NOTES OF AN EXCURSION TO CUMMINGS'S HEAD AND THE FALLS OF THE MEANDER, ON THE WESTERN MOUNTAINS, TASMANIA.

By W. Archer, F.L.S.

Accompanied by a friend and two servants I started on the morning of May 10th, 1848, for an excursion to Cummings's Head, a spur of the Western Mountains near Cheshunt, with the intention of visiting the falls of the Meander River, which I had seen before in the summer, when a mere silvery thread of water was all of them that was visible. We hoped at this season to find a large stream flowing over the dark basaltic rocks of the mountain side. Our provisions consisted of 4lb. of cold meat, 12lb. of bread, 3lb. of rice, 5lb. of sugar, and ¾lb. of tea; and we took with us an opossum-skin rug, a pair of blankets, and a light tent weighing 3¾lb.—besides the usual accompaniments of matches, knives, tomahawk, &c.

At the foot of the mountain we first passed through a gum-tree forest, with a thick underwood of "native hop" or "bitter leaf" (*Daviesia latifolia*), mixed with the "native indigo plant (*Indigofera tinctoria*), the "clover tree" (*Goodia lotifolia*), red and white Epacris (*Epacris impressa*), "prickly beauty" (*Pultenæa juniperina*), the common "fern" (*Pteris aquilina, var. esculenta*), and other less conspicuous plants, all destitute of flowers at this season; and then entered a dense thicket composed for the most part of "musk-wood" (*Eurybia argophylla*), "dog-wood" (*Pomaderris apetala*) "daisy-tree" (*Eurybia lirata*), "stink-wood" (*Zieria lanceolata*), "fern-trees" (*Dicksonia antarctica*), and the common "fern" 6 and 7 feet high—growing beneath gigantic trees of "stringy-bark" (*Eucalyptus robusta*), "white-gum" (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) "blackwood" (*Acacia melanoxylon*), and "silver wattle" (*Acacia dealbata*)—and rendered almost impenetrable by the huge trunks and branches of fallen gum-trees, and a net-work of nettles (*Urtica incisa*), with the rope-stemmed Clematis (*Clematis coriacea*) and Lyonsia (*Lyonsia straminea*), here and there, stinging our hands and faces, or tripping us up as we scrambled and cut our way through the entangled mass of vegetation. To the right of our track were some many-crowned fern-trees (*Dicksonia antarctica*), one with about thirty crowns—a wonder of the vegetable world,—and somewhat further on we came to a white-gum tree of enormous height, towering far above the surrounding forest, and rising to an altitude of some 300 feet, with a trunk about 40 feet in circumference at a height of 4 feet from the ground, tapering

very gradually up to the first branches, fully 150 feet from the base.

At the height of 500 feet from the plain—about 1,400 feet above the level of the sea—plants which grow to a height of 30 feet on the low ground are dwarfed down to shrubs. "Native box" (*Bursaria spinosa*), for example, is here a thorny little shrub a foot to 18 inches high, and the small-leaved Coprosma (*Coprosma microphylla*), is reduced from 12 to 2 feet in height. At an elevation of 2,000 feet above the sea, the character of the vegetation is altered considerably, and the gum-trees lose the straightness and slenderness of their branches, and their now spreading tops approach the ground more closely. The "waratah" (*Telopea truncata*), 3 feet high, and "wax-cluster plant" (*Gaultheria hispida*), 2 feet high, grow here among the rocks; and a little higher up the pretty little Tetracarpæa (*T. Tasmanica*) makes its appearance. Huge masses of rock, detached from the crags above, are now met with, and the shrubs and trees have a somewhat battered and straggling form, until the summit is reached, when they are found to assume a dwarfed and more compact appearance.

On reaching the summit, we rested for awhile from our labours, and ate our dinners, water being found in a little hole which I had previously dug beneath a dripping rock. Before starting again, my friend and I clambered to the very apex of Cummings's Head, where there is a little plateau of a few yards square. From this spot, situated at the brink of a terrific precipice, there is a wondrous view of the country lying to the west, north, and east, including the towns of Deloraine and Westbury in the middle distance, and the northern line of coast as far as the eye could reach to the eastward, and for a considerable distance to the westward, until shut out by Mount Roland and other intervening mountains. Wishing to get the bearings of some of the principal mountain peaks, and especially of Quamby Bluff, rising in solitary grandeur on the east, I placed my compass on one of the rocks of the plateau,—when, to my great surprise, the bearing indicated was due west instead of due east; and it turned out that the local attraction was so great that the points of the compass were all reversed as long as the compass remained in direct contact with the rock. On removing it from the rock, and raising it to the height of three feet above it, I found the bearings restored to their true position. This fact shows how careful explorers should be in availing themselves of commanding points for the purpose of fixing the positions of their camps of rest or observation; or the routes to be taken in order to reach other localities. We now

descended about 400 feet, to a plain lying between the heads or sources of two rivulets, one flowing to the east and entering the Meander, just above Archer's Sugarloaf, and the other flowing to the north-west into Dale Brook, near Gibson's Sugarloaf.

Upon this plain are found the large "mountain ranunculus" (*Ranunculus Gunnianus*), with its bright, varnished yellow flowers, purple underneath, and much-divided leaves, and the curious little "Caltha" (*C. introloba*) both found also on the Victorian Alps by Dr. Mueller,—a little yellow-flowered "Stackhousia" (*S. pulvinaris*), occurring also on the Gipps Land mountains,—a prostrate little Pultenæa (*P. fascicularis*), gathered also on the Cobberas Mounts in Victoria,—the singular little *Liparophyllum Gunnii*, belonging to the Gentian tribe, found nowhere else in the world, small large-flowered plants of the "mountain gentian" (*Gentiana montana*), found also on the mountains of Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia,—the little *Mitrasacme Archeri*, found nowhere else,—*Euphrasia alpina*, *striata*, and *cuspidata*, the first found on Mount Kosciusko in New South Wales, and on the Cobberas Mountains in Victoria, a most singular little plant—and the last nowhere but on the Western Mountains, Mount Sorell, and Mount La Perouse in Tasmania; besides several other plants peculiar to mountainous localities, and some that are found also on the plains, such as the common "tea-tree" (*Leptospermum lanigerum*) which grows here in thickets to the height of 12 to 15 feet.

We erected our light tent—made of unbleached linen, and enclosing a space of six feet by six feet and a half—and leaving the servants to procure a large supply of dry fire-wood for consumption during the long and cold night, made our way down the valley of the eastern rivulet. After descending about 200 feet to a spot where the rocky sides of the valley rise steeply from each bank of the stream, we came to fine specimens of different species of the largest kinds of "mountain pine"—as I generally call it,—*Athrotaxis cupressoides*, *selaginoides* and *laxifolia*,—and also the "celery-topped pine" *Phyllocladus rhomboidalis*, which occurs also on the Meander near Cheshunt. Here were also many beautiful and rare mosses, clothing or fringing the rocky margins of the brook; here I found a pretty white violet,—found also in New Zealand,—*Viola Cunninghamii;* here, straggling among the rocks, is *Decaspora disticha*, with its little clusters of purplish berries. Having gazed our fill at the rare and noble trees and curious alpine plants around us, and made a collection of botanical specimens, we returned to our tent.

One side of the tent being left open towards the large fire,

we passed a comfortable night, sleeping on a bed of tea-tree branches, with our feet towards the blaze, and only waking when the diminished heat warned some one of us to put on more wood. The coldest part of the night was—to use the words of a well-known song—"2 o'clock in the *morning*," owing partly, I suppose, to the fire having died down at about that hour.

We started very early next morning in a direction nearly due south, in order to skirt a rocky gully, the hidden source of Dale Brook, and then crossed a plain in a south-easterly direction. On our way we passed through a large quantity of the mountain *Bellendena* (*B. montana*), a handsome glaucous-leaved small shrub, with pointed spikes of cream-colored flowers, followed by reddish-brown pods,—an alpine form of that very graceful branched fern, *Gleichenia dicarpa*,—the pretty and rare *Eurybia abcordata*, only found on the Tasmanian mountains, with its wedge-shaped leaves, toothed at the apex, and daisy-like flowers,—the bright "green cushions," bespangled with the disproportionately large berries of the tiny *Pernettya Tasmanica*, a plant of the heath tribe, found only on the mountains of Tasmania,—and the beautiful little *Gaultheria antipoda*, not found anywhere else in Australia, but occurring on lofty mountains of the Middle Island, New Zealand,—the cider-tree (*Eucalyptus Gunnii*),—and many other rare and interesting plants. On the plain just mentioned we found a small group of the cypress-like "mountain pines" (*Athrotaxis cupressoides*), with a ragged and broken-down appearance. Shortly after passing them we began to ascend the western end of the Ironstone Mountain range, and came upon a kind of saddle between the trigonometrical station and "West Bastion Bluff." Here we found that curious little coniferous plant, *Microcachrys tetragona*, lying, here and there, perfectly flat on greenstone rocks, whose surfaces were nearly level with the ground; and then, keeping too much to the left, we passed through or over an underwood of a dwarf pine, about four feet high,—which attains to the height of ten feet in very sheltered situations—called *Diselma Archeri*, with many straggling branches so close to the ground, that if one put one's foot between instead of on them, one's progress became slow and exceedingly laborious. My friend, who did not succeed well in making his way through them, on coming up to me, botanising while waiting for him, requested me particularly to tell him the name of the plant, "in order," as he said, "that he might hate it all his life."

Looking from the top of West Bastion Bluff we saw Lake Lucy Long—a somewhat appropriate name—extending in a

lengthened, narrow sheet of water to the westward, on the plain below. Far away to the south-west the Frenchman's Cap stood up against the horizon, and to the southward lay the Lakes Augusta and Ada, and the other waters of the Nineteen Lagoons. Turning to the left after leaving the saddle, and skirting the upper part of Ironstone Mountain, we proceeded nearly in the direction of the Split Rock trigonometrical station, passing over ground covered with *Astelia alpina*, and soon came to a small lake, which proved to be Lake Meander, the chief source of the Meander River.

Leaving Lake Meander, with its bright and pellucid water, and scrambling down the bed of a rivulet running towards the east, we soon found ourselves at the brink of a vast precipice, over the face of which the water of the rivulet was falling in a long silvery sheet, frayed at the edges into foam and liquid ravellings, and plashing into a nearly circular basin. Before us lay, in grand ruggedness and confusion of huge crags and great bare patches covered with rocks and stones, interspersed with lines and clumps of small trees and straggling shrubs fighting a hard battle of life for bare existence, the immense gorge at the bottom of which the rapid and winding Meander rushes along its sounding course to the plains below. This gorge extends upwards beyond "The Falls" for about a quarter of a mile, and terminates in a short curve where a stream runs under rocks from a pretty, little shallow lake, not far off, which I named "Lake Pediluvium," for a reason which can be as well imagined as described. From the cliff, to the westward of the end of the gorge, The Falls looked like a tiny thread of silver, suspended from the brink of the precipice above, and we could not hear the noise they produced, after our rough scramble down the rocks and through the shrubs at the end of the gorge, until we were within about fifty yards of the pool into which the water tumbled after its gigantic leap.

On viewing The Falls from the front they had the appearance of an unbroken descending line; but, on moving to the right or left, it became evident, at once, that they consisted of two parts separated by the basin which we had seen from the summit of the rocks. When standing close to the foot of the lower fall the effect was very grand, as the broken sheet of bright water, splashing, foaming, hissing, rent into a thousand fragments, then united, fell in a continuous torrent at our feet, just, in a word, as "the water comes down at Lodore."

One of my companions mounted to the summit of the lower fall, close to the basin, which we had seen from above, somewhat of a circular outline, and found it to

be about 100 feet across. From thence he let fall a stone, attached to a ball of twine, until it reached the foot of the lower fall. On measuring the length of this line afterwards I found it to be 150 feet. Judging by this ascertained height, the upper fall must have been fully 200 feet high,—making 350 feet in all.

After refreshing ourselves, and dividing our provisions into equal shares, in readiness for such emergencies as being lost, or being the victim of hungry companions, we started on our way homewards.

A little way above the Meander on the left bank, to which we had crossed immediately after leaving "The Falls," a fine specimen of the mountain pine called *Athrotaxis selaginoides* met our view. It was covered with its small cones just ripe, and afforded a rich harvest to one of my companions, who was on the look-out for such treasures. A little higher up the pretty *Pimelea sericea* occurs, a small shrub, with very pale green leaves, smooth above and covered beneath with long, silky hairs, and bearing (in December) rather large heads of flowers. Passing through a grove of small gum-trees, (?) *Eucalyptus coccifera*, and leaving the eastern bluffs of Ironstone Mountain on the left, we had to scramble across a plateau of great rocks, like those near the summit of Mount Wellington, with deep caverns beneath them into which there was much risk of falling, and then found ourselves on a plain sloping gently towards the river on our right, and dotted with small gum-trees and various shrubs. Here we pitched our tent near a bright little rill, many of which flowed across the plain.

Next morning, pursuing our way northwards, we found a large patch of *Coprosma nitida*, a kind of "native currant,"—as it is absurdly called, merely on account of the colour of its fruit,—thickly covered with its shining, crimson berries. It occurs also on the Bau-Bau Mountains of Victoria. On the plateau of the mountain above us may be found another and much smaller species, (*C. pumila*) which is found on the Bau-Bau and Cobberas Mountains of Victoria. Two much larger species,—*C. hirtella* with much larger berries and leaves, and *C. Billardieri* with berries and leaves smaller,—grow on the lower ground, the latter being very common in some localities. The berries of all the species named have a similar and by no means pleasant flavour.

By the side of a murmuring rivulet which we now crossed, were growing some beautiful plants of *Athrotaxis laxifolia* with its graceful pyramidal form, and delicate branches covered with bright yellowish-green leaves, only long and spreading enough to give the branchlets a somewhat serrated appearance, as they waved in the breeze. The *Athrotaxis* previously mentioned

(*A. selaginoides*), with longer and more spreading, prickly leaves, is more prized in England than this species; but I think this is the more elegant of the two. The third species (*A. cupressoides*) is a much more sombre tree, with smaller and blunter leaves closely appressed to the branchlets. All the species are, I believe, peculiar to Tasmania.

Among the many shrubs through which we now walked and, sometimes, struggled, may be mentioned *Persoonia Gunnii*, with its olive-shaped leaves and black sloe-like fruit,—*Orites revoluta*, *Decaspora thymifolia*, *Tetracarpæa Tasmanica*, *Eurybia pinifolia*, with its pungent leaves,—*Ozothamnus Hookeri*, and *Bœckia Gunniana*. Above us, at a height of about 400 feet, was the summit of the mountain, to which we clambered by a sinuous course over the loose stones, taking care not to move until we were all proceeding in the same direction, in order to avoid rolling down the stones on each other. Arrived at the tolerably level ground above, covered here and there with flat rocks, or with great stones among the smaller shrubs and grass, we could see Cummings's Head to the northward, while the Ironstone Range, with its trigonometrical station and its "Bastion Bluffs," lay to the south-west, behind our left shoulder.

"The cider-tree" (*Eucalyptus Gunnii*) was plentiful on the stony rises, and various alpine shrubs grew beneath its shade, or on the open ground. *Sprengelia montana* and *Cystanthe sprengelioides*,—both of the *Epacris* tribe, the latter closely resembling *Sprengelia incarnata*, but with the peculiar calyptrate flowers of the genus *Cystanthe*,—are found here. Here are the "green cushions," already mentioned, so well-known to mountain excursionists, at first sight appearing to be composed of one plant only, but proving, on examination, to combine four or five; for instance, *Scleroleima Forsteroides* and *Pterygopappus Lawrencii*, both plants of the Composite Tribe,—*Coprosma pumila*, of the Madder Tribe,—*Pernettya Tasmanica*, of the Heath Tribe, and *Oreobolus Pumilio*, a cyperaceous plant, are all found densely packed together in a green, rounded mass, dotted here and there with the drupes of the *Coprosma*, and the berries of the *Pernettya*, or powdered lightly with the tiny flowers of the various plants composing it. The little *Rubus Gunnianus*, of the Rose Tribe, with cream-coloured, bramble-like flowers, followed by blackberry-like fruit of good flavour, occurs in dry sandy spots; the common burr (*Acœna Sanguisorbœ*), of the same tribe, exhibits its patches of pretty green, wrinkled leaves, smaller and more wrinkled than those of the variety on the low ground; *Eurybia persoonioides* and *E. alpina* of the Composite or Daisy-flowered Tribe,—thrown together into one species by Bentham, but differing in some

important particulars,—are seen, often close together, with their leaves, dark green and glossy above, and covered with densely-packed hairs beneath,—the flower-heads (daisy-like flowers so-called) of the former being several together on long slender stalks, while the latter bears single, larger heads of flowers, on short, stout stalks; *Boronia rhomboidea* and *B. pilosa*, with their pretty, pinkish, four-petalled flowers, and leaves smelling like Rue; the little Mountain Sundew (*Drosera Arcturi*), found also in Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Africa, &c., with its largish, white flower,—and the tiny *Claytonia australasica*, of the Purslane Tribe, found also in New Zealand and America,—*Nertera depressa*, a very small plant of the Madder Tribe, found in Victoria on the Bau-Bau Mountains, and on the banks of the Snowy River,—*Liparophyllum Gunnii*, a little plant of the Gentian Tribe, which occurs in Europe, &c.,—*Ourisia integrifolia*, of the Foxglove Tribe, a small plant, found likewise in New Zealand,—the little Bladder-wort (*Utricularia lateriflora*),—and some other small plants are to be found in wet places; *Cryptandra alpina*, of the Buckthorn Tribe,—the curious little *Stackhousia pulvinaris*, with its stamens, abnormally, of nearly equal height,—the handsome great mountain Daisy (*Celmisia longifolia*), the large mountain Bachelor's Button (*Craspedia monocephala*),—a variety of *C. Richea*, found also in south-eastern Australia,—*Craspedia alpina*, found on Mount Buller in Victoria,—*Raoulia catipes*, of the Daisy-flowered Tribe, in whitish tufts,—the mountain *Gnaphalium* (*G. collinum*, variety *monocephalune*,)—the minute *Mitrasacme Archeri*, the singular little *Pimelea pygmæa*, the remarkable little Rib-grass (*Plantago Archeri*,) with its minute flowers and its leaves closely appressed to the ground, and hairy on both surfaces,—all these occur, here and there, with numerous other plants, over the area between Cummings's Head and Ironstone Mountain. There is also the extraordinary little Eyebright (*Euphrasia cuspidata*), together with two other herbs of the same genus (*C. alpina* and *C. striata*)—to be found on the little plain below the summit of Cummings's Hd. to the southward. We noticed also, between and among the rocky rises farther back, plants of *Diselma Archeri*, and *Microcachrys tetragona*, together with *Podocarpus alpina*,—all belonging to the *Coniferous* or Pine Tribe.

We returned to the summit of Cummings's Head, passing through a wood of dwarfed Beeches, called Myrtle Trees, (*Fagus Cunninghamii*), a little after noon; and having eat n our dinner and refreshed ourselves with bush-tea, and enjoyed again the extensive view over the low country lying to the westward, northward, and eastward, we descended the mountain, and thus terminated a pleasant and most interesting excursion.