

BACK NUMBERS.

R. L. MITCHELL.

“ THERE is no despotism like that of the zealous and energetic editor who, by his own devotion to his project, acquires the right to hold to their word those who, in a moment of unguarded sympathy, have promised to enlist under his banner.” Such were the opening words of our *Journal*, written by the first Honorary President, later to become Lord Bryce, in “ Some Stray Thoughts on Mountain Climbing.” Thus it appears that Inkson M’Connochie employed editorial cunning closely allied to that of our present editor, for such ideas are not far from the mind of your reviewer, especially as many of the highlights from the pages of the *Journal* have been filched by the editor for his history of the first fifty years of the Club, which appeared in the preceding issue. Nevertheless there is not one volume, one number, which does not still provide much of interest, and the difficulty is not in finding what to mention in a review such as this, but what to leave out.

Of the four topographical articles in the first number, the only one with a Cairngorm connection was on Sgòran Dubh, surely the Cairngorm top least often visited by the Club, written by Hugh T. Munro, a Scottish climber whose name may survive longer than most. Others dealt with Beinn Laoigh, Beinn a’ Ghlo, and the Blue Hill. As all but the last had by a strange coincidence been ascended by your reviewer for the first time during the Jubilee year of the Club, there was nothing for it but to make a first ascent of the Blue Hill. But the account of this expedition, its hazards and hardships, is a story which must be told elsewhere! Amongst the first batch of Notes, which were formerly more interesting than they have become of late, the attempt by Douglas and Gibson on the most difficult of the standard gullies on Lochnagar is recorded. Not until the summer of

1933 was this gully climbed, by Ludwig, and it is as yet unclimbed under winter conditions, as at the time of Douglas and Gibson's attempt. Unfortunately, no account of Ludwig's ascent appears in the *Journal*, beyond casual mention in a report of an annual dinner.

One editorial problem which becomes apparent in writing an article such as this is the rendering of Gaelic names, and any inconsistencies are due to the adoption to the spelling used in the article in question. Thus we pass from Beinn Muich Dhui to Ben Macdhuì, Learg Ghruamach to Lairig Ghru, noticing that it is generally the more popular names which have shown evolution—or is it merely progressive misspelling? Whilst on the subject of nomenclature, it is perhaps a pity that the apt title of Cairnmaster, used by the now defunct Perthshire Mountain Club and recorded somewhere in the Notes, did not find a place in our constitution instead of the prosaic Chairman and Presidents whom we honour.

The lack of articles on the Cairngorms was soon remedied, and the first six volumes, more especially the first three, provide an unequalled source of information on most Cairngorm topics, other than snow and rock climbs. The collective index to Vols. I. to VI. is particularly useful in this respect. M'Connochie himself wrote the principal series, "The Cairngorm Mountains," which was well illustrated by sketches by J. G. Murray (Vol. I., pp. 236, 309, 336; II., p. 38). A more useful guide to the area for the hill-walker is difficult to find. Supplementing this, Professor Trail's "Flowering Plants and Fern Allies of the Cairngorms" (Vol. I., p. 197), Rev. William Forsyth's "Outlying Nooks of Cairngorm" (Vol. I., pp. 134, 294; II., pp. 9, 206; III., p. 17), and C. G. Cash's "The Cairngorm Parishes and the (Old) Statistical Account of Scotland" (Vol. VI., pp. 116, 154) demonstrate the wide field covered. The last is well worth mention as it brings together the very scattered information on the state of the Cairngorm country at the end of the eighteenth century, contained in Sir John Sinclair's twenty-volume Statistical Account. Then, be it said, Statistical Accounts were not the terrifying things they have

become to-day. We note many even stranger spellings, as, for example, Loch-na-garaidh, which at that time was known mainly for its amethysts; it must, however, have been visited fairly often, at least in summer. The following description of the birthplace of the Club may be of interest: "At the foot of Cairngorm is Loch Aven, from whence the river of that name issues, containing plenty of trout, but dry and indifferent ones to eat. At one end of this loch, surrounded with vast mountains, is a large natural cave, sufficient to hold a number of men secure from snow, rain, and wind. People often lodge here for nights, some for necessity, others when hunting or fishing. It is commonly called Chlachdhian or the 'Sheltering Stone.'"

We learn that smallpox was the only disease that was "remarkably fatal" in the district, and find mention of such an unlikely person as the Delai Lama of Thibet, in an account not of the Himalaya but of the Cairngorms, written in the seventeen-nineties.

Yet whilst the *Journal* has ever been concerned chiefly with the hills of Scotland, and those of the north-east in particular, there has been no restriction of subject-matter, which has ranged from the Rockies to the Himalaya, from Japan to New Zealand, and it will be quite impossible even to attempt to notice such articles in this review.

Amongst the more general articles in earlier volumes, the series of J. C. Barnett on "Mountain Measurements" (Vol. I., pp. 152, 192, 278) may be taken as an example. These dealt with methods of determining altitude, and are typical of many semi-technical papers dealing with subjects of interest to hillmen, even should they not all react as does this author to some of the manifestations of progress. "What mountaineer," he writes, "is there who has not felt his pulses thrill when, in some wild and silent solitude, he gazed upon the station cairns and altitude marks that reveal the passage of the Ubiquitous Survey Sappers?" Are such thoughts aroused by the bare concrete blocks which in recent years have surmounted and occasionally, as on Ben Macdhui, displaced the summit cairn? Let us hope that in time they will disintegrate into the landscape.

Interspersed among "Experiences (or Misadventures, or Camping) in the Cairngorms" and the "Lochnagars in April" (or June or October, but seldom December or February), which form the less interesting matter of the earlier volumes, are to be found, in addition to articles of the types already mentioned, short monographs such as that of Rev. George Williams on "Heather" (Vol. IV., p. 87), dealing with its botany, its ecology, and its place in literature.

In 1911-12, J. G. Kyd, who had already reviewed the first twenty-one years of the Club (Vol. VI., p. 177), brought out two numbers, and, on leaving Aberdeen, was succeeded by J. B. Gillies. With the changes we note the first introduction of articles on rock climbing and a temporary improvement in the reproduction of the illustrations. But one is curious of the reason for the poor quality paper in Vol. VII., pp. 97-130 (January 1912). Typical rock-climbing articles of this period are by James McCoss on the Kin-cardineshire Coast Climbs (Vol. VII., p. 107) and H. G. Drummond in Glen Clova and Glen Doll (Vol. VII., p. 12), in which we learn that Parker was the Jonah of the party! Thus names familiar to present-day members begin to appear.

In the "Circuit of the Cairngorms," John Clarke (Vol. VII., p. 201) describes the covering of the four main tops in one day—not, however, the first of the records as all six had already been done (Vol. VI., p. 49). A further attempt (Vol. VII., p. 316) described by J. L. McIntyre concludes: "At 7.59 (I must be exact here) (A.M. or P.M., ? reviewer) Mr Clarke re-entered his house at Boat of Garten; a minute later, it is said, the spirit of a certain Colonel Bogey looked in, but retired discomfited using words which one may hear upon the golf course, but never on the mountains." But perhaps the author had never eavesdropped on a party in a stubborn gully. The Bogey question was discussed by Parker (Vol. VIII., p. 19), who quoted Naismith's rule (*S.M.C.J.*, Vol. II., p. 136) that the time taken by a party in fair condition for easy expeditions should be an hour for every three miles on the map with an additional hour for every 2,000 feet of ascent. A later series of record attempts

on the six tops occurred in 1932-33 (Vol. XIII., pp. 98, 191), one on the occasion of a memorable midnight excursion which the Club enjoyed on Lochnagar. That morning was such as is described by Pittendrigh MacGillivray in a few verses entitled "Lochnagar: Dawn, July 22, 1914" (Vol. VIII., p. 43). A few days later war broke upon the world, and apart from the *Journal*, the activities of the Club were limited, and the office-bearers kept in office until the conclusion of hostilities. Actually the Committee were given powers to arrange such excursions as circumstances permitted, but it appears, from *Journal* reports, that nothing was done. As in the present conditions, it seems that the *Journal* may suffer appreciably from war-time restrictions, it is to be hoped that it will be possible to continue other activities in some modified form. Out of 140 members, 41 were on active service in 1914-18, and there were 17 casualties, 9 of which were fatal. The Roll of Honour appears in Vol. IX. at p. 244. A further scanning of the earlier volumes confirmed the fact that not a mention of the Boer War occurred.

In the number for July 1915 are articles on the Vat by Alexander Bremner (Vol. VIII., p. 86) and "The Call of the Wild," by H. D. Welsh (Vol. VIII., p. 94), both of whom twenty-five years later we are pleased to find assisting in the production of this number.

In the middle of Vol. VIII. Robert Anderson took over the editorial pen for the next three volumes, but maintained the form and content of the *Journal* rather like that of Gillies, with the influence of M'Connochie still dominant.

An unconventional route from Glasgow to Braemar is described by George Buchanan Smith (Vol. IX., p. 20), and members on a certain excursion not so long ago will agree with his remarks about Càrn-an-Fidhleir, "What a wilderness we were in the midst of—never in Scotland have I felt it so." This is a most invigorating article by one of the members who fell in the Great War.

The Jubilee Number of the *Journal* in January 1918 contained articles by several of the contributors to the first issue, amongst them Viscount Bryce, Sir Hugh T. Munro,

and James Rose. The opening paragraphs of Lord Bryce's article have once again a peculiar aptness.

“Unable to visit the Alps in war-time, I have this summer been wandering among the mountains of Sutherlandshire and Perthshire, and along the delightful shores of Arran. Hills and glens are silent. All the young men have gone—many never to return. The faces of the women are sad. Seeing few anglers in the rivers, hearing hardly a gun upon the moors, one is reminded of Macaulay's lines about Etruria when Lars Porsena was marching his army on Rome :

“ ‘ Unharm'd the Waterfowl may dip
In the Volsinian mere.’ ”

“ One tries among these lovely peaks and along the wave-resounding shores of ocean to forget what is passing in Flanders and France, in Macedonia and Palestine and Mesopotamia. But the contrast between the stillness and beauty of Nature, offering us her peaceful delights, and the flames of strife and hatred which have enwrapt the whole world, destroying the youth of many nations, seems almost as awful here as it does to those in the midst of battle, who have indeed little time to reflect upon it.”

Amongst the more technical articles which are to be found in every volume is one by G. G. Jenkins, on “ Curvature and Refraction (Vol. IX., p. 27), which might well be read by all members who attempt to identify distant peaks. It supplements an article by Rev. Robert Semple (Vol. I., p. 265) on the “ Distance of the Visible Horizon ” and could well be studied in conjunction with other articles on “ Map Reading,” by P. A. C. (Vol. VII., p. 154), and “ Compass and Map Reading,” by D. P. Levack (Vol. XIV., p. 178).

Vol. IX. includes a list of Club excursions from 1889 to 1919 (p. 298). In the early days excursions were much less frequent than they have become in recent years. Originally only three meets or excursions were held, at the spring, summer, and autumn holidays, but the latter was soon dropped owing, it was explained, to the bad weather frequent at that date. A few Saturday afternoon excursions and later extra week-ends made up the year's programme.

Scanning more recent volumes shows that the first of the New Year Meets was that of 1920, to Braemar, where it has remained every year except 1927, when a meet at Ballater was poorly attended. The New Year Meet of 1920 appears, in fact, to have been the first official Club meet or excursion in the period between the Aberdeen September Holiday and Easter. How the earlier members must have disliked snow! The first Sunday excursion, other than those at week-end meets, did not come until July 14, 1931, and attracted but four members. Fortunately this lack of desire to climb Morven on a Sunday did not discourage the supporters of the innovation, and soon the snow-climbing excursions to Lochnagar in February and March were instituted (1932). Figures of members attending meets show that the number of members turning out has tended to rise in the last few years. Never, however, since that Mount Keen excursion of fifty years ago has the attendance exceeded the number of members. There is much of interest in the accounts of meets and excursions long past, in those at least which are not merely registers of attendance and lists of tops covered. While it may not be of great interest to know what the Club eats for tea, it is news when the presidential rucksack makes an involuntary descent of a hard-won snow slope, and accounts of such incidents are welcome. May we, however, make a plea for accuracy on the part of reporters—however excusable the muddling the Hogmanay and New Year's Day may be!

An article by James McCoss (Vol. X., p. 119) on knots and climbing hints may be taken as the forerunner of the real change, as far as the *Journal* was concerned, from hill-walking to rock and gully climbing. We have noted this to a slight extent in 1911, but under Robert Anderson's editorship the M'Connochie tradition had prevailed, and continues to the first number of Vol. XI., which has articles by Robert Clarke, "On Ben Muich Dhui at Christmas" (perhaps the date is significant), and J. R. Leslie Grey on "The Physical History of Arthur's Seat." The three numbers of Sir Henry Alexander's short period as editor are the Indicator Numbers, with full descriptions of the

labours of Parker and his co-workers on Macdhuì and Lochnagar. In E. W. Watt's first number the most important item is undoubtedly the note on p. 283 (Vol. XI.) on the Left-hand Branch of the Black Spout, initialled G. R. S. This record of the passing of the Chokestone pitch is the first of many accounts of ascents by Symmers in the north-east corrie of Lochnagar. "Two Climbs on Lochnagar" (p. 313) is the second, and introduces the name of W. A. Ewen, our present editor, who with Symmers laid bare the secrets of the north-east corrie. J. A. Parker records in "The Scottish Threes" (Vol. XI., p. 290) the ascent of all the 276 separate mountains of Munro's Tables—Beinn Tarsuinn being then undiscovered! The incident on Mount Arrowsmith, Vancouver Island, B.C., which the same author reports (Vol. XII., p. 1) may be related to these 276 ascents, as the thirty-four-year-old ice-axe whose long-suffering shaft presumably assisted in many of these ascents finally rebelled, fortunately at a not too inconvenient moment.

A link with the past is A. I. M'Connochie's article on the Moor of Rannoch (Vol. XI., p. 70), forty years after his first publication for the Club. Throughout the intervening years since his series on the Cairngorms previously noted, various articles of his had appeared in the *Journal*. Before leaving Vol. XII. the names of the articles from Symmer's pen must be included. These are: "With a Rope on the Craggs of Lochnagar" (p. 6), "An Unclimbed Gully" (p. 31), "The Pannanich Cave Pitch" (p. 42), "On Sgòran Dubh" (p. 146), and "Some Rock Climbs on Lochnagar" (p. 186), the last being an account of the Lochnagar position up to 1931.

On p. 87 is the catalogue of the Club Library, now unfortunately well out of date—perhaps a revision will be published in the not too distant future? Finally, mention must be made of J. C. Ormerod's masterpiece, "A Case of Forbearance," especially as our editor misquoted the title when he referred to it in the preceding number! Incidentally no attempt has been made here to quote titles in full.

If Vol. XII. showed the trend to rock climbing on

Lochnagar and elsewhere, Vol. XIII. contains little else but accounts of new climbs in the north-east corrie. There is one notable exception—J. Norman Collie's "Dreams" (p. 59), a delightful account of the memories of a great traveller. It is utterly impossible even to mention all the articles dealing with the cliffs of Lochnagar. Raeburn's Gully is described by James McCoss (p. 19), Eric Maxwell (p. 23), and E. W. Smith (p. 81). W. A. Ewen writes on The Central Buttress (p. 70), the Black Spout Pinnacle (p. 90), and Polyphemus Gully and Gargoyle Chimney (p. 221), whilst there are several more contributions from Symmers. No one who intends climbing in the corries of Lochnagar should do so without first consulting the detailed information available in Vols. XII. and XIII., both in the articles quoted and in the Notes in each number. These two volumes are to the rock and snow climber what M'Connochie's articles in the earlier volumes were to the hill-walker.

On W. A. Ewen taking over, a change to the present printers, the Darien Press, brought about alterations in the make-up of the *Journal*. This is particularly noticeable in the reproduction of the illustrations, especially as the first number was illustrated almost entirely by H. C. Dugan, who was responsible also for the Club Crest which now appears on the cover. Throughout the life of the *Journal*, the illustrations have been rather mixed, and reproduction until recently, except for some early swan-types, was, to put it mildly, indifferent. The most photographed view in the Cairngorms, the Sròn Riach shoulder of Ben Macdhui from the Lairig Path, has appeared at least four times. The first rest on the way through the Lairig is certainly not due at the Luibeg Bridge, and stopping here to take a picture might well be abandoned, for a year or two at least. But perhaps the photographers all start from the Aviemore end.

The policy of the present editor has been to pursue an intermediate course with articles both on serious climbing and on topics of general interest, but if more of the former category were made available they doubtless would be readily accepted. Since Symmers fled to the lowlands and Ewen himself retired to the editorial chair, members equally at

ease on rock, snow, and paper have been disappointingly few. We hear rumours of new climbs, but the descriptive faculty seems to have deserted the climbers.

Having made our way through the first fourteen volumes of the *Cairngorm Club Journal*, we must take leave of it at a time when its very existence is in peril—not from any lack of vitality in itself or in its parent Club, but because the freedom of the Hills of Scotland is beset. The spirit of the time is reflected in a passage from “Dreams” by our Honorary President, and which forms a fitting conclusion to our survey:—

“There are other times when storms sweep over the mountains, then a different and more subtle beauty reveals itself, when the rain falls, and the winds shout and wail over a grey land; when the streams gather, and the rock faces of the hills are streaked with white waters. Torn clouds, shadowy horses of the Valkyrie, tear in mad hunt along the ridges, wan gleams of light struggle and die away in the ruined corries, and the deep voice of the tide calling on the beach can be heard in the distance, its wild waves dashing against tall cliffs and barren shores. Sometimes when the winds are at rest, the mists come down and all is hidden in a garment of white stillness. The loneliness and silence is of another world. Strange thoughts wander through one’s mind. The old mysterious tales of ghostly beings who haunt the wilds. There are places that one dreads, where one trembles and is afraid, one knows not why, and fears stand in the way. For the Sidhe have power over us and can weave strong spells of magic to our undoing, and there are others, the Great Lords of Shadow, the Herdsman of Dreams, the baying of the White Hound, the Washer of the Ford who weaves shrouds out of the moonbeams by the river of Death, and those unnamed ones who can entice the soul out of the body, driving it afar into the dark and madness. To guard one from the dominion of these there is an old Gaelic prayer: ‘Send God in his strength between us and the Sidhe, between us and the dread Hosts of the Air.’”