

MORE SUMMER DAYS ON THE MOUNTAINS.—I.

BY WILLIAM BARCLAY, L.D.S.

Now the soft hour
Of walking comes ; for him who lonely loves
To seek the distant hills, and there converse
With Nature :

For Nature's charms, the hills, the woods,
The sweeping vales and foaming floods,
Are free alike to all.

DURING the past few years it has been our good fortune to return to the "old country" with the cuckoo—when "the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, and the time of the singing of birds is come"—so that we have turned more or less inadvertently into a fair-weather hill-climber. Still, it is very enjoyable to again wander o'er the grand old hills of Scotland and revisit spots familiar to us in the days gone by. Two summers ago we were privileged to spend one whole day of every week either tramping the old drove roads that wind their sinuous grass-covered way through the Grampians, or climbing some of the misty bens ; and this summer (1921) we again enjoyed the same good fortune. The following is an account of some of our doings.

To start off with, during the month of May, we had a few preliminary walks among the Ochils, Sidlaws, and lesser Grampian heights, with the idea of getting into something like fit condition again, for life in the tropics does not tend to harden one.

I.—GLAS MAOL.

With the advent of June, however, we embarked on more extended excursions. The first of these was a visit to Glas Maol, and with the aid of our bicycle this was carried out in a one-day trip.* The mist was just

*From Scone, near Perth.

touching the tip of Ben Vorlich when we left home one morning in the early days of the month, and cycling *via* Blairgowrie and Glen Shee to the Spital, continued up Glen Beag for about three miles farther, until just opposite the burn coming down from Carn Aighe. Here, the bicycle was left to browse among the sheep, and, fording the river, we ascended the hillside diagonally towards Creag Leacach, whose stony crest was visible from the road.

The slope was nice and easy, mostly grass and heather, and just a wee bit moist, so that very little exertion sufficed to land us on the top of the Creag. The summit of Glas Maol was now in sight again; we had first seen it in the morning while cycling along Strathearn, 30 miles away. Mist was then driving across its bald crest, but now everything was bathed in sunshine.

There is undoubtedly an advantage in thus early being able to view the object of one's excursion: in fact, we are rather fortunately placed in that way, for from our bedroom window we can view a large slice of the foothills of the Grampians, with the peaks of Ben Vorlich, Am Binnein, Ben More, and Ben Chonzie showing up behind; while, on crossing the bridge over the River Tay, as we must do on the way to the railway station, a look is also had at the Beinn a' Ghlo group, Beinn Dearg, and Ben Vrackie. So that, before embarking on a railway journey, we are enabled to form a pretty good idea of what sort of weather is likely to be experienced on the hills.

A few minutes were spent in having a look around, then we continued north-eastward along the dykeside towards Glas Maol. Just beyond the dip on the Glen Brighty side we came upon a snug well-built shelter of stone, roofed with sods—a point well worth knowing to seekers after sunrise effects. Drifted snow filled all the eastern side of the march dyke, but there was very little anywhere else, only a few small patches here and there. Looking backward, Creag Leacach presented a very

pleasing outline—a regular “Creag” with its sharp, stony summit and steeply sloping sides, quite unlike anything one is accustomed to find among the smoothly-sloping, rounded Glenshee hills, and we regretted we were not carrying our camera. A good two miles separates Glas Maol from Creag Leacach, but it is quite an agreeable walk, at first over the small boulders strewn the slopes of the Creag, then up the broad grassy braes of the Meall; and it was just noon when we stood by the cairn (3502 feet) on the highest point in Forfarshire.

The doubtful morning had turned into a fine day, and the outlook was fairly extensive except in the far west. In the foreground in this direction, the most absorbing feature of interest was the fine south-eastern corrie of Glas Thulachan streaked with snow, while behind rose the imposing crest of Carn nan Gabhar. Northward, all the Cairngorms were spread out before us, from Beinn Bhrotain to Ben Avon. In the south, the Sidlaws showed their well-known tops, with Largo Law in the distance beyond. Then came the Lomonds and the Ochils, but, of course, the prime view was in the region of the Làirig Dhrù. We wandered over and had a peep into Canlochan Glen and regretted that we could not descend into Glen Isla but must needs return to our steed in Glen Beag. So we retraced our steps almost to the dip, then descended the steep hillside to the burn, which was followed down to the road just below the Devil's Elbow. Thereafter the cycle was picked up and we pedalled leisurely down the glen, reaching Scone just 12 hours after we left it.

II.—STUCHD AN LOCHAIN.

Ten days later we were in Glen Lyon, and made our first intimate acquaintance with that out-of-the-way mountain, Stuchd an Lochain, and although this can hardly be said to be a popular hill among climbers, it has been well known in the botanical world for a hundred and fifty years.

It was a wild scowling morning, with a strong wind

from the north west, as we cycled up from Aberfeldy, past old-world Fortingal to Bridge of Balgie. The mist drifted low over Carn Gorm as we passed, and nothing was seen of the Ben Lawers hills on the south side of the glen but their flanks. Before running down to Innerwick, the eastern corrie of Stuchd an Lochain came into view, right ahead, the broad base of the mountain seeming to completely block the glen. About a mile beyond Meggernie Castle we struck off to the right by a road which climbs steeply up Glen Conait and ends at the shooting lodge of Lochs, standing solitary between the two little lochs—Girre and Dhamh. Stuchd an Lochain rises directly opposite. About a quarter of a mile from the first of these lochans we left our bicycle by the roadside, and by great good luck managed to cross the river by stepping from boulder to boulder. Then we struck through the heather in the direction of the east shoulder of Creag an Fheadain, intending to pass along the ridge between the north- and east-facing corries of the mountain. As we started from an elevation of 1200 feet, it was not much of a climb to the shoulder we were aiming at though the slope was fairly steep.

A heavy shower of rain gave a sufficient excuse for a few minutes' halt in the lee of a boulder. The backward view from this point was very fine. We could look away down Glen Lyon to the pass of Chesthill beneath Creag Mhor, while on the south side the glen was backed up by the Ben Lawers' tops, now completely free of mist. Directly opposite us, and only a few miles away, the Tarmachans and Meall Ghaordie were very imposing, while on the north side of Loch Girre rose another very much out-of-the-way mountain—Meall Garbh. Taken as a whole, the prospect from here certainly demonstrates very fully the deepness and narrowness of Glen Lyon.

When the small cairn adorning the Creag was reached, we found that the shower had cleared the air and dispersed the mist, and a few minutes later, from the dip

below the south-east top, we had the satisfaction of seeing the cone of Stuchd an Lochain standing entirely clear on the other side of Coire na Cat, about a mile off. A broken-down fence runs all the way round, up the final slope, and over the summit.

A strong head wind was blowing, and it was anything but warm, so we did not feel much inclined to loiter. A march cairn was passed, then the small one marking the subsidiary or south-east top, Sron Chon a' Choirein (3031 feet). The name is only on the 6-inch O.S. map, but in reality the top is only a shoulder and not worth calling a separate "top" at all. A slight descent now landed us at the base of the final cone of the mountain. The next 200 feet or so are fairly steep, but we were sheltered from the wind and rapidly mounted, disturbing a raven which went off uttering his harsh croak as we stepped on to the small grassy summit, (3144 feet). There is no cairn—just two or three stones lying together on the highest point. The north-east face falls away steeply from our feet in broken-up rocky terraces to the little Lochan na Cat, lying 1000 feet below, but on all other sides grassy slopes predominate. Away down below us lies the shooting lodge of Lochs, snugly ensconced in a planting of wood, and by moving a few paces to the north-west we can also look down on Loch Dhamh and the glen of the same name. Loch Girre is not seen from the summit, as the steep ridge on the other side of the corrie completely shuts it out.

Of distant view there was none, all the bigger hills being again enveloped in mist, but of course a good slice of the Moor of Rannoch was visible, with Loch Laidon, and numerous smaller pools. A little bit of Loch Lyon was also in sight.

A heavy shower of rain now sent us off the summit, so we hastened down to get shelter from the wind, and in driving mist just retraced our steps all the way to the end of the ridge. Then, when descending to the river, we came upon a fawn, beautifully marked, lying in a cosy corner among the heather; so we sat down beside

him for a few minutes. He lay quite still, looking at us and sniffing our fingers, and no doubt wondering what sort of an animal we were, but when we attempted to scratch his paw, he was up and off like a shot. Re-joining our cycle, we free-wheeled all the way down to the road in Glen Lyon.

It was noticed how early the bell-heather was in flower this year. Here we were only at the 20th of June, and yet we saw numerous patches in full bloom.

The Cairngorm Club