

A WINTRY DAY IN JUNE.

BEINN EUNAICH, BEINN A CHOCHUILL AND  
BEN CRUACHAN.

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A GOOD many years have slipped past since I was last on Ben Cruachan—since that fine summer's day when, under clear skies and with bright sunshine, I traversed the rough backbone of that wild mountain group from end to end—from Ben Vourie to Meall Cuanail—

In life's morning march, when my bosom was young.

As I happened to be again living in the vicinity last year (1922), I could not resist the lure of the sharp peaky tops 'twix Lochs Awe and Etive. To me there is always a peculiar charm in revisiting scenes after a long absence. This time, however, I thought I might with advantage embrace within the compass of my day's visiting Beinn Eunaich and Beinn a Chochuill, two outstanding hills immediately to the north-east.

When I left my cottage by the sea on the morning of the 14th June, the sky was heavy with clouds and the mists were drifting along the hill-tops. The wind was strong and gusty, blowing fresh, very fresh, from the south-west, and in this district that generally means wet weather, so that, altogether, it looked as if I might have a stormy day up aloft on the ridges. However, the man who climbs our Scottish mountains must be prepared to encounter all kinds of weather, especially all varieties of bad weather, and must smilingly accept a day of driving sleet or snow in the month of June just as readily as he would welcome the warmth of a summer's day in January. Such experiences are often met with, and to the true lover of the mountains they all have their charm, storing the mind with fragrant memories which ripen as the years pass.

On leaving Lochawe station I turned eastward for about a mile, passed the road running up to the disused quarries and walked on to Castles, the farm-house lying under Beinn Eunaich and in sight of Coire Creachainn and Coire Ghlais, the east-facing corries of the Cruachan massif. From the farm I climbed directly up the steep face of Stob Maol, the south-west shoulder of the mountain, and soon topped its 1,400 odd feet. A few minutes' rest beside the cairn gave me time to recognise some of the surrounding hills and lochs before they were blotted out for the rest of the day.

From Stob Maol the summit of Beinn Eunaich lies far back, and it is a long gradual climb over grassy slopes that give pasturage for numerous sheep and lambs. Passing round the headstreams of the burn which drains the southern slopes I reached a small cairn just as the rocky eastern face of the mountain opened up through the mist under my feet, and a walk of a few minutes more brought me to the large cairn marking the highest point (3242 feet). The so-called south top (3174) is nothing more or less than a shoulder.

Up till now the mist had been playing hide-and-seek among the tops, ever lapping the summits of all the higher hills; first one and then another would be enveloped and as quickly cleared. But presently both Eunaich and Beinn a Chochuill were considerably swept clear, and I could see my route along the ridge of the latter to where it bends round to the north-west towards the summit. Of course, under the circumstances, no distant view was to be had, only fitful glimpses here and there, and as the mist was again beginning to whiff about the flanks of Beinn Eunaich I made my way down the western slope to the dip—a descent of nearly 900 feet over stony ground. From the saddle Beinn a Chochuill rose steeply for the first two or three hundred feet, but once that was surmounted there followed just a fine breezy walk along the ridge for nearly a mile to the grassy summit (3,215 feet) with its small cairn. On my way along the ridge all the upper half of the mountain

was hidden in mist, but before the top was reached it had cleared and I had a few minutes in which to look around.

When I decided to visit these mountains I was in hopes of getting some photographs of the fine north face of Ben Cruachan with its corries and rocky buttresses, but first on Beinn Eunaich, and again here, the mist played havoc with my plans, so I just had a seat for a short time and a peep through my glass into the various glens—Noe, Liver, and Kinglass—about me, and away down the course of the Allt Mhoille towards Dalmally and Ben Lui. Neither Ben Cruachan nor Ben Starav would show itself, and even of Loch Etive I could see little. Beinn na Lus, on the far side of Glen Kinglass, presented a rather weird appearance; the slopes, though not steep, are almost wholly bare rock with little surface soil anywhere, and these showed up through the fleeting mist like a surface of wet clay.

Rain was now approaching and the mist closed in again, so I descended rapidly to the Larig Noe, the pass separating these mountains from the Cruachan group. This entails a drop of 1383 feet but is easy. I next tackled the face of Sròn an Isean opposite and picked my way up this rocky boulder-strewn slope in the teeth of a stinging shower of sleet. When I arrived at the cairn, however, everything was again bright. A good deal of old snow was lying about here, as in all the north-facing corries. From Sròn an Isean (3163 feet) it was only a step (half a mile) to the main ridge of Cruachan at Stob Diamh (3272 feet), and there is not much of an intervening dip. The walk between the two points, however, is very interesting, as it affords fine views of the rocky faces of Stob Garbh and Ben Vourie, and I was glad that for these few minutes the weather was agreeable. But it was only an interlude, for I had scarce reached the summit of Stob Diamh when the snow came on in earnest. Under the circumstances, I did not stay many minutes but passed on down the ridge—there is only a drop of 436 feet—and up the short

but stony ascent towards the next top, Drochaid Glas (3312 feet).

Returning from this slight divergence, I was soon on the steep and rough slope of the main peak. Here I was more exposed to the fury of the wind, and with that and the driving snow my face and hands were well nigh frozen, but I pushed rapidly on and ere long reached the summit (3689 feet) where I found shelter behind one of the big blocks of rock so plentiful here. I sat for nearly an hour watching the snow being driven horizontally past. At times the mist thinned sufficiently to show the patches of old snow lying on the sides and floor of Coire Caorach beneath me, and through the film of vapour these had all the appearance of pools of water.

But the mist closed in again and the snow came along faster than ever. Everything pointed to the storm having set in for the night, so I slipped along to the Taynuilt peak (Stob Dearg 3611 feet). This, the finest part of the ridge, was most impressive under the prevailing conditions, and to a solitary climber somewhat awe-inspiring. I next descended in a direction towards the Pass of Brander, and came down between the two headstreams of the Allt Cruiniche. When near the junction of the burns I emerged from the mist. The snow by this time had given place to rain, and as the hillsides were soaking, it was not long before I was in a like condition, so I just splashed on through the "wee" and reached the road a short distance from the bridge over the river Awe. The trudge of a couple of miles more to Taynuilt could not possibly make me any wetter, and in due course I arrived home thoroughly sodden yet well pleased with my long day among the misty peaks above Loch Awe, and can say with Stevenson—

Give me again all that was there,  
Give me the sun that shone !

Billow and breeze, islands and seas,  
Mountains of rain and sun !