

## THE HUNGRY GRASS OF GALTYSMORE.

MANY will have noticed the rather curious suddenness with which hunger sometimes makes itself felt on the hills. It is not that you are underfed, or likely to be so. It is simply that you have been going for some time, and there comes on rapidly a feeling of exhaustion which can only be put right by eating, a mere morsel of food being generally sufficient to put you on your way again.

Application to the physiologist will no doubt produce an explanation of this, in terms of fatigue, proteins, vitamins, and the like. But in considering the question of hill-hunger there is another possible line of approach, and this I only learnt of on Galtysmore. I there heard unexpectedly of a remarkable theory which purports to explain the phenomenon referred to. If you accept this theory, it completely accounts for the noticeable sequence which runs: climb—activity—feeling of exhaustion—pause—bit of scoff—renewed vigour—further activity.

Galtysmore is the summit of the Galtee Mountains. By the map it is 3,015 feet high; and they call everything a mountain in Ireland which is more than a thousand feet high or so. It looks over the plain of Tipperary; and from its top you look west to the mouth of the Shannon shining in the sun, and east to—well, they say you'll be seeing the town of Waterford in that direction, so you will, but that I was unable to verify. Galtysmore is a great pile of old red sandstone, with the strata lying flat; and on the north side of it are two fine corries, each with a little loch in it. The south side of Galtysmore slopes down very gradually, and seems, by comparison, to be quite uninteresting.

It was after I came off this hill that I learned some of the most interesting things about it. I was in Fahey's cottage, at the foot of it; and him and me were sitting there having a chat, and there was another man sitting there, too, and his name I don't know. It was Fahey that explained about the men I had seen on the hill that looked



like shepherds. A single man with a dog on a hill you would naturally take to be a shepherd, but I was told that these were men who go up every day to count their own sheep, and the dog knows its own sheep as well as the man does. So what I made out of it was that they still have in Ireland a system of souming and rouming, each person being entitled to put so many animals on the common pasture. It may be I'm not quite right about that ; if so, no matter, because accuracy is out of place in Ireland.

And after a while, Fahey he says to me, " And were ye on the hungry grass ? " he says. " And what's that ? " says I. " I don't think you'll have been on the hungry grass," he says, " because it's mostly on the other side of the mountain." And he went on to say that it was a very bad thing indeed, the hungry grass. In fact, it was a real wicked thing. " Yes, and so it is," remarked the man that was sitting at the other side of the room. " But what is this thing you're speaking about ? " I said. " What's wrong with the grass on the mountain ? "

" Well, it's just this way," was the answer. " Over on the other side of the mountain, there's places where there's this grass ; and when ye come to it, it's faint ye are, just pure faint. If ye've some grub in your pocket ye can eat it, and go on. But if ye haven't any, ye'll mebbe die there, just from this pure faint. . . . There was a lad up there two years ago, and he stepped on that grass and he couldn't go on at all ; he could just creep into some rocks there is there and get some shelter, that was all he could do. Next day there was a man up for his sheep chanced to go in to that rocks to light his pipe ; and if he hadn't done that, and found the lad there, and him near dead, then that lad would have died there, so he would."

After a while, and after some more questions from me seeking some more exact details and getting none, the man across the room was appealed to. He entirely corroborated all that the other man had been saying about the wickedness of the hungry grass. " You'll remimber my uncle," he said, " he was the great man for going out on the mountain after the hares, with his dogs ; well, my uncle would be often



speaking about the hungry grass ; but me, I never took much notice of what he said. But that's just the way of it, as he told it to me. When ye come to that grass ye must have something to eat with ye, or else ye're just nailed there. Mebbe it's the grass takes all the strinth out of yer legs, or something like that ; I don't know."

In this fashion these two Irish tongues rambled on about the "hoongry grass." It was a string of nothings gravely uttered as history, and it was all about this or that person known to them who had experienced the difficulties occasioned by this grass. I was not clear whether either of them knew it at first-hand, but that is immaterial. And one might imagine some practical-minded person from our side catching one of these persons by the arm and asking : "Now, as man to man, tell me, what is this hungry grass, and where is it ?" Such a question would certainly produce nothing, unless merely a quick evasion of the point.

An hour or two later I came into Tipperary town, past the ruins of the old barracks, which are its conspicuous feature. You will be told that Tipperary was a gran' town when the military were there. It is now like any other Irish town. But notable for one thing which only the visitor notices, the fine view of Galtymore lit up in the evening sun.

As I looked at the mountain, and recalled what I had heard about the hungry grass, it seemed to me that I had been in real touch with the spirit of this curious people. If they get hungry on the hill, they put the blame not on their own emptiness but on the grass, and by working their imaginations they can make a pretty little fairy tale for themselves and for their listeners. And that tale you will find much more entertaining than anything you will find on the subject in a book on dietetics, or in any blue-book issued by the Board of Health. Because these people really can tell a tale, and their unwitting mastery of the art lies in the uncertainty in which they leave you as to whether or not they believe it themselves.—W. M. A.