

## AN "AUTO."-CAMPING TRIP TO THE YOSEMITE VALLEY.

BY S. LORENCIE ANDERSON.

[THE following article consists of extracts from a letter written by a young lady resident in California to a relative in Aberdeen, a member of the Club; hence the personal note and the informal style. The letter was not written with any view to publication, but the subjects dealt with and the vivacious manner in which they are treated amply warrant the transference of the subjoined passages to the pages of the *C.C.J.*—EDITOR.]

I suppose I must give you some account of our automobile and camping trip to the Yosemite Valley. You know, of course, that the Yosemite Valley is one of the great natural wonders of the United States, and I do not need to tell you that "Yosemite" is pronounced Yo-semi-té, and not Yosemite, as I constantly heard it called on your side when I was over (the guides, by the way, told us the Indian pronunciation was "Yohim-a-te.") As you did not visit the valley when you were here, perhaps I had better give you some topographical details to begin with.

The Yosemite Valley is about 150 miles south-east of San Francisco, on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada, a mountain range which extends north and south along the eastern boundary of California. Yosemite is believed to be a corruption of the Indian word "A-hom-e-tae," which means the "full-grown grizzly bear," and the name is supposed to have been originally that of an Indian chief. There is a legend to the effect that the early Indian inhabitants of Yosemite, called Ah-wah-nee-chees, were driven from the valley by evil spirits, but, after many years, returned to their former location. Shortly after, a brave young chief won the



*Photo by*

EL CAPITAN.

*Putnam & Valentine, Los Angeles.*

title of Yosemite, or large grizzly bear, by killing one of these animals; and gradually the name Yosemite came to be applied to all the tribe of the Ah-wah-nee-chees. The valley or canyon is really a deep gorge in the mountains, traversed by the Merced River, which is formed in the snows of the Sierras. It (the valley) is seven miles long, and from half a mile to a mile or two miles wide. It lies at an altitude of 4,000 ft. above sea level; and it is famous for quite a number of magnificent natural features, these including gigantic mountains and huge perpendicular cliffs, and waterfalls of stupendous height but also of exquisite beauty. Fortunately the whole region—I forget its exact extent—is conserved by the Government as a national park, and travelling through it and camping in it are very strictly regulated. Needless to say, the attractions of the place draw thousand of visitors to it annually.

#### CAMPING EXPERIENCES.

There were four of us on the trip—my sister H. and me, our brother B., and J., B's "chum." We had planned to leave San Francisco in the family automobile about 8 a.m. on June 11th [1914], but innumerable delays detained us until 1 p.m. Then we missed a ferry-boat, and had to wait half-an-hour at the ferry with the best grace we could assume in the face of a cold and penetrating wind. At Oakland we had another delay while trying to find a telegraph office; and, to set the climax to our dilatory start, we had a "blow-out" as we were spinning along on a boulevard leading out of Oakland. After we left that city, we drove through Dublin Canyon, the scenery of which is quite attractive; incidentally, we ran over and killed a huge bull snake—my first experience of snakes in their "native wilds." Then we drove for miles and miles along an exceedingly fine broad highway, bounded on both sides by fenced-in farm lands.

No indications of a suitable place at which to camp for the night were visible, and we were almost in despair

when we found a likely spot in a little hollow between the highway and a railroad track, and beneath "a spreading chestnut tree"—it was some kind of a tree anyhow; only that sounds poetical and picturesque. It wasn't much of a place, but it was the only one we had seen, and it was better than none; and as it was after 7 p.m., we decided to fix up for the night there. By the time the boys had built a fire and pitched our tents, and H. and I had struggled with our first camp meal, it was after 8 o'clock—dark as could be, and decidedly cold. Supper, to tell the truth, was a very dismal affair, in spite of the camp fire, an acetylene lamp, and the desperate efforts of all of us to be cheerful. Our next experience was with our novel bed—the hard, hard ground. Such a time as we had trying to find a soft spot! However, we didn't struggle long, for we were all tired and sleepy enough to bivouac anywhere, and to remain quite undisturbed by roaring trains and whizzing motors.

The sun shining on our tents at 5 o'clock the next morning was the first thing that roused us. We were all in fine spirits then, and "This is the life!" was the joyous refrain we sang while we cooked breakfast. "Breaking camp" was a lengthy proceeding for us amateurs, and it was 9 o'clock before we were ready to continue our progress towards Sacramento, where we arrived about noon.

#### VISIT TO LAKE TAHOE BARRED.

The first item on our projected programme was a visit to Lake Tahoe, a famous beauty-spot on the borders of California and Nevada. It is situated 6,200 ft. above sea-level, is 23 miles long by 13 wide, and is surrounded by mountains of great height, rising 3000 to 4000 ft. above the elevation of the lake. The scenery is superb, a specially attractive feature being the wonderful hues of the lake itself. I find them exuberantly—but I fancy excusably—described in this wise in a recently published book, "California, Romantic and Beautiful"—

When the day is calm, there is a ring of the lake, extending more than a mile from the shore, which is brilliantly green. Within this ring the vast centre of the expanse is of a deep yet soft and singularly tinted blue. Hues cannot be more sharply contrasted than are these permanent colours. They do not shade into each other; they lie as clearly defined as the courses of glowing gems in the wall of the New Jerusalem. It is precisely as if we were looking on an immense floor of lapis-lazuli set within a ring of flaming emerald.

Prudence, however, sent us along to the Chamber of Commerce at Sacramento to find out about the road to Lake Tahoe, and there we learned that the road was quite impassable, being covered with a foot and a half of snow. I am almost sorry now that we were too cautious and abandoned the trip, for we might have got through after all, and so won the cup which is given to the first motor-car that reaches Lake Tahoe after the winter season. By-and-by we discovered that unless a road in California is almost swept, dusted, and polished every day, it is labelled "Dangerous but passable." That is why I think we might have reached Lake Tahoe.

However, we had also Yosemite on our itinerary; and so we proceeded to retrace the route we had followed in the morning until we reached our former camping-ground, which we promptly named "Camp Ditto." We spent another night there, and set out for Yosemite about 9 o'clock next morning.

#### TROUBLE WITH BAD ROADS.

From that time until 1 p.m., when we reached Merced, a town 66 miles from "Camp Ditto," we had a continuation of the fine highways and the rural scenery so distinctive of California. At Merced we bade farewell to paved highways and pleasant rural scenes, for, before reaching the mountainous district which was our destination, we had to travel along a rather rough and dusty road that traversed a somewhat barren strip of country which radiated as much heat as a Numidian desert. At Snelling, a small "burg" 18 miles from Merced,

the car and one member of the party had an opportunity to "cool off," which afforded much amusement to the rest of the party. Quite unexpectedly, we came to a section of the road that was for some distance entirely covered by water. We hadn't an idea how deep the water was, or how solid the road-bed underneath it might be. Consequently, "yours truly," as the only member of the party who had on high water-proof boots that day, had to wade in and make a spectacle of herself before the car was permitted to dash through the water with a grand splash. I may mention here that long before we reached Yosemite we crossed so many streams that our experiences bore a resemblance to those of the gallant young Lochinvar—

He staid not for brake, and he stopp'd not for stone,  
He swam the Eske river where ford there was none.

Soon after we left Snelling we found ourselves on a mountain road where we had some fairly stiff climbing to do before reaching Coulterville, a small town 31 miles distant. I almost feared that we would not reach the place before dark; and the prospect of camping on a narrow mountain road, far from a good water supply, was not altogether pleasing. However, we did manage to reach the town just as "the shades of night were falling fast." As it was dark by this time, and as we had driven 115 miles, a hot supper and a decent bed looked pretty good to us, so we put up for the night at a hotel. It was the typical hotel of a Western mining town, but the meals were good and the rooms clean, and I guess the place was respectable enough, though we took a chance on that.

#### A HAZARDOUS ASCENT.

We learned next morning that the Commandant at Yosemite was not to open the Park to autoists before the 16th of June—three days ahead—and maybe not then. But as other "auto." parties had gone on to Hazel Green, a nice camping ground about 30 miles from Coulterville,

the last town on the route to Yosemite, we decided to join them ; and, accordingly, we departed soon after 10 o'clock, thinking we would reach our destination about 1 p.m. We were mightily mistaken, for we did not arrive till 3. The road was "something fierce"—to use an expressive Americanism. It was good enough for a mountain road, though inclined at just the right angle to engender the uncomfortable feeling that one might tip over the mountain-side at any moment.

When I tell you that in the thirty miles from Coulterville to Hazel Green we climbed from an elevation of 1675 ft. to that of 6115 ft., and dropped again to 5665 ft., you can imagine what sort of work our good little car had to do. It was up hill and down dale the whole way, but that is too mild a way of putting it—it was more like scaling a precipice and then dropping into a gorge. The grades ranged from 1 in 17 to 1 in 3, and most of the way the road wound along the mountain-side in an exceedingly perilous fashion. If anything happened to a car, and it went off the road, it would roll down hundreds and hundreds of feet to the valley below. I fancy the road is so dangerous that every driver is extra-cautious, and so accidents are rare, while "speeding" is out of the question. To many autoists the trip to Yosemite is entirely spoiled by the thought of the terrors of the outward journey.

We were all of opinion, however, that it had been more than worth while to brave the dangers of the road for the sake of the magnificent scenery observable from every point of view—to say nothing of what awaited us at Yosemite. There was one place in particular so like the Trossachs that H. and I both called attention to the resemblance, in one breath as it were ; only "our Trossachs"—I mean the Californian sample—extends over a much larger area than the Scottish Trossachs, and has, besides, a background of stately pines.

When we reached Hazel Green we found about an acre of ground fairly well cleared and supplied with fine

spring water. It was a delightful spot in which to pitch a tent—just in the midst of a huge pine forest. The place should have been re-christened “Starvation Camp,” however, for the majority of the large number of autoists temporarily detained here had expected to go straight through to Yosemite, and had only a limited supply of food and blankets. Those of us who were well furnished with such comforts shared them with our less fortunate fellows, and a fine spirit of comradeship was thus developed.

#### THE YOSEMITE VALLEY.

On the morning of Tuesday, 16th June, word came that we would be admitted to Yosemite as soon as the stage coach to Crocker's had passed the cross-roads. There was a general stampede to break camp, and for a grand finale one of the men killed a huge rattlesnake—about 100 feet only from our location.

We were among the first to proceed to the Ranger's camp, where we skidded our wheels to show that our brakes were in good working order; then registered and paid an admission fee of 5 dollars (£1), and duly received a time schedule that had to be followed exactly for the next 22 miles. One could drive as slowly as he pleased, but woe betide anybody who covered the distance in less time than that specified in the schedule! He would be promptly “pinched” for “speeding”—in other words, arrested. The penalties for this offence vary according to the degree of defiance of the regulation. Some offenders have to go all the way back to the Ranger's camp, and then make the journey at the schedule pace; others are charged a second admission fee in addition.

After we left the Ranger's camp the scenery became grander every mile until we got to Yosemite, where it reached a climax of absolute magnificence. So wonderful and varied is it, on such a stupendous and colossal scale, that my poor powers of description are inadequate to depict it or to enable you to realise it. I am





*Photos by*

YOSEMITE FALLS (UPPER FALL).



*S. Lorencie Anderson.*

MIRROR LAKE.

afraid I must fall back on the awfully banal phrase—  
“Words fail to convey an adequate impression of the scene.”

Yosemite, as I said at the beginning, is a valley—a beautiful and fertile valley, well wooded—lying between precipitous mountain sides, ranging from 2000 to 5000 feet in height. The geological theory is that the mountains were riven asunder—one can almost see where the mountains would fit were they drawn together again. This theory is better and more scientifically stated thus—

The high vertical walls, the small amount of debris at their foot, and the character of the Yosemite chasm itself, have led the geologists to ascribe its formation not to erosion or glacial action, but to a mighty convulsion in the granite rocks, whereby part of them subsided along lines of fault-crossing nearly at right angles. The observer, standing on the floor of the chasm, can see no outlet anywhere, the almost perpendicular walls towering on high in every direction.

The Merced River winds through the valley, receiving many mountain tributaries which are fed by numerous falls. The falls, indeed, are a conspicuous feature of the Yosemite; here one can fully comprehend the felicitousness of Tennyson's description in “The Lotos-Eaters”—

A land of streams ! Some, like a downward smoke,  
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go ;  
And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke,  
Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.

One of the most notable of the falls is the Bridal Veil Fall, which is about 70ft. wide, and descends vertically 630ft. It is appropriately named, the wind often making the foaming column flutter like a white veil. Another fall ordinarily named the Ribbon Fall has the very pretty alternative name of the Virgin's Tears.

There are a great number of objects of interest and “scenic views” at Yosemite. Among the first things to arrest the attention of the autoist as he enters the valley, driving his car along the fine road which the Government

has made through the Park, is El Capitan, a cliff rising almost in a straight line to a height of 3360ft. You may be specially interested to know that an American writer terms it "the most kingly, awe-inspiring, single mass of granite known." As we progress we come in succession upon the Bridal Veil Falls, the Cathedral Rocks, the Yosemite Falls, the Half Dome, and Glacier Point.

We had our camp within sight and sound of Yosemite Falls, one of the most beautiful in the valley; at the same time it is, I believe, one of the highest waterfalls in the world, if not the highest. The upper fall is 1,600 ft. in height, the lower 600 ft., and the cascades at the foot of the falls constitute a drop of 400 ft.; so that, altogether, the volume of water descends 2,600 ft. One day we followed the trail [track] to the top of the falls, and it was wonderful to watch the mountain torrent rushing over the precipice, breaking into sprays of foam like the bursting of rockets in mid-air, and shooting down to the ledge 1600ft. below, where the water foamed and boiled in a seething cauldron. Anyone walking within a quarter of a mile of the foot of the falls gets sopping wet from the prevailing mist. We know by experience.

Two other magnificent falls are the Vernal Falls and the Nevada Falls. They carry tremendous volumes of water, but lack the slender and graceful lines of the Yosemite Falls. They are seen to advantage when following the trail to Glacier Point, which we did on mule-back.

#### GLACIER POINT.

Glacier Point (5000 ft. high). is famed for the splendid view of the valley that is obtained from its summit, and also for an overhanging rock projecting out from the mountain side, suspended, as it were, in mid-air, the side of the mountain here being a sheer precipice for at least 3000 ft. down. Many people are venturesome enough to walk out on to the rock, but the performance requires some nerve and we one and all begged to be excused.

The panorama unfolded is certainly very wonderful. In the foreground is the deep gorge forming the pleasant valley of the Merced River. Across the gorge is a succession of noble mountains, and away behind them stretch the high Sierras, their snow-capped peaks glittering in the sunlight, the torrents dashing down their rocky sides looking like white streamers floating in the breeze. May I transfer a passage from a glowing description of the scene? All descriptions I have seen are equally luxuriant in style—

Not a few experienced travellers have pronounced the Glacier Point view the grandest sight on earth. It is one that every visitor should see, for from this point his eye may range over all of the more striking glories of Yosemite. Well might one yield himself up to silent amazement as the scene slowly possesses him, for he will be totally unable to grasp its full grandeur in a moment or even in an hour. There is a vague impression of vastness and beauty, but it is some time ere the mind is able to dwell on the details and to analyse the marvellous landscape into its component parts.

Just opposite one sees the white swaying ribbon of Yosemite Fall; to the right rises the tremendous bulk of El Capitan, which suffers little from the distance, and towering just behind this is Eagle Peak. A still grander view greets the eye as one turns to the left and gazes up the valley. The dominating feature is the rounded white summit of Half Dome, for its bold situation in the foreground gives the impression of greater height than the still loftier Clouds Rest just behind it. One is quite overwhelmed by this weird, glistening mountain, so strangely different that it seems as if some titanic architect had planned and reared the stately dome as the crowning glory of his gigantic palace. When the eye at last breaks away from the fascination of this strange peak, it ranges over an undulating sea of mountains—the high Sierras, which stretch away sharp and clear to the horizon. Vernal and Nevada Falls may be seen in the foreground, white pillars standing sharply against dark masses of rock and pine trees—but why continue a futile effort to set forth the glory of the Glacier Point panorama in words?

We had the advantage of beholding this gorgeous panorama under particularly auspicious conditions—sunshine followed by a storm. The storm gathered in the mountains across the valley, and it was an awe-inspiring sight to watch the clouds envelop one peak after

another, and then sweep across the chasm and overtake us in a downpour of rain, adding immensely to our discomfort, as already we were all more or less damp and shivering.

With a slippery trail ahead of us, and bearing in mind several stories we had heard of its sharp and dangerous turns, we had expected all sorts of thrills on the way up and down, but not one did we experience. After the sensations of our "auto." journey, we had become immune to all dangers, so far at least as nerves were concerned. At times I felt a bit anxious about B., for he is not what you might call an expert horseman, and was mounted on a rather mean-tempered animal. I had a very sedate mule bearing the aggressive name of "Carrie Nation" (the lady who smashes drinking saloons with an axe), but she—the mule, I mean—displayed no eccentricities other than an intense desire to contemplate the scenery below from a position uncomfortably close to the brink of the trail on its outward side, and a very unfriendly disposition to constantly bump my knees against the rocks on the inward side.

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We could have spent an indefinite time at Yosemite, revelling in its beauties and exploring its many features, but "time and tide," etc.; and at the end of a week we—I was almost going to say, quoting once more—"folded our tents like the Arabs, and as silently stole away." There was, however, nothing particularly silent or stealthy about our departure, as the engine of the automobile was as noisy as engines usually are, and, besides, we had to report at every checking station. But once out of the boundaries of Yosemite we went on speedily, and, after two days on the road, found ourselves once again in San Francisco in fine health and spirits, and the auto. not much the worse of the wear after such a hard trip. New brake bands and the vulcanising of a couple of punctured tubes were the only repairs needed.