

FROM BRAEMAR TO BLAIR ATHOLE *VIA*
GLEN TILT.

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ON a Saturday afternoon towards the end of July our party of four set out from Ballater for our long-talked-of pilgrimage through Glen Tilt. The first sixteen miles were covered most unromantically in the G.N.S.R. motor 'bus. Weather conditions were anything but cheering, for the persistent drizzle which had greeted us at Ballater increased in intensity to a regular downpour as we approached Braemar.

Nothing was visible of "the finest glen scenery in the Highlands," as, with heads down to meet the driving rain, we wearily trudged along the five miles from Braemar to Inverey. There we were much fortified and cheered by an excellent repast. We would fain have tarried a while longer in the hospitable company we found there, but, the rain having ceased and the evening being already far spent, we must needs on.

At the Linn we stopped to survey the rushing waters, for the Dee was rising rapidly. The walk up Glen Dee was delightful. The evening air was soft and balmy after the rain, and, although the hill-tops were still shrouded in mist, the aspect of the lower landscape in the waning light was particularly charming. By the time the White Bridge was reached darkness had fallen, and shortly after it began to rain again. It behoved us, therefore, to find shelter for the night, and in our haste to do so in the pitch darkness we lost the path. But after divers wanderings through bogs, water-holes, and such-like humid ground, we stumbled upon, rather than arrived at, a "lone shieling," and there we proceeded to make ourselves comfortable for the night.

We awakened from a sound and dreamless sleep to a vivid demonstration of how that part of the country

achieves its annual rainfall of 40 inches. Water poured from every hillside, and the burns between the slopes were roaring torrents. To proceed further in such weather was deemed absurd, so we decided to remain where we were. Immediately upon this decision being taken, however, the question of the commissariat became an urgent one. We had expected to reach Blair Athole that night in time for an evening meal, and our supplies had been laid in accordingly. The provisions on hand were carefully divided out in definite rations to furnish the necessary number of meals ahead of us. But when that had been done we looked with dismay on the prospect of the morrow's long tramp on such a meagre allowance of internal combustion fuel. Many proposals were brought forward for replenishing the larder, but ultimately this was successfully accomplished to the satisfaction of all by a happy discovery on the part of the foraging party, and we no longer "bitterly thought of the morrow." We could not have been more fortunate had we received a literal response to Falstaff's invocation—"Let the sky rain potatoes," and at the proper hour we were able to give the invitation—"Come, we have a hot venison pasty to dinner."

Rain continued to fall until evening, and then the lifting clouds gave some promise of a better day to follow. Our horizon, which throughout the day had been severely circumscribed, was now extended to where the higher hill-tops were just emerging from the enveloping mists. In the clear evening atmosphere every object within our range of vision was sharply delineated. Away down the glen a large herd of deer was calmly browsing on a stretch of green sward, while another but smaller herd on the opposite hillside was evidently clearly aware of the presence of the only human beings in sight.

In the morning, the promise of the previous evening being fulfilled, we continued our journey. When opposite Bynack Lodge we had, looking northward, a very fine view of the Cairngorms. The Devil's Peak and

Cairngorm of Derry stood out bold and prominent, while beyond Carn a Mhaim the morning mist still enshrouded the top of Ben Muich Dhui. Some discussion arose in the party as to whether the latter hill was really visible from this point. On the one side mathematical demonstration from the Ordnance Survey map was brought forward as proof that it could be seen, but the other section, believing strongly in appeal to authority, disallowed proof of this nature. None of the party being an admitted authority on the topography of the neighbourhood, the matter reached a deadlock, and the journey was resumed without the point being settled.

The path across the watershed was very wet, but we soon gained firmer ground where conditions were better. Already the sun had broken through the clouds, and by the time we were crossing the small stream from Loch Tilt the full force of its rays had completely dispelled the morning mists, and the sky was almost cloudless. Looking down Glen Tilt we could see the green slopes of Beinn a'Ghlo in the distance, and we were fortunate in securing a good photograph of the view from this point. Conditions were ideal for walking. In the brilliant sunshine the Glen was looking its best. The verdure, always richer than that on the other side of the watershed, was richer than ever after the recent rains, while every plant still harboured a supply of sparkling rain-drops, and every mountain rill, full to the brim, was singing its loudest. We had not seen a rabbit since we left a much lower altitude in Glen Dee, but here every now and then one would dart across our path. Butterflies (mostly the dark green fritillary) flitted hither and thither on all sides, while heather linties kept us company in our progress down the Glen. Soon the Tarf was reached, and right glad were we that a bridge spanned the stream, for in its flooded state no easy crossing would otherwise have been afforded us.

Opposite the point where the An Lochain joins the Tilt we called a halt for lunch. While that meal was in

progress, it was observed that there was a beautiful halo surrounding the sun. There is a popular belief, especially among sea-faring men, that these halos, whether round the sun or the moon, portend a storm of some sort, and recent scientific investigations seem to point to this belief—unlike many popular ones—having some foundation in fact. Certainly on this occasion the appearance of the halo was followed by a cyclonic disturbance. For, as we proceeded down Glen Tilt, the sky became clouded and got greyer and greyer until, on our arriving at Forest Lodge, it was distinctly lowering and threatening. Soon after passing this place rain began to descend in torrents, and throughout the remainder of our journey we were accompanied by a downpour.

The lower part of the Glen, though fuller perhaps of softer beauty, appeared somewhat dismal compared with the part traversed in sunshine, and little could be seen of the view ahead of us, which we understood ought to be rather fine. The dripping trees by the roadside afforded us little shelter when later in the afternoon we stayed our progress for some refreshment. In spite of all this we held cheerfully on our way, believing that "to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive." Later on, however, the question of our arrival took on a more serious aspect, for, having some distance back chosen the more inviting of two paths, we found ourselves wandering in the grounds of Blair Castle, and doubt arose in our minds as to the shortest way thence to Blair Athole station, which we wished to reach in time to catch the 5.15 train to Pitlochry. Presently we began to meet groups of school-children, of whom we made enquiries. Our questions were sometimes answered by looks of blank astonishment, but we finally learned that the distance lay somewhere between "a wee bittie" and "nae far." Our minds were soon at rest, however, for, on rounding the next corner, we beheld the entrance gates about fifty yards off and the railway station immediately beyond them. We had arrived!