

## TWO HILL WALKS FROM CLOVA.

BY WILLIAM BARCLAY, L.D.S.

To climb far up from the valley  
And its homely farmstead cries,  
And be alone in the silence  
Of the mighty hills and skies.

To tread the springy heather,  
Dark on the upland moor ;  
To feel the wind in our faces,  
Cold and sweet and pure.

AS has been mentioned from time to time in the pages of the *C.C.J.*, the Clova district is one which lends itself admirably to the activities of the hill-walker. To recapitulate—First of all, we have the three well-known tracks—through Glen Doll to Braemar, over the Capel Mounth to Ballater, and by Bachnagairn to Loch Muick, etc. Then as to the hills, they rise directly from the head of the glen, and they are mostly grassy or covered with grass and short heather, making the walking very pleasant. The slopes are generally easy, and the dips almost negligible, so that the first ascent of a couple of thousand feet is really the only climb worth mentioning during the whole day. What could be more enjoyable or more profitable to the old-fashioned hill-man than thus to wander leisurely from one top to another over cloud-shadowed sun-flecked hillsides, on through the length of a long summer's day, peeping into this glen, now into that, while at the same time the more distant prospect is constantly changing !

The following is an account of two such walks during the past summer. On each occasion a start was made from Forfar—the twenty-five miles separating that town from the farm of Braedownie, at the head of Glen Clova, being covered by the humble push-bike, as was also the return journey in the evening. Of course, to

those who can annihilate distance with their Rolls-Royce cars, that would be quite a negligible item.

The earlier excursion took place in the month of May, on one of the first really warm days of the month, when all the women-folks in Glen Clova were busy at their spring cleaning; such a wielding of scrubbing brushes and airing of beds and blankets I had never seen before. On quitting Braedownie, I crossed the river Esk and turned up Glen Doll to the lodge, which was shut up and deserted. The keeper was at work tidying up the kitchen garden, and his wife, like the rest of the good ladies farther down the glen, was busy with her seasonal cleaning. I passed round the lodge and followed the footpath till it emerged from the plantation by a wooden bridge which spans the stream here. Glen Doll now lay before me in all its freshness and grandeur. It is a wild little glen as one looks up to the black forbidding rocks of Craig Rennet right ahead, or into the depths of Corrie Fee, where the burn tumbles over the precipices in one long silver thread. Nearer at hand and high above us on the left nestles Corrie Kilbo, showing a rough stalker's path straggling along its western slope. The floor of the glen is filled with the broad prattling stream of the White Water.

I crossed the bridge and stepped along the footpath, which, after passing through the plantation and then through a deer-fence, slants up the hillside. At the lip of Corrie Kilbo I encountered a large herd of deer feeding side by side with sheep. The former, of course, on seeing me, wheeled about and went off at a canter up the glen and passed in single file over the skyline and out of sight. The track now crossed the burn and climbed high up along the right-hand side of the corrie, landing me on a wide stretch of moorland about midway between the summits of Mayar and Dreish, and at an elevation of 2746 feet. Rounding the head of Corrie Kilbo, just above the snow cornice, I proceeded in an easterly direction up the gentle grassy slopes to the summit of Dreish (3105 feet). A fence runs all the

way—in fact, connects this hill with Mayar. Snugly ensconced behind the large cairn, I could enjoy the wide prospect at my leisure, for the atmosphere was very clear. Suffice it to say that my vision ranged from the snowy Cairngorms and the paps of Bennachie to the Firth of Forth, the Lomond and the Pentland hills; and from the shapely cone of Mount Keen to the bulky Clachlet in the far west. A little bit of Loch Tay backed by the steep profile of Ben More was particularly arresting.

I now retraced my steps to the dip and walked along the flat tableland towards Mayar, whose summit rose from the moor about a mile off. On the way I rescued a sheep from a serious predicament. I found the poor animal securely fastened to the fence by its long fleece, which was firmly entwined round two of the wires, so that it was able only to slide backwards and forwards between the two uprights. I promptly cut it loose.

Mayar (3043 feet) stands at the head of Glen Prosen, and from the summit one can look down almost the whole length of this quiet pastoral valley, whose slopes were everywhere dotted with sheep and the whiter coats of their accompanying lambs. There is only a small cairn here, and the view is practically the same as from Dreish, but the actual hilltop is smaller and more shapely.

As I had made a late start, I must needs now get back to Clova, so, descending to the north, I tramped round the edge of Corrie Fee eastward to the path in Kilbo, by which I dropped rapidly to the white house in Glen Doll and so home.

Six weeks later, I was again in Glen Clova. In the midst of a spell of broken weather, I was fortunate in being able to snatch one good day. On this occasion Braedownie was reached by 9 o'clock, and that allowed ample time for a long day on the hills. Following the storm of the previous day there was a delicious crispness in the air; the day was more like one in autumn than in July.

My walk took me along the valley of the South Esk, past the beginning of the Capel Mounth path and the keeper's cottage just beyond it. Craig Mellon presents here even a steeper front than it does to Glen Doll—one long stone-shoot sweeping down almost from the summit to the river. Beyond the house the path, which at this point is indistinct, crosses the marshy floor of the valley, and leads to a rather primitive bridge over the river, here a raging torrent. After crossing the stream one is on firm ground again and soon reaches the corner where the glen narrows and turns sharply to the west. The windings of the path can now be followed as it climbs up the hillside towards the thick plantation surrounding Bachnagairn. Numerous sheep were feeding contentedly on the steep slope opposite, and in the distance I spied deer. Some time was spent by the old ruin admiring the falls and ruminating on the general surroundings of this "lodge in the wilderness." Then I moved on again. Recrossing the stream by the rustic bridge between the two falls, and following the zigzags of the Muick path, I soon reached the shoulder of the hill above, from which I could look down on the plantation and the upper part of the glen.

The path now travels away from the river over the moorland in the direction of Loch Muick, while the hump of Broad Cairn rises with a gentle slope on the left. Cuidhe Crom of Lochnagar showed occasionally through the mist. I left the path in the vicinity of the Forfar-Aberdeen county march and moved off to the left towards Broad Cairn, following a track which I noticed leading in that direction; but, before reaching the upper, stony part of the hill, I left it and struck over to the right to have a look at the Dubh Loch, lying dark and sullen beneath its surrounding cliffs. Then I made my own tracks for the top (3268 feet). A large herd of deer was feeding between me and Loch Esk, which, under sullen skies, appeared a desolate sheet of water.

Up till now the day had been very dull and gloomy—

almost threatening—and mist hung about all the higher hilltops, yet I had a clear view to the south as far as the West Lomond in Fife. Of the Cairngorms I could see nothing but a few snow patches below the trailing clouds of mist. Even Lochnagar was only seen occasionally, but the view of Loch Muick and the valley beyond was very refreshing.

Descending from the rocky knob which forms the summit of Broad Cairn, I strolled along the broad and almost flat ridge to Cairn Bannoch (3314 feet), another rocky little top, where I found a snug shelter just below the cairn and facing the Muick valley, with seats for two. Here I ate my lunch while the mist swirled about the slope of Cairn Taggart opposite, and the Allt à Choire Bhoiaheachl poured its waters in one continuous fall of quite 150 feet to the Dubh Loch below.

I next continued my high level walk—and it was both high and level—westward towards a couple of cairns which stood up against the sky about half a mile away, on the summit of Fafernìe (3274 feet). In addition to being the county march, this is evidently the dividing line between the adjoining estates, for firmly embedded in the larger cairn is a dressed stone showing a big letter M on the east face, and an I on the west—Muick and Invercauld, I presume. The one thing noticeable on this hill was ptarmigan; they were everywhere, and during my walk southward along the ridge of the mountain I flushed hundreds.

The ground here at one time must have been fenced, as a long line of broken-down posts and loose strands of wire stretched south down the back of Fafernìe for about a mile, and then struck across and ran up the slope of Tolmount. During my walk I followed the general direction of this fence to the Knaps of Fafernìe (3059 feet) and Crow Craigies (3014 feet); then, turning to the west, I crossed the boggy ground at the watershed and struck up the short ascent to Tolmount (3143 feet). Viewed from Fafernìe this is quite a distinct little top with a steep face to the Allt an Loch. Here I also

found two cairns a short distance apart. The one to the north commands a view of the length of Loch Callater and the lodge at its far end. Just below the south cairn are the ruins of a hut, which must have been a fairly substantial structure at one time and overlooked the whole valley towards Glen Doll.

The day had now improved so much that the sun actually came out and I lay basking in its rays spying the country all around. About me on the slopes of Tolmount fed numerous herds of deer all unconscious of my presence. But it was towards Cairn na Glasha that my glass was levelled most, for that brae-face presented a wonderful sight, and such a one as it had never been my lot previously to behold, and I have wandered about deer forests all my life. The whole hillside, quite half a square mile in extent, was actually swarming with deer, not grazing here and there in isolated herds as one generally sees, but so thickly distributed as to form one great gathering, and if there was one deer in that herd I am morally certain there was well-nigh a thousand. The scene reminded me forcibly of a big sheep farm when all the flocks have been collected into the home paddocks preparatory to clipping operations. Reluctantly I closed my glasses and prepared to move on. At the same time I thought it a pity to disturb such a multitude, so resolved not to visit Cairn na Glasha but to pass directly to Tom Buidhe, which rose a grassy dome about a mile to the south. On the way I successfully stalked a herd of deer, crawling up to within less than a dozen yards before I was discovered. The dip was soft and peaty, but the walk from the one hilltop to the other was quite short. Two small quartz cairns adorn the flat grassy summit (3140 feet). Mount Blair is a very prominent object from this top, as is Glas Maol from them all.

I continued my walk down the long south-east running ridge, crossing a considerable stretch of peat bog on the way, till the ground began to fall to the Fialzioch burn. Then I dropped down to the river, crossed it and joined Jock's Road at the commencement

of the steep descent into Glen Doll, just where the valley falls away from under one's feet, and the streams precipitate their waters in a series of falls. Above me towered the steep rocky buttresses of Craig Maud and Craig Rennet, black and forbidding in the evening shadow, and a great contrast to the kind of scenery through which I had been wandering all day.

A quiet walk along the excellent path above the White Water brought me in three miles to the white house of the Doll and to the end of a very fine hill walk.