

## MOUNT ASSINIBOINE.

BY WILLIAM GARDEN.

It is a far cry from Cairngorm to the great system of the Pacific Cordillera, and, once there, it may be said with truth that we are far from the field that should furnish food for this journal. On the other hand, however, it may be fairly enough argued that, should a would-be loyal member of this Club desert, even but for a season, for him his only hills—the Cairngorms—then he will do well to expiate his transgressions by instantly giving an account of his wanderings in the leaves of his mother-club journal.

Up to the present time Mount Assiniboine has perhaps been the most talked-of mountain in the Canadian Rockies, owing to the striking photographs and fascinating descriptions of Mr. W. D. Wilcox. Mount Assiniboine (11,860 feet) is the loftiest peak in the Canadian Rockies south of the Canadian Pacific Railway. It lies about twenty miles in a bee-line south-west of Banff, though the exigencies of valley and pass demand a route of some fifty miles. It stands upon the ridge of the great Continental Divide, a conspicuous landmark for miles round, towering fully 1,500 feet above any of its immediate neighbours. It commands attention by its majestic outline and striking character, and has been dignified by the title of "The Matterhorn of the Rockies," from the remarkable resemblance which it bears, from certain aspects, to the Swiss monarch. Before Mr. Outram scaled the peak in August, 1901, for the first and only time, three previous attempts at least had been made to ascend this picturesque and fascinating mountain. In 1898, Mr. Bryant of Philadelphia and Mr. Steel of England made a reconnaissance to about 10,000 feet by the N.W. arête. In 1900, two brothers, named Walling, from Chicago, attempted an ascent by the north face, with three Swiss guides, but failed to scale the first great limestone wall. Again, in the summer of 1900, Mr. Bryant made another assault, accompanied by

Mr. Wilcox and two guides. Passing round the mountain, they camped on the south-west side, and ascended by the easy south-west ridge to 10,750 feet. From this point the difficulties, especially from avalanching snow, appeared insurmountable, and, after ascending 100 feet or so further, they abandoned the attempt.

The news of this last defeat fired Outram afresh with desire to visit Assiniboine. It may be interesting to note that Outram's mother was the eldest daughter of the late Patrick Davidson of Inchmarlo, so that he may be claimed as an Aberdonian. In August, 1901, then, he started off from Banff, a station on the Canadian Pacific Railway, with the Swiss guides Häsler and Bohren, pitching his base-camp somewhere in the vicinity of the photograph here reproduced. From what he had learned, the north-west arête or ridge seemed the route most likely to prove successful. Accordingly, he ascended from his base-camp with the trapper, Peyto, and the two guides, carrying a tent, blankets, and provisions, to an altitude of over 11,000 feet. Here, however, a dense mist had settled down which did not lift though they waited an hour, and as they were on entirely unknown ground and apparently confronted by an impossible rock-wall between them and the true summit, they were compelled to retreat owing to the intense cold. They descended therefore to their tent by the way they had come up, and, rather than bivouac at this high altitude in the present weather conditions, which was their original intention, in the event of being defeated, they decided to descend again to the base-camp with all their paraphernalia.

Next morning promised a magnificent day, and so, starting at 6 a.m., rapid progress was made to the col, which was reached two hours later, the former route being followed but with the advantage of now being able to see ahead. A careful traverse to the left over steep ice proved a simple way for negotiating the rock-wall which, but the day before, looked as if it would prove a final barrier to their further progress by this ridge, and by 12.30 they stood on the summit of the noble pyramid. At 7.15 p.m. they were once more at the base-camp, having descended by the north face,

thus making not only a first ascent but a complete traverse of the mountain. A detailed account of Outram's ascent will be found in the "Century Illustrated Magazine" for September, 1903. He says of the climb—"It reminded me more than anything of the Dent Blanche in fairly bad condition with verglas. On the south-west side it cannot be called a very severe ascent, only about 700 feet are difficult at all for practised mountaineers; but the north side will always, I think, provide a climb equal in interest (though only 1,500 feet of the highest order), to almost any peak in Switzerland."

My friend who accompanied me to Canada in 1903 had left Scotland resolved to attempt the ascent of Mount Assiniboine. By constant travelling we reached Banff on the morning of the fifteenth day after leaving Aberdeen. There, by careful arrangement beforehand, we met our Swiss guides Christian Häsler (who had made the first ascent with Outram) and Hans Kaufmann, a well-known Grindalwald guide, Bill Peyto, a famous trapper, his two cow-boys, and our faithful cayoooses, or mules, and the next morning we started off—a goodly company—seven men and seven horses with three tents and provisions for ten days. After fording streams and cutting at one time through dense timber, and at another crossing bare and rugged lofty mountain passes, we reached the spot in the photograph which was to be our base-camp, and which my aneroid made out to be 7,175 feet, just at the timber line, and within a mile of the base of our mountain. The weather among the mountains is fickle here as at home. It had favoured us so far, and time was precious. Our camp pitched, we at once commenced to prospect, and we were not long before we both agreed that the manifest route for attack was by the north arête, by which Outram had descended. The morning after we arrived in camp, therefore, my friend and the guides made an early start by candle-light at 3 a.m., though the original intention was to have had an 'off-day' to recruit for the effort, for we had had three very hard days' work since we left Banff. I felt sure of their success as I bade them farewell. As dawn broke I saw them cross the upper ice-fall; with the telescope I saw them negotiate with success the last

tricky bit of work on the great limestone band beneath the summit peak, which indeed was the only part we suspected might prove troublesome from our previous day's examination. Finally, at 10:30 a.m., I saw my friend triumphantly waving his hands as he stood on the summit itself, just  $7\frac{1}{2}$  hours after he had left me, and so the second ascent of the great peak was an accomplished fact, and the first ascent had been made by the north arête, which Outram had believed at one time to be impossible. Coming down by the same route they were in camp again by four o'clock in the afternoon, having been just thirteen hours away. To me it seemed a long time, though I put in the time watching them with the glass, prospecting with the trappers, and photographing, trying the while to persuade myself that the mountain looked best from the foot, though this I fear I failed to do!

It was an excellent climb, and though not so much difficult or sensational, yet, from the rotten nature of the rocks, it demanded constant care and attention. I subsequently found that the character of the limestone rocks of which these mountains principally consist is, from a climbing point of view, totally different from the rocks of the Swiss Alps. The strata run the wrong way, so to speak. Indeed the rocks are like books in a book-shelf lying upon their sides, so that, when any outward strain is put upon them, they pull out in long slabs in the most alarming manner, and are in consequence most treacherous. Each hand- and foot-hold has to be thoroughly tested before weight is put on it, and all this means additional time and care. Assiniboine climbed, we retreated next day to our second camp at the head of the Simpson Valley, and the day following, abandoning our tents and horses to the mercy of the trappers, the guides and ourselves set off by lamp-light at 3 a.m., and made a forced march of over forty miles on foot into Banff, which we reached about six in the evening. Next day we caught the west-bound train, and spent our remaining fortnight exploring the lofty peaks round Lake Louise and Mount Sir Donald and others in the Selkirk Range still further west. The further west one goes the more luxuriant the vegetation becomes. On the Pacific side of the great mountain chain what impressed me most was the

gigantic size of the cedar and hemlock trees. A humid climate and a very heavy rainfall have clothed the lower slopes of the mountain giants with far nobler trees and a more luxuriant undergrowth than exists on the eastern slopes of the Rockies, where the hot prairie winds have rather a tendency to check what scanty growth exists.

In conclusion, a word of comparison of this vast mountain system with others may not be out of place. The continued fine weather, which had favoured us, gave us every opportunity to enjoy fully the magnificent and unique scenery, and to gauge more correctly than we could otherwise have done the merits and possibilities of the Rockies as a mountaineering field. Regarded as a whole, and from the severely 'greased-pole' point of view that Mr. Ruskin lamented, it may be said at once that they can hardly, in this respect, become serious competitors with the Swiss Alps, the lofty summits of Suanetia, or the still more gigantic Himalaya; indeed the majority of the peaks will not test the skill of the modern Alpine gymnast very severely. The chief obstacles to the climber at present are the distance of the mountains from his base, and the impenetrable character of the forests through which he has to fight his way. In future days, when trails are cut to the foot of the peaks, when the easiest routes to the summit are discovered, and the contempt, bred of familiarity, supervenes, it is possible that a good many of them may be lightly esteemed by up-to-date mountaineers. Nor, perhaps, from an æsthetic standpoint can it be maintained that the Alps of Canada possess quite the grandeur or stateliness of their European compeers. For instance, it is doubtful whether there are any mountain landscapes in the Rockies that can vie with the view of the Jungfrau from Interlaken, the Italian side of Mont Blanc, or Monte Rosa, or the Matterhorn. On the other hand, they have a remarkable individuality and character, in addition to special beauties of their own which, I think, Switzerland cannot rival. The picturesque landscapes in the valleys, the magnificence of the vast forests, with their inextricable tangle of luxuriant undergrowth, and the wreck and ruin of the fallen tree-trunks, the size, number, and exquisite colouring of the

mountain lakes—in these respects the new Switzerland stands unrivalled.

In the Alps there are few lakes of any size surrounded by high glacier-clad mountains, but in the Rockies they may be counted by the score—gems of purest turquoise blue, in matchless setting of crag and forest scenery, glacier and snow, storm-riven peak and gloomy mysterious canyon. Last, but not least, in the free and wild life of the backwoods can be found absolute freedom from all taint of the vulgar or the commonplace; and the sense of mystery and of awe at the unknown—things which are gone for ever from the high mountain ranges of Europe—yet linger around the crests of the Northern Rockies.

Gradually, year by year, these things are getting appreciated by the outside world. Canada, as all the world knows (or should know), is now entering on a new era of commercial, agricultural and industrial development. Vast tracts of country are being opened up in the great North-west. Settlers are pouring in from the States and elsewhere, and the whole country is progressing by leaps and bounds in wealth and material prosperity. Coincidentally with this advance in riches, there is growing in the west a taste for natural beauties, an appreciation, hitherto dormant, of the fair things of the earth, which in its turn is proving a new source of wealth. The Canadian Pacific Railway has, with accustomed shrewdness, learned that even glaciers, if utilised with skill, may have a commercial value. A growing horde of tourists all along the railway is the result; while—most happily for those who shun the society of their fellow-wayfarers, and long for the silent solitude of the forest, and the grandeur and the keen air of the great peaks—a tent and an outfit will always afford an easy means of escape from that over-civilisation which, as some of us think, is already sufficiently burdensome in our home surroundings.