on the journey was a short halt at Rothiemurchus to enable one of the members to pay a visit to a friend in camp with the Seaforth's there. The whole neighbourhood bore evidence of the presence of the "citizen soldier," and one could not fail to be struck by the interest and even enthusiasm excited by his presence. The material, officers and men alike, was obviously excellent. The outdoor life in camp, not merely from a military but also from a moral point of view, confers

lasting benefit upon the young men, and especially the town-dwellers, who are fortunate enough to enjoy it.

Achlean was reached in due time, and the honours of the place were done by the tenant, Mr. John Clark, who, besides being a sheep-farmer, performs the duties of official "fox-hunter" on the estate. Among his canine assistants was exhibited a beautiful specimen of deerhound, a young female descendant of the very animals that Landseer used as his models when painting his deer scenes in this picturesque glen. The artist's studio, the "Landseer hut," lies some three miles higher up the glen near the shooting lodge. From Achlean the ascent was begun by the Allt Fhearnachan past the snow patch said to cover Ciste Mhairearaid (Margaret's Coffin), containing the bones of a certain Margaret of the Mackintoshes who once on a time had for some purpose of revenge pronounced a curse of doom against her clan. Continuing over Carn Ban, whose summit is flattish and presents no outstanding feature, the party reached the Breakfast Well (*Fuaran-diotach*), where a halt was made for lunch. From this point the ascent of the main peak of Sgoran Dubh may be said to begin. It is wrongly named on the early editions of the Ordnance Map as well as in the Club Map, its proper name being Sgor Ghaoith (3635 feet), while the northern peak, the one so conspicuous from all along Speyside, lying about a mile off, is Sgoran Dubh Mhor (3635 feet). On the former a meeting of the Club was constituted, the only business being the offering of congratulations to the members on having successfully carried through the programme of the Club's twenty-second annual excursion. The day had meantime scarcely fulfilled its early promise. Mist had hung round the higher mountains all the time, varied by dashes of somewhat more solid character. It was some compensation to obtain the rapid and often weird effects produced by the clearing mist as it rolled up from loch and corrie. The glimpses of Loch Eunach, 1500-2000 feet below, were striking and characteristic. There, right opposite, were the tumbling cataracts of Braeriach; here at our feet the

huge amphitheatre which skirts Loch Eunach. On the south was a large herd of deer browsing, apparently unconscious of the near presence on the height above of "tainted" man. The huge chasm in which Loch Eunach lies is at all times imposing and even awe-inspiring. Other view points were afforded in the ascent; for example, the retrospect away round by Kingussie and beyond, the line of the Spey from Dalwhinnie on the south to Grantown or further on the north, and away on the left toward Forres, the long irregular ridge of the Monadhliadhs—such were the substitutes for the more distant and higher peaks excluded from view by mist and cloud.

The descent was made by Allt-na-Criche, at the bend of which a piece of water showed, which was at first identified as Loch Gamhna adjoining Loch-an-Eilein, the rendezvous for the carriages for the return journey. As it proved it was a case of mistaken identity. The lakelet is in part artificial, and is not named on some of the maps. It is distant over a mile from Loch Gamhna, and the intermediate ground is of the very worst character for walking. From whatever point one approaches the labyrinths of Rothiemurchus forest it seems to raise false hopes and so offer unanticipated difficulties. Where there is a road or path, it is pretty sure to lead eventually to human habitation. Where, as in this instance, there is none, the situation might be a very serious one if night were approaching—as it was, no more serious consequence resulted than a little delay. Loch-an-Eilein was eventually reached, and the carriages which were in waiting put an end to any anxiety about the return.

A striking feature of the excursion was the number of young game birds met with, testifying to the comparative abundance of animal life even in the higher regions of the hills. Two broods of ptarmigan allowed themselves to be closely inspected, though the mother birds kept coquetting around and refused to pose to the official photographer. A mother grouse was even less accessible, and was apparently prepared to abandon her "cheepers" altogether to the enemy. On the low ground were

found some long-billed fledglings whose identity could not be established. They might have been sand-pipers, golden plover, or oyster-catchers: the wailing of the oyster-catcher in the offing suggested parental concern, but these creatures, it must be remembered, are always somewhat plaintive of note. The summit cairn of Sgor Ghaoith yielded a very perfect eagle "casting," the massed feathers, fur and claws of which forcibly recalled the toll which the king of birds exacts from his subjects. From the mass a foot was extracted almost entire, perhaps that of a plover or some smaller bird. Vegetable life was also fairly abundant, and many of the slopes afford excellent pasturage for deer and sheep. On the higher reaches specimens of the dwarf willow (*Salix herbacea*), the smallest of "trees," were obtained at several points.

From Loch-an-Eilein the return journey was quickly made to Boat of Garten. A few of the party after dinner returned to town by the Speyside excursion train, while the rest stayed over the week-end to enjoy for a little longer the glories of the mountains.