

OSBORNE

Pound about BALMORAL
OSBORNE

I.—BALMORAL.

BY ALEXANDER I. MCCONNOCHIE.

*Illustrated from Photographs by W. A. HAWES,
Aberdeen.*

AMONG the loveliest resorts of the Queen when she is in the highlands, is Glen Muick, which is a typical highland glen, a charming mixture of picturesqueness, grandeur and desolation. It joins the Dee near the village of Ballater, its stream, the Muick, having its source on the southern face of classic Lochnagar.

It may well be called a royal glen, for the Queen



BALMORAL

has no fewer than three "shiels" or lodges in it—Birkhall, Alltnagiubhsaich Lodge, and Glasallt Shiel. The first is within two miles of Ballater, and is therefore best known to tourists and visitors; the second is at the commencement of the mountain path to Lochnagar, and therefore familiar to hill climbers; while the last is still farther up the glen, beyond the reach of



GLASALLT SHIEL.

the ordinary tourist, near the head of Loch Muick, a great expansion of the stream which finds its way through the valley.



FALLS OF MUICK.

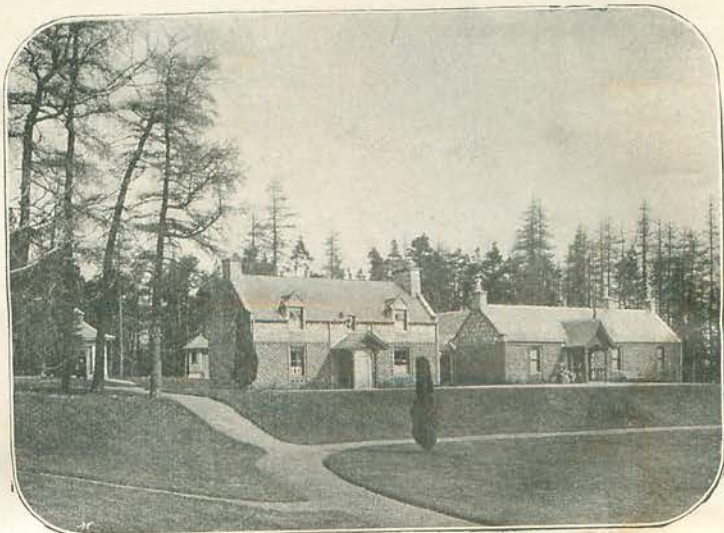
There are roads on both sides of the glen : that on the right terminates at Spital, opposite Allnagiubhsaich Lodge, and is always open to the public ; the other is continued to Glasallt Shiel, and being mainly on her Majesty's private property, and connecting the Glen Muick shiels together—as well as with Balmoral Castle and Abergeldie Castle by a cross-road—is only open to the public under certain conditions. The upper portion is closed at all times to public carriages, and a written order from the Commissioner is necessary to thus procure access to the uppermost shiel. Her Majesty does not however indulge in the usual threats to trespassers, "Strictly Private" being the only announcement made where the Queen's right to privacy is undoubted.

The left side of the glen is all owned by or let to her Majesty, the other side belongs to "the testamentary trustees of the late Sir James T. Mackenzie," the first baronet "of Glenmuick"—the appropriateness of which title

is not quite apparent. The glen is wholly in Aberdeenshire, but borders on the south with the county of Forfar, with which it is connected by a high mountain pass, the Capel Mounth, thus giving direct access for pedestrians between the two villages of Ballater and Kirriemuir, otherwise "Thrams."

Spital, as its name indicates, was of old the site of an hospital or hospice of the Churchmen of the day, under the Bishop of Aberdeen, and was doubtless of considerable advantage before the era of roads, when passes across the mountains were the recognised means of communication between north and south. Latterly the opening of railways made

an end of the drover who supplied the southern markets with "prime Scots," and such passes as the Capel Mounth fell into desuetude. The packman lingered, however, behind the drover ; but he too is practically extinct, and only the tramp remains. The latter survives in two forms—the genuine



ALLNAGIUBHSAICH LODGE.

tramp and the pedestrian tourist. An occasional shepherd may also be met on the Mounth seeking fresh pastures for his flock.

The hospice was succeeded by the modern public-house, which in its turn has been displaced by a forester's cottage.

The outstanding natural features of Glen Muick, besides the mountains which form the valley, are the Falls, or Linn of Muick, Loch Muick, Falls of Glas Allt and Dubh Loch. The royal shields of course make the left-hand side of the valley the more interesting, but, quite apart from them, the glen is one of the finest on Deeside, presenting all the distinguishing features of highland scenery.

Crossing to the south side of the Dee at Bal-later the mouth of the glen is close at hand, and the visitor is impressed with the upward view.

In the foreground are the Coyles of Muick, several finely peaked hills just under two thousand feet in height, which owe their picturesque appearance as miniature mountains to their peculiar geological formation; beyond them rise the higher hills of Conach-

Passing the churchyard and the site of the ancient church of the glen, the ruins of Knock Castle may be observed on the right



AT THE HEAD OF LOCH MUICK.



THE BLACK BURN, LOCH MUICK.

craig; while over all the summit of Loch-nagar stands monarch of the mountains on the south side of the Dee.

peeping through the trees. The present building has done service as barracks for maintaining in troublous times the royal authority on Upper Deeside; its predecessor dates from the time of the ancient Earls of Mar. On the opposite side of the Muick may be seen Braichlie, the Mackenzie dower-house, and Glenmuick House, a modern pile, the mansion of the estate. The latter is not infrequently visited by royalties and other notabilities during the sporting season.

The little property of Birkhall, extending to some seven thousand acres, was formerly part of the estate of Abergeldie, and was bought by the Prince Consort for the Prince of Wales. On the Prince ceasing to regularly visit Deeside he sold Birkhall (in 1885) to the Queen. The original house, built about 1715, as an inscription above the door testifies, was suited for the occupation of but a small laird, and accordingly

considerable additions have been made by her Majesty. The old ivy-clad front faces the Muick, but a modern wing, with a more

Coyle having a stone bearing the following inscription:—

ERECTED
BY COMMAND OF
QUEEN VICTORIA
IN REMEMBRANCE OF
THE MARRIAGE OF
ALBERT EDWARD PRINCE OF WALES
AND
ALEXANDRA PRINCESS OF DENMARK.
10TH MARCH, 1863.



LOCH MUICK ON THE SOUTH-EAST SIDE.

imposing entrance, looks towards Ballater. The house is beautifully situated among trees—birks or birches—from which it derives its name. It is always lent by the Queen to members of the royal family or distinguished friends of her Majesty, the Duchess of Albany being a frequent occupant. But a generation has not wholly passed away which can remember when the garden was let for market purposes, and strawberries and cream could be had in the drawing-room at sixpence a plate. The Prince's connection with Birkhall is commemorated by a cairn, now ruinous, which was erected on one of the Coyles by the tenantry in connection with his marriage; another cairn was afterwards built on the highest

But time spares not even royal memorials, and the inscription-stone now lies at the foot of the cairn.

The Falls of Muick, about five miles from Ballater, are annually visited by thousands. At the point where the Falls occur the glen is contracted, as though some titanic hand had here throttled the valley, which is richly wooded with a variety of trees, larches predominating. The Falls did not escape the ubiquitous Pennant, who tells us that the "hole was supposed by the vulgar to be bottomless." The height of the Linn is about thirty feet, and prevents the upward passage of salmon. A salmon ladder has been talked of, as there is excellent spawning ground in the upper reaches of the river. The falls were formerly frequently visited by the Queen.

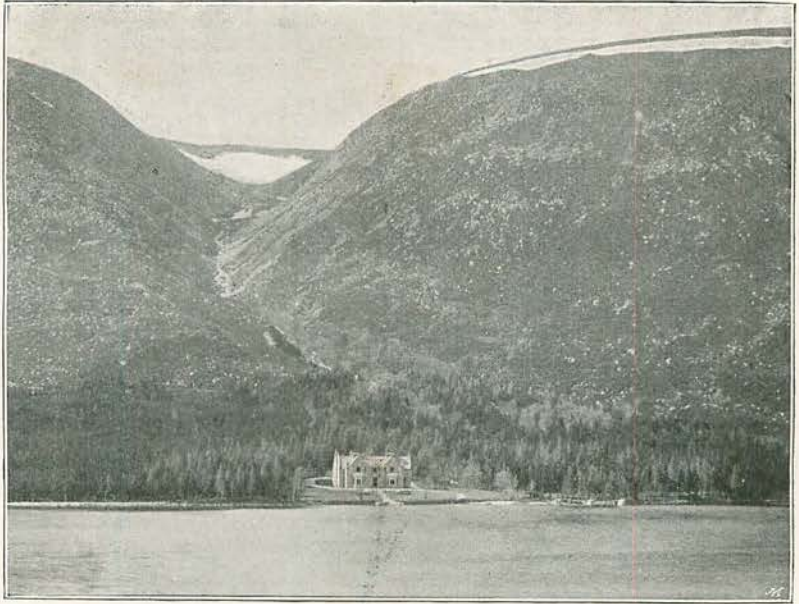
"The Prince's Drive," as the road on the Queen's side of the Muick is called here, had to be blasted out of the rock in the Linn Wood just above the Falls, and as the river there is bordered with pines, the glen is particularly beautiful. Emerging from the



BIRKHALL.

Linn Wood the scene suddenly changes and a wilder phase of a highland glen is experienced. Trees are fewer and smaller, being of more recent planting, and there are only two or three houses and one croft, so that the picturesque gives way to grandeur, not unmingled with desolation.

Allt-nagiubhsaich Lodge (the Lodge of the Fir-tree Burn), which is on the estate of Birkhall, is about three miles above the Falls, and, facing the south, is embosomed among pines which recent wind-storms have not spared. It is a modern structure, the part on the left being the forester's cottage, connected by a covered



GLASALLT SHIEL, FROM THE SOUTH-EAST SIDE OF LOCH MUICK.



FALLS OF GLAS ALLT.

passage with the lodge, which has a range of bedrooms at the back. A building of some sort had stood here from time immemorial, and doubtless deserved the name it bore—"The Hut"—before it fell into royal possession. Looking towards the Capel Mounth and Loch Muick, and well sheltered by larches, it is a charming occasional residence, and here the Queen and the Prince Consort frequently came, on a visit of two or three days' duration, from Balmoral. It is referred to in "Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands" as "our humble little abode." The lodge is conveniently situated for the royal deer-forest of Lochnagar, and many a pleasant evening has been spent here by the Prince and his friends after a day's sport among the stags, the proceedings winding up with a torchlight dance on the lawn in front of the house. The public path leading to Lochnagar passes in rear of the lodge, but too often tourists prefer to walk by and stare into the front windows.

Loch Muick lies at an altitude of 1310 feet above sea-level, and is fully two miles in length, with a breadth of about half a mile. It had formerly been of much greater extent, probably extending to the Falls. Evidences of its shrinkage are not wanting. The hills on both sides are very steep, and frequently send down in spring miniature avalanches of snow and stones.

Boating on the loch was at one time a

favourite pastime of the Queen. "The scenery," her Majesty writes, "is beautiful here, so wild and grand—real severe high-

and an appearance which an artist such as Graham would delight in, but which might frighten teetotalers into drinking beer!



DUBH LOCH.

land scenery, with trees in the hollow. We had various scrambles in and out of the boat and along the shore, and saw three hawks, and caught seventy trout. I wish an artist could have been there to sketch the scene, it was so picturesque—the boat, the net, and the people in their kilts in the water and on the shore."

Writing of the south-east side of the loch, the Queen says: "It is very fine indeed, and deeply furrowed by the torrents, which form glens and corries where birch and alder trees grow close to the water's edge. We landed on a sandy spot below a fine glen, through which flows the Black Burn. It was very dry here, but still very picturesque, with alder trees and mountain-ash in full fruit overhanging it."

Loch Muick has been suggested as a natural reservoir, to be artificially increased, for water for the city of Aberdeen.

But the name *Black Burn* has an ugly sound in this connection, for that stream flows through moss, and has generally a colour

Walking from Allnagiubhsaich Lodge to Glasallt Shiel, along the loch side, a small burn—Alltan Dearg—is crossed. It rushes down a rocky gorge, with here and there a little cascade, and is thus described by the Queen: "The Alltan Dearg is very fine and rapid. Up this a winding path has been made [now neglected], upon which we rode, though some parts are rather steep for riding. The burn falls over red granite, and in the ravine grow birch, mountain-ash and alder."

The Glasallt Shiel is close to the shore of the loch and on the left bank of the stream, Glas Allt (the gray burn), from which it derives its name. The shiel is a neat gray-granite building of two stories facing the loch, sheltered by firs, and protected from the north wind by the western extremity of Ant-Sron (the nose), a dependency of Lochnagar.



TOP OF THE BLACK SPOUT, LOCHNAGAR.

It is the most remote of her Majesty's Deeside residences, and occupies the site of an old shooting-box of the Gordons of Aber-

geldie, which latter was preceded by a shepherd's hut. Above the door is the inscription—

VICTORIA REGINA.
1868.

This neighbourhood had long been a favourite with the Prince Consort, so after his death the Queen erected the shiel. But owing to increasing years her Majesty's visits both to Allnagiubhsaich Lodge and Glasallt Shiel are getting fewer and fewer; an annual afternoon visit suffices now. But the rooms are kept in order and always ready for the reception of their royal mistress. Glasallt Shiel has not been occupied, in the ordinary sense of the word, for years, and is never lent. Allnagiubhsaich Lodge also was kept sacred till four years ago when it was lent for a season to Sir Allan Mackenzie, the Queen's neighbour on the other side of the glen—a very high mark of her Majesty's favour. This season it has been lent to General Sir D. M. Probyn of the Prince of Wales's household.

The Glas Allt, an impetuous mountain torrent, comes tumbling down behind the shiel, half a mile above which are the Falls of that name, with a descent of about 150 feet. They form one of the finest waterfalls on Deeside, and whether viewed from the foot or from the high ground on the opposite side of the loch, after a "spate" or flood, have an imposing appearance. The Falls are confined within a rocky corrie by which snow often lingers into summer, as may be seen from the illustration of the shiel from the south-east side of the loch. A pony path passing the Falls affords a direct connection between the shiel and Balmoral.

The sternness and ruggedness of the scenery increase above the head of Loch Muick. The mountains are higher and the glen becomes narrower, leaving only room for the break-neck river to find a way to Loch Muick from Dubh Loch (Black Lake) two miles beyond Glasallt Shiel. Till recently a visit to the Dubh Loch was one of her Majesty's favourite excursions and was latterly made in a little carriage by the pony path from the

shiel. A small stream has to be crossed between the two lochs with a high slender waterfall close to the path. Here a cairn marks the spot where, on October 3, 1870, the Marquis of Lorne proposed to the Princess Louise—the Queen very thoughtfully having gone to Pannanich Wells, near Ballater, that afternoon.

The perpendicular height of the crags on the south-west side of the Dubh Loch is about eight hundred feet, on the other side the rocks are not so precipitous, descending as they do more gradually from Lochnagar. The top of the Black Spout, near the summit of Lochnagar, is a grand specimen of rock scenery. Lochnagar has been frequently ascended by the Queen and members of the royal family, her Majesty's first ascent



ABERGELDIE CASTLE.

having been made on September 16, 1848, when, owing to a dense mist, the guides lost their way, and thus an extra detention of five hours was experienced, a circumstance which caused no little anxiety at the Castle.

The property belonging to the Queen on Deeside includes the two estates of Balmoral and Birkhall, Abergeldie (in which is embraced Glasallt Shiel) being only held on lease. Abergeldie Castle is six miles from Ballater and two from Balmoral, and the estate is so peculiarly situated with regard to her Majesty's property that sporting and other amenities cannot be properly exercised unless the three estates are held together. The Queen invariably lends the Castle, amongst its occupants having been the Duchess of Kent and the ex-Empress Eugénie.