WITH THE RUCKSACK MEN TO BECKFOOT, Easter, 1906.

By GEORGE MILNER, M.A.

Pleasurable anticipation should always be the key-note of any successful journey; but it may be one or other of two kinds. We may go to a new country of which we have heard much, but which we have not seen. In that case we make pictures before-hand and are eager to test the reality. Or we may go because we have been before, and know exactly what awaits us. Of the two kinds I think the latter yields the greater delight. I know men who are afraid to visit a fine piece of scenery twice for fear it should fall in their estimation. I am not of these. If there is real beauty or grandeur to begin with, the oftener I go the more complete is my enjoyment, each succeeding visit being enriched by the wealth of accumulated reminiscences. So, when I was asked to join the Club Excursion, my answer was—"I have been there and still would go." It was true that being a very old campaigner I could not hope to join in the high mountain-climbing; the "traverse" and the "chimney" were not for me, but I should sympathise with all that the stalwarts might do, my blood would warm to their work, if not to my own and, so to speak, I should "shoulder my crutch and show how fields were won."

The main body of the Club were not to leave Manchester until the evening of the day before Good Friday, but as this meant a very late arrival at Beckfoot I chose to make an earlier start, and our good friend Hobbins kindly offered to accompany me. The railway journey is a long one but, it seldom becomes wearisome. Grange and its little park, already gay with spring flowers, looked charming as we passed, and after the smoky purlieus of Ulverston and Barrow we were refreshed by the sight of the wide Estuary of the Duddon, with all its endearing associations, and of Black Comb, that hill of clouds and storms, which stands like a sentinel at the gate of the mountain country to which we were bound.

Between four and five o'clock we were at Ravenglass. It is a difficult place to describe. It is quaint and pleasant, but not beautiful. It looks like an old-world fishing and smuggling village, and there is no approach towards the attractions of a sea-side resort. There is just one long windy street. Behind the houses on the landward side you see the green country, leafy lanes, and the foot-hills; in front of those on the other side there is the beach, a wilderness of sand and black rocks through and among which three several and separate small rivers creep sluggishly to the sea under a cloud of screaming, wild birds. Two fine things, however, may usually be counted upon—a magnificent sunset and a view of the Isle of Man, rising like a fairy island from the sea.

In 1894, I was here with a company of enthusiastic mountaineers who came for a few days' strenuous climbing in and around Scawfell. On that occasion we made acquaintance with the hospitalities of the Pennington Arms. To that hotel Hobbins and I now made our way, having some time to wait for a train on the toy-railway which runs from Ravenglass to Boot. The old inn was but little changed. As is so often the case, the rooms seemed somewhat smaller than when I saw them last, but there was the same cleanliness, the same solid comfort, the same unprofessional kindness. It is a place where the tourist who is not entirely dependent upon modern refinements may make himself eminently comfortable. An air of antiquity meets you at the threshold, for in the porch hangs a huge battle-axe, two horse pistols, and an old crossbow. One thing, however, was changed much to my regret, the old landlady—a ruddy and buxom dame—had been gone for some years. When tea was served to us we had an instance of the way in which old customs and even traditional viands linger in a place of this sort. In the middle of the table there was set a large china bowl filled to the brim with an attractive condiment. I gazed in wonder. Could it be? Yes, it was—the bowl of 1894, and its contents were of the same compounding. By this bowl there hangs a tale. When, in the year alluded to, the company of good fellows were set down to tea—one of the more intrepid spirits having tried the strange looking mixture—they began helping themselves with a capacious spoon. They said nothing, but the smile of satisfaction on their faces, and their speedy appropriation of further supplies, shewed that they had fallen upon

a good thing. Quickly the whole round table clamoured for a "helping." The general verdict was "Ambrosial," but no one could give it a name. After tea, I was commissioned to take the landlady aside, and, if possible, extract the secret.

"What is that grand stuff you have given us in the big bowl?" I said.

"Why, don't you know what that is?" she replied. "Wherever do you come from? We all know it in these parts."

"Well, well, but what is it?"

"What is it? Why, it's Rum Butter."

"Rum Butter! And, may I ask—How is it made?"

"Well you take a lot of fresh butter—it must be fresh you know—then you put in some sugar, and after that you pour in as much rum as the butter will take, stirring it up all the time with a spoon. Eh, it's good takin' and verra healthy."

It should be added that when the true nature of the mixture became known an opening for a joke—too tempting to be lost—was made against the water-drinkers of the company, who, it was said—perhaps maliciously—had been the most persistent in their demands for more "Rum Butter."

As the evening drew on Hobbins and I took a special holiday train to Beckfoot, arriving at Headquarters, the Stanley Ghyll Hotel, about seven o'clock. Pickstone and Corbett were already there, having come across country.

The night was clear and starry, and I ventured on a short walk alone in the direction of Boot, which brought to me a vivid return of youthful sensations and a recurrence of certain well-remembered lines, uttered in the same place and under similar circumstances, long ago—

His daily teachers shall be woods and rills,
The silence that is in the starry skies,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills.

The main contingent of the party arrived a little before midnight instead of at ten o'clock. They were in high spirits, however, and after supper there was a meeting in the smoke-room at which there was much merriment and some discussion of plans for the morrow.

On Friday, though the wind was easterly, the weather was fine and warm. The mountaineers made an early start, in picturesque

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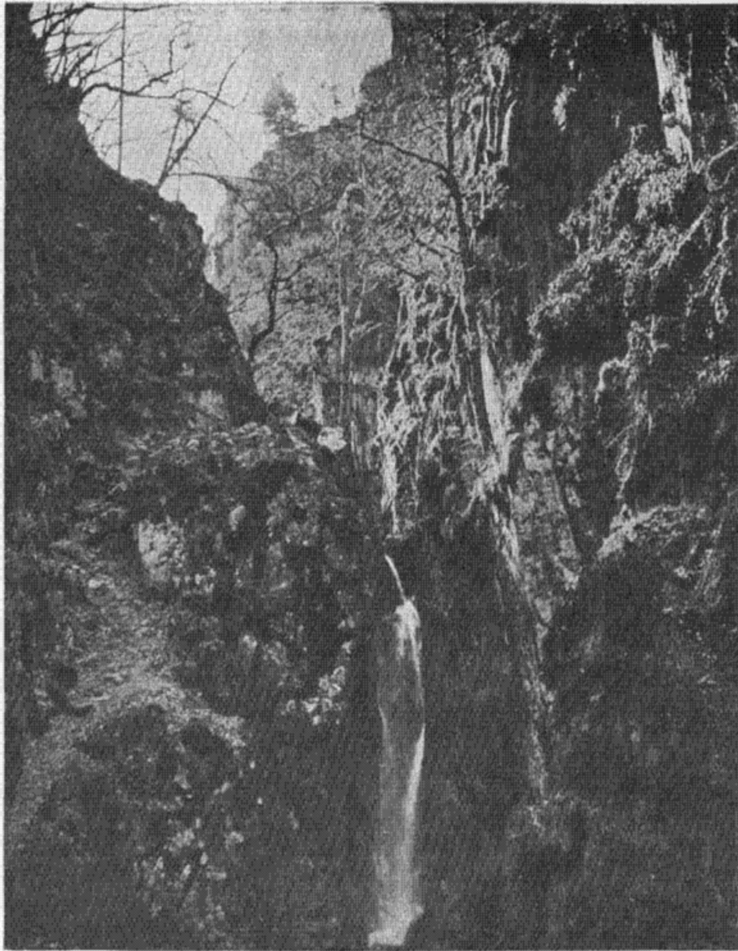

Photo. by W. J. Pearce.

STANLEY GHYLL.

groups, multifariously clad, and carrying, as if they were but feather-weights, the usual impedimenta. Being alone I spent the day in quiet but delicious wandering among all my old haunts—to the quaint secluded church hidden in its leafy hollow by the river, to the village of Boot, and along the high road as far as the Woolpack, where I got an indifferent sketch of Scawfell, which, though vast in bulk was grey in colour and deficient in detail.

For Saturday a great game had been arranged. It was to be played between "Scouts" and "Outposts." The field of operations extended from Beckfoot to Wasdale, and from Wasdale to Rosthwaite, the central fortress being the summit of Scawfell Pike. The attacks were made by the Scouts, and the defence by the Outposts. The object aimed at was the capture—unobserved and unimpeded—of Scawfell Pike. This gigantic pastime occupied the whole day and involved a vast amount of climbing. During the day Pearce and I explored Stanley Ghyll, coming out on the old road to Devoke Water. I found a fine subject for a sketch in the view of Scawfell which may be got from the point where the Stanley Ghyll ravine comes up to the high road. Pearce also found many tempting bits for the camera. In the evening there was a great Symposium at the hotel. The physical exertions of the day, which were of no ordinary kind, had done nothing to abate the vocal and histrionic ardour of the Club.

Sunday saw most of the men off to the hills again, but, for those who wished to take it, a pleasant change was to be found in the bright Easter Morning Service at the little church by the river.

On Monday, preparations for return began; but, as I and Hobbins were remaining till Tuesday, there was leisure for more quiet rambling. I was, as usual, drawn irresistably by old associations to the village of Boot. The place has changed but little. I lounged awhile in the humble "public" and talked with the landlord, but he is a new-comer and could tell me nothing of his predecessors. Then I followed the stream towards Burnmoor. I have seldom seen blocks of rock lying in a river-bed more vast than those which are to be found just beyond the bridge. Further on I came upon a comfortable looking, white farmhouse—a pleasant place to lodge at, I should suppose, and which I thought I remembered having seen before. At the point where the Burnmoor tarn

comes in sight I sat down to rest. Here the clouds broke and the sun streamed through them. Scawfell remained hidden, but Great How in front was clear. The solitude was complete. There was neither sound nor motion beyond those which were made by a few sheep cropping the turf around me. To fall into reverie was natural, and my thoughts went back to the time when I traversed the selfsame moorland path fifty-five years ago with a dear friend now long dead.

The judicious Editor of this *Journal* suggested that I should include in the present paper some reminiscences of my first visit to Eskdale and its neighbourhood; and here, perhaps, the story may appropriately come in, just as, in fact, the incidents passed through my mind, sitting lonely and contemplative on Burnmoor in the spring of last year.

It was in 1851 that my friend Basil and I made our first visit to the Lake Country. I can always remember the date, because I know that it was the year in which the poet Wordsworth died. Basil and I were devoted admirers of the then Laureate, and we had a long-cherished desire to see him in his beautiful retreat at Rydal Mount. I had been favoured with an introduction, and we trusted that when our autumn holiday came our pious wish might be gratified. But, alas! the old man died in the May of that year, and our excursion in the month of August was shorn of its chief attraction. In due course, however, we presented ourselves at Rydal Mount, where our "introduction" and our youthful enthusiasm ensured us a kindly reception from Mrs. Wordsworth. It was a pleasure, though of a melancholy kind, that we were allowed to see, in a wheeled chair on the terrace, that dear sister who had shared the poet's home through all his life, and who herself wrote one of the most charming books in our language—"The Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth." At this time her reason had become clouded, and we could not but remember the lines, half prophetic, surely, in which he speaks "Of the shooting lights in her wild eyes."

Our lodging was at what was then, at least, and may be still, a charming little hotel at Ambleside, called the Royal Oak. Here we lingered for a few days, scouring all the immediate neighbourhood and

ascending most of the hills; and then on a bright autumn morning we started for Eskdale. I remember we left the Royal Oak in a staid and sober fashion, carrying our luggage demurely in our hands, but at Clappersgate, resting by a stone wall, we strapped on our knapsacks and snapped our fingers at the world. Our first divergence was to Skelwith Force, behind which the Langdales, we thought, made the noblest mountain background we had ever seen. Then came Colwith Force, where we oriented ourselves—you must remember we were new to the game—with pocket compass and dial; and so on, by Fell Foot and Langdale Tarn. After that, we had the satisfaction of thinking that at last we were fairly in the wilderness, for wild-looking sheep set their black faces against us for a moment and then bounded up the hill sides. Between us and the Pikes of Langdale there was a wide valley with one tree only, and a group of shepherds with their dogs. As we gazed steadily with rapt eyes at the great, solemn hill before us, it seemed to enlarge its proportions and almost to come marching over the vale towards us. Here, too, we began to see signs of rain. We were now to witness the grand changes that accompany a mountain storm; and who would set against such a spectacle a paltry drenching of garments? We could see the showers descending miles away in front, then they came sweeping towards us and pelting us in the face; and in five minutes they were off down into the valley behind, while we were again surrounded by rejoicing sunshine. Sometimes between the storms we had a rainbow stretching from hill to hill, nor could we have resisted, if we had wished, the impulse to cry out—

> My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky.

Our road now lay over those two steep hills, Wrynose and Hard Knott—rugged names and rugged realities, too. When we gained the summit of the second, a noble prospect opened out. The weather was now calm and clear. On either hand there was a range of hills sweeping down with nice gradations both of colour and of size, and, as it seemed, to the very edge of the sea. The sea itself was probably twelve or fifteen miles away, yet so clear was the air after the rain that we could discern the water rising and falling in the light. Right before us, too, and distinctly visible,

like the back of some great leviathan, was the Isle of Man. It was probably some such scene as this which suggested to Wordswords that beautiful image in the well-known ode on "The Intimations of Immortality":—

Hence in a season of calm weather,
Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the children sport upon the shore
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

Towards evening we unbuckled at Boot, abundantly satisfied with what we had seen of the beauties of Eskdale, and no less with the ancient-looking village and the modest but clean and cosy hostel which we had entered. It had been our intention to cross Scawfell that night and descend into Wasdale, but we were warned not to attempt it, and it was well that we took the advice given us, for had we got on to Scawfell—knowing nothing of the mountain—we should certainly have been lost in the dark and would probably have furnished an interesting but melancholy paragraph for the next week's papers.

After tea we were bent on seeing Stanley Ghyll, and, although we had had a long and a hard walk, we set out with a light step and an elevated spirit, for the mountains were transfigured, as we had never seen them before by the light of a glorious autumn sunset. We loitered for a time in a low thicket where we were knee-deep in fern and heather, and by the river-side, admiring the little whitewashed church, so that it was quite dark when we got near the fall. "And, pray, what was the use," it may be said, "of going a-hunting for waterfalls in the dark?" "Infinite use," I may reply, for that fall proved to be the most astonishing thing we had seen on the journey. Imagine a dark, deep chasm, the sides of which are about 150 feet high; at the top is a small round space of starry sky, fringed with the bushes that overhang the mouth of the chasm. The water comes down in an unbroken line—you cannot see where it comes from—and plunges into a black pool. Our guide—a benign old man, whom we had picked up at the inn—said that three persons had never been in that place after dark

before. The guide went first along the narrow and tortuous footpath. I followed, keeping my eyes on the old man's white jacket, and Basil brought up the rear, holding by the end of my stick. My conviction is that the old man could not see at all, for he frequently stumbled, striking fire with his nailed shoes, and at length lost his way altogether, and went into a great fright, saying that we should all be drowned. However, we got safely out of the gorge and keenly enjoyed talking over the incidents of the adventure as we sat at supper in the inn. The most memorable and beautiful thing, however, which we saw in the Ghyll was a unique display of glow-worms. The time of the year, the hour of the night, the abundance of foliage, and the heavy moisture were all favourable to the production of the singular effect which we witnessed. The little creatures were in hundreds—I do not think I should exaggerate if I said there must have been a thousand. They were on both sides of the glen, beneath, and above, and around our feet, twinkling in and out with that mysterious glimmer—that "light that never was on sea or land" except by their own production. It seemed like a poet's dream, an Autumn night's dream, rather than a reality. I had never seen anything like it before, nor have I since, nor may I hope to see it again. We managed to convey one of the glow-worms back with us to the inn. We put it under a suitable glass and after the lights were extinguished in our bedroom we could see it travelling, with its little green lamp, round and round its prison.

The next day we journeyed by foot and horse through Wasdale and Buttermere to Keswick—but that is another tale, which may not be told now.

At five o'clock on Monday the Rucksack men—after giving an exhibition of Alpine climbing along the narrow ridge of the station roof and over the carriages—returned by rail through Ravenglass to Manchester. Pickstone had left in the afternoon to walk to Windermere, and Corbett started at seven o'clock, intending to walk through the night to Carnforth, where he proposed to breakfast.