

## THE GLEN DOCHART HILLS.

BY WILLIAM BARCLAY.

“Give me health and a day and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous.”

I CAN find no recorded account of these hills in any of the volumes of the *C. C. Journal*, so perhaps the following account of a walk undertaken in the early days of last summer, may be of interest.

When viewed from the north or south, the chain of mountains lying between Glen Dochart and Glen Lochay present to the observer three well defined masses, carrying on their crest six points which rise over 3,000 feet, and although the dips are somewhat formidable it is yet possible to visit all six tops in the course of a walk from Tyndrum to Luib or Killin.

Nearly half the day had already gone, in other words, it was eleven o'clock before the train arrived in Tyndrum, so that I made rather a late start for an excursion of the extent which I had outlined for myself; but as all my programmes are elastic, suited to the vagaries of the weather and the whims of a solitary wanderer, that did not matter very much.

Stepping over to the West Highland Railway Station I proceeded eastwards along the line for a mile and a half to the high viaduct spanning the Allt Gleanna a Chlachain above Auchtertyre. Immediately on crossing the bridge I climbed over the dyke and set my face towards the slopes of Creag Loisgte. These are grassy and quite pleasant to ascend. I proceeded leisurely up this hillside enjoying to the full the delights of perfect freedom, and ever and again stopped to cast a backward

glance across the valley to the stately peak of Ben Lui towering in virgin whiteness to the sky. The crest of the Creag was reached at a height of about 2,000 feet, and now the snow clad slope leading to the south top of Ben haluim rose before me. Half a mile of treacherous peaty ground, very wet from the melting of the snow had to be crossed before I reached this slope, but the next thousand feet were easily overcome and I was standing at the south end of the summit of Ben Chaluum, or as it is often called—the South Top, 3,236 feet. A few stones on top of a big rock mark this point. The higher peak of the mountain still rose a hundred feet above me and half a mile due north, the rocky gap between being packed full of drifted and frozen snow to a great depth.

From here the mountain falls to the east in a steep rocky corrie that gives rise to one of the headstreams of the river Lochay. It was 12.30 when I arrived at the south top, and after taking a photo or two, another 15 minutes saw me by the cairn on the summit of Ben Chaluum, 3,354 feet.

Half-an-hour was profitably and pleasantly spent here in studying and assimilating the view, and it was a sight worth travelling a continent to see. All the shapliest hills in Scotland from Ben Nevis to the Lomonds in Fife, and from the massive Cairngorms to the imposing twin of Ben Cruachan, and all the grand hills in the immediate neighbourhood—Ben Lui, Ben More, Ben Doran, Cruach Ardran, etc., etc., were ranged before me in winter's garb. Ben Nevis projected like an iceberg into the sky, and on the distant Cairngorm Mountains there seemed a tremendous depth of snow, for the glass failed to reveal one black speck. But it is impossible adequately to describe such a scene, and I'd rather lay the remembrance of it by to be drawn upon on some future day, perhaps when the vision is limited to a few yards and we sit cowering behind the cairn on some wind swept *view point*.

Meall Glas, the next point to be visited, stands nearly

three miles away in the east, but a vast gulf lies between, involving a descent of 2,250 feet, so I must needs be off.

The north face of Ben Chaluum is steep, and the upper part of its eastern front almost equally so. To-day this part of the mountain was wholly under snow, only an occasional black rock jutting out here and there, so I had to proceed with caution. But when I had descended a thousand feet or so I could move more rapidly. At 1.45 I reached the river and found it a goodly stream. Numerous relics of the ancient forest were much in evidence in the peaty ground here. While resting for a few minutes I was much impressed by some fine corries on Creag Mhor and Beinn Heasgarnich. From the river a steepish climb over grassy slopes and large snow beds brought me to the cairn on Meall Glas (3,139 feet) at 3.10. Fifteen minutes were spent here during which I recognised Cat Law above Kirriemuir, then I continued on my way to the peak at the north east end of the ridge—Beinn Dheiceach, 3,074 feet. There is but a slight depression between these two tops, and although they stand a mile apart the walk only occupied a quarter of an hour. While sitting here I was rather startled at the extent of heather and bog that separated me from the bridge at Auchessan, and decided it would be preferable to cross over Meall Chuirn and Sgiach Chuil, and then descend to the foot-bridge over the Dochart beside Luib station. As events proved I decided wisely.

Between Beinn Dheiceach and Meall Chuirn there is a drop of nearly 1,300 feet, but the slope opposite looked rather easy, so I acted instantly. At first the descent is steep, but I soon got down to the peaty ground, passing a large cairn, and surprising a solitary deer on the way. The dip was reached in half an hour and I was on the top of Meall Chuirn (3,007 feet) in another 35 minutes. There is a small cairn here, not quite on the highest point. I did not stop but passed south to the rocky peak of Sgiath Chuil (3,050 feet, approx. no-

cairn) at 4.45, and here on the last of my tops I sat down and had a short rest and finished my "piece."

The Cairngorms were still in view, and with the glass I recognised Ben Macdhui, Cairntoul, the Angel's Peak and part of Braeriach. Mount Blair and some of the hills above Clova, with patches of snow on them were also observed. Ben Nevis was not now seen. Of course Ben More, Stobinian, and Cruach Ardran were a constant source of delight and admiration during the whole day.

Descending to the lesser top, which is also rocky, I then dropped down to the moorland over which I made my way towards the footbridge by Inneschewan farm, and so to Luib station at 6.20, thoroughly well satisfied with my day on the Glen Dochart hills. A perfect day, plenty of sunshine tempered by a breeze, a far horizon, no flies, midges, or other temper trying pests. Of wild life I met ptarmigan on all the hill-tops, as well as plenty of hares, a few grouse on the lower ground, and one solitary deer—a wanderer. The whole ground is under sheep, and these hills are well seen from the Callander and Oban Railway.