

## THE PRESIDENT'S DAY OUT.

It came about thiswise: on the afternoon of Saturday, November 25, 1933, the date of the Annual Club Dinner, Smith and I decided to do a climb on Lochnagar on the Sunday. A remark made by one of the speakers at the dinner that night to the effect that a President should have done the "real thing" led me to whisper to Smith, "We must get Malcolm to come with us to-morrow." After the dinner we stealthily approached the President and said, "Lochnagar to-morrow, Malcolm, we'll call for you at 7.30. Bring the usual hill lunch." "Here, what's this?" he gasped. We made reply, "A President must do some of the 'real thing.'" "I know," he answered, "but after this dinner!" "Certainly," we said, "a President must show a good example to the Club. Besides," we added, "think of the prestige, man. Newly-elected President starts off term of office with the 'real thing.'" "Yes, but after this dinner," he reiterated. "Splendid," we said, "we'll call for you at 7.30 then," and, slapping him on the back, we hurried off lest he should change his mind.

We picked up a sleepy-eyed President at 7.59(!) a.m. and set off. A red sky in the east and sharp, frosty air suggested ideal climbing conditions (which were later fully realised). We were soon in high spirits—despite the dinner! The drive by the South Deeside Road *via* the Shooting Greens was indeed delightful. The countryside lay white in the grip of a hard frost, and with the shafts of sunlight picking out delicate patterns on the hoar-laden trees and undergrowth we seemed to be driving through Fairyland.

Altnaguibhsaich was reached about 9.45, and ten minutes later we set off at a brisk pace, for the sharp air did not encourage loitering. Coming out of the trees our eyes rested delightedly upon the patches of snow on the lower slopes of the White Mounth, for we knew the gullies would be holding snow. We passed the Fox's Well at 11 a.m. and, crossing the Meikle Pap Col we soon gained the

rocks below the Central Buttress. Here we called a halt for a light meal. We decided to attempt one of the gullies to the left of the Douglas Gibson. (This we discovered later to be the Giant's Head Chimney.) A steep slope of hard-packed snow led up to a miniature bergschrund at the foot of the first pitch, formed by some six feet of frozen boulders in the bed of a stream rising at an angle of some 45° and culminating in a vertical slab of rock some seven feet high, over which a half-frozen waterfall gurgled most unpleasantly. We roped, and I made gingerly for the wet, icy slab. I succeeded in getting my sleeves and boots filled with the icy liquid—cursing the while. All this, mark you, to the intense delight of Nos. 2 and 3. I eventually gained the stance above the waterfall and, my discomfort temporarily over, called on No. 2 to follow. In order that he might not escape what he seemed to consider a pleasant pitch I generously guided him up its wettest part, but I doubt if he really enjoyed it. When we were both secured we called to No. 3, "Now, Mr. President, Sir." From the point of sheer delight this was by far the best part of the climb. The President was getting the "real thing." Our efforts had been amply repaid. We were content.

To enable Mr. Wet President to obtain a stance I moved up the next pitch with much misgiving, for the snow and ice-covered boulders made holds of dubious safety. I gained a good stance in hard-packed snow and called on No. 2 to come up. At this point No. 2 seemed to be suffering under some disability with the bergen, holding thermos flasks, food, spare sweaters, etc., and in view of the narrow chimney higher up we decided to lower the bergen down "to be called for." I'm sure Mr. President enjoyed bumping down my bergen—it contained my thermos. The next pitch led up good snow to the foot of the chimney, and getting Nos. 2 and 3 up to a good stance I tackled the chimney. The going was easy here. Had I planned the holds myself I doubt if I could have placed them more conveniently. I gained the cave below the chokestone and, driving my axe in, belayed No. 2 on his ascent. We just managed to squeeze into the cave together. There

was no room for Mr. President! The chokestone, which in summer would present but average difficulty, was covered with a film of hard ice which made pressure holds quite impossible. After three attempts to turn this pitch, I subsided gloomily on the snow and cursed myself for forgetting to bring pitons. Time was getting on and Mr. President could be heard stamping cold feet. With luck and combined tactics we might have turned the chokestone but we had no knowledge of the difficulties which might lie ahead, and we had no wish to become benighted. Reluctantly we decided to turn back—after ascending some 200 feet.

The descent was more exciting by far than the ascent, for it was now freezing hard and the gully was slippery in the extreme. Only the good die young, they say, and we reached the waterfall stance without mishap. Now for the marine adventure—Mr. President leading! It was a wet, dirty business. Nos. 2 and 3 had their revenge in my prolonged immersion.

The snow rake leading from the gully provided us with short glissades and soon we were re-crossing the col above the loch. Twilight deepened into night, but a pale moon lighted us on our way. Arrived at Altnaguibhsaich again we found a party of Club members who had also spent the day on Lochnagar.

Driving down Glen Muick we asked ourselves how best to put the finishing touches to a splendid outing. Someone suggested bacon and eggs at the Alexandra. Carried unanimously. And so to the Hotel Alexandra we drove, there to find our host bemoaning a cold in the head. The bacon and eggs seemed to be no whit the worse, however, and we did full justice to them whilst our host regaled us with his philosophy.

And here endeth the chronicle of the first outing of the President *qua* President.—R. P. Y.