

A SCHOOL-BOY WALK OVER THE PENTLANDS.

Aquila non capit muscas, and why, it may be asked, should the *Cairngorm Club Journal* chronicle a trivial saunter over the Pentlands with a parcel of school-boys? Abana and Pharpar, we reply, were, doubtless, very fine rivers, but Jordan had its merits too; and it was not the least, nor least beloved, of English naturalists who saw "majestic mountains" in the smooth slopes and humble altitudes of the South Downs. Moreover, the school-boy who is entered at the Pentlands between 9 and 12 years of age may find his way to the top of Ben Muich Dhui or Cairn Toul in all the greater comfort when he is 18 or 20.

" Ere bairns can read they first maun spell,
I learnt this frae my mammie".

It was a little before ten in the forenoon of a fine, but rather sultry, Saturday that we mustered at Princes Street station—some five and twenty boys and two men, the latter known as Pathfinder and Strayaway. The order was flannels or other rough clothes, every one to bring his own good and sufficient lunch, and those who had them to bring compasses, aneroids, field-glasses, and such-like gear. A few minutes in the train brought us to Colinton, and a few minutes' walk from Colinton to the foot of the hill. We struck up past Bonaly Tower (once Lord Cockburn's country seat) and presently found ourselves on the slope above, which gave a view, to those who cared to look back, of Edinburgh on the right and the three camel-humps of the Forth Bridge on the left—a more cheering outlook than Servius Sulpicius had returning out of Asia, for we looked not on the ruins of man's work, but on a thriving city and a busy thoroughfare of traffic. As for the further distance, it was dim and hazy, like the landscape of a troubled dream. But the boys did not care to linger long: Where was the reservoir? was their question; and when the dyke and overflow came in sight they crowded towards it like wasps to a honey-pot. There is a good old shooters' rule,

never to drink between breakfast and luncheon, but to enforce it upon boys were the merest pedantry. They drank as Thor drank at the Giant's Horn, and we were half surprised when we climbed the dyke to find the waters not visibly shrunken, and a couple of wild duck—which the glasses revealed as the pied drake of the tufted duck and his smaller, duskier mate—swimming undisturbed upon its surface. They gave us a wide offing, having possibly heard of school-boys before, and we wished them good-bye and an unmolested breeding-time as we turned away. From the pool it was plain and easy going, and we were soon dropping down towards Glencorse, putting up a few peeseweeps as we got down into the valley. We struck the road close to Glencorse reservoir, and now, in the close valley, the heat began to tell; there were a good many stragglers, and a little judicious whipping-in became necessary. But the white-breasted sand-piper lured us on, crying, "Kittie-needie, kittie-needie, kit, kit, kit", from the water's edge, and a halt near the upper, or Loganlee, pool for luncheon gave the laggards time to come in. We noted then, what held good all day, that it was not the strongest built boys that went the best, but the lightest built; in hot weather, at all events, little to carry seems to be a greater advantage than much carrying power—the smallest and slimmest boys led all the way. After luncheon, we took the road again, still going up the valley, and after turning off to visit and climb about the ruins of the old royal hunting-lodge, shortly struck off on to the track leading up to Habbie's Howe. After jumping the windings of the burn—oftener, perhaps, than was in strictness needful—we reached Habbie's Howe itself, and there the boys entered upon their heritage. Walking was in their eyes all very well, but a burn to tumble into, a little rock face to climb, and a pool to bathe in were as incense thrown on their sacrifice. First they clustered together on the face of the rocks beside the waterfall like a clump of guillemots at St. Abb's Head, save that their voice was not the voice of groaning; then the bolder spirits climbed away out of sight, and the Johnny-raws, who had never tried scrambling on a

rock face before, began, with knees set painfully and precariously in the toe-holds, to follow them. It was vain to tell them that sore knees and sudden tumbles await him who uses his joints instead of his extremities: incompetent climbers all over the world will use their knees for their toes, and these were no exception; they were more grateful for an occasional shoulder-up than for a world of good advice. Here we made a long halt; some bathed in the upper pool, others, content to take their happiness piecemeal, "douked", or paddled, while the small son of a distinguished man of science sat dangling his heels from the little bridge below, begging his friends to dry their ears and faces thoroughly if they did not wish to be burnt sore by the sun. When at last we left this Happy Valley, Pathfinder went off with the vanguard, and it fell to Strayaway's lot to whip up two stragglers, one of whom was found completing a leisurely toilet after his bath and the other hunting butterflies. At the slap in the next stone dyke a double line was formed up and the laggards had to run the gauntlet, but the executioners were not in a mood to lay on with severity, and the offenders came out at the other end smiling. A little further on we found the delicate buckbean flowering in a wet spot among rushes, and before we reached Bavelaw we saw a hawk—though certain Sadducees would have it that it was only a cuckoo—and then at the water-trough at the top of Bavelaw avenue we drank surprisingly: had Gideon been to choose among us for fighting men he would have made up but a short muster-roll. Down the avenue and over the Threipmuir Bridge we went, and just beyond found the whole moor white with cotton-grass, more and more shining white than we had ever seen it. And then came "the stale bit", as the boys said, the road into Balerno. But they hastened over it, for they were thirsty again, and drank lemonade in the baker's little shop till the goodwife laughed to see them. And so we reached the train, just before the storm, which had long been threatening, burst over the village. It might rain for us: little we cared whose skins were wet, for ours were dry; we were in the "*suave mari magno*" mood,

only we didn't all know it, and our mirth was loud enough to drown the rattle of the train. As if to crown our cup, too, before we parted at the Princes Street station the rain had almost stopped.

To reckon up our day's walk: we had gone some eleven miles beneath a sultry, clouded, summer sky; no one had broken down or lost his temper; one of our number, indeed, was once seen to blush, but then it is to be remembered that, as on the noted occasion of Thrasy machus' blushing, it was a very hot day. We had done what we meant to do, and no wonder, for four of our number, two of the boys that led all day, Pathfinder himself, and Stray-away, had all learnt to walk among the Cairngorms.

On the Monday many of the boys came to Pathfinder again to ask where the walk was to be on the coming Saturday, but Pathfinder only shook his head:—" *Ne quid nimis*" is a good rule to observe even in the healthiest of all amusements—hill-walking.

STRAYAWAY.