

NOTES.

AN animated controversy over the view from the Blue Hill was carried on in the *Aberdeen Free Press* during the autumn. It arose

out of an observer on the Blue Hill, on a day when the horizon was extraordinarily clear and distinct, VIEW FROM THE BLUE HILL. the horizon was extraordinarily clear and distinct, noting, "away up the Dee Valley at the most distant point," a hill with a big patch of snow on it, and assuming that the hill must be An Sgarsoch. This opinion was backed up by one set of correspondents and contested by another set, who argued that the hill with snow on it must be Ben Bhrotain, which is admittedly visible from the Blue Hill. Claims were also put forward on behalf of Cairn-an-Fhidleir (or Cairn Ealar), 3276 feet, about a mile west of An Sgarsoch, and Cairn-an-Fhidhleir-Lorgaidh, 2786 feet, about six miles beyond Ben Bhrotain and beyond the Feshie. Ultimately, the issue really came to be whether An Sgarsoch is visible from the Blue Hill. This point was practically settled in the negative by Mr. G. Gordon Jenkins, in an article in the *Free Press* of 16th October, in which by the aid of a curvature diagram, he demonstrated that An Sgarsoch was not visible from the Blue Hill. A further demonstration to the same effect is made by Mr. James A. Parker in the following interesting communication with which he has favoured us :—

"I ascertained last August that there was a small patch of snow on the north slope of An Sgarsoch, which seemed to confirm the statement made in the first letter that that hill had been seen from the Blue Hill ; but a mathematical calculation proved at once that the thing was impossible.

"On the 29th October, I climbed the Blue Hill with the man who said that he saw An Sgarsoch. Visibility to the west was perfect, and there was no difficulty whatever in convincing my friend that the 'unknown hills' were not An Sgarsoch, but were simply our old friends, Ben Bhrotain and Monadh Mor. With my Ross binocular (8 times) we could see the shadows of the clouds drifting slowly across their snow-clad summits, 60 miles away."

THE controversy just alluded to had hardly exhausted itself when the cairn on the Blue Hill from which the disputed view was obtained collapsed. It had been in a somewhat ruinous

COLLAPSE OF THE BLUE HILL CAIRN. condition for a considerable time past, but a violent wind-storm which prevailed during Saturday, 16th September, had a serious effect on the structure.

CAIRN. The cairn, which was 13 feet high, was composed of rough stones, a flight of fourteen granite steps leading to a circular platform on the top, with convenient seating, enclosed

by an iron railing. A large portion of the cairn, including the circular platform and iron railing, was blown down, and probably the whole structure was weakened, though the stairway remains intact. It is exceedingly unfortunate that this very valuable view-point should be thus rendered useless, and it is to be hoped that its restoration will be undertaken ere long. The cairn was erected in 1879, by the late Sir David Stewart of Banchory, on the highest point of his estate (480 feet above sea level.) A bronze tablet subsequently affixed to the structure states that the cairn was erected at the suggestion of Dr. Alexander Gerard and Dr. Alexander Cruickshank, and that "It affords an extensive view over sea, plain, valley and hill, the sea horizon being twenty-eight miles distant and the land horizon varying from six to sixty miles." An article by Dr. Alexander Cruickshank and Mr. Alexander Copland, giving a detailed description of the view from the cairn was published in the first number of the *C.C.J.* (July, 1893), and was accompanied by a diagram showing the relative position of the principal hills as seen on the horizon and the foreground. Mr. G. Gordon Jenkins directed attention to certain "inexactitudes" in this diagram in an article in the *C.C.J.* for July, 1917; and to his little volume on "Hill Views from Aberdeen," he appended a diagram of a Mountain Indicator for the Blue Hill.

Mr. Parker states that the view of the Deeside hills from the Cran Hill, which is a mile west of the Blue Hill, is even finer than the view from the latter hill. The Cran Hill is 483 feet high and is about the same distance from the Bridge of Dee as the Blue Hill, and there is a little house beside it where they sell refreshments! The view westward is quite unobstructed.

THE Aberdeen Centre of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society provided us again (Nov. 7) with a lecture by Mr. George L. Mallory on the year's climbing on Mount Everest; and aided THE MOUNT EVEREST by Mr. Mallory's charming exposition and a fresh series of magnificent photographs, the lecture proved as fascinating as was the one he delivered in February. Unfortunately, the lecturer could tell us only of a succession of baffled efforts to reach the summit. The first attempt was made on May 19-21, when a party of four (of whom Mr. Mallory was one) started from the camp at the north col, at a height of 23,000 feet. Three of the party, after very severe hardships, reached a height of 26,985 feet on the third day, but finding that the top could not be attained before nightfall, they retraced their steps, rejoined their comrade (who had been obliged to give up), and returned to the base camp. A second attempt was made on May 28th, by Captain Finch and Captain Burce, who used the oxygen apparatus, which weighed thirty-two pounds and had to be carried by the climber. When they reached a height of 27,235 feet (only 1,905 feet from the summit), it

was found that the oxygen apparatus was not working so well as was expected, and they had to turn back, a severe wind-storm being experienced. A third attempt was made by Mr. Mallory and Dr. Somervell on 7th June, but it was quickly brought to an end by an avalanche, which carried nine of their porters into a crevasse, two only being rescued alive. Mr. Mallory furnished interesting details of all these attempts, his account being rendered all the more vivid by the accompanying photographs; and in concluding he reviewed the possibilities of Mount Everest being climbed. He is a decided optimist, and thinks it can be done—possibly without oxygen, certainly with it; and he is of the opinion moreover, that the task, having been begun by Britons, should be accomplished by them. His view, indeed, may be expressed in the title of Millais' famous picture about the north-west passage—"It ought to be done, and Britain should do it!"

PROFESSOR J. ARTHUR THOMSON delivered one of his charming lectures on natural history to the members of the Club and their friends at a special meeting held on 11th October.

PROFESSOR THOMSON'S LECTURE. The subject of the lecture was "Birds and Mammals of the Mountains," which it is needless to say was dealt with in the lecturer's felicitous and fascinating style. Professor Thomson's main purpose was to furnish a biological interpretation of how the mountains have come to be inhabited by the fauna we now find. The fauna of the mountains were readily divisible into three groups. There were the "relics" or survivors of the glacial period, such as the snow-mouse, the marmot, the blue (or mountain) hare, and the ptarmigan, which climbed the mountains when the climate became relatively mild. Then came what might be termed "the insurgent colonists," vigorous creatures which pressed up from the lower ground on to the pasture-shelves and plateaux at a considerable height, such as the chamois, the Rocky Mountain goat, and the Tibetan yak. Finally, there were "the refugees" who had found the plains too crowded for them—for example, the hyraxes or conies of Africa and Syria, the extraordinary desman of the Pyrenees, the water-ouzel or dipper, and, best of all, the archaic North American mountain beaver. Dr. Levack the president of the Club, presided, and Mr. William Garden moved a vote of thanks to the lecturer, which was very heartily accorded.

THE *Aberdeen Free Press* of 5th October had an interesting account of extensive improvements which have been carried out on the estate of Glen Lochy, on the south side of the Cairnwell, recently bought by Sir Archibald Birkmyre, the jute manufacturer of Port Glasgow and Calcutta. The old mansion-house has been greatly enlarged and improved, and it and the whole estate are now to be called Dalmuinzie, after an old castle of which there are still some remains. Among the innovations

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introduced is the construction of a light railway from the mansion-house up Glen Lochy to an old shooting-box, a distance of two miles, the line rising to a height of 400 feet. The railway is 30 inches gauge, and the rolling stock consists of two petrol tractors, two carriages like the stock of an ordinary railway, and a combined tractor and carriage. The line is evidently meant for the convenience of sportsmen. "No longer," we are told, "will it be necessary for sportsmen to spend a night at the old shooting-box. They will sleep at Dalmuinzie, and in the morning step on to one of Sir Archibald Birkmyre's little trains and be carried up the glen in luxury."

THE first scenes of a new photo-play, to be entitled "The Romany," were filmed in the Highlands recently, these initial scenes being taken on the wild moor beyond Dalwhinnie, 1,500 feet above sea-level, with a majestic background of towering mountains. With due regard to the requirements of the play, the principal artistes engaged lived for a time under canvas. The "story," however, does not appear to be particularly Highland in character. It deals with the interrupted love of a Romany king and princess, and gipsies rather than Highlanders constitute the *ensemble*. During the film-making they were housed in their own picturesque caravans.

THE ptarmigan is essentially a bird of the mountains, and is seldom seen on the lowlands. More often than not it is found above the 2,000 feet line; the rocky crags, towering peaks, and rugged corries of the Highlands being a favourite haunt. In some countries—Norway, for instance—ptarmigan are met with at an elevation far beyond that suitable for the growth of trees. On inaccessible heights, where even the intrepid climber fears to tread, the ptarmigan is at home, finding sustenance from the scanty herbage, and roaming wild and free over great solitary expanses. Although somewhat closely related to the red grouse, the ptarmigan differs in habits from the bird of the lower moorlands; it is not polygamous and is of a different structure to the red grouse. In colouring of plumage, too, it has marked differences. In the sporting ptarmigan we get an eloquent illustration of Nature's protective colouration, for this mountain bird changes its plumage according to the seasons, and to this adaptation of hue it doubtless owes its immunity from extermination. Living on high, almost barren ground, where little cover or none exists, it is particularly exposed to attacks by vermin. Therefore, all-providing Nature has so designed the bird that as the environments change with the seasons its plumage also changes in harmony with its surroundings. In winter, when the mountains are

clad in their coverlid of glistening snow, the ptarmigan's plumage is also white, though Nature seems to have erred somewhat by allowing the bird to retain two black tips ; otherwise a ptarmigan at rest on the snow-covered ground is practically invisible even to the keen eyes of the hawk or the eagle. Even with these two small black patches on its spotless plumage it is not easily seen. In summer, however, when its light-coloured winter dress would render it conspicuous against the grey rocks and dark heather, the bird assumes plumage of grey and brown, which harmonises well with its summer haunts. Thus at each season of the year suitable variation in plumage affords protection for the bird, and, notwithstanding the obvious disadvantages under which it exists, it has so far proved able to withstand extermination.—“A.S.” in *Weekly Scotsman*, 19th August