

RHYMES OF A "SALVATIONIST."

*Souvenir of a walk through the Larig Ghru from Aviemore
to Braemar, September 1923.*

BY MARY AGNES SKAKLE.

Come a' you hill-climbers an listen tae me,
As I tell o' twa sisters wha lived near the Dee,
An' wha wanted tae pass by the dark Larig Ghru,
Tho' tae gang by their lanesome they feared they micht rue ;
For awat they were jist what crack mountaineers ca'
"Salvationists," kennin' nae muckle ava
About climbin' the face o' a rock like a flee,
A thing that their Maker ne'er meant them tae dee ;
Nor yet had they hung on the Black Coolin's edge,
Slung up by a rope frae a corrie's steep ledge,
But tae tack tae the road ower their ain native hills,
Brocht relief frae the noise o' this warld and its ills.

Noo, whaur'll they get them a braw mountaineer,
Thro' the gloomy Cairngorms them safely tae steer,
Though mist should be flyin' ower corrie and Ben,
An' thunner an lichtnin' resound in the glen ?
Then up spak' a wight o' the Cairngorm Club,
Wha likit tae wander ower heather and scrub,
Quoth gallant MacSimon " An' I'll be yer guide,
Frae dark Rothimurchus tae bonnie Deeside."
Sae they're aff tae the Hielans tae sweet Aviemore,
Awa frae the city an' traffic's lood roar,
An' when tae Craigellachie station they got,
They met the hill-climber wha's name means McScot.

In kilt and in tartan awat he looked fine,
MacSimon cried " Laddie, ye've jist come in time
For ye ken ilka step o' the steep Larig Ghru,

So ye'll jist gi'es a han' tae tak' twa lasses thro';
 But they're nae very swack, an' wi' siccan like sheen
 As the stanes o' the Larig 'll fairly ca' deen,
 For they've never a tacket an' trachled they'll be
 By the time they hae crossed frae the Spey tae the Dee.
 Quo' McScot " And it's blithely we'll a gang thegither,
 Ower boulder an burn we can help ane anither,
 But as sune as the hoosie we've passed at Alltdruie,
 I'm gane by the the summit o' steep Ben Macdhui."

That was mair nor the lasses had lippent tae see,
 But pride gaured them answer " We'll follow or dee !"
 Noo certes they'll a need tae start wi' the lark
 Or they'll nae see Glen Lui afore comes the dark ;
 For bonnie September was near at an en'
 An the mists they were wreathin' ower corrie and ben,
 Whan early next mornin', nae lang aifter seven,
 They're aff tae get four thousand feet nearer heaven.

Across swirlin' Spey by the brig they're a' roadit,
 The clouds and the mist fickle weather they bodit,
 But forward they stride past the tinks' caravan,
 Till they stan' on auld Coylum abune its ae span.
 Syne through by the yett tae the haunts o' the deer,
 Ower juniper, bracken, and heather-clad muir,
 Till they cam tae the Beinne and blessed on its brig
 The hill-climbin' billies wha made it sae trig.
 An' aifter the brig o' the Beinne they crossed,
 They threidit their wye till they cam tae the post
 That tells ye ye're richt for the lang Larig Ghru.
 Fegs they'll hae tae look smairt ere Braemar comes in view !

Alang by the path that was sappy and weet,
 The lasses lamentit the state o' their feet,
 As the deer keekit oot tae remind them in passin'
 The Larig's nae place for the latest in fashion.
 An' afore them there rises the dome o' Carn Elrig,
 That stan's like a sentinel guardin' the Larig
 An' looks nae sma' drink as ye come tae Alltdruie,
 But siccan a pimple when seen frae Macdhui,
 In wha's shadow the burn o' the Larig was twinin',

As the sun on the flat o' Braeriach was shinin',
While cuttin' through a' like a great muckle wedge
Was the mou' o' the Pass an the Lurcher's black edge.

Ahint them the mountaineers left the last tree
An' roon them the signs o' an Ice Age they see,
The little green knowies that ance were moraines
And the bed o' the burn fu' o' boulders and stanes.
But the dark gloomy pass gaurt the lasses feel eerie,
An' they thocht that the roof looked a hantle mair cheerie,
Though they dootit as steep Creag-an-Leth-choin appeared
They'd be gey oot o' breath when its tap they had cleared.
O' blithe shone the sun as they drank frae the rill
That wimples tae Larig frae green Castle Hill !
An' syne they tak up Creag-an-Leth-choin's dark side
Whaur high ower the rocks the white ptarmigan ride.

Fleet fittit McScott he set aff like a maukin,
An' quickly MacSimon the hill was sune takin'
But waes me the lasses near han break their banes
As they stottit and stumblit ower heather and stanes.
An' the day was advancin', they nott ilka meenit,
McScot blew his whustle for fear the speed leemit
The dames might exceed, but they dandered awa'
An' I trow they were gled when the summit they saw.

Weel awat 'twas worth while tae wrax body and limb
Frae the fit o' the Pass tae the plateau tae climb
An' see spread afore ye the stately Cairngorms,
The haunt o' the eagle, the mist and the storms.
An' a sandwich or twa an' a drap o' the cratur
Has muckle effect upo' tired human natur',
An' pat them in trim for the summit they saw
Jist ower the next ridge wi' its sprinklin' o' snaw.
But I trow that they a' thocht it gude tae be there,
For better nor they have been wont tae repair
Tae the taps o' the hills, in His quaetness tae find
Refreshment o' speerit and balm for tired mind.
If ye're weary o' life like Elijah the Tishbite
Or needin' new strength like oor Maister the Naz'rite,
Haud up tae the hills an' the still sma voice hear,
That canna win through far below in the steer.

A'roon them the hill-climbers lookit in wonder
 At mountain and corrie, whaur lingers the thunder.
 Braeriach he growled an' syne braidcast the soun,
 When like bairns they sent stanes tae the pass rumbling down.
 Noo when Keats first beheld Chapman's version o' Homer,
 That sweet singer felt like stoot Cortez the roamer
 Wha' eagle ey'd gazed ower the Pacific Ocean
 Frae Darien's peak ; so a similar notion
 Cam into the minds o' each hill-climbin' lass
 As she lookit far ower the dark Larig Pass
 Whaur peak upon peak like a sea rolled afore them
 An' mingled at last wi' the clouds that lay o'er them ;
 For though aft hae you veteran mountaineers stood
 On that very same spot and the same scene hae viewed,
 Can later impressions ye've had lang since syne
 Eclipse what ye thocht when ye saw't the first time ?
 But what gaurs ye stan' on the tap moralisin'
 When far tae the northward the white mists are risin' ?
 Sae tak' a guid look ere they're a' lost tae view,
 O' Creag Meaghaidh, The Window, and sharp Sgoran Dhu ;
 Syne look tae the north far beyond Aviemore
 Whaur the lan' meets the sea by the Moray Firth shore
 An' then turn about tae the Craggs o' Cairngorm
 Snaw streak'd like the breist o' a thrush, by the storm.
 Ower Corrie-an-Lochain an eagle was soarin'
 Suspicious, the ptarmigan fluttered afore him,
 As he wheeled an' he poised the intruders tae scan,
 Then ower the Snaw Corrie he sailed tae Loch A'an.
 Was't shak' o' an earthquake frae Vulcan's dark forge
 That caused tae appear sic a fearsome like gorge
 That stretches afore them as far 's eye can see
 An' beckons them on frae the Spey tae the Dee ?
 Or was it the rage o' the wild winter storms
 That whistle an' rave roon the lonely Cairngorms,
 That eroded the land an' dissected the mass
 And left the steep crags o' the deep Larig Pass ?
 Or here did the grindin' white glacier slip
 When the Ice lang ago held the land in its grip,
 And in its rough pathway the big boulders strewin'
 Leave ilka steep corrie its clear Lochan Uaine ?

By the side o' the Pass in procession sae gran',
Fu' lonely and silent the lofty peaks stan',
Like weel ordered sodgers, except whaur sticks oot
The Black Devil's Point like an awkward recruit.
Or may be Auld Nick leans as far as he may
Awa frae the Angel now lit by ae ray
Frae the slow dyin' sun haudin' roon tae the west
An' gildin' Carn Tual ere he sinks tae his rest ;
Or brightening the loch that in Garbh-corrie lies
Like a baptismal font whaur the stream takes its rise:
An' blessin' pours oot on the pure infant Dee
Afore he sets aff tae the distant North Sea.

But now ower the corrie the murky clouds soared
Whaur ance in the snawdrift a sodger was smored ;
His fate gaured the lasses tak tent o' the time
For Macdhu's steep summit they yet had tae climb.
Sae viewin' ance mair Corrie Brochain's reed scaur
An' the clear pools o' Dee gleamin' oot frae afar,
The mountaineers hastened by Corrie Mhoir's tap,
Took their breath an' a drink an' began the last lap.
But here frae Cairngorm cam' the mist and the sleet ;
'Twas fower o' the clock and sune fower pairs o' feet
Were leavin' their tracks in the saft weety snaw,
An' a square yard o' hillside was a' that they saw.

Weel awat but the lasses were dowie and cauld,
As they crawled tae the tap o' Macdhu sae bauld,
Aye sloggin' and slippin' an' tchavin' awa,
Amang stuff like a mixture o' pease meal an' snaw,
Till at last, through the mist, like a bogle or ghaist,
The sicht o' the cairn gaured the mountaineers haste,
Frae Boreas tae shelter a while in its lee
An' their bearin's tae tak in that white misty sea.
O' the bird that hops early mak's sure o' his worm,
But lazy hill-climbers like you get the storm,
For yer Zenith ye could hae attained wi' the sun
And in his last rays might yer race hae been run.

Did their guide sing "It wasna his wight he was late?"
Na, na, he jist sat there resigned tae his fate,

Syne got oot the compass and spread oot the map,
 An' got ready tae grope through the mist frae the tap.
 But here were memorial cairns by the score,
 As if ilka square yard was like Gilgal of yore,
 Whaur each Jewish tribe when the Jordan was cross'd
 Set up a curn stanes lest their fame should be lost.
 So wi' mist and wi' stanes were the lasses fair dazed,
 As they baith ower a circle o' wilderness gazed,
 For they feared tae gang forward in case they'd be seen
 Hingin' ower "The Reed Spoot" by the briers o' the 'een.

They were trachl't gaun up, fegs 'twas waur comin' doun
 For the stanes o' Stron Riach greed ill wi' their shune,
 An' the licht was near gane by the time they were viewin'
 Far doun in the corrie the glint o' Loch Uaine,
 That lay' neath the mist in a fearsome like spot
 Whaur the white vapours seethed like a witch's black pot ;
 The haunt it micht be o' the Ben's muckle ghaist
 Wha' wanders the hillside and never kens rest.

McScot was as wise as the men frae the East ;
 He could tell ilka star frae the greatest tae least ;
 But they wished he'd been Joshua doun that Green Hill,
 Syne he micht hae commanded the Sun tae stan' still.
 Though they hurried fu' faist yet the meenits flew faister
 An' syne the sun set and the darkness was maister,
 An' doun the weet hill-side that's said tae be green
 Cam' fower ghostly figures that prayed for the meen.
 'Stead o' "Lead kindly licht" it was "Lead kindly whustle,"
 As McScott blew a pipe like the note o' a throistle,
 An' I trow even Will o' the Wisp had been cheery
 If him they had seen through that darkness sae eerie.

The lasses crept forward and kept close thegither
 And "Oh dinna leave me" ane cried tae the tither,
 As did Orpheus ance, sae the ancient poets tell
 When Eù-ry-dicé- disappeared intae Hell.
 An' noo at the spot whaur the twa burnies meet
 There were as mony moss pots as near gaured them greet,
 And they grovelled aboot in that sink o' stagnation,
 Like souls in torment in the Lake o' Damnation.

But wi' help o' a stlck an' a moss hag or twa,
They cam' tae the Luibeg splashin' awa
Ower boulders and hillocks whaur slippit their feet,
An' the bed o' the burn was a cauld eneuch seat.
An' 'twas o' for a lanthorn or even a spunk
As they barkit their shins on a stane or tree trunk,
But they followed the whustle that wheebered awa
An' led through the darkness tae Carn Crom's black wa.

But Heaven for ever denied nae its licht
An' sune cam' reward tae the pilgrims o' nicht,
For oot cam' the meen ower the tap o' Carn Mhaim
An' I trow but the scene spread afore them was fine.
Gin ye'll tak' the advice o' the poet Walter Scott,
An' see at its best a historic auld spot,
Ye'll gang tae Melrose by the licht o' the meen
An' he'll promise ye there a richt wunnerfu' scene.
But its nae a great poet wha's apprisin' ye here
O' a wark o' man's han' seen in meenlicht maist clear,
But the humble advice o' a hill-climbin' lass
Wha has seen the meen rise ower the dark Larig Pass,
An' shed ower Carn Mhaim an' unearthly like glory
An' siller the peaks o' the mountains sae hoary,
Or seek oot each corrie on dark Ben Macdhuì,
Or dance on the ripples that rise on the Lui.

But the cauld siller moon winna dry soakin' feet,
And 'een Heaven's glory palls when ye've naething tae eat,
Sae, thankfu' for licht whaur afore it was black,
They wind roon Carn Crom on a welcome white track.
O' aft will these mountaineers see in their dreams,
The licht that frae Luibeg cottage now streams.
Pale meen, ye're a' richt for the lonely hillside,
But this speaks o' comfort and welcome inside.
Sae wi' blithe expectation the stream they're now fordin',
As eager as Joshua crossin' the Jordan;
Nae Canaan they seek wi' its milk and its honey,
But a drappie o' tea wad be worth ony money.

'Twas nine o' the clock, yet they werena ower blate,
Tae knock at the yett though 'twas Sabbath and late,

An' oot cam a giant wha stood in the door
 Like Kenneth McAlpine or brave Fergus Mhor.
 But certes his heart was as big as his frame,
 As he welcomed them intae that snug mountain hame,
 Whaur his kindly guid-wife and his sweet lassies three
 Heard a' their adventures, an' warmed them wi' tea.
 An' loath were the wand'ers tae leave that fireside
 As they thocht o' the lang miles they yet had tae stride,
 But wi mony a han' shak and hearty good-bye
 They made for the Derry an' syne Inverey.

Wi' story an' crack an' the lilt o' a sang,
 E'en in cauld sodden shune the wye didna seem lang,
 An' the murmer o' Lui, through pine trees sae sweet,
 Kept time wi' the rhythm o' weary sair feet.
 But fu' welcome at last, thro' the wood, cam' the din
 O' the waters o' Dee as it roars at the Linn
 An' sends up its spray tae the ower-hangin' moon
 An' sings tae the stars wi' its unending tune.
 Is this the calm stream that sae peacefully rose
 'Mang the quaet o' the hills and the Cairngorm snows?
 Like mony a mortal, ye havena gane far
 Ere ye've fa'en on the rocks that yer peace sairly mar.

By the time they drew near Inverey's sleepin' toon
 'Twas near twal o' the clock and the bogles' high noon,
 An' siccan an hour, an' it Sabbath for bye,
 Tae wauken the natives o' kind Inverey.
 Like the freen in the Scriptures by midnicht wha came
 An' withoot some refreshment, refused tae gang hame,
 They knocked at the cottage ca'ed aifter the thistle,
 But answer was nane tae their knockin' or whustle;
 An' 'twas "O are ye sleepin' ma kind Maggie Gruer?
 Lat's in, though its late, for it's nae a brow wooer,
 But fower mountaineers by the Larig belated."
 Fegs the door was thrown wide when their case they had stated!

For the guid soul within kent the spirit that draws
 The lover o' hills tae these summits whaur blaws
 The wild restless wind and whaur mortals may find
 In that Temple o' Nature, refreshment o' mind.

Sae she didna upbraid them for brackin' her sleep,
For the sake o' stravaigin' the hillsides like sheep,
But wi' welcome sae kindly she brocht them a' ben
Tae comfort that only tired wanderers ken.
And aifter they'd a' had refreshment o' body,
Wi' plenty tae eat an' a drappie o' toddy,
They're aff tae their beds whaur in dreams ance again
They're gropin' in mist doun the side o' the Ben.

And noo weary climbers whaur's a' yer reward?
Is't feet that are weary an' limbs that are jarred?
And a' ye've brocht hame siccan objects o' mockery
As a ptarmigan's feather, an' stane for yer rockery?
Mair food for reflection we got frae the hills,
Than Wordsworth ance got frae a wheen daffodils
Whan his heart used tae dance at the thocht o' these flooers,
As he lay on his couch in his quaet leisure hooers ;
Sae tae us haudin' doun ance again tae the strife,
Tae the noise an' the steer an' the hurry ca'ed life,
Comes the thocht o' His quaetness that broods ower the hills,
Rebukin' yer cares an' belittlin' yer ills ;
And again comes the mem'ry o' vast open spaces,
Wi' the pure air o' Heaven that tingles yer faces,
And in dreams, as yer feet touch the saft springy sod,
Ye're soothed in the Silence that listens for God.

MARY AGNES SKAKLE.