

## THE HILL OF CUSHNIE.

BY ROBERT ANDERSON.

“CUSHNIE for cauld” is a familiar saying, which owes its extensive currency partly to its alliteration, but much more to its aptness. The Macgregors, who once infested Cromar and raided the adjacent districts, are credited with having coined the phrase. Probably they found the climatic conditions of Cushnie too rigorous for the special kind of “outdoor life” they cultivated. Gilderoy and his gang of free-booters, in particular, are said to have declared the hills of Cushnie to be the coldest in Scotland; but such a declaration must now be accepted with very considerable reservations—there must be many other places more bleak, more wind-swept, and much colder than Cushnie. By whomsoever invented, however, the phrase is a felicitous one, as accurate as it is terse.

Cushnie is notoriously a cold parish. It lies high, its elevation averaging from 690 feet at the junction of the Cushnie burn with the burn of Leochel, to 1,400 feet at Bogsowie, the highest cultivated ground; and though it is bounded on the west by a range of hills, the range is not of sufficient height to afford protection from the cold winds that sweep over this elevated region, especially in winter. The parish minister who furnished to the New Statistical Account (published in 1843) the description of Leochel-Cushnie—the parishes of Leochel and Cushnie were united in 1793—was obliged to confess that “Both Leochel and Cushnie have long had an evil report on account of the coldness and lateness of the climate, and the consequent uncertainty of the crops.” One local authority on place-names, indeed, defines Cushnie as meaning “frosty place,” deriving it from the Gaelic “Cuisneach” = “frosty,” and adding that “In the glen of Cushnie, 1,000 feet above the sea, the grain crops are liable to damage from frosts in early autumn.”

Another authority, however, regards this derivation as very doubtful, and deduces Cushnie from a conjunction of Celtic words corresponding with "Foot o' Hill."

The true meaning of the word Cushnie need not worry us. The latter of these two derivations, at any rate, whatever its merits or demerits philologically, fits in with the topography. Cushnie lies at the foot of the Hill of Cushnie—or, rather, the hills of Cushnie, for, as just indicated, a long range of hills extends along the western boundary of the parish, separating it from Tarland and Towie, and throwing spurs into both these parishes. In common parlance the specific title of Cushnie Hill is given to the highest and biggest hill of the range, which is named Sockaugh on the Ordnance Survey map of 1874. The Cushnie people have always rejected that name; but the long-standing dispute over the nomenclature was set at rest by the revised survey of 1905-6, when the correct name of Pressendye was assigned to the hill, and as such it appears in the new O. S. map published in 1909. The whole subject of the proper title of the hill, along with the derivation and application of the several names, was dealt with in an article on "Sockaugh," contributed by Rev. George Williams to the first volume of the *C. C. J.* (pp. 284-293), and in a supplementary note (pp. 335-6), and need not be gone into here. It may just be mentioned, however, that the name "Socach" now stands in its proper place on the revised O. S. map, applied to a long spur stretching northward from Pressendye, whence flows, from its north-west side, the Socach burn, which joins the Don at Milltown of Towie.

The general character of the Hill of Cushnie may best be described, perhaps, by the phrase applicable to so many Aberdeenshire eminences that are devoid of special features—"a great lump of a hill." In other words, it is more imposing by reason of its extent and its bulk than by its height, which is only 2,032 feet. It consists in the main of a succession of gently-rounded heights, crowned with extensive plateaus, and its contour

outlines are accordingly too smooth and regular to be in any way picturesque. Such impressiveness as the hill possesses is due almost wholly to its location. Standing, in a sense, athwart the lines of the Deeside and Donside hills, it arrests attention from its very position. Like almost all hills, it gains distinction when seen from a distance. It is very conspicuous from most parts of Cromar, forming a striking barrier on the east of the valley; and it is hardly less conspicuous when viewed from the Aberdeen-Tarland road between Corse and Tillylodge. Here, its one outstanding feature is especially discernible—a green strip far up the hillside, in shape like a “flauchter-spade,” an implement (it is perhaps necessary to explain) of peculiar shape employed in cutting turf preparatory to casting peats. The “flauchter-spade,” as the strip is called colloquially, is a piece of boggy ground, out of which flows a burn, known first as the Corse Burn and then, lower down, as the Leochel Burn. The hill is clothed with grass and heather, the heather short on the northern and eastern slopes; and the ascent—from the Cushnie side, at least—is exceedingly easy.

It was from that side that the writer and a friend made the ascent on a very windy day in September last. We were spending a week-end at Burnside of Hallhead, the “outmost” farm-house in the parish—a veritable “back o’ beyont” in a remote and lonely glen, with, however, a glorious outlook on the hill range from Clochnaben to Mount Keen, while “just round the corner” is a superb view of Lochnagar; and a day was devoted to climbing Pressendye and a spur called Pittenderich, running southward into the parish of Tarland (needless to say, the whole day was not so employed). Several ways of going up the hill were available from our starting-point, but our host (who accompanied us) chose one by “the drove road”—a very old road, along which sheep are still driven. From this road we diverged into a track through a wood, which led us in a comparatively short time to the summit of a prominent flank of the hill,

singularly enough designated "The Top" (1,750 feet high). Here the parish of Cushnie lay spread out before us, the valley of the Corse burn to our right, and the Glen of Cushnie to our left, our view extending far beyond to the coast-line. From "The Top" to the top proper of Pressendye would, in ordinary circumstances, be an easy and enjoyable walk, but on this particular day a violent gale was blowing right in our teeth. "The wind blew as 'twad blawn its last," and not only was our progress impeded, but the pleasure of the walk was wholly nullified. Gaining the summit eventually, we were glad to take shelter from the blast in the lee of the unusually large cairn which marks the top. The view from the summit is described in some detail in Mr. Williams's article. It will suffice simply to say that it is one of very remarkable extent, ranging from the Blue Hill to Lochnagar and the Cairngorms on the one side, and sweeping round from the Cairngorms to Tap o' Noth, Bennachie, and Brimmond Hill on the other. The gale was too fierce, however, to permit of the prospect being enjoyed for any time, and very speedily we relinquished our far from comfortable shelter behind the cairn.

We descended the hill on the Tarland side, and made for that village to learn the latest war news (it was Sunday, on which day an official telegram is displayed at country post-offices). The descent was without incident beyond the circumstance that, in making short cuts across stubble fields and by farm roads, we struck the right of way—or must we say the alleged right of way?—from Tarland to Cushnie which runs past Douneside, and is at present the subject of a protracted and costly litigation. From Tarland we found our way to Burnside by a delightful hill path which strikes off the Tarland-Alford road at Milton of Culsh and crosses Pittenderich to the Hallhead glen—to us a fresh sample of the many pleasant routes away from the high roads that are to be found in country districts.