

tain in Georgian) was the name given to Dr. Radde for the range on this side at Glola.

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SNOWDON AT CHRISTMAS 1878.

BY H. G. WILLINK.

WHEN the following paper was written, the practice of winter mountaineering had scarcely arisen, and climbers went into winter quarters as regularly as did the Middle Age armies. Even now there may still be some members of the Alpine Club who have not yet treated themselves to a Christmas campaign. In the fear that this may be so, and in the hope that, if so, such members may be interested in an account of a visit to Snowdonia at that time of year, I have ventured to send the story to the Journal. It has the merit of having been composed while the scenes described were still fresh in my memory, and perhaps even those to whom such scenes are familiar may find a superior kind of pleasure in reading it.

The floridity of the original narrative has been left unshorn. It will at any rate add to the amusement of the latter class of readers, if it does not tend to the edification of the former. It was written before my style had had much opportunity of being chastened by the study of austere Alpine literature.

I had often wished to see whether Wales at Christmas could combine the beauties of an Alpine summer with those of an English lowland winter.

I had never forgotten a certain walk in the Pyrenees, from Eaux Bonnes, over the little Col de Tortes, to Argelès, on January 20, 1875; but for some reason or other all plans of such an excursion nearer home had year by year come to nothing, the only consolation

in each case being that after all the loss had not been so very great in so mild a season. In December 1878, however, it seemed likely that in the event of another disappointment no such consolation would exist, and I was, therefore, hardly surprised on the evening of the Saturday before Christmas Day to find myself (with W., my brother, L. his wife, and E.) crunching over the snow, from the station at Llanberis up to the Victoria Hotel, with the ugly quarry-tips on the side of Elidyr Fawr looking quite strange and unfamiliar in their white nightgowns to the left. It was a fine frosty night, stars clear overhead, though there was cloud on the higher parts of the mountains, and we soon resolved to make a start for Snowdon the next morning, all four of us, and get at least as far as L. could go; she, on her part, submitting to ride as far as a pony could be taken before beginning to walk. There was no slackening of the frost during the night, the morning broke sharp and fresh, and by soon after ten o'clock our little procession was passing through the short wood with which the well-known tourist 'route to Snowdon' commences.

From the first it was evident that we were to have a day of no ordinary beauty. Lofty masses of cumulus had, for at least an hour before the sun touched upon the mountains in our view, been ruddy in the morning light, contrasting finely with the pure pale indigo of the lower clouds. There was that indescribable spirit in the air when it seems to be purged of all its grosser constituents, and to be more transparent and more refined to every sense than usual. But as yet—except for the tender glow in the clear heaven above, for there is a warm blue sky as well as a cold one—it must be confessed that there was something rather disappointing in what we saw. The somewhat shapeless hills which are visible from the Llanberis track looked more shapeless than ever—mere white forms with a delicate outline—each patch of rock, from the black spots on Eilio to the base of the crags of Clogwyn-dur-Arddu seeming to be close at hand.

Suddenly, however, the brow of Moel Eilio was crested with a slender line of light, compared with which the driven snow at our feet was but dull grey; and as the day stole down over the shoulders of the hills, the effect of the broad illuminated surface was like a second sunrise long before the direct rays reached us. There is no cause to complain of shapelessness now. When did you ever see such subtle gradations in a hill contour before? Each ridge and swelling, each dimple and knoll, revealing itself in the infinite beauty of mountain perspective, the deepest shadows varied and relieved by reflected light, the highest lights softly blending, it is impossible to say where the change begins or ends, into the tender shade. And as the day grew, so did the intensity and multiplicity of tint seem to grow with it; there was no dull monotonous glare, as is so often the case in a summer noon; nor was there any haze except away to the north over the low land. This was covered with a thickish pall of mist, lurid above and murky blue below, an atmospheric Hades to which were consigned the coarser colour spirits of the every-day world, lying dead and hidden under its winding-sheet of snow, while around us up in the hills, wherever the eye turned, it beheld a very

heaven of colour, suffused with all the more ethereal hues set free from their gross embodiments of form, in everchanging harmony.

Meanwhile, however, we have been plunging along through the powdery stuff which, at a distance, lends such enchantment to our view and are beginning to feel that, if L. is to reach Y Wyddfa, she will have to come home by the light of the moon, and there will be no moon to come home by. The pony has been sent back long ago, and we sink often up to our knees, over the ankles at every step—hard work for a lady in an ulster. The guide leads, not only that he may keep us on the track (which is not very important), but that he may make the foot-holes for us; *ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte*. Half-an-hour more of this made it obvious that any idea of pushing on to the top must be abandoned, and we looked only to attaining some point at the edge of Cwm Glas Bach for the view into the Pass of Llanberis. But the fates were against us, the mist rather spread than dispersed, and, though we gave the weather every chance of clearing by spending a needlessly long time over lunch at the little refreshment hut (of course, uninhabited, and standing deep in snow), we were finally compelled, after some conversation with the echoes of Clogwyn-dur-Arddu to give up, and come back, as, indeed, our sagacious Cymro had all along foretold.

The next day W. and L. left us, and E. and I made a very interesting expedition to Pen-y-gwryd by way of Cwm Glas, and back by the road. The drifts which we fell in with, and into, on this occasion were, I think, deeper than any which we afterwards came across, E. being unable to obtain soundings in some of them with his six-foot alpenstock. The great steep-sided hollow had acted as a perfect snow trap. This state of things, of course, very greatly increased the toil of ascending; especially as it was in most cases impossible to tell whether a slope of snow to our front was resting upon a corresponding slope of terra-firma, or was nothing but a drift piled up against a more or less vertical face of rock; and if the former, whether or not the slope of ground was of a nature to afford good or any hold for feet or hands.

Often it turned out to be coated with ice, and often after some minutes' exercise we found that we had but laid bare something that we should never have dreamt of trying to get up if we had been able to see it. The art of climbing steep soft snow is in fact an art by itself, and like all high arts requires practice and patience. Probably a calendar month's treadmill would be good training: or *vice versâ*. E. developed a fine turn for it, and rapidly rose above me, though I imitated his graceful wriggings to the best of my power. Once up at the level of the floor of Cwm Glas proper our chief difficulties were over, though it was necessary to cut a dozen or so steps in a little ice-wall, formed several inches thick where the drainage of a spongy bit of ground is wont to find its way down over the side of the ridge of rock that hems it in. The icicles which we passed on our way up (and which were plainly visible from the road) were very large and beautiful, the big bluff which lies immediately below the smaller of the two lakes being densely hung with them: they represented the two pretty

falls which in open weather drench the whole cliff. Some of them were considerably thicker than the body of a man, and many feet long ; while their colour and brilliancy were well set off by the sombre background of rock behind, the darkness of which varied with the thinness of its own coating of ice.

One of the most striking characteristics of the hills in winter, which we could not help noticing perhaps more on this day than on any other, was the absolute silence in places which in warmer seasons are jubilant with streams. It was all of a piece with the general unearthly nature of the magic world around us, and it was not without an impressiveness, a solemnity, of its own ; but on the whole it seemed a loss rather than a gain.

There are surely few things more fascinating than that sense of open space arising (in great measure) from the subdued ceaseless murmur of the myriads of brooks and torrents on a mountain-side. It is to the ear what the extended horizon is to the eye ; and goes perhaps as far towards completing the charm of the upper world. How much of that charm consists of sound—whether it be this same far off water music, or the burn chirruping close at hand, or the dumb sighing of the tree tops, or the melody of the homely cowbells, or the many other still small voices which can never be heard by ear or heart in the busy hum of men (though there are voices, plenty of them, there too which speak to those that listen) ! All who love the hills know them. Wordsworth had them in his mind's ear when he wrote

And sure there is a secret Power that reigns
 Here, where no trace of man the spot profanes,
 Nought but the herds that, pasturing upward, creep,
 Hung dimdiscovered from the dangerous steep ;
 Or summer hamlet, flat and bare, on high
 Suspended, 'mid the quiet of the sky.
 How still ! no irreligious sound or sight
 Rouses the soul from her severe delight :
 An idle voice the Sabbath region fills
 Of Deep that calls to Deep across the hills,
 Broke only by the melancholy sound
 Of drowsy bells, for ever tinkling round ;
 Faint wail of eagle melting into blue
 Beneath the cliffs and pinewoods steady sough ;
 The solitary heifer's deepened low,
 Or rumbling, heard remote, of falling snow.

Byron's poetry is full of them, and it is hardly possible to hear the latter part of the overture to the opera of 'William Tell' without being carried away in fancy to the higher Alpine pastures and their peaceful surroundings.

The sounds proper to such places as Cwm Glas are, it is true, in many respects different, though they, too, have their value in 'acoustic perspective.' But they on their part are not without their peculiar charm. No spot seems so wild and rugged as where the precipitous cliffs repeat the turmoil of cascades, and the raven's croak echoes back harshly from the crags around.

On this day, however, when the waters stood spell-bound, and the

very cliffs were muffled, even Cwm Glas lay in a trance which no shouts of ours were able thoroughly to break.

At Pen-y-gwryd we heard a great deal about the severity of the cold and the depth of the snow; how the sheep could get nothing to eat, and had to be supplied with hay spread on the lower parts of the hills; how the frost had already lasted some weeks; and how even the River Glaslyn at Beddgelert was frozen over, so hard that a man had walked across with a load of hay on his back. It was, in fact, said to be the hardest winter that had been experienced in North Wales since the year of the Crimean war. The exterior of the inn was itself a sight, with snow lodged upon it at every conceivable resting-place, the ivy stiff with ice, and long icicles drooping from the eaves, while the snow in front of the house was almost level with the seats under the firs, a strong contrast with the warmth of the hearty welcome and the comfort of the chimney corner in the familiar kitchen! [Dear old kitchen, how art thou now translated!]

The next morning saw us starting from the Victoria Hotel for Snowdon in perfect weather, with scarcely a cloud in the sky, though our walk past Gorphwysfa overnight had been through a blinding snow-storm. The fresh snow of the day before and the drifting winds had in most places obliterated our old track of forty-eight hours ago, and, long before getting as far as the half-way hut, we were striking out a line of our own, at first by accident, afterwards by choice. The half-way hut, indeed, we never approached, nor could we even discern it, though there was nothing in the state of the weather to prevent our doing so. We were above it, and covered as it was we failed to distinguish it from the numberless other white mounds. It was disappointing to find that the snow was again too soft and powdery to bear our weight even high up on the mountain; we had hoped that the successive influences of sun and frost would have caused something in the nature of a hard crust, especially as on the Sunday the last few minutes of our advance had been partly over a surface of that kind. Still, we could see that the windward flank of Crib-y-ddysgyl ahead of us was of a dull grey, and we floundered slowly towards the nearest part of this, cheering ourselves with the thought of the good progress we should make when we reached it.

To our surprise, however, when we did set foot on this promised land, we found that it was neither more nor less than a coating of granulated snow-ice some inches thick, not rough enough to give foothold even at the moderate angle of 30° , or thereabouts, at which it was set, and too hard to stamp the feet into. There was nothing for it but cold steel, so the axe went to the front, and for twenty minutes it was necessary to enjoy the pleasure of making the back ache with cutting steps. More by token, E., who had no axe, slipped and went down a long way, and I had to cut down and bring him up.

However, in due time the slope eased off, and we were able to walk erect for a few minutes without thinking of our feet before reaching the soft snow again on the flatter portion of the hill. The view was beginning to open out; Moel Hebog, "The Rivals" in Carnarvonshire, and most of Anglesey had long been in sight; and we were soon looking

down towards Cwm Dyli from Bwlch Glas, and were assured of a clear horizon nearly all round.

What a strange place it was! The whole length of the saddle between Crib-y-ddysgyl and Y Wyddfa was edged with a massive cornice of snow overhanging the 'Capel Curig path,' or rather the place where the path ought to be. We had heard from our guide on Sunday that four weeks ago (the last time he had been on the mountain) he had come thus far, and had turned back, not liking to go on, or to try to get down through the cornice to Pen-y-gwryd; but we had been inclined to think that he had been over-discreet, and we had fully intended to make short work of any little obstacle which we might find. But this was no toy-cornice: we could see very well where the true edge of the ridge ran, and from that line to the edge of the snow was a good five yards, while we could also see that even below the part which absolutely overhung the snow stood nearly vertical for some little distance before the slope began, which finally eased off to a manageable angle.

So we gave up the idea of descending that way [funked it, in short] in favour of the Beddgelert ridge, which we felt sure we should find a safer route. The first thing, however, of course, was to go on to the top, which presented no difficulty whatever, and by half-past one we were in possession of the prize. And is it not a prize worth a plod of three hours and a half? Not a cloud is in the sky; not a single hill hidden! From Plynlimmon round to Elidyr Fawr, from Cardigan Bay to the mouths of the Mersey and the Dee, all is clear—only the slight haze to the north-west. And all is white. At this distance even the rocks of Cader are not distinguishable, and the entire face of the earth from north to south, from east to west, for miles upon miles is one wide undulating sheet of snow. The effect of aerial perspective in point of colour is odd, the distant hills seeming to be of a warmer, duller white, with a tinge of red in it, which appears fainter and fainter in those nearer to us, until the highest pitch of light is reached in the blinding snow at our feet.

The shadows are blue, reflecting the hue of the sky, which above, especially as against the dazzling brilliancy of the cairn (now like a huge white bush), is as dark as any Swiss sky in summer. Look at Crib Goch, his sharp, ragged edge frosted with delicate filagree work, almost enough to tempt one to go and have a look at it! It would be cold work for the hands along there to-day, even with so little wind. Look at shapeless old Siabod, and the swelling range of Cribiau, Moel Meirch, and Cynicht; how the modelling stands out, like a plaster-cast! Now is the time to learn hill-drawing. But it is far too cold, even here in the sun, for anything but a hasty sketch or two, and, besides, we have not had lunch.

Five minutes after taking our gloves off they were frozen hard; my beard and moustache were stiff with congealed breath and frozen snow which had got there from some tumble in a drift; our woolly clothes were tagged with little bobbins of ice which tinkled as we walked, and later on towards evening we found our axe and alpenstock covered

with jackets of ice formed by the freezing of snow melted by the friction and warmth of our hands.

The rocks near the summit presented a very curious and remarkable appearance. On the north-western side they were adorned with a shaggy fringe of snow-icicles which stood out in most cases more or less horizontally to a length often of 2 or 3 feet.*



The effect was that of heavy tassels blown out by the wind; and we jumped to the conclusion that it was in some such manner that they had been formed; that is to say, that the individual drops of wet had been swept round to the sheltered side before they had had time to freeze, and had then turned into icicles continually increasing to leeward of the object to which they were attached. This appeared to be particularly obvious in the case of the larger rocks, the huts, and the cairn; here the wind had apparently, in its eddies and swirlings behind each obstacle, so affected the formation of the ice in course of congelation that the icicles had taken shapes in conformity with the wayward direction of these windy 'backwaters,' and were twisted and grooved inwards from the edge of their shelter, frequently in exceedingly graceful and symmetrical patterns. Indeed, it never occurred to us to doubt that this was the proper way of accounting for them, even though on our second ascent they faced the wind then blowing, and though we might well have suspected that a south-easterly gale would not have been likely to be blowing in the weather and during the time required for their deposit. In the visitors' book, however, at

* The whole question of 'Aerial Perspective' and of the 'Theory of Turbid Media' is lucidly explained by Mr. John Collier in the two following treatises by him, viz.: (1) *A Primer of Art.* Macmillan, 1882. Pp. 59 *et seq.* and 65 *et seq.* (2) *A Manual of Oil Painting.* Cassell, 1887. Pp. 100-108.

Pen-y-gwryd, we afterwards saw* a note by Mr. Biden, the purport of which may interest others as it did us. This gentleman had had ample opportunity of seeing the process in course of operation, having been up Snowdon some seventeen times in three or four weeks during the months of November and December some years ago; and his account, founded on careful personal observation, is, in spite of a different opinion once expressed (I think in the *Saturday Review* in 1861) by Professor Tyndall, that these icicles invariably grow *to windward*. The fact is, most probably, that a damp wind coming in contact with a surface the temperature of which is below the freezing-point is to the extent of such contact condensed and *pro tanto* parts with the moisture which it had held in suspension. This moisture, of course, immediately takes the form of ice, and in its turn is the means of catching more moisture, thus adding to the length of the icicle *in the direction of the wind's eye*. Mr. Biden has watched the visible growth of the accretion; † sometimes, on a small scale, even on blades of grass, and there can, therefore, be no doubt that this is the true theory. I have often remarked it since. Indeed, had we only been making proper use of our own eyes, I think we should have been led to suspect this ourselves, for on reading the above account we could recollect no case where a pure snow-cornice or drift (which are always, I believe, found under the lee of some protection) was on the same side of a ridge or other object as that upon which the icicles had collected. This was especially noticeable on the Beddgelert arête, which, at all times very fine, was rendered inexpressibly lovely by the exquisite variety of these Christmas decorations. Sometimes it would be a shaggy bunch of icicles standing out to our right, sometimes a thin curling crest of a cornice (always, however, on a far smaller scale than that overhanging the Capel Curig path) drooping over to our left, but at every step there was something new and striking to admire.

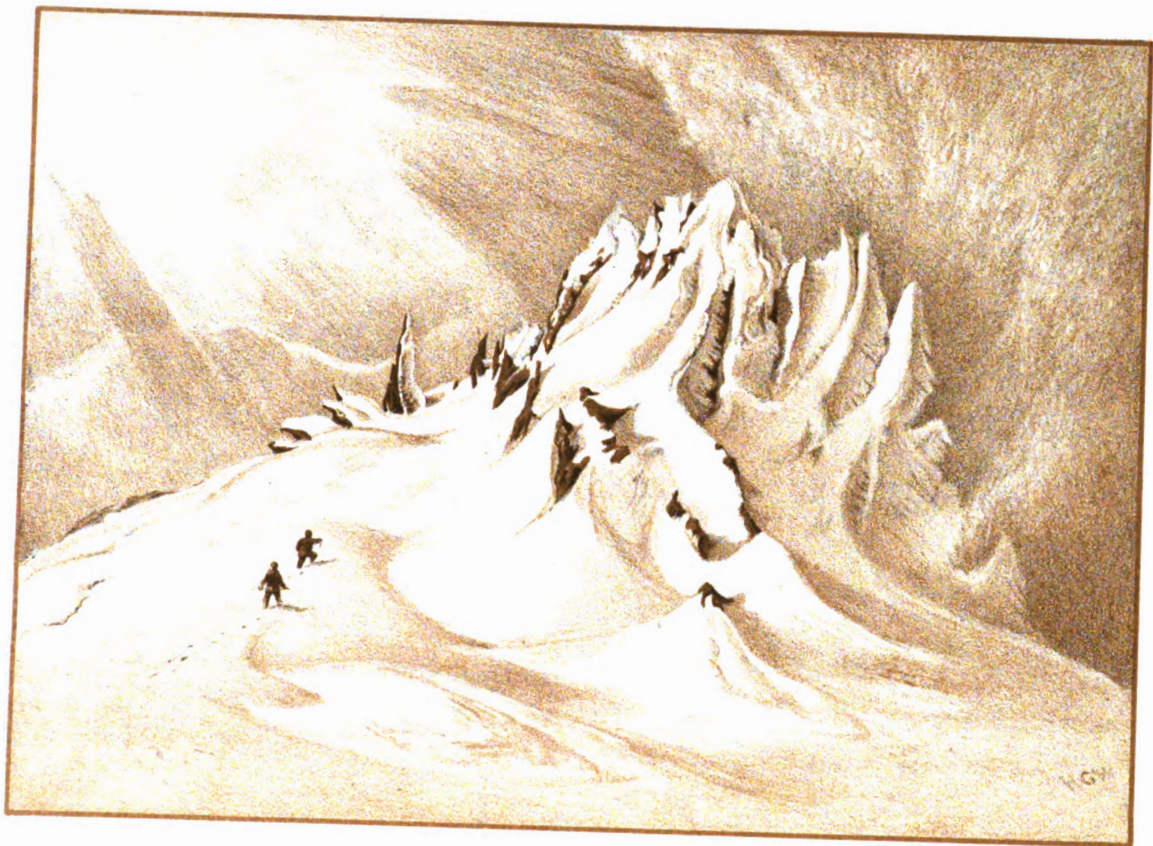
The days are short, however, in December, and Christmas Eve was fast coming on, so we lost no time in getting down to Nant Gwynant through Cwm Llan, where we astonished the natives whom we met, especially a man going out to shoot foxes, who utterly declined to believe that anyone could have come over Snowdon, let alone two helpless Sassenachs without a guide.

Llyn Gwynant we found frozen over hard; many sheep had evidently been across, and we walked some little way upon it ourselves; but there was snow to a depth of several inches, and no skating would have been possible.

The trudge up to the comforts of Pen-y-gwryd was long and laborious owing to the state of the road, but in every other respect it was a fit ending to a glorious day, the stars shining bright in a steely-blue sky to the eastward, against which, two hours after sunset, the shoulder of Siabod stood out white and distinct, while the vault of

* Unluckily only just before leaving, so that we were unable to see the truth of his theory for ourselves.

† The process has already been more than once visible in this winter of 1891-92 on shrubs and bushes.



CASTELL GWYNNT
THE GLYDERS

heaven paled in the west to a calm saffron glow behind Lliwedd and the other mighty peaks of the Snowdon group, each of which remained clearly visible until successively hidden from view by Y Foelberfedd.

Christmas morning was very different: no clouds that could be called clouds; but no blue sky; a nasty, dull, colourless day, with a queer sort of haze, which became thicker and lower till the evening closed with a howling wind and a snowstorm.

We spent the better part of the day on Glyder Fach. Our first intention was to take Tryfan as well, and come back by Glyder Fawr, perhaps having a look at Twll-du on the way; but there was nothing to see, by reason of the mist, and all climbing was impossible by reason of the snow. The great chaos of stones on Glyder Fach and Castell Gwynnt was a sight in itself; * we had looked forward to it with some curiosity, and not a little doubt whether we should be able to get about among those pitfalls and jagged pinnacles masked under a covering of deceitful snow. And, indeed, in other parts of the mountain we found this a great difficulty; it is rather startling to feel your foot sink suddenly a yard when you have made calculations in the belief that it will support you firmly; still more so to find it jammed between two bits of rock that put a very different construction to your own on the word 'foothold.' But up on the wide plateau of the Glyders, exposed to the same winds which had sheeted Crib-y-ddysgyl's northern flank with ice, the surface afforded very fair walking in most places; and it was generally pretty easy to escape breaking through.

It was a wild scene. The great hollow of Cwm Idwal is boiling with ragged clouds, which come tearing up as the fancy seizes them, to sweep overhead, and then whirl down again to the Devil's Kitchen, whence they have come. There is a mysterious lurid light in the mist; and through the gaps you catch glimpses of Snowdon with his supporters—how changed from yesterday—pallid and grim now. You can see the snow whisked up into driving whirlwinds along his ridges; and you know very well what those columns mean from the stinging of the icy particles against your face up here even under the lee of this big stone; not that there is really any lee side to anything on such a day as this. It is plain that Æolus has been letting the winds out of the bag again, and there is no Neptune nowadays, with his *Quos ego*, to come and set matters in order. And for a foreground what wizard has been at work here? Can this be Castell Gwynnt? Where are the piles of disintegrated blocks at its foot? Why does the sharp needle of rock on its southern side appear only half its usual length? Can it be that the base of the whole structure is buried deep in snow? It must be so. This rounded swelling surface, which sounds hollow to the tread, is a roofing below which the true level of the hilltop lies several feet down. And if you want icicles, just look

* It was interesting here as elsewhere to see in operation on so large a scale the process by which to a great extent these heaps have in course of time been formed, nearly every cleft and crevice being filled with ice, that render of rocks.

at the north side of the rocks. Those on Snowdon yesterday are nothing to these. Great bristling bundles of them pointing into Cwm Idwal, and all (consistently with Mr. Biden's theory) sprouting from the side opposite to that against which the snow apparently lies drifted deepest. His thermometer on the Little Glyder will register a pretty intense minimum. Our human mercury is sunk quite low enough, and nature's clock within us is also suggesting that by the time we get back to Pen-y-gwryd it will be time for roast goose. So, after a shivering sketch of Castell Gwynnt, we gave up the other Glyder and away down by the shortest possible line, chuckling at the thought of the snug parlour and the still snigger kitchen afterwards; and feeling, perhaps more keenly than ever before, what a winter campaign must often be—where there is no goose, no fire, no roof even, but an open-air bivouac on an empty stomach, with the prospect, it may be, of having to fight for the enjoyment of that too before morning.

Christmas Day proved to be the turning-point in the weather: the day after was comparatively mild, with a rather strong wind from the south-west, the clouds being low, and nothing visible above 1,800 feet. We went up Snowdon, nevertheless, keeping approximately to the 'Capel Curig route,' in company with young Harry Owen, who, after our account of the wonders on the top, wished to see them for himself. The redoubtable cornice was nearly all gone, the masses of crumbled snow bearing witness to its former size, and we had no difficulty whatever either in ascending or descending, only the long heavy plod through soft snow. The redeeming feature was a rather good sitting glissade, which we all executed according to our lights, with evolutions more or less beyond our control, Harry Owen displaying perhaps the greatest amount of centrifugal eccentricity.

For the rest of the week thaw continued, making all things disagreeable and causing us to give up any idea of visiting Crib Goch or Cwm Idwal; for to wade through deep damp snow, set sometimes at steep inclinations, for hour after hour in a mist is excessively unpleasant, and to climb on rocks the real nature of which is completely hidden is next to impossible.*

We saw one more sight, however, before leaving which was full of beauty, and that was on the day we left Pen-y-gwryd, the 29th, when the sun came out late in the afternoon and lit up the landscape with almost as much effect as on the first day after our arrival, while the steaming wreaths of cloud drifted leisurely up the gullies and round the ridges, bathed in a flood of golden light. The streams, too, were at work again after their Christmas holidays, and Cwm Dyli rang once more with the gossip of the waters. Another couple of days and the lower hillsides would be bare and easy to walk upon; already they were dappled with spots and streaks of mother earth; but the change came too late for us, and the next night we were in London again.

* A fatal accident on Snowdon occurred not many days later.