

MOUNT BATTOCK.

A DECEMBER DAY ON THE HILLS.

BY IAN STRUTHERS STEWART.

ONE morning in mid-December our small party left the Bucket Mill and, in brilliant sunshine, crossed the Feugh, taking the path which leads up to the ridge of Glaspits. The air had that delightful crispness which make hill walking such a pleasure. The clear atmosphere, the beauty all around, and the constant calling of the grouse gave an impression of a day in spring with dreary winter well behind.

The pace was slow and it was past midday when the ridge was reached and a line taken for the base of Cock Hill where it touches the Aven. This little river was easily crossed as the water was almost at summer level.

A toilsome grind had now to be faced up Cock Hill and so to the ridge which leads to the summit of Mount Battock, but this was amply repaid by the increasing beauty of the view to the east and north as we climbed higher. Whilst enjoying one of the frequent rests by the way, we noticed a golden eagle sailing overhead as, with hardly a wing beat, he systematically quartered the whole of the upper valley of the Aven. This was in all probability the well known Mount Battock eagle which has its eyrie—shall we say?—"somewhere in the district." On the flat ground to the west, a herd of hinds was grazing peacefully in the sunshine, quite oblivious of the human presence.

The snow level was now reached where it lay in deep drifts in sheltered places on the northern slopes. About two hundred feet below the summit we beheld a picture of wild life very typical of the district. To the left of the cairn a herd of stags was silhouetted against the

sky. In the centre of the picture a company of white hairs in their winter coats were resting just below the cairn, while on a snowdrift to the right stood a flock of ptarmigan purring out their curious alarm note.

A few minutes more and we were at the top. Behind the cairn the air was so still that it was possible to sit in comfort with but few extra wraps. A convenient snowdrift supplied the water and in a few minutes the kettle was boiling over a small primus. Lunch was enjoyed under ideal conditions. Re-invigorated, we were now able to surrender ourselves to the enjoyment of the view on all sides. To the south a thick haze prevented us seeing beyond the valley of the Tay, but the Montrose basin seemed to be almost at our feet. From south-east to north-east the sea was clearly visible and passing vessels could be made out by the aid of the glass. Aberdeen appeared to be lying under a pall of smoke and we did not envy those from whom the sun was hidden. As the temperature fell, we could make out the cold mist spreading up the valleys. To the west and north the beauty of the view was beyond description. The sky was clear and the low winter sun shining on the snowfields of Ben Avon, Lochnagar, and the White Mounth showed up as reflections varying from yellow to the bluest of blues and the deepest of purples. An intense silence brooded over all and we conversed in whispers as it seemed like sacrilege to intrude on such a silence. The sun sank lower and lower in the west and yet we could not tear ourselves away from the beauty and fascination of the scene spread around and below us. At last twilight came, the colours disappeared, and their place was taken by many shades of delicate gray.

The twilight deepens and as if by common consent three figures steal silently away. The Aven was crossed by the aid of the last rays of daylight when a course was laid for the top of the ridge. A rest at the ridge gave the young moon time to rise high enough to shed its light on the path to Feughside which was reached without any difficulty. So ended a perfect winter day on the hills.



(Ian Struthers Stewart).

MOUNT BATTOCK, FROM THE RIDGE BETWEEN PETER'S HILL AND GLASPITS.