

THE MYSTERY OF MOUNT BATTOCK.

BY WILLIAM GARDEN.

THE local press was not far wrong in describing the Aberdeen May Holiday of 1925 as "drab and cheerless," and these conditions were certainly experienced to the full by those members of the Club who toiled along the path which leads from the head waters of the Feugh to Tarfside, with the summit of Mount Battock as their objective.

A cheery party, however, started from "Bawbie Law's" in two charabancs at 9 a.m., and two hours later they dismounted at the head of Glen Finzean. In all, the party numbered over thirty, including guests. Just as the summit of the path was reached two figures loomed out of the dreary, drenching fog—two ladies from the south who, however, had only crossed over from the north to Tarfside the previous day. "May we join your party," said they. "Most certainly," said we, and with that they at once gave themselves over to our care. We may here say that we cannot help thinking that, though they stuck by us for the rest of what turned out to be an eventful day, they must have repented their request eventually, and that if they were prompted to join us by any chance from a feeling of security in the guiding capacity of two high officials of the Club, that security must have been thoroughly eradicated before the day was ended! From the summit of the pass an easterly direction was followed over some horribly wobbly peat hags, and eventually it was thought that the tops of the Mudlee Bracks and the Cammie were reached, but at the best they only appeared to be mere boggy excrescences. Afterwards a descent, though but slight, followed, and then a decided rise when a fence and cairn were reached, and the party unanimously decided

that the western, or Forfarshire, cairn of Mount Battock had been surmounted. The writer had, and still has, his doubts, as it was utterly impossible to say anything definite about where one was, the mist being so dense that the members of the party had to be counted every now and again like sheep to make sure that no one had gone astray.

Battock or no Battock the party had had enough, and if Battock it was, the course now to be followed was generally north to north-east in order to strike the top waters of the Aven. So down we went right willingly, thrusting the cold south wind and driving fog on our backs. Soon a pronounced stream was reached winding its way through deep ravines, which every now and then formed a series of beautiful cascades. Later on, the gorge opened out and seemed to be succeeded by a broad valley, so that we felt convinced that we were on the direct route to Feughside Inn via the Aven. On this assumption three stalwarts suggested that, for the convenience of the others and to save time, they would cross the Aven and walk cross country some trifling four miles! and so reach the Bucket Mill on Upper Feughside, where the charabancs containing dry clothes and other comforts had been left in the morning, and they would bring them down to Feughside Inn to await the arrival of the main party there. As our two ladies from the south had also left their car at the Bucket Mill on the Sunday evening on their way to Tarfside, and they had to pick it up again there they again, in their trustfulness, said to the stalwarts, "May we come, too," and having got the same reply as they did earlier in the day they came, but certainly they neither "saw nor conquered!"

The Club's Secretary has evidently a fondness for the north when reading the compass, and being a good Scotsman I entirely sympathise with him, and so we bade the main party adieu about 4 p.m., telling them that we would meet them with the charabancs about 5.30 at Feughside Inn, and up we got again into the dense mist

and drizzle—up and down, over ridge after ridge, over burn and bog, through deep heather and drenching grass, and so after a “bogsloshing” process we once more struck the firmer, higher levels. At length we met a costly and well-made deer fence, which seemed rather foreign to the Feugh district, and irresistibly our thoughts turned towards Glentanar, though we had—none of us—the moral courage to even suggest such a thing. Bow wow! This fence then we found *ran* north, so we were quite content at this stage to *walk* by its side, but alas, it suddenly ended turning due east, so once more we betook ourselves to a flat and colourless expanse of bog and fog. After a weary tramp over this seemingly never ending desert, we began to descend, and now here and there a gnarled pine stood out against the mist, so that one almost ran against him before being aware of his presence. We thought—or perhaps rather wished to think—that we must now be near the head of the Feugh Valley, so we halted for a moment under a friendly giant of the forest, where one of our kind lady friends shared with us an apple which helped to quench our thirst, for we had now been forcing the pace rather for nearly three hours, and the veteran of the party had quite made up his mind that the “ship” was more or less at sea—probably more! However, off again we set, and after crossing what we thought must have been the same deer fence we had left, but of course at a much lower level, we got into the midst of a fine old pine forest, where cutting operations were in full swing.

Soon we reached the saw-miller’s bothy, and we felt that all was now well, but what was our dismay when, upon the President saying to the good man and his wife, “Is this the saw-mill at the top of Feugh?” he got the reply, “Guid sake, man, it wad tak’ ye till the sma’ oors o’ the mornin’ to reach the Feugh, forbyes the saw-mill. Ye’re only about twa mile wast o’ Abine!” Alas! how are the mighty fallen. How we longed for the kindly mud, which stood knee deep all around this wretched saw-mill, to rise up and swallow us! But no, we still

had visions of that belated repast at Feughside, so we put on the pace and reached Aboyne at 8 and, by car, Feughside Inn one hour later, to find that the main party we had so light-heartedly promised to meet there at 5.30 *sure*, with their dry clothes and charabancs, had left for town about an hour ago.

As regards that party we had solved the mystery. We had not left them in the Aven Valley at all, but in one of the tributary valleys of the Feugh, with the obvious result, of course, that by following that valley they reached the main valley and the Bucket Mill, and so picked up one of the charabancs there for themselves. But what had we done? I leave it at that with this one remark, that the mystery proved our lady companions to be excellent walkers and worthy of better things than to be misguided, though, as one of them afterwards said, the experience was unique and the whole thing a perfect scream, and she would not have missed it for anything—a truly splendid loyalty to those who now dare only rank themselves, and that even with some difficulty, among the Has Beens!

CLUB COLOURS.

The Cairngorm Club has adopted colours, and it is hoped that the members will support this new emblem of club identity and enthusiasm. As so many regiments, schools, colleges and other bodies have colours, it was difficult to get a new combination of shades, but one was submitted by Mr. J. McCoss, and approved by the Committee. It is a pleasing design, and it is being supplied, either in silk squares or in ties, by Mr. Alexander Booth, Union Street.