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“WASTDALE HEAD AT EASTER.”

By LEHMANN J. OPPENHEIMER.

IT seems hardly credible that a village lying at the foot of some of the grandest hills in England, and only a few miles from crowded tourist centres, should be undisturbed by the accompaniments of a civilization to which so many of our most beautiful spots have fallen victims ; yet, thanks to the inconveniences of approach, Wastdale Head has escaped. As yet, no signboards point the way to the best scenery, the waterfalls are unenclosed, the mountain sides undesecrated by railways. Many a day have I spent rambling with an ecstatic sense of perfect freedom over Great Gable and Sca Fell, seeing no one from morning till dusk, and hearing only the far-away roar of the becks below or the shivering clatter of scree beneath my feet. Yet if anyone should go to Wastdale at Easter, hoping to enjoy the mountain solitude—“the sleep that is amongst the lonely hills”—though other and unexpected enjoyments may be thrust upon him, in his hope he is likely to be disappointed.

In my mind's eye I see a pedestrian, rejoicing in his escape from town after three months of work and worry, hurrying up from the coast to reach Wastdale in time for breakfast. As he nears the hotel, with appetite whetted by a night in the train and a dozen miles walk, he hears an unwonted hum of voices, and entering the yard he finds a group looking up at

and shouting to a man who seems stuck like a fly some ten feet up the rough wall of the barn, feeling with one hand amongst the open joints of the stonework for a hold higher up. He stares a little at these antics, but being on the wrong side of breakfast he wastes no time, and passes on to more important business. From the hall he catches sight of the innkeeper's daughter passing from the kitchen to the coffee-room with a huge dish of ham and eggs, and shouts out, "Good morning! can you give me a bedroom for a few days, and something to eat at once."

"I'm afraid not, sir," she says shyly, and glides past into the room.

"What! I can't have breakfast! What's the meaning of this?" he says to himself, following her in astonishment to the coffee-room door.

"As I'm alive, some day-trippers have forestalled me and taken possession of the place. What a rough lot they look—what a Pandemonium."

He waits to waylay the lassie as she returns with a pile of empty porridge plates, but meanwhile the kitchen door opens again, and a fine old fellow with the face and gait of a Cumberland shepherd appears.

"Ah! good day, Mr. Tyson! I wanted breakfast and a room for a few nights, but it seems doubtful whether my wants can be satisfied."

"Eh, sir! every room in the house was taken two or three weeks ago: there's some folks a-sleepin' i' the smoke-room, and some i' the barn—not a bed to spare nowheere, and they're full up at Burnthwaite too."

"How provoking—I've often been here in the height of the season and never had any difficulty in getting a room; I thought at this time of the year I should almost have the place to myself. Some trip from Barrow or Whitehaven, eh?"

"Eh, no: there's only a two three gentlemen fro' these parts: mostly they're from all over England—London and Oxford and Yorkshire and Manchester, and I dunno wheere all: they come up every Eastertide, a lot of 'em—a daft lot.

But there'll be a second breakfast presently—there are some hangin' about outside waitin' for it.”

At this moment a wild-looking, unshaven individual enters, without collar or tie, and with knickerbockers well torn and patched : he gazes abstractedly at the traveller, and passes on into the coffee-room.

“ Who in the world is that Bohemian ?” our friend asks.

“ Oh, he comes fro' some place down i' the South—they say he writes verses and plays, but I dunno much about that sort o' thing. An awfu' clever sort o' chap, but ye can never mak' out what he's drivin' at. There are some comin' out now ; they'll have finished, so if you're wantin' summat to eat you'd better get a seat afore some other body comes in.”

Breakfast is proceeding merrily : the talk at the table is loud and jovial, for the majority in the room have met at least half of those present before, either here or at Pen-y-Gwryd or amongst the Alps, and have plenty of tales to tell and experiences to compare. The Bohemian combs his hair with his fingers before joining the company, which, however, seems hardly to expect such a work of supererogation from him. Only three very proper young men, with well starched collars and cuffs, turn and look up with wonder as he takes a vacated seat next to them, one dropping the lower lip slightly and another raising an eyeglass. But indeed, he is not the only unconventional figure at table. Most of the others wear jerseys or coarse flannel shirts without collars : some are breakfasting without their jackets, which are still at the fire recovering from the vicissitudes of the previous day. The only one whose attire can be called dainty is the Christ Church undergraduate. He wears a white flannel shirt, fastened by a silk cord with tassels, instead of a stud, and he has no waist-coat to hide the hardly visible white embroidery down the front. The patches on his jacket have been so carefully sewn on as to be inconspicuous. His watch is carried for safety in a small leathern pouch fastened to his belt, but he does not take the same care of an exquisite Greek cameo which he wears set in a gold ring of Venetian workmanship, for the

scars on the back of his hands shew that it has been often in peril of a too close acquaintance with the rocks. He and the Bohemian represent opposite tastes in dress, but, though extremes in appearance, they are extremes that in higher matters meet.

Much of the conversation at breakfast takes the form of speculation and prophecy. Various parties are inquiring how much the barometer has fallen and discussing whether the day will be better for rocks or snow, arêtes or gullies.

Presently the three faultlessly dressed ones retire. "Do you think those men are climbers?" the Bohemian asks loudly, looking round the room with affected doubt in his face, amidst roars of laughter. "I merely ask," he continues, "to acquire information, and seeing that they display some interest in the subject. One of them made some inquiries about the lunatic who was performing on the wall outside, meaning, I presume, our friend the Photographer doing the barn-door traverse."

"It's like you to call me names in that underhand way," replies the Photographer, "but we're in the same boat you know—'the lunatic, the lover and the poet,' as your friend says."

"Do I look like a lover?" the Bohemian asks with feigned simplicity.

"Oh, you're not going to entice me into flattering you by saying you look like a poet."

Several men now move off, laughing as they go. The room is gradually emptying. The Yorkshire party has been in earnest over breakfast, hardly stopping to talk, but the Christ Church man, though one of the first down, is still dallying with his knife and chatting with a member of the Alpine Club beside him.

"I must confess," the latter is saying, "that I like these little English climbing expeditions better in many ways than the Swiss ones. A good English breakfast and a night's rest at the back of it are delights to begin with. You go out into the fresh morning air readier to enjoy the mountains than after

having been rudely wakened at one or two in the morning, sitting down cold and half asleep to a roll and cup of coffee, and tramping for an hour or two along interminable moraines and glaciers by the feeble light of a candle.”

“But then, think,” replies the undergraduate, “of sitting down to breakfast at dawn amongst the snows; the solemnity and stillness of it all: the great Alps towering above in sunlight through the mists of the morning, to say nothing of the meat and wine and raisins and honey, tasting as food never tasted in an hotel.”

“Oh, yes! I grant all that: I don’t mean what I said quite seriously; but at the same time there are certain enjoyments connected with English climbing that you don’t get amongst the Alps, and do you know, too, I think that whilst there isn’t the hundredth part of the danger, the standard of difficulty is higher here.”

“Oh, how can you say so?” the Christ Church man ejaculates.

“Well, of course I know that any of the English mountains could be climbed by a boy of six or seven if he took the easiest way, as people do amongst the Alps as a rule, but a different system prevails here; the difficulties are hunted for, and in misty weather often can’t be found. You’ve been up the Grépon, haven’t you?”

“Yes, I climbed it with our Oriel friend last summer.”

“Well, there you have one of the stiffest Chamounix climbs, but it’s hardly as difficult as the end gully on the Screes or Kern Knotts Crack or half-a-dozen other recognised ascents here.”

“I’m afraid you have me in a corner now, for I was beaten by Kern Knotts Crack only yesterday; still I won’t give in, because there are more than mere gymnastic difficulties in the Alps. No, to my mind the only great advantage that England has over Switzerland is the absence of the professional element.”

“Well, as far as that goes you needn’t take guides unless you wish.”

"That may be all right for you after all your experience," replies the undergraduate, "I wouldn't like to attempt it; but there is a great charm about the compulsory reliance of two or three firm friends on each other here. I shall feel far more delight if we succeed in getting up the crack to-day by ourselves than if Simond or Burgener led the way."

How long the conversation will continue seems doubtful; the room is becoming deserted, and we will follow the deserters into the hall. In it stand three pairs of well-blacked shining boots, and some forty or fifty others streaming with oil; strong and heavy, the soles and heels completely surrounded by curiously shaped nails. All the men who can crush into the little standing room left are trying to discover their belongings; outside some are hammering fresh nails into gaps made the previous day, and on the stairs others are attempting to extricate their ropes from the many which wind up the staircase, strained tight round the newel posts, reminding one of Wordsworth's Yews—

"A growth
Of intertwined fibres serpentine
Up-coiling and inveterately convolved."

In groups of two or three the climbers stroll off with their ropes and ice-axes, and their pockets swollen with lunch. A couple of hours more, and the cliffs of Sca Fell and Great Gable will be ringing with voices, and the hotel will have resumed its wonted quietness. Our disappointed friend has departed with his knapsack to try for better luck at Rosthwaite, and the three tourists, attired in mackintoshes, are wandering along the road towards the lake.

"Well, I'm awfully glad to get away from those rowdy fellows," says the man with the eye-glass.

These tourists look wonderfully alike at the first glance; they have all such a monotonous air of conventional respectability about them, but their uniformity is merely superficial. The most sensitive and æsthetic of them is revelling in the scenery, and hoping in vain for some expression of appreciation from his companions. Half way down the lake they turn and

stand long looking back towards the head of the valley. “What a splendidly buttressed pyramid the Gable is,” he says to them, “and just look at those clouds blowing along between its peak and those sharp rocky teeth just beneath it.”

The bumptious little tourist puts up his eye-glass. “Yes, awfully jolly—like washing day, isn’t it? That’s where those fellows at the hotel must be: I asked one of them where that awful looking rock was that there are so many photographs of in the dining-room, and he told me it was up there. They’ll be getting drenched in the cloud and seeing nothing: I’m blessed if I can imagine where the fun comes in: it can’t be much of a lark fagging up those insane places in the wet.”

“Brag, sir! merely brag—that, I have no doubt, is their enjoyment,” adds the eldest of the three.

“Do you see that faint line across the mountain, lower down?” asks their more refined friend.

“Well, what of it?”

“That’s the path Gray writes about in one of those letters that are so much ridiculed to-day. He tells about coming up Borrowdale under the guidance of someone who informed him that beyond Seathwaite all access was barred to prying mortals; that there was only a dreadful track, impassable except by the hardy dalesmen, and open to them but for a few weeks in the year. That is the track, and as far as I remember he speaks about the pass at the top as the abode of Chaos and Ancient Night.”

“What rot! Why, the fellow we left at the hotel was going that way with quite a big knapsack: those old chaps talked a lot of nonsense about the hills: I don’t think they believed what they wrote themselves: I guess they wanted to blow a bit about the terrible places they’d been to.”

“I’m not so sure about that: mountains seem to exercise a very disturbing influence on our accurate observation of fact even now, and I believe they had a much greater effect in times past. I rather think our susceptibilities are getting blunted, to our great loss. Why have we come here now? Simply because we wanted something grander and more

impressive than the scenes round Derwentwater and Windermere: we have got so accustomed to the hills there that we begin to think them a little tame. Well, as far as I am concerned, I wish I could take Gray's place, enjoying all the luxuriant beauty of Keswick and Ambleside, and yet imagining the scenery there to be also savage and sublime, the roads 'only not perpendicular,' the cliffs impending and threatening to overwhelm. At least, I'm glad that the view before us satisfies my craving for grandeur, and that I haven't to risk my neck with those climbers in order to find it."

The elder tourist, somewhat uncommunicative as a rule, settles the matter by adding—"No one could find it in such company—men struggling to degenerate into the apes from which they have risen."

"How do you make that out?" asks the little man.

"Well, it is generally admitted that the hands and feet of infants are peculiarly adapted for climbing——"

"What's that got to do with it? You're going to prove we ought all to be climbers."

"My dear sir, as I was about to remark, these adaptations are vestigial; they indicate our ancestry: as we develop they become imperfect—the anthropoid ape in man tends to disappear; but those fellows at the hotel will not let it die; they attempt to return to a stage that is past."

"By Jove! I must play that card off on someone at dinner time. Oh! I say, rain again! What an infernal nuisance—let's turn and make for lunch."

All this and many other things I hear and see in imagination, as I plod with two friends up the breast of Lingmell, leaving conversation for flatter ground, but at last the shoulder of the hill is turned and the tourists forgotten as we stand gazing at the sunshine far away over the sea, and the solemn purple gloom of the Mosedale amphitheatre of mountains. The cliffs, whither we are bound, are still hidden from view

"In fleecy cloud voluminous enwrapped,"

but we can see the base of the great precipice, and that is enough to call up visions of the happy days we have spent on

it, and to make our hearts leap with joyful anticipation. A mile more of easy tramping up a grassy tongue between chattering becks, then a scramble up the scree-shoot that comes down from Lord's Rake, and we are at the foot of the cliff whose top is Sca Fell Pinnacle. Here we have a rest and a smoke, sitting where we can look up into Deep Ghyll, and watch the snow gleaming weirdly through the mist, high up the gully, like a phantom light between its dark, dripping walls.

At last we rouse ourselves to action, tie on the rope, sling the ice-axes over our wrists, and start clambering slowly round and up the base of the precipice into Steep Ghyll. Soon we are in the cloud, but the dampness is a trifle compared with the drenching we get from the rocks. We pull ourselves up on to a ledge, and the water trickles down both sleeves: we back up a narrow chimney, and are suddenly aware of a cold sensation about the patched part of our trousers, and finally we grow callous. Then comes some step cutting up the snow in Steep Ghyll, which we soon leave and work out again on to the face of the cliff as far as an almost isolated shelf, beyond which all further traversing seems impossible. Our only way now appears to be straight up, for the shelf ends abruptly and falls precipitously on all sides but the one by which we have reached it. A deep narrow cleft severs it from Sca Fell Pinnacle, and whether we look over the opposite edge or the one facing Deep Ghyll we can see nothing but perpendicular rocks beneath us descending into the mist. Ten or twelve feet above us, on the face of the main cliff itself, a fine looking chimney starts, though we don't feel sure that it leads to the top of the Pinnacle, and the rock on the opposite side of the cleft offers very few hand and foot holds by which to reach the chimney's foot. Instead of tackling it at once, we all three, finding the shelf just large enough, sit down on it with our backs to the difficulty, and for a while watch the cloud whirling round and below us. One of my companions is a strong, broad-shouldered, cautious fellow; he is appreciating the scene round our airy perch to the full, but he says nothing about it. The other is somewhat of a contrast. He is wiry and six foot

three high ; beside him I feel but a dwarf, and he has a reach long even in proportion to his height. It is a pleasure merely to watch him striding away over the mountains with his cap stuffed into his pocket and his face brimming over with delight. Whatever strikes him he says straight out, and often expresses for us what we all feel. As we sit on our perilous ledge, suddenly some huge dark object appears, moving steadily towards us. For a moment a shiver runs through us, then an exultant thrill, and my tall friend shouts out—" Oh, man ! how grand it is to be alive ! " The cloud is dispersing, and the vague shape of terror is resolving itself into the cliffs on the opposite side of Mickledore. A patch of blue sky follows, and presently there is sunshine on all the mountains round. Thin clouds form and trail and vanish again below us, and we hasten to get out of the shadow of the great cliff and into the warmth ourselves.

The difficulty proves by no means so serious as it looked. We steady the tall man as he reaches a high hand-hold on the opposite side of the cleft, and struggles into a place of security. Then we join him, give him a shoulder at the foot of the chimney, and follow him up it to the lower peak of the Pinnacle. Here we are in full view of the top, to which the Low Man is joined by an arête some fifty feet long, like an acute roof ridge tilted up at one end. This is the most sensational piece of the ascent, and at the same time the easiest. The ridge has to be crossed straddle-wise, one leg pointing down right into Steep Ghyll and the other into Deep Ghyll. Then comes a scramble over some broken rocks, and we are on the summit of the Pinnacle.

Here, in one of the grandest spots in England, with the snows and rocks of the Sca Fell chasms beneath us on either hand, a tumult of mountains round, and a distance of fertile valleys, glistening lakes and azure sea, our first thought is, sad to confess, of lunch. Pockets are soon emptied : bread and butter, potted meat, raisins, prunes, chocolate, crystallized ginger and brandy—a queer mixture, truly, and no doubt the three tourists lunching quietly at the hotel would have pitied

us as much as we pitied them. As I am spreading the meat on the bread and butter with my penknife, our tall friend says, “I wonder if either of you remember an old picture by Tenniel of a large modern plate-glass window, filled with tinned fruits and potted meats; outside, Romeo, in antique garb, is looking wistfully at the nineteenth century grocer’s stock, and below is the legend,

‘An’ if a man did need a poison now,
Here lives a caitiff wretch would sell it him.’

However,” he says, taking a large bite, “after your trouble in bringing the pot up that chimney, I’ll do my duty at all risks. Here’s to you, grand old pinnacle! But bury that pot under a stone, you lazy chap, and pick up the silver paper.”

“What ho!” shouts a familiar voice, and turning round we see the merry face of the Photographer appearing over the edge of the rocks on Sca Fell itself, followed rapidly by four others.

“Another first ascent?” we shout back, inquiringly.

“Not to-day; we’ve been in Moss Ghyll taking the direct finish; none of the others had tried it. Which way have you come? Steep Ghyll? Grand fun along the arête, isn’t it? You know there’s a new way now to the ledge below Slingsby’s chimney? O. G. found it out. Right up the angle of the cliff.”

The Photographer’s knowledge of the crags is most amazing—not only every climb, but every variation seems familiar to him. His party is a right jovial one, and finishing our lunch we descend from the Pinnacle to join it by the “Easy Way.” “How are the mighty fallen.” Before Haskett Smith made the first ascent, a shepherd was asked if he thought such a feat possible.

“Eh, mon!” he said, “nobbut a fleein’ thing ’ll ever get up there.” Now it is the “Easy Way,” and which is the difficult one there is no telling for any length of time. Until six years ago the route by which we have just ascended held the place of honour, and now there is some doubt whether the impossible looking one which then displaced it has not fallen in its turn. Soon those anxious to make ascents in new ways

will have to adopt the tactics of an old hand at the game, who last year succeeded in climbing a famous boulder, near Wastdale, feet uppermost.

By the time we have descended from the Pinnacle another group of men has joined the Moss Ghyll party, and Sca Fell presents a lively scene. One of the Photographer's companions bursts into song, and the Photographer himself tells us all kinds of stories about famous climbers who have been here. My friends are reminded of Professor Wilson's doings on Sca Fell Pike, and suddenly start a wrestling match in his memory, the tall man being thrown.

At last we separate, and our party makes off for Mickledore Chimney. We drop over the top blocks and cautiously cut steps downwards in the hard snow and ice with which the gully is choked. Lower down the snow is softer, and the leader, steadied by the rope above, can kick out holes for the feet, and as we near the bottom we indulge in a glissade. This proves so intoxicating that the strong man of the party, after unroping, rushes some way up the chimney again and again to enjoy the exhilaration of the rapid descent. Time after time he plunges up the snow, each time going a little higher and whizzing down more rapidly, until at last he loses his balance and ungracefully rolls over on to the scree below, amidst the laughter of less energetic onlookers. After this he thinks it might be well to sit on Mickledore Ridge and watch other mountaineers for a while, so we lazily look on at the desperate but futile efforts of two men to get up the first few feet of Collier's Climb. We tried the same thing ourselves for an hour the day before, so we take an envious interest in their struggles, and, our vanity being soothed by their defeat, we go round to shew them a way of circumventing the difficulty, invented by the Photographer.

On our way back to the hotel the tall man insists on our trying a few first ascents of our own on some fine looking boulders, and by the time Wastdale Head is reached, we are warm and damp and dirty and hungry enough to think of nothing but cold water, dry clothes and dinner.

Several parties have returned, and are lolling about in the hall waiting for the sound of the gong. As we sit down on the stairs to take off our boots the Bohemian walks in with his companions, remarking to the company at large, “‘My knees are weak through fasting; and my flesh faileth of fatness.’ ‘Bring me a cup of sack!’ Good Lord! what two fools belong to those laths in the hat rack? Bamboo alpenstocks!—tin ferrules tacked on to look like spikes!—spiral coil of summits burnt in and varnished at half a franc apiece——”

“Don’t talk so loud, old chap! they’re just in the smoke room round the corner.”

“Grindelwald, 3468 feet,” the Bohemian shouts, “a noble peak to start with—Wengern Alp, 6184—how I can see them ascending by the cog-wheel railway—Pilatus—Righi—Stanserhorn——” we hear him proclaiming down below as we make for our rooms to prepare for dinner.

At last the gong sounds, and the dining-room is rapidly filled. With what eager expectant faces all the company await the soup—everyone has plenty to tell of what the day has brought forth, but talk is not free until the first course is over: then the ring of voices rises, and dinner slowly proceeds to the accompaniment of a merry clamour of tongues.

The Bohemian has donned a tie and combed his hair, and the three faultlessly attired tourists begin to look on him as a fellow man. He first addresses my neighbour across the table. “Pray, have you seen two most egregious swells with lofty bamboo sticks?”

“Oh, those men with the marvellous alpenstocks? Yes, I saw them leaving the hotel in a trap shortly before dinner.”

“Aha! I am glad of it—their accent was of ‘Stratford-atté-Bowe,’ and I hold with old Christopher North that although a cat may look at a king, a Cockney should not be allowed to look at a mountain.”

“I suppose there were lively times at Wastdale when Christopher North descended on it,” says the literary tourist, anxious to get on to safer ground. “I once read an account of his pranks in a book of Edwin Waugh’s.”

"You observe that grey-haired old boy making yawning gaps in a leg of mutton? A Liverpool doctor—used to come here forty years ago, and knew Will Ritson well. Ask him. 'Verily,' he will say, 'the former days were better than these.' 'Foolhardy gymnastics,' he calls our climbing, though he tramps all over the hills to watch us. If you want to know about Wilson and Tyson and Ritson and the olden times, ask *him*."

"What sort of a man was Ritson?"

"Behold his portrait at the end of the room, with his clay pipe and mug of beer; the man who boasted that Wastdale had the highest mountain, deepest lake, smallest church, and biggest liar in England."

"Indeed!" remarks the tourist, "I've heard before of the first three, though the third is disputed, but never of the fourth. Who was he?"

"Why, Ritson himself, of course, while he lived, and though he is dead, Wastdale still maintains her supremacy. You will be convinced after dinner when you have heard the stories that will be told—climbing with teeth and eyelashes—sticking on to seamless perpendicular cliffs by the mere friction of tweed trousers——"

"Well, after looking at the photographs round these walls I am ready to believe almost anything. By the way, you yourself seem to have been trying to stick on to a cliff by the friction of the back of your hand: I hope you haven't injured yourself."

"A mere scrape—I foolishly jammed it in a crack—the smart is trifling, and 'the labour we delight in physics pain.'"

"That was not what you said at the time," interrupts the gentleman on the other side of the Bohemian.

"I probably said 'Damn,'" he replies.

"I would have respected you more if you had: as far as I remember you said—'Verily my flesh is consumed away that it cannot be seen, and my bones that were not seen stick out.'"

"You probably don't remember how that most apt utterance was followed by a noise as of 'the crackling of thorns under a pot.'"

“Oh! I admit that we were not very sympathetic, but it was too ridiculous to watch your pretended indifference to the scrape until you had got out your inevitable quotation.”

After this interruption the tourist continues—“How appropriately, from your point of view, this room is decorated. You have photographs of all your climbs round the walls to refer to, and at the end you have Ritson, whom, I suppose, you would claim as a kindred spirit, to remind you of the days that are past——”

“Yes, and you have a card forbidding smoking in this room at the other end, which reminds you that to-day is not as the days that are past, and is quite inappropriate from my point of view: but you’ll see we’ll remove the obnoxious document after dinner,” the Bohemian adds.

The unsociable elder tourist now hastens to get a word in. “While you are talking of appropriate decorations,” he interjects, “don’t forget the portrait hanging in the place of honour, looking down between those needles and cliffs and gullies like the corpse at an Egyptian feast: a powerful sermon, but you are all heedless of what it——”

“Sir, will you dare to say that if the Professor could come back to us now he would not approve——”

“No, no, no—I don’t want you to take it that way: I know he had the climbing fever like all the rest of you. I spoke with an eye on my friend here: I am afraid he is being seduced by the prevailing enthusiasm, and I wished to remind him that there is ‘mountain gloom’ as well as ‘mountain glory.’”

The Bohemian regards him with scorn, saying—

“‘Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once.’”

Dinner over, the company is scattered about the hotel, yet every room seems crowded. Some remain in the dining-room discussing the possibility of new ascents with the aid of the large photographs on the walls. In the smoke-room the sofa and chairs are all occupied, and several men are lying on the floor round the fire, leaning against other people’s legs, renew-

ing the adventures of the day and garnishing Swiss experiences of the summer before with lively flights of imagination. The veterans have a stock of stories about their guides, and every exploit recounted suggests to some one else another still more thrilling, humorous or improbable. As coffee is passed round, and the room fills with smoke, criticism slumbers: the narratives become more imaginative, and relate to far off periods: jokes from Leslie Stephen and Mummery pass as original, and raise a laugh for the hundredth time, and gradually the company settles down into a blissful dreamy state, thinking lazily of past victories and defeats that rise and pass and fade with the flickerings of the fire.

Meanwhile, the more energetic may be found in the billiard-room, shouting and laughing as the ball rebounds or flies off the table to the imminent danger of someone's head. "By Jove, what a game! No wonder we couldn't play this afternoon," the bumptious little tourist remarks to his laconic friend, "the ball must be covered with notches." The table is being used for a game of fives, and the partners are rushing wildly backwards and forwards, or into their opponents. The Bohemian stops to take off his coat—"Not that I love warmth less, but freedom more." And now, yet oftener, the ivory ball flies off and adds to its many dinges, until at last a collision between it and an enthusiastic spectator suggests a change. "Let's have the passage of the billiard table leg." All congregate round a corner of the table to watch one after another make the attempt. Only the Gymnast succeeds. He begins by sitting on the table, despite the warning notice above him of a half-crown fine for such an offence; he lets himself down gently, and, suddenly twisting round, he braces his legs firmly against the cross-bars underneath; from above nothing can now be seen of him but one hand clutching the cushion, but all are watching down below to see that he does not touch the ground. After a struggle his other hand and his head appear on the opposite side of the table leg, and a moment afterwards he is sitting breathless on the table once more, amidst loud cheers. Then the respective advantages of tall and short men

in climbing are discussed, and the heights and reaches of all in the room are marked on the wall. Next the billiard-room traverse is suggested, but no one responds. After much pressing the Gymnast consents to try. He takes off his coat and shoes, and placing his hands on the edge of the billiard table, he walks backwards up the wall to within a yard of the ceiling. Then he moves along the table and wall simultaneously with hands and feet, avoiding the framed chromolithographs as well as he may. With an enormous stride he reaches from one wall to another at the corner of the room, and is just saved from upsetting some half emptied glasses of whisky on the mantleshelf by the terrified shouts of the owners. The next corner is easier, and in the middle of the third wall he can rest his legs awhile on the window ledge. The fourth wall is more difficult again : it contains a large recess, too deep to reach from the billiard table, and only a foot lower than the ceiling. All round the angle of this he must pass before he arrives at the door, which is set diagonally across the corner of the room. This is the *mauvais pas* of the performance. The Gymnast cautiously brings one foot down until his toe rests on the latch hold ; then, supporting himself from the corner of the billiard table with one hand, he reaches the top of the door lintel with the other, lets go with the first, swings round in the opening, and catches the lintel on the opposite side also. Here he gets the first rest for his arms by jamming himself tightly in the opening with his back and legs. To complete the traverse in the orthodox way he has still to work along the passage as far as to the smoke room, and this, after an uncomfortable rest, he quickly does with back against one wall and feet against the other, finally opening the smoke room door and descending to *terra firma*. The tales and visions of the company there assembled are interrupted by cheers, and those who have missed the performance unreasonably clamour for a repetition. An old hand insidiously suggests that there are three variations of the move into the doorway, and the Gymnast is dragged back once more to try them. Then there are tests of balance, of wriggling through narrow chair backs, of hanging

on the rope and lifting people with it, and the evening wears away in attempting or watching all kinds of mad antics.

Outside, in the cold clear starlight, the literary tourist, having deserted his two companions, is walking up and down with the Oxford man, looking up in reverent silence at the dark silhouette of Great Gable, or discussing how best to enter into the spirit of the mountains.

"My own experience," the undergraduate says, "leads me to think that only by spending the night alone on the fell tops can you fully enjoy the grandeur and solemnity and the weird mystery of the mountains."

"If you feel so, why do you desecrate them by climbing about in their most secret recesses with those noisy fellows inside? I myself have at times felt a very strong inclination to climb amongst the rocks, but I have always been deterred by the thought of approaching them in such company—and perhaps by the danger that everyone talks about. I would like to go alone, but I am too afraid of getting into a fix."

"Well, do you know, you cannot have every kind of pleasure at once: there are joys of exertion and victory and of jovial company as well as of meditation amongst the lonely hills. As to the danger, I am afraid a very exaggerated idea of it prevails. Many people have certainly been killed on these fells, and I would not advise you to go rock climbing alone, but no serious accident has yet happened in the Lake District to any properly roped party, and a great amount of climbing is done here. I remember when I was a boy hearing that not half-a-dozen people had ever reached the top of the famous Pillar in Eunerdale; that there was only one way, and it was necessary to start with a particular foot first, for if you failed to do this you arrived at a difficult corner in such a position as not to be able to advance or retire. Well, of course this was all nonsense: there were at least six routes known even then, and plenty of people climbed it. Now there are nine principal ways and many variations: I should think over a hundred ascents are made every year, many of them by the long and difficult routes on the north face, so you may feel

assured that the danger is not so considerable. Will you come there with us to-morrow? I am sure you would enjoy it. The views are grand; every muscle will be called into action; ingenuity has to be exercised continually to overcome obstacles, and I promise it will make you feel alive in every fibre. But my enthusiasm for climbing is running away with me. You see I'm a believer in Scott—

‘Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife!
To all the sensual world proclaim,
One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name.’”

“Well, many thanks for your invitation: if my companions will allow me to desert them, I will go with you gladly. Merely as a lover of Wordsworth, I would like to see the Pillar.”

“Yes, but don't come in a Wordsworthian frame of mind: if your brain is pre-occupied with that ‘something far more deeply interfused,’ you won't do your share of looking after the rope. But I see candle flickerings in some of the upper rooms, which means bed-time, I suppose. I warn you, by the way, that you won't find the clothes you sent to be dried, outside your door in the morning. You'll have to hunt for your stockings amongst some four dozen pairs hanging over the stair rail, and someone else is sure to have run off with your underclothing by mistake—it's one of the amusements of the place. Good night, and good luck on the morrow!”

While writing these notes of my impressions of a Wastdale Easter, the joy of many visits to the place returned to me, and lightened the dreariness of Manchester for a while, but, in an evil hour, I shewed them to those who know, and they have rudely disturbed my tranquil enjoyment. My tall friend reminds me that my climbs with him were in the broiling heat of summer; asks me if I don't remember how we tramped over from Keswick; how some Oldham trippers rattled past us in a waggonette, shouting out, as they caught sight of our ropes—“Eh, sithee! they're goin' a 'angin' sumbody;” how elated we were when one of our heroes, who has taken part in half the first ascents in the district, also overtook us on his bicycle, and got off to shake hands, and to wish he were free

to go along with us. He reminds me also of the bilberries we found on our way up the north side of the Pillar, when the heat of the day had parched our throats, and of the wonderful stride he managed to take in getting up Collier's climb.

My brother, too, says that I went up Sca Fell Pinnacle with him, and not with the tall man; that the three tourists and many of the incidents belong to the year before, and, above all, that I haven't made the people half jolly enough.

This cannot be denied, and I begin to remember myself that I have described the snow in the gullies from a still earlier Easter, when the Engineer was kind enough to initiate me into the mysteries of the game. Truly, I seem to have got into hopeless confusion.

But, after all, why should I be bound down by fact? Why should I omit incidents, typical of the place and season, because they happened a mere year or more too soon? From a higher standpoint than that of correctness of detail my account is true, and I would fain hope that some fellow-climbers, reading these notes of what I have most vividly retained of the delights of Eastertide at Wastdale Head, may be reminded of their own experiences there, and live them over again in memory.

The time passes all too quickly. For barely a week the overflowing hotel resembles topsy-turveydom, and the hills are dotted with pigmies. Then comes a sudden change. The climbers drive or tramp off. Once again the hotel is left to hardy pedestrians and lovers of quietness, disturbed only by occasional coaches bringing people up from Seascale for the day. Once again the mountains resume their lonely spell. Cragmen will come at times, but their manners will be more reserved. Tourists will appear at breakfast, wearing cuffs and ties without exposing themselves to derision, and may even hire ponies and guides to Sca Fell Pike without being looked on contemptuously.

But the climber will find delight at Wastdale, whether he go in or out of season, and will be puzzled to decide whether he enjoys most the wild seclusion at the one time or the outlandish life and good fellowship at the other.