

MORE SUMMER DAYS ON THE MOUNTAINS.—II.

BY WILLIAM BARCLAY, L.D.S.

III.—BEINN CREACHAN, BEINN ACHALLADER, BEINN A CHUIRN, BEN VANNOCH.

BY nine o'clock next morning (21st June, 1921) we were at the east end of Loch Lyon; and, standing among the straggling pine-trees at Invermearn, this upper Glen Lyon greatly fascinated us, the loneliness, the absolute stillness, the air of solitude and remoteness being very refreshing. On all sides rose steeply sloping hillsides, grass-covered to their summits, and, though we say it perhaps somewhat selfishly, we were glad that the road ended here and that there was no thoroughfare to the west, glad that there are still some spots left undisturbed to the pedestrian. On the way up the glen we were particularly struck with the fine profile of An Grianan (2,500 feet) above Cashlie (this old farmhouse is now being converted into a shooting lodge) on the one hand, and Meall Ghaordie (3,407 feet) and Creag Laoghain (2,663 feet) on the other, while from Invermearn Beinn Heasgarnich (3,530 feet) rose directly opposite in two long ridges, enclosing in their upper fold the fine north-facing corrie. Our thoughts, however, are not of Heasgarnich to-day, though sixteen years have elapsed since we wandered about its broad summit, but of some view-point from which we can look out over the wild and dreary moor of Rannoch to the towering mountains of the north and west.

At the head of Glen Mearn and only a couple of miles away stands Beinn Creachan (3,540 feet) (pronounced Ben a Chrachan) visible from base to summit, one small patch of snow still lingering among the rocks

above its eastern corrie; so up the glen we wend our way. A rough track runs by the stream for about a mile or so, but the walking over the springy turf was so delightful and the morning so fresh and invigorating that we found a path quite superfluous. Soon the stream forks and Gleann Caillich, another fine glen, opens up on our left, but we keep straight ahead, crossing the burn and making tracks for the lesser or north-east top of the mountain. The slope here is not so steep as on the main peak, and we steadily mount up the eastern skirts of the corrie, disturbing a solitary hind, who most likely has a fawn tucked away somewhere near at hand. As we climbed the slope numerous well-known mountains in the south and east began to show their crests, and when we "topped the brae" (3,145 feet) what a prospect lay before us! Instinctively we recalled Principal Shairp's lines:—

East and west and northward sweeping,
Limitless the mountain plain,
Like a vast low-heaving ocean,
Girdled by its mountain chain.

The Moor of Rannoch stretched from our feet lonely, black and bare, the innumerable pools of water dotting its surface serving only to emphasize the blackness. In the centre of the picture Loch Laidon stretched its be-draggled length. The western end of Loch Rannoch was visible, and just the merest fringe of Loch Tulla with its sandy eastern shore. Behind all this towered the vast amphitheatre of hills from the twin peaks of Cruachan (which stood out very conspicuously over the slope of the main peak of Creachan). Ben Starav, Stob coire an Albannaich, Stob Ghabhar and the Clachlet with its huge corrie were right in the foreground; the steeply sloping contour of Buchaille Etive Mor beyond guarded the entrance to dark Glencoe. Over the south shoulder of Starav two of the Benderloch hills raised their heads. Then came the mountains of the Mamore forest represented by Sgor a Mhaim and Binnein Mor;

behind we had Ben Nevis, the Aonachs, and the Stob Coire an Easain groups. The "Ben" only showed a spot or two of snow, far more being seen on Aonach Beag. Through the gap of Loch Treig were seen some distant peaks, but what they were we do not know. Next among recognised faces was Creag Meaghaidh and the Ben Alder group, with Beinn na Lap and the uninteresting Corrou hills in front. Loch Ericht, visible in practically its entire length, lay deep between Beinn Bheoil and Ben Udlaman. The Cairngorms were distant but quite distinct. Nearer at hand was Beinn a Chuallaich, Schiehallion, and the Carn Maigr tops. To the right of Chuallaich the Beinn a' Ghlo mountains appeared as two massive peaks, while to the left we had Beinn Dearg and Carn a' Chlamain, the red scaur on the latter being particularly noticeable. In the near foreground just the tip of Stuchd an Lochain led the eye on to the group of Ben Lawers and the Tarmachans and Meall Ghaordie. One of the Fife Lomonds—the west—was visible on the far horizon. Away down Glen Mearn lay the shepherd's house at the east end of Loch Lyon, and just over the way Beinn Heasgarnich and Creag Mhor, while through the gap between these towered the grand peaks of Ben More and Am Binnein, seeming grander than ever from here. Between An Caisteal and Beinn a Chroin, Ben Lomond reared his head.

As the summit of Beinn Creachan was still 500 feet above us, we proceeded up the narrow ridge separating the two corries, each with its pool of water, but the north is much the larger and grander. Nearly 1,200 feet below lay the lonely lochan enclosed by steep rocky walls, seared with gullies, which would undoubtedly provide some sport in early spring. Ours, however, is a summer walk, and twenty minutes sufficed to take us up to the large quartz cairn of Beinn Creachan (3,540 feet). The outlook to the west was now considerably extended, and one or two other additions were made to the view from the lower top. In front and close at hand were the long rounded backs of Meall Buidhe and Beinn

Achallader and the knobbier points of Beinn an Dothaidh and Ben Doran; beyond these Ben Lui and his companions, Beinn Oss and Dubh Chraige, looked very imposing. Both Lomond hills were now in sight, as was also Ben Chonzie and the Glen Turret hills above Crieff. Right over the centre of Clachlet Bidean nam Bian, the giant of Argyllshire, just showed his crest. In the east, in the line between Schiehallion and Beinn a' Ghlo, Glas Maol and the other Glenshee hills were recognised.

There were now signs of an approaching change in the weather. Dark ominous clouds were gathering round Ben Nevis and the other big hills in the north-west, and very soon they were blotted out with mist, so it was time to continue our walk along the ridge westward. We descended the stony 400 feet to the dip, climbed the gentle ascent of Meall Buidhe, passing along its flat grassy back of delightfully springy turf to the highest point at the south end (3,193 feet) (small cairn), then descended another 400 feet to the base of Beinn Achallader. The ascent of the first 600 or 700 feet of this mountain is steep, but after that it eases off as one approaches the small cairn at the northern end (3,404 feet). Towards the north both Beinn Achallader and Creachan fall away in steep rocky faces seared with gullies, but to the south the slopes, though steep, are grassy. We could now look down on the farmhouse of Achallader standing by the West Highland Railway line, and the ruin of the ancient castle alongside. Loch Tulla was also visible in its whole length, but as our range was now confined to the fringes of the moor, we did not stop many minutes here, but turned south and strolled along to the other top (3,288 feet), about a mile away. Then we had a look at the north-east face of Beinn an Dothaidh before descending to the burn in the Achallader-Chuirn dip. Here we found a nice cool spring and lunched while the mist swirled about the summits of Ben Doran and Creachan. A large herd of deer were interested spectators of our proceedings.

While sitting here eating and ruminating, we came to the conclusion that it would be easier and more congenial to cross over Beinn a Chuirn and Vannoch than to follow the burn down to the Chonoghlaish glen and then east round to Loch Lyon, so once more we started to "spiel the brae" and soon reached the top of Beinn a Chuirn (3,020 feet). Since leaving the north top of Beinn Creachan we had been following the Perth-Argyll county march, but now we stepped directly into Perthshire. An easy walk eastwardly with a slight descent and then a rise of 375 feet brought us to the cairn on Ben Vannoch (3,125 feet). From here the near at hand views were the predominating feature, that down Chonoghlaish glen to the railway viaduct at Auch with Ben Doran on one hand and the steep slopes of Beinn a Chaisteil and Beinn Fhuaran on the other, we think had first place. Then of course we had the upper part of Glen Lyon. Across the valley Beinn Heasgarnich and Creag Mhor throw their long ridges down to the loch, and on the other side of Glen Cailliche, Beinn Creachan stands up boldly. As it was now raining heavily and the mist settling down we descended due south to the west end of Loch Lyon, where we forgathered with some shepherds busy among the lambs. Later on, we followed the rough track with its ups and downs along the lochside to Invermearn.

IV.—BEINN A' GHLO MOUNTAINS.

PROFITING by the continuance of the good weather we set off on the morning of July 5th for a long delayed trip to Beinn a' Ghlo. At Blair Atholl everything above 1,000 feet was smothered in mist, but we hoped that later on, as on the two previous days, the sun would break through, so we proceeded on our way past Old Blair and by the well-known Shinigag road up the south side of Glen Fender. About a mile beyond Loch Moraig, where a couple of huts stand by the roadside, we struck through the short bit of moorland on the left

and so on to the steep slopes of Carn Liath, the most westerly peak of the group. While ascending this hillside it was noticed that the lessons learnt during days of trench warfare were now being applied to the annual campaign against the feathered tribes of the moors, beginning on 12th August, inasmuch as shooting-butts, instead of being built of stone or turf as formerly, are now sunk in the ground and are hardly discernible at a few yards' distance. As there was no outlook we had no excuse for frequent halts, so just plodded on up the brae-face past the tumbledown guide cairn and on to the large one marking the summit (3,193 feet).

The sun now burst through and the mist dissolved from all the hills as at the touch of a magician's wand, though a few trailing wisps hung about the valleys for some time. One of our duties—the duty of every visitor to the summit of Carn Liath—is to examine the post box and collect the letters; but perhaps the members of the Cairngorm Club are not aware that there has been a regular postal service carried on from the top of this mountain for (to our knowledge) over twenty years. An old tin can marked "Post Office" serves as a collecting box; letters, postcards, etc., are deposited in it; and the next climber empties the box and duly passes the missives through the official post office. Letters have reached us in Central Africa that were posted here.

Of course, to the local inhabitants and the average tourist Carn Liath is Beinn a' Ghlo; it is also the peak seen in the well-known view looking up the Pass of Killiecrankie. To these people this fine mountain group, as viewed from Carn Liath, with its complicated system of ridges and its score of corries, has rather a forbidding aspect, and it is seldom that this class of visitor proceeds any farther. Once he has reached the top of Carn Liath, to his mind Beinn a' Ghlo has been conquered.

We found the post box in a recess in the cairn and made the collection—a few picture postcards left a week before—and as there was no very distant view owing to

the heat haze, we passed on down the Z-shaped ridge first to the N.N.W., then bending to the N.N.E., and again north to the dip (2,550 feet). Quite a gradual ascent of about 1,000 feet, at first leading to the right and then to the left, brings one to the cairn of the massive middle peak of the group with the long-sounding name of Braigh Coire Chruinn Bhalgain (3,505 feet). The Cairngorms and other big hills in the north-east as far round as Lochnagar were now seen, (on a clear day, of course, the section from Sgoran Dubh to Ben Muich Dhui is also visible from Carn Liath). Across the deep hollow of Glen Tilt Carn a' Chlamain (the Kite's Cairn) looked imposing enough for a much higher mountain, while Loch Tilt appeared what it is, a puddle on the moorland. The valley of Glas Leathad now separates us from the highest peak—Carn nan Gabhar—whose three large cairns are distinctly seen, so we proceed due east in the direction of the pass. First, there is a drop of thirty or forty feet, then an appreciable rise to a sort of rocky shoulder, and about fifty yards beyond this one can descend direct over scree-strewn slopes to the Bealach an Fhiodha (2,893 feet). Water is usually to be obtained hereabouts, but, owing to the abnormal dryness of this season the supply had run out, so we proceeded up the opposite slope direct to Airgiod Bheinn (3,490 feet), the southern end of the Carn nan Gabhar ridge. Then we wheeled about and picked our way along the stony shoulder and up the remaining slope to the summit of Beinn a' Ghlo (3,671 feet), at 12.30, or just a few minutes under four hours from Blair Atholl. There is a fifth top—Beinn Beg (2,500 feet)—lying in the hollow between Carn Liath and Airgiod Bheinn, quite an isolated little hill, but as it is so much overshadowed by its loftier neighbours it is very rarely ascended or even taken notice of.

Three large cairns crown the crest of Carn nan Gabhar, the middle one marking the highest point. While lying here on this beautiful summer's day we close our eyes and there rises up before our vision

memories of other days spent wandering among the tops or laboriously picking our way up these same slopes. There was our first visit of over a quarter of a century ago, whose memory is still green; then there was another noted trip entailing a midnight tramp up Glen Tilt by the light of a waning February moon, when the play of moonlight on the snow exerted a curious soporific effect on both my companion and myself, so that before Forest Lodge was reached we were compelled to sit down by the roadside, where, sheltered from the biting wind we slept till daylight. Carn nan Gabhar was then ascended by Meall Gharran under icy conditions and traversed to Airgiod Bheinn, when a descent was made to the south, and a heavy tramp through soft snow took us back to Blair in the evening. Another grand day was vividly recalled—this time a blustering autumn one, when, in company with a friend, the group was traversed from Blair Atholl, after which we crossed over Ben Vuroch and so on to Pitlochry. But we have climbed the Beinn a' Ghlo mountains at all seasons of the year, and, no matter when or from which point of the compass we approach these fine hills, we never tire of their windy, mist-swept, stony slopes and ridges.

On the present occasion a descent was made to the east into Coire Cas-eagallach, where we obtained water; then the steep heathery slope to the north of the burn was followed directly down to the lonely Loch Loch. A couple of hours were pleasantly spent exploring the surroundings of this quaintly-formed sheet of water, in the course of which we discovered two "otters" carefully tucked away under a boulder, (not the real live variety of course, but a species known among the non-sporting followers of the gentle Isaak). Then we sauntered down Glen Loch to the solitary shepherd's house at Dail Dhubh, where the road in Glen Fernait was joined, and in the cool of the evening we trudged along its stony surface down to Kirkmichael.

Next morning, we walked over to Ballinluig Junction

by the old right-of-way track through Glen Derby, and over the moors by the south of Loch Broom to the Braes of Tullymet, on the way diverging from the path a little and passing over Meall Reamhar. This is a fine breezy moorland walk of about ten miles, and, to anyone wishing to reach the railway line, much to be preferred to following either of the turnpikes, to Pitlochry or Blairgowrie.

V.—BEN CHONZIE.

THE next hill revisited was Ben Chonzie, and we did that a few days after our return from Beinn a' Ghlo, cycling up by Logiealmond (Ian Maclaren's "Drumtochty") and the Sma' Glen to Auchnafree, in western Glen Almond. It is not possible to cycle any farther though a rough track continues westward and down Gleann a Chilleine to Ardtalanaig on Loch Tayside, so we left our "bike" here and proceeded afoot for another mile and a half. Forging the river at a shepherd's cottage, we struck up the slope behind to the north-running shoulder of the mountain, marked 2,331 feet on the O.S. map. Rabbits and mountain hares were numerous, and the cuckoo very much in evidence, three being seen on the wing together. On reaching the crest the view southward opened up and we looked down Glen Turret from the loch directly beneath us to the town of Crieff and the vale of Strathmore beyond. A dip of about 100 feet separated us from the upper reaches of Ben Chonzie, but that was soon negotiated and we were speedily breasting the final slope. The ascent of this mountain is so very easy that from the river in Glen Almond to the summit cairn (3,048 feet) only occupied an hour, and that without any undue haste.

The day was very warm, one of the hottest of this hot summer, yet the view superb, not a speck of haze or cloud anywhere, and we have seldom seen the far distant hills stand out so clearly. The Cairngorms

might have been only a few miles away instead of the actual forty-six. The remote view to the north-west is, of course, pretty well restricted owing to the close proximity of the Tarmachans and Ben Lawers tops, yet the prospect before us extended from Ben Cruachan to Dundee and the silvery estuary of the Tay, and from Ben Alder and the Cairngorms to the rugged peaks of Arran. We spent hours on the summit, then descended direct to Dalriech in Glen Almond, and so down to Auchnafree and our bicycle.