

A DAY IN SUMMER.

BY DR. J. L. McINTYRE.

IN the *Cairngorm Club Journal*, of January, 1913, Mr. John Clarke gave an account of a "Circuit of the Cairngorms." He and his son having cycled from Boat of Garten to Loch Morlich, climbed in succession Braeriach, Cairntoul, Ben Muich Dhui, and Cairngorm, returning to Loch Morlich and then home by wheel. Last summer, on July 29th, the present writer had the privilege of joining Mr. Clarke in a reversal of this journey, under better conditions however, both as to conveyance and as to weather. A short account of the experience may encourage other members of the Cairngorm Club to repeat what is perhaps the most fascinating high-level tour in the Cairngorms that can be accomplished in one day, without undue stress.

We had decided to drive to Loch Morlich, and at 7.30 in the morning we set out, having, as we believed, successfully misled the anxious enquirers at home as to our intentions, and having at the same time covered our retreat should disaster overtake us. The Sluggan road was not in worse condition than usual: the Loch was still sleeping gray under the morning mist as we passed it, and the Cairngorm ridge was wrapped in cloud. Experience of the past few days, however, gave us hopes which were nobly fulfilled. At 9 o'clock our foot-journey commenced, across the bridge below Glenmore Lodge—the familiar way through the forest up past the mighty stone, Clach Fhairvaig, that a child's touch, it seems, might send whirling down into the valley. As we reached the ridge above Coire na Chais we overtopped the mist, and shortly came upon one of those thrilling sights which only the mountaineer enjoys. One has often, on passing through a mist on the mountains, been able to look back and down upon it as a dense white, glaring sea, lapping the mountain-side, and hiding all beneath. But this day, for the

first time, I looked down upon fleecy clouds, floating below us, and away out in the distance—glinting here and there in the sun while between them, and through their edges, the woods, fields and villages of Strathspey were clearly visible.

It was a fairy scene, and in natural conditions I should probably have idled half an hour over it. My guide, however, was haunted by a certain Colonel Bogey, known to golfers, who had done things in ridiculously short times, and whom we were evidently expected to keep in our minds, and defeat if possible. I herewith enter a solemn protest against this gentleman's admission to the Cairngorm Club.

However, we were a minute or two in advance of him at the top of Cairngorm (11.5 a.m.) The sun was now beating down in full force, the air was still, the sky almost clear of clouds—a perfect day had there only been a breeze to cool our faces. With the briefest of rests we were up and away by the shortest route to the “big Ben,” Muich Dhui. We dipped a little towards Loch Avon, striking the ridge again above the crest of the Coire an Sneachda: a little further on a corner of Loch Avon was seen on our left, plunged in its eternal shadows, its cool waters appealing to at least one hot and thirsty traveller above. We contented ourselves, however, with a sample of the source-waters of the much-debated Avon from an upper stream of the Feith Buidhe, which we compared, afterwards, with the Dee-sources. At this critical stage of the discussion wild horses will not draw from me the judgment which we passed. With a flying glance down Coire Etchachan, which raised memories of climbing days from Braemar side, we reached the shoulder of the Ben: the giant “pairting-stones” and boulders made for rapid going and the top was reached almost precisely at 12.30.

I have had clearer and more distant views from Ben Muich Dhui, than we had on this day, but never one so satisfying or so stimulating. The heat haze hung over the huge mass of Ben-y-Gloe to the South, over Lochnagar and Mount Keen in the East, and the Monadhliath Range

in the West; but this only served to bring out in stronger contrast the vivid lines of the near Cairngorms themselves. After all the popular mind is right in fixing on Ben Muich Dhui as being the finest as well as the highest of the range. Braeriach runs it close, and Ben Muich Dhui is itself unimposing when viewed from any other point. But the view from its summit excels all others; the deep gash of the Larig Pass, the huge rock masses dipping down into it from the other side, the majestic Angel's Peak dominating all; the weirdly rugged corries surrounding it, thrilling even in the thought of climbing. On this day the stillness and silence accentuated the grim beauty of these corries, which seemed to change their aspect with every step we took. There was no wind, no human voice reached us from any part of the hills: even birds were strangely absent, except that small bird which flits noiselessly from stone to stone before you. On the other side the quaint knobs of Cairn a Mhaim, and the mammoth backs of Ben Bhrotain and Monadh Mor stood vividly out. But, as it is *just* possible that some one has already mentioned these things in the Journal, I pass on.

Being sensible persons, we took half an hour's rest and lunch at the head of the Choire Mhoir burn, by which we proposed to descend into the pass. Looking across at Cairntoul, the next object of our ambition, we could not with any certainty make out the grassy course by which Mr. Clarke and his son had descended on the earlier circuit; the whole peak showed dry and gray, with only a few patches of grass here and there. Still, we hazarded a guess for it, and made first for the burn that runs down from Lochan Uaine below Angel's Peak. The Choire Mhoir was rougher than we expected, but it was nothing, as we shortly found, to the "roughness" of Cairntoul. This was really the only toilsome part of our journey, lightened in the descent (of some 2,300 ft.) by the charm of the Angel's Peak opposite, and its corries; but sheer drudgery in the ascent. We took the slope on the left of the corrie that runs down from Lochan Uaine, and were guided by deceptive grass runs on to a most un-

angelic mass of slithering scree: there were pleasant-looking flat stones here and there, which only waited for your foot to rest upon them to start incontinently for the pass below. An ice-axe, which I had been secretly rather ashamed of carrying up to this point, became all at once a friendly protector. The shoulder was made at last, however,—at a point overlooking the lonely Lochan to which, with its glorious buttresses, I promised myself a future visit. There followed a scramble—mainly, I confess, on all fours, so far as I was concerned—over the big boulders and so to the top, which we reached, “proud but puffed,” at 3.30 p.m. I began to wonder—while enjoying a well-earned rest—whether three such peaks were not enough for an amateur; the way to Braeriach seemed long, the heat became suddenly oppressive, to my fancy, and my limbs obtrusively heavy. Fortunately, however, Mr. Clarke was there, and he at once put his foot down firmly—in the direction of Braeriach. Being a social animal, I followed, and gathered spirit as I went. For after all, the day was superb, the worst was over, there was no dip to speak of: there was Glen Eidart and Sgoran Dubh to admire, and as I had been over the ground several times, it was something like a “kenned face.” Yet, I am certain if I had been alone I should not have hit as we did upon the very shortest route from peak to peak. One of the interesting things my companion brought to my notice on the plateau between the Angel’s Peak and Braeriach was the difference between the two sources of the Gharbchoire Burn, which is one of the head-waters of the Dee. In the branch we first crossed (from the “Wells of Dee”) the water was soft, almost lukewarm on that summer day; a short distance on, in the branch running down from the shoulder of Braeriach itself, the water was hard, pure and icy cold. One could hardly have believed that two so different waters could have come from springs so near each other in level and in position.

The top of Braeriach was reached at 5.10, a most exhilarating moment, which will ever be marked in my

mental diary. We stayed a little, in spite of my vain-glorious mood, to watch the strange shadow-hills—we could not decide as to their reality—that seemed to rise away beyond and above the Monadhliath range in the softening evening light; then made for the lower bothy of Loch Eunach where our labours were to end, past the edge of the Coire an Lochain, and down the long terraced dip to the valley. From afar we spied our trusty John asleep by his chariot, no doubt dreaming of better ways of spending a holiday than ours: the sight brought strength to our lagging limbs and weary knees, and by 6.15 we were on the Glen Eunach road. A rough but pleasant drive through the forest to Coylum Bridge, then on the high-road to “the Boat”—and our summer day was over.

At 7.59 (I must be exact here), Mr. Clarke re-entered his house at Boat of Garten; a minute later, it is said, the spirit of a certain Colonel Bogey looked in, but retired discomfited, using words which one may hear upon the golf-course, but never on the mountains.