

THE LOCHNAGAR CORRIE.

BY JAMES ROSE.

THE crags of Lochnagar—its “steep frowning glories”—have by no means received their due meed of attention from the mountaineer. It is its battlemented front which fascinates when upon, or near, the mountain, and which displays that characteristic blue colour which is so marked a feature in all the distant views of it from the eastern side.

It was with the intention of making a leisurely survey of the wonderful corrie and its encircling cliffs, and of varying the ordinary route to the top by ascending the “Black Spout”, that three “dissentient” Cairngormers, having turned their backs on the easy delights of Sockaugh, found themselves, on the occasion of the Spring Holiday, on the saddle that connects the Meikle Pap with the main mass of Lochnagar. The little black loch, which receives the waters of the melting snows that linger so long at the foot of the cliffs, had almost shaken off its winter coat of ice, and the great scree slopes that separate it from the precipices bore comparatively little snow, just enough to make the “going” fairly easy along the foot of the cliffs, where our route lay.

The Lochnagar Corrie, as every one knows, is a double one, the north-western portion being by far the more interesting from the greater height and steepness of its rocks. Both are crescent-shaped, and, where the two curves join, the main cliffs are continued by two lower systems of crags down to the edge of the loch. Our way seemed to lie along the top of the upper rocks, which route would take us right to the foot of the cliffs of the principal corrie, and that, too, without our having to descend much below the level of our point of survey. The course we thus marked out was found to be quite feasible, and, taking advantage of the snow wherever possible, after a short scramble we found ourselves at the base of the great buttress that forms the southern extremity of the larger corrie.

A closer inspection of the giant walls of Lochnagar can only add to one's appreciation of the apparently inaccessible character of the mountain on this side. True, in most places the cliffs are by no means perpendicular, and time has scarred their front with several gullies which, no doubt, will yet yield to the bold climber, but the party will have to be a strong one, and the difficulty of making a complete survey of any route from either bottom or top of the cliffs will always leave the practicability of an ascent a problem to be solved by actual trial. It was one of the objects of our visit to reconnoitre these gullies, or "spouts", as they seem to be called locally, and from the bottom one or two appeared to promise a possible way to the summit. At the foot the cliffs have not experienced the shattering effects of the weather to the same extent as towards the top, and the difficulties that would present themselves would come from the comparatively smooth and unbroken nature of the rock. All this, however, is changed further up, and insecure hand- and foot-holds, and sudden "faults" in the cliff, would doubtless be the obstacles the climber would have to encounter.

The ever active forces of Nature here work with rudest vigour: frost and the "ever young and ever mighty sun", of which Tyndall writes so eloquently in that memorable passage where he describes the power that has so wonderfully carved the giant features of the Alps—these are the joint sculptors of this gloomy corrie, and are ceaselessly fissuring the crags, and strewing the slopes with the *débris*. The silence is often broken by the crash of falling stones. A great block that had recently been shot from the upper regions of the cliffs had cut a deep trough in the snow slope, and ploughed its way far down towards the loch. These snows, and the waters that one hears every-where rushing along under the stones, are the agents that are always at work clearing the base of the cliffs and making way for the shattered and toppling masses which hang ready above for the next impulse of King Frost.

As our expedition was only of the nature of a reconnaissance, we were unprovided with the "moral support" of

a rope, and so the temptation to try the merits of a very promising "chimney" had to be put aside, and, as the afternoon was waning, so had likewise the desire to tarry longer as passive spectators of this savage scene. Up to this point the weather had served our purpose admirably; it was certainly not a day for distant views, but these were not our special object. A thicker haze, however, which was creeping up from the east, seemed to threaten our investigations at the top, and, though fortunately this anticipation was not realised, prudence suggested an onward movement.

Still keeping to the snow, and as close to the foot of the crags as possible, we had worked our way to the head of a great scree slope which stretches from the bottom of a gully we had been scrutinising almost to the loch. From this point the rocks, which form the centre of the Corrie wall, reach much further down, and to round them we had to seek a considerably lower level. This was easily and pleasantly accomplished by means of a sitting glissade, which method of progression on snow of the proper consistency is not nearly so wearing to the nether garments as might be supposed. Thus far we had kept to an average level of about 3000 feet, but now we struck straight up to the foot of the Black Spout, observing, as we went, that the rocks on its right might possibly be climbed all the way to the summit. On the day of our ascent, the name *Black Spout* was obviously a misnomer, for it was floored with snow from bottom to top, with the exception of a spot near the head, where a low cliff of about six feet broke its continuity. Just above this rock the snow rose in an almost perpendicular wall for about twenty feet, and this having been duly scaled, we were on the summit plateau, and only a few yards from the Cac Carn Beag.

The ascent by the Black Spout is, undoubtedly, the most interesting of the routes to the top of Lochnagar. To gain it one must pass under the mighty cliffs, and no one can appreciate this distinctive feature of the mountain unless he has surveyed these sublime walls from their base.

Anything of the nature of pinnacle or *aiguille* seems foreign to the character of the Lochnagar rock wall, but,

while standing at the top of the Black Spout our attention was rivetted by a huge rock of distinctive needle shape, which is cut away from the main mass of the mountain by a gully which branches off the Black Spout on its southern side. From this point of view it is seen to rise a completely isolated mass, terminating in the sharpest of points, from the foot of the Spout to the level of the top of the Corrie wall—a height of perhaps 400 feet. As seen from the Black Spout it is quite inaccessible, but in mountaineering, as in other questions, it is wise to hear the other side, and as we moved southwards in continuation of our investigations, we soon saw that our inaccessible pinnacle was connected by a rather rotten-looking ridge with the plateau along the edge of which we were walking. On this side, too, the peak was very much weathered, and, further, what seemed a fairly easy gully led apparently to the foot of the cliffs on its southern side.

Our explorations along the top of the cliffs revealed nothing finer than this rocky needle, unless we except a splendid jagged ridge at the extreme south of the main corrie, almost right above the point where we began our walk along the foot of the precipices. Here the rocks are, perhaps, highest, and the climb, if it is ever accomplished, will no doubt satisfy the most exacting lover of mountain adventure. But every-where at top or bottom these stupendous rocks are intensely interesting. The student of the forces of nature, the lover of mountain scenery, and the climber will ever find something new to wonder at, to admire, or to conquer in these grim precipices; and when the ever-changing conditions of weather are taken into account, he will be a very easily satisfied mountaineer and scarcely worthy of the name who can fancy that he has exhausted the attractions of Lochnagar.