

## ARTHUR'S SEAT.

BY C. G. CASH.

IN John Hill Burton's book on the Cairngorms he says some vigorous things against what he considers the evils of guides and guide books, and makes merry at the expense of a friend of his, a chancery barrister, who, in "an anxious way", asked whether Burton could recommend to him "a steady guide to Arthur Seat". Now, if guides and guide books are as loose and inaccurate in topography as is Burton in the book just named, they deserve a greater anathema than Burton pronounces; but a "steady guide", possessing reasonable accuracy, may, and should, be very helpful, and need not be the incubus Burton considers him. If you will allow me, I will be your "steady guide" to Arthur's Seat, and if I prove wearisome, you have only to close your book and so dismiss me.

Arthur's Seat is the dominating feature in the topography of the Edinburgh district, and though only 822.9 feet in height, may well be called a mountain from its geologic structure, and the fine abruptness of some of its crags. Viewed from the south-west, at the distance of two miles, it presents best its characteristic appearance of a lion couchant.

Its topography is very striking. It has five well marked ridges, whose steep sides face the west. The most westerly of these is the Heriot Mount, which plays no important part in the scenery. Its escarpment is hidden by buildings, and its eastern slope is not interesting. The second ridge is the greatest, the Salisbury Crag, a noble curve of precipice three-quarters of a mile in length, 100 feet high, surmounting a talus slope 200 feet high, and overlooking the eastern portion of the city. Behind the crag is the deep hollow of the Hunter's Bog, almost like a fragment of a Highland glen. From the south-eastern part of this valley rises the grand mass of Arthur's Seat proper, its steep-faced bulk towering some 600 feet upwards, and affording much good

scrambling to keep one in training for work on the bigger hills away north. From the northern part of the Hunter's Bog rise two more of the ridges—the Dasses, three almost detached hummocks of rock ; and the Long Row, a low line of cliff running almost north and south. These two ridges disappear under the great central mass, but reappear unmistakably on its southern side. Eastward from the Long Row is the deep hollow of the Dry Dam, and beyond this again is the considerable hill known as the Crow or Whinny Hill.

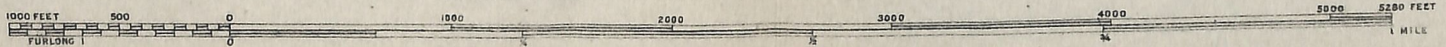
Round about the hill are three lakes : St. Margaret's on the north, an uninteresting sheet of water ; Dunsappie on the east, nestling at the foot of its crag with not a little of the beauty of a Highland loch ; and Duddingston on the south, a fine sheet of water, too rarely the scene of an animated skating holiday.

Arthur's Seat is of great interest to the geologist. Its strongly marked ridges are the outcrops of sheets of intrusive volcanic rock tilted upwards to the west. The Whinny Hill is an overlying mass of contemporaneous volcanic matter. The main summit consists of volcanic agglomerate, filling an almost vertical vent, and itself pierced by a volcanic plug, of which the Lion's Haunch is perhaps a lateral outbreak. On the south side of the Lion's Haunch, and overhanging the road to Duddingston, Samson's Ribs present fine examples of basaltic columns. In parts of the Crow Hill others may be seen, but less well developed.

The geologic history of the hill has not been finally written, but its broad features are fairly clear. In the Carboniferous period volcanic energy was active in the region now occupied by the midland plain of Scotland. Evidence of this is found wherever hills protrude above the general level. In the case of Arthur's Seat, four sheets of volcanic matter were intruded among the aqueous strata already *in situ*. The source of these sheets is doubtful. It has been suggested that they are lava outflows from the volcano whose neck is marked by the Castle Rock ; again that they are possible outflows from the central Arthur's Seat



NATURAL SCALE 1:10,560 = 6 INCHES TO A MILE.



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volcano, though this seems less likely. Another deposit of volcanic matter constitutes the Whinny Hill. This was laid down on what was then the surface, and shows on its west edge masses of volcanic ash. At a later period there was broken up through all these rocks a volcanic vent, which was subsequently filled with agglomerate; and yet later, through this neck of agglomerate, there was extruded lava, a plug of which still constitutes the summit rock.

Ages of weathering have removed great thicknesses of super-incumbent rock, and the present surface has gradually been developed, the harder volcanic rocks standing out as ridges and summits, and the softer aqueous rocks wearing away into hollows.

The hill, like all Scotland, has undergone much denudation by glaciers, here moving down the valley of the Forth on their way from the Highlands to the North Sea. By the side of the Queen's Drive, just above Samson's Ribs, is a mass of rock showing very plainly the work of ice on its smoothed and scratched surface.

To the botanist the hill affords a wide field for investigation. There have been gathered on it 248 species of flowering plants, representing 45 Natural Orders, and 7 or 8 ferns. Among the less common flowering plants may be mentioned *Dianthus armeria* and *caesius*, *Lychnis viscaria*, *Arenaria verna*, *Geranium pyrenaicum* and *columbinum*, *Linum perenne*, *Euonymus europaeus*, *Cichorium intybus*, *Echium vulgare* and *Linaria repens*. Among the ferns, *Asplenium septentrionale* was found some years ago, but I think not lately; *Asplenium fontanum* was reported in 1889, but has not been confirmed, and was probably inaccurately reported. White heather has been gathered on the hill once to my personal knowledge.

The hill and its immediate surroundings have associations in legend, in history, and in literature. Its name links it with the myths of Arthurian legend. Close at its foot, to the north-west, lies Holyrood Palace, with its dark and sad Marian associations, contrasting with the brief brilliance of Prince Charlie. The army that won Prestonpans lay on the eastern slopes of the hill, while the Prince himself found

quarters in a cottage at the most easterly corner of Duddingston. St. Anthony's Chapel, on one of the north crags, guided at one time the mariner on the squally Firth, and its well still gives an abundant supply of excellent water, and is reputed to possess virtues as a "wishing well". Some consider it as of medicinal value, and it probably does contain some iron, of which there is much in the rock of the hill. Nearer Holyrood Palace is St. Margaret's Well, in its quaint gothic shrine, brought from a more eastward position when the North British Railway was formed. On the southern slopes of the hill are the Wells o' Wearie, alluded to in more than one local song.

From Horne's "Every-day Book" (1827) I make the following extract :—

"Allow me, without preface, to acquaint you with a custom of gathering the May-dew here [Edinburgh] on the first of May. About four o'clock in the morning there is an unusual stir; a great opening of area gates, and ringing of bells, and a gathering of folk of all clans, arrayed in all the colours of the rainbow; and a hurrying of gay throngs of both sexes through the King's-park to Arthur's Seat. In the course of half-an-hour the entire hill is a moving mass of all sorts and sizes. At the summit may be seen a company of bakers, and other craftsmen, dressed in kilts, dancing round a Maypole. On the more level part next door is usually an itinerant vender of whisky, or mountain (not May) dew, your approach to whom is always indicated by a number of 'bodies' carelessly lying across your path, not dead, but drunk. These proceedings commence with the daybreak. The strong lights thrown upon the various groups by the rising sun give a singularly picturesque effect to a scene, wherein the ever-varying and unceasing sound of the bagpipes, and tabours, and pipes, *et hoc genus omne*, almost stun the ear. About six o'clock, the appearance of the gentry, toiling and 'pechin' up the ascent, becomes the signal for serving-men and women to march to the right-about; for they well know that they must have the house clean and everything in order earlier than usual on May morning. About eight o'clock the 'fun' is all over; and by nine or ten, were it not for the drunkards, who are staggering towards the 'gude town', no one would know that anything particular had taken place".

The custom of gathering this reputed excellent cosmetic, May-dew, has not entirely ceased here yet, and May-day still draws groups of people to the summit of Arthur's Seat at an early hour.

From the summit of the hill in clear weather a fine view is obtained. Leaving out of account the near view of the city, we see to the east the open North Sea, with May Island low on the horizon, and the Bass Rock and North Berwick Law prominent. Passing round by the south, the valley of the Esk is near, and beyond it are the Lammermuirs, Moorfoots, Peebles Hills, Dollar Law, and the Pentlands. To the north-west the Forth Bridge shows its mighty spans, with the Ochils beyond, and due north, across the Forth, the Fife Lomonds are in full view. But most interesting is the noble range of Grampian summits. The full tale of these is seldom seen, but I have identified the following :—Ben Lomond, Ben Venue, Ben A'an, Ben Ledi, Am Binnein (Stobinain), Ben More, Ben Vorlich, Ben Lawers, Ben Chonzie, Schichallion, Beinn Dearg, Ben Vrackie, Beinn a' Ghlo and Lochnagar.

Twice I have witnessed from the summit of the hill the interesting phenomenon known as the "Spectre of the Brocken". In each case it was about the middle of a winter day, and the shadow, vastly greater than life size, was thrown on a cloud or mist near St. Anthony's Chapel. In neither case was there any appearance of halo or colour.

The easiest ascents of the hill are two. The Queen's ascent is made by following the Queen's Drive to Dunsappie Loch, and then walking up the last slope to the summit of the hill, which is in full view. The most usual ascent is made from near Holyrood Palace, passing St. Margaret's and St. Anthony's Wells, and following the ridge of the Long Row. An interesting walk may be had along the Radical Road, round the foot of the Salisbury Crag, at the head of its talus slope. At its most westerly point the "Cat Nick" offers an easy gully whereby to ascend to the top of the cliff. The Queen's Drive is an excellent road right round the whole hill, and is a favourite and very pleasant drive.