

## THE BEN MACDHUI FATALITY.

ON Saturday, May 5, two young men, J. Lawrie, age 23, and N. McLeod, of the same age, spent the night, along with a friend, C. Smith, camping in Glen Derry. McLeod had been a member of the Cairngorm Club for about six months and had considerable experience of the high Cairngorms, it being his custom to spend most of his holidays camping and climbing there. He was of strong physique and, subject to moderate weather conditions, sufficiently well equipped for hill walking. For strenuous conditions such as often occur on the high Cairngorms during the winter and spring months, his equipment should have included an ice axe and a woollen helmet. It also appears that, although his boots were well nailed, the nails were much worn and often caused him to slip on frozen surfaces. Lawrie, although not so experienced as his friend, was not unacquainted with the Cairngorms, having made three or four climbing visits to that district. The three friends left camp about 6 a.m. on Sunday, intending to climb Ben Macdhui. The weather was fine and sunny but with a high wind on the tops. On arriving at Loch Etchachan, McLeod and Lawrie dumped their packs, as they intended to pick them up on the way back and proceed to the Shelter Stone. Unfortunately they forgot till later that their compass was in one of the packs, and, as the weather was then clear, they did not think it worth returning for. The summit was reached without incident about 9.30 a.m. and, shortly afterwards, Smith left them, as he intended to spend the night at the Corrour bothy. Smith had a compass, but in spite of this, it is understood that when he reached the bottom of the Larig, he was well to the North of his destination and in the vicinity of the Pools of Dee. Soon after Smith departed, and before McLeod and Lawrie had left the summit, a blizzard from the South came on and visibility became practically nil. As it was well nigh impossible to face the wind, the two friends took what shelter

they could near the cairn, hoping the storm would pass. They must have spent more than an hour in this situation and were becoming thoroughly chilled. Finally McLeod decided that they must make for lower ground and gave up the idea of returning to Loch Etchachan. They appear to have walked with the wind behind till they came on a steep snow descent. They attempted to walk down this, supporting each other by holding hands. Suddenly McLeod slipped, dragging Lawrie with him, and both were precipitated some distance down a boulder-strewn slope, McLeod probably striking heavily on a boulder as they fell. They were not far apart when they came to rest, and Lawrie soon saw that his friend was seriously injured. McLeod managed to rise to his feet and say a few words, but almost at once collapsed and, becoming unconscious, probably died shortly afterwards. Lawrie stayed beside his friend for some time, doing what he could to try and bring him round, but finding that he could get no signs of life, was forced to the conclusion that he was dead. He then sheltered him as much as possible behind some stones and continued the descent towards a pool (afterwards identified as one of the Pools of Dee) which had become momentarily visible at the bottom of the slope. Near this point he came on fresh tracks in the snow and, hoping to get help, and the mist again being dense, decided to follow the tracks. It was only when well down towards the Rothiemurchus forest that he realised he was not making for Deeside. Unfortunately he met with no help till he reached Coylum Bridge. Here he obtained the loan of a bicycle to take him to Aviemore where willing helpers were obtained, although it was not till some days later that they were able to locate and bring down the body of his friend. Too high praise cannot be given to the police, gamekeepers, and others who gave the most willing assistance in the search, and never relaxed their efforts.

[We are indebted to Mr. Lawrie for the facts here recorded, and he has confirmed the above account.]