

ROCK CLIMBING NEAR ABERDEEN.

BY H. G. DRUMMOND.

Oh, the wild joy of living,
The leaping from rock up to rock.

Browning.

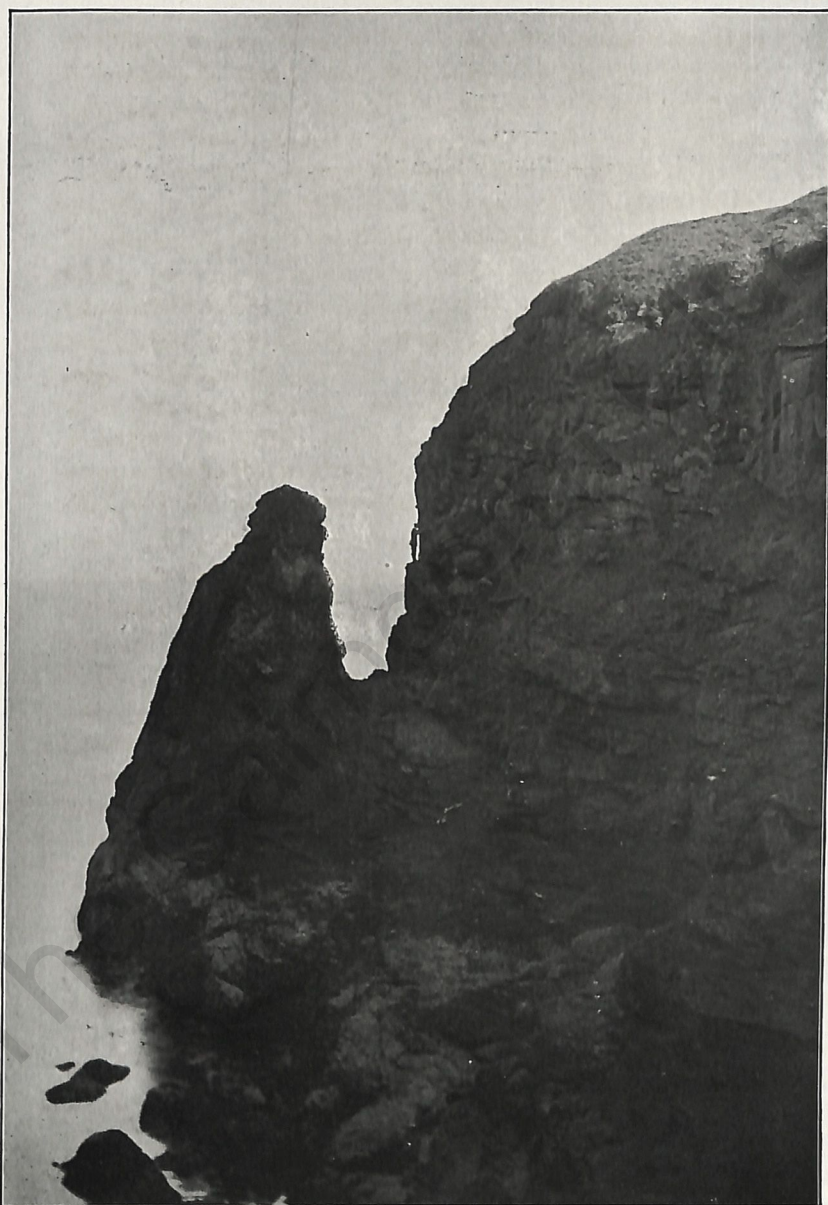
THE sport of rock climbing becomes every year more popular, and as the branch of mountaineering most readily obtainable in this country, one cannot wonder at it. Though probably the majority of the Cairngorm Club members look upon a good hill walk as the loadstone of their desires, there are yet a number to whom a scramble, necessitating the use of hands and feet, or a climb of not too great difficulty, gives an added zest to their day's outing.

To the south of the Bay of Nigg stretches a long range of cliffs, as yet but little explored from a climbing point of view, whose value as a training ground cannot be overestimated. True, there are no peaks to be ascended, if one excepts certain rocky pinnacles, but the essence of the sport lies, not in bagging peaks, but in struggling with and overcoming the difficulties and obstacles of nature, continued practice giving increase of skill and necessarily involving a corresponding increase in the difficulties which can successfully be grappled with and overcome. Among these cliffs, then, the happy climber may find corries, ridges, gullies, chimneys and cracks to his heart's content, all within easy reach. Geologically the region is somewhat of a puzzle and contains several different kinds of rock, some of which are good climbing material, others but indifferent. Generally speaking the best climbing is obtained where a granite outcrop occurs, as there the rock is sound, and being much weathered gives splendid hand- and foot-hold. Cliffs composed of rotten rock, such as is found near Muchalls, or where the climbs end up in steep grass, earth and gravel, are better left alone, or at any rate first done

with a rope from above. Roughly there are four sections of cliff where climbs are most easily obtained. The first stretches from the Coastguard station at Doonies Yawns to Long Slough; the second from Altens Havens to Souter Head; the third for about a mile and a half south of Cove quarries; and the fourth for some distance north of Newtonhill; but along the whole coast outlying climbs giving satisfactory sport can be found. The courses are necessarily short, none being more than 150 to 200 feet in height, but as much technical difficulty is often comprised in short stretches as in longer ones, and all grades of climbs, suitable for novice and expert, are obtainable, with the advantage, from the novice's point of view, that he can have the other than moral support of the rope if he wishes. The embryo mountaineer of Aberdeen who thinks of spending a climbing holiday in Skye, Glencoe or elsewhere, has therefore only himself to blame if he quits his native heath without some practice and knowledge of perhaps the most important branch of his craft. Many climbs have been done on these cliffs, but multitudes are still waiting to be conquered, so that anyone having the "wanderlust," may exult in the feeling of the explorer, that he has done some climb which has never before been attempted, even though it is not a Matterhorn.

It would be impossible here to give any list of those climbs that have been accomplished, but one or two of the more notable may be mentioned. As one proceeds southwards from the Coastguard station, a prominent headland is noticed surmounted by large boulders which give it the appearance of a human head and shoulders, somewhat resembling the north peak of the Cobbler from Arrochar. Beneath the "head" boulder, two easy climbs start from the shore. The first consists of an inside chimney containing a large wedged mass of rock, the top of which slightly overhangs, the route finishing over the "head" boulder. This might merit the name of "Jammed Block Chimney." The second climb commences immediately to the right of, and parallel with, the first climb. A sensational, though easy, traverse above the deep bay to the

right brings the climber to a nose of rock over which a short though steep pull lands him above the jammed block, the climb being finished up as before. Proceeding along past the farm of Doonies, a deep bay running right up to the railway line, called Long Slough, possesses a sharp knife-edged pinnacle, detached from the southern wall of the bay. The ascent of this pinnacle is difficult, and as the rock near the top is rotten, not to be recommended, though with three on the rope, the leader can be safeguarded. Its ascent cost six separate expeditions, and was made from the small col between it and the south cliff. On the south cliff slightly to the right of the wide chimney opposite the pinnacle, one of the best moderate courses on the coast commences. The route appears quite impossible from the other side of the bay, but a nearer view discloses a series of wide ledges running into each other at fairly easy angles, and with the exception of one short steep pull about half way up, leading directly to the top of the cliff. The climb is now considerably easier than at first, as an amount of loose material has been cleared away. Its descent is the only method of reaching the pinnacle col at high tide. The traverse of the Coolin-like ridge of Souter Head from end to end over its various summits gives a most enjoyable scramble, and will take a couple of hours if one or two of its many chimneys are negotiated *en route*. One remarkable through chimney starts at the back of a cave on sea level about half way along the ridge, giving pleasant back and knee work till the climber's head emerges like a rabbit, through a hole on the summit ridge. To make a complete exit, however, some of his outer raiment may very possibly have to be removed in order to reduce his dimensions. At Cove and Newtonhill several fine climbs can be done. But enough has been said to indicate to the climber where he may seek pastures new. Let him look for himself! He that seeketh findeth, and not least among his pleasures will be the fine combination of rock and sea scenery opened out before him during his explorations. The granite cliffs of Cornwall have long been exploited, why not those of Kincardine ?



Photo

D. Gillies.

THE PINNACLE AND SOUTH CLIFF CLIMB, LONG SLOUGH.

The figure on the sky line is immediately underneath the "steep pull" referred to in the South Cliff Climb.