

LOCHNAGAR AND THE CAIRNGORMS IN SNOW.

BY JOHN R. LEVACK, M.B., C.M.

THE fascination of mountain-climbing is exercising its spell on a rapidly increasing number of people. Once let a man be persuaded to spend his holiday amongst the hills, and, in nine cases out of ten, he will return year after year to climb and scramble, and get fresh inspiration and health, amid the glories of rock and snow.

A party of three visited Lochnagar early in April last year, whilst staying at Ballater for a week-end. On the first day we encountered a blizzard of wind and snow, so no attempt was made to reach the top. We scrambled down along the foot of the cliffs, past the head of the loch, which was frozen over, and up over some ice-covered rocks and snow-covered scree to near the foot of the Black Spout. We had the good fortune to see and photograph a snow avalanche that came thundering down an adjoining gully. Next day we returned to the hill, and, as the mist had cleared, we had a surpassingly beautiful view of the whole corrie, decked in its winter garb. Some stiff climbing up a steep ridge of soft powdery snow, in the teeth of a driving gale filled with stinging particles of ice, brought us to the plateau leading to the top, from which an unimpeded view of all the surrounding hills was obtained. Wonderful effects of light and shade, sunshine and gloom, chased each other across the landscape. The steady, silent gale drove us before it, along to the cairn on the Cuidhe Crom, and from there an easy scramble down over soft snow and loose stones brought us to the head of Loch Muick.

Early in May, 1905, we climbed Braeriach, ascending from Loch Eunach. The snow reached down almost to the loch, so up we pounded, kicking steps almost all the way, a most tiresome and exhausting task. Dense mist had settled like a pall on everything over 3000 ft., and, as we wished to cross a corner of the plateau forming the top of the hill and reach

Coire an Lochan with its loch, we had now to steer by map and compass. As the plateau sloped gently towards the west, we had an irresistible tendency to edge away to the left. The mist lifted for a moment and revealed us far out of our course. We could see our goal about a mile away, so we simply raced for it, as fast as two feet of lightly frozen snow would allow us. Loch Coire an Lochan was frozen over, and the crags around it were almost buried in snow, great cornices overhanging them all round. We amused ourselves dislodging some of these snow masses and starting miniature avalanches, which thundered down to the loch. Then we edged round the cliff till we came to a good snow slope and down we went—a magnificent glissade—to the loch. Two of the party toiled up the slope again and had a second glissade.

The return journey towards Loch Eunach was made along the plateau till we came to a gully which was filled with snow right down to the foot of the hill. On to this we went for a final glissade, quickly dropping about a thousand feet.

On the previous day we made an utterly unsuccessful excursion from the Lurcher's Rock, which we ascended from the Larig. We wished to reach Loch Avon, the dense mist hiding everything, but, so sure were we of our direction, we did not think it necessary to use the compass. Instead of walking in a straight line, we actually completed a circle, and came on our footsteps of an hour before. Later on, we tried to reach the cairn of Cairngorm, and failed ignominiously. After that, we gave up in disgust, as it was now late in the afternoon. One member of the party now carried a compass in his hand, and steered the rest of us in front of him in the direction desired. Some rapid and joyous glissades landed us safely in Coire an t-Snechda, and Glenmore Lodge was soon reached.

On the same date the previous year we made an ascent of Cairngorm from Glenmore in shocking weather—a southerly gale with sleet and fog. The cairn was reached, but the roaring gale and swirling ice particles drove us down fast enough. Evidently a big storm was brewing. Occasionally the mist would lift a little, revealing enormous cloud masses,

black as night, crowding rapidly up over the corries from the southward, so we literally fled down the hill as fast as we could glissade. At intervals, the sun would attempt to peep out, only to accentuate the gloom of the storm-clouds that loomed ever nearer. The rain caught us as we were near the foot of the hill, and by the time we reached Aviemore we were drenched to the skin, cold and hungry, but altogether pleased with our day's outing. The luxury of a hot bath, a good dinner, and the pipe of peace, can be thoroughly appreciated only by those who have spent a day on the hills, and watched, from close quarters, the sublime spectacle of the birth of a mountain storm.

BY JAMES GRAY KYD.

WHEN 1905 was drawing near a close, a friend and I turned our faces westward to the Cairngorms. We had no special peaks we wished to climb, and no programme marked out: we merely wished to "bring-in" 1906 among the hills. Inverey was our head-quarters.

On 30th December, starting in the starlight of a crisp cold morning, we cycled, ere daybreak, to Derry Lodge. The roads were frozen hard, the very streams bridged over, and our ride, though cold, was enjoyable. The keeper at Derry was astonished to see two hill-men at this unusual season, and tried to dissuade us from attempting any climbing, as the hills were ice-bound; assuring him of our caution, we started up Glen Derry. Daylight was slowly coming on as we tramped through the firs in the lower part of the glen, and as we reached the open ground the rising sun lit up the snowy peaks of Derry Cairngorm and Beinn Mheadhoin with a faint hue of the most delicate pink. Corrie Etchachan was reached in full daylight. In summer the track along Glen Derry is soft and marshy, but in that bright winter morning it was slippery and hard. In Corrie Etchachan walking was dangerous, as the smooth ice which covered the track was coated with powdery snow, and several times when walking along what appeared to be the most innocent slope, we

instantly found ourselves "broad-side-on." We soon reached the top of the corrie, but on that day there was no loch to be seen, as it lay far beneath the surface of ice and snow. We crossed Loch Etchachan. The effect was as if we were walking on the sea, as we found that the waves had been frozen in the act of breaking. Crossing the col towards Loch Avon, we got an excellent view: Alpine Cairngorm stood stern and silent in the distance; its precipitous sides were decorated with the most wonderful icicles, the whole prospect was a fairyland of beauty. Dark Loch Avon, partially frozen over, formed an ideal contrast to the delicately fantastic pictures on the precipices opposite.

The last day of 1905 found us early at Derry, and soon on our way up the sides of the frozen Luibeg. We crossed the stream where it turns towards Ben Muich Dhui, and climbed up the skirts of Carn a' Mhaim. Most of us know the marshes that make the ascent of this interesting peak so damp in summer. Each of these marshy slopes was frozen hard into a miniature glacier. Climbing demanded caution, and at parts step-cutting was a necessity. The summit was reached in a little over an hour after leaving the glen, when we got a view which surpassed anything we had ever seen. The Devil's Point, Cairn Toul, and Braeriach stood wrapped in their silent winter sleep. Clouds chased each other along the sow's back of Ben Muich Dhui. Glen Geusachan seemed to cry out in its loneliness, and the bothy of Corroul down in the glen was a black patch in the desert of snow.

On the summit where we stood, the boulders were covered with most beautiful crystals of frozen mist. But with a thermometer near zero we must off. We disturbed the golden eagle on our descent, and soon reached Derry to cheer the keeper and his wife in their lonely hogmanay.

The clouds hung low on the hills as we walked up Glen Luibeg, in the early hours of the 6th of May. That was the first mild day of the season, and the streams were pouring down the hill-sides in torrents. Our first difficulty was met in the crossing of the Luibeg, two miles up the glen. The familiar bridge was lying half a mile from its proper place, beached

high on the heather. The path over the shoulder to Glen Dee was miserably wet, in fact a good sized burn flowed down each side. Even in summer the crossing of the Dee at the entrance to Glen Geusachan is no easy matter, but with the river thrice its usual size, the task was exceedingly dangerous. However, with the moral support of a rope round our waists, we had courage to leap from boulder to boulder over the raging river. The sun came out for half an hour and gave us time to look around. Glen Geusachan was actually looking gay in its spring garments. The forbidding sides of Beinn Bhrotain were softened with snow. Very little snow was melted above the 3000 feet line. Our intention was to climb the Devil's Point by the first gully in Geusachan; from the base the route looked quite practicable, so we scrambled up to the foot of the slabs which surround this wonderful little mountain. From the climber's point of view the strata here are quite a mistake—the upper belts of rock over-lapping the lower, and consequently making good holds few and far between. We crossed several very nasty slabs on our way to the gully, but as good hitches for the rope were scarce, the work was unpleasant. When we reached our gully we found that it formed the bed of a large torrent, and further progress by this route was impossible; so we got down to the glen, and walked up to the next gully—a much easier climb—and scrambled up to the 3000 feet line. As we climbed up we got a magnificent view of an avalanche, but unfortunately here the mist came on very thick, and rain came down in torrents. After a short wait for better conditions—which did not come—we crossed to the avalanche-swept gully, down which we glissaded to the glen. At the foot of the gully there was a miniature glacier, the huge blocks of ice from the rocks above had been hurled for months and formed together into real glacier shape. We walked down the glen to the Dee, where we had to perform the same gymnastic feats as in the morning. Soon the shoulder was crossed, the Luibeg forded, and our resting-place reached with mingled thoughts of sorrow and joy—sorrow at having been beaten, and joy in anticipation of future victory under more favourable conditions.