

A WEEK-END IN AND AROUND THE TROSSACHS.

BY AN EDINBURGH MEMBER.

ON the Saturday evening preceding the Edinburgh September Holiday of 1900, the writer and six comrades, all Edinburgh Volunteers, found themselves at Callander. In the summer they had spent a fortnight amidst the incessant rain and mud of the Forth Brigade Camp at Lochcote, and the contempt, which they had there acquired, for the comforts and luxuries of city life was responsible for the expedition on which they were now bent.

The party carried forty-eight hours' rations, including Bovril, tins of café-au-lait, and suchlike beverages, familiar to campers-out. Each man carried a spirit lamp for boiling water (all spirits other than those required for the lamps were strictly barred!). The general idea was to have two complete days and nights in the Highlands; and the special idea was, on the first night to sleep out in the Trossachs; on the following day to cross over Ben Venue to Ben Lomond, and in the evening get back to or near to the Trossachs; and on the Monday to climb Ben Ledi, and then return to Edinburgh by the evening train from Callander.

More than a quarter of a century divided the ages of the oldest and youngest of the party, but the former backed himself for a hundred yards sprint against any of his friends, of whatever age, and the writer feels assured that seldom has a party setting out on a similar excursion looked or felt in better fettle. Nevertheless, it must be owned that in all likelihood our appearance caused amusement to onlookers. The equipment of some of our members was, to say the least, unusual. Instead of providing themselves with knapsacks of the conventional pattern for pedestrian tourists, they defied usage, and

(tell it not at Headquarters!) the Volunteer Regulations as well, by making use of their regimental equipment. For example, the senior aforesaid, whose military enthusiasm thirty years or thereby of continuous service in the Volunteers has not damped, reached the height of absurdity by dangling from his belt (regulation Rifle Brigade pattern) a tin mug of the kind usually associated with Sunday School picnics. However, no objection was taken by the local guardians of law and order, and by twilight we were well on our way by the side of Loch Vennachar to the Trossachs, where we intended to bivouac.

About ten o'clock we reached a spot near the Sluices, at the east end of Loch Katrine. We meant to rely for shelter on the trees and bracken, and there was no want of these, but otherwise the circumstances were the reverse of encouraging. The night was so dark that, when near the head of Loch Achray, one of the party stumbled over one obstruction and nearly fell on a second; it was not until matches had been lighted that it was found that these obstructions were two navvies—drunk and sound asleep—stretched across the road. A thick mist which had hung over the country for some days, and was now developing into a drizzle, had made the grass and bracken quite wet. The Achray Water flowed close by the road, but we had no pail, or suitable substitute, for drawing water, and the temptation was strong to dispense with hot Bovril for supper rather than risk an involuntary dip in the river. At this juncture a light was seen. This betokened a house, but—had we not forsworn houses until our return to Edinburgh? And so for a time each man outdid his neighbour in ignoring that light! However, an eminently sensible member of the party suggested that we might, at any rate, see whether a pail could be borrowed. There seemed to be a suspicion that behind this suggestion lurked the idea of asking shelter for the night, for all felt it their duty to object to any negotiations whatsoever with the occupants of the house. The objections were not strongly pressed, however, and liberty was given to our friend to endeavour to

get the use of a pail. The negotiations between him and the good lady of the house were continued longer than seemed reasonable, and other two or three members of the party found their way to the door. By and by the pioneers returned with the intimation (it need not be said whether it was welcome or unwelcome!) that an unfurnished apartment, attached to the house, was at our disposal for the night. No time was lost in taking possession. Water was brought from the river, the spirit lamps were lighted, and very soon the fragrance of café-au-lait filled the room, and supper was being eaten with great contentment. To crown our good luck, the gudeman presently appeared with a supply of fuel, and a fire was lighted in a stove. Before getting into these comparatively comfortable quarters, we had not been in such an unfortunate plight as Fitz-James, when,

“Not the summer solstice there,
Tempered the midnight mountain air,
But every breeze that swept the wold
Benumbed his drenched limbs with cold.
In dread, in danger, and alone,
Famished and chilled, through ways unknown,
Tangled and steep, he journeyed on;
Till, as a rock's huge point he turned,
A watch-fire close before him burned”.

Still we were irresistibly reminded of the hospitality which Fitz-James received from Roderick Dhu—

“He gave him of his Highland cheer,
The hardened flesh of mountain deer;
Dry fuel on the fire he laid,
And bade the Saxon share his plaid”.

The night was a rather sleepless one. The wooden floor made a somewhat hard couch, and in the cold autumn night our waterproofs were poor substitutes for blankets. Besides, there were snorers in the party. In the last number of the *Journal* (page 102) it is said—“A *Rhonchissator* or Snorer is a pestilent Thing in a Tent, and there be few who can abide him, even among those of his own kind. It avails nothing to reproach him with his Trumpeting; for, look you, he will deny it—snore he never so rumbustiously”.

The writer can say, from his camping experience in general and this Trossachs experience in particular, that these are words of wisdom. When morning came, every one was firmly convinced that he had not, but that all his neighbours had, snored. In such a case it is difficult to get at the truth, and perhaps all that can, with safety, be affirmed is that there was hardly a moment during the four or five hours nominally given over to sleep, when all of us refrained from snoring. In view of all this it was not wonderful that we were early astir. Breakfast was over by five o'clock, and a start was made ten minutes later.

There was now a wonderful unanimity of opinion that in the Trossachs the nights were much colder than in Edinburgh! And the proposal that for the succeeding night we should, if possible, take advantage of the shelter, which we had so unexpectedly found, was carried *nemine contradicente*. A note was accordingly left to inform our hosts that, with their kind permission, we should again be their lodgers.

Crossing the river at the Sluices we made for the western peak of Ben Venue by the route indicated in Baddeley's map. As we ascended by the Pass of Bealnam-bo, the view was particularly fine, the mist which hung over Loch Katrine adding to the effect, but, before we had ascended far, it became so thick as to make us doubt the practicability of carrying out our programme. This was to cross from Ben Venue by the east side of Beinn Bhreac, thence down the Eas Cheagill, and thence to Ben Lomond by the path which strikes off at the west end of Loch Ard.

The summit of Ben Venue was reached about seven o'clock. Here an attempt was made to photograph the party, but the mist was so thick that one could see but a few yards in front, and the attempt resulted in failure. Soon after leaving the summit, we dropped into a water course, which it was thought must be Eas Cheagill, though it was agreed that we had reached that stream in an unexpectedly short time; but the man with the map and compass pronounced the water to be running in the proper

direction—almost due south—and, thus reassured, the party went forward. As we got lower, the mist became less dense, and, the sun breaking through for a moment, it was seen that we were now going eastwards. A further examination of the map showed that, instead of getting into Eas Cheagill, we had dropped into Glen Rievach, and were on the way back to the Trossachs. Still, all hope of Ben Lomond was not abandoned, and, compass and map in hand, we made a fresh start—over Beinn an Fhogharaidh—for the west end of Loch Ard. By the time the top of the latter Ben was reached, however, the mist had become “small rain,” and the one obvious thing was that there was no hope of a view that day from the top of Ben Lomond, should we have the good fortune to get there. Reluctantly it was decided to make for Aberfoyle, thence by Loch Ard and Loch Chon to Stronachlacher, and back by the north side of Loch Katrine to our quarters near the Sluices.

The descent to the road from the Trossachs and Aberfoyle was made by the Slate Quarries, and Aberfoyle was reached without incident. Space does not permit of our enlarging on the beauties of that delightful spot—beauties which would have made it popular apart from its associations with Bailie Nicol Jarvie. The veritable coulter with which the worthy Bailie did such good execution, and which still dangles from a tree opposite the Hotel bearing his name, adds romance to the scene, however.

Leaving Aberfoyle by the Stronachlacher road, we were soon in full view of Loch Ard, “the spacious mirror which reflects in still magnificence the high dark heathy mountains, huge grey rocks, and shaggy banks by which it is encircled”. Perhaps the long tramp which we had had over the misty hills, and a swim in the Loch which was now indulged in, and which made us all feel as if we were but beginning the day, sharpened our appreciation of the loveliness of the scene. Certain it is that we all felt we had seldom beheld such a delightful Arcadia. Loch Chon, which was next passed, is thought by some to be even more beautiful than Loch Ard. Loch Ard, however, has an

advantage in its associations. At its east end is the famous "Pass" of Aberfoyle, and at Ledard, near its west end, and a short distance north of the road, is the waterfall which Scott made the greeting place of Flora MacIvor and Waverley.

Stronachlacher Hotel was reached in time for tea, and such a tea! Men who, for twenty-four hours, had tasted nothing but sandwiches and the results of their own cooking (?) were not easily satisfied, and the waiter stared as helping after helping of cold meat was called for. Let us express the hope that our depredations did not lead to an increase in the moderate tariff of the hotel.

After tea a boat was hired to row the party across Loch Katrine, and the walk was continued eastwards along the north side of the Loch. The mist had by this time lifted, and the view of the Loch and the hills on the south side—among which Ben Venue, of course, stood out prominently—was charming. Our quarters at the east end of the Loch were reached as darkness was closing in.

In camp the first night is invariably sleepless, the second night usually sleepy. So it was with our party; and during our second night in the Trossachs even the snoring nuisance was not felt. It was past six o'clock before it was agreed that reveillé must be held to have been sounded, and by the time we had bathed in the river and leisurely breakfasted and got ready for the road it was 9.15. The Brig of Turk was reached about 10, and left about 10.40. Taking the road along the Finglas Water to the farm of Achnahard, we commenced the ascent of Ben Ledi about 12.30, in a mist as thick as that which we had experienced on Ben Venue. It was three hours later (not good time in ordinary circumstances) ere the top was reached. The mist was very troublesome, and necessitated almost continuous reference to the map and compass. Our view from the top was even more limited than that of the party whose ascent is described in Vol. II. of the *Journal* (page 118), for we never saw more than a few yards ahead. We afterwards considered ourselves lucky, however, for a

party of ladies and gentlemen, who made the ascent the same day, got lost in attempting to descend by the ordinary route to Coilantogle, and had to spend the night on the hill. We ate the last of our provisions on the summit, and, descending by the Pass of Leny, reached Callander about 6.30. Three hours later we were back in Edinburgh.

To some members of the party now in a distant land, the outing must be one of the brightest of their memories of Scotland. It is one of the writer's pleasantest recollections, though what it would have been but for the shelter so opportunely found in the Trossachs he does not care to conjecture.