

GLEN GIRNOCK.

LOOKING down into Glen Girnock from the Coyle of Muick one day, I suddenly wondered why I had never been in it. Many a time had I passed the entrance to it in walking along the south Deeside road, but always having had some definite project on foot with no time to spare—very often the catching of the last train of the day from Ballater—I never had entered the glen itself. During occasional holiday residence at Ballater, I had become fairly familiar with Glen Gairn, but somehow or other had not made the acquaintance of Glen Girnock. Possibly this neglect was due to Glen Girnock figuring so little in the repertory (so to speak) of Deeside pedestrians and to the depreciatory allusions to it in guide-books. One of these dismisses it summarily as “a narrow glen with a few farms,” while a writer on Deeside scenery contents himself with describing the Girnock as “a streamlet flowing through a pretty strath”—which might be said equally well of nearly every other tributary of the Dee. While I was musing on my neglect of Glen Girnock and considering whether I ought not to remedy it, my eye caught two very clearly-defined roads in the glen. Now, most roads that I do not know have for me a singular fascination—I always want to find out whither they lead ; and as I continued gazing at these two roads their appeal to my inquisitive instinct became so strong that I resolved then and there to get to them some time or other and so investigate Glen Girnock. An opportunity did not present itself till long after, and it was only last summer that I managed to carry out my intention. I walked up the east side of Glen Girnock one day, and then walked up the west side the day after.

The Ordnance Survey map shews a road on the east side, but this is quite illusory, what road there is ceasing shortly after you pass the farmhouse of Littlemill. Where the road ends a path begins, and as this path—

which runs through a fringe of trees skirting some fields—evidently proceeds up the glen, the indication in the map may be warranted, but it is misleading all the same. The path soon degenerates into a mere track, and you emerge from the rather scraggy belt of trees into an open moorland and have the Glen right before you. It is not a long glen—four miles would probably be its total length—and it is not wide. Nor, frankly, did the strath appeal to me as in any particular sense “pretty.” An impression that the glen must be beautiful is conveyed by the picturesqueness of its entrance, which is between two finely-wooded hills, Craig Phiobaidh and Craig Ghuibhais, but the impression evaporates as you penetrate into the glen and find it in the main an expanse of rough grass and moorland running up into heathery hillsides. The glen is partly pastoral. Many sheep were grazing in the low bottoms beside the Girnock, and there are several farms on the left bank of the stream, one of these farms, Loinveg, being conspicuous from its position at the top of a steep slope. The dominant sense, however, soon becomes one of prevailing moorland, with that free and open aspect which accompanies moorland and gives it its peculiar charm. Hardly any character is imparted to the glen by the Girnock itself. The name is said to be a compound of Gaelic terms and to signify “the little rushing burn.” The diminutive exactly defines the situation; as a feature in the scenery the burn is entirely insignificant.

The track I had been following vanished near the ruins of a sheep bothy opposite the farm just named—either the track vanished or I lost it; but this was of little moment. The heights that wall in Glen Girnock on this side are really outliers of the Coyles of Muick, and I had decided to surmount the ridge and get on to the Coyles behind. This was very easily done. The day being a pleasant one in mid-summer, albeit the forenoon was somewhat dull, I had a delightful walk, while from the summit of the principal Coyle I had an equally delightful view. The big bens to the north-

west were clearly visible, but dark clouds hovered over Lochnagar, strangely reminiscent of a photograph of that mountain from this point which appeared in the last volume of the *C.C.J.* There seemed no indication that the Coyles were to be turned into a deer forest as was recently rumoured; there were sheep all around at all events, and the character of some new fencing pointed to the enclosing of sheep rather than of deer.

From the Coyle of Muick I descended into Glenmuick. The customary way is to walk in a northerly direction across the rough pasture-land between the Coyle and an extensive plantation till you reach a farm road that goes down to the Birkhall and Alltnaguibhsach road. For some reason or other—probably because the afternoon had become warm, the sun having come out, and I wanted to escape from the heat and the glare—I made for a slight opening in the wood which promised to develop into a glade and seemed to have in it, besides, the potentialities of a track down to the road. I was deceived. There was no glade and no track; my downward way became a very tortuous one and was at many places soft, at some decidedly wet—I had struck a watercourse, not a path. I forget now, but I rather think I finally encountered an iron fence of some height—a fence, however, with a gate conveniently near and handily open. Anyhow, I got on to the road, and, after following it for a mile or two, crossed at Mill of 'Sterin to the road on the east side of the Muick. Thence I had an enjoyable walk to Ballater, along a road that is always charming. The beauty of Glenmuick below the Falls, with its combination of birches and pines, requires no eulogy at this time of day—it has become well-known. It amply compensates for the circuitous and switchback nature of the road—I am not sure, indeed, that the turns and elevations of the road do not contribute very materially to the fuller perception of the loveliness of the glen.

I will not assert that the road on the west side of Glen Girnock is specially attractive. Everyone to his

taste, as the French saying hath it. Any road is good enough for me on a fine day, and the day on which I tackled this unknown road was remarkably fine—a red-letter day as regards weather conditions. There is just a possibility therefore that anyone following in my footsteps might not experience the sheer delight in being “out in the open” which I felt that day, and might wonder why I extol the walk—which I can very well do without claiming any superior attractiveness for the road itself. But once you have ascended the rather steep gradient that confronts you almost at the outset and have got on to the crest of the road at Loinveg, you have the expanse of Glen Girnock before you, backed by Conachcraig, with Lochnagar behind that; and in all this, surely, there is a prospect that is satisfying. The road, too, like that in Glenmuick, is of the switch-back order. After passing Loinveg, you dip down into the valley of the Girnock, then swing round almost at right angles, and climb up to Bovaglie. A postwoman whom I overtook left me at Loinveg, taking a short cut over the hill to Bovaglie, but I was desirous of following the road—it was one of the two I had seen from the Coyle of Muick—and so held on. After passing Bovaglie it joins the second of the roads I had seen—a road leading from Easter Balmoral to Inschnabobart, from the Dee to the Muick in fact. What tricks the memory plays! I walked along this road many years ago to join a Club meet at Loch Muick, but had forgotten all about it!

I reached the junction of the two roads at the height of the day—about 1 p.m. “summer time,” to use the terminology of the Daylight Saving Act—and rested there an hour or so, revelling in the light and air and sunshine and in the prospect—idling deliciously, to tell the honest truth. I think it was W. R. Greg, a very “solid” thinker and writer of bygone days, who suggested that the most perfect exhibition of idleness was to sit at the edge of a pool and chuck stones into it. I lean to the opinion that sprawling at full length on

the heather and kicking up one's heels in air excels even that—there is certainly less exertion about it. But doing nothing in this delightful fashion comes to an end like everything else. "Bundle and go!" is eternally at the back of the pedestrian's head—"Git up and git!" the Americans would phrase it; and so I pull myself together and resume my walk. As the road descends quickly to the Dee valley, you have a good view of Balmoral and the adjacent country-side, and you can observe, too, the effect on some of the erstwhile wooded heights of the great felling of timber that has taken place recently. I sauntered leisurely through Crathie churchyard, having a look at the many tombstones erected by Queen Victoria and at others, and then, taking the north Deeside road, walked on to Ballater. That walk is always delightful, and on this occasion it served admirably to constitute for me "the end of a perfect day."

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