

ADAM'S PEAK.

BY GEORGE R. MARNOCH, COLOMBO.

THERE are higher mountains in Ceylon than Adam's Peak, and it would seem, from his high-sounding title, that Dom Pedrotallagalla, with his 8200 feet, would present more features of interest than a mountain with a less pretentious name and a less near acquaintance with the heavens by some 900 feet; but a knowledge of both, as they are commonly conquered by the sight-seer, gives the palm undoubtedly to the Peak.

Those who have been fortunate enough to make Colombo on a clear day during the North-East monsoon (October to March) cannot fail to remember the purple-coloured Peak visible long before Colombo Harbour was entered, which was a far surer sign of the actual existence of Ceylon than the mythical "spicy breezes"; and more than one busy European in Colombo has gazed upon the distant mountain, and has sighed for a small share of the purer and more invigorating air playing round its noble summit, almost as ardently as ever did Byron "for the valley of dark Lochnagar"; but during a great part of the year the privilege even of gazing at the distant mountains is denied to one whose lot is cast in that hot city of the plains.

The ascent of Pedro from Newara Eliya (6200 feet), the sanatorium of Ceylon, is quite an easy matter, and ponies can be ridden to the top; but such royal roads to the Peak are not. From its unique situation, however, Adam's Peak commands a much wider view than can be obtained from Pedro, and to see its wonderful shadow cast by the light of the morning sun is worth the expenditure of much energy.

To the good Buddhist or Brahmin or Hindu, however, its principal attraction lies in the pilgrimage which may be undertaken to worship the sacred footprint of Adam, made, as everyone knows, by our worthy ancestor when he stepped

over from India to Ceylon ; and at favourable periods of the year, when good weather obtains, and especially when there is a full moon, many hundreds of Orientals make the ascent.

We were glad to seize the first opportunity afforded us on the commencement of our short Easter holidays to get away from Colombo, and we found many other perspiring Europeans, eager to get away up country for a short spell, waiting for the night train to start on the eve of Good Friday.

Our journey commenced at about ten o'clock, and we reached Hatton at six a.m. The distance covered is only about 108 miles ; but remember that we started from sea-level, and reached an elevation of 4200 feet in the meantime, and you will understand that the slowness of trains is not wholly due to the fact that the railway is a Government concern.

At the Adam's Peak Hotel (enticing name for the poor globe-trotter who fondly thinks, perhaps, that he has but to start from the doorstep to make the ascent) we had something to sustain the inner man before starting our fourteen mile bicycle ride to Maskeliya Resthouse. The road runs downhill for the first four miles or so ; then there is a very stiff rise until the intermediate range of hills dividing Dickoya from Maskeliya is crossed. But the surface of the road was—as, indeed, nearly all Ceylon roads are—in splendid condition, and the trees with which the road is lined shaded us from the rays of the hot sun.

The scenery on this road might be beautiful were it not that the ubiquitous tea bush seems to rob the hills of their very shape ; it is only in small favoured spots—where the tops of the tea bushes are so large and table-like that they almost touch each other, and so at a distance give the appearance of a grassy mound, or again at a piece of ground so utterly broken that the planter has not considered it worthy the labour of clearing—that the eye is for the moment altogether pleased.

And so in due course we arrived at the Resthouse, an institution the uses of which you will understand if you are a lover of Kipling, for it provides much the same accommoda-

tion for the Ceylon traveller that the Dak bungalow does for the European in India. We found a hot bath and breakfast very welcome, and, by the time we had rested a little, the afternoon rain was falling, and there was nothing more exciting to do than to look through the Resthouse-keeper's book, containing the remarks of former visitors. We found paragraphs by people of many countries, frequent entries by German globe-trotters, and the enlightened Jap, and one by some of the Burmese pilgrims who lately came over to Ceylon with an immense golden casket for Buddha's sacred tooth. "Four royal peoples and three other peoples visited this place for the account of Adam's Peak", and then follows a record of the hospitality of the Resthouse-keeper. The wide difference in the opinions expressed by the visitors is most marked: one is loud in his praise, another plaintively writes that "after perusing this book we expected a slap-up feed, but tough chops do not a dinner make, nor iron fowls a meal"; this gentleman had evidently small experience of the glories of Resthouse cookery AND Ceylon goat, and it was perhaps well for him that he knew not that the "chicken" had very likely met its doom about half-an-hour before it was placed before him. We have often arrived unexpectedly at a Resthouse, to dine off the products of the poultry yard, a prodigious squeaking in the back premises immediately after our arrival heralding the menu to our accustomed ears.

However, on this occasion we had given timely notice of our arrival, and, in consequence, we had a fairly good dinner before we turned in at nine o'clock for a short sleep. We woke up at twelve, and by one o'clock we were plodding our way along the lonely estate roads under the brilliant light of a tropical moon. The stars, too, shone brightly, and seemed to intensify the cold feeling in the air, reminding us rather of a frosty night in late autumn at home.

Our way for the first four miles or so led us through the uneventful tea; and there was nothing to enliven the stillness of the night except the howls of pariah dogs as we passed occasional coolie lines, until we came to the first amblam, or native resting-place, which was lighted up with

torches and cocoa-nut oil lamps, and plentifully decorated with paper streamers.

Just before we reached the second amblam, which is distant only about a mile from the first, we passed two immense rocks, both very similar in appearance to the Shelter Stone on Ben Muich Dhui. The larger one is quite three times the size of its far-off brother, and we found we could walk comfortably under the lip.

We had now only a very little more easy walking before crossing a stream, then two and a half hours of steady climbing through dense jungle. The path, however, is well defined, and it is almost impossible to make any mistake. Occasionally, when we came to a small clear space, we could see the lights carried by groups of pilgrims far away above; others whom we passed on the way were singing native songs, and endeavouring, seemingly, to make up for lack of tune by abundance of grace notes. The curious smell of the burning torches was rather overpowering at times, and we were glad to call to our aid our slight knowledge of Singalese or Tamil to command for ourselves a right of passage. By four o'clock we had made the last amblam, situated at the foot of the steepest part of the ascent. We rested there for a few minutes; but we soon began to feel chilly, and were obliged to move on again. We had been able, lower down, to avail ourselves of convenient tree stumps to pull ourselves up; but here there were no such natural aids, and we were glad to find steps cut out of rocks which otherwise would have been almost impassable for us, and these staircases guarded with hand-rails.

The jungle on this higher portion of the mountain is less dense, and we often found a jutting rock from which, on turning round, the country below could be viewed. Many of the valleys were shrouded in clouds, so that the outstanding heights in the silvery light of the moon looked like wind-swept mounds surrounded by drifted snow.

As we drew nearer to the summit we found one or two rude huts. The first one we passed was inhabited until recently by a Chinaman, who had lived there for six years

without ever making a descent; two others were occupied by the priests who officiate at the temple on the top.

The signs of litter which seem to be inseparable from mountain tops, and a hubbub of voices, soon assured us that a few strides more would bring us to the 7332 feet elevation which the Peak boasts; but I am afraid our hearts were chilled when we saw the trivial frumperies with which its summit is decked. A wall is raised round the outstanding rock, and it encompasses a shrine, or temple, built round the sacred footprint. Crowds of Singalese were pressing up the steps to this gaudy erection, holding sprays of tree blossoms between their uplifted hands, prostrating themselves on the ground and shouting out prayers, each phrase ending with an unctuous "Saädu" by way of Amen, then depositing their offerings inside the railing which guards the footprint.

The indentation in the rock seemed to be well bolstered with cement, but we were informed that this was done only to protect it from the Brahmins, who always endeavoured to take away a chip the which to worship afterwards. Let that be as it may; our unbelieving eyes had soon tired of the mummery and the smoke of the incense sticks.

We put on our warm overcoats and walked round the inside of the temple wall, and, keeping a sharp look-out for the Colombo and Galle lighthouses, were soon gratified by seeing the Colombo light flashing out, Galle showing up a little later.

At shortly after five o'clock the sky in the East was tinted with the first rays of the rising sun, and presently we were fully occupied in watching the kaleidoscopic changes in the clouds, and the ever-increasing view on the land. Then the round circle of the sun began to appear over a ridge of distant hills, and soon his light was flooding over land and sea.

During this time we had been standing rather uncomfortably on the wind-swept side of the rock face, and we experienced a pleasant sensation of warmth when we got down and walked to the other side to look out for the shadow of the Peak, which was just becoming visible on

the clouds, very dimly at first, but gradually becoming more and more distinct, till, by the time it had descended from the sky and commenced to move along the land, the triangular form was quite clear and defined. While the apex of the triangle was still some miles distant the pure cone shape was preserved; but later on, about seven o'clock, when it had moved up close to the mountain, it took on a more rounded and blunted form.

The vegetation on the hill-top creeps right up to the wall which surrounds the temple. Rhododendron trees with their beautiful crimson blossoms, and a variety of lesser shrubs, are dominated by the larger Keena tree, while bamboos of stunted growth fringe the path up to all but the highest rocky part.

When we again turned our eyes to the temple we found that its tawdriness had become more apparent with the increasing light, and of the candles, which had looked cheerful enough before, there remained only the dirty grease marks on the rock. The smell of the incense (not to mention the general oily native odours) became less welcome as the sun rose, so we were not very loth to take leave of the two or three hundred ladies and gentlemen of colour who were trooping round and repeating their prayers under the leadership of a few yellow-robed priests.

The way we had to traverse seemed much more difficult in daylight than under the less searching light of the moon, and we may have felt not a little tired; anyhow the descent was to us a much more formidable undertaking than the ascent. We left the top before eight o'clock, but we did not reach the Resthouse till after twelve. We had thus been on foot for nearly a full round of the clock; still, considering that we came straight from the debilitating atmosphere of Colombo, we considered our performance not a discreditable one.

After a bath and a good breakfast we turned in and slept a bit, and then made preparations for our departure on "bikes" on the morrow.

We had almost closed this account without mention of our native companions on the march, but a sneaking regard

for the truth compels us to state that the guide who went along with us went up again as merry as a cricket on the following night, but the coolie who had carried a box of provisions and a change of clothes for us (which, what with an iron kettle and a few sundries, must have weighed not far short of twenty-five lbs.) evidently thought *he* had had enough, and preferred to utilize his unconsumed energy in washing plates in the Resthouse!

CAIRNGORM.

THE summit gained! And one, with down-bent eyes,
 In rain-washed hollows, white with gravel bare,
 Full keenly looks, now here his glance, now there,
 And fruitless looks, till, lo! a sudden prize
 Gleams in the net of patience, and he cries
 Loud of his luck. Eager to him repair
 A wide-eyed group, his boyish glee to share
 As in spread palm brown prism of pebble lies!
 But I, withdrawn, was gazing o'er the scene—
 North, where the sea scarce differs from the cloud;
 East, where Ben Avon stares back with solemn mien;
 Or south-west, where the Badenoch clan-hills crowd.
My Cairngorm goodlier than his, I ween:
 But what I found I could not tell aloud.

WALTER MORISON, D.D.

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