

A SPRING TRAVERSE OF LOCHNAGAR.

By MARGARET SKAKLE.

A HACKNEYED subject you say! Well, no apology is necessary for giving a description of a traverse of Lochnagar, for it would be an insult to that mountain to declare there was nothing new to say of it. Nowadays, when transport is so easy, boys and girls, youths and maidens, men and women, race up to the top and back again without thinking the feat in any way remarkable. Any week-end you will find bivvy tents lurking beneath the firs at Altnaguibhsaich, and the young stalwarts therein know the hill from A to Z. Nevertheless do we not all love to browse over the things that have stood the test of time—a fine old song, an exquisite vase, a lovely garden, anything that has been created with love and care? How much more then is it profitable to ponder over this masterpiece of the Creator! What a master-mind set this gem of corrie and loch, buttress and crag, precipice and plain, towering like a proud giant over lovely Deeside!

Of all seasons, Spring is the ideal one in which to see Lochnagar in his most majestic garb. This year, the Cairngorm Club elected to traverse the hill from Altnaguibhsaich to the Garrawalt. Sub-sections of the Club had explored out-of-the-way corners on various week-ends throughout the season, and the May Holiday saw a mass meeting of the enthusiasts. No time was lost in preliminaries, and the large party set off from the lodge in good spirits. There is something inspiring in that brotherhood which one feels as a whole company with kindred interests wends its way up a hill track. It is like the "assembling of yourselves together" which worshippers feel when they bow together to pray. It is like the journeying of the pilgrims in Taunhauser or the marching of the Israelites towards the Promised Land. The Cairngorm Club, threading its way along the slopes of Conachcraig and down by the dip at the Gelder, made a speedy pilgrimage, for the Foxes' Well was reached in

record time, and the welcome halt made for material refreshment.

Surely that well was not placed there by accident. How many amateurs have thrown themselves down at that hospitable oasis before they gathered their second wind to mount the Ladder? And surely the Ladder was not placed there by accident either, for the gasp of surprise which a beginner must give on first viewing the grandeur of the corrie is sufficient reward for the hard grind up that stony staircase.

On this occasion, the great corrie had been decked out in all its finery for this State visit. Never did the silent waters of the dark loch look more sombre. The sleeping giant of the hill, who at one time had emerged from that crater in fire and smoke, was imprisoned beneath the black surface, still and deep. The corrie hung round it like a mourning mantle of black and white, with deep rifts like chains holding the monster in spell. One could imagine Brunhilde standing there when the storm sweeps the mountain, calling her war maidens to come to her aid. Where is the Scottish Wagner who could fittingly write an opera to this setting?

The summit of Lochnagar seems less inspiring than the rest of the hill. At least on this May Holiday it did so. Perhaps it was because like other mortals, the Cairngorm Club must eat to find energy to finish the day's work. Or perhaps it was because no foot of ground could be found clear of snow, and such a cold seat could not beget inspiring thoughts. The best distant view was got, not from the summit, but later from the Stuic Buttress. However, the nearer view was superb. The western corrie was smiling up towards us like a sunny child, its two lochs like baby blue eyes fringed with the golden locks of the yellow sand. Nothing sinister here! Indeed the summit might have been the balancing place of the two forces of dark and light, good and evil, that are continually at work everywhere.

The cavalcade moved forward towards this sunny scene, down that boulder-strewn ridge which must have been part of the giant's upheaval long ages ago. Soon the corrie was rounded and the Stuic Buttress was seen in all its strength with the sun picking out each fissure on the great

wall. What visions were called up of past Presidents hanging "by the briers o' the een" over that terrible precipice! Here the distant view was enough to delight any mountaineer's heart. The glittering mass of the Cairngorms, fold upon fold, swept round from Cairntoul to Ben Avon, each peak standing out for inspection as though conscious of the special occasion. A light "that never was on land or sea" gleamed on the whole panorama, showing up the monarchs in true proportion and compelling the subordinates like Derry Cairngorm or Carn à Mhaim to lower their diminished heads. It was with reluctance that the club turned towards the long nose that leads towards the headwaters of the Garrawalt. If a "Te Deum" could have been sung, there was the place to sing it. Unfortunately Cairngorm Club members are rather inarticulate until pipes are lit up after supper time.

Our President has no doubt been trained by some of his predecessors to keep to a time-table. It was discovered that at the rate at which we were going, we were in danger of arriving at the Garrawalt Bridge several minutes too early! Accordingly, when a spring was reached before entering the tree area, a pleasant quarter-of-an-hour's reminiscent talk was indulged in. And so down to "Union Street"—as the President dubbed it—that lovely pine-needle track down past the Falls. Just as watches pointed to 5 the Club crossed the White Bridge, punctual enough to satisfy the most exacting martinet.

Will we do it again? Yes, a thousand times if we are spared. For a visit to Lochnagar never palls, and the monarch remains the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.