

## AN ENGLISHMAN ON BENNACHIE.

THERE were seven of us. We were divisible in three ways. Into two and five, two being Scots and five Saxons. Into three and four, three being of the fair sex and four otherwise. Into one and six, one being a child and six considering themselves grown-up. And we went forth in January to climb the Mither Tap of Bennachie. Transport was provided by βιβλιάκος so called from his library of books, read and unread, and the "Lunch Lady" came with him, her "function" and intention being to stay at the foot and boil kettles while others climbed. Then there was the "Old Bird." He was English, but had breathed the air of Garioch for twelve months in early manhood, and had married a Scots wife, and had a speech so intertwined with Doric that he might pass for a Scot, in England. Then joined the party the "Englishman" and his "Winsome Wife," his "Demure Daughter," and the "Boisterous Boy."

The "Englishman" had read the guide book and had passed on to the family some information about pronunciation. It was "Ben-na-hee," he told them, not "Bennakky." They said it after him until they were word-perfect . . . "Ben-na-hee," "Ben-na-hee." But they waited to hear the Scots announce it before they gave tongue to it themselves in public, and they were not a little discouraged at the wonderful tonsil-and-palate work which these experts introduced between the "na" and the "hee."

The "Old Bird" soon began to quote

"O! gin I war whar Gadie rins,  
At the back o' Bennachie."

The Saxons were much impressed. So this was not only a mountain to which they were going, but a mountain famed in song! They repeated the couplet in whispers to themselves. All but the "Boisterous Boy"

who was absorbed in the speedometer and was watching for it to touch 40. The "Old Bird" took him in hand. "Boisterous Boy," he said, "do you know the poem—'Oh! gin I war whar Gadie rins, at the back o' Bennachie'?" The "Boisterous Boy" snorted, "Burns, I suppose." The "Boisterous Boy" regards himself as St. George for England, and will have none other patron saint even on the horizon. The "Old Bird" patiently began to explain, but the speedometer here touched 45, and the "Boisterous Boy" had no ear either for poetry or patriotism.

So we crossed the Don and came to Inverurie. Here the "Englishman" disembarked to pursue a quest that had engaged him ever since he came to Scotland. Bread with a real crust—that was his desire. So at least he says. The family, however, aver that from all the confectioners' shops which he enters, ostensibly on this quest, he emerges with a disappointed look but also with a fresh discovery of Scots cake. At Inverurie a new kind of gingerbread, unseen in England, assuaged the disappointment.

Not far out from the little town we had our first sight of Bennachie—a crag in the distance shewing boldly above the slope of the nearer hills. Just below the road, an eager, hasty stream sparkled and twisted on its eager way. The "Old Bird" took his cue immediately.

"O! gin I war whar Gadie rins,  
At the back o' Bennachie,"

he quoted. But the "Lunch Lady," with quiet certainty said, "That's not the Gadie, that's the Urie," and the song of the "Old Bird" abruptly ceased. The order was "eyes left" to see Bennachie and thus we ran through Chapel of Garioch. The first sight of many mountains is disappointing. One tries to be more impressed than one is. But they do not look so high as are expected, and the sense of disappointment struggles with the desire to be polite. But Bennachie is for unaccustomed eyes a very impressive sight. The low-lying land to the east of it, and to the north of it, and to

the south-east of it isolates its height and lifts it boldly for the eye to take in. The Saxons were sufficiently impressed, and vocal enough in praise even to please the Scots. The "Boisterous Boy" was inclined to complain that there was no snow on the top, and, indeed, to regard this defect as a personal slight to himself. But all the other Southrons exhausted their adjectives of praise. The ordinary man's vocabulary is spare to an almost pauper degree. The impressive things of Nature move him to such words as "lovely," "grand," "fine." He feels in his mind for other, rarer words, and then falls back again upon "lovely," "grand," "fine." The Saxons exclaimed and muttered these three in varying tones. The "Winsome Wife" said "It's lovely"; the "Demure Daughter" said "It's grand"; the "Englishman" said "It's fine." The Scots, of course, merely said "Ah, ah."

The ascent began. The plan was of the humblest kind; to go up by the path. There were no venturesome climbers looking for danger. They were excursionists out for the day. They started in a bunch. But soon youth, eagerness and breath began to distinguish themselves from discretion, experience and girth. The "Demure Daughter" and the "Boisterous Boy" soon led the ascending march. There followed *βιβλιάκος* and the "Old Bird" deep in theology. The "Englishman" discoursed with the "Lunch Lady" and the "Winsome Wife" in the rear. It was easy going on the grass, although it was not inconvenient to stop and gaze behind at the increasing panorama and see Dunningdeer and Christ's Kirk across the valley. "Now, *that* is the Gadie," said the "Lunch Lady," but the "Old Bird" was too far ahead to hear. Stones now began to appear in the track, and weak ankles began to hamper, and the Englishman's two companions proposed to descend again and prepare food against the climbers' return. The proposition was carried, and the "Englishman" went on by himself after the brisker members of the party. At this point he made a grave mistake, a mistake

inexcusable at his age. He tried a short cut. The winding path irked him, and he saw no reason why he should not make a bee line rather than describe an arc, and he plunged into the whins. But the ground beneath his feet became spongy, and black water appeared here and there, and his heart misgave him, and he beat a retreat. He reconciled himself to the beaten track and to the rearmost position.

Near the summit the nimbler people awaited him, and a pause was made. Under the rocks we sought shelter from the wind and took our fill of the view. Eastward gleamed the sea; southward the wide valley of the Don with Cairn William showing his brown shoulders above Monymusk; northward we looked to Foudland. Talk died down and our own thoughts busied our minds. A spell was put on us by the Spirit of the Heights. Not a smile even greeted the "Old Bird" when he sighed and said—"O, gin I war whar Gadie rins at the back o' Bennachie." It came to us how an exile from Garioch might feel as he thought of his beloved mountain and his beloved stream.

The last scramble up the boulders to the very top occupied but little time, though it left its mark on the unsuitable shoes of the "Demure Daughter," and there at the top the "Boisterous Boy" saw snow on the western mountains and was comforted. Was that Ben Macdhui? Was that Cairngorm? What was that? So many questions broke from us. But the wind searched us and the gale buffeted us, and we thought of kindly people at the foot preparing lunch, and we remembered that there would be other times when we could climb Bennachie. We let off our little bundle of appreciative adjectives, and began to descend. The "Englishman" thought many happy thoughts. If this little mountain could yield him so much pleasure then what further feasts of delight awaited him when he would be able to explore Scotland's more famous regions? It seemed to him that what Scotsmen had said about their country was too modest for the facts.

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