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RECOLLECTIONS IN TRANQUILLITY.

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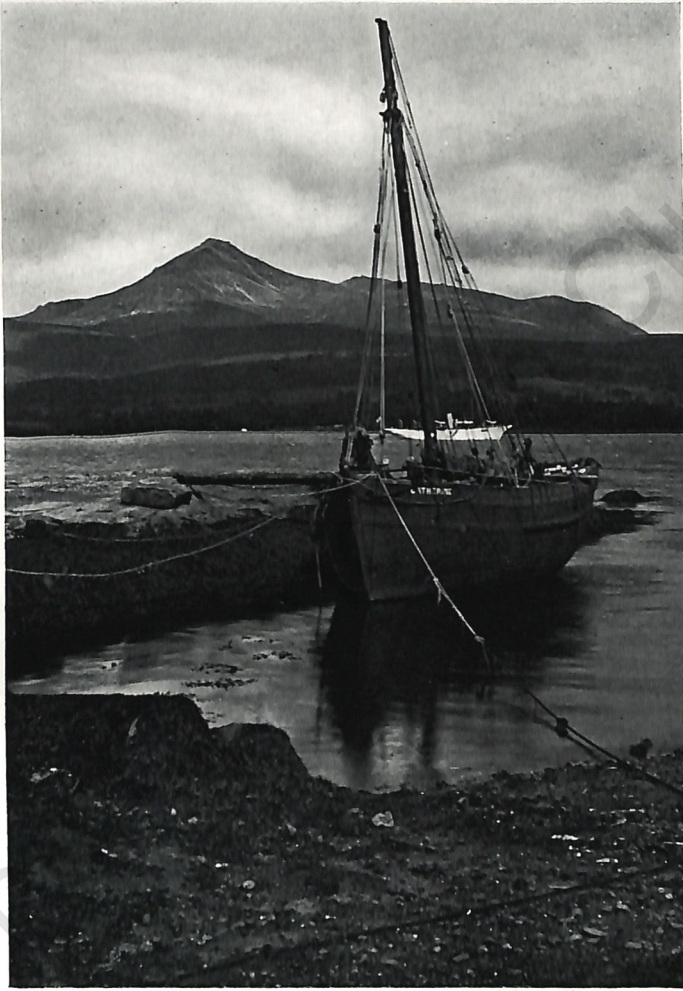
THERE were three of us, namely, the President, the Secretary and Treasurer, and the writer, who, not to be outshone, styled himself the Extra-ordinary Member. It was our custom to forgather on Thursday evening to discuss everything in general and the weather forecast in particular, for by Thursday evening our thoughts would be reconnoitring the possibility of a climb on the following Saturday. We constituted K.M.C., a totally unofficial and unregistered body—almost an unrecognised body, save that on one occasion we achieved the distinction, unsought, of featuring in the *S.M.C.J.* One Easter, at Corrou Bothy, stocked as for a siege with victuals and coal, we, in the purely Biblical sense, took in and ministered to an utterly exhausted member of that Club, who gratefully acknowledged his good luck and our quite ordinary services in the next issue of the journal. But that is another story.

The fireplace in the den is a thing to marvel at, recalling that in the common-room of Gwydyr Ucha, one of the North Wales chain of hostels, with its brave motto, "*nec tumet, nec timet*" (so aptly rendered, "he has neither swelled head nor cold feet"!). None of your miserly narrow gratelings whose capacity is limited to one lump of coal at a time, but a wide open-hearted generous hearth and at the side a coal-box of ample proportions. Little wonder, then, that

our sessions were wont to be protracted, and not infrequently one member would discover that he was uttering pearls of great wisdom before a somnolent House. The discovery was not made readily, for the club would be no more than constituted when the room would rapidly assume almost solid properties and everything would be seen, if at all, through a blue haze of tobacco smoke, "as imponderable as colour and tenuous as twilight."

We had been discussing the attitude of those climbers who confine their attention to one particular group of mountains to the virtual exclusion of all others, however attractive they may be, whether for diversity of rock structure or for novelty of problem, and we agreed *nem. con.* that such an insular outlook could not be defended. "Take, for example, the experience of Messrs Sansom and Herford," piped up the President, winging his words from a point almost due west of the footstool, which occupied a central position in front of the fireplace. "It is on record that these two gentlemen once planned a climbing holiday in the Alps, contracted midway a particularly virulent kind of nostalgia, and returned home to finish their holiday at Wastdale Head. Now, it may be that as rock climbers they did not take kindly to 'the incomparable treasures of the snow,' but is it not wise to remember the virtue of the maxim, 'Nothing too much'?" (the President is a Hellenist), "a maxim which is as applicable to a seven-course dinner as to indulgence in one's favourite peaks? In my opinion, such men are on a par, in the realm of literature, with those who limit their reading to the products of one individual author. Let us consider a Gallovidian who has read nothing but S. R. Crockett. What does such a one know of the realms of gold? How can he. . . ."

Already, alas! the fire had won and one member at least was losing the thread of the argument, basking in that delicious buoyancy as the ship of consciousness slips her moorings for the glamorous half-world of memories and dreams! Already we are across in spell-binding Arran and are chatting with the cottagers of Corrie as, pipe in mouth, they fill the doorways of their whitewashed abodes.



BRODICK BAY AND GOATFELL

H. C. Dugan

In the bay basking sharks hoist and lower their sails, and farther out steamers of all sizes, ships of peace and men-o'-war, ply the firth. In imagination we stand on the summit of Goatfell as Q.S.T.S. "Queen Mary" steams down the Clyde on her maiden voyage. No finer viewpoint could be selected. On that great day, in the words of the agreeable saying of Japanese climbers, "may our six senses be pure and may the weather on the honourable mountain be fine!"

Arran has that quality of diminutiveness that evokes the possessive instinct and induces a proprietary sensation in those who love her. From most of her higher mountains the whole island can be embraced in one sweeping glance, affording a perfect example of Montague's thesis in possibly the finest chapter of "The Right Place." There he argues in favour of that magnitude in a country which can be grasped and comprehended by the eye. "I have already," a troubled American said when the Philippines were delivered into his hands, "more country than I can love." On this basis, it is easy to understand the affection Arran inspires when it is remembered that the perimeter is only 56 miles, a stout day's march, the record for which is believed to be just under twelve hours! Moreover, Arran has contrived to remain unspotted from the more blatant aspects of modern civilisation, boasting neither cinema, nor railway, nor slums, nor—trespass notices!

Our magic carpet has taken us to Glen Sannox, considered by many competent judges to be second only to Glen Sligachan. It is dominated by the impressive and shapely mass of Cir Mhor, Arran's finest individual mountain. The deer love the east end of this glen and frequently they wend their way from the Corrie of the White-water into the Punch Bowl, thence across to Sannox and over the shoulder of Suidhe Fhearghais to North Glen Sannox. Yonder unsightly abomination, a conspicuous piece of unloveliness at the east gate of the Glen, is the superstructure of the commercially profitable barytes mine which is extending its vandal tentacles ever farther afield. If we were dictator we should, for one thing, appoint a

Permanent Commission of Fine Glens, solely and specifically to prevent such destruction of natural beauty. There remains the consoling thought that this eyesore is not visible from the upper glen, being hidden by the uncurved flank of Cioch na h'oighe.

It was a perfect Monday morning in September and we had come to the end of a strenuous week-end, with Corrie as our base. Surely it was a gross sin against the light of opportunity to idle away our last forenoon? So up Cioch na h'oighe we went, ascending by the well-defined crack which cuts across the east-facing slabs. Rich indeed was the harvest of the eye we reaped, but it must not be forgotten that the transport authorities give no consideration to the week-ender from the mainland, but compel him to bid Corrie good-bye by 2 P.M. Not much time then to measure the yield which our summit lavished on us. Let us return via the Punch Bowl—yes, by the first gully that sweeps down from the ridge just behind the peak. It is gravelly, with loose boulders at frequent intervals, but this state of affairs soon gives way to a slope of increasing angle. Thus we were forced out of the gully to our right, where at last it dawned on us that we had really gone and done it this time and that there was no way down save at the ruthless despatch of the Law of Gravity, truly a grave outlook! Fortunately there was heather (yes, we know that vegetation holds are to be eschewed, but they have a place, *faute de mieux!*), which provided the necessary anchorage against precipitation, and after a superlatively careful and laborious re-ascent we once more stood on the summit one and a half hours after we had left it! Readers of F. S. Smythe will recall that it was not a slip of his own or an accident to a friend which instilled into him “the fear of the hills which is the beginning of wisdom” but a hapless sheep which was offered up in vicarious atonement for his youthful crimes. Lucky is he who early learns the lesson of the simple end exacted by Gravity, “the simplest, the most elemental of Nature’s forces.”

Near the head of Glen Sannox we come into line with the Witch’s Step Gully, which, from below or from the

Saddle, appears to enjoy perpendicularity but is really at a moderate angle save perhaps for the last 100 feet. Here the gully is split in twain by an obtruding rocky rib. Both branches are floored with detritus and the angle, together with water action, has seen to it that nothing projects to provide holds, not even on their walls. The right-hand branch is the better, but the most satisfactory route is by the rib, which is stable at least, and, in comparison, reliable, so far as Arran rock can be termed reliable.

The mass of Cir Mhor stands between the two Saddles and the north-east face provides a broad field for rock scrambling. It was on a day in May that the President and the writer essayed one of the gullies, since recognised as Gully B. We had sauntered up the glen without rope or any definite objective and, spotting a likely thing, we had irresponsibly decided to follow it up. Everything went uninterruptedly until the President, who played leader *ex officio*, reached an overhang which would admit of no turning. At this juncture he reached out to test the adhesibility of a sizable projection, whereby No. 2 was put in serious jeopardy for a few palpitating seconds. By chance he was widely stanced, but it was a dismaying experience to follow the bounding descent of the all-too-easily detached projection, as, passing narrowly between his legs, it made for the slabby course of the Sannox Burn! Arran is an admirable training ground for rock as much of it is utterly unreliable!

If there is one quality more than any other associated with reminiscences and dreams, both diurnal and nocturnal, it is their inconsequence. To find oneself now step-cutting up the snow slopes of Ben Ime, the monarch of the Arrochar Alps, far from coming as a surprise, seemed the most natural thing in the world. We could report progress since that red-poker Thursday evening, the evening of the Branding of the Communal Ice Axe. On that occasion the writer had the honourable privilege of impressing well and truly the letters K.M.C. on the shaft of the club's first axe, heedless of the possibility of upsetting its balance or of weakening the finely grained shaft! Now on Ben Ime each member

was axe-equipped. Seldom, as on that February day, can there have been on its summit such a fine display of snow ferns, but something was to happen which was to blot out for a time the recollection of the beauty of winter's foliage.

Starting from Butterbridge at the east end of Glen Kinglas, we plodded on through soft snow and in surprisingly warm air to the col between Ben Ime and Ben Chorrnach. The mystery of the extraordinary mildness was soon explained, for, on reaching the col, we were faced with an east wind blowing up the Coiregrogain, the coldest east wind it has ever been our misfortune to experience. Its frigidity can be judged from the fact that the fingers of two of the party suffered from frostbite in consequence of the day's, or rather the wind's, activities. Much time was misspent renewing our youth as we glissaded wantonly on a short and safe slope near the cairn. The gathering dusk, so early on a midwinter day, bade us straightway begin the descent to Arrochar, via Allt Coiregrogain and Glen Loin.

Ice-glazed rocks gave us pause and somewhat sobered our exuberant spirits, but on coming to the top of a magnificent sweep of hard-frozen snow we succumbed simultaneously to the imperative need for haste and the exhilarating call of a glissade. The Secretary and Treasurer, however, wise beyond his years, elected to descend *ventre à terre*, while the other two members made a sitting double of it and started off together down what proved to be a slope of 500 feet. The fairway was not free of obstructive nodules, as one had supposed from above, and we had not accelerated for more than 50 feet when we parted unceremoniously and an ice-axe shot out incontinently from our rapidly disintegrating partnership. The whole episode lasted probably only a few seconds, but to the foolhardy protagonists time was not the essence of the contract, and the chief concern in the mind of one of them was to remain absolutely relaxed throughout. Down, down, down! What an exhilarating feeling, particularly since we had started off feet first and now were literally heading for the unknown. (Let us confess it. The slope was absolutely new to us!) One vividly remembers being hurled into mid-air from contact with the

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ARRAN FROM CRAIGIE HILL

D. Deans

1. Beinn Nuis.

2. Beinn Tarsuinn.

3. Goatfell.

4. N. Goatfell.

5. Mullach Buidhe.

6. Caisteal Abhail.

7. Cioch na h'oighe.

8. Suidhe Fhcarghas.

bulge of a snow-covered boulder, which stood athwart the course, and landing some yards down again to continue the merry prank as long as might be. Stop at last we did to our immense surprise, just where the angle eased off to form a platform, on which much soft snow had collected, to add greatly to our comfort and the sole spectator's relief! Two things stand out, however, in the recollection of the Ben Ime glissade: first, by some inexplicable wizardry, the writer's rucksack now suspended itself by both straps from the same (right) shoulder! Mercifully, he had not engaged a waist belt! And then the maxim, "Never glissade on a slope you have not climbed."

" . . . and I am perfectly convinced that we ought to pay far more attention than we do to the complementary and more difficult art of climbing down." It was the voice of the Secretary and Treasurer. Along what tortuous labyrinths the discussion had roved we knew not. Sufficient for us that the meteorological experts, whose motto seems always to be "safety first," had forecast fair periods generally—but with local showers! Is it to be Arrochar then as was suggested a couple of hours ago?

Saturday's programme settled, the club anthem is chanted pianissimo (the hour is late and the landlady is a light sleeper). Another Thursday has come and gone, yielding promise of an active Saturday on the high hills. Surely, in the words of the unknown sixteenth-century climber who scratched his philosophy in Greek on a rock on the Niesen, "The love of Mountains is best."