

## THE NEW YEAR FATALITY IN THE CAIRNGORMS.

THE New Year of 1928 has been marked by a sad mountaineering accident in the Cairngorms, involving the death of two young Glasgow men and surrounded by a mystery which will never be solved. The story, so far as it is known, may best be given here in the order in which the various facts emerged, leaving speculation to the end. It should be added that the newspaper accounts, written, as they necessarily are, by men unfamiliar with the ground, are fragmentary and confusing and, in places, not easily reconciled.

On Monday, 2nd January, two young men from Perth, Edward Maconachie and Alistair Cran, who had come up to Aviemore for the New Year holiday, were walking up Glen Einich and had reached a point within sight of the Lower Bothy, some five miles from Coylum Bridge, when they found a man lying by the side of the track, unconscious and with his hands and legs badly bruised. They carried him to the bothy and tried to revive him, but the efforts were fruitless and Cran started back to Coylum Bridge to secure assistance while Maconachie remained in the bothy. At Coylum Bridge Cran telephoned to Dr. Balfour at Aviemore and the doctor came in a motor, but was unable, on account of snow drifts, to get more than a mile up the Einich road. A sleigh was obtained but even with this conveyance Dr. Balfour had great difficulty in completing the journey to the bothy. He had been preceded on foot by Cran and upon their arrival at the

bothy they learned that the man had died not long after Cran had set out for Coylum Bridge. Maconachie had for four hours or more kept a lonely vigil over the body. The party put the body on the sleigh and conveyed it to Aviemore. A letter in his pocket identified the man as Thomas Baird, M.A., of the Geology Department of Glasgow University.

It was next ascertained that Baird had not been alone, but had been accompanied by another Glasgow student, Hugh Barrie, and that he was missing. They had arrived at Aviemore the previous week and had gone to the farm or holding of Whitewell in Rothiemurchus, where they had taken up their quarters in an old building. On Wednesday they told the people of the house that they were going off next morning, that they were leaving part of their equipment and that they would not be back until the Sunday night. They left early on the Thursday before anyone saw them.

Beyond the above facts nothing is known as to where the two men went or what happened. Barrie's body has not been found and, even when it is found, the story will only be filled in by surmise. The most strenuous efforts were made to discover Barrie. A party of ghillies and police went up Glen Einich on Tuesday, immediately after the finding of Baird, and again on the Wednesday and searched the glen as far as the Upper Bothy which stands at the foot of Loch Einich but without result. The weather was very wild and by this time it was quite clear that Barrie, if lying injured on the hillside, must be dead. Two days later, on the Friday, a party of Deeside police made an attempt from Braemar to reach the Corrour Bothy at the foot of the Devil's Point, the supposition being that the two men might have come through the Lairig Ghru and taken up their quarters in the Corrour and that some clue might be found there. So tempestuous were the conditions that the party who were accompanied by Mr. Alexander Grant, the keeper at Luibeg, and his

son, were only able to round the corner of Cairn a' Mhaim and there they had to turn back without reaching the bothy. A party of ghillies from Aviemore who went up Glen Einich on the same day discovered nothing.

During the week Professor Gregory of Glasgow University, in whose department Mr. Baird was engaged, had been organising a search party on a large scale. This arrived at Aviemore, and on Sunday, 8th January, a party of some sixty men, including local men as well as the Glasgow volunteers, explored a large tract of Glen Einich, under the direction of Mr. John Mackenzie, the head Rothiemurchus keeper, dividing themselves into groups and searching all the corries of Braeriach which overlook the glen. Some of the men actually reached the summit plateau of the mountain but the fierce gale which was blowing made any further progress across the plateau impossible. The accounts of the search indicate that many members of the party were not properly equipped for winter mountaineering, and some of them had narrow escapes from accident on the hard snow slopes of the corries. Nothing was discovered.

At the following week-end the search from the Braemar side was resumed, and on the Saturday, the 14th, when the weather had improved, Mr. Grant and his son from Luibeg reached the Corrou bothy. Nothing was found in the bothy indicating that any party had recently visited it, and this seems to dispose of the suggestion that Baird and Barrie had come through the Lairig Ghru. A few hours after Mr. Grant arrived at the bothy, two young Glasgow men came up, who spent two nights in the place, making a search without result, on the Sunday, on the Devil's Point, and between it and Cairn Toul. The Corrou was also visited on the Sunday by a party from Braemar and a party from Dundee, who ascended the slopes of Cairn Toul to within a thousand feet or so of the summit. The search was fruitless.

Here the mystery rests. Those who know the region

can appreciate how remote it is from any base, and how impossible it is to effect a complete search until summer comes, and even then the difficulties are great, for much of the ground is precipitous and accessible only to practised mountaineers, and it is quite conceivable that the body of the missing man may lie undiscovered for years in some recess among the rocks and boulders of the corries of Braeriach or Sgoran Dubh, for there is no clue as to where Baird and Barrie were climbing, and no hint pointing to the particular area that should be searched. It is stated that the men were not total strangers to the region, because during a recent Glasgow Rectorial election they—or one of them—was engaged in a kidnapping exploit when the leader of a rival party was captured and taken a prisoner to Glen Einich.

One of the strange features of the whole affair is that Barrie, the missing man, contributed to the *Glasgow University Magazine* last summer, an almost prophetic poem anticipating his own fate. It ran:—

When I am dead  
And this strange spark of life that in me lies  
Is fled to join the great white core of life  
That surely flames beyond eternities,  
And all I ever thought of as myself  
Is mouldering to dust and cold dead ash,  
This pride of nerve and muscle—merest dross,  
This joy of brain and eye and touch but trash,  
Bury me not, I pray thee,  
In the dark earth, where comes not any ray  
Of light or warmth or aught that made life dear ;  
But take my whitened bones far, far away  
Out of the hum and turmoil of the town.  
Find me a windswept boulder for a bier  
And on it lay me down,  
Where far beneath drops sheer the rocky ridge  
Down to the gloomy valley and the streams  
Fall foaming white against black, beetling rocks :  
Where the sun's kindly radiance seldom gleams :  
Where some tall peak, defiant, steadfast, rocks  
The passing gods : and all the ways of men  
Forgotten.

So may I know  
Even in that death that comes to everything  
The swiftly silent swish of hurrying snow ;  
The lash of rain ; the savage bellowing  
Of stags ; the bitter keen knife-edge embrace  
Of the rushing wind : and still the tremulous dawn  
Will touch the eyeless sockets of my face ;  
And I shall see the sunset and anon  
Shall know the velvet kindness of the night  
And see the stars.

The only comment upon the affair which can be fairly offered in the light of the information so far available is that made by Mr. William Garden, the former chairman of the Cairngorm Club, and it is to emphasise the risks of winter climbing in the high Cairngorms. No one who has ever experienced a snow-storm on the mountains will ever think lightly of the danger.