

## RECOLLECTIONS OF GEORGE TAYLOR

THROWN early on his own resources, George Taylor's outstanding characteristic was a sturdy self-reliance, carried at times to almost embarrassing limits, for there were few who knew him well who did not have some kindness to replay and whose desire to do so would be frustrated by George's uncompromising independence. Hesitating to make even the smallest demand upon his friends, he never spoke about the possibility of his joining the Cairngorm Club until it was suggested to him that a man with his interests ought to be a member. Then only he revealed that he had long wished it. His sponsors knew that in George they had a good man—how good they never guessed, for, at that time, one had not thought about huts or bridges, or, if one had, one realised that many years and manifold impracticabilities stood between the hope and the realisation.

There is an element of chance in these things, perhaps; at all events the right men came together at the right time. There was the ginger group of young members, mostly medical students, pressing for a Club hut, the better to pursue their studies of the local topography. There was E. B. Reid as President, with a flair for circumventing, or blandly ignoring, difficulties, and there was G. A. Taylor with, in this environment at least, unrivalled engineering knowledge and experience. So, from E. B.'s skill as a negotiator with the Estate, George Taylor's engineering expertise and the labours of the student members there grew first the Lui Beg Bridge and then the reconstruction of Muir as a Club hut.

Although George himself never appreciated this, he was one of those fortunate individuals who know from an early age what they want to be. One was never left in any doubt as to the relative value of the various faculties in the University. While reluctantly admitting to scientific research a certain measure of usefulness, he would make it quite plain that, in his opinion, all progress in civilisation is due wholly and solely to the labours of the engineers! His father, himself a graduate of Aberdeen and lecturer in Veterinary Science in the Canterbury Agricultural College, New Zealand, sent him as a boarder to Fordyce Academy, at which he was the outstanding pupil, learning Greek in the rose-garden, where the Headmaster occasionally nurtured his charges and his favourite blooms concurrently. His father had wondered what the Head would have to say on the subject of pocket money and whether two shillings a week would be enough.



DR G. A. TAYLOR

Doubts were quickly resolved : sixpence was the absolute maximum, and George would ruefully recall the difficulty of living on sixpence a week, the best buy being Abernethy biscuits at three a penny.

Of his academic career one learned very little from George directly, except that he had not been very good at mathematics at school ; nevertheless, he won the Irving Memorial Medal at Fordyce. Not very good at mathematics, indeed ; it depends on one's standards and his were set high. He took Arts before graduating with a First Class Degree in Engineering, qualifications then worth no more than £150 per annum to the City Engineering Department in which he took his first post, transferring shortly to the County, for whom he designed and built, among other things, the attractive road bridge over the Callater at Auchallater, his first solo job. In 1946 he joined the engineering staff of the University, his application for the post occasioning him some difficulty lest he should be presenting his qualifications in too favourable a light, such was his sterling honesty. But he was appointed to the lectureship, becoming shortly involved in investigations, conducted in the engineering laboratories at Marischal College, for various Scottish Hydro-Electric Schemes and other projects. He gained his Ph.D. in 1949 for a thesis : *A Study of Scale Effect in Hydraulic Engineering*, thereafter contributing a number of papers to engineering journals.

The University was certainly his proper niche. He took to it a wide practical experience, a great interest in young people and a deep regard for that ancient institution itself. The Club, too, was the gainer, for the various hut and bridge projects owed much to his association with the Engineering Department at Marischal, where the bridges were sometimes first erected, at least in part. While the mere list of his achievements is impressive, it fails to convey an adequate idea of the time, thought and preparation he devoted to this almost continuous programme of improvements ; in 1948 he built the Lui Beg Bridge ; in 1950 he undertook the reconstruction of Muir and of Corroul ; in 1954, the Hutchison Hut for the Etchachan Club ; in 1955, the reconstruction at Derry Lodge. In 1957 the Lui Beg Bridge was damaged by unusually heavy floods and was transferred to a new site, and the Eidart Bridge was built for the Scottish Rights-of-Way Society. The following year he surveyed the Bridge of Tarff and advised on repairs and, in 1959, built, for the Nature Conservancy, the bridges at Corroul, the Derry Dam and the Glas Allt. He also advised on the repair of the Black Bridge and on other bridges outwith our area.

He was elected to the Committee in 1946, the year he joined the Club, became Vice-President in 1949 and was elected an Honorary Member in 1957, in recognition of his very great services to the Club. He never sought, or thought about, such rewards; indeed, he was never happier than when engaged on these projects and that was reward enough. The natural reserve and diffidence, evident on the formal occasion, evaporated completely in these more natural circumstances; in a small company his humour took on more of the tang of the North-East. He was rarely out of humour, though he disliked being interrupted in his own particular task and could, in these circumstances, become temporarily unco-operative. His insistence on the highest quality of materials and workmanship occasionally earned him some criticism, but, on matters of this kind, he was rarely to be budged; and his sense of fitness extended far beyond the realms of engineering. Observing him hoeing weeds around the Derry, Angus Thomson gaily loosed a shaft at this unnecessary refinement: "Nature's damned untidy, George", he said. "Aye", George drawled, poker-faced, continuing hoeing. While he joined readily in the general hilarity that seemed inseparable from these occasions, his sense of responsibility to the Club was never submerged: this and the energy and enthusiasm he displayed earned him the respect of all his colleagues on the job.

He would never have described himself as a mountaineer but he walked and camped among the Cairngorms from his student days, his only concession to "time-wasting"; in athletics or in indoor games he had no interest at all. He took up ski-ing rather late in life and for long it seemed that he would never attain even a moderate competence, but latterly he enjoyed many long expeditions among the hills of Donside, Glen Muick and Glen Cluny. I suppose most climbers find that one mountain holds, for them, a special appeal; in George's case it was Ben Sgriol, which may surprise as much as the fact that such a typical son of the North-East was born in Dysart, Fife. In later years, he combined camping and climbing with a visit to a Hydro scheme, delighting, on these occasions, to take along some young person to show him Scotland in its various aspects. For he was himself deeply interested in our Scottish heritage, the order of his priorities being revealed, perhaps, in his bequests—to the University, to the National Trust for Scotland, to the Cairngorm Club. A minor interest, in heraldry, found outlet in the design of armorial bearings for the Club.

In 1958 he visited Norway, motoring from Bergen to Hammerfest

via the Arctic Highway, returning by Rovaniemi, Stockholm and Oslo. In the autumn of 1960 he went to Athens, Rhodes and Crete, his interest in things Greek stemming partly from his early study of the language but more, perhaps, from his evident regard for the engineers of antiquity. He was no Philistine—far from it—but the engineer, the easer of man's lot, was honoured a little above the artist. This visit revived his interest in the language and he set about learning Modern Greek, in which he became fluent, though diffident about using it in Athens on his second visit in 1963. He had been in Palestine and Jordan the previous autumn, with Petra as the chief objective and late in 1963 he made his last trip abroad to see the High Dam at Aswan; but the wonders of ancient Abu Simmel appeared to outweigh the new marvels at Aswan.

He had planned to re-visit Greece, but illness necessitating major surgery prevented it. In the late summer of 1964 he visited the Corrou, the Shelter Stone, the new Forth and Tay Bridges, all in the space of fourteen days, before his health again collapsed. During the weeks he spent in hospital there was no word of complaint, no trace of self-pity, only an anxiety that none should be put about in any way. We can let George say the last word: one evening he became involved in a politico-geographic argument with a group of young people, one of whom hurled a question designed to demolish the opposition. "I don't know the answer", said George quietly. "You are the student of geography. You tell me. Me, I'm just a humble engineer." To that there is nothing to add, save that many of us are the better for having known him.

W. A. E.