

CAMPING OUT ON THE RIVER, AND HOW TO ENJOY IT.

BY ARTHUR H. SHAW.

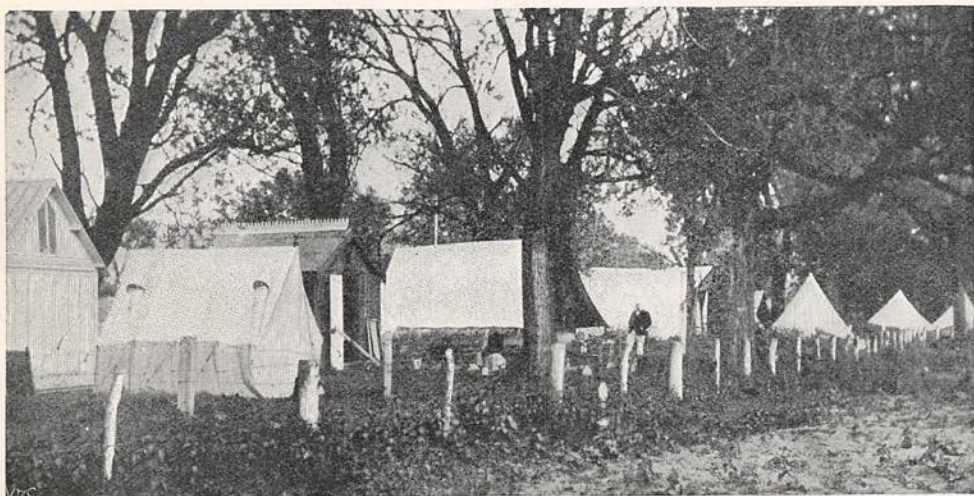
Illustrated from Photographs by W. H. BUNNETT.



WITHIN the last two or three years there has been a wonderful increase in the number of camps pitched on the banks or on the islands of the ever-charming summer Thames.

There is hardly a frequented reach of the river that does not boast its canvas tent tucked away amidst sheltering trees and bushes, or else standing open and defiant upon the green meadow. Upon many a familiar lock island, too, show the tiny scraps of canvas that mark the pitches of the

wanderer or gipsy in the veins, with a contempt for bricks and mortar, and a love for the open air and green country, that makes your true camper. To the camper of this calibre nothing comes amiss. He is Bohemian enough, happily, to disregard the absence of feather-bed comforts, and to convert mishaps and difficulties straightway into fun and amusement. There is no obstacle that he will not tackle, and should he fail to get over it, he will promptly turn its flank and go round it. He is as full of rough resource as a tramp or a Klondyker; in fact, he is



STREET OF CAMPS AT PENTON HOOK.

nomadic campers on their progress up or down river.

To the eyes of the average Saturday or Sunday rowing party or riverside cyclist, one camp is much like another. It is a mere matter of canvas and tent-poles. Poles and canvas are elementary essentials of a camp, certainly, but beyond those details the camps are as varied as the campers themselves. I am here almost tempted to claim that the true camper, like the "pote," is born, not made. It is the man or woman—for I know no reason why the fair sex should be left out in the cold in this connection—with just a strain of the blood of the world-

the embodiment of self-help and smiles. The fascinations of the flowing river and the free air are to him so vivid and alluring that he wonders why all the world is not camping; but on second thoughts he is glad it is not.

All campers are not as this, however. I have known renegades and backsliders who, covering their retreat with loud expressions as to their own perfect sanity and consequent inability to perform deeds of madness, have on a wet night deserted our canvas home for the four walls of an inn or hotel, and from that safe distance have announced that business of the most urgent and pressing nature has called them from the river back to town.

There are many sorts of camps, as I have already hinted, but for the purpose of comparison they may be divided into two kinds



A MUSICAL PARTY.

—permanent camps and moving camps. The permanent camps are put up and maintained for the season, which with hardy campers runs from Easter to the end of October. Usually these camps are within reasonable walking or cycling distance of a railway station having a more or less efficient train service to London. For a camp of this kind is used as a regular week-end resting-place, and in not a few instances is the summer residence of the camper, who has to go to town daily to bank or office, as though from a more conventional suburban home. Accordingly, the chief permanent camps are to be found in Teddington Reach, at Thames Ditton, Sunbury, Shepperton, Penton Hook, and Staines, and further afield at Bray and Shiplake.

Generally speaking, the completely-equipped permanent camp is the development of several years' work and experience.

The camper early learns to condemn the second-hand army bell-tents so freely advertised. These are rarely shower-proof, are like bake-ovens in a summer day's sun, and their very shape makes their conversion into comfortable living quarters impossible. Where the bell-tent is not discarded altogether, it is used merely as a kitchen or as a store for boat gear or cycles. The pattern of tent almost everywhere adopted for permanent camps is that known to the trade as the emigrant or squatter's tent. It is made in many sizes, ranging from the big tents that measure twenty-four feet

long by twelve feet wide, and stand eight feet or nine feet high at the ridge pole, with three feet six inch side walls, downwards to the common size of tent, ten feet long by eight feet wide, standing seven feet six inches high, with three feet side



MODEL KITCHEN, BUILT BY ITS OWNERS.

walls. Without exception these tents are provided with wooden floors, and all of them are covered with huge fly-sheets that extend

fore and aft of the tents and come down well to the ground on both sides. In some camps the fly-sheets are lashed down to ground-pegs with short lines, but the neatest job is made by putting up a strong wooden railing on either side of the tent at the right distance, and lacing the sheet to it with a length of stout cord. It is advisable to have the fly-sheet come forward several feet over the front of the tent, for it then gives the occupants a large, airy porch, proof against sun and rain. In large camps, where a number of campers have united on the co-operative principle, the big tent is ordinarily set apart as the dining hall and general room, while the smaller tents are used as the sleeping apartments. Sometimes a small marquee is put up as the dining and reception room, but it is not nearly so satisfactory as a big square tent; for it is not possible to rig a fly-sheet over it, and, consequently, in the event of rain its walls and roof are saturated, while under a strong sun the interior becomes insufferably close. The emigrant tent, provided with a large green rot-proof fly-sheet, on the other hand, is always comfortable. On a howling wet night—and that is the usual allowance at Easter time—the inner tent is dry and warm, while under blazing sunshine it remains comparatively cool.

Several camps I know possess all the luxury of a first-class house-boat, without the drawback of the latter's necessarily cramped quarters. Take the camp at Penton Hook, which Mr. Bunnett has so successfully photographed. Three years ago the ground was a rough, marshy, rat-infested spot. Today, it fronts the stream with a trim green lawn that might move to envy many owners of swell riparian mansions. The main or saloon tent here is lined with fantastically coloured cloths. A fine carpet conceals the wooden floor. Brass hanging lamps swing

from the decorated ridge-pole, and a piano-forte constitutes a never-failing temptation to the formation of just such a musical party as our knight of the camera has snapped at.

The sleeping tents in this camp are bedraped and becarpeted, and have cosy corners set off in fitments of polished split bamboo, the whole effect of which is to convert your common tent into an artistic and sybaritic dwelling-place.

The kitchen is a model of propriety and neatness. It looks as though it had been taken bodily from a West-end flat, but it was built in every detail on the ground. The model kitchen stands behind the line of tents. Its construction is peculiar and ingenious. Open, it presents itself as a



AFTERNOON TEA IN A MODEL CAMP.

three-sided, white-painted, wooden hut, without a door. The missing front wall is stretched flat on the ground before the kitchen. This wall is hinged at the bottom to the hut floor, and when the kitchen has to be closed is raised to the perpendicular position and secured at the top by bolts and padlocks against all possible invaders.

A pretty landing-place abuts on the river, where punts, skiffs, and canoes can all moor together. A profuse display of bunting by day, and of Chinese lanterns at night, make this camp-ground attractive to all who pass in boats. It is, in fact, a glorified camp, and it is the pride of the campers there, that all the work has been done with their own hands. Their enterprise even went so far as to fit up an electric bell connection with the "man's" tent, but that is no longer used, probably for the reason that a knobby tent-peg was found to be the man's best awakener. The omen of the gods to the builders of this pretty camp was not particularly encouraging, for on the day of their arrival at the camp-ground, in bleak February, the punt containing the six bold campers over-



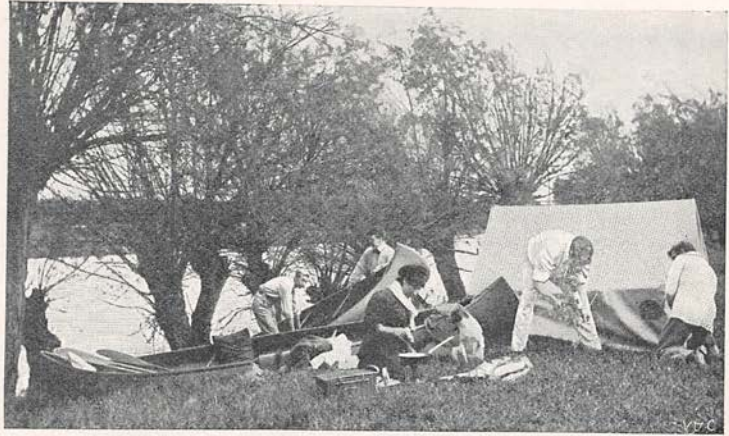
REGATTA DAY.

BY ALEC BALL.

turned, and threw them all into the cold, wet river.

All campers, however, have not this—shall I say?—gilded luxury. As the young lady remarks, "It is nice," but it is not necessary. The first season I ran a fixed camp, I had a nine feet by seven feet "A" tent, which I got with the original idea that it was just the right kind to pack away in my Canadian canoe for use on flying pitches. With the addition of a wood flooring it made all the permanent camp I wanted that year. I never had a more enjoyable camping time, and we often crowded three and occasionally four fellows to sleep in it. The steep slopes of the roof made it perfectly watertight and it stood the heaviest thunderstorms without shedding a tear inside. Next door, on the same pitch, were two camp-mates with a funny-looking cut-down bell-tent, got out in the first instance for camping on cycle tours. It leaked, certainly, in a heavy shower, but that never damped the spirits of the inmates.

I mention these personal experiences to show that a good time can be had in a fixed camp of the simplest and most inexpensive



ENCAMPING FOR THE NIGHT ON A FLYING PITCH.

description. Where a couple of companions club together, all that is needed is a good squatter's tent measuring ten feet by eight feet, with a fly-sheet of Birkmyre's cloth or Willesden canvas projecting about five feet over the tent door, and reaching well out beyond the tent sides. A wooden floor should be fitted, of course, and there you have a dry and comfortable summer home.

The initial difficulty with most would-be campers is to find a suitable ground. The lock-keepers or boat-builders in the neighbourhood selected are usually able to supply the desired information as to likely spots and the landlords thereof. It is easier, however, to get a pitch now than it was a few years ago, for many riparian land-owners have woken up to the fact that there is more money in letting a half-acre as a camping-ground than there is in using it for grazing.

Where it can be managed, the camper should endeavour to be near a town for the convenience of shopping and railway, but also sufficiently distant from any road—except the river—to be sure that the camp, when



THE HOME OF THE "SHUTTLECOCK," ABBEY RIVER.

When it is stated that one was an Irishman and the other a New Yorker, that circumstance may be somewhat explained.

ence of shopping and railway, but also sufficiently distant from any road—except the river—to be sure that the camp, when

left unoccupied, is safe from any marauders in the shape of "weary Willies." An ideal camp in this respect is the camp on the Abbey River, which I have named the "Home of the *Shuttlecock*." One of our best known lady novelists, Miss Braddon, has certainly charmed recollections of the Abbey River, for there is more than a word descriptive of its beauties and the "Hook" in "Dead Sea Fruit." The Abbey River is a stream that runs out of the "Hook" and makes its way by tortuous windings to Chertsey. Though undoubtedly Thames water, it is claimed as a private river, and few go down it but adventurous voyagers, to whom the notice, "Private River; No Boats Allowed," is always a sufficient in-

A certain amount of cooking is part of the daily routine of camp life. Fortunate is the camp that possesses a good *chef*, but constant practice makes even the tyro proficient. The majority of campers get along very well with oil cooking ranges and wickless oil stoves, but a small coal stove, set up in a little wooden shelter, is to be preferred.

Compared with the fixed camp the moving camp is a very different institution. The camper on the move has forgotten all about railways and business. He needs towns and villages only for the opportunity they afford to replenish his stock of provisions. He is the free wanderer—barring the lock dues. All his household goods are in his boat; where he stops for the night is his camp.



AN AFTERNOON "AT HOME."

ducement for exploration. The camp of the *Shuttlecock* is pitched on a wooded bluff at the head of the stream. The big tent is almost entirely screened by the surrounding foliage, and a stairway of roughly cut steps leads up to it from the water's edge. The camp is wholly solitary; not a house is to be seen, and the campers might with little exercise of imagination fancy themselves miles away in the backwoods. The current round the "Hook" is always swift—in winter time it is a gushing rapid—and there are many shallows, so that the adopted boat of the campers, a punting canoe, is just the type required. It is named the *Shuttlecock*, but is given more than ordinary canoe stability by the addition of side keels.

To make a camp he does not even need a tent; the canoe turned over on the level bank, or a tarpaulin thrown over the sculls leaning against the hedge, will often satisfy his requirements. *Al fresco* camping of this kind is seen in all its variety at Henley during the Regatta week. There are tents—big, little, new, and old. Campers sleeping out in skiffs, punts, and canoes moored along the banks and up the backwaters. Boatmen roosting under lean-tos against the hedges, and tramps, with only a newspaper for covering, prostrate under the trees. Here is your complete object lesson on the varieties of camping. All along the river, from Lechlade down to Sunbury, are these temporary camps scattered during the

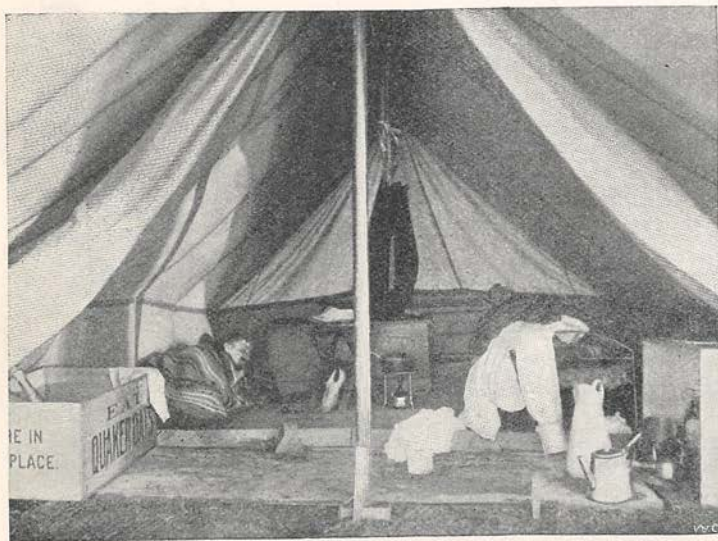
summer months. Sometimes the camp is fixed for two or three days, but more often it is pitched in a fresh spot every night.

Under the best circumstances the wandering camper has few of the comforts of the fixed camp. Not for him are fly-sheets, wood floors, camp-beds, carpets, and coal stoves. He has to restrict himself to absolute necessities, for his accommodation is limited, not by the size of the camp-ground, but by the capacity of his boat. The camper's usual mistake on his first trip is to take too much in the way of equipment. The consequence is the craft is so laden with cargo that there is hardly room for the passengers. On the second trip that mistake is not repeated. The camper has discovered

properly stowed. Boat-tents are used by many campers. As the name indicates, the boat itself is curtained in a low tent stretched over a ridge-rope raised on two short masts. The boat-tent has the advantage that the campers can moor alongside a suitable bank without landing. There is, consequently, no danger of a sudden onslaught from gamekeepers, farm-hands, and sheep-dogs just when the camp is snug for the night. This kind of tent, however, affords very cramped accommodation, and when four men have once tried to sleep in a double-sculler in this fashion, they are heroes if they repeat the performance. For this reason — to avoid a nocturnal Chinese puzzle of mingled bodies, arms, legs, pots,

pans, and spirit stoves—most experienced campers prefer to pitch their tent on the ground. Inquiries made of the lock-keepers will generally result in direction to a suitable spot for the night's pitch. In many cases a small charge—half a crown or five shillings—is made by the landowner or his servants, but often permission to camp is given free, on the understanding, of course, that the camper does not abuse the privilege.

Although the majority of campers seem wedded to the double-scutling or randan skiffs, to my



A SIESTA, FOR THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S BENEFIT.

mind the best boat for river work is the canoe. The fascinations and joys of camping are endless. "In fine weather!" some scoffer remarks. "True, O philosopher! Fine weather is good for the camper, but it is the variety of our climate that provides him with a large share of his humour." Lively comrades, a hand at cards, or songs and tales, can take the edge off any wet night, and in the morning there is the rush of pure cold air and the sweet smell of the country after the rain. And then a refreshing swim, a wholesome breakfast encountered with hearty appetites, a camp quickly struck, the canoes pushed out into the shining ripples of the river, and ahead for fresh scenes and Nature's beauties new! Paddle!

from painful experience that every single article in his pile has to be handled several times a day. It has to be taken out of the boat at night and packed away again the following morning. The larger the collection of odds and ends, the more time there is wasted in disembarking and embarking. In short, the camper soon learns that the less he carries in the way of gear, the better for his peace of mind and pace.

For a party of four or five men an "A" tent, ten feet long by eight feet wide, is about the best. It is easily and quickly pitched, and packs up in small compass. A crew of four would require a double-scutling skiff, while five would want a randan. The bow and stern of the boat should afford all the room required for the camp equipment if

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