

BEINN A' GHLO FROM BRAEMAR.

BEINN A' GHLO (the Mountain of Mist), with its triple peaks, is a hill of striking contour and is a conspicuous object from many points of view. For long I had wanted to climb it, but it was not until last summer that a sojourn at Braemar provided the opportunity. The hill is a somewhat difficult one to approach. The usual way to tackle it is to start from Blair Athol, but, for a cyclist at least, there seems to be a good deal to be said in favour of starting from Braemar, as the following narrative may demonstrate.

On a Sunday towards the end of July, a friend and I left Braemar on our cycles at 8.30 a.m. (summer time) for Bynack Lodge. The morning was fine, giving promise of excessive heat. We quickly covered the distance to the Linn of Dee, but thereafter our pace was greatly reduced owing to the deplorable condition of the road. There is very little traffic up there nowadays, and national and local circumstances have removed almost every incentive to road-maintenance. After crossing the White Bridge (now no longer white), we had an opportunity along various narrow ridges and hollows of the road of exercising our powers of trick-riding, and eventually we reached the Geldie without mishap either to man or cycle. Instead of taking the road across the ford, we crossed the stream by the foot-bridge, which had evidently been recently rebuilt, but found that further cycling was entirely out of the question, the road being practically non-existent. We accordingly left our cycles in a dry side-channel of the Bynack Burn and proceeded on foot to the Lodge, which we found to be tenantless.

It was now fully half-past ten o'clock. The sun was getting very powerful, and there was not

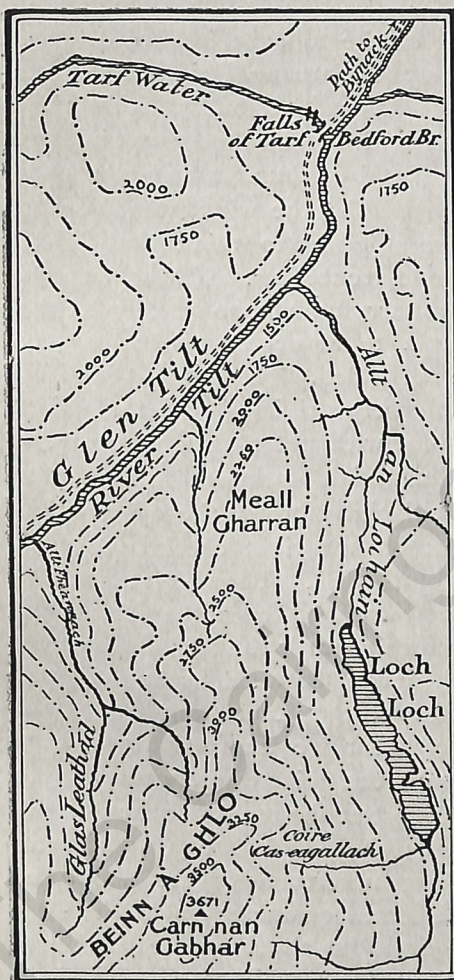
a breath of wind. As we tramped along the path leading over the watershed to Glen Tilt, we noticed that thunder-clouds were forming and we experienced one sharp shower. We reached the Tarf at noon, and under the Bedford Bridge took shelter from another shower, sitting close to the water's edge. We noticed that the Falls of Tarf were in their normal summer condition, and we let our imagination picture what the scene would be like if the stream were in flood. After a short rest, we continued on our way, following the path down Glen Tilt until we came to the point where the Allt an Lochain, from Loch Loch, joins the Tilt. Here we took lunch, and, while so doing, proved the value of a "Tommy's (or 'Little Mary') Cooker" as an adjunct to a mountaineering outfit. Thereafter we walked across the Tilt (*à la* Parker) just below where the Allt an Lochain flows in, having previously tightened up our boots to keep out as much water as possible. By making use of stones in the bed of the river, we avoided getting wet more than half-way to the knee.

A careful examination through a field glass from the summit of An Sgarsoch on a previous day, and a somewhat prolonged study of the map, had led to the conclusion that the easiest way to reach the highest top of Beinn a' Ghlo was to cross the Tilt at the point just mentioned and to make the ascent by following the ridge which rises from the angle formed by the Allt an Lochain and the Tilt, and runs almost in a straight line to the summit of Carn nan Gabhar. Commencing to climb at 1.30 p.m. we soon rose 1000 feet to the 2250 contour, and by keeping to the west of the highest part of Meall Gharran, we avoided negotiating any but negligible dips. By the time we had risen another 500 feet, we were able to look behind us to a very fine view of the Cairngorms, remarkably conspicuous by reason of the large amount of snow upon them. Gradually we mounted the steep-sided saddle which separates the right-hand bank of the Allt Fheannach from the



A GIANT PINE IN GLENMORE FOREST.

Loch Loch valley. The first glimpse of this Loch was one never to be forgotten, and the view of the sunlit



valley leading down towards Kirkmichael was particularly pleasing. All the time we were climbing, thunder was muttering almost directly overhead, but we had no rain, although a storm was evidently breaking in the region of Blair Athol. The route we had chosen proved to be one of easy "going," the surface being covered with either grass, moss, or short heather. The only slight drawback was the absence of water. Indeed, we did not find any until we were almost at the top, when we came upon a solitary spring of great virtue. After surveying the magnifi-

cent Coire Cas-eagallach, which drops down to the head of Loch Loch, we reached the highest cairn of Beinn a' Ghlo at 3.45.

The top was quite clear at first, but from time to time a thin film of mist floated past, and so the mountain justified its name to us. Even when there was no mist,

the view to the south and west was considerably restricted owing to the thundery condition of the atmosphere, but in the other directions the panorama was charming. As we sat on the top, the landscape in the region of An Sgarsoch and Carn an Fhìdhleir became completely blotted out by a pall of cloud, which rapidly grew darker and darker until the blackness was intense. Then came an ominous peal of thunder, and after that we saw the cloud burst. As the wind was blowing towards the storm, we rejoiced to think that in all probability it would not trouble us. Nevertheless, it seemed advisable not to tarry unduly, so we left the top about 4.30 and began a rapid descent, following the route by which we had ascended. The contrast in views from the saddle was intensely striking—on the one side, a land bathed in sunshine with not a cloud in the sky; on the other side, Cimmerian darkness. The storm rapidly spread, and, unluckily for us, the wind which had been caressing us on the right cheek, suddenly changed and smote us on the left. Thereafter a drenching was inevitable, but we sought to escape, for a time at least, by dropping down towards the Allt an Lochain and so placing Meall Gharran between us and the approaching storm. The postponement, however, was brief, and for about an hour we tramped along in a downpour of rain towards the point where we had commenced our climb. Almost at the mouth of the Allt an Lochain we came upon a shepherd's bothy, and hoped to get shelter in it, but unfortunately the door was securely fastened, so we continued on our way to the Tilt.

When we caught sight of the river, our breath almost failed us. The peaceful stream which we had walked across so easily five hours before, was now in mighty flood. Since the bursting of the thunder-storm, the water had risen with incredible rapidity, and it came raging past us with a speed which at once convinced us of the absolute impossibility of getting across. What then were we to do? Our path to Braemar lay on the

farther side, and the bank on which we stood was, as we had observed in the morning, very precipitous. Supposing we could find a way along it, would the two other streams which combine and flow into the Tilt just beyond the Bedford Bridge also be in flood and uncrossable? If so, our position would be unenviable, with the prospect of a night in the open, or at best in the shepherd's bothy. Considering the direction from which the storm had come, we thought that the flooding would probably be confined to the Tarf, and that the two other streams would not be swollen to any great extent, so we determined to try to find a way along the left bank of the Tilt to the point where the Tarf enters, and then beyond this, get across to the path on the other side. In addition to being steep, this bank is broken by numerous water courses and sandy chutes leading down to the river. A cool head and a steady eye were necessary, as footholds were precarious, and we were conscious that with a single false step we might find ourselves in the swirling water below, which, when we looked down, seemed to exercise an almost mesmeric influence.

At the bend of the river, about half-way along to the Tarf, the scene was awe-inspiring. What impressed us most was the irresistible force of the flood, and the change in the water from its former clearness to a muddy blackness. Looking down the river from the bend, we could see it rushing far into the distance. While picking our steps, we encountered a shepherd—presumably the occupant of the bothy—who assured us that we would get on all right, and that only the Tarf was in flood. Not long after receiving this cheering information, we arrived opposite the Bedford Bridge, and climbing to a coign of vantage got a magnificent view of the Falls of Tarf, not merely of the lower Fall, but also of the upper Fall, the existence of which is unknown to many who have gone through Glen Tilt. The scene we had imagined in the morning was now

before our eyes. The mass of water thundering down was most impressive. Although we were unaware of the exact circumstances of the drowning accident which led to the erection of the Bedford Memorial Bridge, we were able to realise how it might have happened, and we felt we had received a very vivid object-lesson on one of the dangers to which mountain wayfarers are liable.

On passing the Tarf we left the floods behind us and at once crossed to the Bynack path. The rain had now completely stopped, so, before proceeding further, we allowed ourselves a rest of three-quarters of an hour, during which we ate our evening meal. At 7.30 we started for Bynack, and by dint of steady tramping arrived there at 8.50. The path from the Tarf to the watershed exhibited little sign of rain, but beyond the watershed it was in many places lying under water, showing that the thunderstorm had not been confined merely to the area drained by the Tarf. The Bynack Burn, we observed, had been in high spate but was subsiding, and for a little we wondered whether we should find our cycles where we had left them. We were soon relieved on this score, but they had had a narrow escape. Their wheels were partially submerged, and the spindrift on the spokes showed the height to which the water had risen in the channel which in the morning had been absolutely dry. After a hasty examination, we speedily got the cycles over the Geldie, and in doing so were thankful to find the foot-bridge still intact, in spite of the flood beneath. We started cycling at 9.15, crossed the Linn of Dee at 9.55, and arrived at Braemar at 10.30.