

CAMPING OUT ON THE THAMES.



A WEEK on the Thames is a very healthy and very pleasant way of spending a holiday, but two things are necessary—you must have fine weather, and you and your companions must have good tempers. A shower of

rain may easily be forgotten, and if the weather is fine on the whole, it is enough; but not a cloud must pass over your moral weather, not a cross word must be uttered where several people are crowded in one small boat; for remember you are travelling in a vehicle that, if it were not for the charm of the scene and the pleasure of the companionship of good fellows, you would vote a monstrously inconvenient and uncomfortable machine. Indeed, boating is another proof that the enjoyments of life depend much less on what we enjoy than the spirit in which we enjoy them. Do you remember how Goldsmith's dear old vicar says, "What we lacked in wit we made up in laughter"? And surely indifferent jests, when we are in a merry mood, are better than brilliant sarcasms, that, however politely they may make their bow, are sure to tread on some one's corns in making it. What you lack in comfort, then, you must make up in good temper, especially if you are camping out. Let me, however, frankly own that change of scene, freedom from everyday cares, will often make a man who usually appears morose and dull, good-natured, and even gay. But such men are like tamed rattlesnakes; I am glad to know they can be tamed, but I prefer some one else taming them. I know good fellows that I would like well enough to be a day with on the river, whose companionship I should fear very much for a week, even with their daily bread provided for them at pleasant hotels. Others I should be delighted to join in a trip from Oxford to Hampton, that I should fear camping out with very much. "With fine weather and good tempers, then, we can start," you say? Wait a minute—wait two—for I am not a quick speaker. In what I have said about weather and temper, like most wisecracks, I have been speaking selfishly; for, you see, your good temper is as important to me as it is that

my best friends should have amiable wives (always take care your friend marries an amiable woman, or you may lose him). Now, I will speak of something that only affects yourself. Can you stand camping out? Pleasure, like borrowed money, may be dearly paid for. Twenty years of odd twinges and pains is a long price for a week's enjoyment. The proverb goes, "A short life and a merry one." Don't be misled by a well-turned phrase. You may try to cut your life short with merriment, but though you may kill all of life that is worth the name, what isn't has to wait its hour. If you will not go at the pace you are fitted for, but must go hop, skip, and a jump, you may come up to the grave with a hop, and remain with one leg there for many a weary year. So, my young friend, I would say to you—are you a fellow who can sleep in damp sheets and sit in draughts without taking cold? Don't answer me that you are strong as a house and hard as nails; houses often fail, and nails break like banks if they are not properly directed. Don't think I want to detract from the pleasures of camping out. There is no writing or telegraphing for beds and dinner. Happy Arabs of the silver highway, you carry your house with you—a pleasant little white castle, delightfully situated, or rather to be situated, on any one's eligible site; a free holding, for you make free; and there is no rent but what you can stitch up. Your pantry and kitchen are packed at the stem of your little vessel, and every one has as many servants as there are men in the boat. This brings us to another point—are you a willing servant? I would like to see you wash out a pot. If you are one of those fellows who put on an expression as who should say, "Really, you know I am not used to this sort of thing. I'm a gentleman, you know. I never saw a thing of this kind before; but I do it because it's the thing—because other fellows of my set do it, you know, so it must be the thing"—if that is your style of washing a pot, go on a steam-launch, and carry a cook. You're a fit companion for a gentleman I am slightly acquainted with (very slightly, thank goodness), who can't walk to his stable in the boots he rides in for fear of cracking the varnish. Nor do I care for you if you giggle over your work, and think it such fun to play kitchen-maid. That kind of thing is well enough on an occasion when kitchen-maid is being played.

Have you ever returned from a fancy dress ball with, say, Queen Elizabeth, Joan of Arc, Charles the First? (You, of course, are Romeo, and papa a friar.) Well, the servants have been told not to sit up. The friar opens the door with a latch-key, and Joan of Arc asks you to step in. Presently her majesty thinks she would like a cup of tea, and Joan thinks it would be such fun to make one. Then you all go into the kitchen; the martyr blacks himself, and is laughed at, getting the fire lighted; Joan gets wet, and is laughed at, fetching a kettle of water; and the friar is laughed

at for his awkwardness in trying to make a bit of dry toast. In fact, every one is laughing and being laughed at. This is all right. You are all playing at servants for the fun of the thing, made funnier by your assumed characters. But when a good camper-out is washing a pot, he does it in earnest. He does not do it because it's the thing, you know, nor does he do it because it's such fun; he washes the pot because it wants washing. He works like an artist, he gives his whole mind up to what he is engaged on, and the consequence is, the pot is washed well—it is artistically washed. I would not be too severe. I do not wish the washer to quite overlook the delights around him. My pot-washer would be a dullard fit only to wash pots, if his ear was deaf to another little camper-out, the lark singing high up above his tiny topsy-turvy green tent, that the one-eyed daisies peep into; if the jolly, sombre, hypocritical rooks, as they caw and flap over the bright river, were unheard; if the leaping fish were unseen, or the cheery welcome from an early passing boat were unanswered; but for all that, the active principle of the man for the time being must be fixed on the washing of his pot. Well, I have done with warnings. You can stand any amount of damp, your temper defies all annoyances, and you do your share of the work simply because it has to be done. The thing is settled; we will camp out on the Thames. Away with stiff and formal attire; feather beds we never use, but now bedstead and mattress alike must go. A waterproof on the grass, a couple of rugs, and a carpet bag for a pillow; exercise and fresh air are your only bed-makers, and drowsiness, not sleep, lolls on a pillow of down. Let those who never tried it laugh at your little canvas bed-chamber. Wait till we wake in the morning—and mind, we do wake! we don't simply recover from sloth; we don't just shake off drowsiness; we don't rub our eyes and say it's time to rise—we wake! we get up because we've done sleeping. And when we go into our bath-room what a difference—no japanned tubs or marble coffins,

with but a sample of water in them. Our bath-room is the wide world, just fringed with greenery where we are; our bath is the river, that's turned on miles away, and comes tumbling over and spurting through the weirs. One good fellow has delayed his swim, and almost before we can shake off what little of the river we can take on to dry land, the bacon is chirping in the pan.

You must never be in a hurry when you are camping out. You must never have a certain journey to perform in three or four days. Hurry makes camping a labour, and instead of being so much of the day's amusement, it is a morning trouble, like shaving. No; have plenty of time, or shorten your journey. Besides, you require time to study each other's peculiarities. One of four may take into his head to bring a fishing-line. He would, if he were with us, be too good a fellow to delay us against our will; so we chaff him, and ask where that fine pike is we expected for supper, and out comes the rod.

Here where I write I have a pleasant fellow, an actor, staying with me. Going down to the pool to bathe this morning, I saw round his hat a perfect decoration of flies; so I knew I was in for a slow paddle, with my friend at the bows. I managed to spend an hour paddling half a mile, while he whipped the sluggish river by the bushes. He caught nothing, but I could see he took as much delight in changing his flies as a certain money-lender's wife I saw at Brighton did her dresses; yea, he varied the colours with equal pleasure. Now, on the other hand, I am sure if I wanted to hurry to a certain spot he would help me, and never think of his angle, though the fish were rising all round us.

Indeed, as in camping out one of the principal pleasures is in having no fixed abode, so in boating a great source of delight is in no one, as it were, having an independent will—each tries to please the others; and the result is, you will hardly find a man who has been long on the river who is not a good fellow. Of course, I don't include *all* bargemen. JAMES ALBERY.

