

COMPANIONSHIPS OF THE HILLS.

BY JAMES GRAY KYD.

THERE is an increasing school of modern authors devoted to the delineation of Nature, with whom the charm of the mountains, quite apart from the sport of mountaineering, holds a prominent place. In recent times mountains have lost a great deal of the terror which they were wont to strike into the hearts of our ancestors, and in days before the war an ever-greater number of men visited the mountains year by year, not merely for the love of climbing, as such, nor for the scientific or artistic interest which mountains yield, but mainly on account of the subtle and elusive attraction of the high places of the earth. I suppose it can be contended with some force that this appeal is largely physical, and is simply the yearning of a tired frame for the higher, purer air, far from the contaminations caused by modern civilization. No doubt change of environment and altitude and atmosphere produce physical effects; but is not the wonderful charm of the hills based upon something fuller and deeper than mere physical refreshment?

To every member of the Cairngorm Club, doubtless, the question has been addressed, at one time or other—"Why do you climb the mountains?" If other members have had the same experience as myself, they will have been asked the question many times. I have found it difficult to satisfy either myself or my enquirers why I climb the mountains. One can expand, at length, upon the joy of overcoming nature, of physical well-being produced, of the scope for botanical or geological research, of the beauty of the wild life of the mountains and the valleys; but, after all our exposition, we seem to

touch merely the fringe of the subject. Even did I feel myself competent to write an *apologia* for mountaineering, I should not choose the pages of this Journal for a medium, as I have no wish to fill the not unfamiliar rôle of a preacher to the converted; but in these latter days mountain rambles seem to possess a new and tender charm.

Comradeship formed on the mountains is a much more intimate relationship than the friendship of society or of the market-place. When one is brought into contact with a congenial soul amid the plain facts of Nature, untrammelled by the artificialities of town life, our sympathies seem to weld much more closely into the fabric of our friend's nature. Perhaps thus it is that we feel the loss of our mountaineering friends more acutely than the hard losses among our friends of the plains which we have all sustained.

It is Robert Louis Stevenson, I think, who says that every place is sanctified by the eighth sense, Memory. We all have memories of great days on the mountains when, perhaps with a single companion only, we braved the tempest and worked our way through storm and mist to the summit. Such memories the hills always have had, but this new tender memory which will live for ever is the memory of those of our companions who are no longer with us on the hillside in the flesh.

We shall have their comradeship in storm and sunshine, in snow and verdure; the hills will still hold in their silence the glorious memory of our friends of other days. Our beloved hills will be fuller of sacred spots—sacred to the memory of our fellowships of the hills. I shall never see the sun rise on the eternal hills without recalling a glorious spring morning when, with one of our clubmen who has fallen, I saw the first rays of the eastern sun flushing the white peaks of our Deeside Hills.

The memories which the hills now have for us were brought home to me during a hurried visit to the Hills of Home last summer. I had a day or two at Stonehaven, and, with the aid of a cycle, I wended my solitary way up the deserted glen of the Slug Road. Leaving the cycle in the heather at the roadside, I walked up the gentle slope of Cairn-mon-Earn, and as the peaks unfolded themselves from the summit, the realities of the memories which the hills hold was borne in upon me. Hardly a hill or valley in the whole extensive prospect but held the memory of some of our members who have laid down their lives that these same hills, and all they mean to us, might be kept free from a foreign foe.

Yestreen I wandered in the glen ; what thoughts were in my head !
There had I walked with friends of yore—where are those dear ones fled ?

Looking westward towards our own Cairngorms, I could picture, as if it were but yesterday, how in 1900 Austyn Fyfe introduced me to the Rothiemurchus ascent of Ben Muich Dhui, and how his precise knowledge of the great summit plateau stood our little party in good stead in the dense mist which enveloped us ; and I could see, in my mind's eye, Meff doing one of his sensational climbs on the Shelter Stone Crag, or McLaren lightly skimming over the white slopes of the snow-clad hills, as I had so often seen him do on ski.

Ever will the Sluggan Glen up there in the west be associated with our joyful and happy Secretary, J. B. Gillies. I well recall our spring meet at Braemar in 1911, and how, after we had scattered ourselves over the Eastern Cairngorms, Gillies cheered us all as we wended our weary way down the snow-clad glen on that glorious evening of Easter Sunday. He will ever remain young in our hearts. Peaks all around me recalled climbs which Dunn, and Ellis, and Lyon had brightened by their happy natures. Whether we, as a Club, erect a Cairn of remembrance to those gallant men or not, the hills themselves will be to us their everlasting memorial.

It is on the mountains that we get a true perspective of the present terrible times ; but it is also from the heights that in this great hour preludeing the dawn we catch the first glimpses of the glorious day which must soon break upon a ravished world. The hills remain steadfast and majestic ; the streams still sing their restful song throughout these dark days. In the contemplation of the one, and soothed by the music of the other, we realise—probably more fully than under any other conditions—that the purpose of the Creator still winds on in its predestined course. In the sorrow of loss and the ever-present anxiety for those dear to us, we find, perhaps as never before, the truth of Longfellow's lines:—

If thou art worn and hard beset
With sorrows that thou wouldst forget,
If thou wouldst read a lesson that will keep
Thy heart from fainting and thy soul from sleep,
Go to the hills !