

A DAY ON GOATFELL.

BY LYDIA BULLOCH.

OUR holiday in Arran, we were assured, would be incomplete if we did not climb Goatfell, the mountain whose lovely contour is observable from nearly every part of the island, and from whose summit there is a magnificent prospect, embracing one special feature—a view of “the three kingdoms.” We were not a party of mountaineers by any means—rather the reverse, to tell the truth; but to “do Goatfell” was so strongly impressed upon us as the conventional duty of every visitor to Arran that we felt obliged to conform. Unfortunately, the weather in the early summer this year was quite as unpropitious in Arran as it seems to have been everywhere else, but the continuous downpour of rain luckily ceased towards the middle of July, and a day was chosen for our adventure which was deemed by “natives,” expert in weather indications, as likely to prove favourable.

Leaving Corrie about 11 a.m., we kept to the road that skirts the shore, until an old quarry-hole was reached about a quarter of a mile from the starting-place. Here we left the main road and took one on the right that leads up to a quarry, and ultimately to the little village of High Corrie, which stands on the hillside, looking out on the sea. It is a very picturesque spot, with its white-washed houses and tar-coated roofs, and its tall fuchsia hedges—these hedges, by the way, are quite a feature of Arran. From High Corrie we mounted the grassy slopes, and headed south as if bound for the Holy Isle with its conical-shaped hill. There is a distinct path here, which one can scarcely miss, as it wends its way through the grass, heather and bracken. Our troubles soon began, however. The sun was too hot, the air was too sultry, and we were over-clad for

walking in warm weather. So, puffing and panting, a halt was speedily called, and we all gladly squatted, to rest and take the first deliberate view of our surroundings.

In front of us was the sea, with the two Cumbraes between us and Bute, which was but dimly seen through the haze. Little Cumbrae appeared not unlike a rather big whale floating in the water. We were in a position to observe—what is, indeed, noticeable everywhere on the island—that Goatfell is not the only mountain in Arran, but is simply part of a ridge, all about which, as Baddeley points out, “the mountains cluster with a rugged picturesqueness and abrupt boldness of outline nowhere surpassed in Great Britain, except in the sister island of Skye.” To our right was Maol Donn (1,208 ft.) and to our left Am Binnein (2,172 ft.), separated from each other by the White Water Glen. Away to the south stretched the Holy Isle, looking from our view-point, however, like a part of the mainland of Arran. The Holy Isle is said to have got its name from being the retreat of a Culdee anchorite, whose hermitage, in the form of a natural cave, is still shown, and near this is a spring, a “holy well,” which for centuries bore a surpassing repute among the superstitious for curing all sorts of diseases.

Resuming the climb, the pathway soon took a decided turn to the right and we turned our backs on the Holy Isle. After crossing a fence by an iron stair, we speedily found ourselves quite close to the White Water, which rushes down a deep, stony gorge, forming many waterfalls as it dashes over the rocks. The beauty of the glen was greatly enhanced by the heavy rains which had prevailed, transforming a comparatively small stream into a raging mountain torrent, which sprayed us as it plunged along its rocky bed. Anyone with a brilliant imagination who, later in the day, happened to look under a large boulder in this neighbourhood, might have been excused for suspecting

that a terrible tragedy had been perpetrated, for there, peeping out from underneath it, was a collection of hats, jerseys, scarves, etc. (there were several ladies in the party), which we found it necessary to discard, and which we carefully hid to await our return on the homeward journey. Relieved of these burdens, we accomplished the remainder of our walk with much greater ease. We made this spot our second halting-place and once more studied our surroundings. High Corrie now seemed a long way beneath us, and the Holy Isle could be seen rising out of the Bay of Lamlash, with its sugar-loaf hill sloping down to the edge of the water. In front we could see that very soon we should reach the rocky part of the mountain and leave the grassy slopes behind us. As we rose to resume the climb we sighted on the sky line our first deer, three of them, but they were a considerable distance away.

Our journey now became a little more fatiguing as we got among the boulders. Up to this point we had kept to the left bank of the White Water, but now we crossed to the opposite side and scrambled up to the top of a long stony shoulder, where we had a good view of the top of Goatfell and "the Saddle," as they stood silhouetted against the sky in all their rugged grandeur. We were surrounded by stones, scattered about in such a way as might have suggested the ruins of Ypres or the scene of some great bombardment. On our left we could distinctly see three Bays lying beneath us—Brodick, Lamlash, and Whiting Bays. This was a very tiring part of the climb as we wended our way up among the boulders, and I must confess that rests were the order of the day.

It almost looked as if our outing were to prove a fiasco for, towering above us, was the top of the mountain, with the mist creeping ever and ever further down its sides. Nothing daunted, we climbed on till we reached the last boulders, some of which, indeed, seemed

to be the result of artificial masonry as they were piled on the top of each other in large rectangular blocks. Others of them were less regular and more grotesque. One in particular, owing to its likeness to a skull, evoked the exclamation—"Alas! poor Yorick!" Another seemed not unlike one of the gargoyles on Notre Dame. The summit (2,866 ft.) was duly reached, but owing to the mist, the view was exceedingly limited. On a clear day it is said to be almost unrivalled, and has been described as extending "north-westward to the Paps of Jura; northward to Ben Cruachan; north-eastward to Ben Lomond; eastward to Ayrshire; southward to Ailsa Craig and the coast of Ireland; and westward to the neighbouring jagged ridges of Caisteal Abhail, Cir Mhor, and Ben Tarsuinn." Of this extensive view we saw little or nothing. Had we been a body of earnest and enthusiastic mountaineers, we might have felt fearfully disappointed; but as we were not in a critical mood and were satisfied with the day's exercise and pleasure, we did not grumble. We were content with the striking grandeur all around, with the lovely view down into Glen Rosa, and particularly with the movements of the mist, which seemed to rise like steam from a seething cauldron below, breaking off into clouds which chased each other round the mountaintop. At the risk of descending from sublimity to bathos, we may mention that on the summit we noticed the names of "H.M.S. Osprey" and "H.M.S. Vixen" chiselled out on the rocks in bold letters, an indication that sailors from vessels of the Fleet often stationed in Lamlash Bay had made the ascent of Goatfell.

Those who care for a bigger day's outing than that here described would do well to cross "the Saddle," which connects Glen Rosa with Glen Sannox. It was here, it may be remembered, that a young man Rose was done to death in 1889; he now lies buried in the little churchyard in Glen Sannox, his grave being marked by a large boulder, which the murderer is said to have rolled on the top of the body, to hide all traces of his crime.

One might also head for Brodick, which is a longer but quite an easy way of reaching sea level. The necessity of retrieving our superfluous garments, however, made us return the way we had come ; so having regaled the inner man (and woman), and bidden farewell to the mountain-top with its ever-changing aspects, we began to retrace our steps, but making one slight change—we struck the White Water much higher up. It is doubtful if this is advisable for the nervously-inclined, as we had to slide down what looked like a land-slip, and the loose gravel and stones kept rolling down the slope, proving rather a danger to those in front. The younger members of the party, however, voted it “great sport,” and certainly the shouts of laughter that echoed and re-echoed on the hill-side showed how much they enjoyed this change of programme. It was only when we reached the valley below and looked back that we realised the risk involved. The White Water, where we struck it, is a mere burn which we crossed on stepping-stones ; and there lay the remains of what had been mayhap “the Monarch of the Glen,” his white bleached bones piercing his once fine coat. One could not help picturing him in his final agony, dragging himself to the water “to drink his fill,” and then lying down to take his last rest.

Hunger sent us flying along the valley at a good speed through much bog-land, which subsequently rendered a little amateur cobbling necessary. We soon reached our boulder wardrobe, which proved to be quite a good left luggage room. High Corrie was soon in sight and no one was sorry, for the strain on the muscles was beginning to tell and we were all longing for level ground, which was reached about 5 o'clock. Almost a deathly stillness prevailed at the tea table, which, to use an Irish bull, spoke volumes for our appetites.

Thus ended a delightful outing, the account of which may encourage other amateur climbers to make the acquaintance of Goatfell.

THE SPEY.

I take my rise where the mountains
Blush with the kiss of dawn ;
Where the mist of the sweating valleys
On the wings of the wind is borne.

Where the moorland meets the mountain
And the red grouse whirr in tune ;
Through rocks as grey as the Judgment-day
My baby course is hewn.

And ever with gathering volume,
Ever with swifter flow,
The creamy foam of my peaty home
I toss to the fields below.

Down, far down, to the lowlands,
Where the alders touch the sky,
And my banks are the rabbits' playground,
And the gulls and the peewits cry.

But on, far on, in the lowlands,
My swiftness does not tire ;
And I toss my granite pebbles,
Till they crackle like gorse afire.

And ever I cut new channels,
Ever I wider range,
For my will is a wayward woman's,
Changeless only in change.

Till, like the wayward woman,
Wayward however she be,
I find my lord and master,
And rest in my love—the sea.

T. F.

—“*The Gordon Book*” (1902).

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