

ROUND ABOUT GLAS TULAICHEAN AND GLAS MOAL.

BY P. A. COOPER.

THERE were three of us; and one was the "Geographer Royal," not that he knew any geography or even thought he knew any, nor on account of any regality of appearance (for in fact he was thin and scarggy) did he receive the name. It was a term of reproach used as often at him as of him. We called him the Geographer Royal because he made himself a nuisance, delaying the party while he produced a barometer, a prismatic compass and a watch with which he made absurd calculations. Then the precious results had to be written down, and really if we had not kept him on the run we should not have travelled above five miles each day. He was "dreadfully opinionative" too. We called him that, but we meant that he was mulishly obstinate. Still he had his useful side, and it is from his notebook that I refresh my memory.

We were three tiny specks in the midst of a vast wilderness of hills, toiling slowly along in the brilliant sun with shirts open at the neck and sleeves rolled up, each of us armed with a stout stick and a rüch-sack filled with lunch and tea and a change of clothes.

We had left Aberdeen at 12.20 on Saturday afternoon, travelled to Braemar by train and 'bus, partaken of an excellent tea, and pushed on to Thistle Cottage, Inverey, as quickly as possible, for the evening was dull and showers fell intermittently.

But as we approached the tiny clachan we were surprised to see a fire raging in the glen. We stopped to watch it. All around was grey and dull. Heavy rain clouds shut out the hill tops; but over the shoulder of Carn na Moine, in the line of the Linn of Dee, came the yellow glare. Yet as we watched, it declined and

disappeared. It was the last glow of the setting sun far up the valley of the Dee, and, as it shone, its orange glow under the lowering sky made a wonderfully realistic fire. As the last rays faded and evening fell we stepped up to Miss Gruer's door.

We had however been forestalled, for already six stalwarts were in possession of the house. Still as the Geographer looked the picture of bedraggled misery and as I am most persuasive, we got comfortable beds and a good supper.

Sunday morning was cold and bright. The mists had gone, and as we made for the Linn the sun shone out upon the hills, raising a wonder of light and shade. The road from the Linn of Dee to the Bynack Shieling is long and tiring; it winds along the glen between the river and the hills. On either side are broken walls, some with a window or a door, sad memorials of a once thickly populated glen.

Soon we were in sight of the White Bridge where our path left the Dee; on our right stood the towering heights of Beinn Bhrotain and Cairn Toul, giants of the Larig. Crossing the Bridge we pushed along and made such good pace that we reached the Fords of Geldie at 10.20. a.m.

As we sat and rested on the bank, we saw two cyclists making for Glen Feshie. Away to the south again, we went past the Bynack Shieling. A more lonely spot it is difficult to imagine. To those who are tired of mankind it is recommended as a winter residence.

From the Bynack the path becomes narrower. Sometimes it almost disappears, as it winds and twists along the steep sides of the valley. To the eastward we saw great green slopes of short hill grass, a ski-ing paradise. Long slopes and curves abound. Short steep jumping tracks are common. It is an ideal place for the beginner or the expert.

Soon we were on the steep sides of Coire an Loch and Coire na Craig, nearing the Falls of Tarf.

But at this moment undue agitation on the part of the Geographer compelled us to wait while he relieved his

mind. Out came the map, the compass, the barometer and the note-book. A few moments later after "shooting the sun" and apparently extracting the square root of 5.3 and making a minor summation by the differential calculus, he came to the conclusion that soon we should find a glen to take us by Carn an Rìgh (3377 ft.) to the base of Glas Tulaichean (3445 ft.). And sure enough just at midday we found it, a small gap, with a stony track winding through. Turning East we climbed the path along the sunny side of Meall na Caillich Buidhe. The hills here are steep and grassy, the valleys narrow and dark with a carpeting of dwarf birches, through which sparkle the pools and waterfalls of glittering burns. We were now in Gleann Mor, toiling along high above the Allt a Ghlinne Mhoir.

There was not a sign of life, but just as we crossed the Feith Lair we saw eight magpies. What a wild spot for those fateful birds. We followed the stream as it wound round the foot of Carn an Rìgh, and when at length we saw the steep side of Glas Tulaichean it was 1.30 p.m. and time for lunch. Up to this we had seen little wild life, only the magpies of Feith Lair and a few scattered grouse; but as we lunched, looking up at Stac na h-Iolair, the rocky brow of Carn an Rìgh, a great herd of deer came slowly round the shoulder of the hill, grazing as they went. They passed within three hundred yards of where we sat, more than a hundred in the herd.

But time was going, and though we had accomplished sixteen miles still other ten lay before us, and so packing up once more we set our faces towards Glas Tulaichean. Far up the mountain is a little speck of white quartz emerging from the green hill side. To us it seemed to be a cottage gable. This, we later heard, is the "white house of Glas Tulaichean." The valley through which we were passing was quite innocent of path, and we had to pick our way, winding out and in among the knolls strewn by the stream.

The scene was wild. Unlike the hills of Aberdeenshire, purple with September heather, these hills were green,

except where grey rocks had been laid bare by the workings of time. High over-hanging us on the left were the sheer cliffs of Carn an Rìgh piercing the blue sky. Flanking our right lay the long green ridge, sweeping eastward and northward to the summit of Glas Tulaichean, the "little grey knoll," for so the name is translated. He was a strong man who could look on the hill rising straight from the valley for well nigh 2,000 feet and still call it the "little grey knoll."

As we toiled through the foot-knolls a new interest broke on us. An eagle left the ground near the stream and with a succession of wide sweeps rose out of the valley and glided over the rocky brow of Carn an Rìgh. Almost at once another appeared and disappeared, and another, and yet another. We stopped to watch, thinking the while that this was but the reappearance of the first, till in a moment, moving in line like the advance guard of an army, came three eagles. Together they glided and swayed across the valley and finally disappeared from view.

And now we set us to the task of scaling the "Little Grey Knoll." How we laboured and strained, tacking to right and left. But at each step we were rewarded, for the view which unfolded itself grew more striking every moment.

Over the saddle of Carn an Rìgh and Mam nan Carn we could see the Learg Ghruamach, the deep cleft of the Cairngorms silhouetted in the northern sky. Away from it on either side stretched great masses of hills, Beinn Bhrotain, Cairn Toul, Braeriach to the west, "Ben Muich Dhui and his neighbours" to the east.

Nearing the summit of Glas Tulaichean we saw the first ptarmigan. Just as the Geographer's barometer was registering 3,200 feet and the great curtain of Beinn a' Ghlo was appearing in the south-west, a flock came sweeping down the mountain-side as if to challenge our presence. They wheeled and circled while the sun flashed bright upon their snowy wings.

So fast had been our progress that despite the last

steep climb we were seated on the top before four o'clock. And what a rolling sea of hills there lay around us, wave after wave, receding to the grey horizon. Scattered among the dark hills the little mountain lochs glanced and sparkled. It was a sight to gladden the heart of a highlander. Light and shade on hillside and valley thrown in wonderful profusion of colour. Green slopes and blue sky, dark boulder-strewn valleys and grim precipices, each fascinated and held the eye. It was a sight to be remembered, but memory fails to grasp that wild confusion. The untutored Sassenach speaks with derision of "shapeless hills" and "the grey mists of North Britain."

Shapeless indeed! What is more graceful than the long beautiful curves, ever changing, ever widening till they fade in obscurity? Bright scarlets and brilliant yellows or blues, these may catch the eye, excite the passions; but where in all nature can we find a grey to soothe the mind, to caress the brain into a state of holy adoration, as the mists of Scotland? Here, only here among our mountains where on the brightest day the distant hills lie buried in the shimmering veil. Grey of a hundred shades, all different, all beautiful in their varying intensity, that is the appealing colour of our Scottish Highlands.

Far and near around us lay the landmarks of the Highlands. Beinn Iutharn Mhor and Beinn Iutharn Bheag—the twin "Hills of Hell," the Cairngorms; Ben Alder and the Athole Hills, Ben Vuroch, Ben Vrackie, Schichallion; Creag Leacach's razor edge, Glas Maol and the Clova hills, our own Lochnagar—they stood out clear, and behind them hung the shadows of a thousand more.

But to the south and far below, timidly peeping round rough shoulders, we could see green pasture and a golden strip of harvest land. There lay civilisation, and there we must rest to-night. So dropping quietly down we passed into Glen Lochsie, and by the old lodge nestling in the larches by the burn.

As we crossed the little bridge, a heron, the lonely

dweller near the lodge, rose and flew before us down the Glen.

After a meal, washed down with water from the stream, we passed away down by the new white lodge.

At the Spital, a warm bath and a good supper revived the Geographer's weary frame. He told us tales, some good and some bad, some new and some hoary. He talked of compasses and of graphs, gave the barometer readings of the day, and passed the time in great appreciation of his own vast wit and wisdom. But as the evening wore on he called for water and a kettle, for sugar and a lemon, for whisky of the glen, and soon he had forgotten graphs and bearings, altitudes and angles. He made hot toddy, and strong toddy, and toddy both strong and hot. And he drank it and we drank it, till at length all that was earthly of him slipped to the floor, and the "Geographer Royal" was asleep.

"Up in the mornin's nae for me
Up in the mornin' early."

Nor did it seem to be for anyone else except the Geographer, and he had a busy time getting the party out of bed. But he did his work with a will, ably assisted by a muscular chambermaid clad in shooting boots.

We were on the road by 9 o'clock and stepping cheerily up the glen with the Cairnwell (Cairn of the Pass) in front. But, alas! the sun had gone. No showers fell, but heavy rain-clouds hung threateningly overhead.

On the side of Creagan Bheithe a grouse drive was in progress, and we stopped to watch it. Far off on the hill-side we could see small patches of white—the line of beaters armed with flags—advancing. Close above us was the line of guns, hidden from the birds behind a sharp rise.

From time to time a low whistle gave the warning of approaching birds. The guns shot well; for time and again coveys of six or eight were reduced to single birds scudding for dear life. On the road we met many carriages and motors, for at this season the Highlands are emptying themselves into the streets of London.

At the highest point of the road, where it passes over the col betwixt Cairnwell and Meall Odhar, we stopped to rest, doubtful of our further movements. The hills were wrapped in mist, and views were out of the question. To give up our hill climb would be disappointing, leaving only a short walk into Braemar by road. Moreover that hearty optimist of barometers and compasses was thirsting for the mists because, although his instruments had been in constant use since the moment when we started, yet never once had they been of the slightest value. So, trusting that the day would clear and that the Geographer would lead us well, we took the hill and set off up the county boundary, working east over Meall Odhar (3019 ft).

The mists were thick but the high wind broke through and afforded us fitful glimpses of the distant hills. To the south lay the country we had come from, to the north our path to Braemar. And beyond the woods of Dee, looming gigantic lay Ben Avon and Beinn a' Bhuid. But the mists closed round and, with our guide ahead, we pushed forward to the summit. It was fifteen minutes past mid-day when we reached the top so, huddling down behind the stout post which marks the spot, we two, the rank and file, prepared to lunch. Not so our leader; his creed must first be satisfied. Mere human wants could wait. In a moment the ground was strewn with his paraphernalia. Even Glas Maol could not contain him. He must needs perch himself on the post. All had gone well and the bubble of his level was settling in its run when an unruly gust blew his cloak over his head. A minute later we had lifted the prostrate scientist, collected his scattered instruments, scraped the butter off his person and applied it to the few remaining biscuits. Peace was again restored, and after a hearty lunch he quite became himself again. As the mist thickened his spirits rose; he climbed on to his perch again and began to sing.

Picture the scene. A flat hill top, thick mist racing past on all sides before a howling gale, bitterly cold and

damp. Seated on a paling post, surrounded by his various toys, a scraggy Geographer singing,—singing nothing in particular, but singing like the last swan of summer. It chilled my bones. I fled, and racing down the grassy slope was only checked upon the cliffs of the Caenlochan Glen, from whose depths rises the River Isla; that glorious Forfar glen, carpeted with green woods. The river lay two thousand feet below me, stretching beneath sheer walls to the Cannes Glen and Finalty Hill.

Pressing along the stoney crest of the Allt a Gharbh Choir, we (the others had now overtaken me) reached the rocky pile which marks the Cairn of Claise (3484 ft.) Passing it by we made a long detour by the foot of the Tolmount to see the corries of Glen Callater. The clouds still hung thick around. Often we saw deer singly and in herds looming through the mist at fifty yards and closer, and when the curtain rose before a gust of wind we found ourselves well nigh surrounded by the great herds, wandering hither and thither protected by their stags. Then bending westward we steered for Carn an Tuirc. Skirting the cliffs of Loch Kander, just resting for a moment to watch the antics of the goats which make their home among the precipices, we passed over the shoulder of Carn an Tuirc. At the shelter there we struck a path * which took us straight to Loch Callater Lodge. Half-an-hour for tea and an hour's walk to Braemar ended our labours. We were in town that evening, but fortified with all that the hills could give

* According to the Geographer's statement, this path, although a very distinct one, is not marked on the one-inch Ordnance Survey Map. I therefore produce the following extract from his note book—

“ 2.30 p.m. Carn an Tuirc, 3340 ft. (Cairn of the Boar). ”

“ Top—stoney and rough grass. Slopes—grass, ”

“ heather lower. Deeside hills—purple heather and trees. ”

“ Barom. has fallen ‘1’ since 1.30 p.m. ”

“ 30 ptarmigain on contour 3250. ”

“ Struck a path near shelter, not marked on map : ”

“ goes N.N.E. to contour 3000 ; N., then N.N.W. to hollow ”

“ E. of pt. 2522. Crossing hollow on E. side of pt. 2522 it is a ”

“ cart track. Thence N. to foot-bridge at Loch Callater Lodge. ”

“ Fresh tracks of stalker's horse going up hill. ”

us, the everlasting joy of happy recollections and a great longing to return.

The following tables of distances and the time employed in covering them are compiled from the note-book of the Geographer-Royal:—

	Miles from Inverey.	Time.	
Inverey... ..		8.45 a.m.	
Linn of Dee	2	9.10	
Whitebridge	5	10	
Geldie Fords	6 $\frac{1}{2}$	10.20	
Bynack Shieling	7 $\frac{1}{8}$		
Junction of Glen Tilt and Gleann Mor	11 $\frac{1}{4}$	12	
Bridge at Carn an Righ	15 $\frac{1}{4}$	1.10 p.m.	Lunch 55 min.
Glas Tulaichean (Summit)	19 $\frac{3}{8}$	3.50	Rest 25 min.
Glen Lochsie Old Lodge	22 $\frac{1}{8}$	5.10	Tea 35 min
Socach (Glen Lochsie Lodge)	24		
Spital of Glen Shee	26	6.45	
	Miles from Spital.		
Spital		9.5 a.m.	
Cairnwell	6 $\frac{1}{2}$	10.45	10 min. halt.
Meall Odhar	7 $\frac{3}{4}$	11.50	
Glas Maol	8 $\frac{1}{2}$	12.15 pm	lunch 25 min.
Cairn of Claise	10 $\frac{5}{8}$	1.30	
Carn an Tuirc (with detour) ¹	15	2.30	
Lochcallater Lodge	18 $\frac{5}{8}$	3.20	tea 30 min.
Auchallater	22 $\frac{1}{8}$	4.35	
Braemar	24 $\frac{1}{2}$	5.5	

¹ Cairn of Claise to Carn an Tuirc, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles.