

## MOUNTAIN VIEWPOINT.

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WE descended a few feet down the lip of the corrie to get out of a howling sou'-wester on the summit of Glas Thulaichean. Our limbs relaxed, we ate sandwiches and enjoyed the Autumn sunshine. Across the wide glen was the ridge from the Cairnwell along which we had tramped. Beyond, we could see the high tops—Ben Avon with its warts, Beinn a' Bhùird and Ben Macdhui. I remembered a Wagnerian thunderstorm on the first, a glorious spring day on the snow of the second, and the year's first sunburn on the third. But the ridge from Cairnwell was long and featureless, and I wondered if our journey along it would remain in my memory. Probably not, for nothing outstandingly dramatic, beautiful, or painful had happened.

I said casually, "The Cairngorms are pretty dull in summer. Nothing like as interesting as the West Highlands." Betty, smelling heresy, said *she* thought they were all right; jolly good, in fact. "Justify yourself," I retorted. "Look at the view. These hills have as much shapeliness as a plate of Bath buns. They are as colourful as a plain woman who doesn't believe in make-up. There is very little to recommend them except their quantity. People walk miles and miles in order to stand on "Munros" with about as much Alpine atmosphere as a deserted football field. To get there, all they need is sheer brute endurance, coupled with a certain agility in negotiating peat hags. On a fine day they usually have a squadron of flies for company. A dirty day comes as a relief, for the distance of the objective is no longer a visible reminder of toil to come; and the skill needed to keep dry and to maintain direction relieves the general monotony. The imaginative mountaineer, with little better to occupy his mind, keeps in front of him a vision of tea, which, like the donkey's carrot, keeps him going until he feels he can decently return to base. Just *look* at the view. As I gaze around me, ladies



and gentlemen, I am constantly reminded of practically nothing."

Bob finished his sandwich in silence and then said that there was always rock-climbing. "Rock-climbing, forsooth! Almost every corrie faces east or north, so the average climber has no sun to comfort him. He needs comfort, for his route is almost sure to involve him freely in slime, mud and wetness. I admit he needs skill, for Cairngorm granite is not famed for its wealth of holds—unless you include vegetable holds. Rock climbing in the Cairngorms is the last resort of desperate climbers who can't get at anything better."

"Anyway, I *like* the Cairngorms," said Betty. "And you must admit the snow climbing is as good as anything in Britain." "Yes, I'll admit that," I replied, "when you can get at the good snow and ice without wearing yourself out by immense approach marches. But the second best can be matched easily and much more accessibly in dozens of places on the West Coast." "You're biased," said Bob. "The Cairngorms have their own special character, and plenty of people get all the enjoyment they want on them."—We moved off downwards. "The Cairngorm Club," I said firmly, thinking of the six miles to Glenshee, "consists of people who must keep fit somehow and are prepared to go to desperate lengths to avoid organised games."

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At tea, I was amused to hear a discussion on the Winter Meet. "That's the worst of the Cairngorms," someone said, "Braemar is the only place easily reached from Aberdeen and reasonably near the hills."

I was rather late in booking for the next outing and feared the worst, but the Meets Secretary thought that there would be room in the bus. "Thank goodness," I said, and hung up the phone.