

## CORRESPONDENCE.

### THE BEN UARNS.

TO THE EDITOR, "CAIRNGORM CLUB JOURNAL."

SIR,—In the last number of the *Journal* attention was again directed to the Ben Uarns. As stated in the note on the subject, the proper Gaelic spelling and derivation of the name of these hills at the head of Glen Ey has always been a matter of dispute. The Ordnance Survey adopted the provincial spelling "Iutharn" (or "Ifrinn"), i.e., hell; hence the hills have recently been known as "the mountains of hell" (See *C.C.J.*, vii., 250).

The word "Drumwharran" \* quoted in the note (p. 76) in all probability refers to the Glen Ey Highlanders and the Ben Uarns, and in every likelihood is a corruption of "Druim-urrainn" (*dreem-ooarn*, the ridge of strength or power). This meaning might have reference to the strength of the mountains, as a natural barrier against the enemies of the men of the glen.

Mr. J. A. Robertson, in his book "The Gaelic Topography of Scotland," published in 1869, prior to the making of the Ordnance Survey map, says on this subject—"The heathen Caledonian Gael appear to have paid to mountains, as well as rivers, a superstitious reverence, by ascribing a power and strength in them. There are in the extreme north-east boundary of the royal forest of Benachrombeg, in Atholl, Perthshire, and close on the county march of Aberdeenshire, two very remote mountains called 'Beinn-urrainn-mor' and 'Beinn-urrainn beag,' which mean 'the mountains of power or strength;' and they are also distinguished by being called 'the greater and lesser.'

\* The Gaelic u is sometime turned into w by English-speaking Scots.



The situation of these two mountains is very solitary, and far removed from any habitations. They, and the whole neighbourhood also, are unoccupied by either sheep or cattle, whereby it is probable that not a dozen people have ascended their tops during the whole of last century."

Although the English-named "Devil's Elbow" and "Devil's Point" are in comparatively close proximity to the Ben Urns, we might reconsider our interpretation of the names of the two hills in question.—I am, etc.,

J. McCoss.

ABERDEEN, 22nd January, 1915.

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#### PLACE-NAMES IN THE CAIRNGORMS, ETC.

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SIR,—I have begun to read the *Cairngorm Club Journal* only recently, but as I have just bought a complete set to date and become a regular subscriber, perhaps you will allow me a few remarks.

I observe in the issue for January, 1913 (Vol. vii., pp. 235-40) a report of the opening of the "Allt-na-Bienne Moire" Bridge. The Cairngorm Club is to be congratulated on constructing this really excellent bridge; but, in the *Cairngorm Club Journal*, why has the name of the stream it spans been mutilated? All through the report, and particularly in the reproduction of the inscription placed on the bridge, (not on the bridge itself, for I specially walked out to see it, but on a buttress), the name is given as "Bienne," whereas it should be spelt "Beinne."

Also, "Larig Ghru" is an impossible form. Larig should be Làirig by the rule leathann ri leathann is caol ri caol. Grù (or gnù) = (1) famous, (2) stingy, (3) grippy, (4) surly, (5) envious; so Dwelly's Dictionary. The word for gloomy is gruamach. The two do not seem in any way interchangeable or synonymous; nor



does Dwelly or MacBain give the one as a contracted form of the other. MacBain's giving of them as from separate roots appears to me conclusive that they are different words; and I suspect it is simply a blunder of the cartographers to assume that they are synonymous.

But I know no Gaelic. I have been trying to learn it, but have hardly got beyond the beginnings of it yet. Still, the above represents what I believe to be accurate. Anyhow, "Bienne" is quite wrong. The combination "ie" never comes in Gaelic.

I am glad to see that there is a prospect of Mr. Copland's "Panorama of the View" being placed on the summit of Beinn Muich Dhui, and I heartily wish the projected memorial every success. If only the Club would erect a similar panoramic view on the top of Lochnagar! In my opinion, the view from that summit is unrivalled; besides, the mountain itself is climbed far more frequently than is Beinn Muich Dhui.

May I venture to dissent from your too favourable notice of the erection at the "View Point" here? The hills are so badly drawn that, unless one already knew some of them, he could not find any like those delineated. The Cromdale Hills, *e.g.*, are largely unrecognisable. Several are quite out of proportion, particularly the Ben Avon and Beinn a Bhuid section. Several peaks marked as *visible* I could not see; nor again could I make the large number of peaks given on the panorama as lying between any two selected points correspond to the few in actual sight; and these peaks are all drawn—not merely their position indicated by arrows. The idea is so excellent that one wishes it had been carried out better.

Please forgive my criticisms—they are not meant to be carping.—I am, etc.,

RONALD BURN.



[While "Larig Ghru" has been constantly used in the *C. C. J.* as a convenient name for the well-known pass, it has all along been recognised that the proper form was "Learg Ghrumach" (Vol. I., 319; II., 297). We may confess to having no predilections on the subject. The trouble is that "authorities" on the Gaelic language are at variance, and those of us, like our correspondent, who do not "have the Gaelic" are apt to be bewildered. Mr. John Milne, LL.D., the author of "Celtic Place-Names in Aberdeenshire," for instance, suggests a delightful compromise, "Lairig Ghru;" while Mr. F. C. Diack, in an article in the *Aberdeen Free Press*, 6th May, 1911, dismissed "Lairig Ghrumach" in this contemptuous fashion:—

"The famous pass leading from the head of Dee to Strathspey is often given in maps and guide books as Lairig Ghrumach, 'the gloomy pass.' Gaelic speakers know nothing of this: they call it L. Ghrū, or, in better spelling, for the sound is the same, *L. Dhrū*. Dr. Macbain pointed out that the stream which rises in this pass is known in the lower reaches as the Druie, and that the name therefore probably means 'the pass of the Druie river.' The desperate expedient of explaining Ghrū as a 'contraction' of a hypothetical ghrumach is hardly worth mentioning, except as an illustration of the curiosities that find ready currency in this department."

The varieties of spelling as between "ei" and "ie" are notorious, even in English. It may be that "Beinne" is the more orthodox form, but Gaelic orthography is a subject on which doubts may be fairly entertained by those who are not Celts and are not familiar with the language, especially when the experts differ so much as they do, *e.g.*, in the adjacent Larig Ghru. It may be pointed out that the latest edition of the O.S. one-inch map gives "Beanaidh" as the name of the burn—this, we understand, on the authority of a Gaelic-speaking member of the Ordnance Survey.—EDITOR.]