

*Frontispiece]*

*[Photo by Miss Oates.*

SLIGACHAN BRIDGE, SGURR NAN GILLEAN AND THE BHASTEIR GROUP.

# WALKS AND SCRAMBLES IN THE HIGHLANDS.

BY  
ARTHUR L. BAGLEY.

*WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS.*

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# CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	BEN CRUACHAN . . . . .	I
II	CAIRNGORM AND BEN MUICH DHUI . . . . .	9
III	BRAERIACH AND CAIRN TOUL . . . . .	18
IV	THE LARIG GHRU . . . . .	26
V	A HIGHLAND SUNSET . . . . .	33
VI	SLIOCH . . . . .	39
VII	BEN EAY . . . . .	47
VIII	LIATHACH ; AN ABORTIVE ATTEMPT . . . . .	56
IX	GLEN TULACHA . . . . .	64
X	SGURR NAN GILLEAN, BY THE PINNACLES . . . . .	71
XI	BRUACH NA FRITHE . . . . .	79
XII	THROUGH GLEN AFFRIC . . . . .	83
XIII	FROM GLEN SHIEL TO BROADFORD, BY KYLE RHEA . . . . .	92
XIV	BEINN NA CAILLEACH . . . . .	99
XV	FROM BROADFORD TO SOAY . . . . .	106



CHAP.		PAGE
XVI	GARSBHEINN AND SGURR NAN EAG, FROM SOAY . . . . .	114
XVII	THE BHASTEIR . . . . .	122
XVIII	CLACH GLAS AND BLAVEN . . . . .	129
XIX	FROM ELGOL TO GLEN BRITTLE OVER THE DUBHS . . . . .	138
XX	SGURR SGUMAIN, SGURR ALASDAIR, SGURR TEARLACH AND SGURR MHIC CHOINNICH .	147
XXI	FROM THURSO TO DURNES . . . . .	153
XXII	FROM DURNES TO INCHNADAMPH . . . . .	166
XXIII	BEN MORE OF ASSYNT . . . . .	174
XXIV	SUILVEN . . . . .	180
XXV	SGURR DEARG AND SGURR NA BANACHDICH .	188
XXVI	THE CIOCH . . . . .	196

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>To face page</i>
SLIGACHAN BRIDGE, SGURR NAN GILLEAN AND THE BHASTEIR GROUP . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
BEN CRUACHAN, FROM NEAR DALMALLY . . .	4
LOCH AN EILEAN . . . . .	9
AMONG THE CAIRNGORMS; THE LARIG GHRU IN THE DISTANCE . . . . .	31
VIEW OF SKYE, FROM NEAR KYLE OF LOCH ALSH .	71
THE BHASTEIR GORGE AND THE PINNACLES OF SGURR NAN GILLEAN . . . . .	78
IN GLEN AFFRIC . . . . .	85
THE COOLINS FROM CORUISK . . . . .	111
GARSBHEINN, SGURR DUBH, ETC., FROM STRATHAIRD	118
SGURR DUBH, SGURR A' GHREADHAIDH, SGURR A' MHADAIDH, SGURR NA STRI, SGURR NAN GILLEAN, FROM STRATHAIRD . . . . .	141
SGURR DEARG, SGURR MHIC CHOINNICH, SGURR ALASDAIR, SGURR SGUMAIN AND SRON NA CICHE, FROM GLEN BRITTLE . . . . .	148
SGURR SGUMAIN IN MIST, AND SRON NA CICHE .	196

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# WALKS AND SCRAMBLES IN THE HIGHLANDS

## CHAPTER I.

### BEN CRUACHAN.

BEN CRUACHAN was the first Scottish mountain that I ascended, and I always feel a peculiar affection for it on that account. Indeed, it was not only the first Scottish mountain, but the first mountain of any nationality, with the single exception of Snowdon. And I had previously never felt much interest in mountains, nor had I greatly desired to climb them. I had been personally conducted up Snowdon some years earlier on a very bad day, and had then come to the conclusion that the game was not worth the candle, and just how or why I became one of the elect I know not. I think the charms of Ben Cruachan clinched the matter, and effected my final conversion.

I had spent a week at Luss on Loch Lomond in one of the wettest Septembers on record (which is saying a good deal). It rained the whole week almost unceasingly. I usually embarked on the first steamer after breakfast with no very definite

plan of action. If the deluge was very bad, I admired the scenery of the saloon. If a landing-place turned up during a lull in the storm, I landed and walked on to some other pier. In this way I circumnavigated, and almost circumambulated the lake, but I did not go up Ben Lomond. Even now, when I have had some little experience on British hills, I am not one of those stalwarts who go out climbing howsoever the elements may rage. Personally, I could never see any sense in such a proceeding. I do not climb for my living; I climb, if I may be permitted to call it climbing—perhaps I ought to say that I “hill-walk”—in my holidays for my own pleasure and gratification, and the process of getting soaked to the skin fails to afford me either pleasure or gratification. If the weather turns bad after I have started, which is certainly rather a way it has, I usually go on with the job, and make the best of it with what philosophy I may; but if the morning is hopeless to begin with, I give it up, and make myself as comfortable indoors as circumstances permit.

After this torrential week at Luss I went on to Taynuilt, the rain still going on, apparently *ad infinitum*. There was an aneroid barometer in my sitting-room, from which, however, I was unable to extract any crumb of comfort; indeed, the indicator sank so low that I was seriously afraid that it would go right round and come up on the other side, and what awful convulsion of Nature might then be expected to ensue? However, I am thankful to

say that I was spared that dreadful portent, and the third morning (Monday, September 21) was, to my great amazement, fine, and seemed likely so to continue, notwithstanding the strenuous efforts of the barometer to adhere to "very stormy." I took advantage of this remarkable state of things to set out for Ben Cruachan, and was rewarded by a fine day, perfect except for a haze that crept up soon after midday. I may remark *en passant* that this was the only day in my fortnight's holiday on which there was no rain.

I suppose most people who take any interest in Scottish mountains are aware that Ben Cruachan is a twin; that is to say, there are two principal peaks of almost identical height, and about half-a-mile apart. There are, however, several subsidiary peaks lying between Dalmally and the twin tops, and indeed Ben Cruachan is really rather a mountain range than a single mountain, as there are about half-a-dozen peaks which exceed 3000 feet, and several others which closely approach that magic height. My idea was to ascend from the Dalmally side and traverse the whole range from end to end, omitting the outlying peaks of Ben Vourie and Meall Cuanail; and I will now proceed to relate how I successfully accomplished that meritorious design.

I left Taynuilt by the 8.42 train for Loch Awe Station, and walked thence along the Dalmally road to the point where the path to Ben Cruachan strikes off. I say "path" because both guide-book

and natives speak of such; but as a matter of fact such paths as exist—and there is at first any number of them—all lose themselves in the bogs, in which the unwary pedestrian runs some risk of losing himself also. Probably, however, the bogs were very much worse than usual, owing to the persistent heavy rains of the last few weeks; at any rate, nobody who has ascended Ben Cruachan by this route, and with whom I have compared notes, seems to have suffered from the bogs as I did, and many men appear hardly to have noticed them. I have, however, a painfully clear recollection of the manner in which I bounded gracefully from one comparatively solid tuft of heather to another, varied by occasional ungraceful flounderings when an apparently solid tuft turned out a delusion and a snare, and did its level best to drag me down with a hideous squelch into the sloshy depths. This sort of thing is fatiguing exercise, and offers no compensations; so I was very glad to reach the foot-bridge over the burn, and to find somewhat more solid ground on the other side, from which the actual ascent now begins.

From here two ridges, either of which may be followed, ascend steeply to two peaks, each just about 3000 feet high; from these two peaks the ridges drop a few hundred feet, and then ascend more steeply to a central peak, 3272 feet, Stob Diamh. The two ridges converging on Stob Diamh thus form two gigantic semi-circles, and enclose a very wild and desolate corrie. I do not know that





[To face p. 4]

BEN CRUACHAN, FROM NEAR DALMAILLY.

[Photo by Wm. Horat.]





there is any choice between the two ridges. I chose the right-hand one, and when I was half-way up I thought the other looked much finer, and wished I had followed it ; but I have not the slightest doubt but that, if I had chosen the left-hand one, I should have been similarly dissatisfied. At all events, I reached Stob Diamh, grandly dominating the magnificent corrie, at 12.30, having left Loch Awe Station at 9.10, and from this central point there seemed to be nothing to choose between the two ridges.

But when you have attained the summit of this peak, although it is considerably over 3000 feet in height, and has probably taken you some three hours of fairly hard work to accomplish, you must by no means imagine that you have ascended Ben Cruachan. On the contrary, you have hardly begun to ascend him, for this is merely one of the half-dozen outlying subsidiary peaks, and the real twin summits have not yet been visible. Now, however, as you step on to the summit of Stob Diamh, the easternmost of the twin summits bursts upon you in all its beauty. Far away, a couple of miles or so, across a wild, boulder-strewn wilderness, with frightful precipices falling into Glen Noe on the north, rises a needle of rock ; this is the real summit of Ben Cruachan, the western twin peak, hidden behind it, being about eighty feet lower. The emotions with which you regard it will, of course, depend upon your appetite for climbing ; if you are a scansorial artist (it sounds rather like a tailor, but

I merely mean a climber) of the first water, you will gloat over the sight and burn for the fray (and when you get it, you will be disappointed); if you are a humble pedestrian your heart will sink into your boots, and you will wonder why you came. I am free to confess that I belonged at this time to the latter category, and indeed, even now, do not claim to have graduated in the higher division. This day was my *début* as a hill-walker, and as I sat there and gazed upon that needle-point my heart distinctly failed me. I wondered how I should get up, and whether, if I succeeded in getting up, I should ever come down again. However, it looks of course at this distance very much steeper than it really is, and there is absolutely no difficulty at all. That is why the scansorial artist will be disappointed, for there is no actual climbing.

From Stob Diamh one descends a few hundred feet, and then ascends another peak (Drochaid Glas, 3312 feet), making the third of 3000 feet or thereabouts, then comes another descent, and finally a mile or more along the ridge, with a clean-cut edge falling away to Glen Noe in the precipices already alluded to. From these first three peaks I had revelled in the most magnificent prospect that I had ever then beheld: a sea of mountain tops all around, more mountains, I suppose, in the one view than I had ever seen in my life before. Behind and far below lay Dalmally, half hidden by trees in the sylvan Strath of Orchy; behind that Ben Lui, with hundreds of encircling mountains; Loch Awe,

looking more like a river than a lake, with its twenty miles of graceful curves. In front the greater part of Loch Etive was hidden by the twin peaks of Ben Cruachan, but a little corner was visible, with a tiny dot, the lake steamer, making its way across. Beyond the low island of Lismore was the Sound of Mull, with the mountains of Morven and Ardgour to the right, and those of Mull to the left; a group of fine mountains headed Loch Etive; beyond, the huge, unshapely head of Ben Nevis, and farther still other mountains without end faded away into the dim and distant north. Never before had I seen such a glorious view, and not often since.

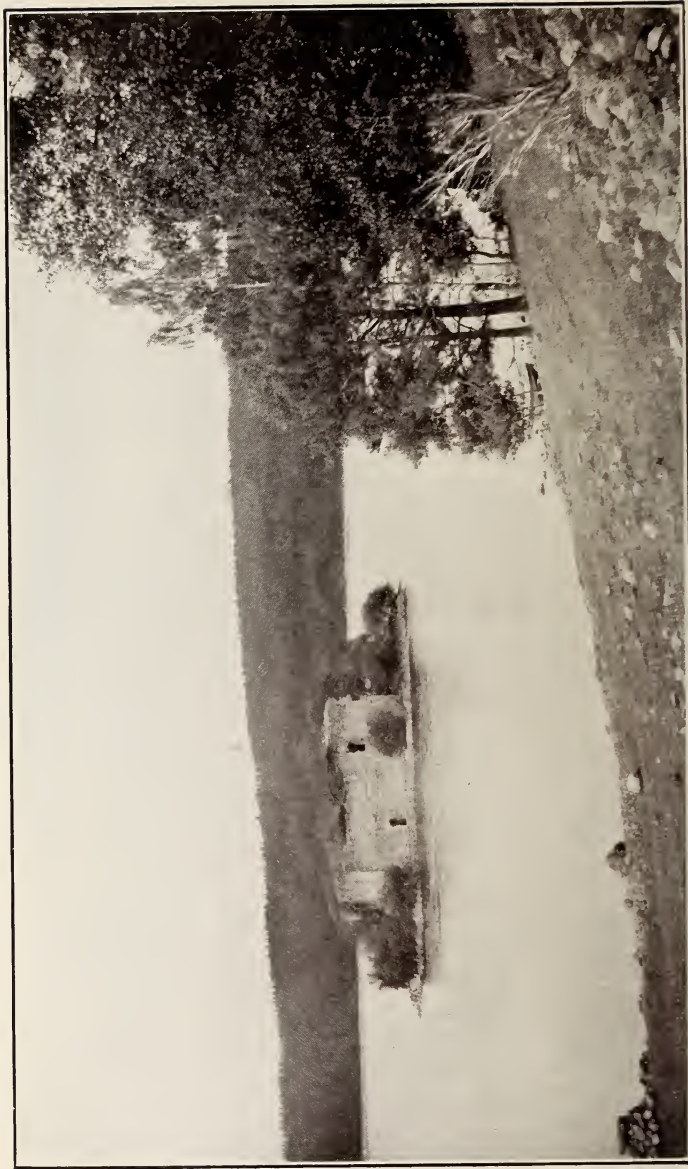
Unfortunately, as I picked my way along the ridge, I became aware that a thick haze was gradually creeping over the scene. I was afraid that rain was approaching, but none came, nor was I ever actually in the mist, for which I was duly thankful. But a curious filmy haze slowly blotted out the whole view, and when I stepped on the summit of the eastern and loftiest peak (3689 feet) at two o'clock there was absolutely nothing whatever to be seen, to my great disappointment. As it was very cold up there, and there was no view, I did not linger, but hurried on as fast as I could along the ridge which connects the twin summits, and up the western and last peak, which I reached at 2.45. By this time the sun had emerged from the haze, and the wind had died down, and I sat for a short time on the summit, finishing the remains of my lunch, and hoping that the haze would

disperse, which, however, it obstinately declined to do.

While I was sitting there a man appeared on the other summit, which was clear of the haze; and we stood there, one on each twin summit, the only visible evidences of human life. I waved my stick at him, and drank his health in my last remaining drop of whisky.

When I left the summit at three o'clock I thought I had plenty of time, but I found the descent took rather longer than I had expected. When I got off the wilderness of boulders, which lay for miles around the summits, I found myself in the bog stratum, and for the next hour I had a terrible time of floundering and struggling, similar to that which I had gone through earlier in the day. However, I descended at last to the road near the Bridge of Awe, and reached my comfortable quarters at Taynuilt about six o'clock.





[Photo by W. J. Moggs Wright.]

LOCH AN EILEAN.

To face p. 9]



## CHAPTER II.

### CAIRNGORM AND BEN MUICH DHUI.

ON a Saturday afternoon in June I alighted at Aviemore after a long and wearisome journey from my native plains, and took up my abode for a week at the Lynwilg Hotel.

On the Sunday, thinking that a day's preparation would be advisable, as I was fresh from an office, though burning for the fray, I did nothing more ambitious than a walk to Loch an Eilean. When first I saw this beautiful little Highland loch I thought that I had never in my life seen anything more exquisitely lovely. I came to the conclusion that if it poured in torrents during the whole of my holiday, and if I saw nothing else whatever, it would still have been worth while to come, if only to see Loch an Eilean.

But, alas ! the glory of Loch an Eilean has departed. A saw-mill now desecrates the scene ; the British tourist has invaded the solitude, leaving unmistakable evidence of his hateful presence ; sundry cottages minister to the tourist's bodily needs ; the hillsides, once densely clothed, are now rapidly becoming sadly bare. No wonder the ospreys have forsaken their home in the ancient tower of the Wolf of Badenoch. I could have



wept. I shall probably never see Loch an Eilean again, but I thank Heaven (and I say it seriously) that I was permitted to see its loveliness, before the barbarian defiled it.

On Monday morning I left the hotel in the "machine" about 7.30, to drive the ten miles or thereabouts to Glenmore, *en route* for Cairngorm and Ben Muich Dhui. I had not seen much of Scotland at that time, and the use of the word "machine" in the sense of "vehicle" was new to me; at first I thought the handmaiden meant a bicycle, and it was only when I saw the trap at the door that it dawned upon me that that was my machine.

My driver was a cheery lad, very evidently a Celt. It is strange that the Celtic and Norse types do not seem to mix; in the same family one brother will be a pure Celtic type, while another, both in appearance and speech, will irresistibly suggest the idea that he had left his home by the side of a Norwegian fjord only a few days before. Optimism, however, is not usually a characteristic of the Celts, and therein my Celtic Jehu diverged from his racial type. Weather prospects, for instance, were hardly encouraging, but Jehu loudly asserted that it was going to be a fine day. There were, however, ominous clouds hanging over the mountains, and the wind was blowing in a way that to me boded ill; it was bitterly cold, and I was glad to wrap myself up in an ulster, to be brought back by the trap. Jehu, however, was right, inasmuch as there

was no rain all day, but the wind was terrific, especially when I got on higher ground.

I soon found that my driver was not very familiar with the road; at Inverdrue, where it forks, I saw signs of hesitation on his part, and where it again forks beyond Coylum Bridge he followed the wrong road. Although I had never been in these parts before, it is fortunately my habit always to study the topography of a district in which I intend to spend my holiday, and I had also a good map in my pocket. Even so he was hard to convince, but as there was a cottage close by I insisted upon his getting down to inquire whether we were on the right road to Glenmore, and he returned, rather crestfallen, to admit that I was right. The road degenerated rapidly after Coylum Bridge into a rough, sandy track through the forest. Soon after passing Loch Morlich I was surprised, and for a moment taken aback, to find a gate thrown across the road, which apparently formed the entrance into private grounds. The road on the far side of the gate was a well-kept drive, and the front door of the house opened immediately on to it. Jehu protested vigorously that this was evidently a private road, that we had no right there, and that we ought to turn back. I hesitated a moment, but finally pinned my faith to my map, and ordered him to go on. We passed the house and reached some stables and outbuildings, distributed on each side of the road, and were informed by a boy that this was indeed Glenmore, and the neat drive a

public road. It seems an extraordinary thing that any landed proprietor should be allowed to enclose a public road in this manner. Any tourist arriving at the gate would think, as we thought, that it was a private drive, and might very conceivably turn back and spend the rest of the day scouring the countryside in search of the road.

Since then the road has been diverted, and the original road is now the private drive whereon no profaning foot of tourist or mountaineer may tread. And I suppose if one strays an inch from the road one is clapped into the deepest dungeon of Glenmore, and may be thankful to escape with life.

I left Glenmore at 8.45 a.m.; there could be no doubt as to the way, as there is a good path which ascends a pretty little glen, and then winds up the bare mountain side, passing beneath an isolated crag known as An t' Aonach. Gaelic pronunciation is a thing utterly beyond me, and I called this rock "Auntie," which is probably as near to the genuine Gaelic as I should ever get. Not long after passing "Auntie" the path dwindles away into nothingness, but one has only to keep straight on up a slope of very moderate steepness. In fact Cairngorm is a remarkably easy mountain to ascend, especially considering its height of just over 4000 feet. I reached the summit at eleven o'clock; the clouds had rolled away to a great extent, and a magnificent view lay before me over Strathspey to the west, and a sea of mountain tops to the north and east; south-west I noticed in the far distance

a shapely cone, to the right of Ben Muich Dhui, which I could not locate at the time, but think now must have been Schiehallion, some forty miles away.

I did not remain long on the summit, as the wind was blowing fifty hurricane-power, and it was so cold that my hands felt frozen, so I very soon set off for Ben Muich Dhui. Baddeley speaks of "the ridge" between the two mountains, but it is a vast plateau rather than a ridge, which latter word suggests a sharp edge. Ben Muich Dhui does not show to advantage from Cairngorm; it looks merely a huge round hump, and nobody would think that it is nearly 200 feet higher than Cairngorm, and the second highest mountain in Britain. From the other side it has a much finer appearance. The name Ben Muich Dhui is usually taken as meaning "hill of the black sows." Geikie says, "mountain of dark gloom," which is much more poetical, and to those who, from the foot of Loch Avon, have looked up at the frowning cliffs which encircle the head of the loch will seem to have the additional merit of accurate description. I wish I could accept it, but I am afraid there is no reasonable doubt that "muich" is the correct word, and "muich" is the genitive plural of "muc," a sow; the same word as the name of the island of Muck, where a "k" has been added by way of anglicization, although the only effect thereof is to render the name even more unsavoury than before.

Many, including some names of note, *e. g.* the late

Dr. Macmillan, write Mac Dhui, but with all respect and diffidence I think this must be wrong. I have never heard of any meaning attached to the word "mac" (or "mhic" as I believe the Gaelic word really is), except the well-known one of "son," and "hill of the black sons" seems meaningless.

I had thought of descending to the Shelter Stone, of which I had heard a good deal, but finding that it involved a descent of 1500 feet, and reflecting that the ascent of Ben Muich Dhui and a long tramp back to Lynwilg still lay before me, I decided to leave it alone. Instead, I took a little extra time over lunch beside the Feith Buidhe, at a point where it issued from a huge snow patch. There was a good deal of snow on the plateau in patches, and I did not like it at all. One could never tell whether the snow was a few inches deep or a few yards. That is to say, one could not tell until one had tried it, and I disapprove of using my body as an instrument to measure the depth of snow. That is a purpose for which it was never intended, and for which it is quite unsuitable; moreover, if the snow happens to be a few yards deep the results are not likely to be of scientific value, while, on the other hand, they will probably be productive of much discomfort to oneself. I sampled one patch which, to my fevered brain, seemed to descend into the very heart of the mountain, but as I floundered out before reaching the bottom I am unable to give any measurements. After this episode I avoided snow patches as far as possible. Sir



Thomas Dick Lauder, in his fine novel *The Wolf of Badenoch*, mentions a glacier descending from this plateau to Loch Avon. This at the end of the fourteenth century! Good old Sir Thomas could write a stirring tale, but evidently knew little of geology.

I reached the summit of Ben Muich Dhui at 1.15, and left it the next moment, as the wind made it almost impossible to stand. In fact, near the Feith Buidhe I was literally blown flat down. I had intended to return by Creag na Leacainn and Castle Hill, but the hurricane made me desirous of leaving the higher altitudes as soon as possible, so I climbed down the steep mountain wall by the side of a burn to the Larig Ghru Pass. I think the Larig Ghru is even more impressive when one climbs down to it, like descending a huge and almost vertical ladder nearly 1500 feet long, than when one walks through it, but under whatever circumstances it be viewed, it must always be one of the most impressive and awe-inspiring scenes in the British Islands. More thereof anon. Just as I started on this descent I passed a deep hollow, at the bottom of which ran the infant burn, and which was almost filled up with snow. In the centre the snow had given way, leaving a large hole, and revealing a cavern beneath. This well illustrates the danger of these snow patches; if anybody had walked over this particular snow patch just before the centre gave way, the result would certainly have been awkward, and might have been disastrous.

Reaching the path in the Larig at 2.30 I thought I had plenty of time; I finished my sandwiches and my last "drappie," and after a good rest set off for Lynwilg, thinking to get there in about four hours. This, however, was the first time I had ever been through the Larig, and both the pass and Rothiemurchus Forest offer many snares for the undoing of the unwary and inexperienced traveller. It is impossible to lose one's way through the pass, as a wall of nearly 1500 feet rises on each side, but it is only possible to advance over the very rough ground at an extremely slow pace. On reaching Auldrue I made a mistake, and crossed a rough plank bridge opposite the house, instead of going a little farther on to another and a much better bridge. This lost me a little time. Two streams, the Leirig Ghruamach and the Beinne Mhor, join just below the plank bridge; consequently I soon found myself on the brink of another stream wider and deeper than the first, yet bridgeless. For a few moments I was in despair, and pictured myself benighted in Rothiemurchus Forest. I thought with longing of the excellent dinner which would soon be awaiting me at the Lynwilg Hotel, and reflected with dismay that I had not a crumb of anything edible about me. However, on sitting down to study my map, I saw my mistake at once, recrossed the plank bridge, and soon found the right one just below the confluence of the two streams. Even then you are not out of the wood in more senses than one, whilst in Rothiemurchus Forest. The paths are innumerable,

they twist and turn about in a most aggravating manner, and I do not know a place where it is easier to lose oneself. Nobody should undertake to find his or her way through Rothiemurchus Forest, unless provided with a first-class bump of locality and a good map. I missed the path once again before emerging on the road at Coylum Bridge, but soon recovered it, and it was 8.15 when I reached the Lynwilg Hotel. This great Rothiemurchus Forest is the last remaining relic of the old Caledonian Forest, and here and there are still left some giant old pines which must be older than history. It is a unique district. I shall not attempt to describe it; I have no gift of word-painting, and those who are interested may go and see it for themselves. But here again, as in the case of Loch an Eilean, the glory of Rothiemurchus has departed, and the hand of the destroyer is heavy upon it. Timber has been felled wholesale, tramways made along the forest roads, and other abominations.



## CHAPTER III.

### BRAERIACH AND CAIRN TOUL.

PUNCTUALLY at 7.30 the " machine " appeared, which was to convey me from the Lynwilg Hotel to Loch Eunach, *en route* for the ascent of Braeriach and Cairn Toul. With a sigh I tore myself away from the well-spread breakfast table, wondering how I manage at home to consume my breakfast in ten minutes, while up here half-an-hour's steady work leaves me with the impression that I am only just beginning, and that a few more scones and another pot of marmalade would be grateful and comforting, not to say a wise precaution in view of the long day before me, if it were not for that wretchedly punctual " machine " waiting outside.

It is a delightful drive through Aviemore and Inverdrue, turning off at the latter place to the right, and then for three or four miles through the cool, deep shades of the great Rothiemurchus Forest ; then gradually ascending Glen Eunach, a wild and beautiful glen lying between the Sgoran Dubh range on the west and the mighty *massif* of Braeriach and Cairn Toul on the east, with Loch Eunach lying in a deep hollow at the far end of the glen. Still, I was eager to get to work, and was glad to reach the first bothy near the little tarn bearing the portentous

name of Loch Mhic Ghille-Chaoile, which I believe means the Loch of the Lanky Man's Son, the unfortunate offspring of the Lanky One having come to an untimely end here in one of the numerous little scuffles which in those days seem to have been the outlets by which the Highlanders let off superfluous steam.

The legend is as follows. The Rothiemurchus men had sent their cattle up to the summer pastures round Loch Eunach, just as the Norwegian farmers send theirs up to the "saeters," and a robber band had swooped down upon them one Sabbath Day. This was evidently before John Knox. A messenger ran down to Rothiemurchus to tell the tale, and the lawful owners of the cattle flew to arms. The son of the Lanky One outstripped his friends, and came up with the caterans near this little lake, and was foolish enough to begin the argument straightway. Naturally they soon settled *his* hash. The moral of this instructive anecdote is evidently : *Surtout point de zèle.*

Rothiemurchus was not a peaceful district in ancient times, any more than the rest of the Highlands. The Grants were given the lands at the end of the sixteenth century, on condition of gaining possession, which they did at the cost of a long struggle with the Shaws, the previous owners, who were eventually exterminated. The Shaws themselves had gained possession by killing the last Comyn of Badenoch.

However, it all looked peaceful enough now ; and

at 9.10 a.m. I left the trap, and struck across the moor on the left, by the side of the burn, the Allt na Beinne Beag, which rushes down from one of the great corries on the north face of Braeriach. For a few yards there was a fair path, but either I missed it or it dwindled away; at any rate in a few minutes I found myself floundering through a bog, without any sign of a path. I must say that, fond as I am of Scotland and of Scottish mountains, I regard it as a great defect in their arrangements that in the great majority of cases a stratum of bog has to be traversed before one attains the higher altitudes. One feels so helpless, poised on a tiny, precarious islet of heather with a sea of quaking bog around one; no other islet within reach, or perhaps you spot what you fondly imagine to be a tuft of fairly solid ground, and the instant your hobnailer touches it—but too late to withdraw—you find that appearances are deceptive, and that there is no solidity about it at all. There is a horrible slish-slosh as your boot sinks in, and a still more horrible squelch as you struggle to draw it out again, and at the next solid islet where it is possible to pause for a moment in your wild career you estimate that there is about a pound or a pint (I really do not know whether solid or liquid measure should be used) of black slush in each boot. No, I do not like bogs; floundering does not commend itself to me as an exercise, and I prefer to feel something solid beneath my feet.

As soon as I had passed the bog stratum, which I

was thankful to find did not extend very far, I struck straight up the mountain, which is here very steep, and steered for the fine rocks at the back of the little Loch Coire an Lochan. Farther on I could see a path zigzagging up the mountain side, but I did not care to go so far out of the direct line, and it was not too steep to go straight up. I reached Loch Coire an Lochan at 10.55, a beautiful little tarn at an altitude of 3250 feet, with magnificent rock-masses overhanging it on the south and east; here I halted for five minutes' rest and a biscuit, then, passing to the south of the tarn, I soon found myself on the vast plateau which extends, in a magnificent semi-circle of three or four miles in length, and at an altitude of about 4000 feet, from Braeriach to Cairn Toul. From here it was an easy walk to the summit of Braeriach (4248 feet), upon which there was a great deal of snow, although it was June 25; the cairn which I reached at 11.40 was almost covered, only just the lip projecting.

I was surprised to see fresh footmarks in the snow, and scanning the plateau, I presently espied "a speck in Nature's plan," an apparent insect, which, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, I concluded to be a man, walking along the plateau. I watched him steadily for a few minutes, and saw that he was apparently, like myself, bound for Cairn Toul, so, without wasting any more time in the contemplation of the view, fine though it was, from the snow-capped summit of Braeriach, I set off in pursuit. I am not always eager for the

society of my fellow-men, indeed I am rather addicted to solitary tramps, but as we two were most likely the only human beings within a radius of many miles, it seemed natural to take a little more interest in him than his personality *per se* would probably warrant. Presently I was astonished to see him march along the sky-line in a direction due west, and wondered whether he contemplated diving into the sapphire waters of Loch Eunach, which lay about 2000 feet below; my interest in him began to wane, as I was quite decided to make for Cairn Toul, so I pushed steadily on past the Wells of Dee and the March Cairn. Now and then I stopped to admire the magnificent Garbhchoire and the huge masses of snow hanging on its precipitous sides, looking as though a touch or a breath would send them crashing far below, and presently reached the foot of the Angel's Peak, otherwise known as Sgor an Lochan Uaine.

Hitherto the going from Braeriach had been as easy as walking along a high road, but the Angel's Peak and Cairn Toul are very different, for the upper portions of both are composed of granite rocks, of all sizes, from a pebble to a huge boulder, generally presenting their sharpest edges to the foot of the profane invader of their solitudes; as, too, both peaks are very steep, it is a fairly toilsome climb, and it was 12.55 when I reached the summit of the Angel's Peak. The view is a magnificent one, finer, I think, than from either Braeriach or Cairn Toul, but I did not linger in the contemplation thereof,



partly because I was becoming keenly aware of a sense of vacuity in the inward parts, and knew that I could not hope to strike water on Cairn Toul, and partly because I had again caught sight of the "insect" whom I had watched from Braeriach. Either he had changed his mind as to diving into Loch Eunach, or (which I afterwards found to be the case) his move in that direction had been a mistake, which he soon discovered and rectified. I tried hard to catch him up before he reached the summit of Cairn Toul, but he had too much start of me, and the upper slopes of that mountain, as I have already explained, do not lend themselves to sprinting. I met him, however, on his return, a few hundred feet below the summit, very much to his astonishment. He had ascended Braeriach from the Larig, and was intending to descend into Glen Eunach like myself, so we arranged that I should finish my ascent of Cairn Toul, then rejoin him at the March Cairn for lunch, after which we would finish the day together, as far as our paths were one. This casual meeting on the peak of Cairn Toul was the beginning of my friendship with Dr. E. A. Baker, a prominent member of the climbing fraternity.

I reached the summit of Cairn Toul at 1.25, and after a hurried glance at the sea of mountain tops around and into the wild depths of Glen Dee, more than 2000 feet below, I turned to make for the rendezvous at the March Cairn. It took me longer to reach it than I had expected. I thought I need not ascend the Angel's Peak again on the return

journey, and from the summit of Cairn Toul it had seemed the easiest thing in the world to pass round the flanks, but either the flanks were a good deal bigger than they looked from the neighbouring and higher mountain, or else I went out of my way. At any rate it was 2.20 when I rejoined my new acquaintance at the March Cairn, by which time I was feeling tired, hungry and thirsty; this was perhaps hardly to be wondered at, as I had been tramping since nine o'clock, with only two or three rests of a few minutes, and had had nothing to eat and drink since breakfast at seven o'clock, except a biscuit and a wee drappie at the Loch Coire an Lochan. It was an ideal day for mountaineering, bright and sunshiny, yet not uncomfortably hot, and there was very little wind even at 4000 feet above sea-level.

We lingered over our lunch as long as there was any to linger over, anon we compared notes on matters mountaineering, and roamed over the greater part of the Scottish mainland. I afterwards discovered that my unfortunate companion's provender had been reduced by some mishap to almost *nil*, and that he had little sustenance at this feast beyond the mental pabulum afforded by the commingling of our spirits in intellectual discourse, which I fear was a poor substitute for the bodily nutriment unfortunately necessary to the human frame, e'en though the mightiest intellect dwells therein. I was thankful, however, not to have known this until I had consumed my own provisions to the last crumb; common humanity would have impelled

me to offer him a sandwich, and he might have accepted it.

From the March Cairn we steered due west, and soon reached the edge of Coire Dhondail, of which the precipices looked at first sight rather forbidding. However, we easily found a weak spot, and climbed down into the corrie; before long we struck a good path descending to the bothy at the foot of Loch Eunach, which we reached soon after four o'clock. From here we kept up a good round pace to Coylum Bridge, where my companion was staying for the night, while I had still an hour's tramp to Lynwilg, which I reached at 7.30, exactly twelve hours after I had left it in the morning.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE LARIG GHURU.

ON a blazing hot day at the end of June I had tramped through Glen Tilt from Blair Atholl to Braemar, taking nearly eleven hours over it—slow work, perhaps, for thirty miles, but under the climatic conditions and with a small knapsack on my back, quite as fast as I cared for. Apart, however, from the effects of an almost tropical sun, it was a much easier walk than I had expected, and I really felt some difficulty in understanding how Mr. Bedford managed to lose his life at the Tarf, even allowing for the fact of there being no bridge at that time.

I had hoped the following day to ascend Loch-nagar, but bad weather unfortunately prevented me from carrying out the project, and I could not wait any longer at Braemar, having arranged to return to Aviemore the next day, Saturday, July 1, over the Larig Ghru Pass. So far I had been alone, but a fortunate chance gave me a companion for this walk. On the previous night, in the course of conversation with a man at the hotel, who had arrived that afternoon, and had intended to leave by coach the next morning, I happened to mention that I hoped next day to walk over the Larig Ghru to Aviemore. It appeared that he also had a

great desire to do this walk, but had not cared to tackle it alone. He went to cancel his coach seat, which he had already engaged, and in a few minutes we had instructed Boots to call us at 6.30 (if weather prospects were favourable), ordered our breakfasts, and made all other necessary arrangements.

Weather prospects next morning were not at all favourable, but a relentless Boots awakened me punctually at 6.30, and when I attempted a feeble remonstrance, sternly informed me that the other gentleman was already up. He was evidently of opinion that I was a poor creature, and I was shamed into getting up, although one glance out of the window had, in my opinion, condemned it as hopeless. It was not actually raining, but heavy, sullen-looking masses of clouds, apparently just ready to burst, hung low in every direction, and anybody would have thought that a wet day was a dead certainty. However, Scottish weather is one of the things that "no fella can understand," and although it hardly turned out a nice day—there was too much cold, damp mist—yet we had no rain. Certainly we owed a debt of gratitude to Boots, for without his persistent efforts—he came again ten minutes later, to make sure that I had not turned tail and gone back to bed—I, at any rate, would never have been unearthed from my bed in time to start at eight o'clock, as we had arranged to do. I sent my knapsack by parcel post to Aviemore, as I felt like having had enough of it. I had a Gladstone awaiting me at the Lynwilg

Hotel, near Aviemore, which was fortunate, as my knapsack took two days to do the journey, having apparently gone for a tour round Scotland on its own account. My companion also forwarded most of his things, only taking with him the barest necessities slung up in a macintosh in a peculiarly artful style.

Precisely at eight o'clock we set forth, with many misgivings as to weather, which showed no signs of improvement. At the Linn of Dee we stopped for five minutes to re-arrange my companion's impedimenta, and while we were thus engaged two men passed by, apparently journeying in the same direction as ourselves. Immediately after leaving the Linn of Dee we, having the immortal work of the great Mr. Baddeley as our guide, philosopher and friend, took a short cut indicated by that benefactor of his fellow-creatures, which saved about a mile. Two or three miles farther on we again stopped for five minutes at a small burn to consume a biscuit and to slake an incipient thirst, and while we were thus agreeably employed the same two men again passed by. They had left us about an hour before dawdling at the Linn of Dee, and their disgust, after walking hard for an hour, to find us a few miles farther on and still dawdling, was so obviously genuine that we explained the position to them, and earnestly advised them henceforth to put their trust in Baddeley. They were going up Ben Muich Dhui, and we saw nothing further of them.

We reached the cottage at Luibeg at 10.55, and sat there for ten minutes, talking to the keeper. This is the outpost of civilization on this side, there being no other inhabited house until near Coylum Bridge, about eighteen miles, so that the business portion of the walk may be said to begin here. Soon after leaving Luibeg we ought to have had fine views of Ben Muich Dhui, and of the mountains on the other side of Glen Dee, but unfortunately they were all shrouded in mist, and throughout the day we saw nothing of the higher tops. The path, however, round the shoulder of Carn a' Mhaim and up Glen Dee to the summit of the Larig Ghru was fortunately unmistakable. The only point where we had a chance to go wrong was when we were getting nearly opposite the Garbh Choire, as it happened that the Larig was then blotted out by a wall of mist, while the lower part of the Garbh Choire was, for the moment, fairly clear. For a few moments it really looked as though the Garbh Choire were the main pass, but the wall of mist obscuring the Larig fortunately rose to some extent, enough, at any rate, to show us where our route lay. When we reached the infant Dee we halted for lunch, but soon found that it was too cold (although July 1) to sit for more than a very few minutes. Cold, thick masses of mist came swirling down the pass, wetting us almost as effectually as rain, and chilling us to the marrow of our bones. We could only keep warm by moving, so, after a hasty sandwich and a wee

drappie, we hurried onwards. Perhaps the expression "hurried onwards" should be taken in a Pickwickian sense. We proceeded as fast as possible, but it cannot be said that our rate of progression for the next few miles would rank high as a pedestrian record. The summit of the pass and for a mile or two on each side is simply a vast stone-heap, and it is a slow and toilsome process to pick one's way over it. We reached the Pools of Dee, three tiny tarns just below the summit of the pass, at 2.30, and made another attempt at lunch, but were again driven onwards by cold in a very few minutes. Our situation was most impressive, the vast and almost perpendicular walls of Ben Muich Dhui, down which I had crawled a few days previously, as described in Chapter II, on the one side, and those of Braeriach on the other; but it is impossible to get up much enthusiasm for romantic scenery when one's teeth are chattering with cold, and when the romantic scenery is heavily shrouded in mist. It was really very disappointing to see nothing of the mountains except their lower portions.

As we gradually emerged from the gloomy pass we saw that the weather was better on this side. We had glimpses through the mist of smiling, sunlit plains far away to the north-west, a land flowing with milk and honey, also with various other articles of diet, more satisfying, if less poetical. We soon left the mist behind, but all the toil of the day was not yet over, although we had, of course, surmounted the worst. There was a long stretch







*To face p. 31*

AMONG THE CAIRNGORMS; THE LARIG GHRU IN THE DISTANCE.

*[Photo by W. J. Moggs Wright.]*

of open moor to traverse before reaching the Forest of Rothiemurchus, which was not the least toilsome section of the day's work. The heather was unusually long, and often covered the path completely. The path was excessively bad; at frequent intervals it had broken away, leaving a black, peaty hole, into which the unwary traveller was very liable to precipitate himself, as the heather often met over the hole, concealing it entirely. Altogether we were very glad to get over this part of the journey, and reach the deserted house of Auldrue a little before five o'clock. Crossing the foot-bridge just beyond Auldrue, we took the path on the right to Coylum Bridge. The path is in places difficult to find, but here and there small cairns have been erected, and I had passed along here a few days previously. From Coylum Bridge we proceeded along the high road to Aviemore, and thence to the Lynwilg Hotel, where we arrived at 6.35 p.m., ten hours and thirty-five minutes from Braemar, which, so far as the entries in the hotel books go, seemed to be a record. We found an account in the Lynwilg book of a party (including a lady) who had done it in ten hours and forty-five minutes, which appeared to have been the previous record. Of course, the very cold weather which prevailed during the greater part of the day was the sole cause of our good time. If we had been able to linger over our lunches, and if there had been any view to admire, we should have taken several hours longer, as we had not the least desire

to establish a record. However, we enjoyed the walk immensely in spite of the mists, and noting that Baddeley describes it as "about the longest day's march in the Highlands," gives the distance as thirty-two miles, and opines that "twelve hours from inn to inn is extremely good time," we felt rather proud of ourselves at having done it in ten hours and thirty-five minutes.

## CHAPTER V.

### A HIGHLAND SUNSET.

LATE one evening in early June I was tramping from Achnasheen to Kinlochewe with a heavy *rucksack* on my back, which seemed every minute to get heavier and heavier. It had been a glorious day: an almost tropical sun had blazed upon me uninterruptedly since I had set forth in the morning; the sky all day had been of that perfect cloudless blue which is not the absolute monopoly of the Mediterranean, which, indeed, one often sees in early summer in the Western Highlands, notwithstanding the abuse that many unpatriotic people love to shower upon the climate of their native country.

It had indeed been a beautiful day, and I had had a grand walk, but I hungered and was athirst; I was also tired, and as I tramped along the side of Loch Rosque, wondering whether it was ever coming to an end, I said in my haste that it was one of the most dreary lakes that I had ever seen, and wished that I had stopped at the Achnasheen Hotel, instead of pushing on to Kinlochewe. But I had made up my mind to reach Kinlochewe that night, and always like to carry out my plans unless prevented by *force majeure*; so when I arrived at

Achnasheen, and found it a little after seven o'clock, and about ten miles to Kinlochewe, I went straight on at once.

The much-maligned Loch Rosque came to an end at last, and presently I was walking up to the watershed between the Loch Rosque valley and that of Glen Dochartie, leading down to Kinlochewe and Loch Maree. On rounding the corner into Glen Dochartie, and beginning the long descent, a glorious vista unfolds itself. The wild and narrow valley extends for several miles, gradually opening out at its lower end into the alluvial strath of Kinlochewe, eight hundred feet below, where can just be discerned a roof or two, with perhaps a thin column of blue smoke ascending to the heavens, or tossing hither and thither, according to the state of the elements. Beyond Kinlochewe Loch Maree, one of the loveliest of Scottish lakes, stretches away to the north-west; you will hardly believe that it is five or six miles away, so near does it seem in the pure air of these northern latitudes. Far below on the left the Dochartie stream rushes tumultuously down its rocky bed, in haste to reach its "Nirvana" in Loch Maree. On each side of the narrow valley rise great walls of boulder-clad hills, not, perhaps, of very imposing height, regarded as mountains pure and simple, but forming a most effective frame for the far-stretching view, and the hills on each side of Loch Maree appear to carry on the mountain-wall without a break as far as the eye reaches.

Yes, it is at all times a magnificent view, but this evening it was glorified, etherealized, beyond anything I had ever seen. When I had proceeded a few hundred yards down the glen, the setting sun appeared over the far end of Loch Maree from behind the hill which had hitherto hidden it, and transformed everything instantaneously. I sat down on a boulder to drink in the beauty of the scene; I forgot that I was hungry, thirsty and tired; I forgot the heavy *rucksack*; I forgot that it was just nine o'clock, and that I had still three or four miles to go; I forgot everything of the earth earthy, for in the beautiful scene before me there was something not of this earth, which banished all base and sordid thoughts.

The distant lake was lit up as though by millions of coloured lamps; a brilliant, fairy-like shimmer hovered over the long line of mountains on the north side of Loch Maree, lighting them until they looked like a mirage of the desert rather than sober masses of granite; presently as the sun sank lower, this gradually gave way to a purple glow; a few minutes more, the ball of fire sank beneath the waters of the distant Minch, and the mountain-wall was left in a deep black, which seemed a blacker black in comparison with the wonderful glow of colour which had preceded it.

For some time longer I sat there enthralled, before I came down to earth again. Many countries have proverbs, "See such-and-such a place and die," and after such a scene as I have feebly attempted



to describe I can understand the idea, for one descends with reluctance to things terrestrial.

The long twilight of the north has a peaceful beauty all its own; here we have the sun setting a little after nine o'clock, and it will hardly be really dark all night. I have read a book at my bedroom window without any artificial light between eleven o'clock and midnight; indeed, when one is in bed, the light nights have their disadvantages. There is an unnatural feeling about the act of going to bed in a twilight which is only one degree removed from daylight, and I at any rate find it difficult to compose myself to slumber under the circumstances. At Sligachan, for instance, in the Isle of Skye, after going to bed at eleven o'clock or thereabouts, I have often lain awake for hours gazing at that beautiful mountain group of Sgurr nan Gilleann, the Bhasteir and the Sgurr a' Bhasteir. I had not the heart to pull down the blind and shut out such a view, although probably I had a long day's climb before me on the morrow, and knew that I ought to be sleeping.

It has often struck me amid scenes as these, how thankful we ought to be for the faculty of appreciating the beautiful. If we possessed no such power what a dreary desert this world would appear to us! How should we—those of us who work for our living in one way or another—ever get out of ourselves, ever emancipate ourselves from the thralldom of our daily toil, often uncongenial, monotonous and wearisome? How put away the

worries and anxieties of everyday life, and give ourselves a holiday in the real sense of the word? If the beautiful had no power to attract us, I suppose there would be no inducement to visit these mountainous and comparatively out-of-the-way regions; nobody, I imagine, would carry a *rucksack* thirty miles a day over rough and hilly ground for the mere pleasure of so doing; it is difficult to conjecture how a holiday would be possible, and it would seem as though the occasional relaxation and distraction, which are a necessity to all of us, could only in that case be obtained in orgies of dissipation.

Longfellow says something to the effect that our lives are kept in equipoise by—

“The struggle of the instinct that enjoys,  
And the more noble instinct that aspires.”

It is a fine thought, and this evening I could fully grasp the idea. Amid that scene of ethereal splendour “the more noble instinct that aspires” was for the time pre-eminent, and carried one away from one’s earthly surroundings, from one’s earthly needs, and for the moment made all ordinary, practical matters seem mean and common. But one has to live one’s life in the world as it is; one cannot live in a continual state of lofty exaltation, and duties which are apparently mean and common have to be fulfilled. Fanatics, enthusiasts, saints, would be exceedingly uncomfortable people to live with; something of the lower instinct is necessary

to balance the higher, to restrain its exuberance and to prevent it from unfitting us for the lives we have to lead.

Sunsets and twilight are conducive to meditation, and for some time longer I sat there moralizing, until at length the influence of the higher instinct began to wane; the lower instinct told me that I required supper and a bed, and that I should get neither by sitting there all night. I shouldered my *rucksack* with renewed vigour, and soon reached the Kinlochewe Hotel, where I met with the hospitable reception which tired wayfarers always get from good Mrs. Macdonald. The lower instinct abundantly provided for, the higher instinct fresh from such a feast of the beautiful, what could the heart of man desire more?

## CHAPTER VI.

### SLIOCH.

SLIOCH is a mountain upon which I had long had my eye ; mentally, that is, for I had never beheld it with a bodily optic until I arrived at Kinlochewe on the afternoon of the 1st of June. After washing off some of the dust of a long journey, and otherwise refreshing myself, I walked a few miles up the Loch Maree road in order to reconnoitre my mountain, and when I had reached a point about opposite, I sat down by the wayside and regarded it with considerable admiration. It falls in such steep slopes to the lake as to appear from this distance of three or four miles one vast precipice, and the western face shows a craggy profile almost sheer. Loch Maree itself is only a few feet above sea-level, so that one gets the effect of the entire height in one *coup d'œil* ; moreover, there are no other mountains of equal height near it and visible from this side, so that altogether one gets the impression of a mountain much exceeding the actual height of Slioch, which is only 3217 feet.

I find that many people are in the habit of speaking of this mountain as Ben Slioch, which, however, is incorrect ; its designation is Slioch *tout simplement*, without the Ben.

As a rule when I arrive from my native plains, fresh from the chains and slavery of an office, I like to have a few days of preparatory training before attempting anything at all big; but the weather the following morning was so splendid that it seemed a positive sin to waste it meandering about on level ground, and, moreover, when one does get a perfect day in the Highlands it behoves one to make good use of it; so at 8.30 I left the Kinlochewe Hotel and proceeded along the path on the north side of the river and lake. Presently I came in sight of the gamekeeper's cottage at Smiorsair, a tiny oasis in the desert of rock and bracken and bog, which stretched for miles around. I was at once spotted, for the keeper left his work and cut across to intercept me. I had not known that Slioch was in a deer-forest, but almost all Scottish mountains are, unfortunately. I gave him my card, and after a few minutes' chat proceeded on my way, my life being spared this time. At the Smiorsair burn, just below a pretty little waterfall, I halted about eleven o'clock for lunch, and progress now became exceedingly slow; not on account of the lunch, but on account of the excessive heat.

I had been told to follow this burn until I reached a steep grass slope, which would conduct me to the summit. Now a steep grass slope—and this particular one was about as steep as they make 'em—is, as a rule, a particularly objectionable route for the ascent of a mountain; but in the first place I am meek and always like to do as I am told, and

in the second place I was by now exceedingly hot, and my chief desire was to reach the summit as speedily as possible by any means or route whatsoever. I therefore crawled perspiringly up this steep grass slope, but soon discovered that I was on the wrong one, with a deep gully between me and the only real and original steep grass slope. The far side of the gully was merely a gravelly edge, but the near side was a somewhat forbidding rock-face, down which I scrambled with some difficulty and much caution; thence straight up the other grass slope, which brought me out on the ridge a few yards west of the summit, where I arrived at 1.15 p.m. This, I suppose, is wretched time from Kinlochewe, but it was far too hot to worry about records.

It was a perfect day to be on the top of a mountain, though the heat had rendered the ascent somewhat of a toil. I lay for half-an-hour in the shadow of the cairn, lazily drinking in the glories of one of the most beautiful views that I have ever beheld. Loch Maree is to my mind one of the finest of Scottish lakes, and to-day, sparkling beneath a tropical sun and a deep blue sky, and relieved by the archipelago of pine-clad islets, it presented an especially attractive appearance. All around were mountains innumerable, mostly black and forbidding, but due north was a group of white quartziferous mountains with reddish streaks, which I suppose were the Challichs, while southwards across Loch Maree arose another quartzite mountain,



Ben Eay, presenting on this side a face of such pure and dazzling whiteness as to render it difficult to believe that it was not covered with snow. Here and there amid the wilderness of mountains a bit of blue loch relieved the prevailing note of desolate and somewhat melancholy blackness. Hardly a human habitation or a sign of human existence was in sight, except the Loch Maree Hotel. Kinlochewe was hidden by the southern spurs of Slioch, and the view undoubtedly gained thereby. Not that Kinlochewe is unpleasant to look upon, but the strath dotted with the habitations of men would have detracted from the prevailing wildness of the scene.

A few yards south of the summit was a great snow-patch from which issued a baby streamlet; here I abode for another half-hour to consume a frugal meal, and then set out for the long eastern arm of the mountain. This side of Slioch is very disappointing, as it is all grass. I had certainly ascended over grass most of the way, but the fine crags of the western face had been close by on my left, and occasionally I had clambered over an outcrop of rock, while the afore-mentioned gully had given me quite a sensation for a moment or two. On this side the moment one left the summit one found oneself descending into a great grassy basin, with hardly a stone to break the monotonous green. The eastern ridge, terminating in a peak, the name whereof I have carefully copied out from my map letter by letter (accuracy, however, not guaranteed),

as Sgurr an Tuill Bhain, seemed to present possibilities of interest, so I made for it, and was rewarded by a fine view into the depths of Loch Garbhaig and Loch Fhada, with Ben Lair, the Mheagdain and Ben Tarsuinn beyond.

Perhaps I may here be allowed a short digression to discuss Gaelic orthography, or rather to explain my renderings of Gaelic names, for 'twere rash indeed for any mere Sassenach to attempt seriously to discuss Gaelic orthography; he could hardly hope to emerge from such a discussion with unimpaired mental faculties. To begin with, there will certainly be occasional inconsistencies in my versions of these fearful appellations; let nobody arise and reproach me therewith. When even Ordnance maps write indifferently: choire and coire; beg, bhig and beag; ben, bheinn and ven, and so on, I do not see how a wretched Sassenach can be expected to be consistent. Moreover, I make no claim to consistency; this book is written with no deep-laid designs of imparting instruction; there is no powder in the jam, and in short I do not care a pin whether I am consistent or not. If it were not my desire to produce a book which the most careful daughter may allow the most unsophisticated parent to peruse, I would say "consistency be d——d," *i. e.* so far as Gaelic spelling is concerned.

One authority has abused me for writing "Sgurr Ouran," on the ground that "Sgurr" is Gaelic, while "Ouran" is the anglicized form of the

Gaelic "Fhuaran." He maintains that I ought to write either "Sgurr Fhuaran" or "Scour Ouran." Well, I don't care if I ought, and anyhow I won't. The only object, or rather the only justification, of anglicization is to facilitate pronunciation, and I do not see that "Sgurr" requires anglicizing, since you cannot very well pronounce it as anything but what it is, while "Scour" would to my mind rather suggest the pronunciation "Skowr." And anyhow, as I said before, I shall write whatever I think well; perchance the spirit may move me to write "Skowr Fhuaran," and if I feel like doing so I shall do it. If it were really necessary to anglicize "Sgurr," I apprehend that "Skoor" would be the best thing to write, but it does not look nice, and I won't use it.

As a general rule I shall adopt the usual anglicized form as given on the Ordnance maps, because it would appear pedantic to adhere rigidly to Gaelic spelling (even if I could, and live) when there is a generally-accepted anglicized form. But there are some specimens of Ordnance map orthography which I utterly refuse to adopt. Wild horses, for instance, shall never force me to transmogrify the familiar Coire Labain into Coire Lagan; I will go down to my grave vociferating with my last breath Coire Labain. Nor will I ever call the Bealach a' Leitir by the hideous name given it on the last Ordnance maps. Never while life remains, e'en though all the rest of the world bow the knee to Baal, will I call it the Bealach nan Lice. If sometimes I feel

in exceptionally good form, and able to embark, without fear of fatal or even serious effects, on such a cataract of consonants as represents most of these Gaelic names, I shall let myself go; and if in the midst thereof my courage fails me, and I feel impelled to abandon the rash attempt, and revert to my native Anglo-Saxon, or the nearest approach to it possible, well, I shall do that too, consistency or no consistency. Selah (whatever that may mean).

To return to our muttons, I reached the summit of Sgurr an Tuill Bhain at 3.5 p.m., and lay there for about half-an-hour, being unwilling to descend to the lower regions. Unfortunately the material needs of poor, weak, human flesh reminded me that after descending the mountain I had still a long way to walk, and that the excellent dinner always provided at that most comfortable hostelry, the Kinlochewe Hotel, would be awaiting me before I could reach it.

The descent down steep grass slopes, and then across a long stretch of sloshy, spongy bog, was tiresome and uninteresting, and brought me down into Glen Bannisdail, about half-way between Loch Fhada and Loch Maree. This is a wild and beautiful glen, down which rushes the Fhasaigh burn, the outlet of Loch Fhada, and as the latter is 1000 feet above sea-level, and Loch Maree only thirty, and the distance between the two only three or four miles, the burn has a tumultuous course—a short life and a merry one—consisting largely of waterfalls.

There is a faint path down Glen Bannisdail, but where it goes to or comes from, I know not, as there is no inhabited house in the glen, or on the shores of Loch Fhada. Possibly there may formerly have been a few crofters here, and possibly they have been removed to make way for the deer-forest—banished to make a Saxon holiday! That is the process whereby public paths and rights of way get lost.

I reached the bridge over the Fhasaigh burn at the end of Glen Bannisdail at 6.25, and the Kinlochewe Hotel at 7.45, having had a delightful day. The only drawback had been the excessive heat; even on the top of Slioch it had been tempered by only the gentlest of zephyrs.

## CHAPTER VII.

BEN EAY.

THIS interesting quartzite mountain, the dominating feature of the Kinlochewe valley, is rather a mountain range than a single hill. Although it dominates Kinlochewe, yet only a small portion of it, the north-eastern spur, known as Creag Dubh, and just 3000 feet above sea-level, is visible from the village.

If the intending climber should walk a few miles along the Torridon road to reconnoitre his mountain, he will be astonished at the length of the white quartzite ridge which gradually unfolds itself behind Creag Dubh. From about the middle of this long ridge rises the peak of Sgurr Ban (3188 feet), looking at first sight like a snow-capped Alpine peak, especially when the quartz is glistening in the sun. Half-a-mile beyond Sgurr Ban is Spidean Coire nan Clach (3200 feet), and about a couple of miles farther west are the twin summits of Sail Mhor (3217 feet), and Ruadh Stac Mhor (3309 feet), with the deep hollow of the Coire Mhic Fhearchair, and the little loch rejoicing in the same euphonious appellation, lying between them. All this aggregation of peaks, together with several others, which I have not thought it worth while to enumerate, is comprehended in the all-embracing name of Ben



Eay, though to the unscientific eye they would appear to divide into at least four separate and individual mountains. Ruadh Stac Mhor is the culminating point of the range; but while both it and Sail Mhor exceed Sgurr Ban in height, both I think are inferior to the latter in beauty and interest, although as I attained not unto either of them, I cannot speak with authority.

I was undecided whether to walk along the Torridon road, and thence make straight for Sgurr Ban, or whether to attack Creag Dubh, which presents a great white face towards Kinlochewe and Loch Maree. I finally decided upon the latter course, thinking that it would be interesting to proceed along the whole ridge.

I left the Kinlochewe Hotel at 8.30 a.m., and followed the path which leaves the Loch Maree road just before the first burn, and strikes up the hills between Creag Dubh and Meall a Ghuibhais, until I was about opposite the aforesaid white face. I had left it for circumstances to decide whether I should ascend the northern or southern ridge of Creag Dubh, thinking that the face itself was far too steep. However, when I left the path, and approached the face more closely, it appeared quite feasible, though undoubtedly very steep, and finally I decided to strike straight up it. I very soon repented of this decision, but having decided upon my plan of action, I stuck to it doggedly. It was, however, a stiffer job than I had bargained for. The whole of this face—indeed the whole of the upper storey of Sgurr Ban, except for an occasional

outcrop of granite (or something else, for I know naught of geology)—consists of quartzite screes at a very severe angle. I hate ascending screes at any time, wherein I surmise that I am not peculiar, but quartzite screes are of all screes the most hateful. It was a splendid but very hot day in early June; the rays of an almost tropical sun were reflected with peculiar intensity from the glaring white débris all around; the Sisyphean process of picking one's way up a severe slope of loose razor-edged bits of quartzite, constantly slipping back, and vainly clutching at other loose bits to save oneself, was agonizing, heartrending. At length I reached the summit of this easternmost point of the mountain at 11.40 a.m., and set off gaily enough along the ridge for Sgurr Ban, imagining that only an easy promenade lay between me and the summit cone. In a few minutes I reached a great pile of rocks, and scrambling up these, found a sheer drop on the other side. At that time I was a humble hill-walker, and knew nothing whatever of rock-climbing, consequently the descent thereof appeared to me impossible; so I had to come down again on the near side, pick my weary way round various shoulders of Sgurr Ban, and finally repeat the heartrending scramble up another quartzite scree to the summit. I felt very much inclined to give it up, but whate'er betide, I felt that I must attain the summit, and stuck to it grimly until at length I reached the cairn of Sgurr Ban at one o'clock.

By this time I was parched with thirst; quartzite always seems waterless, and I had drunk nothing

since breakfast at 7.30, except one little drop of water about ten o'clock, just before I reached the quartzite. This spoiled my day altogether. I had hoped to follow the ridge over Spidean Coire nan Clach to Sail Mhor, and possibly to Ruadh Stac Mhor; this would have made a grand day, and I could probably have done it easily enough, if only something had been available wherewith to moisten my interior. Also I had heard of some wonderful cliffs in Coire Mhic Fhearchair, which I was particularly desirous to see, but my prospects of beholding them seemed remote, at any rate on this occasion, and I doubt whether I shall ever again summon up enough energy to tackle Ben Eay. I began to be seriously afraid that if I did not get some water very soon I should collapse, and that would be very undesirable. In a huge corrie on the south side of Sgurr Ban I could distinctly see a burn, and as it appeared to be the nearest place where I was certain of obtaining water, I set off down that awful scree. It was farther than I had expected, and it took me a good—or rather a very bad—hour to reach the water.

Directly after leaving the quartzite screes I almost stepped into a tiny well about the size of a tea-cup—a most welcome sight. The author of *Benedicite* remarks in that most interesting book that, “He whose lot is cast amid the civilization of the West can scarcely realize the feeling of thankfulness with which wells are regarded by the Oriental.” On Ben Eay the civilization of the West, amid which my lot seems irretrievably and unfortunately cast, contributed nothing towards the assuagement of

my thirst, and I regarded wells, or at least this particular well, with feelings of very real thankfulness. Nor was this the first occasion on which wells had evoked similar feelings in my bosom, and I would suggest that after the word "Oriental" in the passage quoted, the following words be added—"and by those who disport themselves on Scottish mountains."

For about an hour I lingered in this attractive spot, dallying with my lunch, reluctant to leave the well. When at last I did gird myself up to bid it a fond farewell (no pun intended), I wandered up the corrie for some time in a rather aimless sort of way, for I could hardly make up my mind what to do. When I descended from Sgurr Ban I had given up all hopes of climbing any other peaks, and it certainly seemed hardly worth while, when I had come half-way down the mountain, to retrace the weary way, even if I had time to ascend Sail Mhor, which was very doubtful. On the other hand it was only just three o'clock, and it seemed rather early to turn my steps hotelwards, especially as two great and unconquered peaks were close at hand. I afterwards found that it was a longer job to get down the mountain than I had expected, and moreover when I reached the road at the foot thereof there was still a walk of five miles, so that if I had gone straight down from this beneficent and ever-memorable well I should probably have only reached the hotel in comfortable time for dinner. Knowledge, however, in this world often comes too late. Fortified too, by copious draughts from the well, with perhaps just

the least admixture of mountain dew, I felt like a giant refreshed, and looked with some scorn at the ridge which rose abruptly from the back of the corrie, thinking in my pride, that I should soon polish off that little lot. The ridge, however, was steeper and longer than it appeared, and as I toiled slowly up it I felt permeated with regret that I had not gone straight down from the well. When I reached what had appeared to be the top of the ridge this feeling was greatly intensified, for I found that this seeming top was only a sort of shelf or ledge, and before me stretched once more a steep and glittering expanse of that hateful quartzite scree. I know not why I was foolish enough to go on, for it was hardly possible now to reach Sail Mhor, unless I meant (which I didn't) to spend a great part of the night on the mountain, but I can never endure to turn back half-way up an ascent, unless absolutely compelled, so I stuck to it doggedly. At any rate I thought, I shall reach Spidean Coire nan Clach, and in the inmost recesses of my heart I believe I was even then not altogether without hopes of attaining Sail Mhor. I had still a few sandwiches left, and although I did not mean to remain on the hills all night, it would not matter if I did not get back to the hotel until late. There were no feminine belongings there to worry about me, which is one of the inestimable privileges of single blessedness. It was early in June, and would not be dark even at midnight, as a full moon would be turned on for my particular benefit. Wherefore, for the third time that day, I struggled disgustedly,



but doggedly, up a very steep slope of quartzite scree.

When I reached the top, words utterly fail to express my disgust. I found myself on a pile of rocks, which formed a sort of natural cairn. The actual cairn of Spidean Coire nan Clach was only a short distance away, and not many feet higher than the rock on which I sat, but was separated from me by a deep cleft in the ridge, and appeared to be attainable only by a long *détour* over that hateful scree. As I remarked before I had at that time done no rock-climbing whatever, and it appeared to me utterly impossible to descend into the cleft and ascend the wall on the other side, although to an expert rock-climber there would probably have been no great difficulty about it. My genesis as a rock-climber had not yet taken place.

Looking towards Sail Mhor, I was obliged to admit that it was now too late to tackle it, as there was a big dip between us; it would probably take me at least an hour to reach the col, and then there was a long and weary climb to the summit; it must have been at least three miles from where I sat to the cairn of Sail Mhor, which I could just faintly distinguish against the sky, and every step would be taking me farther away from the hotel, where a bath, dinner, cooling drinks, and other sybaritic luxuries were awaiting me. If I attempted to go on I could hardly reach the hotel until the small hours of the morning, and although, as I remarked just now, I have no feminine belongings to worry about me, still I felt that my non-appearance at dinner would



be a source of great anxiety to good Mrs. Macdonald, my amiable hostess, as I had hitherto never been known to miss that festival, though I had occasionally been somewhat late. Also there was another party staying at the hotel, which included three ladies; those ladies had taken much kind interest in my little expeditions, and each night at dinner used to ask where I had been, and what I had done, and how I had fared, in a manner that was most grateful and comforting to a lonely male creature, even to one who does hug himself on his single blessedness. This is perhaps hardly an appropriate place for misogynistic reflections, otherwise I might remark that women are satisfactory enough—speaking generally that is—unless or until they belong to you, then their sweetness is apt to vanish. Possession kills the sweet illusion. However, I was going to observe that I feared that if I did not turn up at dinner, nor during the evening, that these three ladies would experience much anxiety on my account. Truth compels me to admit that they seem to have endured the uncertainty as to my fate with much fortitude.

Anyhow I gave up all further ambitions, for that day at any rate, in the mountaineering line; my only ambition now was to get back to the hotel and reach those luxuries just enumerated as soon as I possibly could. So I turned away from Sail Mhor and Ruadh Stac Mhor, which seemed to grin at me derisively, and went straight down. A glissade down the steep quartzite scree played havoc with my boots, a pair of faithful old friends which had seen much service in various parts of these islands; a

long day on the Coolins a week later completely finished them off, and with much regret I bestowed them upon Boots at the Sligachan Hotel, but fear from his manner that he regarded them with a lack of enthusiasm.

After leaving the quartzite, which I did with devout thankfulness, I found that the rest of the descent was longer and rougher than I had quite anticipated. I met with nothing sensational and no real difficulties, but the way was rough and tiresome, and possibly I was getting a bit tired. I was also getting thirsty again, and was constrained to halt more than once at sundry infant burns. Altogether the descent was not accomplished in record time, and it was nearly eight o'clock when at length I reached the road at the foot of the mountain, about five miles from Kinlochewe, and 9.30 when I entered the hotel.

Ben Eay is the only quartzite mountain which I have ascended, and if all quartzite mountains are girt about with screes like those encompassing the peak of Sgurr Ban, I can only say that, fond as I am of Scotland and Scottish mountains, I never want to ascend another. After a good clean-up and an excellent dinner, I almost succeeded in persuading myself that I had enjoyed the day. I had been out thirteen hours; it had been one of the hardest and longest days that I had ever had, and the greater part of the day had been spent in toiling laboriously up and down successive quartzite screes, and for all this expenditure of energy, I had only Creag Dubh and Sgurr Ban to show as trophies.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### LIATHACH; AN ABORTIVE ATTEMPT.

I AM not proud of this day's proceedings. I suppose all mountaineers have failures occasionally, and it is not merely because I failed to reach the highest point of Liathach that I am not proud of the day's work, but I cannot help feeling that I allowed myself to be rather easily choked off by bad weather. In a previous chapter I stated that if bad weather came on after I had started, I usually went on with the job with what philosophy I might, but on this occasion I certainly failed to act up to that excellent principle.

Liathach is a very little known mountain, and most readers will probably never have heard of it, so it may be as well to explain that it is stowed away in a corner of south-west Ross, close to the head of Loch Torridon. It is out of any ordinary tourist track, although there is a good road at its foot; but that road only leads to Torridon, and there comes to an untimely end, while the nearest point of the mountain is at least seven or eight miles from Kinlochewe.

To avoid possible reproofs from Gaelic scholars and others, I may remark that I do not by any means guarantee, nor even defend, the spelling

adopted above. Having seen the name of this mountain spelled in at least a dozen different ways, each one more terrifying to the helpless Sassenach than another, I have adopted Bartholomew's spelling without either knowing or caring whether it be correct. I have already made some remarks anent the spelling of Gaelic names, so will not pursue the subject.

The question of maps is a very important one to the mountaineer. I do not propose to utilize this volume as an advertising medium for any special brand either of maps or of other goods, although of course I am always open to consider a good offer. But I may say at once, and quite frankly, that I always swear by (and occasionally at) Bartholomew's maps. (If Mr. Bartholomew thinks well to send on a good thumping cheque, it will be accepted with grateful thanks.) Still, although Bartholomew's maps are excellent, they are not perfect. The half-inch to the mile maps are good enough for ordinary walking, but are not good enough for mountains. Many names, especially of subsidiary peaks, are omitted; many of course must be, but it certainly seems to me that some are omitted that might be inserted. I had trouble this day in consequence, as will presently appear. The one-inch to the mile are better, but they do not seem to have any more names, and only a few maps appear to be published of that scale. The coloured contours were a great idea, and a vast improvement on the contour lines of the Ordnance maps. Once I tried one of the latter, but, as the celebrated Raven observed,

“Nevermore,” for I regard the one-inch Ordnance maps as dismal failures, and moreover they only give you about half as much for your money as you get from Bartholomew. Also they are not even reliable. Craig yr Ysfa, for instance, is marked on the south-western end of Carnedd Dafydd (which is really Craig Ddu), whereas it is actually situated on the north-eastern side of the ridge leading from Carnedd Llewellyn to Pen Helig. And Glyder Fach is not marked at all. What are we to think of an Ordnance survey which remains in apparent ignorance of the fifth highest mountain in Wales? At any rate this particular Ordnance map had such a destructive effect on my temper that I never purchased another. The six-inch Ordnance maps are of course the best for mountaineering, but if you are going to cover any ground at all, you have got to take a cartload with you.

I apologize for this digression, and will now return to Liathach. As it was likely to be a big day, I decided to drive to the foot of the mountain, which indeed it is always wise to do, when possible. One of the secrets of successful mountaineering is never to walk when it is possible to drive: it is likewise a most successful method of getting rid of your spare cash, but that is a detail. I left the hotel at 8.30 a.m., which seems to be the earliest hour at which I ever succeed in getting away. I am always making elaborate preparations for an early start, I give careful instructions for my breakfast and for my awakening; occasionally I succeed in dragging



myself, or in being dragged; out of my bed at unchristian hours, but somehow I very rarely succeed in getting away from the hotel before 8.30.

Hitherto the only fault I had had to find with the weather was that it had been so hot. Day after day for a week I had toiled up the hills beneath a tropical sun and an unclouded sky, and had found the process laborious and dry—dry, that is, as regards my internal mechanism. I must say that Highland weather has been much maligned; according to many writers a fine day is a rarity, a fine week unknown, but I have always been fortunate in my Scottish holidays as regards weather, whenever I have gone early in the year. The only time I have had hopelessly bad weather in Scotland, was one year when I had to take my holiday in September, as recorded in the first chapter of these chronicles, and there is no doubt that May and June are the months to go to Scotland in, if one wants fine weather.

This morning when I set forth, it was still fine, and my driver was firm in his asseverations that it was going to be a fine day, but the weather forecasts of local talent are rarely worth much, and on this occasion were worth nothing at all. He was a most civil, pleasant-spoken man, but he knew nothing about either the weather or Liathach, which were the only two topics that for the moment had the slightest interest for me. Local talent as a rule knows nothing of the mountain which rises from its back door, but will die rather than admit its ignorance.



At the seventh milestone from Kinlochewe I left the carriage and struck straight across the intervening moor. I had been studying the mountain as we approached, and had mapped out what I thought would be a feasible route, but unfortunately I went straight up the easternmost spur, Stuc a Choire Duibh Bheag (that's all for the present), which faces Ben Eay, and presents a bold front to that mountain, falling very steeply into the deep valley, which separates it from Liathach. This peak was not marked on my map, and I was under the impression that I was climbing Spidean a Choire Leith, the culminating point of the latter mountain (3456 feet), and I did not discover my error until, about one o'clock, I reached the summit of this easternmost spur, when I beheld the peak of Spidean, far to the west with two miles of a very rough and broken ridge lying between. This would not have mattered, and indeed I love a good ridge, and should have rejoiced to traverse Liathach from end to end, but unfortunately the weather was breaking up. Hitherto I had been too much engrossed with my climb to look behind me, or to pay much attention to the weather, but when I reached the summit of this peak I was amazed to see the transformation. Thick black clouds were rapidly approaching, the wind was getting up, and it was obvious that a storm was about to burst. I started off along the ridge as fast as I could, hoping that even now I might be able to get up Spidean, but a ridge of this nature does not lend itself to sprinting,

and just as I reached the foot of the final cone of Spidean, the heavens opened and the waters fell upon me.

I sheltered for a time beneath an overhanging rock, awhile I sustained nature with a sandwich and considered the situation. I hoped too, that the storm might pass over, and that I might be able to proceed on my way, but the storm showed no indication of passing over; on the contrary, the rain was coming down in a steady stream which looked as if it might very possibly go on for a week or two, and thunder and lightning were playing around me. Moreover, everything was by now blotted out by a thick mist, and it was soon borne in upon me that I had better give up all hope of ascending Spidean on this occasion. At present I did at any rate know exactly where I was, and although I could not see many yards around me, yet it was hardly possible that I could lose myself in going down from here, with a tremendous ridge behind me, and a valley straight in front. But if I went on up the cone of Spidean towering above me, I might very easily lose my sense of direction, and descend on the north or west side of the mountain, in which case there was no knowing when I should see Kinlochewe again. I had a compass and map with me, but at that time I had had very little practice in the use of the former, and I don't think I had ever before been caught in a mist so dense. Since then I have had numerous opportunities, like all mountaineers, to practise steering a course with the aid of compass

and map through a thick mist, and I have often regretted that I did not go on, especially as it seems doubtful whether I shall ever have the opportunity to try conclusions with Liathach again, but I think that I did the right thing in the circumstances.

I descended through a great corrie which I had noticed in the morning from below. It is a noble amphitheatre, hung about with colossal rocks, and girt with the terraces which are a peculiar feature of this interesting mountain. Two or three times I came to the verge of a smooth wall of rock, one of these terraces, and for the moment seemed stuck, but always managed to find a crack, or some weak spot. I should very much like to revisit this corrie in fine weather, but in this raging storm the scene was more awe-inspiring, and the huge rocks seemed even huger, looming dimly through the mist, than in ordinary conditions. I do not think that I have ever before or since been caught on a mountain in such a terrific war of the elements, and it was an experience worth going through. But I should certainly look back upon it with more complacency if I had attained unto the summit peak of Spidean.

I did not reach the road at the foot of the mountain until nearly five o'clock. The worst of the storm had now passed over, but the steady down-pour still continued, and everything was still smothered in mist. I was of course literally soaked to the skin; this is an expression often very loosely used, for it takes a good deal of rain to penetrate

a Norfolk suit and a flannel shirt, but on this occasion it was perfectly accurate and I felt half drowned. I had still nearly eight miles to go, and did not reach the hotel till close on seven o'clock, the rain continuing the whole time.

On my way I was stopped by a keeper, who asked whether I had been on the hills, and upon my admitting the soft impeachment, demanded my name and address. Surely it is coming it a little strong when a peaceful pedestrian is stopped on the King's highway by the myrmidons of Scottish landlordism. I felt too sodden and washed-out to say anything effective; two or three hours later, when I had been cheered and refreshed by the application of hot water to my wearied frame, and by the inducing of clean garments, I thought of many things that I would fain have said. Unfortunately it was then too late, as is so often the case in this world.

## CHAPTER IX.

### GLEN TULACHA.

I WAS still at the Kinlochewe Hotel, and was told by a fellow-guest of the walk which I am about to describe. I owe him a deep debt of gratitude, for amid a long series of Highland tramps, this stands forth pre-eminently in my memory as one of the very finest and most interesting.

I left the Hotel at 7.45 a.m. on a grey and ominous looking morning in early June, to catch the steamer up Loch Maree. All the hills were thickly shrouded in masses of mist, and I am not sure that I should have set forth, only that this was my last day, as I was due to leave Kinlochewe the following morning.

I just reached the sort of glorified tea-kettle which does duty as lake-steamer on Loch Maree in time, and was the only passenger, so fear that this particular trip was not a profitable one. I found that the steamer was not supposed to call at Letterewe, where I wanted to land, but when I explained my desires, the Captain was quite willing to call there in order to drop me, and would also have fetched me away in the evening, if I had intended to return that way, which however was not in my programme.

Loch Maree was obviously once called Loch Ewe, as is apparent from the names, Kinlochewe, Poolewe,

Letterewe, but I have never been able to discover when or why the name was changed, or who was the "Mary" or "Marie," in honour of whom it was renamed. Also I have vainly sought the signification of the prefix "Letter," and I do not know another instance of it in Scotland, though there are Letterkenny and several others in the north of Ireland.

Let nobody imagine that Letterewe is a village, even if he seek it on the Ordnance map, or on one of Mr. Bartholomew's excellent productions and should find the name appended to a cluster of black dots. Letterewe is a shooting lodge *et præterea nihil*: the principal dot represents the house, and the subsidiary dots the barns and outhouses, and so far as I know, there are no habitations on that side of the lake for many miles, except one or two scattered gamekeepers' cottages at wide intervals. But the house is in a very fine situation on the shores of Loch Maree, and at the foot of Ben Lair, with beautiful views over the lake and the mountains beyond.

I became involved in difficulties as soon as I attempted to leave the pier: one path led into a barn, whence I retreated hastily, but the only other one had even more alarming results, for it took me straight into the private garden. To beard the lion in his den is as nothing compared with the feat of encountering a Scottish deer-forest proprietor on his native heath, and dread forebodings filled my soul. I was just wondering whether I should



be hanged, drawn and quartered, and my head stuck on the gate-post as a gentle warning to other intending trespassers, when a door opened, and the ample form of the housekeeper appeared. She was evidently only too glad to see anybody from the outer world, as she was there with only one or two fellow-servants until the shooting season. She said that the path through the barn was the right one : it seemed a curious idea to put up a barn on a public path, but it is the sort of thing they do up here. She also told me that the next house on the said path was five miles away, further than that she had never been, but apparently believed that the pathless and houseless desert lay beyond. She was much disappointed to learn that I was not coming back by way of Letterewe, and was obviously doubtful as to whether I should ever come back at all, or reach anywhere ; the house five miles off seemed the *ultima thule* of her geographical attainments, beyond lay the Great Unknown.

I tore myself away from the good lady's alluring conversation, and set off along the first-rate path, which strikes over the hill to the Fionn Loch. Ben Lair on the right ought to have been the dominant feature of the landscape, but was unfortunately swathed in mist. My first idea had been to ascend Ben Lair and descend into Glen Tulacha, but I was not very keen on tackling an unknown and invisible mountain on such a day. There was no rain all day, although it continually looked and felt as though rain were just on the point of coming.

Soon after passing the col between Ben Lair and the little hill of Meall Vannie, the path to Glen Tulacha and Loch Fada branched off to the right, while the main path swept steeply down to the south-eastern corner of the Fionn Loch, and on to the solitary cottage of Carnmore, the house five miles off, of which the housekeeper at Letterewe had told me. I mounted a little knoll close by, in order to get the lovely vista up the Fionn Loch, and to take a last look at Carnmore, as I was not to see another inhabited house for five or six hours; fortunately it was fairly clear in that direction, and the view up the Fionn Loch with one or two tiny islets scattered about the lake was very beautiful, and perhaps the fact that the surrounding hills were smothered in mist heightened the effect. Then I turned down the gloomy defile of Glen Tulacha, which indeed was what I had "come out for to see." The great feature of it is the mighty rampart of the iron-grey cliffs of Ben Lair, which form the southern wall of the glen. The north side of the glen is quite uninteresting, and the valley is one long bog from end to end. The path came to an abrupt end almost at once, although marked on my map as proceeding down the entire length of the glen. I tried it all ways; at the bottom of the valley, at the foot of the rocks on the right, along the hills on the left, but everywhere it was alike, and for more than an hour I squelched through unceasing bogs, a veritable Slough of Despond. As I have remarked in a previous chapter, I particularly dislike bogs, but

they flourish exceedingly in Scotland, and one has to put up with them, and in this case those wonderful grey cliffs extending the whole length of the glen, redeemed it from utter dreariness, and rendered it indeed one of the most impressive bits of Highland scenery that I have ever seen. Most unfortunately the upper parts of the cliffs were in the mist, and I could therefore form no idea of their height, nor judge of their attractions for the rock-climber. The rock, so far as I could see between the wisps of mist, which hung down like a ragged curtain, seemed very similar to the gabbro of the Coolins; but I know nothing of even the ABC of geology, so may be entirely mistaken. It was very annoying to see nothing of these fine cliffs except the lower part of a line of great buttresses, but I saw enough to convince me that they are very fine rocks, and to make me resolve to visit them again in better weather, if I ever have the opportunity.

It was 12.30 when I reached the bottom of Glen Tulacha and the north-western end of Loch Fada, nearly three hours from Letterewe. I had hopes that the bogs would here come to an end, and that I should henceforth have firmer footing, but these hopes were vain, for the bogs continued the whole way along the shores of Loch Fada. The maps mark a house, or at least a black dot, which I supposed represented a house, "Claonadh," about a mile down the lake, and a path leading to it by the way I had come, and I had expected to see some fellow-creatures here. The path, as I have already

remarked, is no more, and when I reached Claonadh, I found only the four bare walls, and not much even of them, of what had once been a cottage. A grassy patch, a tiny oasis in the boggy desert around, was the only other sign that human life had once existed here. It was quite a disappointment to me, and imparted a melancholy tinge to my thoughts as I ate my lunch by the side of the burn, and speculated as to the former inhabitants and their fate. Had they been removed to make a deer-forest—banished, if not butchered, and to many a Highlander the former were the worse fate, to make a Sassenach holiday, to leave space for the sport of an American millionaire, or a wealthy brewer? Are they perhaps toiling on the Canadian prairie, consumed with a bitter “Heimweh,” a vain longing for the little hut on these lonely shores of Loch Fada, which they will probably never see again?

The weather improved somewhat as the day wore on, but the mist only lifted slightly, and very erratically. The Mhaigdean and Ben Tarsuinn remained all day in seclusion; Ben Lair during the afternoon emerged from the mist, but I was then too far away to see the wonderful cliffs. I was very desirous to get a clear view of Slioch’s western face, which is by far the finest feature of that mountain, but it did not emerge from the mist all day.

I wonder how many people are aware that we have a “Jungfrau” among Scottish mountains, as well as in the mightier Alps? I am not a Gaelic scholar, as I have already observed, but I am told

that Mhaigdean means "maiden." If this be so, philologists may speculate on the curious similarity between the English and Gaelic words and the German word "Mädchen," although as "*mh*" is (I believe) pronounced as "*v*," the similarity dwindles somewhat in Gaelic in the spoken word. However, this obdurate maiden refused to disclose herself to me, and "If she be not fair to me, what care I how fair she be?" Perhaps on some future occasion, I may be permitted to make her closer acquaintance.

Reaching the foot of Loch Fada at 3.30, I was glad to find a path leading down Glen na Muic to the Heights of Kinlochewe, where the houses were the first I had passed since Letterewe, thence a good road took me back to the Hotel, which I reached at 6.30, after a most delightful walk.







To [face p. 71]

VIEW OF SKYE, FROM NEAR KYLE OF LOCH ALSH.

[Photo by Richard Morelan.]

## CHAPTER X.

SGURR NAN GILLEAN, BY THE PINNACLES.

I HAD come to Sligachan on a Saturday in early June, in what is usually considered typical Skye weather, though in my opinion Skye weather is much maligned. If one accepts *au pied de la lettre* all that one reads about the Coolins, one would imagine that the sun is never seen in that dismal region, and that it rains unceasingly, whereas on my visits to Skye I have usually been favoured with fairly good weather, and on the two occasions when I went in the early summer, the only complaint I could make was of the almost tropical sun, which beat down upon me relentlessly, and made climbing a terribly dry business. However, my first view of Skye was certainly dismal and dreary enough for anybody. As I emerged from the Kyle of Lochalsh railway station, the rain was pouring down in pitiless sheets, a stiff gale was tearing down the Kyle, and the Promised Land was entirely blotted out by mist, except just a strip of coast-line. Yet even under these unfavourable conditions Kyle Akin struck me as one of the foremost of the beauty-spots of Scotland. I fell in love with it at first sight and familiarity has only increased my admiration.

I suppose the sponsor of Kyle Akin was Haco,

King of Norway, who, like many other people, found the Scotch "ill to meddle wi'," and was badly mauled at Largs some 600 years ago. On his retreat to Norway he got into trouble in these narrow straits, and indeed the wonder is that he ever emerged therefrom, although I suppose the Vikings must have been almost as familiar with these seas as with their own fjords. Probably, when he got back home with the remnant of his great armada, the wife of his bosom met him with: "I told you so." And if he did not slay her there and then he was a Christian, and a better husband than she deserved.

Near Kyle Akin, and almost exactly opposite Kyle of Lochalsh railway station, are the fragmentary remains of Castle Moil, said to have been the residence of a Danish princess, familiarly known as Saucy Mary, who established herself in this stronghold and seems to have made a good thing out of the plunder of passing ships. A strong-minded female evidently, who would have scorned the methods of the modern suffragette. If she wanted anything, she took it, vote or no vote.

When I arose on the Sunday morning at Sligachan, I beheld a cloudless sky of Italian blue, and a blazing sun. It seemed a pity that my sabbatarian principles forbade me to go forth. After breakfast I had some talk with two other men, and maintained (probably from sheer cussedness), that the weather would change for the worse before the day was out. They laughed me to scorn, and went forth to disport

themselves on the hills. I strolled up the Glen Brittle footpath with the idea of reconnoitring Sgurr nan Gillean, and lo ! after an hour or so, I perceived a black cloud approaching. As I was clothed in Sunday raiment, I returned to the Hotel, and shortly after a tremendous thunderstorm burst over us. Later on the two Sabbath-breakers returned in a sodden condition. I said : " I told you so." They did not slay me, but they looked as if they would like to, and they made use of expressions quite unfit for publication.

On Monday morning I left the Hotel at 8.50 for Sgurr nan Gillean viâ the Pinnacles. To my urban eye it looked a bad morning, and the summits were invisible, but everybody assured me—and I consulted every available native—that it would be a fine day, and for a wonder they were right ; which, however, is the less to their credit, in that they always prophesy the same thing, and consequently their prophecies *must* come right occasionally even in Skye. I have often wondered why the native almost invariably prophesies fine weather. Is it optimism pure and simple, or does the milk of human kindness prompt him to give the answer, which he knows we long to hear ? A cynical friend once suggested to me that it is the outcome of a subtle form of pessimism, and that the native, when he sees us return in the evening in a thoroughly sodden condition, gloats with an unholy joy over our miserable condition. But this I do not believe. Even the mildest of mankind may on occasion

experience the feeling known to our Teutonic cousins as *Schadenfreude*, but the average native is quite incapable of such deliberate iniquity as this hypothesis would suggest.

Anyhow it soon became exceedingly warm work as I toiled over the boggy moor towards the Pinnacle Ridge, and finding a tiny spring near the foot of the first pinnacle, I halted for a little light refreshment and a prolonged rest. And as I lay on my back in the heather, I wondered why on earth I spend my holidays in the toil of climbing mountains. I have been working hard for a year, and when I get a fortnight's holiday I come up here and work harder still. And I might have gone to the seaside, and basked in this glorious weather, and just pottered about. Yes, and have got thoroughly sick of it in less than a week. It is no use arguing, or trying to analyse the thing with scientific precision, when one knows what one wants. One year I had been working rather harder than usual, and had had a good deal of worry, and I talked to myself like a father, a maiden aunt, and an elder sister, all rolled into one. The result of it all was, that I went to a quiet little seaside place in Wales, of which some friends had given me a glowing account. The first day it was delightful to potter about, the second day it began to pall upon me. The third day I was sick of it, and studied the maps in search of the nearest hills. The next day I tramped twenty-eight miles, with three fairly respectable hills thrown in, and felt much refreshed. I have never tried



that sort of holiday since, and never will again, if I can help it, at any rate until I am too decrepit to climb hills.

The climbing was nothing more than rough walking until the top of the third pinnacle was reached. Then I did rather wonder whether I should ever leave it again alive, as I stepped on to the summit, and space disclosed itself before me with dramatic suddenness. The upper part of the pinnacle in fact overhangs, and one more step would have landed me on the rocks some hundred feet below. Retreat was not to be thought of, yet I could not see how I was to descend. The beneficent stream of mountain literature, which of late years has gushed forth so plenteously from Keswick and elsewhere, had not then begun to flow, and I had not understood what lay before me. As a matter of fact this is not a difficult climb, but I had had absolutely no experience of rock-climbing. All my modest mountaineering had been mere hill-walks, such as I have described in the foregoing pages. I do not think I had ever set foot on a rock before, at least with scansorial intent. I had not even got nails in my boots, for I was then so utterly ignorant of the very ABC of rock-climbing, that I did not even know that nails are necessary. If it had been possible to pass along the flanks of the pinnacle, I should have done so, but on both sides great slabby rocks fell away almost perpendicularly. The orthodox route is on the left, but I did not know that then, and when I went to the left I did not like the look of it at all.



Then I went to the right, and found a route which I descended easily enough, until I came to the edge of a smooth holdless rock, at the bottom of which was a sort of gully or chimney; this looked almost a high-road compared with its surroundings, and it was easy enough to drop into it. The difficulty was that I could not see the lower part of the gully, or even if it had a lower part at all; also, and particularly, that though it was easy enough to drop down the smooth holdless rock into the gully, it would apparently be impossible to climb up again, in case I could not proceed down the gully. I knew absolutely nothing of rock-climbing, but it required no technical knowledge of that art to make me see that it was madness to descend any place which I could not reascend if necessary. Yet what was I to do? There seemed no other way, and I had an instinctive conviction that the gully below was the thoroughfare from the third to the fourth pinnacle. I sat there for ten minutes debating the question, then I suddenly let myself go, and the thing was done. Fortunately the gully descended with a sweet reasonableness to the col between the pinnacles.

I do not in the least defend my conduct on this occasion. In fact, I relate the incident principally as a warning to other aspiring novices. For, if there had been any insuperable difficulty in the gully, I should have been in an exceedingly awkward position. It is true that they knew at Sligachan where I was going, and if I had got hopelessly stuck, a search-party would have been out early next morning, and would soon have found me. But

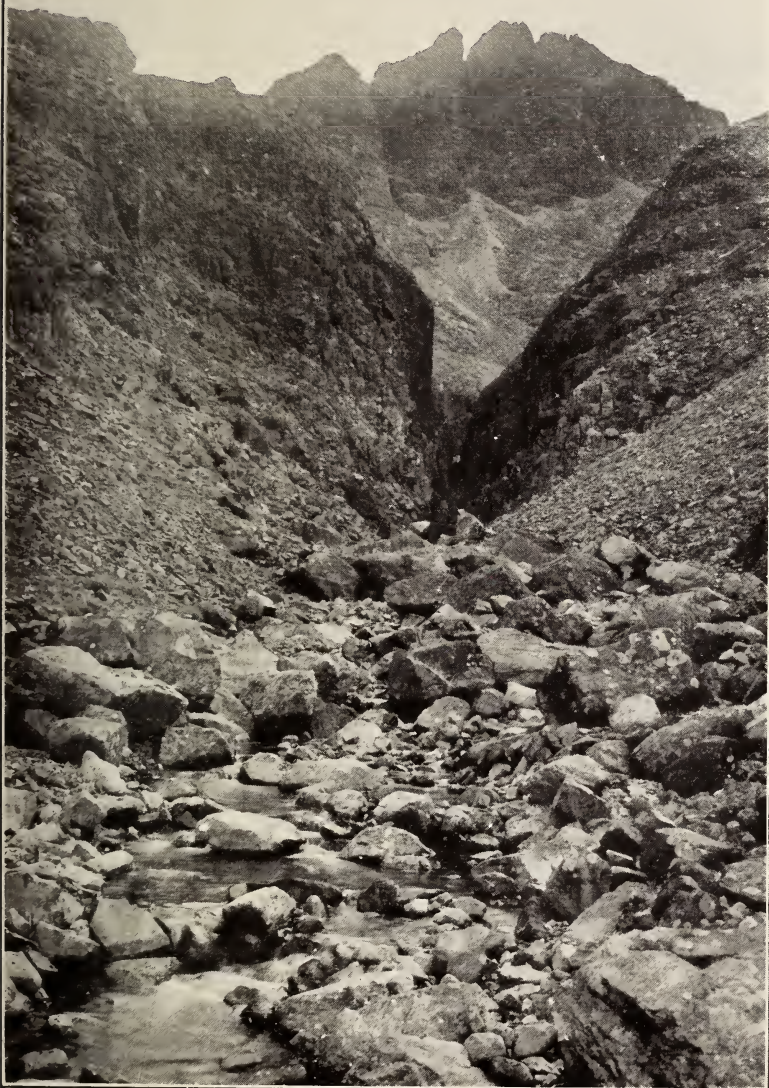
one does not want to be the object of a search-party, which moreover would be an expensive luxury.

It will have been noticed that I am nearly always alone. Solitary scrambling is universally condemned—by those who don't like it. I could adduce many arguments in favour thereof, and could bring forth one in particular, which I think would justify me. But I am not concerned here to justify myself, nor have I any desire to seduce anybody from the paths of orthodox virtue. Only this I will say : that most men condemn solitary scrambling because they don't like it themselves ; they “ compound for sins they are inclined to, by damning those they have no mind to.”

Some years ago an accident occurred on a British mountain. The leader fell ; he was injured, but was not killed, remarkably enough. It afterwards transpired that the second man did not see how, or why, he fell. There was nothing to obstruct his view of his leader, upon whose movements his whole attention ought to have been concentrated ; he was admiring the view, or himself. It is generally supposed that the rope caught, and jerked the leader out of his steps. Even if this were not the case, the second man was criminally neglectful, in that he was not concentrating his attention upon the leader. He condemned himself, when he admitted that he was not looking, at the moment the leader fell. He and his like ought to be sent to Coventry by all climbing parties. Am I safer alone, or with such a man ? Yet that man abuses me for tackling easy climbs alone.

After this I had no further excitement, and reached the summit of Sgurr nan Gilleann ("the peak of the young men," 3167 feet), at 2.20 p.m., which of course is preposterous time from Sligachan, even for a novice, but it was far too hot to worry about records. The mist had cleared off long before this, and I do not think that I have ever seen a more beautiful view than that which now lay before me. The great island of Skye lay at my feet, like a huge map, and as one noted the innumerable arms of the sea winding in and out, and often almost meeting, with great wing-like promontories in every direction, one felt the appropriateness of the Gaelic name, Eilean Sgiathanach (spelling not guaranteed), *i. e.* "the winged isle."

After a short rest upon the summit, I descended the West Ridge until I found an easy chimney, down which I climbed to the Bhasteir corrie, and was very thankful to find myself off the rocks, and still in possession of my full complement of limbs. I had had some idea of also climbing the Bhasteir, but it was now about four o'clock, and a mirage of the hotel dining-room floated before my eyes, myself as the central figure doing ample justice to an excellent dinner, and imbibing copious libations of cooling drinks. The last sandwich consumed, the last drop of whiskey gone to the bourn whence no whiskey returneth, the mirage was too much for me; I turned my back on the Bhasteir, and made my way out of the corrie, and across the moor to the fleshpots of Sligachan.



*To face p. 78]*

*[Photo by Richard Moreland]*

THE BHASTEIR GORGE AND THE PINNACLES OF SGURR NAN GILLEAN.





## CHAPTER XI.

### BRUACH NA FRITHE.

THE next day was again very hot. I made up my mind that it was too hot for climbing, and that I would just potter about. But after all there is not much to do at Sligachan except climb, and after I had got outside a fairly extensive breakfast I felt more energetic. So I gathered myself together, and about ten o'clock set forth for Bruach na Frithe, as being the easiest thing in the neighbourhood. I followed the Glen Brittle path until I was opposite the Fionn Choire, then crossed the burn with some little difficulty, as it was rather full, and toiled up the corrie. It certainly was hot, and again I asked myself those futile questions, as to why I do this sort of thing. And the temptation assailed me to lie down in the first suitable place that presented itself, close to a burn, or even in it, and abide there till eventide, and then return to Sligachan and tell them that I had been up Bruach na Frithe, and who should say me nay? But unfortunately I possess a conscience, and persevered doggedly in my self-imposed task.

There is very little to relate about this ascent, as it is a mere walk all the way. When I got about opposite the gap in the north ridge of Bruach na



Frithe I left the corrie, and struck up the scree on the right, and thence over the rocks to the ridge, but met with nothing exciting, and reached the summit at two o'clock. This mountain is popularly supposed to be the finest view-point in Skye. Personally I find it difficult to believe that any view could surpass that which had so impressed me the previous day from Sgurr nan Gillean, except that of course you cannot see Sgurr nan Gillean from itself, and it is one of the most graceful mountains in Britain. However, it was hazy out at sea to-day, so that I had no opportunity to compare the two mountains as view-points.

From Bruach na Frithe I went first to Sgurr a' Fionn Choire. It is an easy little scramble, but it is just over the magic height of 3000 feet. Then I went to look at the Bhasteir Tooth, which I very much wanted to climb. First I inspected the caves on the north side, but came to the conclusion that the game was not worth the candle, as the rocks were so wet and dirty. Then I got on the col, just below the overhanging nose, with the intention of trying the route which starts from here up the western face, but soon decided that it was rather too risky alone. I have since often regretted my pusillanimity on this occasion, but I certainly did the right thing, considering my very slight experience of rock-climbing at that time. Remained therefore only the old route from the Lota Corrie, but this involved a long descent over screes, and I hate screes; moreover, my interior was by now in its

usual parched condition, so I gave up all thought of climbing the Bhasteir Tooth to-day, and adjourned to the nearest burn, and passed half-an-hour in futile attempts to moisten myself; it was like trying to water the Sahara with a penny squirt, but the process was agreeable while it lasted. When this delightful occupation began to pall upon me I found it was nearly four o'clock, and the spirit being none too willing, and the flesh lamentably weak, I set off for Sligachan.

Before I got back to the hotel I had an experience of what Skye really can do in the matter of weather. So far a tropical sun had blazed down upon me from a sky of cloudless blue. Soon after I got off the rocks, the sky became suddenly overcast; a storm was evidently brewing, and I hurried on in a vain attempt to reach the hotel before it broke. I was just in the middle of the boggy, open moor, where there was no shelter for miles, when the heavens suddenly opened, and a deluge of rain and hail fell upon me. In three minutes my garments were so thoroughly sodden that I could feel the hailstones on my bare back, through coat, waistcoat and shirt. It got very dark, and all the surrounding country was blotted out; with no visible landmarks I only retained the vaguest idea of the direction in which lay Sligachan. Several times I slipped into a boggy hole up to my knees, and when at length I arrived at the hotel I was in the filthiest condition imaginable.

I think this experience must have damped my ardour, (it certainly damped everything else that I

had on or about me) ; at any rate, though I stayed four days longer at Sligachan, and though the tropical sun and the cloudless blue sky were turned full on during that time, at least during the usual solar working hours, yet I did nothing, except the walk round Camasunary and Loch Coruisk on my last day. The heat was the principal deterrent agent ; it really required great strength of mind to persevere in that long grind over the moor, which had to be done before one reached the foot of one's climb. Afterwards, when I had returned to my native plains, I bitterly regretted the deplorable waste of those three days.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THROUGH GLEN AFFRIC.

FROM Invercannich to Glen Shiel is one of the very finest pedestrian routes in Scotland, and had been an object of my ambition for many years. But it would never fit in with any of my Highland trips, and so it always got left, until at last one year I found myself at Cannich in the middle of June. It is not a walk to be lightly undertaken, as it is thirty-four or thirty-five miles from Cannich to Glen Shiel, and more than half the way lies over very rough ground, as this veracious chronicle will show. Moreover, as Cannich is seventeen miles from Beauly, and Glen Shiel somewhere about the same distance from its nearest railway station, it is hardly practicable to send one's things on. I carried a *rucksack*, which contained an entire change of garments, an extra shirt or two, and other necessities, and sent a spare pair of boots on by parcels post.

Thus equipped, I left the Glen Affric Hotel at 8.10 a.m. in a smart shower; indeed I was of two minds whether to set out or not, as it was a very unpleasant morning; great swirling masses of wet-looking, black clouds, alternated with transient gleams of blue sky and bright sunlight, which raised hopes destined to bitter disappointment. It would

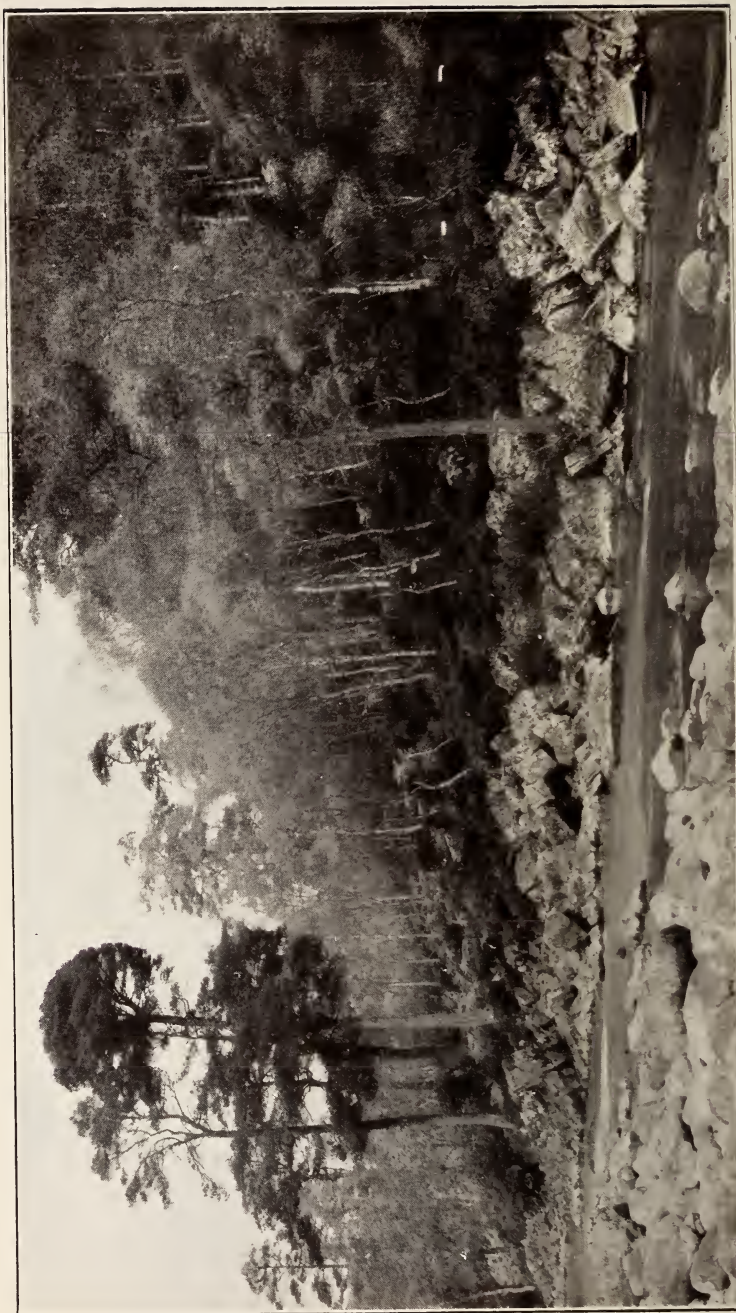
probably have been wiser not to have started, but I have had many a grand walk on a worse-looking day, and if in the Highlands the pedestrian defers his big walks until an undoubtedly good day, he might easily spend his entire holiday in the process, and never get a good day or a big walk at all.

Strong representations had been made to me by a man staying at the hotel to the effect that I ought to go up Mam Soul, as being the highest mountain in this part of Scotland. I had not intended to ascend it, principally because of its remoteness from any possible headquarters, but I was told that I could probably get a bed somewhere on my line of march and go on to Glen Shiel the next day. The mountains, however, were all so smothered in mist, that it was doubtful whether it would be advisable to ascend Mam Soul; and on the other hand, if it should turn out a pouring wet day, I was not keen on walking the entire distance to Glen Shiel, so that on setting out I was in considerable doubt as to what the day's programme would be.

The greater part of the route lay through the deer-forest of Glen Affric, belonging to the Chisholm family. I had heard some alarming tales of the treatment that a common, or garden, tourist might expect in this region. There is, of course, a public path right through the forest, from Invercannich to Loch Duich, otherwise I do not think I should have dared to set foot in this Tibet of the Highlands; if I wandered a foot from the path, I expected to hear a terrible voice shriek, like the Queen of Hearts:







[Photo by Richard Mordland.

IN GLEN AFFRIC.

“ Off with his head ! ” I had been told in all seriousness that keepers and other cottagers (if there are any), were forbidden to take in benighted tourists except in cases of absolute necessity, such as illness, and that in such cases they were instructed to make a prohibitive charge, *pour encourager les autres*.

I have been told of an epitaph in some Scottish kirkyard : “ He was a true friend, a sincere Christian, and the best deer-stalker in Lochaber ” ; indicating a crescendo scale of qualities in the eyes of the composer thereof. The only thing that surprised me was, that it did not go on to add, “ and he slew many tourists with his own good right hand.”

About two miles from Cannich the entrance to the Chisholm’s Pass is reached ; here the high road (if such it can be called) turns off to the left, crosses the river and goes on to Tomich and Guisachan, but there is a good road to Affric Lodge, (ten miles farther on), which climbs up the hill, until one gets a beautiful view over the trees of the densely wooded glen, and the Affric river tumbling over innumerable rocks far below. Then the road and river approach more nearly to one another, and the romantic scenery culminates in the wonderful gorge of the Dog Falls. I had intended to tramp steadily to Affric Lodge (twelve and a half miles from Cannich) without any halt, but the occasional gleams of sunshine were warming, the *rucksack* heavy, the scenery seductive, and I was constrained to make one or two short halts.

Just as I reached Loch Beneveian I was overtaken by a keeper on a bicycle, who very kindly offered to carry my *rucksack* to Affric Lodge, and when I accepted his offer with much gratitude, absolutely refused a gratuity. I hoped fervently that the terrible Queen of Hearts would not "off with his head!" in return for his kindness to a tourist. After he had gone, it occurred to me that his Norfolk suit looked far more respectable than my own weather-worn habiliments, and I felt a little anxious as to whether I had committed a solecism in offering him a tip; but he was a keeper, for I inquired afterwards. Thanks to him the next five miles or so of my tramp were much easier. Loch Beneveian is a fine sheet of water, diversified by numerous little bays and several pine-clad islets, but when one has to walk past it, it seems a dreadful length, and there are two more small lochs to pass, before Affric Lodge is reached. I got there at 12.30, which is bad time from Cannich, but I had sheltered two or three times from passing showers, and had lingered occasionally to admire the view. So far the weather had not been amiss; I had had several showers, but nothing serious, but I was sorry to see that the black clouds did not lift, and there was evidently worse to come.

Affric Lodge is a palatial shooting-box standing at the east end of Loch Affric; behind it, and facing the little loch, are one or two cottages, where my *rucksack* was awaiting me. I was received with the most amiable hospitality; they gave me some

lunch, for which at first they refused to accept anything, and when I offered them a shilling, said it was too much. They said Mam Soul was quite out of the question, not from any proprietorial objections, but because the mountain was smothered in thick mist, and bad weather was evidently coming on. Indeed a weatherwise native opined that it was likely to be several days before the weather would be fit for the ascent, (wherein he turned out to be entirely and absolutely correct, for the next three days were simply beastly), and as meanwhile there was no earthly thing for me to do there, if I could not climb, I decided to go on. I should have liked to climb Mam Soul, but it certainly did not look inviting in the thick mist.

I left Affric Lodge at 1.15; the road goes no farther, but there is a good path from here to Aultbeath, the keeper's cottage at the far end of this huge Affric forest, nine miles from Affric Lodge. Aultbeath is a common name in the Highlands, and I should like to know its meaning. "Ault," or rather "Allt," is of course a stream, or burn. Baddeley contradicts himself. He gives the meaning as the "burn of the cattle," yet in his glossary he says, "bea (beath) " .. birch, and moreover gives "Aultbea" (which is the same word) as an example. Cattle is "ba." Loch Affric is a fine lake, but less attractive in my opinion than Loch Beneveian; however, the fact that I passed the latter in continued sunshine, and the former in driving rain, may perhaps colour my impressions.



Still, Loch Beneveian is certainly better wooded and offers more variety; Loch Affric is rather bare and monotonous, although the greatly superior height of its encircling mountains, especially at the western end, as compared with those around Loch Beneveian, would no doubt lend an additional majesty to the scene, when one can see them. Unfortunately, they were to-day completely hidden, and I saw nothing of them, except an occasional glimpse of a snow-capped ridge through a momentary break in the mist. During the nine miles to Aultbeath, I did not see a human being, nor any sign of human life. I believe there are one or two cottages at the western end of Loch Affric, but suppose they must be hidden behind a hill, as I saw nothing of them. The weather was getting steadily worse, and it rained hard nearly all the way, and I was very glad to reach Aultbeath at 4.45. I had a copious tea in a very comfortable room, followed by the usual coy "nothing," when I asked what was to pay; I proffered the handmaiden a shilling, whereupon she exclaimed that it was too much, and only took it after some considerable pressure, figurative and moral, be it strictly understood, not literal or corporeal. I feel it a duty to record that what I had heard as to the treatment of tourists in this district appears to be at least greatly exaggerated.

Due south of Aultbeath there ought to have been a very fine view of an interesting group of mountains, several of which are nearly as high as Mam

Soul, but they too were now wrapped in thick black mist. Through the midst of them a wild and little-used path leads over to Clunie Inn.

By the time I had finished tea, it was 5.30; Shiel Inn was thirteen or fourteen miles distant, eleven miles of which was over a very rough path. Should I push on, or stay the night at Aultbeath? This would be my last chance (or so I thought) of staying the night on the way, but it was still early, and what on earth was I to do all the evening? Besides, I felt a natural desire to go the whole hog, *i. e.* do the whole tramp from Cannich to Glen Shiel in the day; on the other hand, Aultbeath is surrounded by many lofty summits, and if I stayed the night I might bag a few peaks on the morrow, on my way to Shiel Inn. Finally I decided to let the weather settle it: if it were fine I would go on; if it were still raining I had at any rate a good excuse for staying where I was. I went to the front door and lo! it was fine, or at least it was not actually raining. I realized then that I had only been seeking a decent excuse to stop, but I accepted the decision loyally, shouldered my *rucksack*, which now seemed to weigh about half a ton, and set off. After all, I thought, it is only thirteen or fourteen miles, I ought to reach Shiel Inn about ten o'clock, even allowing for some rough ground. But the rough ground was rougher than I had expected, and there were other difficulties: soon after leaving Aultbeath a wide expanse of dreary boggy moorland, where several glens meet, has to be crossed; all the burns



were very full, and the stepping-stones were on several occasions under water. The process of crossing a raging torrent on stones some few inches below the surface of the water, with a heavy *rucksack* on one's back, is a gymnastic feat which I had not previously practised, but at which I now consider myself an adept after my performances on this occasion. After this there follows a long and toilsome rise of several hundred feet, past the solitary shanty of Camban (a keeper's cottage, but no longer in the Affric forest), to the col between Glen Fionn and Glen Lichd.

The descent into Glen Lichd is very steep and quite magnificent; it is, indeed, one of the grandest bits of Highland scenery that I have ever seen, and a fine waterfall greatly enhances the beauty of this wild and remote glen. As a matter of fact, I hardly saw it; it had begun to rain soon after I left Aultbeath, and as I descended into Glen Lichd, it was pouring in sheets, and I saw little except the turned-down brim of my slouch hat, and a square yard or so of very rough path at my feet. At a solitary cottage in Glen Lichd I stopped to ask whether I was on the right path, as there seemed to be paths on both sides of the river. The people hospitably invited me in for a rest and a cup of tea, and although it was now 8.20 and I had still about seven miles to go, I had not strength of mind to refuse. It was a poor little shanty, but the people were most hospitable; they gave me excellent tea and eggs, and could with difficulty be persuaded to accept a shilling.

Half-an-hour later I set out again down the sloppy boggy track, which in places was very faint. It seemed a long weary way down that glen, and I was now getting rather tired, which was perhaps excusable; fortunately I had no more rain. The *rucksack* seemed to increase in weight at the rate of about a pound avoirdupois every five minutes, and before I reached the Hotel it seemed to be loaded with granite blocks. I don't think I ever was so sick of anything, as I was of that unoffending *rucksack*. The path, the river, and the glen, twisted and turned about in every direction, and seemed interminable, till I began to wonder whether for my sins I was doomed to perambulate that Highland glen until the crack of doom. Fortunately in those latitudes at this time of year (the middle of June), it is only dark for an hour or two; otherwise I might easily have wandered about all night. Everything in this world comes to an end at length, and I did at last reach the high road at the head of Loch Duich about 10.30; from there it was plain sailing for about two and a half miles to the Glen Shiel Hotel, which I was very thankful to find still open, although, had it been closed, I should have got in somehow, if I had had to break a window in order to do so.

I regret to have to record that this old-established hotel has lately been suppressed.

## CHAPTER XIII.

FROM GLEN SHIEL TO BROADFORD BY KYLE RHEA.

FOR two days I had been shut up in Shiel Inn, and although it was a cosy hostelry, and nobody need desire more comfortable headquarters; and although a comely maiden ministered unto my bodily needs with a neat deftness, which left nothing to be desired; yet I was getting tired of it all. Not of the Shiel Inn, nor of the comely maiden, but rather of the enforced inaction. I had arrived late on the Monday night, wet and tired, after the long tramp through Glen Affric recorded in the last chapter. The weather next day was of the same variety; the mountains were all more or less enveloped in thick black mist, and there were frequent smart showers. I had had a long tramp the previous day, so decided to give myself a rest, and climb on the morrow.

The morrow arrived, and was an absolutely hopeless day. When I arose with the lark, it was pouring down in sheets of steady, pitiless rain, which gave no hope of clearing. I went back to bed, and the lark, if it were a sensible bird, did likewise. All through the day it was the same, whenever I looked out of the window, the same mists enshrouding all the hills, the same torrents of rain descending in the same steady fashion. I spent

the day in an armchair in front of a good fire, although it was the end of June, and only went out for an hour in the afternoon for a breath of fresh air.

It was a great disappointment to do no mountaineering at Glen Shiel. Sgurr Ouran, the dominating mountain of the district, is, I suppose, nothing particular from a purely climbing point of view; being, so far as I could see, simply a very steep grassy cone, but it is a very shapely cone, and I had heard much of the beautiful view from its summit up Loch Duich and Loch Alsh. Moreover, I had hoped to proceed from it along the chain of mountains eastwards towards Clunie Inn. Furthermore, I desired to explore the line of hills on the south of Glen Shiel; I had heard rumours of a knife-edge ridge said to be impassable, though probably it is nothing of the sort. However, I had to turn my back on all these allurements, as I was due at Broadford on Thursday.

When I descended on Thursday morning, I found it fine, but the clouds were still hovering around Sgurr Ouran in a way which did not meet with my approval. The comely maiden, however, committed herself to the positive statement, which in matters meteorological is always imprudent, that it would be a fine day. Whether she wanted to get rid of me, I know not, but anyhow the comely maiden was what Jerome K. Jerome euphemistically calls an "untruther," and later on in the day I hope her conscience smote her.

I started at 11.10 a.m.; rather late to set out,

but it was not a very big day, only about twenty-two miles, and up to the last moment I was undecided whether to ascend Sgurr Ouran, and stay at Glen Shiel another night. The mist obstinately refused to lift, so the temptation to desert the path of duty, and disport myself upon Sgurr Ouran, was not so keen as it might have been. And I knew that I ought to get to Broadford that day, as important business letters might be, and in fact actually were, awaiting me.

For three miles the road zigzags steeply upwards to the Mam Rattachan Pass, rising about 1100 feet in that distance; the sun was temporarily in full working order, and I was carrying a *rucksack* stuffed to the brim, so that it was warm work. The view, looking down into the head of Loch Duich with its encircling mountains, and the little strath of Glen Shiel, is one of the most beautiful I have ever seen, and offered ample compensation for the toilsome tramp. Sgurr Ouran (I will *not* write Sgurr Fhuaran, nor will I write Scour Ouran) was the dominating feature of the landscape, and as its graceful cone gradually emerged from the enveloping clouds, I thought what a fool I was, to be toiling up this road with half-a-ton of *rucksack* on my back, when I might just as well have been ascending that graceful cone. However, before many hours, I was very glad not to be on Sgurr Ouran.

The long descent on the other side, from the summit of the Mam Rattachan is very uninteresting; on both sides of the road nothing but vast stretches



of boggy moorland, unrelieved by a shapely mountain, or any other object of interest. Ben Screel was a disappointment; from Loch Hourn it looks a fine peak, but from this side it is rather shapeless and featureless. The Skye Hills were all shrouded in mist; at one spot a tiny triangle of the Sound of Sleat came into view, but it soon vanished behind a hill. The weather gradually changed for the worse; one or two smart showers came on, and increased to a heavy downpour, just before I got to the point where the Glenelg and Kyle Rhea roads fork. I hesitated what to do; if I went down to the Glenelg Hotel, I should escape a wetting if it turned out a wet afternoon; but if it cleared up, the flesh-pots of a comfortable and fully licensed hotel would probably be too much for my strength of mind, and I should get no farther that day. I know my little weaknesses, or at least some of them. It was still early in the day, and I had only done ten miles. On the other hand, if I turned off to Kyle Rhea, I could go on to Broadford if the weather were reasonable, and could stop at one of the Kyle Rhea inns if it were not, so I decided for Kyle Rhea.

Soon afterwards a funny incident occurred. The downpour increased, and there seemed no natural shelter handy, so I went up to a cottage, and asked the old lady if she would kindly allow me to shelter until the storm passed over. I have met with so much genuine hospitality in all my wanderings in Scotland, that I was very much astonished to receive a rather incoherent, but certainly negative, answer,



followed by a torrent of verbosity, of which I could only make out the words, " we are not rich enough." For a moment I was utterly unable to understand what the old party was driving at, but presently I gathered that she took me for a peddler; my *rucksack* was covered by a mackintosh cape, and probably I looked rather disreputable. I made no attempt to undeceive her, but merely observed that I hoped to have the favour of her orders when next I came that way. Presently I found shelter under a tree, where I remained for nearly an hour until a lull in the deluge occurred.

Owing to this delay I did not reach Kyle Rhea until four o'clock, and found the inn on this side a very poor place. However, I had some tea and eggs, and the old lady knew how to put up her prices for Sassenach tourists, though her English was about on a par with my Gaelic—both being practically non-existent; she knew just enough to ask one-shilling-and-sixpence, and to see that she got it. I had very soon made up my mind that I could not stay the night there, whatever the weather might do, so decided to cross the ferry and see what the inn on the Skye side might be like. This Kyle Rhea strait (though that is tautological, as Kyle means a strait, or literally " narrow," the meaning of " Rhea " I have not been able to discover) is very fine from a scenic point of view, and a pretty bit of water from the point of view of navigation. The two tide-ways meet here, and it is interesting to watch the ferrymen steer their boat due south for some distance, as though they

were going to Glenelg, instead of across the strait; then they presently catch the other tide-way, and the boat suddenly flies northwards to the shore of Skye.

The inn on the other side looked about on a par with the one on the mainland, so I decided at once to walk on to Broadford, and as it was only just five o'clock, I had plenty of time, if only the weather would be reasonable, which, however, it wouldn't. I had not proceeded more than a few hundred yards, when the heavens suddenly opened, and a terrific storm burst over me. The road ascends very steeply to over 900 feet in two and a half miles. The wind tore straight down the pass with fifty-hurricane power, and often almost blew me off my feet, and during the whole of that two and a half miles the rain streamed down in torrents. Half-way up I met a native, who cheerfully remarked that "it was wet," a proposition which I do not think I could have well disputed, even if I had felt militant, which I certainly did not.

I believe this is a fine wild road, when one can see it, but I couldn't to-day, or at least I could see nothing of the surrounding scenery. The hills around were all smothered in mist, the Kyle and the mainland entirely blotted out; I saw nothing, during that miserable two and a half miles, except a square yard or two of very sloppy road at my feet. It took me one and a half hours to do the two and a half miles, and I only halted once, when a friendly projecting rock invited to shelter, and I slipped behind it for a few moments, to pull myself together.

As I reached the summit of the pass, the storm abated, and after one or two showers, it finally passed over.

The descent on the Broadford side is much more gradual, as it takes four and a half miles to reach sea-level again. It is also very dreary, a typical Skye landscape of peat bogs, with not a single habitation, or sign of human life, for a distance of about seven miles. The only redeeming feature to-day was a ravine on the left, through which tumbled a noisy burn. In clear weather the view of the Coolins, and of the islands lying between Skye and the mainland, should redeem the prospect from dreariness, but to-day the storm passing on had obliterated everything: not a single mountain was visible, and hardly an island; even Scalpa, across Broadford Bay, was only just discernible, and looked more like a cloud than solid ground. The only visible thing, besides the dreary moor, was the islet of Pabay, which lay just outside the region of storm; but as Pabay is more like a vast pancake floating on the sea, than a respectable island, it did not help matters much from a scenic point of view. Altogether it was a miserable travesty of what in clear weather is doubtless a very fine view. However, I finished my walk without any more rain, which was at any rate something to be thankful for, and reached the Broadford Hotel at 8.40. After a clean-up and a good meal, I almost succeeded in persuading myself that I had enjoyed the day, and I was at least thankful that I had not ascended Sgurr Ouran in that storm.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### BEINN NA CAILLEACH.

BEINN NA CAILLEACH is the highest peak of the Red Hills of Skye, and is just behind Broadford. It is depicted in the hotel advertisements, and on their notepaper, as rising from their back garden. The guileless pedestrian will soon discover that a considerable expanse of moor and bog—especially bog—has to be traversed before the ascent can even be begun, but the illustration is fairly accurate, as such things go. Probably very few have heard of the mountain, unless they happen to have stayed at the Broadford Hotel, and fewer still will be aware that there is another hill of the same name, within a dozen miles as the crow flies. This reduplication of names is not an uncommon feature in the Highlands, and might appear to indicate some poverty of resources in the science of nomenclature on the part of the original sponsors; more probably, however, it would generally rather indicate the isolation of the mountain districts at the time the names were bestowed. One valley or district would be almost entirely cut off, by a mountain range or other natural barrier, from another, perhaps quite near as the crow flies. There would be little or no communication between the two

districts, and no inconvenience would result from the repetition of names. There is, however, no such natural barrier between the two Beinn na Cailleachs: the one occupies that corner of Skye which dominates Loch Alsh and Kyle Rhea; the other, as I have remarked, rises up just behind the Broadford Hotel and dominates Broadford Bay; between the two lies a long stretch of level ground, the most important centre and the most densely populated district, after Portree, of the Island of Skye. They are, too, of almost identical height: the Broadford hill being just over 2400 feet, while the Loch Alsh Ben is some half-dozen feet lower. Of the latter I can say no more, for it always retires modestly behind a sheltering curtain of mist whenever I am in that part of the country, and would fain gaze upon its beauties; I know nothing therefore of its shape or form, or whether it be worth the toil of exploration, although I should imagine that there would be a very fine view from its summit, of Loch Alsh and of the mountains round the head of Loch Duich.

With the Broadford Hill, on the contrary, I was fairly familiar, although I had never before considered it worth climbing. One does not take much notice in Skye of a very ordinary looking hill of about 2400 feet high, when there are a score of the finest peaks in Britain within a few miles. Beinn na Cailleach would be thought a lot of in Warwickshire or Middlesex, but in Skye nobody looks at it as a rule, except very verdant tourists.



The fact was, that I had been shut up at Broadford by bad weather. I had arrived there on the Thursday night literally soaked to the skin; the next day was almost worse, and I spent most of the time in front of a good fire, as I had done at Shiel Inn, and as I seemed likely to continue to do for the rest of my holiday. On Saturday I had intended to go on to Camasunary, where I hoped to get a bed and ascend Blaven. While I was breakfasting, a violent storm came on, which somewhat shook my determination, as I am not one of those stalwarts who carry out their plans whatever the weather may do; on the contrary, I never start out on a really bad morning, unless compelled to do so. After breakfast I strolled out for a few minutes, trying to make up my mind; within a quarter of an hour another storm came on, which at once made it up for me, for I immediately realized that if this sort of weather were going to continue, a fully licensed hotel would be a far more comfortable abiding-place than a little Highland farm like Camasunary. Bad weather is bad anywhere, but at least there are possible alleviations at a hotel. Wherefore I decided to remain at Broadford until Monday, and immediately I had arrived at that decision, and had communicated it to the hotel proprietor, the weather cleared up and it rained no more.

At lunch a man staying at the hotel, and whom I understood to be the unfortunate lesser half of a newly married couple, suggested that I should



ascend Beinn na Cailleach. At first I rather scouted the idea, but after lunch I set off for a stroll along the Sligachan road, eyeing with some disgust the peat-bogs which lie between the road and the upper portions of the hill; presently I fixed upon a route which seemed likely to offer a minimum of bog, and proceeded to test it. This sort of thing is always insidious; a mountain of any kind will ever draw me onwards, as a magnet attracts the needle, and I very soon settled down to the ascent in earnest. The bogs were very tiresome, as bogs always are, and extended for a considerable distance; several times I reflected that it really was not worth while to have all this bother for the sake of a little hill 2400 feet in height, but the north ridge looked quite close, and it seemed a pity after floundering through about a mile of bog, to flounder back again with nothing to show for it, so I stuck to it, steering as straight as I could for the foot of the long ridge, which descends almost due north from the summit.

This ridge was rather longer than I had expected, but there is no difficulty about it, and nothing that one can call climbing; it is merely a walk up a hill of moderate gradient. It had turned out a fine afternoon, and the sun was in good working order after a week's inactivity, so far at least as these regions were concerned. I reached the summit in two hours and twenty minutes from the Broadford Hotel, and was rewarded by a truly magnificent view. Westwards the whole grand panorama of

the Coolin Hills, from Sgurr nan Gilleann to Garsbheinn, lay extended before me, except that two or three peaks lay hidden behind Blaven, which with Clach Glas, looked gloomy and forbidding; southwards an expanse of sea, with numerous islands dotted about, formed an archipelago of great beauty, in pleasing contrast to the stern grandeur of the Coolins; eastwards the long line of the mainland, broken at frequent intervals by fjords, each one enclosing, as the *cognoscenti* know, scenes of surpassing charm; northwards an array of mountains around Glen Shiel, embosoming all the hidden beauties of Loch Duich, with hundreds of peaks behind, receding into the dim distance in endless succession. The Applecross Peninsula was blotted out by a huge mass of black clouds, looking as though they were having heavy rain there, which we in Skye for a wonder escaped—as a general rule if there be any rain within 1000 miles Skye gets it. The most interesting feature of the glorious prospect was the Coolin range, and I sat for ten minutes on the cairn, studying the wonderful series of saw-like *arêtes* and jagged points and pinnacles. Sgurr Dearg was behind a cloud nearly all the time, but just as I turned to descend, the tail-end of the cloud passed over, revealing the familiar finger of the Inaccessible Pinnacle pointing heavenwards, without which no general view of the Coolins seems complete. Sgurr nan Gilleann hardly showed to such advantage as usual. The summit and the fourth pinnacle stood out boldly against the sky,

and just the tiniest bit of the third pinnacle was visible, but Sgurr a Bhasteir formed the background of the rest of the ridge, which was therefore invisible against the black rocks of the former.

Instead of descending the way I had come, I went down the great corrie on the N.-E. face. The upper part is very steep, but nothing more; presently, however, I passed through some rocks, and then got into a sort of shallow gully, and for about ten minutes had quite a mildly exciting time. I had not expected any rock-climbing on this mound, and had brought a stick with me, also a mackintosh cape—hence the beauty of the afternoon—and found both these articles very much in my way. Two or three times on arriving at the verge of a rock-pitch, I had to throw them down, as I wanted both hands to help me to descend in safety, and found it impossible to carry luggage as well.

After these rocks were safely passed, I had no further adventure; all too soon I reached the bogs, and after an hour of weary floundering, the high road. This route through the corrie would be much more interesting for the ascent than the route up the north ridge, and the dramatic effect of the view would be much greater, as the whole panorama would burst upon one, as one emerged from the corrie on the summit plateau; whereas, in ascending by the north ridge as I had done, the view gradually unfolds itself, first one peak and then another, as one mounts higher and higher.

At dinner I related my adventures to the newly

wedded pair, and endeavoured to arouse them to emulation; but I fear, and in the circumstances perhaps not unnaturally, without success.

Beinn na Cailleach means "the hill of the old woman," and there is a legend to the effect that some ancient Norse dame in olden times, when about to depart this life, most inconsiderately demanded a solemn promise from her sorrowing family, that the summit of this mountain should be her last earthly resting-place, apparently under the curious impression that she was nearer to Norway up there, than down in the Broadford plains. They must have had a job to get her up, and it is no wonder that the perspiring bearers christened the mountain "the old woman's hill." In these degenerate days our own carcasses are as much as most of us care to drag up mountains, without hauling up our grandmothers' corpses also. I have not heard whether there is any similar legend connected with the Loch Alsh mountain of the same name. But feminine human nature remains the same while the centuries roll by. Doubtless some other old lady was roused to emulation; she probably remarked (after the manner of women), that old woman No. 1 was no better than she should be, and anyhow she need not imagine that she was the only old woman that could be buried on the top of a hill. It is fortunate that the fashion did not spread.

## CHAPTER XV.

### FROM BROADFORD TO SOAY.

FOR the benefit of those who have never heard of the Island of Soay, I may explain that it lies off the south coast of Skye, from which it is separated by a narrow sound, rather more than a mile wide. It lies between Loch Brittle and Loch Scavaig, and as one approaches Loch Scavaig by sea, the orthodox route to that wonderful scene, Soay lies close by on the left.

When I arose this morning, it was raining heavily, but it was useless to worry, as I was obliged to set forth, whatever the weather might do. For I had arranged with the Postmaster of Soay, my landlord for the next two or three days, to meet me with his boat on the coast of Skye opposite Soay at 7.30 this evening. Everybody assured me that it would be fine, and for a wonder everybody was right, for with the exception of one slight shower about one o'clock, there was no more rain throughout the day.

I left Broadford at 9.30 a.m., which is rather late to start on a big day, but I did not quite realize what a long tramp I had before me, although I had certainly intended to start earlier. As a rule I am rather inclined to err on the side of caution, and allow

more time than necessary for an expedition, but on this occasion I certainly made a mistake.

For twelve miles, or nearly half the distance, my route lay along a fairly good road, but after that it was excessively rough going. I had, a year ago, walked from Camasunary round the point to Loch Coruisk, and therefore knew what to expect; I knew that there could be no path beyond the latter, and that it would be very rough, but this last stage from Loch Coruisk to opposite Soay was far harder work than I had anticipated. Possibly, too, I had not sufficiently allowed for the retarding effect of a heavy *rucksack*, although that ought not to have been an unknown quantity to me, after carrying it about for more than a week.

The road from Broadford to Torran (six miles) is not very interesting, at any rate at first, as it passes up Strath Suardal over bare open moorland; and the somewhat shapeless Red Hills, rising on the right, do little to relieve the monotony of the scene. Soon after passing the ruined church of Kilchrist, the fine serrated ridge of Blaven comes into sight, and thenceforth there is no more monotony in the scene, to the mountaineer at least.

I had been undecided whether to get a boat to ferry me across Loch Slapin, or walk round the head of the loch, but as all the boats were high and dry on the beach, and as there was nobody about, except three men who were putting up a stone cottage, and who took no interest in me whatever, I concluded that to find a boat and boatmen would save very



little time, if any, so walked on. It is a fine wild glen that comes down to the head of Loch Slapin, between Ben na Cro on the east, and the Blaven, Clach Glas and Garven Range on the west. One is here at the very foot of Blaven, which is one of the finest mountains in Skye, and therefore in Britain, from whatever point of the compass it is seen.

I followed the road on to Strathaird House, whence a faint and rough path winds across the moor and over the hill to Camasunary. I may here remark *en passant*, that I did not see another road of any kind for three days, and hardly anything which in more densely populated districts would be considered a path. Upon attaining the col between the Loch Slapin and the Loch Scavaig basins, a glorious view burst upon me: the splendid ridge of Blaven in the foreground with the solitary farmhouse of Camasunary at its foot, the whole magnificent Coolin range beyond, some of the peaks however, being hidden behind Sgurr na Stri; to the left Loch Scavaig, and further out the islands of Soay, many-peaked Rum, Eigg, Canna, and many others.

I reached Camasunary at 2.30, and was not welcomed with *empressement*, nor indeed at all. Formerly one could get a bed here, and I had hoped to do so on my return journey, in order to facilitate the ascent of Blaven, which is a terribly long way from anywhere else. But to my great disappointment I was told that they could no longer take

tourists in for the night. This knocked all my plans on the head, as Blaven was one of the principal items on my programme, and I had reckoned on doing it from here. Lunch, however, was a necessity; for once I had been a foolish virgin, and had brought no provender with me, and after some persuasion and a pathetic account of my famished and foodless condition, I got the woman of the house to admit me within the forbidden precincts, on the distinct understanding that I was to have my lunch and then clear out.

Camasunary is of course the anglicized form of the name. The Gaelic spelling according to my map is Camas Fhionnairidh, and certainly shows the need of anglicization; for how could any poor helpless Sassenach suppose that "Fhionnairidh" is pronounced "Unary"? I do not know the meaning of the word, but the stream which descends from Loch na Creitheach to the sea is known as the Camasunary burn. The only similar name I know of is Camasericht, on Loch Rannoch, at the mouth of the Ericht river. This would suggest that "camas" is synonymous with "inver," and means the mouth of a river, and it seems to me that the name of the barn should really be "Fhionnairidh," or "Unary," and that only the house is entitled to the entire mouthful of Camas Fhionnairidh.

Leaving this inhospitable mansion at 3.30, I made for the stream, and sought the shallowest place for wading it, as the stepping-stones marked on the maps have long since disappeared. This

I already knew, having passed this way a year ago. On that occasion an ancient fisherman was mending a boat close by, and for the sum of one shilling sterling carried me across. Unfortunately ancient fishermen are not always forthcoming when their presence is desirable, and to-day there was nobody in sight, so there was nothing for it but to take off boots and stockings, and wade. I had quite a job to get across; the water appeared only a few inches deep, but this clear water is very deceptive, and in places it was over my knees; the current was very strong, and almost carried me off my feet. The water appeared to have been carefully iced for my reception, and the bed of the stream seemed paved with razors, with the edges uppermost. However I got safely across, but it was after four o'clock before I left the stream, and I now realized for the first time that I was likely to be late for my appointment.

It is a wonderfully fine walk round the point, as the beauties of Loch Scavaig, and the splendid Coolin range come gradually into sight, though the general opinion is that Loch Scavaig should be approached from the sea, to be fully appreciated. In due course I reached the Bad Step, which is not so very bad, except to weak nerves. It cost me, however, a pair of puttees, perhaps in revenge for my depreciation of its terrors. I had taken them off to wade the Camasunary, or Unary, burn; and knowing that I should also have to wade the Scavaig river, I had not put them on again, but had placed them on the top of my *rucksack*, where they seemed safe

enough. However, as I stepped on the ledge at the Bad Step, I somehow jerked the *rucksack*, and shot one of the puttees out, and it straightway disappeared down the open crack between the ledge and the main body of the rock. I threw the other one after it, as one was no use alone, and if anybody should happen to find the first one, I was quite willing to give him every chance of getting the complete pair.

I did not reach Loch Coruisk until 5.35, and as I had expected, was obliged to wade the stream; it was as icy cold as the Camasunary burn, but there was not much current, and I am thankful to say that the bed was not so razory. I did not linger in the contemplation of the beauties of Loch Coruisk, as it was getting late, nor do I propose to inflict upon my readers a description of the scene. I have no gift of word-painting. I yield to none in appreciation of beautiful scenery, but I cannot describe it, and I am not going to try, especially as such innumerable descriptions have already been written of "that wild Hebridean lake."

The inner chamber of Loch Scavaig, known as Loch Cuilce, is very small in superficial area, but I found it a long and weary job to get round it, as I slowly picked my way over boulders, slabs, and patches of bog. Then ensued a period of much tribulation; I had fixed upon the particular point of Garsbheinn, where I intended to cross the shoulder of that mountain, which stretches out towards Loch Scavaig, but fixed it rather too low. If I had gone

higher up, I should certainly have had a little more climbing at the start, but it would have been shorter and quicker in the end. As it was, I had a heart-breaking succession of ascents and descents over a series of arms of that abominable shoulder, until I really began to doubt whether I should reach Soay that night at all. I had been on the tramp continuously since 9.30, except for the halt at Camasunary; my lunch there had not been a gargantuan meal, and was my only sustenance during the day; I was getting very tired, and was beginning to feel the want of food.

When I did at length arrive opposite Soay, it was 8.30, and much to my relief I saw the boat waiting some distance farther on. I now realized, what had somehow never struck me before, namely, that this is a coast where one cannot land or embark just anywhere. The cliffs are low, but only at one or two spots between Loch Scavaig and Loch Brittle is it possible, so far as I could see, to reach the water's edge. I therefore went on until I came to a place where it seemed possible to embark; I then hung out my handkerchief as a signal, and determined that I would not budge from that spot, until the boat came to fetch me. Soon, however, I was horrified to see the boat, having apparently given me up, move off to Loch Brittle; they had obviously not seen my poor little signal. If it did not come back, but went straight across to Soay from Loch Brittle, I should be in a fix, as there was no house nearer than Glen Brittle, probably a good three

hours' tramp. However, before long the boat reappeared, and to my great joy came slowly down the coast. I climbed to the outermost point of rock that I could reach, and waved my signal frantically; they seemed to see it, and were apparently pulling steadily for me, when to my intense disgust they turned suddenly inland, as though there were a little cove, which I could not see. This manœuvre filled me with consternation, but soon they emerged again, having (as I afterwards heard) pulled in to fetch a man whom they had left there, in case I should turn up while they had gone round to Loch Brittle. The place where I was waiting was not a good place for embarkation, but they got me on board somehow. Sailing across the Sound, after a ten minutes' walk across the island, I at length reached my destination, a few minutes after ten o'clock.



## CHAPTER XVI.

GARSBHEINN AND SGURR NAN EAG, FROM SOAY.

THE day after my arrival at Soay, I contented myself with strolling about the island. I had had a fairly long tramp the previous day, and was ready for a day off; also the Coolins were smothered in mist, and there was therefore no very great inducement to climb. Of course the proximity of Soay to the Coolins was my sole reason for going there. I had not been able to get a bed at Glen Brittle, and the peaks at this end of the range are a terrible way from Sligachan. So when I heard of a room on Soay, I decided at once to go there. There is nothing very interesting about the island itself. It is only about three miles long, and the maximum width is about two miles. It is almost cut into two portions by a semi-circular bay on the south-eastern side, and a long narrow inlet on the north-west, facing Skye and known as the harbour, the two fjords approaching within a few hundred yards of each other. There are about a dozen cottages dotted round the bay; the population is between seventy and eighty, and is steadily decreasing; probably the rising generation are apt to seek a less peaceful existence amid the haunts of men. There is, of course, a school;

wherever in Scotland there is more than one house, you will usually find that one of them is a school.

The island consists almost entirely of peaty moorland, but there are one or two tiny patches of cultivated ground, and the cows seem to thrive, for the milk and butter were excellent. At dinner it certainly seemed rather strange to be told that there was not a potato on the island, but after all potatoes are not by any means necessities of existence, and I got on very well without them, and upon the whole was excellently fed. Poultry was the only item of my menus that was unsatisfactory; an elderly hen was sacrificed to make a Sassenach feast, whose muscles were as iron bands. Fowls in the north of Scotland are not made of flesh and blood, but of cast iron and wire; I do not know the reason for this singular fact of natural history, but a distinguished geologist, who once watched with *Schadenfreude* my futile efforts to dissect a formidable specimen, informed me that it was because the poor things had to work so hard to pick up a subsistence.

The only direct communication between Soay and the outer world, is by the mail steamer *Hebridean*, which leaves Oban on Tuesday morning, and is due at Soay at 2 a.m. on Wednesday. This is the great weekly event in Soay's social life, and it will probably be news to most people that there is a spot in the British Islands, and so near to the mainland, where letters are delivered only once a week. Personally I had no objections whatever to this, as

I have not the least desire to be bothered with letters while I am away on my holidays. Indeed, I regretted sincerely that there was any delivery at all, as I received an important business letter by the *Hebridean*, which clamorously demanded a telegraphic reply. This was awkward, as there is a post office on Soay, but no telegraph office, and the nearest are Carbost and Sligachan in Skye, both about fifteen miles by sea and land.

The second day (Wednesday) I intended to have a day's climbing, and had arranged with Cameron (my landlord) to ferry me across the Sound. I strolled down to the beach about 7 a.m., while they were getting my breakfast, and was just in time to see the *Hebridean* steam into the bay. She was five hours late, but nobody except myself appeared to notice the fact, and nobody hurried themselves even then. She had been at anchor in the bay for some minutes, and had been tootling until I was afraid something would burst, before anybody bestirred themselves. She brought me the important business letter to which I have just alluded, and for a few minutes I was nonplussed: it would be cruelly hard luck if I had to leave Soay without a climb, and on the other hand if I had to walk to Sligachan to send my telegram, I should stop there, as it would hardly be worth while to come back to Soay; besides, further telegrams might be necessary, so that I must remain in touch with a telegraph office. I could not bear the idea of utterly wasting the two days at Soay (*i. e.* from a climbing point of view);

and then it struck me that my correspondent was not quite certain as to which day I should get to Soay. Supposing that I had not arrived there till the Wednesday night, it was obvious that I could not have sent my telegraphic reply till the Thursday; if he could wait for his wire until Thursday in the one case, he could wait for it in the other, and he might think, if he pleased, that I had not arrived. Wherefore I determined to ignore, for this one day, telegraphic offices and such drawbacks to civilization, and to proceed on my climb. To-morrow I would return to the thorny path of duty (in this case "boggy" would be a more appropriate adjective). I would leave Soay the first thing next morning, and would walk to Sligachan to despatch my telegram.

Mr. Cameron seemed to require considerably more time than I, both for his breakfast and for his toilet; at any rate, I had completed all my arrangements in both departments, and had been waiting some time, before he was ready to start, and it was 9.15 when I at length landed on the Skye shore. Islands, be it remarked *en passant*, have their disadvantages.

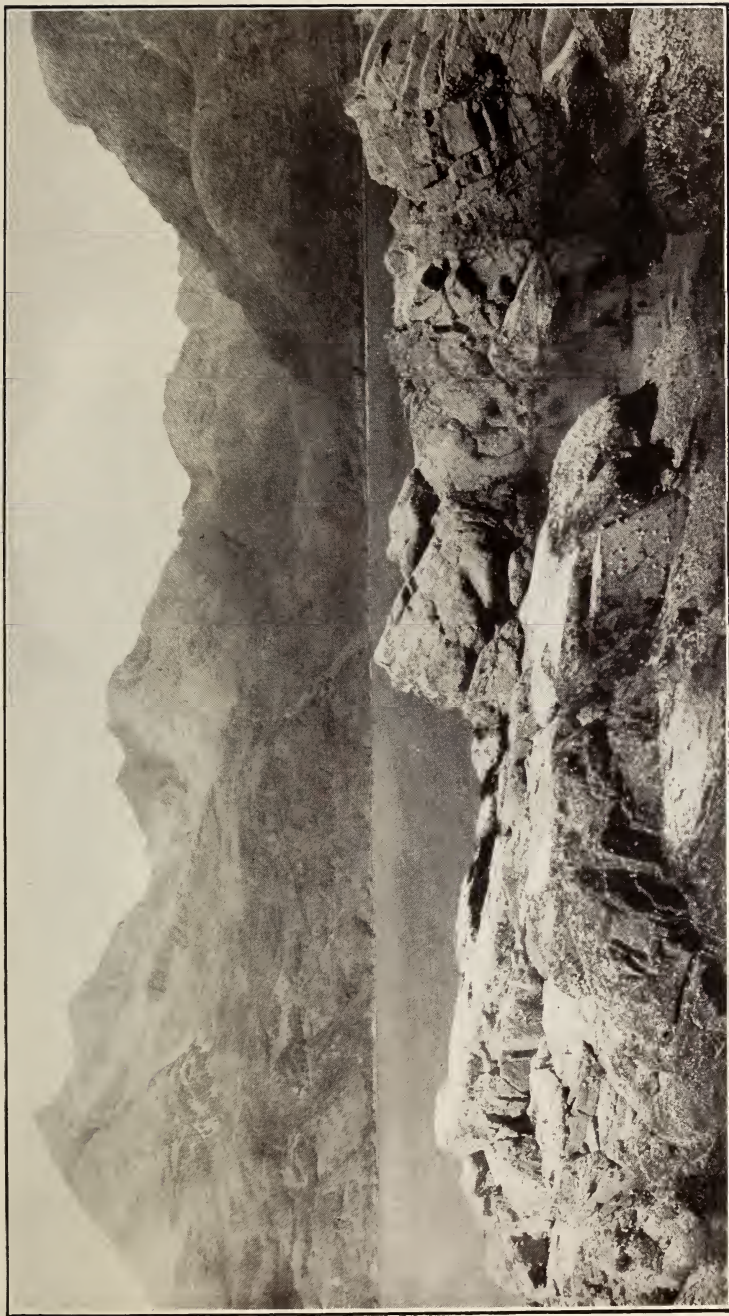
The little harbour of Soay, from which we started, would be an ideal place for a bathe I should think. It was a hot morning, and the wonderfully clear water looked most inviting, but I am not a very keen sea bather, and anyhow I was here to climb, and reserved all my time and energies for the business in hand. I arranged with Cameron to fetch me about seven o'clock in the evening, and set off across

the intervening bogs for the foot of Garsbheinn, the last peak of the Coolin range, whose sides sink precipitously to the Sound of Soay on the one hand and to Loch Scavaig on the other. My idea was to ascend this mountain, and then follow the ridge northwards as far as I had time. There was a great deal of mist floating about, of a fluffy, feathery type, but occasionally I had a lovely *coup d'œil* over Soay. I never got a good view of the Coire nan Laogh on my left; at intervals some fine rocks would loom into sight through the mist, and once or twice I caught sight of a fine gully, apparently leading up to the ridge of Sgurr nan Eag, but I never obtained a bird's-eye view of the whole corrie, and I never saw Sgurr nan Eag until I was on it. However, there was no rain all day, so I had much to be thankful for.

The upper portion of the mountain is very steep, and rather tiresome, but there is no difficulty about it whatsoever. I reached the summit at 12.5, and was agreeably surprised to find a glorious view spread out before me. All the mist seemed to be on the side whence I had come; the Coruisk basin was fairly clear, and many of the glorious Coolin peaks stood out boldly, although those nearer to me, from Sgurr nan Eag to Sgurr Dearg, were still modestly and aggravatingly veiled from view. This, however, and the patches of mist which occasionally floated by me, rather heightened the general effect.

From Garsbheinn I followed the ridge up and down, and presently reached a little peak, not much





GARBHEINN, SGURR DUBH, ETC., FROM STRATHAIRD.

[Photo by Richard Moreland.]





more than a pinnacle, at the head of Coire nan Laogh, and known as Sgurr a' Coire Beag. The former was still full of mist, while the Coire Beag, on the Coruisk side, was perfectly clear. Near here I halted for lunch, but found the occasional masses of mist which floated over me rather chilling, and did not linger over my frugal repast. The ridge is a typical Coolin one, and I picked my way slowly and laboriously over the series of fantastically shaped pinnacles and rock-masses to the cairn of Sgurr nan Eag, which I reached at 1.55. "Eag" means "a file," and one now perceives the appropriateness of the name, for from the cairn there stretches northwards a long saw-like ridge.

After this I followed the ridge onwards until it descends rather abruptly to the Coire a' Ghrunnda, and halted at a tiny spring of icy cold water for a second lunch. It was 3.35 when I reached Loch a' Ghrunnda, and I hesitated much what I should do. In front of me were four splendid peaks—Sgurr Dubh na Dabheinn, Sgurr Tearlach, Sgurr Alasdair and Sgurr Sgumain—all of which I wanted to ascend, especially Alasdair, which I think is the finest peak in Skye. There was no knowing when I should be in the Coire a' Ghrunnda again, as it is a terrible way from Sligachan, and it did seem a great pity to turn my back on these fine peaks, when I was so near to them. On the other hand, Cameron was to fetch me at seven o'clock, and I did not want to be late, having kept him waiting for a long time on the Monday evening, the night of my arrival. The

Coire a' Ghrunndda was an unknown quantity, and might possibly offer some difficulties; allowing for such difficulties, I thought it might perhaps take me three hours to reach the place of embarkation, which in fact was just about the time, within a few minutes, that it did actually take me. This only left me half-an-hour to spare, and I certainly could not ascend the nearest peak in that time, so that I should probably be late if I made the attempt. Reluctantly therefore, I turned away, and set off down the Coire a' Ghrunndda, which is one of the finest of all the Coolin corries.

For some time I had no difficulty, except that there was a great deal of the kind of rocks known to climbing experts as "boiler plates," *i. e.* smooth rounded humps of rocks with occasional ribs, reminding me more of petrified rhinoceroses than anything else I could think of. To avoid these, I kept to the left of the corrie (which was a mistake), following a burn down a narrow gully; for some little time the footing was good and safe, but suddenly the floor of the gully came to an abrupt end, and there appeared a sheer drop of fifty feet or more. If I had had a companion and a rope, we could very likely have descended it, but I thought it was too risky to try alone, so climbed up the gully again, and got round another way.

The petrified rhinoceroses recurred at frequent intervals, and gave me a good deal of trouble, but I met with no other real difficulty, and reached the meeting-place at 6.30. Cameron made up his mind

that I should be late again, and did not turn up until eight o'clock; I could not well blame him, as I had been so late the other night, but I felt mad to think that after all I might just as well have ascended Sgurr Dubh or Sgurr Alasdair, or even both. Islands, as I have already remarked, have their disadvantages. The next morning the weather was perfect for mountaineering, and I was strongly tempted to leave that wretched telegram yet another day, and ascend those peaks above and around the Coire a' Ghrunnda. But I have unfortunately a tender conscience, and it would not be pacified until the telegram was sent. So as soon as breakfast was disposed of, I got Cameron to ferry me across the Sound, and bidding a regretful farewell to Soay, I started off on my fifteen-mile tramp to the nearest telegraphic office.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE BHASTEIR.

THE Bhasteir is a prominent object in the splendid mountain view from the Sligachan Hotel, though in that view it hardly gets justice. It is somewhat overshadowed by Sgurr nan Gillean on the left, and the Sgurr a' Bhasteir on the right, the latter gaining undue prominence through being so much nearer. But when one tramps up the Bhasteir corrie, and sees at close quarters that huge mountain wall straight ahead, one conceives a wholesome respect for the Bhasteir. It is rather confusing that one peak should be called the Bhasteir, and the other the Sgurr a' Bhasteir, the two being so near. We are told that the word means "Executioner." Certainly the curious rock known as the Bhasteir Tooth suggests a head chopped off from the main body of the mountain, but if that is really the idea which gave rise to the name, the Bhasteir is obviously the executionee, not the operator, which rôle would rather appear to be filled by the Sgurr a' Bhasteir. Indeed I have often wondered whether in the process of anglicization, the names have got confused, and whether the Gaelic name for the Sgurr a' Bhasteir is "executioner," and the name for Bhasteir is "execution," thus differentiating

between the active and passive rôles of the two peaks. Or again, perhaps the name "execution" is in Gaelic given to the whole group, and it is a modern and Saxon idea to call the one peak "Sgurr a' Bhasteir" in order to differentiate between the two.

The only other visitors at the Sligachan Hotel on this occasion were two bright and shining lights of the Geological Survey, and on the particular morning when I thought of ascending the Bhasteir, I found that they were intending to adjourn to the Bhasteir corrie, and there spend the rest of the day in chipping rocks and otherwise disporting themselves, so asked and obtained their permission to join them, at least as far as the corrie.

We left Sligachan at ten o'clock, striking across the moor almost at once. In a few moments we reached a very rough plank bridge over the burn which descends from the Fionn corrie; there was a single plank from the hither side to a big boulder in the middle of the stream, and another plank from the boulder to the far side. There had once been a rough wire balustrade rigged up, although its support, even in its healthiest days, could only have been a moral one; now it was far more of a hindrance than anything else, as the wire lay in coils all over the bridge. The torrent should have been foaming far beneath, but I am incurably truthful, and feel impelled to state, although I perceive that the confession robs the picture of artistic finish, that the water was only a few feet



below the planks, and that on this occasion there was no foaming being done to speak of, as the burn was exceptionally low.

The bright and shining lights of geology tramped across that moor in a steady stick-to-it-all-day-long-and-as-long-as-you-like sort of manner, for which I had not given them credit, and I am bound to admit that it took me all I knew to keep anywhere near them. It was a beautiful day, but very hot; if I had been alone, I should not have done it in anything like the time, one and three-quarter hours from Sligachan. At the corrie we parted, somewhat to my relief; the ægis of science was no longer thrown over my little expedition, but on the other hand, I could now go at my own pace. You cannot have everything in this world, and upon the whole I preferred to dispense with science and its ægis, and get along at a milder pace.

My way lay over a boulder-strewn wilderness at a fairly severe angle, at the foot of the beautiful pinnacles of Sgurr nan Gilleán, most awe-inspiring when seen at such close quarters, to the Bealach a' Bhasteir, the pass between Sgurr nan Gilleán and the Bhasteir. I had hoped to find some water hereabouts, where I might halt for lunch, but much to my disappointment there was none. The previous year, when I was here about the same time (middle of June), there were plenty of infant burns tumbling cheerfully down from almost every gully and chimney, and numerous patches of snow lay at the foot of the pinnacles, from each of which

there issued a tiny streamlet of icy cold water. But this year the season was exceptionally dry and exceptionally early, for there was no water on these slopes, and during my holiday, I did not see a single flake of snow on the Coolins.

From the Bealach to the summit of the mountain is only an easy half-hour's scramble. The ridge is a very neat one, and the Bhasteir is a rather remarkably shaped mountain, like a gigantic wall, rising gradually to a point at its western end. At almost any spot between the pass and the summit, a false step or a slip would precipitate one into the Bhasteir corrie on the one hand, or into the Lota corrie on the other. The precipice on the northern side, that is towards the Bhasteir corrie, is sheer, and even in places overhanging; the drop on the southern side, into Lota corrie, is certainly less steep, but it is steep enough to make one apprehend the necessity of walking warily. Nevertheless the ridge, although sensational, is quite easy; there is always safe and ample footing, and consequently there is no danger to anybody with an ordinarily steady head, and no others should go on the Coolins, or indeed on any other mountains.

I found the summit cairn almost blown away, only about half-a-dozen stones remaining, and I was surprised to find a lot of green moss among those few stones, and on further investigation I found decided moisture. I made earnest efforts to "go one better" and find water, as I wanted lunch badly by now, and could not eat my sandwiches

without a preliminary moistening of my internal apparatus, but my efforts were unfortunately not successful.

I descended to the Bealach, and thence into the corrie, and almost reached the little loch in the latter, before I came across a spring, where I sat down and refreshed myself copiously. I had had some vague idea of doing a little more climbing, but it was very, very hot, and I felt strangely lacking in energy. Presently I rejoined the two geologists, who were gaily chipping rocks close at hand, and ascertained that they would probably spend another hour or two in that seductive occupation. It occurred to me very forcibly, that I would much prefer to return to Sligachan at my own pace rather than at theirs, so I bade them farewell and departed.

For a moment I contemplated the fine Bhasteir gorge, and debated whether I should try to return through it. The geologists were not encouraging; they said that it had only been done once, and that on that occasion the hardy explorers had been nearly drowned. The burns were all so remarkably and exceptionally low, that this would have been an excellent opportunity to try it, and I have since often regretted that I did not at least make the attempt, but the flesh was lamentably weak, and the spirit perhaps none too willing, and I sauntered down to Sligachan, reaching the hotel about five o'clock.

I have always felt somewhat ashamed of myself

for not having gone on from the summit of the Bhasteir, and climbed the Tooth, but the drop to the gap between the mountain and its satellite looks rather fearsome from above, and I suppose in plain English that I funked it. At a later date I made a successful attempt at it in the reverse direction. I walked up the Fionn corrie to the Bealach a' Leitir, looked at the direct climb from the col below the Tooth, but soon decided (as in Chap. XI) that it was not for me, not alone at any rate, and went a little way down Lota corrie, taking to the rocks at the first spot where they seemed practicable. It was rather a longer climb than I had expected, but there was no real difficulty, and on the way I found a few bilberries, which made a most welcome extra *plat* to the otherwise dry lunch, which I consumed in solitary state on the top of the Tooth.

The first stage of the route from the Tooth to the Bhasteir summit is somewhat alarming; it is a rock-wall some twelve or fourteen feet in height; and although there are several routes up it, they are none of them easy. However, I picked out the least offensive route, and in two or three minutes, after a strenuous heave and struggle, was sprawling on the top of the wall, and five minutes later reached the summit of the Bhasteir. I passed down the ridge to the Bealach, and then started up the West Ridge of Sgurr nan Gillean. Here again, before very long the climber is up against a rock-wall, and a far more serious one than that which

I had just climbed. This rock-wall across the West Ridge of Sgurr nan Gillean must be forty or forty-five feet in height, and appears unclimbable. I avoided it on the left, and then passed up an easy chimney, reaching the ridge a few yards above the top of the wall. Thence to the summit is merely easy scrambling, and I descended by the easy scree gully between the fourth and fifth pinnacles; perfectly easy, but full of loose stones, and I was thankful that there was nobody behind me.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### CLACH GLAS AND BLAVEN.

FOR some years the ascent of Blaven viâ Clach Glas had been one of the most prominent items of a list, already long and rapidly lengthening, of things pedestrian, mountaineering, scansorial and what not, that I desired greatly to achieve.

There are so many things that one wants to do, and one accomplishes so little. Life is so short, or at least that portion thereof, (and the rest is mere existence), which one can devote to mountaineering. It is all very well for those whose holidays are unlimited, and whose purses are of an appropriate depth, but when one is condemned by a cruel fate to earn one's bread in commerce for an inadequate reward, and when one gets a fortnight's holiday in the year with an occasional week end, one works one's way rather slowly through a long list of things to be done. And, alas! however willing and even keen the spirit may be, the flesh is so lamentably weak, and often responds so feebly to the spirit's ardent call.

Hence, during two visits to Sligachan, something always prevented me from attempting the ascent of Blaven. Once it was bad weather, then it was good weather, that is to say, it was so hot that the



feeble flesh rebelled. Another time I had made all my arrangements, and was actually called at a time that would have done credit even to the most matutinal lark, (for whoso would accomplish the traverse of Clach Glas and Blaven must rise betimes, or his return will be delayed to an unseemly hour), but something had played havoc with my internal arrangements, and I was *hors de combat* for that day, and it was the last day of my holiday: feeble flesh again.

But at length my opportunity had come. In the course of some pedestrian wanderings round Skye, I found myself at the village of Elgol, and thought that it would not be bad headquarters, from which to ascend Blaven. The latter mountain alone would have been easy enough, but I wanted to traverse the Clach Glas ridge also, and this makes a big day from anywhere. Most climbers start from Sligachan, but it is a long, weary grind up the glen, and up Coire Dubh to the north end of the ridge; and it is a terrible grind back again after you have done your peaks, (if you have done them, and much virtue lies in the "if"), especially if the shades of night are falling, and they usually do before one gets back. It always seems to me that the best way is to drive from Broadford to the head of Loch Slapin, and drive back after the burden and heat of the day, for one secret of successful mountaineering lies in never walking where it is possible to drive.

However, Elgol is only about the same distance

from Coire Dubh as Sligachan, and I argued that when on the top of Blaven (if I ever got there), every step down the long south ridge would bring me nearer to Elgol, and farther away from Sligachan, and therefore that Elgol would be the better headquarters of the two.

Blaven is one of the finest mountains in the British Islands, 3042 feet, and giving the impression of much greater height. I suppose the correct Gaelic orthography is Blath Bheinn, usually anglicized as above, and it is said to mean "hill of bloom": a profane young friend suggests "That blooming hill." Clach Glas ("the grey stone"), though overshadowed by its mightier neighbour, and only 2590 feet in height, is a most shapely little rock-peak, like a miniature Matterhorn, and its summit is one of the most difficult to attain of any in the United Kingdom. Most of, if not all, the mountains on the mainland of Britain have an easy way up, usually a long grass or heather slope, more or less boulder-strewn, which anybody can walk up, who can walk at all, if his wind is good enough; and although there are plenty of fine crags in the Lake District and in North Wales, still they are merely outcrops of rock at various points of the mountains, and can always be easily avoided, if the explorer so desire. In Skye, on the other hand, or at least in the Black Coolins, all above 1500 feet up or thereabouts is generally solid rock, the good old gabbro that is so destructive to one's garments and fingers, but so splendid to

climb on. Even so, most of the Coolins have also an easy way up, which does not involve anything more than easy scrambling, but three or four peaks necessitate actual hand and foot climbing, and Clach Glas is one of them.

There is nothing specially attractive about Elgol, except that the views from the Coolins are finer than from any other point whence I have seen them. As you wander through the long straggling village, there is at one point a dip in the line of low hills on the right, and looking across the patches of oats, an entrancing vista is framed between the two hills, including the whole range of the Coolins, with just the tip of Sgurr nan Gilleán showing above Sgurr na Stri, and a little triangle of Loch Scavaig in front. Farther on, where the road begins to descend to the shore, the view is perhaps even finer, extending seawards to Mull, Coll and Tiree, with beautiful many-peaked Rum in the foreground.

At 8.30 a.m. on a fine morning I set forth up the hill at the back of the house, then descended steeply to a charming little bay on the western side of the peninsula, and struck a very rough path which leads along the cliffs to Camasunary. Whether this were my nearest way, I know not. Whatsoever way one goeth to approach Blaven, it seemeth a terribly long way, and you will generally wish that you had gone some other.

At Camasunary one is at the very foot of the long south ridge of Blaven, which is merely a rough walk, and entails no serious climbing, and if my sole object

had been to ascend Blaven, I should have gone straight up this easy ridge. But Clach Glas lies on the far side of the great mountain, and I had a long rough tramp at the foot of Blaven's tremendous western wall, past Loch na Creitheach, and up Coire Dubh, to the northern end of the Clach Glas ridge. And I found this tramp longer than I had expected. In my own mind I had allowed three hours to get from Elgol to the ridge, but I was behind time when I reached the foot of the corrie, and my progress up the steep heather-clad slopes of the latter took far longer than it ought to have done. It was my first day on the hills for many months, and I was in wretched form; when I did at last reach the ridge, it was just one o'clock, and I had fondly hoped to have got there by 11.30.

A long shattered pinnacled ridge lay before me, involving nothing more serious than easy scrambling, then ensued two great rock-towers. The first of these I traversed; then remembered that my allowance of daylight was somewhat inadequate for the business in hand, and passed along the flanks of the other. After this I found myself in a steep scree gully, and passing up it for a few yards, soon perceived a narrow opening in the rocks on the right, with nail-marks indicating the obvious route. This brings you out on the very steep open face of the upper storey of the peak. The climbing is not really difficult, but the situation is very exposed, and I suppose a slip on my part would have landed me in the corrie, some 300 or

400 feet below, where I should have made a nasty mess. To tell the truth, it is hardly a suitable place for a solitary climber, but I went up it with extreme care, and arrived at the summit intact at two o'clock.

I did not linger there; time was "fugiting" inexorably, and I had still much to do. Also there was no view. During my toilsome tramp up Coire Dubh, I had turned several times to admire the grand panorama of the Coolins, which gradually unfolded itself, but in the meantime the mist had crept up and smothered everything. This made me rather anxious. Of course he who disporteth himself upon the hills soon gets accustomed to mist, but I had heard a great deal as to the difficulty of finding one's way from Clach Glas to the summit of Blaven in bad weather, and felt diffident as to my ability to do it.

The next section of the ridge I found rather more difficult than the first part. Several times I came to the edge of a vertical drop, where I generally had to retrace my steps, and find a way round. There were several pinnacles or towers, and I never knew whether to traverse along the crest thereof or to pass round them, and whichever I did, I usually wished that I had done the other. Also hereabouts was a good deal of rotten trap rock, awful stuff to climb on, bringing one's heart into one's mouth, as every bit you catch hold of comes away in your hands.

At three o'clock I reached the col between Clach



Glas and Blaven. Dread forebodings filled my soul. With only about three and a half hours of daylight—for this was in the autumn—and Blaven wrapt in mist, I felt hopeless of finishing my task, and getting off the mountain before dark. Still, having got thus far, I could not give it up without an effort. Staring me in the face was the *mauvais pas* (a very mild one) of this climb; to-day it was wet and slippery, otherwise there is no difficulty in it. It is just a wall twelve or fourteen feet in height, with a sufficiency (but no more) of holds for hands and feet. Beyond this a tremendous cliff, obviously impossible, lay straight in front; nail-marks, though scanty, were sufficiently in evidence to indicate the route to the right, and presently up a steep and narrow gully on the left. Hereabouts I got worried; I lost the friendly nail-marks, and felt no confidence that I was on the right track. Blaven's architecture on this side is most complicated, and dodging round pinnacles, and in and out of gullies, one is apt to lose one's sense of direction. However, noticing a chimney to which somehow I felt instinctively attracted, I was glad to find nail-marks again, and followed them up the chimney, which was just difficult enough to be interesting, and which brought me into a wide indefinite sort of gully. Two or three small cairns then indicated the route, and at four o'clock the cairn of the north peak, the highest point of Blaven loomed up before me. Blaven was conquered at last.



This is a splendid view-point. The whole magnificent semi-circle of the Coolin Hills lay before me, the whole of Skye lay at my feet; the Hebridean archipelago, the deeply indented coast of the mainland with mountains innumerable, and beyond the Minch the long line of the Outer Hebrides, all lay around me. I had looked forward so much to this view, but nothing of it all was visible. Everything was smothered in a pall of thick, grey mist, and nothing could be seen more than two or three yards away.

Still, it was a proud and joyful moment, and for a few minutes I was as happy, as it is ever given to poor erring mortals to be in this vale of tears. Then Nemesis was upon me. A momentary rift in the mist suddenly revealed what appeared to be a mighty mountain due south, where the lower top of Blaven ought to have been. I could have wept, for it seemed so much higher than the summit on which I sat, that it was borne in upon me that the latter was some subsidiary spur of the mountain, honoured for some occult reason with a cairn, and that the real summit of Blaven still lay before me. It was a horrible idea, after all my toil, and with only about two hours of daylight left, but by this time I had made up my mind to go through with the job, if it took me all night. I arose, ran down the slope and across the narrow connecting ridge, panted up the other side, and in fifteen minutes was on the south summit. For it was an optical illusion, and the mighty mountain, which I had

dimly seen through the mist, was after all only the south top.

I had intended to descend the south ridge to its foot, and it might perhaps have been better if I had done so. But I noticed something dimly resembling a path on the left, and it struck me that if I went down the south ridge, I should have to descend to sea-level, and then rise again some 500 or 600 feet to the moor between Camasunary and Strathaird, which I had got to cross in order to reach Elgol. Whereas, if I went down this path, I could contour along the side of the opposite hill to the moor, keeping at about the same level all the way. But the path was a delusion and a snare, and the opposite hill, which had seemed as nothing from Blaven, seemed never-ending when I had to walk along it. By the time I reached the moor, light was beginning to wane. I could just discern the path on the hillside opposite, which I knew must lead to the Elgol road, and struck straight across the moor for it. It was a race with the gathering darkness, and I can hardly claim a win. I lost the path after a time, but clinging to my bump of locality, I stumbled blindly on in the same direction, until at length I almost fell into the road. I had still two miles to go, and milestones on that road seemed about five miles apart that night, but I got home at last about 7.30, just eleven hours after I had set forth in the morning.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### FROM ELGOL TO GLEN BRITTLE OVER THE DUBHS.

IT was the end of September and I was still at Elgol. And I wanted to get away from Elgol. The weather was delightful, I had a comfortable room and was living luxuriously, to an extent that I had certainly not anticipated, when I made up my mind to go for a few days to this out-of-the-way village. In fact the flesh-pots of Egypt seemed to be ransacked for my benefit. But there was nothing more to do there; that was the point. I had had a great day on Clach Glas and Blaven, but there were no other mountains within reach of Elgol, and I had gone to Skye for mountaineering. Moreover, four days of my fortnight's holiday had passed by, and it behoved me to pass on at once, if I meant to do any more climbing. Wherefore I set about the arrangements for my journey to Glen Brittle.

This was not quite so simple as might appear. True the two places are only some eight or ten miles apart, as the crow flies, but about half that distance is taken up by the broad bosom of Loch Scavaig, and the rest of it is occupied by the mighty mass of the Coolin Hills. To walk the whole way, round by Camasunary, the Bad Step, and Loch na Cuilce, wading the Camasunary stream and the Scavaig

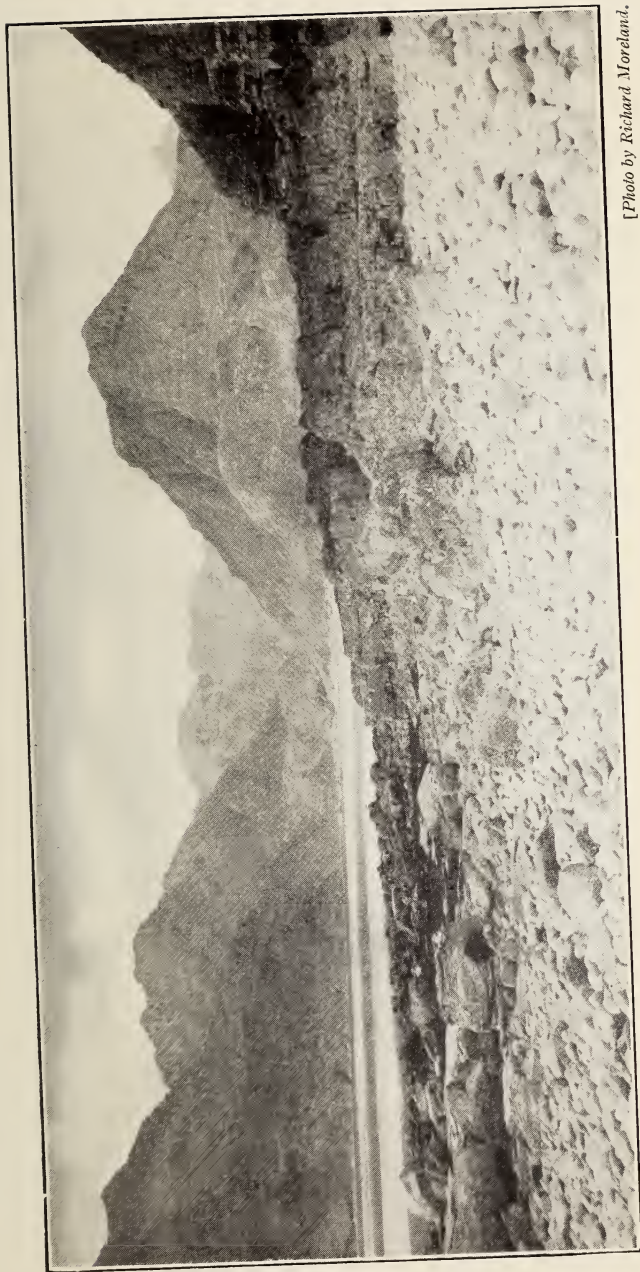
river, and then cross the main ridge of the Coolins and get down to Glen Brittle, would be a very big day, and I did not care to undertake it in the short days of autumn. Wherefore I tried to get a boat to take me across Loch Scavaig, and save me at any rate the first part of such a weary Pilgrim's Progress, especially as I had done that part before. But the whole population of Elgol were intent on their oats harvest, and until it was all gathered in, and safely stacked up in the funny little conical ricks which they affect up there, they had no moment to spare for the consideration of other matters; except indeed on the "Sawbath," and I could not wait till the next "Sawbath." Of course the weather might change any day—and it did in fact change two or three days later—and it was of vital importance to them, to get their harvest in while the fine weather lasted. For a time I was in despair, and feared that I should really have to do my Pilgrim's Progress on foot all round, but at last I found an Ancient of Days, who was apparently too old and infirm to work at the oats, but was not too old and infirm to row me across Loch Scavaig for a consideration. He informed me that the usual charge for the excursion is twelve shillings, which seemed a bit stiff, as it only takes them about an hour and a half to take one across. But it appears that Trade Union principles obtain even at this out-of-the-way spot, and the Ancient was not going to be a blackleg, not he. Moreover, he condescended to explain that they could take

several passengers in their boat : twelve shillings was the price per boat-load, and if I were only one, and not four or five persons, that was my affair. All of which is doubtless perfectly logical, though rather rough on me. Elgol is not so unsophisticated as one might imagine.

At any rate it was at length arranged, that a boat should be ready for me at 7 a.m. the following morning. This was rather alarming, as it was nearly two miles from my temporary dwelling-place down to the beach, but I had got a fairly big day before me, and I wanted to make sure of getting to Glen Brittle before dark. Wherefore on Thursday, the 30th September, I arose at a most unchristian hour, and sailed about 7.30. As I descended to the beach, I noticed that there was rather a choppy sea on, and experienced some prophetic quivers of apprehension. For I am a most miserable sailor. I wanted to traverse the three peaks of the Dubhs on my way to Glen Brittle, and this is a fair day's work when one is fit and well ; what it would be when one was suffering from a severe attack of *mal de mer*, makes me shudder to think. I had visions of myself being flung out on the rocks, a limp mass, and lying there till Death put a merciful end to my sufferings. However, either the sea was not so bad as it looked, or my internal arrangements were in better order than usual ; at any rate nothing happened, and I landed at 9.10 on the far side of Loch Scavaig, with my breakfast still safely inside me.

It is usually considered that the orthodox way





[Photo by Richard Moreland.]

To face p. 141]

SGURR DUBH, SGURR A' GHREADHAIDH, SGURR A' MHADAIDH, SGURR NA STRI, SGURR NAN GILLEAN, FROM STRATHAIRD.





of approaching Loch Scavaig is by sea. It is indeed a wonderful scene; I know of no other where one gets mountains and sea in such close juxtaposition, and both in such perfection. I have not been to Norway, but I imagine this to be the nearest we have in these islands to the Norwegian fjords, and I can hardly believe that it is so very inferior even to the finest of the latter. But I do not agree that one gets the finest effect when approaching by sea. I have, as recorded in Chap. XV, walked round from Camasunary to Coruisk over the Bad Step, and I certainly think that Loch Scavaig made a greater impression on me then, than to-day as I approached it by sea. But however one approaches it, it is one of the very finest scenes in the British Islands—or anywhere else for that matter.

I started up the hillside by the so-called "Mad Stream," which to-day was a very mild affair, then across the Garbh Choire, and up a streak of grass and heather, leading to a great gap in the Dubh ridge, about half-way up to Sgurr Dubh Beag. My first idea had been to walk along Loch Coruisk, and ascend the ridge from its foot, but the route I followed seemed shorter, and I do not think it misses any climbing. It was a perfect day for mountaineering; fine all day, but no sun and very little wind, and only just a wisp of mist occasionally. Nevertheless it took me longer to reach the Beag Peak than I had expected, and it was 11.30, when at length I attained thereunto. Up to this point the climbing had been nothing more serious than a rough walk, with an occasional bit of easy scrambling,

but Sgurr Dubh Beag culminates in a sharp point with alarming precipices on three sides. When I went to the edge, and looked down the hundred feet or so, to the col between this peak and Sgurr Dubh Mhor, I was aghast. I had some notes with me, which alluded easily to a fifteen-feet drop at this spot. Now when you sit in an armchair, in front of your study fire, (as a matter of fact I haven't got a study, but it sounds well), and read of a fifteen-feet drop, it does not frighten you in the least. But when you stand on the extreme edge of a precipice, and look over it, and you perceive that at the bottom of the fifteen-feet drop is the top (about a foot square), of an isolated upstanding rock, and when you consider that if by any mischance you fail to attain the top of the said rock, or fail to stop on it when you get there, you will undoubtedly distribute your carcase over the surrounding landscape, it will probably frighten you very considerably. At any rate I will quite frankly admit that it frightened me. Then I read in my notes, "by keeping to left drop can be avoided"; whereupon I kept to the left, and found another drop almost as bad as the first. There was certainly a small ledge about half-way down, but above the ledge was a nasty little outward bulge of the rock, which I perceived would just about meet a somewhat similar bulge in my waistcoat, and the combined effect of the two bulges would tend to throw me off my balance. I was alone, and as it was late in the season, it might be weeks, or even months,

before another human being came along, and, to put it quite crudely, I funkyed it. I retraced my steps for a short distance, and then got down into the Garbh Choire by a series of ledges. I felt a bit small, but I think I did the right thing; and I do not think the direct climb is the right thing for a solitary climber, at any rate unless he is a much better man than myself. I endeavoured to console myself with the reflection that I was still all in one piece.

I think the most difficult thing about climbing is to decide when one ought to turn back. One does not want to be an old woman, and turn back unnecessarily, and yet on the other hand one feels one ought not to take undue risks, and it is difficult to draw the line between the ignominy of old womanhood, and the acceptance of justifiable risks. I am perhaps more justified in taking a certain amount of risk than most men, as I rejoice in single blessedness, and have nobody dependent upon me. Nor can I flatter myself that my continued existence here below is of any real benefit or utility to any living creature. Yet even so, and although life has no particular savour for me, I do not feel justified in taking unnecessary risks. One does not want to bring the noble sport of mountaineering into disrepute, and every accident on a mountain helps to do so. And moreover, even if one does feel that life on this mundane sphere is a dismal failure, and that everything is vanity and vexation of spirit, and dust and ashes, and all the rest of it,

yet the irresistible instinct is to keep one's worthless life to the very last possible moment.

From this col Sgurr Dubh Mhor seems to tower above one in a most forbidding style, but the ridge up to it, though very much broken up, is never at all difficult. But before I reached the summit I came in for a little more excitement, for I got crag-bound. I had been following some rather scanty nail-marks, which had left the ridge temporarily, and I had not noticed the place where they led up to it again. Passing on without taking much heed, I found myself on one of the numerous terraces, which are so characteristic of this side of the Dubhs. Then I found some bilberries. Now I have a particular weakness for bilberries, and I had certainly not expected to find any up here. One does not look for much pertaining to the Vegetable Kingdom in the Coolins anywhere above about 1500 feet up, and this was a glorious find. I had had breakfast at the unchristian hour of 6.30, and since then nothing liquid had passed down my throat: wherefore I wallowed in those bilberries. For the next fifteen minutes I forgot all about Sgurr Dubh Mhor, and wandered on from terrace to terrace, until I was suddenly brought up sharp by an uncompromising gabbro wall, with never a hold or ledge or excrescence on it, and for the life of me I could not remember how I had got down to the terrace on which I found myself. It took me some little time to extricate myself, and I tried several ways unsuccessfully, until at last I managed to

struggle up a nasty corner, which I should never have dreamed of attempting in cold blood. After this episode I adhered religiously to the ridge, till I reached the summit of Sgurr Dubh Mhor at 1.50. This was very late. I had fondly hoped to get to the top of Sgurr Dubh na Dabheinn in three hours, that is by 12.10, and here I was at 1.50 only just at the top of the Mhor peak, with Dabheinn towering in front, and looking a terror. My heart sank. I knew that I had got rather a long job to get down from Dabheinn, and every step of the way to Glen Brittle was new ground to me. In little more than four hours it would be getting dark, and I began to have dismal visions of groping my way down Coire Labain in the darkness, and perhaps not getting out of it all night. However, you never know your luck with the Coolins, and good old Dabheinn turned out much simpler than he looked, and at 2.25 I stood on the summit. Anyhow, whatever might yet happen, I had at any rate done the traverse of the Dubhs: one more score wiped out.

Coming down from Dabheinn into Coire a' Ghrunndda, I think I left the ridge a bit too soon; at any rate I got into mild difficulties, but got down safely, and steered across the corrie for the Bealach a' Coire Ghrunndda, which I had been told was the nearest way down to Glen Brittle. The Bealach seemed rather a complicated spot, and I think I turned down towards Coire Labain a few yards too soon. At any rate the very steep scree shoot descended with a sweet reasonableness for 200 or



300 feet or thereabouts, then the scree came to an abrupt end, and a lip of rock announced a pitch. It was not a very difficult pitch, but unfortunately a healthy young waterfall was already in possession, and I have a foolish fancy for keeping dry when possible. But the gully, if such it can be called, was divided here, and the pitch in the other part, though it looked rather more difficult, lacked the waterfall, so I decided to try it. I got down safely, though a bit of rotten rock, which came away just as I was about to entrust my person to it, gave me cold shivers down the spine, as it distributed itself over the corrie, some hundreds of feet below, with resounding crashes. After this I had no further adventures, and kept steadily on down the corrie, and across the boggy moor. Coire Labain is one of the finest mountain scenes in Skye, and therefore in these islands; but I was getting tired by now, and the afternoon was advancing, wherefore I did not devote much time to the contemplation of the wonderful rock scenery, with which I was surrounded. I was going to stay ten days at Glen Brittle, and knew that I should be up in Coire Labain again. As a matter of fact I was in the corrie several times, but the weather changed for the worse a day or two later, and I never really saw the rock-scenery again. However, I had had a delightful day, and got to Glen Brittle at 5.45 p.m., feeling on very fair terms with myself, though regretting that I had not descended direct from Sgurr Dubh Beag.

## CHAPTER XX.

SGURR SGUMAIN, SGURR ALASDAIR, SGURR TEARLACH  
AND SGURR MHIC CHOINNICH.

THE day after I arrived at Glen Brittle was a gorgeous day; cloudless blue sky and tropical sun. I carefully chose a suitable spot out on the moor, and there lay on my back all the morning, and as I basked in the hot sun, thought of those foolish people who write as though the sun never shines in Skye, and would have you believe that it is eternally raining in that dismal hyperborean island. I also thought of some foolish things that I myself had given utterance to of a similar nature. Somebody, for instance had once remarked to me that October was the most delightful month of the twelve in Scotland, and I had instantly retorted: "Yes, when it is fine—which it never is." Yet this was the 4th of October, and I had now had a week of perfect weather. But alas! this was my last really fine day. For the next day the weather changed; the rain pelted down, the wind shrieked round the cottage, the mist shrouded all the hills, and swirled unceasingly down the valley; and out in the loch great white waves came rolling up, to break in clouds of spray on the cruel rocks. Then I bitterly regretted the waste of this glorious day.

The third morning things looked better when

I arose, and my hostess committed herself to the rash statement that it would be a fine day. So at 8.45 I started for Sgurr Sgumain by the West Ridge. The sun was in good working order, and I found it a strenuous hour's grind across the moor to the foot of the ridge, and another strenuous hour from there to the first cairn, which I suppose is the summit of Sron na Ciche. Then the sun disappeared, and mist gradually closed up around me. I just caught a glimpse of the Tearlach-Dubh gap as I was approaching the Bealach a' Coire Ghrunnda, but the next moment Alasdair disappeared into the mist, and I saw nothing more all day until I got down again.

The ridge up to Sgumain is quite easy, and from that peak to Alasdair is not difficult. There are several pinnacles, which can all be passed on the right, and can also be traversed without serious difficulty by those conscientious individuals who take their ridges *au grand sérieux*. Then comes the *mauvais pas*, a twenty-feet wall which is certainly a bit stiff. This can also be passed on the right, but for some inscrutable reason, (there is no accounting for these things), I was seized with a determination to do the thing, and with a heave and a struggle managed to get up. After this there was no further difficulty, and I reached the summit of Sgurr Alasdair, the highest point of the Coolins, at 12.30.

The weather had been getting steadily worse. The mist had thickened, and nothing could be seen more than three or four yards around me; it was raining steadily, and I was already wet through. Up to the Sron na Ciche cairn it had been almost



To face p. 148]

SGURR DEARG, SGURR MHC CHOINNICH, SGURR ALASDAIR, SGURR SGUMAIN AND SRON NA CICHE, FROM GLEN BRITTLE.

[Photo by Richard Moreland.





insupportably hot ; now it was so cold that I could not sit for five minutes to eat a sandwich. It was rather eerie, perched up on these sharp summits, as though impaled on the point of a gigantic needle, and seeing nothing but boiling mist all around me, but it was far too cold to linger to enjoy the sensation.

I descended quickly over easy rocks to the col between Alasdair and Tearlach, and expected to find an easy route up the latter peak, but in the dense mist I evidently missed (no pun intended) the usual route. At any rate I groped my way along the foot of an apparently impracticable rock-wall for a few minutes, and at the first spot where it seemed possible, started to climb up it. I had rather an awkward ten minutes ; then I saw nail-marks, and knew that I was on the right track. I reached the top of Tearlach at 1.5, and left it again immediately, for wind and rain were at their worst.

I was a little anxious here as to whether I should find the route, and keep to my ridge. Hitherto my way had been about due west, now it turned at right-angles to nearly due north. In ascending a peak you cannot go very far wrong ; as long as you keep on ascending, you are bound to get to the top some time or other. But when you have reached the top, and begin your descent, your troubles will begin, if there should be a thick mist around you ; it is fatally easy to turn round on the summit without thinking, and thereby lose your sense of direction. I had never been up here before, and knew very little about Tearlach ; if I once got off the ridge there was no knowing where



I might get to, or whether I should ever get anywhere again. Of course I always carry a compass, but on this occasion I had forgotten my map, and the one is not much use without the other. Besides, I never can get into the habit of using my compass as much as I ought to do, and nearly always I trust to my bump of locality. To-day I never once thought of it until I got home in the evening, and unearthed it from the damp recesses of a waistcoat pocket. But as a matter of fact the compass is not much use in the Coolins, as much of the rock is magnetic, and deflects the needle. The mist at this time was about the thickest that I ever remember, and it was almost as bad as climbing down in the dark, as I crawled down that Tearlach ridge. I kept as much as possible on the Coruisk side, in order to get some slight shelter from wind and rain, but dared not stray many yards. I was beginning to feel like having had enough of this sort of thing, and when at last the huge bulk of Mhic Choinnich loomed dimly up through the mist, looking of course ten times bigger and more ferocious even than it really is, it fairly knocked the stuffing out of me. I knew that there are two or three ways up from the col, on the Coire Labain side, of only moderate difficulty, but in this weather I should probably have great difficulty in finding the route, and did not feel like tackling it. Anyhow, when a gully suddenly presented itself on the left, I incontinently turned down it, and trusted fervently that it would bring me into the corrie without any serious climbing.

We are creatures of impulse. I descended that

gully for about 200 feet, with the absolute intention of going straight back to Glen Brittle. Then I stopped to consume a jam sandwich, and suppose that the feast put new heart into me. At any rate, when I had finished the sandwich, without any discussion with myself, I turned round and made straight for Mhic Choinnich, or at least for the direction thereof, for it was now again invisible. I did not climb up to the col again, but struck up the rocks at once, for it seemed clear that if I kept on, I must before long meet one of the moderately easy routes on this face alluded to above, if only I kept a sharp look-out for nail-marks, which however, would be difficult to see with the rocks all streaming with water. Several times during the next twenty minutes I cursed myself for a bally idiot, and wished I had gone on down Coire Labain. Two or three times I got into rather tight places, and climbed things, which in the ordinary way I should never dream of tackling; I think two uncompromising corners were the worst bits, at the first one I really thought for a moment that I was hopelessly stuck. Once I saw a line of faint nail-marks, but it wandered off to the left along a series of terraces; my blood was up by now, I saw a possible route straight ahead, and went for it. Eventually I emerged on the summit, a yard or two on the right of the cairn. About twenty feet before the top I encountered nail-marks again, probably the last bit of the west buttress climb.

I got down the knife-edge ridge of Mhic Choinnich as quickly as possible, and when I reached the col

between that mountain and Sgurr Dearg, turned off down the corrie, this time for good. If it had been fine, I might have made an effort to finish the round of Coire Labain by climbing Sgurr Dearg, but it was nearly three o'clock, and would be dark in about three hours, and anyhow I wanted no more Coolin ridges that day. So I tramped steadily down the corrie and across the moor, and got to my diggings at five o'clock. I was told that down in Glen Brittle it had been fine all day, which seemed a cruel shame.

It seems a remarkable thing that there should be a mountain in the British Islands—and that, too, the highest peak of the Coolins—that had never been ascended, or at least of which no ascent was recorded, until the 'seventies. Sgurr Alasdair was first ascended by that genial sportsman, Sheriff Nicolson. I have not been able to ascertain the date, but as he wrote an account of the ascent in *Good Words* in 1875, it was probably shortly before. The peak has been appropriately named after him. It was supposed to have had no name previously, but I have often thought—as did Sheriff Nicolson himself—that the name Sgurr Sgumain rightly belonged to it. The meaning is “stack peak,” appropriate enough to the peak now known by the name, but still more so to Alasdair. Besides, Alasdair is obviously the master-peak of the group, and Sgumain is so obviously a subsidiary peak, that it seems incredible to me that anybody should have bestowed a name upon the latter, and have left Alasdair out in the cold.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### FROM THURSO TO DURNES.

MANY years ago I remember reading an article on Pedestrianism, wherein twenty miles a day for at least three consecutive days, was fixed as the test of a good walker. Anybody who had done it was told that he might henceforth conscientiously consider that he had qualified as such, and contrariwise nobody was entitled so to flatter himself, until he had achieved the feat. The uninitiated were warned that it was not quite so easy as it sounded; anybody who can walk at all, can walk twenty miles in a day, and anybody with serious pretensions to be a good walker, can walk twenty miles the second day. The third day is the crux.

So I read, and smiled as I read, for in spite of the warning, I thought in my haste that twenty miles a day was nothing much, whether for three days or thirty, and I had always flattered myself that I was a fair walker. Yet as I thought the smile faded away, for I soon realized that I had never actually kept up twenty miles a day for three consecutive days. I had often walked far more in a day, and had occasionally done as much the second day, but for some reason or other I had never kept it up for three days. Something had always

intervened, a wet day, some hindrance or slight mishap: of course (I said) I could have done it easily enough, but nevertheless I never had, and then I began to wonder uneasily whether after all I really could have done it, and straightway I made up my mind that at the first opportunity I would do it, or at least I would have a good try at it. Well, I did it. I went for a short walking tour in the West Country, and walked twenty-four or twenty-five miles a day for four days, so I considered that I had passed with honours. Still, what the writer of the article said was perfectly true: the third day is undoubtedly the crux; and I am free to confess that about midday on the third day I felt very much inclined to throw up the sponge, but I stuck to it, and the fourth day I felt fit to go anywhere and do anything.

That successful little walking trip took place, alas! many years ago. I have since put on more than a stone, and to my downward-looking eye the lower portion of my waistcoat seems to have mysteriously advanced. I take a larger size in all garments, apparently even in hats, for a short time ago I had to attend a funeral, and disinterred an ancient "topper," which—Tell it not in Gath!—had not seen daylight for several years, and found it too small, and I went to that funeral with the ancient "topper" balanced precariously on the summit of my cranium. This would seem to indicate that intellectual development has kept pace with bodily expansion, though a candid friend preferred to attribute the phenomenon to swelled head.



All this has not got much to do with Thurso, but we shall get there in time. In fact we are there, and are about to leave it, and we are going to walk to Durness (sixty-seven miles) in three days, or perish in the effort. For it was suggested to me, that in view of the aforesaid physical and mental development, I very possibly could no longer graduate as a good walker. And although I repudiated the idea with indignation, yet I felt none too confident; but I would not give in, and write myself down as superannuated without a struggle, so I set forth from Thurso one October morning, determined to walk those sixty-seven miles in three days, if possible.

Thurso itself has no particular attractions, but the bay is very fine. It was at first a very clear morning, and the Orkneys looked most alluring; the giant cliffs of Hoy were distinctly visible, and I longed to visit them, but I am a wretched sailor, and when I looked at that unquiet sea between, the desire was much mitigated. In about an hour a rain-cloud came up from the west, and a smart shower ensued. I concluded that I was in for the sort of weather that one usually gets in Scotland in the autumn, but the cloud passed on at a great rate, and blotted out Hoy and the Orkneys, and the rain soon stopped, and I may here remark that there was no more until a fortnight later, when I was on my way home.

The interior of both Caithness and Sutherland consists mainly of a vast expanse of dreary peat-moor, and with the exception of occasional oases



and occasional mountains, the interest is concentrated on the coast. To-day, except the fine view of the Orkneys, there was nothing of interest until after passing Melvich, the Griams and Ben Loyal came in sight, and the long bold Strathy Point. At the little, but very comfortable, Strathy inn I turned in for the night, having walked twenty-one miles.

Next morning I started about nine o'clock for Tongue. The scenery for the first few miles was much the same as on the preceding day: the same old peat-moors all around, with an occasional view of a wide expanse of sea, the Orkneys receding now into the distance, though still occasionally visible. Then a long, winding descent into Strath Armadale was followed by the ascent of a most portentous hill on the other side. The scenery now improved very much. The many-peaked Ben Loyal was here, and for the next twenty-five miles, the principal feature of the landscape; soon Ben Hope also came into sight, but though more than 500 feet higher than Ben Loyal, it is not nearly so impressive. The latter is a most fascinating mountain, and I have never seen one that makes a better show of a mere 2500 feet. I regretted that my programme did not include the ascent thereof, but my chief object in life just now was to walk twenty miles a day for at least three days, and mountains could not be included. Similarly there were hereabouts one or two little glens descending on the right to the sea, which looked as though they might be charming, and I would have liked to have explored them, but

I had got to get to Tongue that night, and side-tracking down pretty little glens could not be allowed. I passed one lane leading to "Farr": I thought I was going fairly far, and indeed considerably farther, but not that far.

I reached Bettyhill Hotel about 12.20, and turned in for lunch. It is a very good hotel in a splendid situation, overlooking the beautiful little Torrisdail Bay, formed by the Naver and Borgie rivers. If it were not for its remote situation, it would very soon become a fashionable seaside resort. After lunch a disappointment awaited me. I had heard of a ferry over the Naver, and a foot-bridge over the Borgie, which would save about three miles, but on inquiry I was told that there was no longer a public ferry over the Naver, and that I must therefore go round by the road, making my day's work twenty-five miles instead of twenty-two. Strath Naver, after crossing the bridge over the stream, is one of the Sutherland oases; but about two miles beyond the bridge my road branched off to the right, and I do not know how much farther the luxuriant vegetation of those two miles continues. The Tongue road ascends a terrible hill, at first up a fine wild glen, which before long merges into the ubiquitous peat-moor. A brief oasis at Borgie Bridge, then again three or four miles of peat-moor. I must say that these peat-moors are dreary. There is certainly something impressive about the vast extent of space, sometimes with no sign for miles of human existence, except the telegraph wires and the road you are walking on, and the latter is so

bad, as not aggressively to suggest human agency. But nobody can call peat-moors beautiful, and about here there are no compensating sea-views, though there is certainly Ben Loyal. When you get to the top of a big hill, and see your road winding down into a glen, and winding up another terrific hill on the other side, and across another endless expanse of peat-moor, and you can even distinguish the telegraph posts against the far horizon miles away, and still there is no sign of Tongue, it engenders a feeling of hopelessness, and you feel as though you were a Dante victim, condemned for your sins to tramp over endless peat-moors till the Day of Judgment.

Fortunately we are still in a finite world, where everything, even peat-moors, comes to an end sooner or later, and after a time there ensued a long winding descent to a little valley, then another rise round a rocky little knob, and a long descent to Tongue. The first view of Tongue Bay, with an archipelago of rocky islets off the mouth, was charming, but I was getting tired, and the thing that I most desired to see was the Tongue Hotel, which I reached about six o'clock, just as the shades of night were falling. I had walked twenty-five miles, and although I was certainly tired, I was not at all done up, and I felt distinctly pleased with myself.

Pride, however, will have a fall, and within a few hours I was feeling much less pleased with myself. Something had disturbed my internal economy. I retired to rest about ten, but could not sleep, and presently began to feel as though I

had swallowed a solid fifty-six pound weight. Over the subsequent proceedings I will draw a veil. When I again retired to rest, after the ensuing cataclysm, it was long after midnight, and I had instructed the handmaiden to arouse me at seven o'clock.

It was excessively annoying. The next day was the crux, the third day of my walk. I had made up my mind to walk twenty miles a day for three consecutive days, and here on the third I was *hors de combat*. I could not decide what to do. I did not want to waste time at Tongue, yet it seemed hopeless to think of walking the twenty-one miles to Durness, and unfortunately there is no inn between, and no place that amounts to a village, even as villages go up here; and it seemed risky to start out on a twenty-one miles' walk, my third day of walking, after the performance just hinted at, when I could not be sure of getting a bed anywhere on the route, if I broke down.

However, I arose about seven o'clock and felt a bit better, and after breakfast better still. I certainly did not feel quite like walking twenty-one miles, but I made up my mind to set out, and if I got bad again, I must try to get a bed in some cottage. I got away before nine o'clock, and congratulated myself on, at any rate, having plenty of time, as I walked down to the Ferry. It was a splendid bright morning, but there was a very strong west wind, and the Kyle looked choppy. Here was another complication, for I am a miserable sailor at the best of times, and after last night's

catastrophe, the first wobble of the boat would probably be enough to set me off. Also there is another ferry about ten miles farther on over Loch Eriboll, about one and a half miles wide. For a moment I thought of returning to the Hotel, and getting a carriage to take me round the head of the loch and on to Eriboll; but I am glad now, that I put away from me all thoughts of such a pusillanimous proceeding. Nevertheless, before long I began to wonder whether I should have to do so after all, for there was no sign of the ferry-boat for a terrible time. The ferry-man lives on the far side, and there is a flagstaff, upon which you are instructed to hoist a white flag for the small boat, and a red flag for the big one. I concluded that the small boat would probably be large enough to contain me, so hoisted the white flag, and sat down to await events.

An hour rolled by, and nothing happened. I began to get seriously anxious. I had got about nineteen miles to do, and another ferry to cross at Eriboll; very soon it would be impossible to get to Durness before dark. And if I walked the two miles back to the Hotel, by the time they had got a carriage or motor ready for me, it would probably be too late to drive. Moreover, all these repeated hindrances and obstacles made me more and more determined to carry the thing through. But I had almost given up all hope, when I at last saw the boat coming across. The ferry-man had been carting, or rather boating, his hay from a little island in the Kyle, and it never occurred to him to leave



his work in the middle of a boat-load, so he calmly went on loading up his boat, sailed it to the mainland, and landed his hay, before he came to fetch me. I got across without any internal upheavals, but it was after eleven when I landed on the western shore—more than an hour wasted.

Between the Kyle of Tongue and Loch Hope, and extending from Ben Hope to the sea, lies the dreary peat wilderness known as the Moins, which I had now got to cross. It is about seven miles from Tongue Ferry to the Hope Bridge, and nearly double that distance from Ben Hope northwards to the coast, and in all that wide expanse I believe there is only one cottage. From the ferry the road ascends steadily for about three miles to a height of about 800 feet above sea-level. The gradient is not at all steep, and I could have kept up a fair pace, if it had not been for that strong west wind, which by now amounted to a gale. Everything seemed against me to-day. I was behind time and especially wanted to get on quickly, and now for about seven miles there was a hurricane blowing straight in my face.

At the top of the long rise, and just about in the centre of the cheerless Moins, I passed the one solitary cottage referred to :

“One bare dwelling, one abode, no more.”

And this abode is far more solitary, in a situation far wilder and more remote from the haunts of men, than the dwelling referred to by the poet. It is only about a mile from Blea Tarn to Wall



End, and but little more to the Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel. Langdale is a teeming hive of human life compared to the Moins.

What a place to live in ! In the exact middle of about eighty square miles of peat desert, 750 feet above sea-level, and three miles down that hill to the nearest dwelling-place of any sort ! No wonder the Scotch are "dour" and self-reliant.

There ensued about a mile of level plateau, then a drop of three miles to Loch Hope. I was thankful to be going downhill, but I could not make up for lost time, as the westerly gale was still going strong, and I reckoned I was about half-an-hour behind time, when I reached the outlet of Loch Hope. Here is a brief oasis, a shooting-lodge beautifully situated, with a splendid view up the loch, and two or three cottages ; it seemed a metropolis after the Moins. There used to be a ferry here, but there is now a bridge, which I reached at 1.30. It had kept fine, which was a mercy, and I was feeling better than when I started, which was another, although it was also rather surprising, when you think of it.

From Hope Bridge the road rises steeply, and winds round the ridge between Loch Hope and Loch Eriboll. Here I lost time again, and it was rather a grind up that hill. On rounding the last knob, Loch Eriboll burst into view. It is more than thirty years since I first read in Scott of "Eriboll and its caverns hoar," and I have often read of it, and heard of it, elsewhere. For many years I had longed to see it, and had often planned

this trip, with Loch Eriboll as one of its principal objects. Yet now I was here, I hardly looked at it. Nobody appreciates beautiful scenery more than I do, although I am quite unable to describe it, or the emotions which it arouses within my bosom; but when I am possessed with an *idée fixe*, everything else has to retire into the background. My *idée fixe* on this occasion was to get to Durness that day, and so complete my twenty miles a day for three days; and moreover I wanted to get to Durness before dark, as I dislike groping about in the dark for a hotel. It is eight miles from the far side of Loch Eriboll to Durness, and there was about three hours of daylight left, but Heilim Ferry, which lay just below me, had to be crossed, and the events of the morning had implanted within me a deep distrust of Highland ferries. I could think of nothing else, and could give no attention to the beauty of the surrounding scenery, until I was over that ferry. However, my luck seemed to have turned at last, for I met the ferry-man in the field, and he said he could take me across at once.

Not quite at once; there is no sense of the value of time up here. The boat had to be baled out, (a cheerful beginning!), then loaded up with stones for ballast. I went into the house and had a glass of milk, and finished my sandwiches, and sat for ten minutes, and even then they were not quite ready. This house used to be an inn, and they have still a bedroom and sitting-room to let, so I could have stayed here if necessary. The house

is built on a little peninsula, that is very nearly an island, and when we got out of its shelter, and were out on the open loch, I would cheerfully have gone back, and stayed the night, and have given up my *idée fixe*, if possible. For the westerly wind was worse than ever, the waves were enormous, and our little cockle-shell was chucked about in a manner most alarming to a wretched landlubber. Occasionally a mighty wave hit us a smack like a thunderclap, and the next minute we had a drenching shower-bath. I took it for granted that before we got across I should be in the agonies of *mal de mer*, and wondered helplessly whether I should be able to drag myself over that eight miles to Durness. However, by some mysterious and merciful dispensation of a beneficent Providence, (and Providence certainly owed me one by now), I had never a qualm, and landed the other side at 3.20; it would not be dark till about six o'clock, so with a straightforward road, and no more ferries to cross, (which sounds like Moody and Sankey), I was fairly safe, and could now allow myself the relaxation of looking at the scenery, which was very fine. Ben Hope is the dominating feature of the landscape; during the day I had walked round it, and it looks very much more imposing from the west, than from either east or north.

The road for three or four miles keeps parallel to the loch, and not far from it, and is fairly level, so I was able to keep up a steady pace. At about four miles, having left Loch Eriboll, it suddenly turns sharp to the east, and dips down to the sea, at a

lovely little sandy bay, with a string of rocky islets forming a natural breakwater, after which there was a succession of similar sandy coves. The population seemed quite dense in comparison with the country I had passed through; one felt as though one were approaching a metropolis. About a mile short of Durness, I passed over the Allt Smoo; somewhere down below was the celebrated Smoo cave, but I could not stop to investigate it now.

Then up to Durness, and the crowning blow of this eventful day. The hotel was not! It had been burned down a few years ago, and had never been rebuilt. My guide-book was rather old, and I had never thought of asking about the inn, until I was actually at Durness. At first it seemed a terrible blow; I had been solacing myself with the anticipation of a good dinner, and had moreover, decided that I would treat myself to an extra "wee drappie," in celebration of having walked twenty miles a day for three days, and behold the nearest inn was fourteen miles away, and it was just getting dark, and I had to grope round to find quarters for the night. However, it did not matter much after all, as I was soon directed to a cottage where they were able to take me in, and where I was made most comfortable. Certainly I was not able to have my "wee drappie," but probably I was just as well without it; anyhow I had a sumptuous tea, and felt very well pleased with myself, and with things in general. That night I slept the sleep of the just for about ten hours on end.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### FROM DURNESSE TO INCHNADAMPH.

AFTER the somewhat strenuous proceedings of the last three days, as recorded in the previous chapter, I felt that I deserved a day off. I breakfasted later than had been my wont, and sat over the peat fire, (how delightful a peat fire is; I love the peat reek, and wish we had peat down south), rejoicing in the luxury of laziness for an hour or so, then strolled down to Balnakill Bay, to look at the old church, which is very interesting, though there is nothing left but the bare walls, an old stone font, broken and lying on the ground, and a monument, of which greater care has been taken, as it is railed in, and the inscription is perfectly legible. It is to one "Donald Makmurchon," but there is no record as to who he was, though there is a coat of arms, that might afford some information to the heraldic expert. The inscription goes on to inform the world, that the said Donald "hier lyis lo, was ill to his freind, waur to his fo." Donald does not seem to have been an amiable character. Probably the conditions of life among the Highlanders in those days, (the tomb is dated 1623), hardly conduced to amiability. But the epitaphist appears to have felt that something ought to be said in the epitaphee's favour, and



finishes up with, "was true to his maister through weird and wo." After all, it is not all of us of whom as much could truthfully be said. Probably poor old Donald was a harmless and virtuous character, and the first part of the epitaph was very likely due to somebody's talent for epigram, and an inability to restrain the same.

I had intended to explore the promontory of "Fair-aird or Far-out Head." It is so marked on the maps, but I do not know whether "Far-out" is the English equivalent of "Fair-aird." Anyhow I did not explore it. There was a good deal of mist about, and I should have had no view, and the view eastwards along this bold and broken coast is just the one thing, that makes it worth while to walk out to the Head, so I pottered about in Balnakill Bay, until it was time to go home to dinner, which turned out a sumptuous repast.

The following morning I set forth about 10.30 for Rhiconich. This was only fourteen miles, and I felt that I was slacking, but I had done my twenty miles a day for three days, and I was going to take it a bit easier now. Besides, it was only forty-six miles to Inchnadamph, and I did not want to get there till the Saturday, and this was only Thursday, so there was no hurry.

At about two miles from Durness the road reaches the Kyle, and a few hundred yards to the right is a large farm-house and two or three cottages, known as Keoldale, and the ferry for Cape Wrath. I had fully intended going to Cape Wrath, but the days



are too short now to walk there and back by daylight. There is a mail-cart one day a week, which happened to be yesterday. It starts at an unchristian hour in the early morning, and when my landlady told me of it on Tuesday night, I did not feel at all like getting up next morning so early; if it had been to-day I might have made an effort—and again I might not. I know not. The flesh is weak, and the spirit none too willing, in the small hours of the early morn.

It was high tide, or thereabouts, as I walked along by the side of the Kyle. I believe, at low tide, it is a sandy wilderness. The water to-day was as smooth as glass, not like those wretched ferries on Tuesday. The country hereabouts seems about as sparsely populated as the "Moins," for between Keoldale and Rhiconich I only saw three inhabited houses, two cottages at intervals of about three miles, then a shooting-lodge (Gualainn), which used to be an inn, and was indeed built for that purpose, as an inscription on the wall records. This is not one of the old highways, it was made by the then Marquis of Stafford about the middle of the nineteenth century, and so far there has been no unseemly haste to run up rows of desirable villa residences. It is beautifully graded, but the surface is very bad, like most of the roads up here. I once heard the expressive word "macadamable" coined, to express the condition of some Scottish road, and it might certainly be justifiably applied to any road that I have seen in the county of Sutherland, with

some few exceptions on the more beaten tracks of the eastern coast.

The glen (Strath Dionard) is of the usual peat-bog variety, wild and desolate, dreary and dismal. Soon after passing Gualainn House, there is a change for the better, the hills are much more broken up, and rocks and boulders take the place of peat-bogs, and I must say that they are much more interesting to look at.

The Rhiconich Hotel is a very comfortable hostelry, and is beautifully situated on a little grassy knoll at the head of Loch Inchar, which here appears more like an inland lake than an arm of the sea, though the retreating tide betrayed salt water. But the hotel seems to turn its back on the beautiful view down the loch, which is an annoying way that hotels in fine situations often have. It had been a dull day, and had often looked like rain, but no rain had actually fallen, and next day I had a beautiful day for my walk to Scourie; bright sun and cloudless sky all day, more like June than the middle of October. Indeed, this holiday was a lesson to those who jeer at Scotland's climate, for I had not one wet day in the fortnight.

It is a very fine walk from Rhiconich to Scourie, not an uninteresting bit all the way. The hills were studded with rocks, and mountains were getting more numerous and better shaped. The most prominent were the peaks of Arkle and Ben Stack, and the long, serrated ridge of Foinaven, all of which were of a very different style of mountain

architecture from the long, grassy slopes of the hills round the lower parts of Strath Dionard, and very much more effective to look at. But the most striking feature of this district is the multiplicity of lochs. The road threaded its way through a maze of them, of all shapes and sizes. Never for more than a few hundred yards was the road without a loch, on one side or the other, and often on both, from a mere reedy little pool to a stately lake a mile or two long, that would have made the fortune of a more accessible district.

At about four miles from Rhiconich, the road suddenly drops very steeply to the shores of Loch Laxford, and I spent the next hour in toiling round the head of that beautiful sea-loch, although just here it is only about 300 yards across. One often has to do that sort of thing up here, but it always annoys me. Perhaps that annoyance coloured my impressions of Loch Laxford, for, beautiful as it undoubtedly is, it hardly came up to the enthusiastic descriptions that I had heard of it. It is the old story of injudicious and exaggerated praise, and consequent disappointment. Loch Inchard is usually spoken of deprecatingly; as not to be compared with Loch Laxford, and I was delighted with it, probably because I had not expected much. There you have it in a nutshell. Laxford of course is Norse, "lachs" meaning "salmon," the salmon fjord, so that Loch Laxford is tautological, though not more so, and with much more excuse, than "Lake Ullswater," which I saw in print the other day.

After passing up a long hill on the other side of the "Lachsford," and then turning suddenly to the south, the road passes the sweetest little loch of the day. It is marked on the maps as "Loch na Claise Fearn," usually anglicized for the benefit of the long-suffering Sassenach tourist into "Loch Clashfearn." It is one of the prettiest little lakes I have ever seen. I use the adjective advisedly, as there are no mountains near, and no elements of the sublime in the scene, but for quiet loveliness it would be difficult to surpass it. The shores are very irregular, and deeply indented, and there are several small islands thickly covered with pine, birch and rowan, one or two of the latter being a blazing mass of scarlet berries. The water, as in all these little lakes, was as still and clear as glass, reflecting every detail of the hill above with such fidelity, that it was often impossible to tell where the hill ended and the water began. Then I nearly circumambulated another smaller loch, almost as pretty as Clashfearn, but islandless; and after a mile or two through somewhat less interesting country, there is a sudden steep descent to Loch Baddidarroch, which I hailed with delight, not for its beauty, for it hadn't any, but because I knew that Scourie, the hotel, lunch, and other creature comforts, lay at its further end.

This was only a twelve-mile walk, and I ought to have gone on to Kylesku in the afternoon, but I didn't. I felt that I was degenerating, yet after all I was out for a holiday, and the chief advantage of walking alone is that one can stop when one likes,

and there is no sense in slave-driving oneself. Anyhow, after a very excellent lunch, I subsided into a most comfortable armchair by the fire, whence I only emerged an hour or two later, for a gentle stroll round Scourie and its environs.

The next day was again a bright, sunshiny summer's day, and I set forth about nine o'clock for the twenty-two miles walk to Inchnadamph. The scenery was of much the same character as that of yesterday's walk, only there was rather more sea thrown in, though it was difficult to believe that a landlocked pool like Calva Bay, or a long, narrow, reedy stream like Loch Eucaill, were arms of the sea. And even when I got a glimpse of the real sea, as when descending to Badcall Bay, a beautiful inner chamber of the larger Eddrachillis Bay, it was so studded with islands, that there was scarcely more water than in the country I had been walking through. Up here the land seems all water, and the sea all islands.

I reached Kylestrome at 12.40, and thought it one of the most beautiful spots I had ever seen. The three lochs, Cairnbawn, Glencoul and Glendhu, meet here in a narrow strait, and a little peninsula shoots out from the northern shore, and further reduces the width of the strait to little more than a quarter of a mile. The great mass of Quinag makes a splendid background, and looks twice its actual height, as is so often the case up here. On the far side of the strait was the little Kylesku inn. Of course not a soul was in sight, but I had a whistle



with me of great penetrative power, and blew a mighty blast thereon, which awoke the Fontarabian echoes, and presently a man appeared, and fetched me across.

I now regretted very much that I had not come on here yesterday. The inn is small, but seemed very comfortable, and the place attracted me more than any spot I have seen on this trip. Indeed I cannot remember ever seeing a place that pleased me more, and I should very much have liked to have spent a day, exploring the inmost recesses of Loch Glencoul and Loch Glendhu in a boat. I would have stopped there for a day or two now, only that I wanted to get to Inchnadamph to-day. Certainly the weather to-day was much more suitable for pottering about in a boat than for walking. After leaving Loch Glencoul, the road ascends a terrible hill to the col between Quinag and Glasven, and as I toiled up it perspiringly, I wondered whether I should ever reach Inchnadamph after all, or whether I should be all melted awa' before I got to the top of the hill. However, I had plenty of time, and, contrary to my usual habit, I stopped several times for a rest, and I only got to Inchnadamph just before dark. I had walked altogether 122 miles in seven days, as nearly as I could reckon it.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### BEN MORE OF ASSYNT.

I LEFT the Inchnadamph Hotel at 9.10 a.m. for Ben More. There could be no doubt as to the way, with the subsidiary peak of Conaveall in full view at the head of Glen Dubh, and, knowing that the principal peak of the group lay hidden behind it. The morning was dull and overcast, and frequently during the day it looked and felt as though rain were coming, but it never actually came.

This glen is a very beautiful one, though just now the stream was rather low after the spell of dry weather. About one and a half miles up the glen, the water disappears and flows underground for a few hundred yards, a very common feature of limestone districts. The old channel is quite plain, and probably water still flows down it after heavy rain. Soon after passing this spot, I found the going rather heavy and toilsome, and struck up the side of Ben an Uran, round the shoulder of that mountain, and into the fine wild corrie between it and Conaveall. As I rounded the shoulder of the mountain into the corrie, I saw a few hundred yards ahead a large herd of deer. The leader was standing like a statue on a projecting table of rock, and stared

at me for several minutes; then he apparently decided that my appearance, or my odour, was not to his liking, and he made off at full gallop, followed by his retinue. There must have been thirty or forty of them, I should think. It was useless to assure them that I was perfectly harmless, and that I would not hurt them, even if I had had the power. But how I envied them, as I watched them gallop over the rock-strewn slopes, and what a miserable creature I felt, as I slowly picked my laborious way over the same slopes. Even the sheep seemed to grin at me derisively, for there were sheep up here as well as deer, and the mountain sheep is a very different animal from his more placid brother of the southern plains. The latter would seem to apply himself with praiseworthy self-devotion to the task of preparing himself for human consumption. Where he is put, if there is a sufficiency of nourishment for himself and his brethren, there, as a rule, he stays put. The mountain sheep is of different mental calibre, he likes to travel, to see the world; otherwise what were these sheep doing up here, nearly 3000 feet above sea-level, and in a region where there were about half-a-dozen blades of grass to the square mile, when there were miles of lower pastures where they were free to gorge themselves? Also the mountain sheep is an athlete. You would never think so, to look at him, but if you once see him jump a high stone wall, you will no longer doubt it, and you will conceive a greatly enhanced respect for him.

I, being a mere ordinary biped, could not gallop up these steep and stony slopes, and I toiled laboriously onwards until at length, at 12.5, I reached the summit of Conaveall. I felt rather pleased with myself. It is about four miles from the Hotel as the crow flies, and 3234 feet above sea-level, and I really thought that three hours was pretty fair time, but my genial host, Mr. Wallace of the Inchnadamph Hotel, rather knocked the stuffing out of me later on, by telling me that they usually reckoned one and a half hours to the top of Conaveall. I wonder—oh! I wonder—was Mr. Wallace pulling my leg? I wonder.

There is a very fine view from Conaveall, but it was too cold to linger, as I was now exposed to the full fury of a hurricane from the north, from which in the corrie I had been sheltered. Also all my attention was concentrated on the fine serrated ridge, a mile long, connecting Conaveall with Ben More, and which I had now to traverse. It looked at first sight rather alarming, but there is no difficulty whatever in it, or at least there would not have been, if it had not been for that northern hurricane, which several times almost blew me over the edge and down into the great corrie far below. It is a very fine, wild corrie, wherein are numerous tiny burns, the sources of the river Oyke, and in one corner, nestling high up in the bosom of the south top of Ben More, is the little Dubh Loch Mor. But I did not desire just now to descend either into the corrie or into Dubh Loch Mor, and, if I did either, I wished

to do so with circumspection, and with no undue haste; wherefore I kept away from the edge.

The ridge took just fifty minutes to traverse, and at 12.55 I stood on the topmost point of Ben More of Assynt, 3273 feet, "a prood mon the day." The view was not so good as I had had from Conaveall, as clouds had massed in the meanwhile, and hid most of the interesting features, and it looked so like rain, and was so bitterly cold up there, that I left the summit almost at once, and found a sheltered nook among the rocks, to consume a sandwich, and to consider by which route I should descend. The obvious and orthodox route was that by which I had come, but I always like to vary my homeward way, if possible. The main ridge of the mountain continues for two or three miles, nearly due south, and looks interesting. It rises to two peaks, the first about half-a-mile south of the north top, upon which I was sitting; and only some seventy feet lower, the second, Carn nan Convaroan, about a mile farther south, and about 2700 feet in height. The latter seemed out of the question; if I attempted it, I should probably not get back to Inchnadamph before dark. I have since regretted that I did not proceed along the ridge to the south top, and then descend near Dubh Loch Mor into the corrie, but at the time even this seemed rather risky, as it was by now after one o'clock. Also the ridge falls very steeply for about 1500 feet to Dubh Loch Mor, and I might possibly have some difficulty in getting down. Furthermore, some terrible black clouds were hurrying

up on the other side, and I felt sure that a storm was coming, and I wanted to get down, or at least off the ridge, before it burst upon me. So I descended almost at once to the head of the corrie, and made the best of my way across it, and round Conaveall to the col between the Traligill glen and that of the Oykell.

I don't think this sort of thing pays as a rule. It is always much farther than it looks from above, and there is always the risk of getting into difficulties; but I have always rather a weakness for going round a mountain on the return journey, rather than over it for the second time. To-day it went off all right, although it certainly did seem a weary way round the endless shoulders of Conaveall, and down to the wild little glen at the col. This was a delightful spot, and I was glad then that I had come this way. To the south there was nothing particularly attractive; the Oykell glen in these upper parts is merely a dreary peat-desert, Ben More itself being the only object of interest, and this was in the mist before I got down. Dubh Loch Mor is invisible from here, being high up on its shelf under the south top; Loch Ailsh is just out of sight round a corner of the Breabag (otherwise known as the Bread-basket) range, and there is no water visible except the infant Oykell meandering through its peat-bogs.

But the little glen at the watershed is charming. It is a very narrow little defile, hemmed in between the steep rock-strewn sides of Conaveall on the north, and those of the Bread-basket on the south,



and the view westwards down Glen Dubh, with a corner of Loch Assynt gleaming in the distance, is a beautiful one. I found the wide extent of boggy ground at the head of Glen Dubh rather trying, but got over it as quickly as I could, and reached the Hotel at 4.30.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### SUILVEN.

To the majority of tourists, at least to others than mountaineers, this mountain will probably be quite unknown, and they will be surprised to learn that, though only 2399 feet in height, it is one of the most interesting and remarkable hills in Great Britain. Those who have sailed the northern seas may perhaps remember it by the name of "The Sugarloaf," a name which sufficiently explains the aspect of the mountain, seen from the west in the neighbourhood of Lochinver. But anybody so seeing it, would never think that behind that round-topped pillar, there extends a long, narrow, rocky ridge more than a mile long, and rising in two or three places to a height nearly equal to that of the westerly peak.

To an ordinary, common or garden, tourist the mountain would appear inaccessible. That steep western face of the Sugarloaf, which is all that most people ever see, looks unclimbable, and was, in fact, first climbed in 1892. The sides of the ridge, both northern and southern, are just as steep, but, fortunately for the hill-climber who is not also a rock-gymnast, there is one weak spot in Suilven's rocky armour. About half-way along the ridge

there is a very steep grass gully, which sound-winded pedestrians may ascend without the slightest difficulty. No doubt there are plenty of other routes open to the skilled rock-climber, but I think this grass gully, either the northern or southern, for it descends on both faces, is the only route that does not involve rock-climbing of some sort.

But after all, the chief difficulty of the ascent of Suilven, as is so often the case with Scottish mountains, lies in its remoteness. The summit is about five miles, as the crow flies, from Lochinver, but cannot be reached with less than eight miles of walking, and mileage in this sort of country is deceptive; one cannot keep up a good pace across these peat-moors, threading one's way through bogs and a network of little lochs.

I had been wanting for many years to climb the celebrated Sugarloaf, of which I had heard so much, but I had never succeeded in getting to Lochinver, (and indeed have not yet done so), and it hardly seemed possible from any other headquarters; and so this seemed likely to be one more of the long list of things which I have wanted to do, but shall have to leave undone. However, finding myself at Inchnadamph for a week, it seemed a pity to be so near without making a try for it, although it was by no means so near as it appeared on the map. Certainly it was only about six miles as the crow flies, but the whole mass of Canisp lies between, and Canisp rises from a boggy moor, which extends for miles in every direction at an altitude of about

200 feet, and between Canisp and Suilven lies Loch Gainimh, only 500 feet above sea-level. Evidently the direct route would be an awful grind, and I doubted whether the short October day would be long enough for me to get there and back by daylight. Moreover, I always like, if possible, to go one way and return another. Finally, I decided to drive to a mile beyond Ledmore, where the Ullapool road crosses the stream connecting Loch Urigill with Cam Loch. There appeared to be a path thence along the north side of Cam Loch, then over the hill to Lochan Fada, and through Glen Dorcha to Loch Gainimh, and on to Lochinver. The path was a delusion and a snare, but more thereof anon. I held a consultation with genial Mr. Wallace, mine host of the Inchnadamph Hotel, and disclosed my idea, and he very kindly offered to send me down to Cam Loch in the motor instead of the trap, at the price of the latter, which would give me about half-an-hour extra time; and he did not disguise from me that it was a big day, and that I should want all the time I could get. I intended to return by Loch Gainimh, and straight across the Canisp moor, and I rather hoped that I might be able to ascend Canisp also.

The motor whirled me down to Cam Loch in no time, and at 9.25 I left it and started to tramp round the eastern corner of Cam Loch, and for about a mile along its northern shore. It is a beautiful lake with very irregular shores and several islands. The path at first seemed non-existent, but when I had got well round the little easternmost corner of the

loch, it developed a little more individuality, but even at its best it was intermittent and indistinct. I followed it for about a mile, and then I struck up the hill on the right as straight a bee-line as I could for Lochan Fada. I think perhaps I left Cam Loch a trifle too soon, but I don't know that it mattered. One could not go very far wrong with Canisp and Suilven straight in front. I was finding it hot work; it was a glorious day, clear blue sky, and a hot sun beating down upon me throughout the day, in a manner that suggested July rather than October.

It was about 10.55 when I reached Lochan Fada, and I think only now did I quite realize what a big task I had set myself. I had walked about four miles over terribly rough and difficult country in one and a half hours, and I was hardly half-way even to the foot of Suilven. Dread forebodings filled my soul, and I hurried on past Lochan Fada into Glen Dorcha, the narrow glen connecting the former with Loch Gainimh. I believe it is a very fine, wild little glen, with the great mass of Canisp rising on the north, and the long, serrated ridge of Suilven gradually unfolding itself to the south, but I was taking no stock in scenery; all my faculties were concentrated on getting to Suilven as quickly as possible, and the going in Glen Dorcha was horrible, whatever the scenery may be. The path principally consisted of boggy holes, and I wasted a good deal of time trying to find better going. It was twelve o'clock when I reached Loch Gainimh, and even now I was hardly at the foot of Suilven. A long mile of boggy moor, mostly covered with long heather,



exasperating to walk over, lay between me and the extreme eastern point of the mountain; then I had to tramp along the rock-strewn grass slopes at the foot of the ridge, till I reached the steep grass gully already mentioned. Up this I slowly toiled, and on to the ridge, which just at this point is only a foot or two wide. Then twenty minutes easy scrambling, and I reached the summit cairn at 1.50. The top is quite a large grassy plateau; nobody would think it possible, to look at the Sugarloaf from Lochinver, that there was so much space on the top.

Suilven is a very fine view-point. The immediate foreground in all directions consists principally of lochs—an amazing network. Almost due east the great mass of Canisp, looking very imposing from here across the great ditch of Loch Gainimh; beyond Canisp Ben More of Assynt and its group of satellite peaks; farther to the left Quinag, which I did not at first recognize, not having before seen its fine western line of cliffs; to the south Coul More, Coulbeg and Stack Polly all looked interesting; westwards the Minch, and the deeply indented and varied coast-line. Out at sea there was a haze which hid the Outer Hebrides from my view.

I would have liked to have stayed up there for a long rest. I had walked hard for nearly five hours with only one stop of about five minutes, and I felt that I had earned a rest. But I dared not linger. I had eight or ten miles across an awful country still to go; I had got to get down to the outlet of Loch Gainimh, then up about 2000 feet over the northern

shoulder of Canisp, and then across a long, boggy moor and down to Inchnadamph. There would be hardly four hours of daylight left, and I doubted whether it would be enough. So I sat for just ten minutes and consumed a sandwich, and then started on my downward way. It took me one and a half hours to get down to the westward end of Loch Gainimh, which seems a long time, looking at the map, but the gully is very steep, and steep grass slopes have to be descended with some caution, especially if one is alone.

Just beyond Loch Gainimh I struck a deer-stalker's path, which was a great help, as it took me to within a few hundred yards of the top of the ridge, and then stopped dead. I think it was about 4.45 when I got there, and I was taken aback at the sight of some miles of moor spread out between me and the desired haven of Inchnadamph. Of course it had long been obvious that I could not possibly ascend Canisp, but it now seemed hardly possible that I should get off the moor before dark. And I must say that a boggy Scottish moor is not a suitable place for nocturnal perambulations.

The next two hours is rather a nightmare to me. The familiar peak of Conaveall was my landmark, and I walked as hard as I could, (which by now was not very hard), straight towards it; or at least as straight as possible, for I was continually obliged to diverge to avoid bogs, a little loch, or some other obstacle. I saw a lot of deer: they were continually turning up a few hundred yards away; they would

stand like statues, staring at me steadily, then go off at a gallop. Hateful creatures! They could gallop! Also they were at home. I began to wonder whether I should ever see mine again.

Hours rolled by. The light began to wane; I was still tramping across that endless moor. Conaveall seemed to come no nearer; Inchnadamph had not yet come into sight. Time after time I had topped a rise in the moor, or come to an edge, expecting to see the Assynt valley below me, and each time another long stretch of that hateful moor unfolded itself. Was I never to get off that moor? Was I condemned for my sins to tramp over it till the end of time?

When the valley at last came into sight, it was almost dark. I could see the lights of the Hotel, and I could just distinguish the lighter green of a field against the darker colour of the moor, where I knew there was a bridge over the river. I tried to keep that patch of lighter green in view, in order to reach the bridge, but soon it merged into the general darkness, and I could no longer distinguish anything; even the Hotel lights disappeared, I suppose behind trees, and I could only go down as straight as possible. Of course it was horrible ground to go over in the dark; frequently I fell down through putting a foot into a hole, or on a loose stone; several times I thought something must be broken; anon there would be a squelch as I splashed through a bog, and I was just thinking how lucky I had been to escape the deep bog holes, when suddenly I went

plump into one. I was in up to my middle, for the skirts of my Norfolk jacket were just touched. There was about a foot of water, and my feet were churning about in thick black mud. I did not touch anything solid, and for one awful moment I thought I was going in bodily, but I threw out both arms, and managed to grasp something solid, and after a heave and a struggle hauled myself out. I was nearly at the bottom of the hill, when this little interlude occurred. A few minutes later I reached the river. I could not have been far from the bridge, but what did bridges matter in the state I was in? I simply walked straight through the river; it could do no harm and might even wash off some of the filthy black mud. Still even now I did not throw all caution to the winds. It was a small thing in the way of rivers, but small rivers sometimes have deep holes here and there, and it was too dark to see anything here. My adventures might possibly not yet have reached their climax. So I trod warily. For a few yards it was quite shallow, so much so that I was almost beguiled out of my caution; the next moment it suddenly deepened, and in the swift current I nearly lost my footing, but managed to recover myself, and reached the other side in safety. The water was not quite so deep as the bog-hole, and at any rate it was cleaner.

A few minutes later I reached the Hotel. It was nearly seven o'clock, and I think Mr. Wallace was beginning to get a bit anxious about me. I had begun to get a bit anxious about myself.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### SGURR DEARG AND SGURR NA BANACHDICH.

AGAIN in Skye, and again in the autumn. I can never quite make up my mind whether I prefer the early summer or the autumn for holidays. July and August I bar absolutely. There is no doubt, I think, that May and June are the best months for the Highlands; the weather is more settled then as a rule, and the long days are a great advantage. In mountaineering, and especially in the Coolins, one can never tell how long it is going to take one to get off the ridge, and back to one's headquarters; and few who have done much climbing in Skye, have escaped the unpleasant experience of getting benighted some time or other, and it is certainly a great point in favour of early summer, that one has then an ample margin of daylight for any ordinary expeditions.

But, on the other hand, if one takes one's holiday in the early summer, one wants another in the autumn, and one can't get it, and then the summer and autumn seem terribly long. Moreover, the weather in autumn is usually much more suitable for strenuous physical exertion than the heat of midsummer. It is apt to be excessively hot in June, as the foregoing narrative will occasionally



have shown. I am not as a rule a particularly thirsty person: in ordinary autumn weather I can walk and climb all day, without feeling any particular need for liquid sustenance; but nobody can toil up and down mountains for ten or twelve hours beneath a tropical sun without drinking, and on many occasions the day has been spoiled to me by the need of water. Of course, it is easy enough to take a Thermos, or other, flask, but I have a particular dislike to carrying anything when climbing. Twice I have had a narrow escape from disaster, when carrying something on my back, that swung round and almost overbalanced me at critical moments, and I never carry anything now, if I can possibly help it. I dislike even to fill up my pockets unduly; it is often awkward when climbing, to require more space than is available. We have probably all of us, (*i. e.* all of us who climb), had the experience of getting temporarily stuck in a narrow chimney, and having to take off our coats, and send them up by the rope. That is all very well for a party, though even then it causes delay, and is therefore a nuisance, but when one is alone, it is very awkward. More than once I have tied a piece of string to my coat, and the other end to some part of my person, and ascending the chimney thusly, have then pulled up the string after me; but it is an anxious process: the string may break, the coat of course cannot deflect from the straight course as the human body is able to some extent to do, and may get caught; and if there were a flask in one of the pockets, the strain

on one's nerves would be too great for endurance. In the cooler autumn weather one can generally get through the day without drinking, though not always, but on the other hand the short autumn days are really not long enough for a long day on the Coolins, and it is exceedingly unpleasant, and indeed dangerous, to have to pick one's way across a boggy moor in darkness, or even in a bad light. I am by now fairly familiar with the topography of the Coolins, and generally know about how long I shall require, to get down from the particular part of the ridge where I find myself. If I am on a part with which I am not so familiar, my usual plan has been to allow myself three hours of daylight to get down from the summit ridge, but it is sometimes difficult to adhere to this.

I had been at Sligachan for a few days, but had done no climbing, as I had left home with a bad cold, and was not feeling very fit. Then I had gone across to Glen Brittle, to lead the simple life for a week, and to make attempts at some of the climbs at that end of the Coolins.

I left my quarters in Glen Brittle at 9.10, and started up the boggy moor behind the village at a steady pace. It was fine and clear, with a cold south wind, and I felt fairly fit, and meant to have a try at the Inaccessible Pinnacle of Sgurr Dearg, which had for many years been one of the objects of my ambition. The moor was rather dry this year, or at least it was drier than the previous time I was here, when the whole moor was like a well-filled

sponge; it was very much pleasanter to walk over to-day. In forty-five minutes I reached the north end of the little Loch an Fhir Bhallaich and the foot of the Dearg ridge, and at 10.55 the first cairn on the latter. The wind by now had increased to a hurricane, and I began to get anxious. The cairn of Sron Dearg I attained at 11.45; from here a typical Coolin ridge, quite easy, but as narrow as they make them—and they make them very narrow indeed up here—extends to the summit cairn of Sgurr Dearg, reached at 12.5. A handbook to the Coolins, published not long ago, says that the summit of Sgurr Dearg may be reached in two hours from Glen Brittle. Far be it from me to impugn the veracity of the authors. I can only say that if they are in the habit of doing it in two hours, I have the greatest admiration for their physical prowess, but shall continue to take three hours over the job myself. And I think they might remember, that such books are after all mainly for the benefit of ordinary people, and not for experts. The sort of people who are able to walk from Glen Brittle to the summit of Sgurr Dearg in two hours, do not require the assistance of other men's books; and I am quite sure that most ordinary people would require nearer three hours than two, to foregather on the summit.

The wind along here was terrific, and several times I went down on my hands and knees, to avoid being blown bodily off the ridge. Where possible I avoided the top of the ridge, and walked along the lee side thereof, but it was often not possible to do

so. Gradually it was borne in upon me, that in this gale I could not tackle the Pinnacle, which now came into sight. Although I had never been up here before, and had only seen the Pinnacle from a distance, I was fairly familiar with its topography, and knew that the long eastern *arête* is very narrow, and very exposed, with a tremendous drop on both sides, not at all the sort of thing to attempt in this tremendous wind. It is a weird object, not exactly imposing, except when one looks at its western front from near the summit cairn of Sgurr Dearg, just below. But as one approaches along this ridge, and it gradually emerges from the rocks in front, it strikes one with a sense of incongruity, as a sort of huge practical joke. Why it should be incongruous, an enormous rock amid a wilderness of rock, I cannot in the least explain, but that was how it struck me. It springs from the very steep side of Dearg, and it unfortunately overtops the summit ridge of the latter by about twenty feet, so that it is the actual summit of the mountain. I say "unfortunately," because if it were not the summit of the mountain, one would not be so keen to climb it. I must say that in general I am not particularly keen on pinnacles, because one has got to climb down again, and I never feel quite comfortable when climbing down. But I am very keen on mountain summits, and so I particularly want to climb the Inaccessible Pinnacle. There are many other fine pinnacles in Skye, and on the mainland of these islands, but I believe this is the only pinnacle

in this country that is also a mountain summit. Also most pinnacles, like the Bhasteir Tooth, the Scawfell pinnacle, and many others, are united to the parent mountain by a narrow gap, or isthmus, high up, whence it is a short and easy scramble to or from the top. In such case, even if one ascends by a difficult route, one has an easy way for one's retreat, which is a great comfort. Here the easiest way is dangerous, and to me seemed difficult.

I sat down on the ridge, and examined the massive western front. There is nothing incongruous or funny about this. As a rule, I always think that rock-climbs look larger and more impressive in photographs than in reality. Again and again, when for the first time I have seen a climb, of which I was familiar with the photograph, it has struck me as being smaller than I expected. But it was not so in this case, and I was very much impressed. So much so, that I gave up at once all thoughts of attempting to climb this end by myself. It starts with a sloping foothold, which I deeply distrusted, or at least I distrusted my own power to stand thereon; then a little higher up, I perceived that it was necessary to climb into a little shallow recess, also sloping, and it looked as though the operation might be somewhat difficult of execution. Thence to the top seemed to present no great difficulty, but that first fifteen or twenty feet quite choked me off. The climb from the other end is longer and easier, but very exposed, and in one part seems to lead up a perpendicular knife-edge ridge. I could not



attempt it in this gale, as on that side I should be exposed to the full blast, and it was quite within the bounds of possibility that I might be blown off, and deposited in Coruisk, 3000 feet below.

So I turned off to the left towards Sgurr na Banachdich, as I had never been up it, and thought if I could not climb the Inaccessible, I must have something to show for the day's work. Also as I descended to the Bealach Coire na Banachdich, the dip between the two mountains, I was sheltered to some extent from the wind by the great mass of Sgurr Dearg behind me. The Coolin ridge just here seems to have curvature of the spine, and in a mist it might be a little difficult to find one's way. To-day mist was coming up, but had not yet reached the Coolins, and I had no difficulty; an hour or two later I might have gone astray. The Banachdich ridge is quite easy, but it seems to me a needless refinement to talk of five peaks. I should call it three peaks, including Thormaid. The other two are merely slight elevations in a fairly level ridge. I reached the summit at about 1.30, and found two men there, who had also come up from Glen Brittle, having ascended by the ridge over Sgurr nan Gobhar. I think this is the only time that I have ever met a human being on the Coolins. I passed the time of day with them, and then proceeded on my way. A week later I met the same two men again on the steamer, as we were on our way home.

I had intended to climb Sgurr Thormaid, and had had some vague hopes of going on to Sgurr a'

Ghreadhaidh, but by this time the mist was coming up fast. It was now about two o'clock, and I had never been in the Ghreadhaidh corrie, and knew nothing about it. Sgurr a' Ghreadhaidh looked a terrible way off, and not for the first time the flesh proved lamentably weak. I have often regretted since that I did not go on, as I have never been so near to Ghreadhaidh since, and I doubt whether I ever shall be again. Still if I had gone on, I should probably have had to descend through the unknown corrie in mist, and might very possibly not have got off the moor before dark. As it was, I got back to my quarters at 4.40, but I went straight down, and did not even stop to ascend Thormaid. That would not have taken much time, and I ought to have done it, but after all it is only a subsidiary peak of Sgurr na Banachdich, and not an independent mountain.

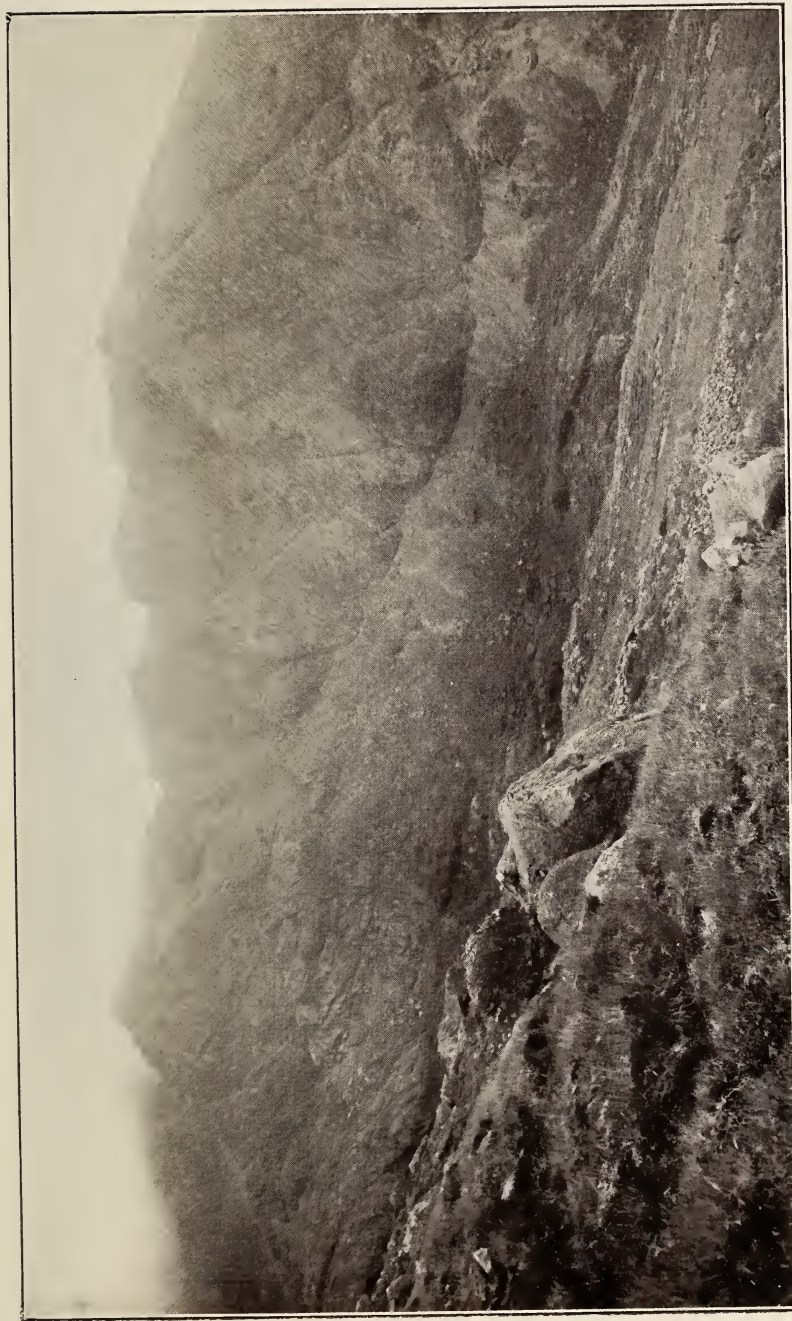
Coire a' Ghreadhaidh is not one of my favourite corries. If Coire Labain and Coire a' Ghrunnda were not there, we should probably think it very fine, but with those wonderful exhibitions of rock architecture just round the corner, one is not particularly struck by Coire a' Ghreadhaidh. I had no difficulty in getting down, although there was a little of the usual struggle with boiler-plate rocks, and then a long grind over the moor.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE CIOCH.

It seems almost incredible, but is nevertheless true, that the very existence of this beautiful little pinnacle was unknown till 1906. A generation of climbers had tramped up and down Coire Labain, and along the Dearg ridge, and nobody had ever happened to notice it, until its peculiar shadow happened to catch the eye of Dr. Collie, as he was walking up the corrie. After all, I don't know that it is so remarkable. One can see it from Sgurr Dearg, and from the lower part of the corrie easily enough, now that one knows where to look for it, and if the light is good. But it juts out from about the middle of Sron na Ciche, which I suppose is the mightiest crag in the British Islands, and seen from a little way off it is lost in the wilderness of rock all round it. Even now it is difficult sometimes to distinguish it if the light is bad.

I started from Glen Brittle at 9.30, two days after the tramp recorded in the previous chapter. The wind was still blowing with unabated vigour, but in climbing the Cioch, I should be sheltered from it by the great wall of Sron na Ciche. Otherwise it was a good day for climbing. It was very cold, and at least I should not suffer from thirst, and of



To face p. 196]

SGURR SGUMAIN IN MIST, AND SRON NA CICHE.

[Photo by Richard I Moreland.]





course there was plenty of water about, as I did not particularly want it. I kept as close to the Ciche crags as possible, in order to look at the starts of the various gullies as I went up. The Western Gully, which is the easiest, I meant to try later, but have not yet climbed it. The Central Gully is difficult, and I resolved to let it severely alone. The Cioch Gully looked interesting, and is not very difficult, and I was rather inclined to try it, but I had set out with the intention of climbing the Cioch by the easy way, and I thought that I had better do that first, and try the more difficult routes later, if at all, when I was a little more familiar with the topography of this very complicated region. Then I passed the foot of the East Gully, a mighty rift, with enormous retaining walls, most imposing and awe-inspiring. It has never been climbed throughout; the first pitch is very difficult, and the second is at present regarded as impossible. I went on a little farther, and soon saw copious nail-marks leading over easy rocks on my right, and then down into the bed of the gully. On the other side of the gully uprose an enormous slab—a Slab of slabs—about the biggest I have ever seen, and pitched at a very severe angle. On the other side of the Slab rises the Cioch. At the foot of both Slab and Pinnacle passes a level terrace, like a garden-walk, and about the same width.

Just here one can walk up the East Gully easily enough, and if it proceeded onwards similarly, the ascent of the Cioch would be a simple matter, but

a little higher up, and before the level of the top of the Slab is reached, the second pitch of the gully blocks the way, at present supposed to be unclimbable. I have described the *mise en scène* with some detail, but I wanted to try to convey some idea of this very remarkable spot, as otherwise the uninitiated might well wonder why there should be any difficulty in finding the way up the Cioch, when here you are, after only a few minutes' easy scrambling, just at the foot of it. But the greater part of the Slab is too smooth and too steep to be climbable. Only near its left-hand edge, almost overhanging the East Gully, there runs up a deep, irregular crack. This forms an easy way up, but does not reach to the top, and when it gives out, one can descend easily into the gully above the impossible second pitch. Then, a little higher up, you leave the gully again, and pass along the rocks at the top of the Slab, to the Pinnacle.

I first walked for a little way along the terrace, and it struck me very forcibly that the Slab was quite climbable close to the Cioch, and I was very much tempted to try it. But that is one of the drawbacks of being alone, it is risky to try new ascents. If I got stuck half-way up, it would be extremely awkward, to put it mildly. As a matter of fact, I have heard since that it had been done, but I did not know that then, and could see no nail-marks. Besides, as I said before, I wanted to do the easy way first, so I started up the aforementioned crack. The Slab is such a terrific affair,

and the consequences of a slip into the yawning depths of the gully would be so disastrous, that one proceeds with extreme caution; but there is really no difficulty about it, as there is always ample hold for hand and foot. Nevertheless I was careless, and got into difficulties at one spot. The crack was rather wide just there, and one leg was inside, and when I tried to proceed, I found that the boot was jammed. I tried to wriggle it out, but could not move it. I could not see the boot, nor get down to it with a hand, and for a few awful moments, I thought that I was chained to that abominable Slab for the remainder of my life, which in the circumstances would not be unduly prolonged. Then I began to wonder how long I should be able to hold on, and what would happen when I had to let go. I supposed that my body would have to obey the laws of gravity, and would swing outwards over the gully, the ankle imprisoned in the crack would snap like a twig, and I should hang upside down, suspended by a broken ankle till something gave way. And all the men who themselves hate to go about alone, and therefore abuse me for doing it, would exclaim: "Behold the dangers of solitary scrambling!" And possibly some of my female relatives would shed a briny drop when they heard of my cruel fate, but they too would be able to say: "I told you so," which is always a source of much refreshment and consolation to the female mind. Probably my few male relatives would say: "Jolly good riddance!"

I tried to reach down with an open knife in my hand, to cut the lace and get my foot out, but could not quite reach it, and after some few minutes' struggling and wriggling I managed to extricate the boot, and a fine object-lesson against solitary scrambling was lost. After this I was very, very careful, and kept outside the crack as much as possible. Towards the top, where the crack gives out, there is a new route straight on, obviating the necessity of descending again into the gully, but I did not quite like the look of it, and my late *mauvais quart d'heure* had made me extra cautious, so I followed the old route, and climbed down over easy rocks into the gully. Then a little higher up I climbed out again, and along a sort of irregular gallery at the top of the Slab, down between two great rocks that formed a sort of open cave, and then out on to a rock-ridge, gradually narrowing to a knife-edge, at the other end of which uprose the Cioch. A few minutes later I was reclining on the top of the latter.

It was now 12.45, and I lay there some little time, considering what was to be done next. The easiest route off the Cioch is usually supposed to be the way I had come, but I felt like having had enough of that Slab, and did not at all want to climb down it. Besides, it was still early, and one never wants to return by the same route as that by which one has ascended, unless it happens to be the shortest, and one is pressed for time. There were half-a-dozen ways off the crag, but unfortunately

all of them were supposed to be more difficult than the way I had come. There was the Cioch Gully, which I had noticed as I came up the corrie, but that led downwards, and I wanted to go upwards; the thing did not seem complete unless I attained the top of the crag. Then there was the Central Gully, but that is difficult, and also I did not quite know whether I could get into it from here. I noticed a very prominent terrace, striking diagonally up the crag from left to right as seen from the Cioch, and felt rather inclined to try it, but it seemed a complicated business to get to it, and I might easily get stuck. Finally, I decided to go on up the East Gully, which seemed the most natural finish to the climb. It is certainly supposed to be more difficult than the climb up the Slab, but I decided to try it, and if any insuperable difficulty disclosed itself, I would turn back, and go down the way I had come.

I got back into the gully easily enough, and finding quite a healthy young burn descending the same, I halted here for a rest and lunch, although it was too cold to sit long. Proceeding onwards, in a few minutes I came to the first obstacle, and for quite a long time I thought it was insuperable, and that I should have to retreat by way of the Slab. It was an ordinary cave-pitch, roofed by a huge boulder, and an emblazonment of nail-marks on the left side (looking up) indicated the usual route clearly enough; but the boulder and the side-walls of the gully are singularly smooth just here, and holds



for hand and feet woefully insufficient, for me at any rate. There was one tiny sloping ledge, or excrescence, obviously destined for the reception of the left foot, but I am short of reach, and could not quite attain it, and the higher handhold also just eluded my anxious grasp. This appears to be one of the places, not so numerous as might be thought, where the tall climber scores. If I had had two or three more inches to my reach, I think I could have climbed it, but being unable to add a cubit to my stature—which indeed I should have done years before, if it had been possible—the difficulty seemed insurmountable. I also tried the right-hand wall, but found that more difficult still. Reluctantly admitting defeat, I gave it up, and set off down the gully, but before I had gone many yards, I looked back, and had a bright idea. Returning, I carefully built a little cairn of the largest stones I could find, and mounted thereon. I thought I had got it this time; my left foot was on the foothold, I was just grasping the upper handhold, two or three seconds more and the thing would have been done, but just then my pedestal gave way, and I sat down in the bed of the gully suddenly and forcibly. I made a few appropriate, but quite inadequate, remarks, ascertained with much relief that nothing was broken, and set off down the gully for the second time. Then I had another bright idea. A few yards below this cave-pitch, I noticed a sort of shallow groove in the rocks, which seemed fairly easy, and it looked as though it might be possible,

to pass over the rocks at the top of the groove into the gully above the cave. There were no nail-marks visible, and probably nobody had been up this way before, but I resolved to be very careful, and not to climb up anything that I could not descend again if necessary; and if I came to anything very difficult or dangerous, I would return at once, and so on and so forth. It is easy to make these virtuous resolutions, but not always easy to keep them, when tempted by the interest of the climb to try something that one feels is just beyond the line. However, on this occasion I was able to proceed on my way, without doing violence to a tender conscience. It was not all quite so easy as the first start up the groove, but there was nothing of serious difficulty, and in a few minutes I dropped into the gully, just above the obstacle which had detained me so long.

A little higher up the gully forks, and I went on up the left branch, without noticing that I had passed the fork, and was annoyed at my own carelessness, as I knew there was a fairly stiff pitch awaiting me very soon. However, I got up it, and then traversed over the rocks back again into the main gully. There was still one more pitch in the latter. I had a note, culled from Messrs. Abraham's *Rock Climbing in Skye*, to which book I take this opportunity of acknowledging my obligations, "will require attention, if climbed on left side, in preference to easy through route." It certainly looked like requiring more attention than

I felt able by now to bestow upon it. Besides, why at any time climb a difficult left wall, when there is an easy through route? One may be permitted to climb an easy side-wall in order to avoid a difficult direct climb, but I hardly saw the point of reversing the process, and felt disinclined for unnecessary strenuosities; the easy through route was good enough for me. A few minutes later I emerged from the gully, and was almost blown down it again by the tremendous wind, to which I was exposed the moment I stepped out into the open, and from which I had been sheltered all the time I had been climbing.

I was now on the stony wilderness on the top of Sron na Ciche. Sgumain was close by on the left, and Alasdair only a little farther on, but I had been up both mountains, and if I set out to climb them now, it was doubtful whether I should get back before dark, so I sauntered slowly homewards, taking it very easily, and stopping to rest occasionally.