

THROUGH THE LÀIRIG PASS AND
GLEN FESHIE.

BY A LADY PEDESTRIAN.

What is the voice of strange command
Calling you still, as friend calls friend
With love that cannot brook delay,
To rise and follow the ways that wend
Over the hills and far away?

W. E. HENLEY.

LAST July I went to Inverey meaning to indulge in a week of rest. The weather proved too tempting, however, and the mountains too inviting, for one to remain satisfied with the pleasing walks in the neighbourhood, and, after a couple of days, the call of the mountains became too insistent to two of us, and so we set out for Speyside—my companion being of my own sex. One of us had long wished to “do” the Làirig, and the other for years had wanted to see Glen Feshie, so we pooled our desires; and in the two days at our disposal we both realised our ambitions.

The morning was dull and drizzling when we left Inverey, but by the time we had put Glen Luibeg behind us and said “Good-bye” to mankind for the day, the sun had broken through the clouds, and we made for the Làirig with high hopes—which, as the result will show, were not disappointed. As we sped along in the sunshine, numbers of brown Fritillaries, with their beautifully-spotted wings, flitted from side to side of the path, and time and again we stopped to search for caterpillars, but without success. (It may here be mentioned that an Emperor caterpillar, found on the way to Ben Muich Dhui a few days later, hatched out a fine specimen of the moth in March last—none the worse of its journey to the heights and back!) Before crossing the Luibeg burn we sat down on the heather and feasted on

the crowperts which grow so luxuriantly among the sand. We wended our way round the familiar Carn a' Mhaim, and soon came in sight of the slender Dee meandering in the valley below. The sun blazed down, and Glen Geusachan, with its light green carpet, looked cool and alluring, while the Devil's Point, in the shade of a passing cloud, glowered upon us dark and unfriendly. Soon we had to take shelter from a heavy shower by the side of a boulder, but the passing inconvenience was counterbalanced by the fine cloud effects we witnessed; looking towards the Làirig the high mountains were completely hidden by mist and rain, while Beinn a' Ghlo and the valley to the south were bathed in sunshine. We congratulated ourselves many times that, when we were at last attempting to go through the famous pass, it was after a fortnight of dry weather. Some years before in a wet season, we had gone as far as the torrent from the Pools, and we then walked through a succession of stony waterways for miles.

After crossing "the infant rills of Highland Dee" the path became very indefinite, and we blessed the good folk who had heaped the cairns, and we duly added our stone—and another forbye! On we continued, past the Pools, and then entered the gigantic cleft between Ben Muich Dhui and Braeriach, being much impressed with the grandeur and loneliness of the scene. This part of our journey took us much longer than we anticipated, but every footstep had to be considered, lest one overbalanced on a rock or brought down a boulder on one's foot. After an hour and three quarters' toil we emerged from the pass, and far below, but standing out clearly in the sunshine, Aviemore appeared in view. We felt elated at the sight of Speyside, but, unfortunately, our imagination played us false, and, instead of an hour's walk, as it seemed, it took us nearly four hours to reach our destination. Just as we got to the grassy part, and before we began our descent, we found a specimen of that dis-

tinctive plant, dwarf cornel. It had only two stems, and we felt that we could not conscientiously take it to add to our rockery collection. The "going" along the path by the Ghruamach burn was easy, compared at any rate with the stony bed of the pass, and we made good progress down the hillside until Rothiemurchus Forest was entered. Here we missed the keen fresh air of the mountains. The afternoon sun was at its hottest; the heather, which covered the pathway knee-deep, reflected its rays and added to the oppressive heat, while innumerable flies augmented our discomfort; and we were heartily glad when we reached an open space, and saw before us the signpost "To Braemar." Here we had a well-earned rest, and took counsel with Bartholomew.

So as to shorten our walk for the following day, our purpose was to make Lagganlia that night, taking the nearest route, and at the same time including a stop at Loch-an-Eilein. After considerable hesitation we decided on the track to the left, as we concluded that the one in front went to Aviemore, which we wished to avoid. The track looked rather unused, but in a few minutes we spied a footbridge, and that reassured us. After crossing it, however, the track disappeared, and we wandered aimlessly in the forest, attempting to keep west in the hope that we would strike the Loch. We came to a formidable stream (the Beinne, though we did not recognise it), and one of us waded through with difficulty, while the other plunged in with shoes on, preferring damp feet for the rest of the journey to braving the rocky bed of the burn. We kept down stream in hopes of finding a cottage where we could enquire the way, and by and by a friend appeared in the shape of the Cairngorm Club Bridge over the Beinne. We hailed it with a shout of joy, and immediately saw that we had made a mistake in crossing the footbridge—a mistake, we have since learned, that is by no means infrequent.

With renewed spirits and vigour, we selected the path due west from the Beinne Bridge, and steadily

following it—taking, by good fortune, the correct turns—we saw at last, glëaming through the trees, the waters of Loch-an-Eilein. We walked along the peaceful shores of the Loch, and in the evening light admired anew its perfect setting. The hospitable Refreshment Rooms were entered at eight o'clock, and it was only after conversing with the occupants that we realised that we had tramped since half-past ten o'clock (when we left Glen Luibeg), without seeing, far less addressing, one human being. In addition to providing us with a bountiful repast, the good folks of Loch-an-Eilein repaired our dilapidated shoe-leather, and, refreshed in body and sole, we left the Loch in its silent beauty, and continued our way by Kinrara. In the near distance was a stretch of soft blues shading into rosy pinks which topped the Monadliadhs, while in the foreground Loch Inch was lit up with all the colours of the setting sun—a glorious view indeed.

Twilight came on as we tramped mechanically the remaining few miles to Feshiebridge, and it was ten o'clock as we swung off the main road and passed through the wood to Lagganlia. The steep mountains flanking the glen were pink with the after-glow, and the heath-covered moorland looked dark and grand in the fading light. Late and unexpected though we were, our welcome was assured, for had we not, as a password, the name of Inkson McConnochie? Our hostess reproved us, not because of our sudden intrusion or of the lateness of the hour, but because, having had no intimation of our coming, she could give us only "loaf," whereas she would have had "scones and cakes" had she but known. The good lady was more distressed over this prospective calamity than we were. We were only too glad to throw off our knapsacks with a sigh of relief, and our subsequent entertainment was such as to make us feel that "It is good for us to be here."

Regretfully we left the clachan behind us at seven o'clock next morning, and had a splendid tramp up

lower Glen Feshie to Achlean. Most travellers omit this part of the glen, and take the moor road to or from Kingussie, thus losing, in my opinion, one of the best parts of the tour, especially if the journey is made "up the Glen." Beyond Achlean we attempted to cross the Feshie by an old footbridge, which of necessity rises high above the river, with a very unstable wire to assist one's balance; but, finding that we were too light-headed for this effort, we contemplated crossing the river in the good old-fashioned way. However, before we had determined on divesting ourselves of our shoes and stockings, a very substantial bridge appeared in sight, and by it we crossed to the south side, re-crossing by the bridge below Glen Feshie Lodge.

We spent a considerable time examining the huts in "the island," of which so much has been written, and we there realised, as we had never done before, what floods in Glen Feshie might mean. We then climbed upward, along a pathway which has been built up on the side of the scree, but, as fresh stones are falling daily, it is of necessity very rough. Alpine milk vetch was found here in profusion, its lavender-tinted sprays and fern-like foliage making a pleasing combination as it trailed over the grey stones. Leaving the scree behind, we turned a bend of the river, and here found it rushing along like a wild thing, tumbling over rocks and forming numerous little waterfalls as it dashed along. After crossing the Allt Coire Bhlair, we saw away on the hillside the stalker's hut which we had been told was one of the milestones on our journey. The bright sunshine of the morning had given place to cold mist with a head wind against us, and we were glad to take lunch in the lee of the hut.

Crossing the Eidart was safely accomplished, and we kept round the hillside according to instructions, and soon the sight of the Geldie coming down at right angles to its subsequent course dispelled all thoughts of losing our way in the bogs. One cannot imagine Glen Geldie interesting under any circumstances, but, in the heavy

rain and cold wind which we now had to face, it was bleak and desolate in the extreme, and we had to remind ourselves more than once that we were touring for pleasure. We found tracks for a few yards, only to lose them, until we reached the road to Geldie Lodge, and from thence onward we looked forward to the shelter of the keeper's hut, and the prospect of a cup of hot tea. The hut stood empty, but a shed afforded us a passing shelter from the elements, and we rested and refreshed before completing the remaining miles to Inverey.

After two days of comparative ease we had the good fortune to be of a party conducted to Ben Muich Dhui by a member of the Cairngorm Club. As in most things pertaining to the hills, our landlady was a sound judge when she predicted "Ye'll be a' richt wi' —!" We had an ideal climb on a glorious day, ascending by Glen Lui and returning by Glen Derry. On the strength of hints afforded by our guide, we betook ourselves to the Angel's Peak on the day following, our energies not being sufficient to extend the climb to the summit of Cairntoul. Next morning saw us *en route* for home, pleurably tired in body and refreshed in mind and spirit; and, after spending so many breezy hours in the heights, it was small wonder that we missed the bigness and space of the hills in the airless heat of the city, and that "sphagnum" at the depôt had a soporific effect for several days after.

E. S. M.