



LOCH AVON

From a Painting by T. Train

ARTIST IN THE HILLS.

T. TRAIN.

A LANDSCAPE painter in Scotland is an uncommon sight, not because painters are particularly scarce but because the modesty of the species tends to solitary effort! The finished work and not the processes involved are his desire. A collapsible easel, canvas, box of paints, and sketching umbrella, all adhering somehow to a cycle and cyclist, make passers-by turn round and stare. A canvas acts like a sail and, given favourable winds, is a great boon to an artist bent on conserving his energies for a full day's painting. In a head wind it requires the enthusiasm born of a monstrous conceit that art is important to enable him to press on to the chosen spot!

And how many counter-attractions, during the journey, tend to beguile him away from a set purpose! The burnished gold of wet, late-winter bracken, the weight of the snows having laid it level to catch and reflect the sunlight; or the ever-changing rhythms of ripples below a waterfall, some bubbles escaping the rush, seeking the safety of a backwater but soon slowly edging up to the pouring water again, a quick, mad dash of a few yards and again a desperate clutching at the mass of bubbles just in safety, often only to break off many others, and away they go into the swift stream, to be reborn, perhaps, at the next fall; or a lovely sky, with fretted, white cloud-islands, floating in cobalt blue, all so transient—and the hills remain the same, or do they? Great temptations but they must be resisted.

The Lui Beg path is left behind and, a few hundred feet up Càrn Crom, a comfortable bielled corner is found and the view is there. S'ron Riach, Ben Macdhui, Càrn a' Mhaim, Braeriach, Cairn Toul—the subtle lines of their forms sweeping together in cross rhythms. Nature has produced the composition; one just opens one's eyes and draws. The canvas securely anchored, the day's work

can begin. Braeriach and Macdhuì keep advancing and receding, sometimes in the sky, sometimes firmly attached to the earth, one moment misty blue, the next a purply dark, now cold, now warm, a veritable kaleidoscope!

From this rich store of colour, form and mood, a choice must be made and a masterpiece might be born. At least, all painters believe it possible and this will-o'-the-wisp is pursued with passion. One can become elated with the struggle, especially if success seems near, and distractions have little power now. One doesn't even stop for food, for, after all, feeding from the left hand is possible while the right hand paints. Looking hard all day and making delicately controlled strokes is physically exhausting, and prudence counsels a break or common sense says take a walk to regain circulation. But no, the stubborn artist lies back in the heather, stretches, hears the Lui again plainly, and may even have forty winks. Once again to work; but the colours now look doubtful; the composition might have been more convincing and the scene has changed radically with the moving sun. The Coire Sputan Dearg now looks more like a subject for cubism than impressionism. The massive content of the Ben, with its spurs, seems more evident, and the sweeping lines have been replaced by planes catching the light and casting shadows.

The sound of human voices breaks the spell of looking, the Nazi salute meets the eye and two handsome young Germans go striding past, methodically doing the job of climbing. They diminish in size as they ascend the Sròn Riach and, finally, two specks are seen moving on the Macdhuì ridge and one feels satisfied—why, it is difficult to say.

The light at last begins to fail and a wet canvas, even when pinned to another, is not the easiest of loads if there is a wind and a rough path to follow in the dark. A retreat as methodical as the Germans' ascent is made; the lure of warm food and a good bed hasten the step, and it is no use studying the fine forms of woods and mounds in Glen Lui or the tree shapes above the Black Bridge. All studies for another day!