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## CONCERNING GRITSTONE.

By a "GRITSTONE" NOVICE.

BUXTON is a capital place for those who like it. Also it possesses two railway stations which enable one to get away.

Fate landed me at Buxton in the August of the year of grace, 1903, but a dozen fates would not keep me there, day in and day out. You see, there is not much to be done at Buxton, except listen to the band or play extravagant golf under restrictions, of both of which there cometh satiety. There is a river at the bottom of the hill, alleged to contain trout and grayling, with a sewage farm emptying into it to improve their flavour. And there is climbing—of sorts.

That is to say, there is a recess off the main gardens which is called a Rockery, containing various problems. I spoiled the best by accidently pulling off the top of an *arête*, which fell on the path fully ten feet below and broke in three pieces. I don't know what kind of rock the Rockery is composed of, but it is not good stuff to climb on.

Limestone cliffs abound, and look very attractive, but are wholly objectionable. Neglecting my Haskett-Smith, I tackled a really nice looking gully on the roadside which I had for some days determined to try, if I could avoid publicity. Everybody lunches at the same time at Buxton, so lunch-time found me on a deserted road. The gully was rotten to start with, and got worse, but it was wretchedly easy. Just as I was getting out, I dislodged a bit of cliff and very nearly killed a wheelbarrow, which was walking past with a man after it. Limestone is indeed "dangerously rotten."

I have only tried limestone once since, and that was because I heard a man had climbed an inaccessible rock, and

left a penny on the top for anyone to get who could. I found out, too late, that he had first thrown a stone over the top; to the stone was attached a string; to the string a rope; to the rope—well, Noah made a successful first ascent of Ararat with the aid of a deluge and an ark. I had a shot at climbing the place, but when I had got a short way up, the whole of the rotten stuff gave way, and I don't want a barometer now. My right arm gives me all the information I need about changes of weather. No more limestone for me.

But gritstone is all right; that is to say, "it is all right when you know it, but you've got to know it first." I was introduced to it by the talented and courteous President of the Kyndwr Club, to whom, with characteristic cheek, I had written, and who, with characteristic good nature, took the first opportunity of accepting my kind invitation to come and show me something about Derbyshire climbs.\*

He first took me to the Black Rocks at Cromford,† and sent me up the Pine Tree Gully, which is sacred to the memory of a pine that is not there. The first pitch was a heap of barbed wire, which completely filled the bottom of the gully, a nice cheerful start. When that had been negotiated very gingerly, I tried the first natural pitch with the comforting thought that, if I did come off, there was the barbed wire waiting for me. There is a chockstone with a way up behind. This appeared to me to be the correct route, but Baker called out to me that it was much more sporting to go outside. I was having all the sport I wanted as it was. I had been accustomed to the Borrowdale series, where you have at least a hold, if it is only a finger hold. But there are no holds on gritstone, only rounded edges and cups, and a horrid rasp-like surface that catches hold of your clothes and pulls you back. However, I did at last succeed in reaching up over the chockstone, and got a real good satisfying hold, the broken end of a glass bottle. Then I came down.

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\* There is a very nice club at Buxton, but, after all, one does not go away into the country to find a good club.

† See Vol. I., *C. C. J.*, pp. 55 *et seq.* and 67.

Baker then went up the outside route. It is a chimney, and you back up. Now backing up on rock is one thing, backing up on gritstone is quite another. On rock you use your back and hands and feet and knees. On gritstone you merely plaster yourself against the grit, leaning your back, or the seat of your breeches, or your cap against the other side of the chimney. Then you detach yourself, hanging on meanwhile by your back, cap, or knickerbockers, and wriggle up; and so on to the top. The hands, feet, and knees are merely more or less useful accessories. Sometimes the process is reversed, and you hang on forward, and wriggle up aft.

Now a process like that requires some learning; it was my first day out, and I was out of condition; and in that Pine Tree Gully I managed to put in enough exertion to take me up ten times the height of rock. Consequently, I was rather done when I got to the top, and was very glad when Bond turned up, so that Baker had some one else to practice on. With supreme content I watched them struggling with an impossible crack, which Baker managed and Bond didn't, whilst I smoked and rested. There is a lot of good climbing on Cromford:—Sand Gully, and never was a place better named, the style of place your stockings carry mementoes of, even after they have been through the wash; the fattest of Fat Men's Gullies, where even I stuck, and I am as thin as they make them; a very interesting climb, first done, I believe, by Mr. Haskett-Smith, in one part of which you have to spreadeagle yourself out, and climb with your toes against either side, whilst you resist gravity by a tiny finger hold, and—a gritstone hold. But the pick of the basket is the Stonnis Crack.\* Baker went up like a lamplighter, but it was too much for us. There is no hold anywhere, and the work gets harder and harder all the way up. As a matter of fact, one wastes a lot of valuable time and energy in seeking about for non-existent holds. The key is to get through with it as fast as ever you can. At least so Baker explained, which accounts for his lamplighter-like ascent.

I had hard luck in the matter of health when I was out in

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\* See Vol. II., p. 179, and Vol. V., p. 136.

Derbyshire. The next meet was at Darley Dale. Darley Dale is remarkable for the beauty of its scenery, the excellence of its Hydro, and the imbecility of its inhabitants. I arrived at night. It was raining of course, and as dark as pitch, otherwise, I should not have been such a fool as to consult local talent (vide *Climbers' Club Journal*, Vol. III., page 64). Anyhow, they sent me furlongs out of my way, to nowhere. At last I landed up at a merry-go-round, where I found more fools, roved around, found some more fools, and at length hit on the Hydro. It is half a mile from the station, on the main road, and there is a board, as big as a billiard table, just outside the station, directing you to it. That I discovered by daylight.

To anyone who wants to do some scrambling in Derbyshire, I can recommend Darley Dale Hydro. It is a very "gentlemanly" house (it is hard to express what I mean, but you don't feel as if you were in a hotel, but in a private house, when you are there), the people are very nice, the terms are very reasonable, and it is a good centre.

I qualified for a resident in Darley Dale by taking a hand at "Bridge" that night. I was wet through, or nearly so; I loathe "Bridge," and I had to climb next day. Consequence: a splitting headache, and breakfast on the short profits and quick returns principle.

I followed Bond, Baker, and a friend through what I believe was lovely scenery, and I judge they had a very good day's sport. As I was quite blind from the pain in my eyes, I may be mistaken. We went to the Andle Stone\* (locally, "The Twopenny Loaf"); Row Tor† (where I had some beer and cheese and felt better); Cratcliffe Tor‡ (where I was fool enough to climb the Owl's Gully, and spent the next half-hour praying for a tourniquet to keep my head from splitting); and Robin Hood's Stride.§

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\*Vol. I., p. 55, *et seq.* Vol. V., p. 136.

†Vol. III., p. 33. Vol. V., p. 136.

‡Vol. I., p. 55, *et seq.* Vol. IV., p. 91.

§Vol. I., p. 55, *et seq.* Vol. V., p. 136 (the upper problem of the two "bouldering" photos is at the Stride).

As soon as I recovered partially from Owl's Gully, I went to look for the party. I found them without much trouble, headed by Baker, with blazing eyes and nose, making for the Stride. It appeared that he had been making use of a nettle as a nosehold. I felt better after hearing that.

On the Stride, Baker did everything that was to be done, and the others did a great deal. I looked on and applauded. Of course, as soon as the day was too far spent for any climbing I got all right.

On the way back Bond and Baker dived into a cave. I hate caves at present. I shall probably be converted before I am much older. Up to date, my cave experience has been limited to the regulation route through the Peak Cavern, made ten times more objectionable by a crowd of Yahoos from Sheffield, or somewhere, each of whom declared with strident noises, purporting to be music, that there was never a daddy like his—and I hope to goodness there will never be such another.

After an interminable time, as it seemed, they reappeared, elate in spirit, with the information that, had I backed them up, they would have reached Hades by that time. If they had only known it, for the last twenty minutes, if thoughts could have helped them on their way thither—well, I was anxious about catching a train.

Visited the Downfall at Kinderscout. No climbing, but a good run from the keepers.

And now, at last, I have something of a free hand. Hitherto I have been trespassing on the work of better men all over the *Journal*, but Laddow Rocks have only received a passing notice on page 30 of Volume V.

The excitement commenced from the start. Just outside Buxton there is a station called Miller's Dale, where the Railway Company throw you out, lose your luggage, and put you in the wrong train. "Mummery used to hold that that which gave the acutest pleasure in a climb was the element of uncertainty."\* Pleasure of that kind starts at Miller's Dale,

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\*Vol. I., p. 30.

right away. Changed at Chinley—train late. Waited for Baker at Sheffield—his train later. Just time to fly across Sheffield in a hansom, and jump into a train to Penistone, without taking tickets. A dirty hole is Penistone, as far as I could judge.

We made for the hotel where we were to meet a Photographic Friend of Baker's. I shall call this gentleman P. F. for short in future. It saves space, and conceals identity. We were curtly informed there was no bed. Baker then enquired whether P. F. had arrived. O, were we friends of P. F.? Of course there was a bed for us; and would we like supper, and what could they do to make us comfortable? This was all very nice, but there was no P. F. It was the same at the railway station, An unimportant person like Mr. Chamberlain might pass unnoticed, but not P. F. I began to feel a curiosity to see this "amazing instance of a popular man." I know him now, about twelve hours' actual acquaintance, and understand. I like, esteem, and respect him, but if he don't break his own, or some one else's neck —. He has no idea of fear or danger. On one occasion he was discovered in a cave, balanced on two flimsy planks which quivered and danced on their insecure holds, manipulating his camera, one of those great three-legged arrangements you have to tie your head up in a cloth to photograph with.

The weather was cold. Baker filled the bath overnight, so as to have the chill off in the morning. I woke up before he did, and was minded to steal a march on him, but chivalry, or fear of assault restrained me. However, there was a leak in the bath, and all the water had run away during the night, so I was not without my reward.

Breakfast was served, through the influence of P. F., willingly, at an unearthly hour, though it was the day of rest—and climbing. My ill-luck pursued me in the matter of health, for I woke with an awful cold. I could neither taste nor smell—and those senses are useful on occasions. Most of us have read of Jerome's pet water-rat, which lost itself in a jar of gooseberry fool, and nobody discovered what had become of it

till the second helping. Well, I never discovered that one of my eggs was bad till the last spoonful. After that we devoted ourselves to ham.

Our station was Crowden. The scenery here is wild and beautiful, and Members of the Climbers' Club will be familiar with it through the medium of Baker's book on walks and climbs, *sub Jove* and *sub terrâ*, in this part of the world, and it would be an impertinence on my part to attempt to describe it, to say nothing of riding for a fall.

P. F. began his attempts on our general safety the moment we left the station. The first adventure shall remain unrecorded. A little further on we came to a romantic dale, at the far end of which we could see Laddow Rocks, beetling fantastically on the sky-line. I was drinking in the fresh morning air, modified by a flavour of bad eggs. Baker was talking geography—he seems to know the district like the palm of his hand—when P. F. made for a signboard, threatening trespassers with all kinds of pains and penalties, and charged valiantly across a rifle range, which, it being Sunday morning, was fortunately deserted. Then came the hardest climb of the day. The Rifle Pitch itself was easy, if damp, but the getting out was extremely difficult. The obstacle consisted of a paling of stout wire uprights, about four feet six high, fastened together in such a way as to afford absolutely no foothold. Moreover, the whole thing shook and quivered at a touch. Baker got over with the aid of P. F. and myself. P. F. climbed up my back and over Baker's head, and I was left on the wrong side of the fence, with the shoulders on the other. I had a try at pulling myself over, using my companions as hand-holds, but it was not good enough, and I gave myself a poke in the ribs, which, if I had slipped more than a few inches, might have had serious consequences. However, a few yards down, the fence turned slightly, and there, as I suspected, the stays that supported it were double. The nut of the screw which joined them gave me a "toe-scrrape," which enabled me to land safely with my knees on Baker's shoulders. He says my knees are very sharp.

Rakes Rocks, on the left, looked so good that we promised them a visit on our return, but we kept steadily on, till we came to a very fine beck.\* P. F. desired with desire to photograph it, and sent us down to stand by the side, in the spray of cascades, to show off the height of the falls. We obeyed cheerfully. As soon as the sitting was over, we scrambled out of the beck and waited for P. F., and waited, and waited. Then we yelled. No answer. More yells, and the same amount of answer. We began to get alarmed, and searched the beck for the bones of P. F. and camera. Neither forthcoming. We concluded hopefully that he had gone on, and were conversing freely on the subject, when he turned up smiling. We were so pleased to see him safe and sound that we forgot to be angry. It appeared that it occurred to his artistic brain that he might get even a better picture lower down, and I gather that he was right. I did not go to see.

Laddow Rocks are divided into two great stairs, with a belt of broken and very steep ground in between. There may be some good work on the lower crags, but all interest in them vanishes in the face of the manifold attractions of the upper series, which are split up by innumerable rifts, some of them 100 feet in length. There is any amount of room for exploration here, and as the crags are within easy range of Sheffield and Manchester, it is to be hoped that they will be thoroughly exploited and made to reveal their veiled charms.

The veil is the most objectionable part of the business. It consists of coarse sand, or, rather fine granulated gritstone, a kind of grit scree, which gets into every part of your clothing, and declines to get out. This only entails discomfort. The danger is, that the beastly stuff lies so thickly in the cracks and gullies, that you never can tell whether a projecting hold is part of the live rock, or is merely embedded in the treacherous soil. In manipulating a rope from above, this danger has to be very carefully watched, as will presently appear.

We went first to the top of the crags and inspected a curious Pinnacle—of which more anon—P. F. having meanwhile

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\* Oaken Clough.

got to the bottom, no doubt by some descent exceptionally perilous. We then climbed down a gully a little to the left. There was a great deal of loose stuff about, and the objections of grit scree were very much in evidence. You would kick and push at a projecting bit of rock, come to the conclusion it was part of the parent cliff, and then, when it had lured you on to trusting it, there would be a shower of grit scree, and the thing would stand revealed as a fraudulent detached boulder. The gully terminates very steeply at the bottom, but if you observe the rule of the road and go to the left, "if you go to the right, you go wrong," you, in descending, will not go wrong.

There is an easy gully on the right (Steep Ghyll), and another on the left (Deep Ghyll), both of which meet at a narrow neck behind the Pinnacle. In fact, the whole arrangement is a kind of Scawfell Pillar in miniature, the Pinnacle itself somewhat resembling its big relation, and leaning over towards the main cliff something in the same way.

What we wanted to do was to climb the face of the Pinnacle direct. The first bit would not go, so I took the lead up the gully, and, on the first possible occasion, traversed out on my right. The traverse was easy, and the handholds from below looked promising, but they would not perform. Baker had a try, with equal success. This was repeated several times on the way up, but it always ended in failure, though on one occasion we did get a few inches up a crack. Arrived at the neck, Baker traversed round to the outside of the base of the Pinnacle and discovered the reason. Viewed from above, those apparently promising holds were minute water-polished rounded edges.

P. F. nearly made the greatest discovery of all. Suddenly Baker, who was moving with the utmost caution, grumbling the while at the disintegrated state of the rock, gave a sharp exclamation of alarm. I held on to the rope like grim death, expecting a game of pull devil, pull Baker (as he said to me on another occasion, when he was leading and I was in difficulties). But he was in no danger, though P. F. was. There he was, right at the foot of the Pinnacle, camera in

hand, quite heedless of the avalanche of loose stones and boulders that might at any moment descend on his head. In response to Baker's warning yells, he moved leisurely out of the way, and coolly attempted the ascent of Steep Ghyll, camera in one hand, and bag in the other. That was a bit too much though, and I had to go down with the rope to help him. We must put P. F. into some climbing club to teach him respect for rocks.

The Pinnacle is climbed by taking a long stride from the parent cliff, and playing at catch-as-catch-can. When you have got your grip, an undercut handhold is utilised and you are up—but not down. The last man has a poor time. He has to jump, as the rock overhangs so much it is impossible to climb down, and there is no belay. The distance is not great, but you have to land on a small ledge. If you overjump, you will come bash against the cliff; if you jump short, you will probably break your shins against the edge of the ledge. This time I stood on the main cliff and had him firmly on the rope, so that he could only have been injured; but the first time Baker ascended the Pinnacle, he was alone, and had to take the jump in a hurricane. Had he not landed exactly, he would have rolled down either Steep or Deep Ghyll, and probably over the broken ground, and the second tier of Laddow Crag besides, in all between two and three hundred feet; or perhaps only some eighty feet to the bottom of the Pinnacle.

The finest climb we had that day was the Twin Chimneys, near the far end of the crags, as you approach from Crowden. It is not far beyond a very curious overhanging chamber of rock, which projects from the top of the Rocks. It is like, to use an Irishman's description, a cave sticking out from a cliff.

A few feet up the chimney there is a projection of rock which seems unstable, but I pushed and pulled at it with hands, feet, and eventually rope, but could not move it more than it did on first being handled, so that, at present at least, it is quite safe. From that point the work is never for a moment easy, and generally difficult. We tried the right (proper left) branch

first. Some way up a leaf of rock projects in the middle of the Chimney. It is quite holdless, as is the rock on either side. The only plan is to embrace it, getting on as much arm, leg, and waistcoat as possible, and friction up. It is short, but when you are up, I am confident that you will not wish, as O. G. Jones did of Scawfell Pinnacle *arête*, that it were much longer.

Just above this, a heap of that detestable grit scree concealed a treacherous slab, on which Baker was about to stand to make room for me. From below it did not look safe, and, with a little trouble, I wrenched it out and threw it at P. F., just to keep up his spirits. "What's enough for one is enough for two," does not apply to footholds, so I had to stick where I was. It now became clear that the left branch of the Chimney was unassailable, so Baker attempted to traverse out to his left, but it was no go. Accordingly, I descended to below the leaf of rock, and Baker came down to the top of it. This is the true point from which the proper right branch should be attacked. The climbing at once becomes very difficult, and it was deemed safest to send P. F. round to the top with a rope. He most obligingly complied with our shouted request, and soon afterwards Baker commenced the final ascent. He went up absolutely with only the moral support of the rope, but it is a climb which ought not be attempted without a rope from above, after the leaf of rock is passed.

After this, occurred a most vexatious delay. Some distance to the right of the Twin Chimneys, we noted another fine-looking fissure. Baker had mounted to the top of a large block, covered with musty vegetation, and I was about to follow, when I noticed the block oscillate. I spoke to him as quietly as I could, and with equal quietness he moved to a place of safety. What was to be done now? I could not get up to him, and he could not advance without me. I suggested that he should climb down on my head, but he declined with thanks. He was anxious to complete the climb, and then, if it would go, we might be able to deal with the ricketty block. With touching obedience I toddled off once more to the top of the Crag, bearing with me Baker's rope and my own.

When I got to the top of the Chimney, I very nearly said something. That execrable, and execrated grit scree sloped steeply down to the edge of the rocks, and from that edge projected large black boulders, which might, or might not be firm. To me they appeared eminently unsatisfactory.

Clearly this was not a "one man job." If I sat delicately on the edge, so as to keep the rope clear of those perilous blocks, any sudden strain might very easily drag me through my precarious seat-hold, and land me and a boulder or two and an avalanche of scree on Baker, 60 or 70 feet below. If I walked back to where the slope eased off, and the ling afforded anchorage of sorts, it was almost certain that the friction of the rope along that uncertain edging would dislodge something. So I yelled for P. F.

P. F. made no reply, so, after shouting myself hoarse, I descended in great wrath to find the explanation. It had commenced raining, and P. F., rightly judging that a camera is more delicate than a climber, was packing his away. Whilst he was thus occupied, I represented to Baker the frightfully insecure condition of the edge above, and again offered my head and shoulders, but he would not.

On the way up I explained the situation to P. F., and it was agreed that, as he was the stronger man, he should sit carefully at the edge and work the rope clear of the doubtful blocks, whilst I held him firmly with the rope, so that there should be no possibility of his slipping. He took up his position, and I was moving back, when I was startled by a shout of alarm from below. P. F. had taken matters into his own hands, and had heaved down a coil of rope, to be followed instantaneously, almost as a matter of course, by a boulder.

My interior seemed to turn to water. An incredible number of thoughts, including one of justifiable homicide as I contemplated P. F.'s broad innocent back stooping over the edge, flashed through my mind, when Baker's voice, very full of vigorous life, reassured me.

Then we settled ourselves to business. The slack was taken steadily in for a time. Then came a pause; then a

sudden strain. It would not go, and once out of the crack, there was no getting back to it, so Baker had to be lowered down some 30 or 40 feet.

Whilst we were waiting for him, I conversed about the weather and the scenery—strictly. At length his face appeared at an unexpected point, a face of reproach. He had climbed a new and really interesting chimney by himself, which doubtless mollified him. I metaphorically fell on my knees, and, with true unselfishness, pleaded my innocence. His countenance cleared at once. It appeared that P. F. had tramped over so much moor, wriggled through so much cave, expended so much time and money, merely to oblige Baker, that the heaving of an occasional boulder was quite part of the game. I did not understand—then.

The weather had now broken, so we set our faces stationwards. The walk passed pleasantly, so pleasantly that before we had gone far, I found myself unthinking all the hard thoughts I had thunk, and, by the time we reached the farmhouse, I was tempted to ask P. F. to throw a few bricks at my head by way of compensation. But, with great fortitude, I resisted the temptation.

At the farm (or is it an inn?) they allowed us to cleanse ourselves in the kitchen, which we did, amidst avalanches of grit scree. Then we had an excellent tea (fresh eggs this time), so excellent that we had to run for the train, which was late—of course.

A few stations down, P. F. left us to tramp over miles of desolate waste to his home on another line, encumbered by his heavy camera bag. Then I understood.

There is only one regret connected with my visit to Derbyshire, and that is the suspection, amounting to a cer-r-tainty, that I shall be led to attempt the *descensus Averni* (? *facilis*), before my appointed time. Well! So be it! I am generally in a hole, normally stony, and parlously near being broke, so that, at least, I am partially qualified to become a speleologist.

Which is a good long word to end up with.