

RECORD OF A WALKING TOUR.

BY JAMES L. DUNCAN.

LAST summer I journeyed through a delightful part of England in the company of a college friend, sharing with him the pleasures of English rural life, from contemplating cows in the meadows to enjoying a tankard of beer (in true Chestertonian style) at the village tavern. In contrast to that I had gone alone the previous summer on a walking tour through the Scottish Highlands to extend my hitherto limited acquaintance with the geography of Scotland. I have mentioned the English tour (which has nothing to do with this article) merely to illustrate from personal experience that nothing is lost by being solitary. One is not alone when thus alone.

If one chooses to "mingle with the Universe" it is not difficult to learn that :

"There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore."

My general intention was to work westwards from Braemar to Fort Augustus and then to strike south and arrive eventually, *deis volentibus*, at Loch Lomond. I considered that, as I had already a fair knowledge of Deeside, it could be excluded from the itinerary. My first day's walk, it is true, was to be over Cairngorm, with which I was already familiar, but thereafter I was to venture on the unknown. The night prior to the first day of my journey I spent in Inverey under the hospitable roof of Miss Gruer. It was from there that I set

forth next morning, fortified with the glad remembrance of scones and kindness!

Prompt at seven o'clock I took the road, for there must be no sluggardliness on such occasions. It was a beautiful morning, with the hills free of mist and pale sunshine flooding the valley. A moment of silent appreciation, and then forward! With my pack on my back, my staff in my hand, and a light heart I began my pilgrimage.

I was due to arrive at Coylum Bridge at six o'clock that evening, and, as I was being met by friends, it was necessary that I should be in time. The route, as I have already mentioned, was to be over Cairngorm and down to Loch Morlich. Going by the Linn of Dee, I took an hour and a half to reach Derry Lodge. Walking through Glen Derry is always an impressive experience, and especially so in solitude, for then the mind naturally travels over long vistas of time. Wordsworth's lines, on the Simplon Pass, might well be applied to the pines here:

"The immeasurable height
Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,

The types and symbols of Eternity."

I do not regard walking as an opportunity for performing pedestrian feats, and yet I think I may pride myself on the rate at which I covered the ground this morning. I was on the top of Cairngorm within three and a half hours of leaving Derry Lodge. The mist which had settled on the hills gradually rose. Cairngorm, when I first surveyed it from Loch Etchachan, was clear and remained so for some hours. From Loch Etchachan I crossed over the plateau called, for some reason I have never discovered, the Dairymaid's Fields. No winsome dairymaid at all events came past, singing blythely, this morning. I climbed Cairngorm by scrambling up Corrie Raebert. From the summit I got an excellent view of the wide sweeping plateaus of the Cairngorms, but the prospect was limited by haze. A cold wind was blowing across the summit, and with

customary irrationality I ate my lunch there, sheltering ineffectively on the lee side of the cairn. As I finished three boys arrived who had come up from Speyside. They insulted my dignity by dwelling on the dangers of travelling alone. After further conversation we parted, I now pursuing my way to Loch Morlich. I had an abundance of time and lingered for about an hour round the shore of this beautiful loch. Behind me black clouds were gathering and the rocky fastnesses of the Cairngorms were lost in haze and mist. Nothing else need be said other than that Coylum Bridge was reached in good time; that my friends met me there; and that I enjoyed that evening all the comforts of civilization.

The next day was an "off day," and then on the morning following we (for I was accompanied by my host who had agreed to come over with me to Fort Augustus) set out for the Corryarrick Pass. To-day certainly we did things with a considerable degree of luxury. My instincts, as a walker, rather condemn motor cars; to-day however, it must be confessed, a motor stood us in good stead. We drove from Boat of Garten up the Spey valley past Newtonmore to Garvamore Lodge. It was a most delightful run, even if I, again as a *walker*, felt conscience urging: "You pretend to come on a walking tour, and here you are driving along like the veriest plutocrat!" However one cannot drive over the Corryarrick (a superfluous piece of information we received when verifying our direction at Newtonmore). In its upper reaches, beyond Garvamore Lodge, Glen Spey narrows considerably. One point of interest deserves mention. When motoring here, we noticed several small cairns by the side of the road. These commemorate the spot where the coffin was rested on the occasion of a funeral from up the glen to the small Catholic chapel a few miles further down.

The historical associations of the Corryarrick Pass are extremely interesting. General Wade constructed a road across it and it was across this road that Prince Charles Edward Stuart led his Highlanders on his march

southwards in 1745. General Cope, whose memory no Scotsman reveres, had intended to intercept him, but, on learning the strength of the rebels, he decided that prudence was the better part of valour and made his way north to Inverness.

To-day the work of General Wade is still clearly defined as it makes its way along the hillside. The road however is boggy and rough and can only be crossed on shank's mare. The route lies north-westwards across a spur of the Monadhliath mountains. At its highest point the road ascends in a series of zigzags and it is instructive to observe that the corners are wide and sweeping, like those which have been made, only within the last year or two, at the Devil's Elbow. The top of the Pass is wild and remote, and the feeling of desolation was enhanced for us by the general gloom of the day. Looking backwards we could trace the far distant windings of the Spey, while, when we came over the ridge, a splendid prospect met our eyes. Serrated against the sky, standing out sharp and jagged, we saw the hills of Inverness-shire and Ross-shire. It was my first introduction to that splendid array of peaks and I stood there in admiration, like Cortez gazing at the Pacific Ocean, experiencing that feeling of wonder which all men feel when they are suddenly confronted with the unknown and the magnificent.

From the top of the Pass down to Fort Augustus is a distance of about ten miles. The road on this side is less well-defined and the traveller starting from Fort Augustus might experience some difficulty in finding his way. It was raining as we reached Fort Augustus this evening. It cleared, however, as darkness came down. Then it was particularly fine to stand and look down Loch Ness, while admiring all the delicate tints of colouring, the purple of the hills, and the dark blue of the rippling surface of the loch.

Next day I wished to reach Fort William and to climb Ben Nevis *en route*. I parted company from my friend as he wished to go north. I caught the morning train

down to Spean Bridge, and from there the day's walk began. I struck the road south-west from the town towards Fort William. I intended to walk about seven miles down it and then to branch off and climb Ben Nevis, over the Carn Beag Dearg. Before me, as I walked, were the tops of the great cliffs of Ben Nevis, giving a tremendous impression of sheer height. Presently I left the road to toil over a mile or so of boggy moorland before the upward climb was commenced. The ascent of the Carn Beag Dearg is fairly steep, but it provides a splendid opportunity of seeing the magnificent rocky face of Ben Nevis. These precipices, I suppose, give the finest impression of stark, naked grandeur to be met with in this country. One may well transpose Byron's lines here and say :

“ Ben Nevis is the monarch of mountains ;
They crowned him long ago
On a throne of rocks, in a robe of clouds,
With a diadem of snow.”

At length I reached the top of my ridge and then circled round the Alt a Mhuillin on to Ben Nevis proper. I made my first acquaintance here with ridge walking. Previously upon mountains I had been accustomed to the plateaus of the Cairngorms. I now seemed to myself to be like a cat creeping along the top of a stone wall, only, of course, I showed far less dexterity. When I reached the top of Ben Nevis I was glad to find it was clear. As I appeared over the ridge of the summit I found I was not to be alone on the top. A man was standing surveying distant hills through a pair of binoculars. On approaching nearer I was surprised to find that it was a distinguished member of the Cairngorm Club, whose name requires no mention, when I say that he was verifying the direction of heights for an indicator. He accompanied me down the hill, and (if the remark may be pardoned) age beat youth as regards speed, only the latter can plead its previous exertions as an excuse !

The next day was Sunday and I made it a day of rest. On the Monday I walked over to Kinlochleven, by Glen Nevis and Am Bodach. That day the weather was not so favourable as it had hitherto been. The mist remained obstinately about the three thousand foot level, while there was a tendency towards drizzling rain. Glen Nevis is remarkably striking. It is fairly narrow and the hills rise steeply on either side. A road goes up it about six or seven miles and is there succeeded by a small footpath. This leads round the edge of a gorge through which the stream rushes with considerable force. The scene is one of much grandeur; the path, however, must be treated warily. It goes along the slope of the hill, just overlooking the dashing waters, as they foam away below. This continues for about a mile. Thereafter the glen widens to some extent into a grassy plain, where cattle happened to be peacefully grazing as I passed through. Beyond this grassy prospect stands Steale Farm, a lonely shieling in all truth. One is surprised to find that it has not shared the general fate of depopulation and decay. I now left the glen to climb Am Bodach. This climb proved very precipitous. Am Bodach means "the old man," and I was afraid at times lest the old man should conquer me. I had frequently to climb up rocks using the best footholds I could. After the first ridge was crossed, however, I got into a grassy recess behind where the rise was more gradual. The top of Am Bodach was in mist. As I was short of time I did not climb right to the top, but crossed over the ridge some distance below it. The descent on the other side was down grassy slopes, comparatively free of stones. It did not take very long to reach Kinlochleven, which is a manufacturing town—it manufactures aluminium—with tall smoky chimneys, such as might have roused the wrath of Ruskin as indicative of the tendency to "make railroads of the aisles of the cathedrals of the earth."

My next two days were occupied with road walks, and, such is the perverseness of things, they were the clearest

and hottest days of my tour when distant horizons might have been scanned from the mountain tops. As it was I walked along roads, soiled by the dust of every passing motor car. Of pedestrians like myself I came across none, so that I was tempted to think that in this age of speed my pursuit was an obsolete one, but none the less I found it enjoyable. From Kinlochleven I walked down the side of Loch Leven to Ballachulish; as I progressed I remember it became hotter and hotter, while I became thirstier and thirstier. Some streams flowed down to the loch of the hillside, or rather it would be more accurate to say that there was no lack of stream beds. Generally, however, on account of the dry weather these contained only the merest trickle of water, not enough for my purpose. I did not actually enter Ballachulish, which is further down the Loch than it was necessary for me to go. Instead I passed through Bridge of Coe, then through some wooded scenery past Clachaig Inn and then out into the open country. Here I came on a post, erected by the wayside, which informed the traveller that yonder is the country where, on the thirteenth of February 1693, the massacre of Glen Coe had taken place. Wild country for such wild work! It has often been remarked how the terrible gloom, which must pervade this spot when the storm is whistling down the glen, harmonizes with the bloody deed with which the name of Glen Coe is associated. To-day, however, the glen was bathed in brilliant sunshine, and, although the mind lingered on these "old unhappy far-off things," there were yet other things to think of. It was here that David Balfour, in Stevenson's romance, took to flight with his comrade after the Appin murder, when, on another such day as this, they lay and "birstled" on the rock in their endeavour to evade the English soldiery.

As I toiled up the steep road this afternoon it seemed to become hotter every hour. But not only the heat was troublesome, for I was also greatly annoyed by the attention of innumerable glegs. There are moments, I suppose, in all walking tours when one's spirits become

weariness and these pestilential blood-sucking insects (for such they were) for a time reduced me nearly to despair. I tried running along the road to avoid them but that did not avail much. Altogether I was glad to reach Kingshouse Inn, which was my hostelry for the evening. Kingshouse is a far distant spot, miles from anywhere, and far removed from the trammels of city life. I was hailed on my arrival by the barking of a scampering terrier, which went by the name of Ivy, and which seemed rather unaccustomed to wayfarers calling there.

Next day's walk was again along roads. To-day I covered the twenty miles—most of it in the forenoon—between Kingshouse and Tyndrum. The scenery in the course of the day's march was rather more monotonous and rather more devoid of interest. The first ten miles is over the moor of Rannoch, which stretches for miles on either side of the road, away towards the far distant hills. The day was perhaps hotter than the previous one, a fact which gives rise to one incident which I clearly remember. About half way to Tyndrum I passed a certain inn, where, as I was feeling droughty, I asked for a bottle of lemonade. The bottle, a fairly big one, was duly produced and its contents drunk in a twinkling. I asked the good landlady for a second, which was similarly treated. I might have continued further with perfect ease, but prudence said no. I remember grumbling at paying one shilling for my treat. Tyndrum was duly reached in the afternoon, and I spent the rest of the day there in idleness.

The day following was the last one of my walk. I wished to reach Ardlui and intended going to it over Ben Lui. From Tyndrum to the beginning of my climb I had a moorland walk of about five miles. The altitude when I commenced climbing was 1,250 feet above sea level and as Ben Lui is 3,708 feet in height I had to climb about 2,500 feet. Unfortunately to-day the mist was lying about the 2,000 feet level, so that during the greater part of the climb I was shut off from the surrounding world. The first part of the

ascent was over a steep grassy slope, by the side of a burn. Presently, however, as the ridge became more precipitous I had to scramble over huge boulders. I now found myself on a ridge, with steep cliffs on either side. Eventually, however, the top was reached, and I had the satisfaction of standing on the top of Ben Lui, albeit nothing was to be seen beyond the radius of a few yards. I made my descent southwards—guiding myself carefully by compass—to a stream called the Dubh Eus, which was safely reached. In its lower reaches this stream flows through a beautiful glade, through which I passed, before striking the main road to Ardlui.

And now at Ardlui, beside the shore of Loch Lomond, my pilgrimage was at an end. A joyful experience it had been, as most of our experiences are when we escape from the "Bastille of civilisation," although probably we do not choose to remain too long outside our prison house, such is the force of habit imposed by economic necessity. Still during these few days one tastes all the freshness of escape from routine, the blood courses more freely through the veins, while the living soul is enabled to "become one with nature."