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CLIMBING IN CUMBERLAND.

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IT may well be thought a hopeless task to interest the members of this Club in such an everyday matter as the English Fells, or to invest with any sort of dignity a subject so exceedingly small of scale. There is, moreover, a twofold difficulty; half the Club know much more about my subject than I do myself, and the other half will not believe that any pleasure can be got out of climbing at only two or three thousand feet above the sea. The latter may, perhaps, pardon something to my patriotism, and look with leniency upon an attempt to encourage a home industry. For Lakeland there is none of the romance which surrounds explorers of the Caucasus or Himalaya—they are the tiger-slayers of our craft; my position is rather that of the humbler class of naturalists who bide at home and patiently investigate the social system of the ant, or the private habits of the domestic flea. There was a time, and that not so many years ago, when it was popularly supposed that there was only one climb in Lakeland, but that one climb was of so utterly gruesome a character that no one could attempt it, and yet preserve a reputation for sanity. Striding Edge is still there. It is still gazed upon by every tourist who ‘climbs the dark brow of the mighty Helvellyn’; but its interest to the climber of to-day is purely antiquarian. Sharp Edge on Saddleback was next discovered; but its reputation was short-lived, and since then the Pillar Rock has been the only climb of which the outer world knows anything. In fact, the stay-at-home reader is apt to draw for himself a picture of Lakeland which might fairly represent a certain square within a

hundred miles of this room—namely, as one magnificent monolith, rising from a picturesque, but rather uneven piece of ground, with bits of water here and there, invaded from time to time by noisy and malodorous mobs. They might almost add to the parallel that it is closely connected with national art, and to some extent overlooked by the Alpine Club. Yet among the most assiduous frequenters of our English fells are men at the sound of whose names the unconquered peaks of Caucasus and Himalaya tremble with affright; for, just as the true lover of poetry is not always in the mood for the loftiest style of all, so the true mountaineer knows that, though you cannot have an epic without a certain bulk, a mountain of many thousand feet is not necessarily an epic, for it may turn out to be a prize-poem; while among hills of modest elevation he will generally find climbs which are in effect smart and stimulating epigrams. And among our fells we have some very good epigrams indeed, for they conform strictly to the old definition, and are precisely bee-like—short, with some sweetness and some sting.

All the best climbing lies round Wastdale Head; to that spot a happy chance directed me, and this was how it came about.

One summer, many years ago, I had agreed to join two reading parties. The arrangements for one of these fell to me. None of us had ever been to the lakes or heard the very name of Wastdale Head; but we procured the Ordnance map of Cumberland, found that there was on it a sombre region thronged with portentous shadows; found out that there was an inn at a spot which seemed the centre of all this gloom, and finally engaged rooms at Dan Tyson's for a month. Long after this was settled, the other party, which had talked of Scotland or Wales, suddenly veered round and pitched upon the same spot. Thus it came about that my first visit to Wastdale lasted over two months. The dale was at that time divided into two hostile camps. Will Ritson had just given up the inn to Dan Tyson, while the farmhouse was kept by 'Dame' Tyson, of 'fratching' memory. She supplied no meat but mutton, and no drink but milk, and pointed the finger of scorn at the old beer-bottles and beef-bones outside the rival establishment, testifying to the disgraceful luxuries which prevailed within. The name of the farm being 'Rawhead,' we used to refer to this standing feud by the name of one of childhood's heroes, 'Rawhead and Bloody Bones.' My first month was at Rawhead, and this was a great stroke

of luck, for here we found and became acquainted with Mr. F. H. Bowring, in whose mind we soon found an exhaustive catalogue of every rock and every gully in the county. For eight hours in every day we absorbed Aristotle and Plato; for six or seven we scoured the surrounding fells, and climbed furiously. In this way we soon began to develop a fine taste in gills. It is one great merit of a climb if it clearly defines itself. When A makes a climb, he wants B, C, and D to have the full benefit of every single obstacle with which he himself met; while B, C, D are equally anxious to say that they followed the exact line which Mr. A found so difficult, and thought it perfectly easy. And this is why so many of our climbs are gills. If you climb just to amuse yourself you can wander vaguely over a face of rock; but if you want to describe your climb to others, it saves a lot of trouble if you can say:—‘There, that’s our gully! Stick to it all the way up.’

And really there are few places where gully climbing in all its branches can be more readily learnt. Gullies with vertical walls and well-nigh vertical backs are to be found on almost every fell. Many, even of the shorter gullies, contain exquisitely artistic pitches. *Deep Gill*, for instance, already described in the *Journal*,* contains two remarkable ones in the space of some fifty yards; while those of *Pavey Ark*, *Great End*, *Doe Crag*, and *The Screes* could not easily be matched anywhere.

Of climbs which are not in gullies, the *Pillar* takes the first place, and surely it would not be easy to find anywhere a piece of rock which contains so rich a variety of climbing. It has no obviously easy side, and at many points of it climbing may be found as difficult as anyone is likely to require. The west side was first done in 1826, the east about 1860, the south in 1882, and the north in 1891. Even in 1826 it must have been pretty well known, for a local paper of that date says that it had been ‘attempted by thousands before,’ a statement which, considering the paucity of visitors to *Ennerdale*, would, if literally true, carry back the art of the rock climber to a very remote period.

Next to the *Pillar* in popularity stands *Micklethorpe*, the passage from the *Pikes* to *Scafell*, bristling with good climbs, among which are *Deep Gill* and the ‘*Deep Gill Pinnacle*’ or ‘*Scafell Pillar*.’

Then there is *Great Gable* with its fine precipice towards

* See *Alpine Journal*, vol. xiii. pp. 93, 178.

Ennerdale, and facing Wastdale with Great Napes, which, besides two capital ridge-climbs, contains the curious *Napes Needle* so frequently photographed.

In those days we were heretical in our attitude towards the use of the rope. Not having one ourselves, we were inclined to scoff at those who had; and in the gall of bitterness we classed ropes with spikes and ladders, as a means by which bad climbers were enabled to go where none but the best climbers had any business to be. The real truth is that, till you are hardened to it, it requires much more nerve to climb with the rope than without it.

In those days we used the rope once and only once; but it will possibly be thought that the deed deserved but little grace of congruity. There were two of us, and each felt that he was doing a very mean and shabby thing. It is not uncommon to see ropes borne as an 'honourable addition,' and openly, not to say ostentatiously. With us it was different; we wore it like monks doing secret penance, and, concealing our shame under our coats, sneaked away to our climb and roped. If we had been a pair of jockeys conspiring to do the same thing, we could not have thought it a more disgraceful proceeding; and so completely unnerved were we by the sense of iniquity that when we began the descent (which was sufficiently nasty) there was quite a scramble for precedence. Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all!

But there are crimes of blacker dye than that of not using the rope; and to one of them we should then have had to plead guilty.

Several hundred years ago there lived in the west country a worthy knight, as to whose sanity doubts arose. The record of the inquisition then held shows that the charges made against him were short but sufficient:—'habuit se diu in lamentabili continentia et per se libenter ambulavit; 'he was distressingly abstemious for a long while and enjoyed walking by himself.' We were far madder than the old knight, for we lived on mutton for a month, and sometimes went out climbing by ourselves.

These heresies such of us as have not given up climbing have long since abjured. Perhaps the first thing which tended to my ultimate conversion was a little incident on the *Pillar*. There were only two of us, my youngest brother being the other, and we were on our way down after an unsuccessful attempt on the Face. We had of course to overcome many obstacles then, which better knowledge of

the rock has since rendered avoidable, and we had reached a point a good bit higher than had been reached before, and as high as any reached since, up to the day when the whole climb was accomplished last year. We had had nearly enough of it and it was getting late. So we decided to venture on a quicker descent beside the Nose. This way quite justified our expectation, and in less than an hour we were again standing safely on the terrace. The descent, however, was what a French guide would call 'bien rapide,' in every sense, and lay chiefly down long, steep slopes of smooth rock. It was in getting down to these slopes that one of us nearly came to grief. A long slab lay on edge parallel to the wall from which it had been cleft and at the top of a precipitous slope. It was necessary to pass along to the end of this slab and then to round a corner. This would have been easy; but it so happened that at the very corner a block not unlike a milestone had fallen upright into the gap and quite stopped the way. My plan was to lie prone and push my feet backwards over the block, so as to drop off as soon as my chest was well over the top of it. My hips were just over and I was beginning to think of choosing my drop when to my horror I found that instead of being firmly wedged as I had supposed, the huge stone had merely rested by its weight (more than a ton) and was coming over with me! My first idea was to pull frantically with my arms and force the mass back into equilibrium. It was like trying to straighten the Tower of Pisa.

The rock came slowly over, checked every now and then by the friction of some excrescence, the pressure increasing frightfully with every minute of inclination. Meanwhile, the jagged top was buried in my waistcoat and the weight of my legs and body made it hopeless to disentangle myself. My fingers were numb with the long strain, my arms seemed to be slowly drawn out of the shoulders. It was a matter of only two or three seconds more, and I called out to my brother to go down as we had come up, and to go slowly as he would have to go alone. But at that instant an idea struck me. Letting go with my right hand I rolled over on my left side, wrenched my waistcoat free of the stone and hung over the precipice by my left hand only. If the stone did not fall quickly I was lost. It seemed to hesitate, but then came slowly over. My right hand seizing the tottering mass and weighing heavily upon it eased for a moment the strain upon my left; then as the great stone dipped for its first plunge my right foot swinging up on to it, and kicking

viciously downwards gave sufficient upward impetus to enable my right hand once more to clutch the hold above. It was a near thing; but a moment later I swung into the cleft just vacated by the stone. My arms were numb, my lungs empty, my mind an utter blank. I felt, rather than heard, my late enemy thundering down into the valley, and meanwhile some one near me grunting and gasping out, 'autis—epeita—pedonde—kulindeto—laas—anaides.' The grunter was myself!

ZERMATT AND THE BREITHORN IN 1830: FROM THE DIARY OF THE EARL OF MINTO.

Aug. 25.—From Sion, after buying worsted gloves, coloured spectacles for those who had not already provided them, a provision of cord, and black worsted stockings, and sausages, we proceeded to Tourtemagne, where we slept. Here we saw a forest of considerable extent on fire. It had been burning for several days, and notwithstanding the efforts of some hundred persons it was obvious that it would consume all that remained to leeward. Like the other hills that bound the right side of the Valais, this was very precipitous, and the burning trees and logs rolling down carried the fire to all parts of the forest below them, and even created some alarm for the fate of a village considerably below the boundary of the forest.

Aug. 26.—The guides went on early, and we followed them about 7 o'clock. Between 8 and 9 o'clock we reached Visp. Our party consisted of the following persons:—Mr. Hildyard, William,* and myself; Joseph Marie Coutet † was chief guide; Julian Devoussoud, Michel Devoussoud, Jean Michel Cachat, Mathieu Balmat, Michel Balmat, David Coutet, Alexis Devoussoud, and Ambroise Paccard. It would have been difficult to collect a more gallant company of adventurers than we had about us; indeed, most of our companions are men celebrated for their adventures, and had been selected by Coutet as the *élite* of the Chamouniards, upon whose courage and skill he could the best rely in any dangers or difficulties we might have to encounter. Our leader, Coutet himself, is unquestionably the most enter-

* The late Earl of Minto, then a boy of sixteen.

† Lord Minto's spelling of proper names, both of persons and places, has been retained.