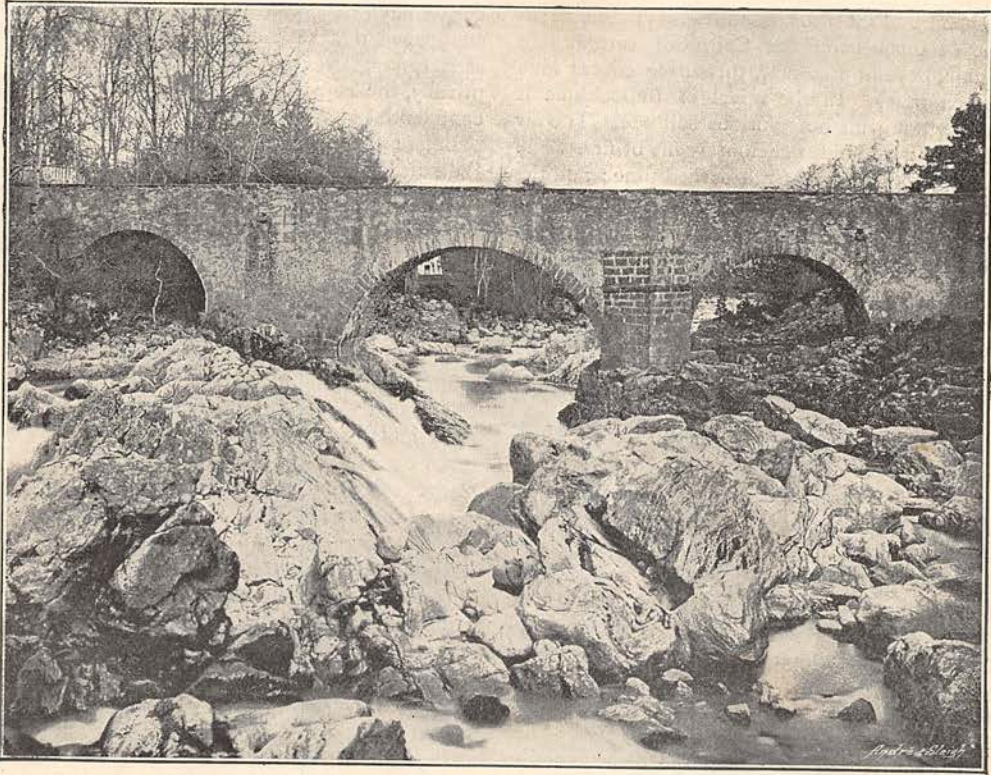
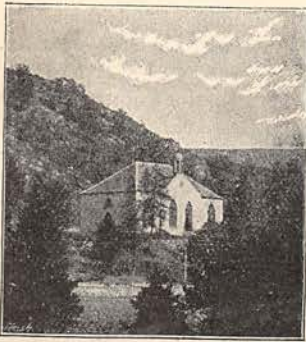


## THE ROYAL HIGHLANDS.

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY MESSRS. VALENTINE AND SONS, DUNDEE.



BRIDGE OF FEUGH, BANCHORY.



THE OLD CHURCH OF CRATHIE.

(From a photograph by Poulton & Son, London.)

THE Dee valley of Aberdeenshire has from the earliest historic ages been favoured of royalty. Just before arriving in Castleton, the stage-coach from Ballater to Braemar passes on the left Creag Choinnich ("Kenneth's Craig"), which takes its name from Kenneth Macalpine. This grey rocky eminence was, until recent

years, the scene of a rough race on the programme of the Braemar Highland Gathering. The athletes started from the Braemar Castle grounds, on the opposite side of the road, and ran, leaped, and clambered up the face of the crags to the cairn on the summit. But a competitor (having burst a blood-vessel through over-exertion) died on the hillside, and the "event" was dropped. King Kenneth built at Braemar a castle, the site of which is marked by an

interesting ruin on the right bank of the Clunie, now hidden from the eye of the visitor by a merchant's shop. Hence the name Castleton of Braemar. For ages Castleton was separated from the equally ancient clachan of Auchendryne, on the opposite bank of the Clunie, until the two were joined into a well-appointed village by the Clunie Bridge. To-day, the only visible indications of the fact that Braemar stands one foot on the territory of Invercauld and another on that of Mar Lodge, are the legends emblazoned over the two hotels of Castleton and Auchendryne respectively—"Invercauld Arms" and "Fife Arms."

Besides the Deeside turnpike from Aberdeen, which runs east and west, there is a fairly good coach road into the Royal Highlands from the south, *viâ* Dunkeld, Blairgowrie, Bridge of Calley, and Spittal of Glenshee. Seven miles out from Braemar this road passes over the shoulder of the Cairnwell by a steep zigzag incline known as "The Devil's Elbow," which reminds one of certain "pretty 'cute" curves on the slopes of the Rocky Mountains. In winter the Cairnwell section of this road is frequently blocked with snow for weeks, until men can be sent out from Braemar and the Spittal to "cast" the wreaths.

The Queen's Drive is a private carriage-road from

Balmoral to Ballater, celebrated for the views of scenery which it commands, more especially "The Queen's View." It passes through the heart of the ancient pine forest of Ballochbuie, where, in days of old, King Kenneth and his hardy courtiers hunted the wild boar. From the confines of Balmoral to where it debouches on the Cairnwell turnpike in Glen Clunie, beyond Braemar, this drive covers nine long Scotch miles. In the midst of Ballochbuie it winds through a grim but glorious solitude. The air is full of ozone and the delicious scent of firs. The forest abounds in the native red-barked pine; and the monster ant-hills of Ballochbuie have long been the study of naturalists.

At Dinnet, thirty miles down the Dee valley from Braemar, there is another seat of ancient royalty. On one of the islands of Loch Kinnord there are remains of a castle originally built by Malcolm Canmore, from whom, it is not improbable, the loch derived its name, since we sometimes find it spelt "Cannor."

But it is the royal Highlands of to-day in which we are specially interested. In Queen Victoria we have a more illustrious personage than either Kings Kenneth or Canmore. Her Majesty has spent enormous sums of money in improving the Royal Highlands. Besides the construction of the drive through Ballochbuie, roads of equal extent have been made through her moors and deer forests; while the improvements on the Balmoral demesne go on without ceasing.

Westward from the castle, through Ballochbuie, the Queen can drive nine miles on end within her own fences. Southward, through the deer forest to Lochnagar, is from six to eight miles of a ride. And the drive eastward, through Abergeldie and Birkhall, covers a similar distance. One of her Majesty's favourite drives is from Balmoral Castle to Allt-naguisach Lodge and the Glassait Shiel on Loch Muick side, *via* Linn of Muick—a distance of over twenty miles.

The River Dee forms the boundary of Balmoral and Abergeldie on the north. Along the south bank of the river, from Braemar on the west to Glen Muick, Ballater, on the east—a stretch of fifteen miles as the crow flies—the Royal Highland frontier extends. The Queen, however, does not confine her drives to her own territory. Her Majesty visits in all the neighbouring glens, and has many friends among the peasantry. Especially is she mindful of the old families of Crathie. In times of trouble and distress she is ever ready to help these people.

We have seen her Majesty turn out in her carriage to attend the funeral of an old gamekeeper. On that occasion, after the company had dispersed, the Queen and Princess Beatrice placed wreaths of heather and rowan-berries on the grave.

When three of the children of a poor cottager were drowned in a flooded burn, her Majesty sent searchers from Balmoral to recover the bodies; and in person she visited the bereaved parents to comfort them in their grief, afterwards assisting at the burial, and

thoughtfully relieving her humble neighbours of all expenses.

The royal visits among the cottages of these glens are writ large in the memories of the people. With her womanly tact and sympathy, the Queen disarms native shyness and reserve, the result being mutual confidence and respect. Naturally, her Majesty resents prying eyes on these occasions; and to secure privacy, the royal visitor is generally preceded by a confidential servant, to give warning of her approach.

Before the construction of the private chapel at Balmoral Castle, Queen Victoria frequently attended public worship in the parish church of Crathie; and to see her Majesty at the half-yearly communion, partaking of the sacramental bread and wine along with the sun-browned parishioners, was a sight never to be forgotten. The old Church of Crathie to which we refer was a very plain edifice, as may be gathered from our illustration, but it is now being replaced by a more imposing modern structure.

The late Prince Leopold was a great favourite with the Highlanders generally, and by none was he better loved than by old Mrs. Mackenzie of Glengairn. The prince was wont to visit Gairnside, and picnic near Mrs. Mackenzie's dwelling. The old lady and her dog were present at all such gatherings. Never embarrassed by the presence of royalty, Mrs. Mackenzie (to the great delight of her royal visitors) did not attempt to modify her native dialect. The Queen, too, when driving through Glengairn, usually called upon Prince Leopold's old friend. On one of these visits her Majesty had paid her respects and graciously inquired after the old dame's health, when Mrs. Mackenzie, all unconscious of the proprieties, replied: "I'm fine, thank you; I'm nae speirin' for yer Majesty, but how's my laddie?" (meaning Prince Leopold).

The stone cairns on the summits of the nearer hills—a notable feature of Balmoral scenery—were all built from time to time by instructions of her Majesty. Almost every hill-top visible from the flag-tower of the castle is tipped with one of these conical cairns. Each cairn commemorates an event in her Majesty's private life: the birth of a royal babe, a wedding, or a death. Periods of joy and of sorrow are thus sternly registered around the Queen's Highland home.

Lochnagar forms the southern extremity of the Royal Highlands. The classic mountain is accessible to pedestrians from both Ballater and Braemar. To reach it from the latter place, one may walk, ride, or drive, *via* Glen Clunie and Glen Callater, as far as the gamekeeper's house on the side of Loch Callater, whence by an irregular path the summit is attainable, either on foot or on the back of a Highland pony. The expedition is no joke. It was while attempting the ascent by this path a few years ago that the late Reverend Mr. Kelly, of Dundee, lost his life. From Ballater, the road to Lochnagar lies through Glen Muick. There is a driving road as far as Allt-naguisach, near Loch Muick, thence a path to the summit. By the latter path the present writer made the ascent quite recently. It came about in this way.



THE COLONEL'S BED, BRAEMAR.

to have been first extemporised in lieu of a sermon during a great snowstorm, which prevented the attendance of the preacher), we get an inspiring peep through the Pass of Ballater. And almost immediately thereafter the train pulls up at Ballater station, the present terminus of this line of railway, and "the capital of the Deeside Highlands."

Gathering up knapsack, staff, and mackintosh, we stroll into the Square of the village and look around. From the steep crags and dark oaks of Craig-an-darroch, our eyes turn to the Coyles of Muick. All around are hills—higher, wilder hills; but the eye can rest on none but this quaint group, with its three conical paps, now aglow in the evening sun. The Coyles form the first bold landmark on the eastern boundary of Queen Victoria's Highland domains of Abergeldie, Birkhall, and Balmoral. The highest of the triplet peaks bears aloft the Prince of Wales's marriage cairn, at a height of nearly 2,000 feet above sea level.

But we must not stand gazing down the lanes of Ballater. It is six o'clock, and there are seven long miles between us and our supper. So we cross the Dee by the bridge of Ballater—a bridge, by the way, with a history of which Graham's great picture, "The Spate," is illustrative—for have not two stone bridges of five arches each been swept away from this site by floods on the river!

Under fragrant birch-trees, we enter Glen Muick, choosing the right bank of the stream, so as to pass through the territory of Sir Allan Mackenzie. The Queen's territory is

on the opposite side of the river. It is a typical Highland road, winding and undulating, according to the freaks of the hillside out of which it is cut.

Passing out of the birchwood we find we have turned the flank of the Coyles range, and that the mountains of the Lochnagar group now stand upon our right front, dark with the mysteries of the gathering night. Crossing one of the many burns that hurry down from the hillside to swell the Muick, we come suddenly upon a clearing. Here the hitherto concealed river appears, struggling through a bleak bare haugh, and we follow the movements of a pair of active ouzels hopping among its boulders. The softer sylvan beauties have vanished. Instead of thriving farms, we have only a few shapeless little fields ribbed with potatoes, or scored with the stunted briard of oats, while a few black steers are picking up a scanty living of wild grass and bracken among the stones and heather. The road soon passes into a dense wood of black firs and larches, where the silence is broken only by the soft sound of the wood-pigeon croodling to his mate, until the noise of the Linn of Muick falls upon the ear. The waters of the river pour through a narrow gully in the dark grey rocks, and fall forty feet into a romantic dell, wooded to the water's edge. The bottom of this fall is 1,145 feet above sea level.

"You are seedy, old fellow," said my friend Spangs to me in the city one morning in early June. "Sunshine, bracing air, and exercise—that's my prescription for you. Come with me to the Royal Highlands of Scotland; I have secured diggings among the hills of Glen Muick." Spangs calls me "Puffs," because I lose my wind at the steep ascents; and I call him "Spangs," because of his long, springy strides. I caught his enthusiasm, and two days thereafter we were bowling along in the afternoon Deeside express from Aberdeen to Ballater, eagerly scanning the line-side for familiar landmarks.

Banchory is the entrance to the Deeside Highlands, Hill of Fare and Tilwhilly forming the portal. Here is the picturesque Bridge of Feugh; and now the resinous odour of the pine-trees first fills the carriage. On the broad flat moor of Dinnet, one of the Messrs. Wilson, of Hull shipping and Tranby Croft fame, has just erected a huge mansion of white granite. But our eyes are on the alert to catch the first peep of the classic old house of Ballaterich, in which Byron lived when he "roved a young Highlander o'er the dark heath." There is his "Morven of snow," and there again "the rocks that o'ershadow Culbleen." Shortly after passing the ruins of the Kirk o' Tullich (in which the famous Highland reel of that ilk is said

The cuckoo is calling from the wooded ravine of the Fox's Burn as we ford the clear cold water of the Muick, here little more than knee-deep. Nine o'clock chimes on the old kitchen clock as we sit down to supper of fresh eggs, cold ham, and refreshing hot tea; and the good lady of the house informs us that the Queen and Princess Beatrice had driven past in the afternoon, on their way from the Glassalt Shiel to Balmoral.

To the average Sassenach, Highland weather is just as enigmatical as the Gaelic tongue. He will never master one or other. He will never master one or other. It was a still clear night when we retired to rest; but when, at five o'clock next morning, we put our heads out at the "skylight" window of our modest little bedroom, the glen was invisible. The white mist prevented us seeing beyond the roof, and we returned to bed repeating an abracadabra incantation. Black art is still potent in the Highlands. At any rate, a charm was wrought on this occasion: for when at seven o'clock we went down to the Muick to perform our morning ablutions, the sun, shining in a blue sky, filled the valley with brilliant light; and the last trace of the mist, a patch not bigger than a shepherd's plaid, was rapidly passing off the summit of the Capel Mount. "It will be haze the day, maybe; but *warrum!*" said our landlady when serving breakfast.

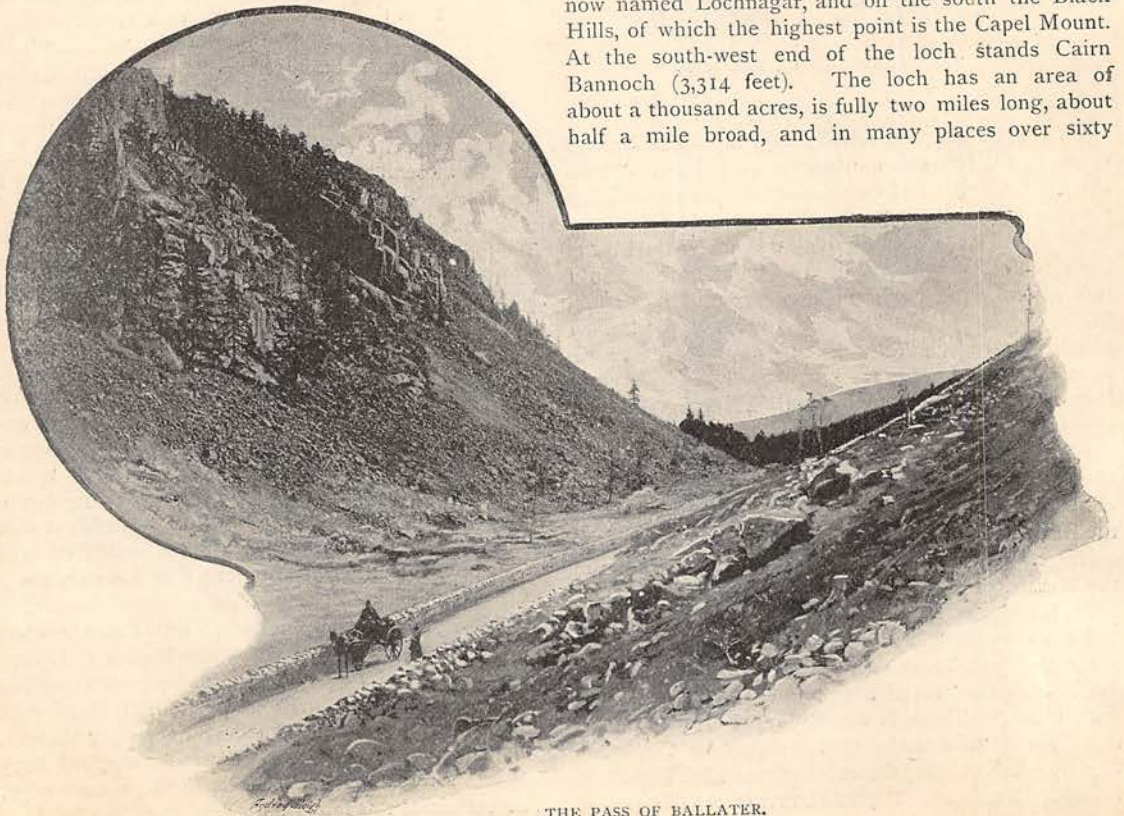
At half-past eight o'clock, when we set out, nothing was stirring along the road but rabbits and red grouse. The carriage road for public purposes terminates at the gate of Allt-na-guisach Lodge, where it becomes

the Queen's private drive to the Glassalt Shiel. From Allt-na-guisach a footpath leads the pedestrian across the valley to Spittal of Muick, the last homestead in the glen. The scent of ash blossom follows us gratefully on the morning breeze half across the flat moorland; and a solitary lapwing puts herself to infinite trouble to hoodwink us as to the locality of her nest, circling and "pee-weeting" over our heads, till we reach the plank bridge by which we cross the river.

At the Spittal steading not a soul is to be seen. A few heavily-wooled sheep rise lazily from the dusty road and slowly mount the bank. Here we take higher ground, and looking back, we see the farm-folk "casting peats" in the moss down near the river. This is the last we are to see of mankind, except ourselves, for ten mortal hours.

Now we have sighted Loch Muick. At a beach of yellow sand the river leaves the loch, and meanders sluggishly through the flat moorland in loop-like bends, resembling "the Links of Forth" on a small scale. As we advance, a brace of long-legged heron start from the river's bed and take wing for a short distance. Alighting at a commanding bend of the stream, they take up positions, one on each bank, deliberately to see us off the premises. Looking back half a mile, we can see the scraggy pair still at their post of observation.

Loch Muick is a characteristic Highland loch. It lies in the lap of the mountains just within the southern boundary of Aberdeenshire, at an altitude of 1,310 feet. On the north side is the White Mount, now named Lochnagar, and on the south the Black Hills, of which the highest point is the Capel Mount. At the south-west end of the loch stands Cairn Bannoch (3,314 feet). The loch has an area of about a thousand acres, is fully two miles long, about half a mile broad, and in many places over sixty



THE PASS OF BALLATER.



CUTTING SNOW WREATHS ON THE CAIRNWELL.

fathoms deep. Viewed from one of the corries near its south-west corner, the wild grandeur of Loch Muick is very striking. To-day its black surface is ruffled into catspaws by a northerly breeze. There is a slight haze on the higher mountains, but below 3,000 feet the atmosphere is intensely clear—so clear that with our binoculars we can follow the operations of a black-throated diver at work in a sandy bay on the opposite side of the loch.

From the summit of the Broad Cairn (3,268 feet) a magnificent view is obtained. Towards the south-east we can see the famous Aberbrothock, or Bell Rock Lighthouse, with the white breakers at its foot, forty-five miles distant.

It was four in the afternoon when we reached the top of Cairn Bannoch, whence the best view of Lochnagar is obtained. On the north side we look down into the Dhub Loch, black and still as death. Around this eerie pool, precipices of dark grey rock rise up to join the scarred slopes and jagged corries of Lochnagar. The hollow of the Dhub Loch is a continuation of the Muick valley and its *cul-de-sac*. The waters of the Dhub Loch run off in a brawling Highland burn, and fall into Loch Muick, about a mile distant. Following the course of this stream, the eye is led into the full vista of Glen Muick—a vista limited, ten miles off, by the Coyles of Muick, which lie athwart the end of the glen, like humpy camels resting in the desert.

The Dhub, or Black Loch, is the scene of an interesting incident in the early life of the Duke of Edinburgh. The prince was one of a deer-stalking

party out from Balmoral, and a wounded stag had swum, though wounded, to the middle of the loch. The desperate "monarch of the glen" was said to be drowning the stag-hounds, when the duke, drawing his *skean-dhu* (a dirk carried by the Highlanders in the right stocking), plunged into the loch, and gave the stag the *coup de grâce*. The antlers of this stag adorn the front door of Allt-na-guisach Lodge.

Midway down the Dhub valley is the scene of an incident still more romantic. At the foot of a beautiful waterfall, and overhung by fragrant birch-trees, a neat stone cairn marks the spot where, on 3rd October, 1870, the Marquis of Lorne proposed to Princess Louise.

Nor is this a solitary instance of royalty wooing in a Highland solitude. The Princess Royal is known to have pledged her hand to the Crown Prince of Prussia (the late lamented Emperor Frederick) in Glen Eye, Braemar. Their party was on an expedition to view the wild scenery along the Eye, of which the Colonel's Bed is perhaps the most notable feature; and it was the presentation of a sprig of white heather by the royal Teuton to the lady of his heart that led up to the all-important "question."

The Glassalt Shiel, as seen from Cairn Bannoch, presents a striking picture. Behind and on either flank this unique royal mansion is sheltered by a close plantation of larch-trees. The burn from which it gets its name rises near the summit of Lochnagar, and in the last stages of its race to Loch Muick it leaps down a wild corrie in falls of from twenty to one hundred feet. The ground in front of the shiel is open to the

loch, and from the main door a gravel walk leads through a grassy lawn to a boat pier. The Glassalt Shiel is a two-storey building with pointed roofs. Over the front door is inscribed "Victoria Regina—1868."

Is the cuckoo a royal bird? "Cuckoo! cuckoo!" was the soft good-bye wafted to us from Allt-na-guisach as we crossed Glen Muick in the morning; and now on our homeward way, as we stand in the evening on the brink of a stupendous corrie with an unpronounceable Gaelic name, gazing across the silent loch at the Glassalt, "Cuckoo! cuckoo!" is wafted to us from the wood behind the royal shiel. Farewell, rare scene! It will be gloaming in the glen ere we get home.

Next morning we are joined by two friends, a lawyer and a military man, who had posted from Ballater to take part in the ascent of Lochnagar. They explain how they have studied to put themselves in form by cutting down their tobacco to one cigar a day. Both carried whisky, but on our advice they did not drink it. Successful mountaineering—like campaigning—demands temperance.

Spangs takes great risks in the matter of Highland weather. To-day he has rejected his mackintosh. He has *faith*, he says. Mine had been shaken. There had been no mist at sunrise this morning, the sun had been suspiciously bright for three hours past, and now white clouds are rolling up from the north-east. "She'll pe show'ry, whatever!" said our landlady at parting. Half-an-hour later we are compelled to seek shelter at Allt-na-guisach from a heavy shower of rain; but at ten o'clock, in fair weather, we file up the bridle-path behind the royal cottage, cross the Guisach Burn on stepping-stones, and set our faces towards Lochnagar.

We are five now, all told. The fifth man is a Highlander, as familiar with these mountains as with his mother tongue—the Gaelic.

The path from Allt-na-guisach to the top of Lochnagar was made at the Queen's command and expense in 1849. To-day, however, we do not follow this path all the way to the mountain top. Before reaching the zig-zag known as "The Ladder," we turn off to the right, and strike along the mountain side to the cairn which marks the spot where, at an altitude of 2,500 feet, the late Prince Consort shot his last stag. This cairn bears the inscription "Albert, 18th October, 1861." Alas! within two months from that date the lamented prince died; and the fourteenth of December has ever since been regarded as a day of ill-omen in the royal house of Guelph.

From the Prince's Cairn we ascend the Meikle Pap (3,210 feet), a detached spur crowned by an interesting natural cairn. As we near the top of this conical peak, the sun, which has been scorching hot, seems suddenly to drop out of the heavens. In semi-darkness and a merciless downpour of rain, we scramble to the summit, and huddle together in lee of the cairn. The situation is, however, anything but uninteresting.

Spangs and the Highlander planned here a surprise

for those of us who had not before ascended the Meikle Pap. "Come and have a look from this window," cried Spangs, pointing to a large square aperture, to which he had climbed, among the shattered rocks. We looked, and lo! a veritable Inferno. It was Lochnagar: the loch whose name is now given to the mountain. Behind the black and silent pool grim precipices ascend hundreds of feet, and in the centre of this stupendous background appears the Black Corrie (or Black Spout), gaunt and rugged, its yawning mouth at the water's edge, and its lofty brow crowned with snow of dazzling whiteness. The rain had almost ceased, and the sun shone bright atop the precipices, although the loch was still draped in gloom: a Dantesque picture, weirdly impressive.

In brilliant sunshine, and without a vestige of the recent shower, we descend from the Meikle Pap, stepping, leaping, and picking our way among splintered stones to Lochnagar side. The wild basin of Lochnagar is surrounded by rocks and precipices, except where a rough burn carries off the overflow of the loch. We cross the burn on stepping-stones near its exit from the loch, and begin again the ascent.

At last we reach the bare shoulder of the mountain, whence we make for the Cac Cairn (4,000 feet above the sea level). On that pinnacle of the wilderness we are perched half-an-hour afterwards, scanning a boundless panorama.

We dine and drink at the Poacher's Well, a sweet and limpid spring which gurgles out of the mountain's side, only about a hundred feet below the Cac. And no sooner have we finished our repast than the wind suddenly veers from west to north, and blows so cold and strong that we are compelled to run off at a brisk trot to keep our blood from freezing. A bee line is made for the top of the Black Spout, but ere we reach it we are caught in a heavy shower of hail, which nips like a cat-o'-nine-tails wherever it hits the flesh. We leap into the cup of the corrie, a drop of six feet, on the top of a wide and deep field of snow. Here we are perfectly sheltered from the biting wind, and can laugh at our past experiences while exploring the terrible throat down which the corrie sends its winter glaciers into the gloomy loch below.

After twenty minutes spent in the cup of the Black Corrie, we return to the open mountain top, to find that the wind has backed into the west, and that the sun is shining brilliantly. And we hasten to a cornice of the precipices to witness a phenomenal rainbow, which rises in two circles out of the loch beneath, its arc intersecting the woods around Balmoral Castle, seven miles away.

Our landlady was right about the weather. "She'll pe show'ry, whatever!" had already been realised; and we performed the last few miles of our retreat from Lochnagar in drenching rain. But we enjoyed our supper as only mountaineers can. We slept, too, as soundly as peg-tops, and next morning, in beautiful weather, had again tramped seven miles to see an eagle's nest before nine o'clock. Such are the bracing effects of mountaineering in the Royal Highlands.