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MRS. OWEN AND HER GRAND-DAUGHTER.

T H E

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REMINISCENCES OF PEN-Y-GWRYD.

By C. E. MATHEWS.

“Shall I not take mine ease in mine Inn.”

—*Henry IV.*, Part I., Act 3.

Is there any hostelry within the British Isles to which the sentiment of Sir John Falstaff above quoted could be more justly applied?

In these modern days a man goes to his Hotel and is known for the most part only by the number of the room he occupies. If he gets what he requires and pays his bill, the contract between landlord and customer is fulfilled. But who ever stayed at Pen-y-Gwryd, in the days of the Owens, without receiving a courtesy and an attention which irresistibly compelled him to return; without forming a friendship, indeed, an affection, for two of the worthiest souls ever born and bred in the Principality.

It was my good fortune to make my first visit to Pen-y-Gwryd and to ascend Snowdon in the spring of 1854. On a certain day in April, 1901, I found myself the only visitor at the Inn. I toiled up the mountain when deep snow was lying between Glas Llyn and the summit. On my return I missed, with profound sadness, the beaming faces and the warm welcome to which I had been accustomed for so many years.

Where was Mrs. Pritchard, who made pan-cakes for me in my younger days? Where was the gallant Harry Owen and his buxom and charming wife? Where were Catherine and Jane, their daughters; the most willing waitresses who ever attended to the wants of man? Where were the friends who climbed with me in midwinter on Snowdon and Lliwedd, on Crib Goch and Siabod, on the Carnedd's and the Glyders, in the days that are no more?

It required but little effort of the imagination to conjure up the ghosts of the departed. I could almost see their "old familiar faces." I could almost feel the pressure of their hands. I could almost hear the honest happy laughter I remember so well. Alas! for Pen-y-Gwryd. One custodian only was in charge, and he was "in possession on behalf of the receiver."

It falls to the lot of few men to pay a visit to the same spot with more or less regularity for a period of nearly fifty years. So many happy memories are associated in so many minds with the home of the Owens, that I have thought that to recall some of them would not be an unworthy task, and that the story might prove of interest to the readers of this Journal.

It is not to be wondered at that Pen-y-Gwryd should have been so long a favourite haunt of the tourist. Its situation is superb. It stands more than nine hundred feet above the level of the sea. The sloping shoulders of Moel Siabod descend from the south almost to its very doors. It is protected from the north winds by the range of Glyder Fawr and Glyder Fach. The green slopes of Gallt-y-Wenalt on the west seem only the distance of the proverbial "stone's throw," and on the east the eye ranges over the lakes and woods of Capel Curig to the sweet and sunny distance far away. The immediate neighbourhood is, from its elevation, naturally sterile, and the mountain sheep would like a richer pasture, but all the approaches are beautiful. From Carnarvon the traveller reaches it by the pass of Llanberis, the summit of which is only a mile distant. From Conway the route lies through

Llanrwst and Bettws-y-Coed, by the banks of the Conway river, and those who remember it before the railway was opened, will recall one of the loveliest walks in Britain. The once enchanting village green of Bettws—beloved of David Cox—is now spoiled by a hideous railway station, from which the traveller gladly turns away. Thence to Capel Curig the scenery is beautiful, the moorland stretching on to Pen-y-Gwryd has its own peculiar charm, and who can forget the approach from Beddgelert, and the glories of Nant Gwynant! I know few views more delightful than that which is seen in looking down this exquisite valley, when the lakes are flashing in the sunlight, or when, far beyond them, the stately Hebog, like topmost Gargarus, “stands up and takes the morning.”

But it is not the splendour of the situation or the glory of the view which gives to any dwelling its subtlest and most indefinable charm. It is the human interest with which it is associated. “It is the people that lend interest to the world.”

Henry Owen was born at Castell Farm, Nant Gwynant, and on the 8th of May, 1847, at the age of 25, he married Ann Pritchard, at the Parish Church of Beddgelert. He had taken the Inn, and a farm which adjoined it, shortly before his marriage, immediately after which event Mr. and Mrs. Owen became landlord and landlady of Pen-y-Gwryd. They had ten children, two of whom died in infancy. Five of the sons—Harry, John, Owen, Griffith and Hugh—survive their parents. Of the daughters, Catherine, now Mrs. Williams, and Jane, now Mrs. Lewis, also survive; and Annie, whom the former generation of Welsh climbers will so well remember, became Mrs. Roberts, and died at Bryntyrch, near Capel Curig, in 1898.

After Annie left, Katie Owen (the eldest daughter of John), took the place of her aunt. Katie had been adopted by her grandmother at the early age of fifteen months, and rendered great help to her in her later years. I am fortunately able to give my readers an excellent picture of the old lady and her grand-daughter, taken when the former was a widow. Katie

is now also Mrs. Roberts, and, on leaving the Inn, was presented with a purse containing the contributions of many visitors to Pen-y-Gwryd, to whom she had endeared herself by her active service and her kindly ways.

The Inn itself has undergone many changes. In 1852, there were only two bedrooms, very scantily furnished, and the only public sitting-room was the little parlour facing the Beddgelert road. Such of the Owen family as were then alive had good cause to remember its reconstruction in 1859, when the present commodious coffee room was added. On the 26th of October of that year occurred the awful storm, in which the *Royal Charter* was wrecked, and which caused havoc in many parts of Wales. The Inn was then in process of roofing. The rain descended in such torrents that the ceilings had to be propped up to prevent their destruction, and all the family spent a night of great misery in one room. The roof of the stabling was torn off, and, when daybreak came, the first words poor Mrs. Pritchard uttered were—"Thank God for the light." Many years afterwards, when visitors to Pen-y-Gwryd increased, further alterations and additions were made. My friend, Mr. E. H. New, has been good enough to make two drawings for me in illustration of this paper. The one taken from an old print shews the Inn as restored in 1859, the second as it now stands, and both will, I think, be interesting to Welsh mountaineers.

Harry Owen entered upon his rest on the fifth of May, 1891, and many of his friends and admirers caused a tablet to be erected to his memory in the old church at Beddgelert, on which the following words are inscribed:—

To the Memory of
HARRY OWEN,
For 44 years Landlord of the Inn at Pen-y-Gwryd,
and Guide to Snowdon.
In business, upright and courteous,
In service, strong and patient,
In friendship, simple and sincere.
This tribute is erected
by old friends
who knew and honoured him.
Born April 2, 1822.
Died May 5, 1891.



Pen-y-gwryd, 1859

E.H.N.



Pen-y-gwryd in 1891

E.H.N.

On the 19th October, 1896, Mrs. Owen followed him, and the two now lie side by side in the beautiful valley which they loved so well, and under the shadow of the church in which they were married.

“For 44 years Landlord of the Inn at Pen-y-Gwryd.” That period witnessed the birth, the development, almost the culmination of mountaineering. Snowdon and Siabod, the Carnedd, and the Glyders, had of course been climbed before Harry Owen became landlord, but the era of real Welsh climbing was not yet. Within the period covered by his life, the great playground of Europe had been thoroughly explored. Mountaineering Clubs had been established all over the world. Adventurous climbers had set foot on the great peaks of New Zealand and Canada, of Asia, and South America. Men, too, had discovered that mountain beauty is to be found elsewhere than in mere height, and that notwithstanding their experience in far off countries, they could still come back and find in the ridges and couloirs of wild Wales an ample field for an honourable ambition.

For some years after their occupation began, the Owens kept no visitors' book. The first dates from 1854. This and all the subsequent books became mangled and torn, entries of interest were cut out and stolen, and whole pages were intentionally or accidentally destroyed. But kindly and reverent hands have now gathered together and refitted all the records that are left. The books, seven in number—exclusive of a special one to be mentioned later on—have been carefully repaired and bound, and by the courtesy and kindness of Mr. J. W. Hawkins (one of the Masters of the Supreme Court), I have been permitted to have the whole of them at my own house, and have thus been able to make that careful examination of them which otherwise would have been impossible.

They still contain reminiscences of the most interesting kind. The first entry in the first book is dated the 23rd of July, 1854, and gives the key to the charm of Pen-y-Gwryd. Mr. E. Homan and Mr. A. G. George record, “that after a long walk over Snowdon they spent an evening most comfortably

at this little Inn, the plainness of the fare more than recompensed by an extra allowance of cleanliness and hearty hospitality."

Scores of undergraduates from both Universities went to the famous hostelry, both to climb and to read. As a rule, they contented themselves by simply recording their names. A. S. Dixon of University College, and D. C. Ireland of New College, Oxford, however, state their opinion, as the fact is, that Pen-y-Gwryd "is much too nice a place to read at." One visitor (August 28, 1855) states "that the whole family, from Granny in the fireside corner, to the young Prince of Wales in the cradle, furnishes a happy example of the honest and open-hearted Welsh mountaineer." Granny was, of course, the Mrs. Pritchard, to whom I have already referred (the mother of Mrs. Owen), and who came to help during "the season," and was admirably skilled in the culinary art.

Another visitor (September, 1860) expresses his thanks in verse:—

"We thank thee, Harry Owen, and thy pleasant active wife,
For many kind attentions during 18 days of life;
Long life to Cook the Grannie, and may thy children be
Right worthy of belonging to the Owen Pedigree."

It is difficult to fathom the depth of the imbecility which some of the entries disclose. The object of a visitors' book is, or should be, to record the names of visitors, but any intimation of a new route, of the best fly wherewith to trap the wily trout, or of the discovery of a rare plant, is naturally welcome; but what inconceivable folly it is for a person to describe himself as "Fagin," or "Bill Sykes," or "The Vicar of Wakefield," or "Arthur Orton of Wagga Wagga." Again, many visitors seem to be under the impression that the public are interested in trivial personal details. What need is there of such entries as "arrived here from Bettws-y-Coed, and after good lunch set off for Llanberis," or, "found the chops supplied very good"! One divine records that he "got a glass of milk at a cottage, which much refreshed him." Who cares whether he was caught in a storm and went without his dinner, or went a mile further

and got a pan-cake. We can sympathise, however, with the following story, which could not have been more succinctly told (July 20, 1874)—

“Been up Snowdon,
A nice ascent;
William Boden,
Burton-on-Trent.”

The masters of Winchester College were frequent visitors. Four of them spent three days at Pen-y-Gwryd, January 10 to 13, 1872, when winter climbing had set in, and five more in the Easter of 1873. The following is the entry of the latter visit:—

F. Morshead.
G. Richardson.
C. H. Hawkins.
C. B. Phillips.
J. T. Bramston.

Opposite one of these names occurs the note—“Many a licking I’ve had from you.” No doubt they were all richly deserved. Two well-known ladies, Maria V. G. Havergal, and Frances Ridley Havergal, were at Pen-y-Gwryd on the 17th of July, 1872, and, in accordance with the custom of their school of thought, inserted long scriptural quotations. The name of Richard Louis Nettleship appears in July, 1873, and again in July, 1874. He was the eminent Fellow of Balliol, who died on Mont Blanc in 1892.

The early tourists sought only the beaten tracks, but in August, 1872, we find the first attempt at a new climb. Two gentlemen of the name of Browne tried to ascend Lliwedd by the central gully, but found it then impracticable.

The first note of sadness is struck on the 30th of January, 1879. Some gentlemen from Birmingham were having a winter climb. Their names were B. H. Bennett, Thomas Cox, A. C. Cox, H. L. Lloyd, and Maxwell Haseler. The latter gentleman was killed by a fall on Snowdon. Mr. Cox and Mr. Bennett write:—“We cannot leave here without recording how deeply we have felt the great kindness, thoughtfulness,

and sympathy shewn us by Mr. and Mrs. Owen, and all their family, in the great distress and trouble of poor Haseler's fatal accident on Snowdon on the 26th"; and George E. Haseler, Jun., "adds his heartfelt thanks, and will ever feel grateful that he has had such sympathising friends to come to in his trouble."

It has always been a mystery to me why so many men should insist on "dropping into poetry." Possibly long days of wet weather left unhappy visitors no other alternative. Most of it is horribly bad, and the result of obvious effort, reminding us of the gentleman in a favourite philosophical treatise, who first dug for poetry, then sank for it, and finally blasted for it. Here and there, however, we have some exceptions to the general rule, of which the following seem worth recording:—

"To wander through each dark recess,
Where Snowdon stands in glory,
To make the Glyders' rift rocks tell,
Their old volcanic story;
To walk where few have dared to walk,
And ride where very few rid,
This is the way to use the hours,
You spend at Pen-y-gwryd.

"And then well tired at eventide
With all your lungs inflated,
With store of body's health, and heart
In thankfulness elated;
Home through the glowing sunset stream
To wander well assuréd
The happiest dinner of your life
Waits you at Pen-y-gwryd.

"Then health to Harry Owen's face,
Kind, brave and honest looking,
And health to Mrs. Prichard's art,
Her pleasant art of cooking;
And health to all who fear no harm
Mid rocks and chasms lurid;
None but the brave deserve the fare
They get at Pen-y-gwryd."

T. W. C.

“A happy trio we, not one yet twenty,
Our hearts are always full—our stomachs empty.”

“Then here’s to Harry Owen,
Be the weather fair or blowin’,
And to all his honest kinsfolk—long life and pleasant days.
As we tramp life’s rugged road on,
To a grander, greater Snowdon,
May we find such hearts to greet us and help us on our ways.”

“Some eat to live, and others live to eat,
Tourists remind one of this latter feat ;
They, toiling, walk in view of mount and tarn,
That in the guest book they may write a yarn.
Alas ! that pen and pencil sketches here,
Of worth or humour should be brought so near,
The blots of all the witless, scribbling pack,
Who pat the friendly Owens on the back.
Let Owens’ books say, is it gain or loss,
An ounce of silver in a ton of dross.”

R. W. B.

But another visitor criticises the critic :—

“R. W. B., with heavy wit,
The Tourist cruelly belabours,
Why can’t he *quietly* rejoice
That he is better than his neighbours.”

A. W. Moore, once Secretary of the Alpine Club, and later a distinguished official in the India Office, was a frequent visitor to Pen-y-Gwryd, and on one occasion (May, 1883) left this distich behind him :—

“O’er Siabod’s boggy height
Cheerful we came last night,
With plan to-day tall Snowdon’s peak to scale ;
But when this morning broke,
The mists hung round like smoke,
So here we stayed and penned this woeful wail.”

W. E. Hall, an eminent member of the Alpine Club, wrote the following lines on the 14th June, 1886:—

“In Poets’ corner I will crave a little space.
 I’ll not ask much. I’ll not the book deface
 Like some who’ve been before me, as I plainly see,
 Imbibing something stronger than weak tea.
 But just a word of warning will you kindly mark
 To every Tailor, Sea Cook’s son, or Barber’s Clerk,
 Don’t write bad verses here—in fact, write none at all,
 Let every merry Cobbler stick to last and awl.
 And now, lest one should say, Physician, heal thyself,
 I’ll sign the book and place it on the shelf.”

W. E. H.

Such are specimens of the better class of verse written in the pages of the visitors’ books at Pen-y-Gwryd. Much prose is also to be found there; some very useful, as dealing with suggestions for new climbs, or recording successful new expeditions. In the year 1884, Mr. Hugo J. Young (now K. C.), an old frequenter of Pen-y-Gwryd, disgusted at the inanities found in the ordinary books, presented a large 4to. volume to Mr. and Mrs. Owen, in which might be recorded matter of more interest than the mere names of visitors, with their constant attendant puerilities. The reasons for a book of this kind were obvious, and I give the dedication in full:—

“April 10th, 1884.

“Dear Mr. and Mrs. Owen,

“On my visits to Pen-y-Gwryd I have noticed that your visitors’ book has become the receptacle for all sorts of nonsense scribbled by the casual passer-by.

“On the other hand, many notes are recorded of lasting use and interest to many who delight to stay weeks with you.

“It would, I think, be an advantage to keep the two distinct, and I now have the pleasure to present you with a separate book, not to be used at all as a record of visitors’ names, but which I hope you may live to see filled with contributions which it will be a pleasure to read. I have provided it with a lock, that by exercising control over the key you may preserve its pages from abuse.

“Please accept it in remembrance of the pleasant days I have spent with you, and your never-failing attention.

“Yours truly,

“H. J. Y.”

Mr. Young was not disappointed. The modern generation of climbing men recorded expeditions of more than usual interest. "W. S." tells us, in August, 1884, "that he ascended Snowdon 40 years ago," and reminds us that at that time "The Holyhead Mail brought you *via* Shrewsbury and left you at Capel Curig." Mr. W. B. Carlyon gives a tabulated list of the ferns to be found in the neighbourhood, and Mr. J. W. Hawkins, in 1890, adds two more to the number. Mr. E. Kidson, who is responsible for a good deal of the prose in the old books, makes sensible remarks upon the traces of extinct glaciers. Numberless climbers expatiate upon the glories of Crib Goch and Lliwedd. The rope begins to be freely used in difficult gullies. The death of Harry Owen is chronicled in feeling terms. Melancholy details are given of the death of Mr. Alfred Evans, who lost his life on the central gully of Lliwedd on the 20th of May, 1888; and the names of the men are recorded—Richard Williams, William Owen, Griffith Williams, and Evan Evans—who brought down the body of Mr. J. Mitchell of Oxford, who was killed on the slanting gully of the same mountain on the 30th of August, 1894. An interesting account of the Devil's Kitchen appears by Owen Glynne Jones, who recently lost his life on the Dent Blanche, and the volume contains some poetry of no mean order.

Probably the most interesting of all the reminiscences of Pen-y-Gwryd is that connected with the visit of Charles Kingsley in 1856. He wrote to his friend, Tom Hughes, early in the month of August in that year:—

"My dear old lad,

"Froude cannot go with us; so are you willing to go to Snowdon! . . . Buy the two sheets of the Ordnance Maps (I'll go share in pence), . . . then send 'em on to me in the coat pocket of one Hughes, Esq., from a Saturday night to a Monday morning, and we will talk it out."

and he adds to his letter some amusing verses, commencing with the following lines:—

"There is no Inn in Snowdon which is not awful dear,
Excepting Pen-y-Gwryd (you can't pronounce it dear),

Which standeth in the meeting of noble valleys three,
 One is the Vale of Gwynant, so well beloved by me ;
 One goes to Capel Curig, and I can't mind its name,
 And one it is Llanberis Pass, which all men know the same."

A little later in the month he wrote again to Hughes :—

"Of all men on earth I should like to have Tom Taylor for a third. Entreat him to make it possible, and I can shew him views of the big stone work which no mortal Cockney knows, because though the whole earth is given to the children of men none but we jolly fishers get the plums and raisins of it by the rivers which run among the hills and the lakes which sit atop thereof."

Taylor consented to go, and the three friends started on the 11th of August, and, walking up Nant Francon, tried in vain to catch trout in Llyn Idwal. They slept at Capel Curig, and the next day reached Pen-y-Gwryd, where happy as school boys they spent a few delightful days. On leaving, Harry Owen asked them to write their names in the visitors' book, and the following effusion was the result :—

T. T.

I came to Pen-y-gwryd with colours armed and pencils,
 But found no use whatever for any such utensils ;
 So in default of them I took to using knives and forks,
 And made successful drawings—of Mrs. Owen's corks.

C. K.

I came to Pen-y-gwryd in frantic hopes of slaying
 Grilse, Salmon, 3-lb. red-fleshed Trout, and what else there's no saying ;
 But bitter cold and lashing rain, and black nor'-eastern skies, sir,
 Drove me from fish to botany, a sadder man and wiser.

T. H.

I came to Pen-y-Gwryd a larking with my betters,
 A mad wag and a mad poet, both of them men of letters ;
 Which two ungrateful parties, after all the care I've took
 Of them, make me write verses in Henry Owen's book.

T. T.

We've been mist-soak'd on Snowdon, mist-soaked on Glyder Fawr,
We've been wet through on an average every day three times an hour;
We've walked the upper leather from the soles of our balmorals;
And as sketchers and as fishers with the weather had our quarrels.

C. K.

But think just of the plants which stuff'd our box—(old Yarrel's gift)—
And of those which might have stuff'd it, if the clouds had given a lift;
Of tramping bogs, and climbing cliffs, and shoving down stone fences,
For Spiderwort, Saussurea, and Woodsia Ilvensis.

T. H.

Oh, my dear namesake's breeches, you never see the like,
He burst them all so shameful a-crossing of a dyke;
But Mrs. Owen patch'd them as careful as a mother,
With flannel of three colours—she hadn't got no other.

T. T.

But can we say enough of those legs of mountain muttons,
And that onion sauce lies on our souls, for it made of us three gluttons;
And the Dublin stout is genuine, and so's the Burton beer,
And the apple tarts they've won our hearts, and think of soufflets here!

C. K.

Resembling that old woman that never could be quiet,
Though victuals (says the child's song) and drink formed all their diet,
My love for plants and scrambling shared empire with my dinner,
And who says it wasn't good must be a most fastidious sinner.

T. H.

Now all I've got to say is, you can't be better treated;
Order pancakes and you'll find they're the best you'd ever eaten.
If you scramble o'er the mountains you should bring an ordnance map:
I endorse all as previous gent.'s have said about the tap.

T. T.

Pen-y-gwryd, when wet and worn, has kept a warm fireside for us;
Socks, boots, and never-mention-'ems, Mrs. Owen still has dried for us;
With host and hostess, fare and bill, so pleased we are, that, going,
We feel, for all their kindness, 'tis we, not they, are "Owen."

T. H. T. T. C. K.

Nos tres in uno juncti hos fecimus versiculos,
 Tomas piscator pisces qui non cepi sed pisciculos,
 Tomas sciagraphus sketches qui non feci nisi ridiculos,
 Herbarius Carolus montes qui lustravi perpendiculos.

T. H.

There's big trout, I hear, in Edno, likewise in Gwynant lake,
 And the governor and black alder are the flies that they will take,
 Also the cockabundy, but I can only say,
 If you think to catch big fishes, I only hope you may!

T. T.

I have come in for more of mountain gloom than mountain glory,
 But I've seen old Snowdon rear his head with storm-tossed mist
 wreaths hoary ;
 I stood in the fight of mountain winds upon Bwlch-cwm-y-llan,
 And I go back, an unsketching, but a better-minded man.

C. K.

And I, too, have another debt to pay another way,
 For kindness shewn by these good souls to one who's far away,
 Even to this old colley dog, who tracked the mountains o'er
 For one who seeks strange birds and flowers on far Australia's shore.

How delightful it would have been to have looked over the shoulders of three such men, and heard their boyish laughter as they capped each other's verses. We can imagine Harry Owen standing by with a pleasant smile, and Mrs. Owen in the kitchen wondering what the merriment was all about. With what pleasure would the younger generation have read the original manuscript in the visitors' book, and imagined the authors of "Yeast" and "Tom Brown's School-days" in so frolicsome a mood. Unhappily, the whole poem, with the signatures attached, was cut out of the book and stolen by some miscreant visitor. May the gods treat him according to his deserts. However, an ardent frequenter of Pen-y-Gwryd had previously made a copy of the verses, which were privately printed. They appear in the "Life and Letters of Charles Kingsley," edited by his widow, and have been reprinted in the gossiping Guide to Wales.

Many years later, Kingsley was again the guest of the Owens, and left the following record in the visitors' book :—

“Fifteen years ago, Thomas Hughes, M.P., Tom Taylor and myself wrote some verses in this book for these dear good people, and they were cut out and stolen by some snob, after ten pounds had been refused for them.

“Now such snobs are unfortunately of the human race, and will wed, and are therefore likely to produce little Snobkins. Some such Snobkins may visit Pen-y-Gwryd, and be still too uncivilized to be weaned from their parents' proclivities.

“Any such I warn that he cannot well steal this bit of writing and shew it again, unless he wish to expose his own shame. And yet I am not sure that this plan will be successful, for, snobs being half of them fools likewise, he may steal this for the mere pleasure of boasting that he stole it.”

Kingsley knew Pen-y-Gwryd before his visit with Taylor and Hughes. He calls it in one of his letters “The divinest pig-sty beneath the canopy,” and in another he refers to the house which James Anthony Froude occupied in Nant Gwynant. In his novel of “Two Years Ago,” he tells us how Elsley Vavassour looked in on his mad journey across the Glyders, and heard sweet Welsh voices singing “The Rising of the Lark.” He went towards the well-known kitchen. “It was a low room ceiled with dark beams, from which hung bacon and fishing rods, harness and drying stockings, and all the miscellanies of a fishing inn kept by a farmer, and beneath it the usual happy, hearty, honest group.”

“There was Harry Owen, bland and stalwart, his baby in his arms, smiling upon the world in general ; old Mrs. Pritchard bending over the fire, putting the last touch to one of those miraculous soufflets, compound of clouds and nectar which transport alike palate and fancy at the first mouthful from Snowdon to Belgrave Square. A sturdy, fair-haired Saxon Gourbannelig sat with his back to the door, and two of the beautiful children on his knee, their long locks flowing over the elbows of his shooting jacket, as with both arms round them he made Punch for them with his handkerchief and his

fingers, and chattered to them in English while they chattered in Welsh. . . . All laughed and drank while Elsley's dark face looked in at the doorway, and half turned to escape. . . . Handsome, ladylike Mrs. Owen, bustling out of the kitchen with a supper tray, ran full against him, and uttered a Welsh scream."

How well I remember Harry Owen doing Punch for his children in the same old kitchen, Mrs. Owen knitting in the corner, and the collie dogs lying on the floor. No hot whisky was ever so delicious as that which we drank over the peat fire, while the wind was howling or the rain was beating outside. No talk was ever more manly, no friendships were ever more sincere. "Shall I not take mine ease in mine inn." Alas! the old kitchen where so many honest men spent such happy hours has now been converted into a bar. Half the charm of Pen-y-Gwryd lies buried with the Owens in Beddgelert Churchyard.

My personal reminiscences of Pen-y-Gwryd are of the most delightful kind, and this fact is entirely owing to the charming comrades with whom I have had the happiness to be associated. I have said that my first visit was made in 1854. My second was in June, 1861. I had then made some important excursions in Switzerland, and thought it would be child's play to get up from Llyn Idwal to the summit of the Glyder Fawr by a bee line. I failed, and a short account of that failure is the only entry longer than a mere name which I ever made in the visitors' book, at least, for a period of more than thirty years. How many times I have since been to the old hostelry I cannot tell. Only about ten visits appear to be recorded, but I know that I have stayed there on at least twenty-five separate occasions.

If I were to set down the number of times I have been on the top of Snowdon, my readers would probably suspect me of exaggeration, so I forbear. But in company with the late Mr. Adams-Reilly, one of the most gifted of men, and with my life-long friend, Mr. Frederick Morshead of Winchester, one of the ablest mountaineers of his time, I certainly was the pioneer

of regular winter climbing at Pen-y-Gwryd. Our names appear January 14 to 17, 1870. At that time of the year we were quite certain of having the inn to ourselves; we almost always found snow on the hills; the rivers were usually in flood. It was an enchanting experience, and yet, will it be believed? some Solon on tour at a later period of the year was good enough to append the following note to our names:—"What an ass a fellow must be to come to such a place in January." It was at this date that we founded the "Society of Welsh Rabbits," the object of which was to explore Snowdonia in winter, and for many years, as near Christmas time as possible, the Rabbits met at Pen-y-Gwryd. Mr. Adams-Reilly designed a coat of arms for the Society. He was an accomplished artist, and his design, beautifully executed in pen and ink, was for some time on the wall of the dining-room, but, of course, was ultimately stolen. On our first winter visit we had one evening an excited discussion about the "Idylls of the King." How it was that the two daughters of the house became "Enid" and "Guinevere" I have entirely forgotten, but certainly, for many years, they were called by us by no other names.

We were not the first persons, however, who climbed Snowdon in winter. So far back as December, 1860, Professor Tyndall, Professor Huxley, and Mr. Busk made a journey from London to Bangor. On the 27th, they set out for Capel Curig, and, stopping at Bethesda, they bought two rake handles for fourpence each. With the aid of a blacksmith, these articles were furnished with rings and iron spikes, and converted into fairly good Alpenstocks.

On the morning of the 28th, they started for Pen-y-Gwryd; Mr. Busk going on to Llanberis. Tyndall and Huxley engaged Robert Hughes as guide, and attacked the mountain by the ordinary Pen-y-Pass route, snow lying deep on the ground, and the frost being very keen. They struck the ridge that looks down on Glas Llyn, forcing their way through a snow cornice. "From the summit," says Tyndall, "the mountain sloped downward to a col, which linked it with a bold eminence

on our right." Probably he had never heard of "Crib y Ddysgyl." They reached the summit at three in the afternoon, and found the well-known huts all cased in ice.

"Above and behind us the heavens were of the densest grey; towards the western horizon this was broken by belts of fiery red, which, nearer the sun, brightened to orange and yellow. The mountains of Flintshire were flooded with glory, and later on, through the gaps in the ranges, the sunlight was poured in coloured beams, which could be tracked through the air to the places on which their radiance fell. The scene would bear comparison with the splendour of the Alps themselves."

They spent one night at Pen-y-Gwryd, and on the 31st, were again in London. Tyndall told his story in the *Saturday Review* on the 5th of January, 1861, and it is reprinted in his "Hours of Exercise in the Alps."

It must have been before 1870, however, that I paid a winter visit, accompanied by Mr. A. W. Moore and Mr. R. S. Macdonald of the Colonial Office. It was their first visit, and they brought ice axes with them from London. We slept at Bangor, and the next day drove to Llyn Ogwen, sending our carriage on to Capel Curig with the luggage. We climbed Tryfan and both the Glyders, and reached Pen-y-Gwryd at 5 p.m. The following day we started for Snowdon. I had laughed so much at the axes that they were left behind. On reaching Glas Llyn, not only was there deep snow, but it was so frozen that we could not make steps in it. We returned for the axes, and with their aid, reached the summit, when the laughter was no longer on my side. The name of Macdonald, as well as Moore, appears on many subsequent dates in the Pen-y-Gwryd records.

The Rabbits met again January 15 to 18, 1871, this time accompanied by Mr. F. A. Walroth; again January 3 to 7, 1874; again December 27 to 31, 1876, accompanied by Mr. Rawdon Levett; and again December 29 and 30, 1879, accompanied by Mr. C. T. Dent and Mr. Osmund Airy; and I shall not easily forget one merry meeting in April, 1879, when twenty-five members of the Alpine Club dined together

at Capel Curig, after a grand day on the Carnedd, when Professor G. G. Ramsay sent us into roars of laughter with his Scotch stories ; and how the following day most of us went on to Pen-y-Gwryd, simply because it was impossible to keep away.

On one of the winter expeditions, on the last night of our stay at Pen-y-Gwryd, Mrs. Owen provided us with a goose for dinner. It has fallen to my lot to enjoy many of these birds, but never before or since have I tasted one like that. Mr. Adams-Reilly, who was of the party, was quite overcome by it, and begged to be allowed to keep the breast-bone as a perpetual memorial of that particular dinner. The next morning, when starting for Bettws, Mrs. Owen handed him the precious relic. On our arrival there, he placed it on the table in the hall whilst he removed his coat. In an instant, an observing dog snapped up the bone, and it was seen no more. Reilly used to say that he had rarely experienced a more poignant sorrow.

There is no further entry till December 28 and 29, 1886, when my comrades were Mr. Horace Walker and Mr. C. T. Dent (both since Presidents of the Alpine Club), Mr. Alexander Mortimer and Mr. Osmund Airy, and a happy day we had on Snowdon, in deep snow.

On the 2nd of April, 1888, I was again at Pen-y-Gwryd with Dent, Walker, Morshead and Mortimer. These gentlemen had been staying with me at a lovely cottage I then occupied in the valley of the Llyffnant, near Machynlleth. I had with me, as a guest, the greatest of Swiss guides, Melchior Anderegg of Meyringen, and he accompanied us on an ascent of Snowdon by way of Crib Goch. I led all the way, and as the snow was deep and very soft, it was not an altogether easy task. In one place I hesitated for a few seconds. Melchior instantly forged to the front and proffered his services, which I emphatically declined. "No," I said, "I am guide to-day, and you are the Herr." On reaching the summit of Crib Goch, there was the peak of Snowdon on our left, a great white cone rising into a blue sky. Melchior, whose

knowledge of Swiss distances is faultless, at once said: "We must go back; we cannot climb the final peak in less than five or six hours." "Oh, yes," I said, "we shall be there in an hour." "That, sir," was his reply, "is quite impossible." In five minutes over the hour we were on the top of Snowdon.

This was not the only occasion when a great Alpine guide has been introduced to Snowdonia in the winter. I find that at Christmas, 1887, Mr. Carteighe, Mr. Wicks and Mr. Muir were accompanied by Gabriel Taugwalder of Zermatt; and that from January 1 to 7, 1890, Mr. J. S. Masterman and Mr. W. H. Cozens-Hardy were at Pen-y-Gwryd, and that the well-known Aloys Supersaxs of Saas was in their company.

Of the many other occasions when I have visited the Owens I have, unfortunately, no record, but there was one memorable visit made with a large party in the Easter of 1865 which will not be easily forgotten. Thirteen of us engaged the whole of the hotel. On the 13th of April, William Mathews, W. S. Church, F. F. Tuckett, Buxton, Fox, Moore, Grove, Walker, Macdonald, Digby, Morshead, and one other, whose name I have forgotten, started from various parts of England, and arranged to arrive at Pen-y-Gwryd in time for dinner. I was unable to join them on the journey, but I left Birmingham in the afternoon of Saturday, the 15th, and reached Bangor between ten and eleven p.m. I drove to Llyn Ogwen, and was mad enough to cross Glyder Fawr by the light of a waning moon. I never had a more difficult or more laborious task, but I reached the hostelry, thoroughly tired out, on the following morning. Harry Owen let me in, and at breakfast I told my comrades of the evacuation of Richmond and the surrender of General Lee, the news of which reached England on the 15th. They were altogether incredulous, and some of them went to Llanberis to make further enquiries. On the Monday we were all on Snowdon together. By some marvellous intuition, John Roberts had taken up with him thirteen bottles of beer. We bought the whole. There could be no quarrel about the division, and everyone was contented and happy.

There is one more recollection too pleasant to be omitted. I was again at Pen-y-Gwryd about a year before Mrs. Owen died. She came to me one evening and said: "Do you remember coming here one Christmas nearly thirty years ago?" "Yes," was my reply. "Do you remember," she went on to say, "writing an article in a certain journal praising Pen-y-Gwryd as an excellent resort at Christmas?" I again assented. "Well," she said, "before you came that winter, we rarely, if ever, had a guest in the house at Christmas, and since then we have hardly ever been without visitors during the same period. Will you do me a favour and accept a little present from me?" and the kindly soul gave me a large roll of excellent tweed, made from the fleeces of her own sheep, and begged me to have it made up into a suit of climbing clothes. I wish I had those garments now.

These reminiscences might be indefinitely prolonged, but it is time to draw them to a close. The difficulty I have to contend with is not so much what to record, as what to omit, and I am only too conscious that whatever I may set down, I shall be certain "to leave the better part unsaid, and the gleanings for others richer than my harvest."

The Inn may soon find other landlords; let us hope it will, and that the farm and the hostelry may be in one occupation as in the days that were. New generations will arise, to whom these Pen-y-Gwryd records will be "a tale of little meaning," but to those who have known and loved the place since the days when the Owens were young, they will ever be instinct with interest and with life.

In recent years the old Inn has overflowed with English hill climbers of the modern school. Some have sought it for its own sake, and for the rest and recreation which its situation and its scenery afford. Others have sought it as a field for genuine climbing, and for the sake of the ridges and couloirs, which for difficulty, interest and variety are not surpassed in any country in the world. Haskett Smith and Bowring, Burrows and Williams, Halliday and Bryant, Kidson and Corlett, Thompson and Turner, and scores of younger men well

known in and out of the Principality, have found a happy home there, and the Climbers' Club was really started within its walls.

To go a little further back, what interesting men do we find once occupying those now deserted rooms. The late and the present Lord Coleridge, Robert Gregory, Lewis T. Dibdin, Augustine Birrell, Tyndall and Huxley, Dakyns and Prickard, Henry Kingsley and W. F. Short, Hastings and Carson, Gladstones, Mathesons, Lytteltons and Glynnes. Bloxham and Hawkins, were frequent visitors. Alfred Williams and H. G. Willink and many another artist have transferred its scenery to their canvas. Charles Kingsley, Hughes and Taylor made it famous. Half the masters of our great public schools have left their names there, and many a well-known scholar has recorded his impressions not in English or Welsh only, but in French and German, in Greek and Latin, even in the Armenian tongue.

My recollections go back to a time which now seems almost pre-historic. I have spent many charming days there with the older as well as with the younger generation of Alpine men. What glorious climbs I have had with kindred souls—

“That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine.”

Some of my comrades of forty years ago can climb no more, and have “one by one crept silently to rest,” but most of them happily survive. How delightful it is to think that when years are advancing and the inevitable yoke is laid upon us all, there are so many still left to us, who knew us, and who climbed with us when we were young.

Of all the many visitors to the well-known hostelry, during the last fifty years, gentle or simple, wise or foolish, young or old, there was not one who had not a kindly word to say of Henry and Ann Owen, who so long ministered to their wants and their comforts both in fair weather and in foul. “Requiescant in pace.” If it is not possible for us really to revive an old association, at least we can cherish it; and

although memory will come sometimes "with sad eyes, holding the folded annals of our youth," the reminiscences of Pen-y-Gwryd will remain while life shall last, not only a priceless but a permanent possession.



Mr. and Mrs. Owen in the Kitchen at Pen-y-Gwryd.