

Roundabout, for all its twists and turns and hesitations, may be the better graded way, and lead through Lakeland farms, or the Chilterns, or even the land of Burgundy, but its turns bring the climber back to the bigger hills, and keep them in the mind's landscape even during times like the present, when more tangible landscapes are hard to seek.

ROCK-CLIMBING IN NORTH WALES

By A. D. M. COX

Read before the Alpine Club, February 25, 1941

‘IT may well be thought a hopeless task to interest the members of this Club in such an everyday matter as the English Fells, or to invest with any sort of dignity a subject so exceedingly small of scale.’ The opening sentence of W. P. Haskett Smith’s paper¹ on *Climbing in Cumberland*, written nearly fifty years ago, gives distinguished evidence of that instinct to apologise which has generally been the first reaction of those attempting to write a paper for the ALPINE JOURNAL on some aspect of British rock-climbing. A man undertaking such a paper feels rather like a nervous trespasser, suspecting both that he ought not to be where he is, and that in any case the innocence of his motives may not be fully understood. On the one hand, there is a genuine doubt whether the British hills may properly be permitted to stand in the august company of the Alps, even in the judgement of those equally familiar with both; on the other, the feeling that sometimes, perhaps, British climbing may have suffered unjustly, through a contempt not always bred by familiarity. ‘There was a time,’ says Haskett Smith, ‘and that not so many years ago, when it was popularly supposed that there was only one climb in Lakeland, but that one climb of so utterly gruesome a character that no one could attempt it and yet preserve a reputation for sanity. Striding Edge is still there.’ Today for ‘Striding Edge’ one might almost emend ‘Twill Du.’

The serious charges that may be brought against the British hills are, I suppose, two: first, that their scale and character mean that, whatever the pleasure they give, it is not properly speaking the pleasure of the mountaineer, and secondly that the type of climbing practised on British crags has become so specialised that it has now lost anything it may once have had in common with the Alps. The first of these criticisms raises deep and possibly unprofitable issues, which I propose to evade. But it is perhaps worth noticing that, along with the tendency

¹ A.J. 16. 141. For general references, see *Alpine Journal Index*, vols. 1-15, p. 37, vols. 16-38, p. 84.

to suspect an incompatibility between the purposes of the Alpine Club and the practice of British rock-climbing, there is evident, at any rate in the early JOURNALS, a quite different tradition, which accepts British climbing as a proper and natural part of mountaineering in the best sense. The first ascent of the West Peak of Lliwedd by A. H. Stocker and T. W. Wall in 1883 finds copious record in 'Alpine Notes,'² as also, less fully, does that of the East Peak of the same mountain twenty years later.³ Notes of the early climbs on the Lake District cliffs occur fairly frequently. Above all, Skye, described as 'the true mountaineering centre of the British Isles,' has a natural home in the pages of the ALPINE JOURNAL, and is glowingly described in articles⁴ from the great men—Forbes, Pilkington, Dent, Archer Thomson, Yeld, Collie. So little, in fact, is Skye felt to stand in need of apology, that the desire not to give publicity to a private mountain paradise is the only reason advanced for an otherwise not very noticeable reticence about it.

If, more recently, British climbing has lost its place in 'Alpine Notes' and has seldom provided material for a paper, this is largely because the twentieth century has given it clubs and journals of its own. Probably, however, this is not the only cause. The period in which ascents on British rocks naturally found their place in a Journal which was a record of mountain adventure was that in which whole rock faces were untouched, and even whole districts little explored from the climbing point of view; in which the right line to go up a cliff was the easiest, and the methods and standards and footgear of rock-climbing were not very different from those prevailing in the Alps. All this, of course, is much changed—was, in fact, already much changed by about the turn of the century. As soon as the earliest and most obvious problems had been solved, a change was bound to come, if only, paradoxically, because one factor in the old approach, more fundamental than method or technique, did not change so easily: the instinct not merely to climb, but to climb and explore. If this is an instinct capable of perverted development, it is nevertheless, at root, the healthiest of mountaineering instincts. It is one which may always find satisfaction in the Alps, not perhaps, for most of us, in the making of new routes, but in the exploration of districts new to us personally, and equally in the infinite variations of condition in which familiar climbs may be found on repetition. But the British hills on which climbing is possible are relatively few, and their variations of condition roughly limited to dry, wet, and occasionally snowy. So in this country, when the obvious natural problems set by the mountains had been solved, this instinct for exploration has had to find satisfaction in problems which, far more than in the Alps, have been of our own setting. Hence almost from the start an element of artificiality appeared in British rock-climbing, little noticed at first—for the gullies seemed good enough natural lines, even though the bed of a gully might be an

² A.J. 11. 239.

³ A.J. 21. 429.

⁴ A.J. 13. 433, 15. 422, 26. 17, 23. 611, 32. 163.

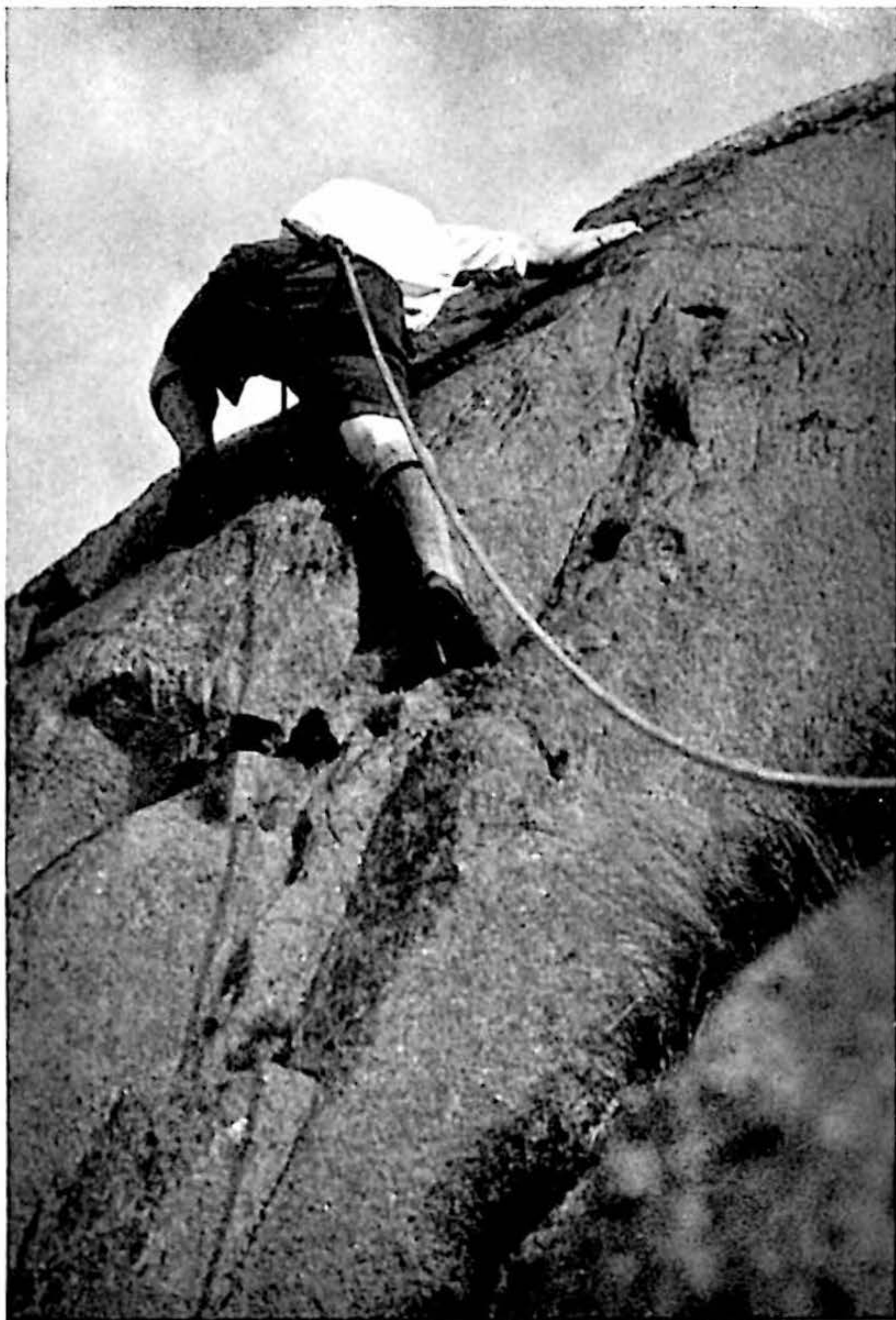
unhealthy place in the Alps—but inevitably refined and refined as each successive route narrowed the area of unexplored rock. Today, with many rock faces almost a network of variants, the element of artificiality sometimes seems so to dominate the sport as to render it ridiculous; and it may be forgotten that it does represent, now as in the early days, a very sound and intrinsic part of the mountaineer's attitude.

The gradual raising of the standard of achievement—it would be a mistake to say ability—which the impulse for exploration in a limited field was bound to bring, has naturally been accompanied by a change in climbing technique, but a change very much slighter and less sinister than might be thought. The essential rules of safe movement on steep ground after all do not change. The external symptoms of such developments of technique as British climbing conditions have suggested are, first, the rubber shoe or the plain stocking—neither of them novelties thirty years ago; and more recently a considerable body of imports from the Continent—Alpine line, the rope loop, *Kletterschuhe*, *Karabiner* and piton. These newcomers, suffering the general fate of invaders from abroad ever since Roman times, have quickly lost most of their alien characteristics, and become assimilated, with mutual benefit, to the native stock. This point needs to be emphasised, since the rather formidable sound of the new equipment has tended to obscure the fact that the actual ways in which it is used, and *ipso facto* the spirit in which it is used, are entirely different in this country. The new devices are largely matters of convenience, which make both for safety on the harder climbs and expedition on the easier. It is always useful, for example, to carry a rope loop and a *Karabiner* on the easiest climb, if only because it is simpler to belay in that way round a chockstone than to pass either the rope or the man behind it. On rubber climbs, *Kletterschuhe* are often useful, because turf ledges retain the wet, and to climb much in stockinged feet is quickly detrimental to both feet and stockings. The piton, indeed, is in rather a different category, for it is never used, fortunately, as a mere convenience. Undoubtedly it possesses a power for evil, and it is healthy that it should be viewed with suspicion. Some would say that it should never be employed at all. Without wishing either to defend or attack it, I think that there has been more ado about it than it is worth. The British crags show no signs of becoming riddled with pitons. In Wales, Cumberland and Skye, I have myself only come across five altogether; and of these not more than two are still *in situ*. Compare this with a standard Alpine rock climb such as the ordinary traverse of the Grépon, on which I think there are four permanently fixed, not as a necessity but as a convenience. I do not know of any British climb on which more than one piton has been used, with the exception of a climb made in 1936 on Tryfan by a party of Bavarians, who inserted three—all destined to be removed, at some labour, by subsequent parties. A piton is never used as a pulley over which the leader is hauled up, and only on the rarest occasions—I can think of two

instances—as anything but a belay or a safeguard. Probably, also, no one who puts in a piton considers the climb as pure as if no piton had been used ; and of course the great majority of parties climbing never carry a piton at all. If it is no longer possible to say, as it was a dozen years ago, that the hand which could insert a piton into British rock would be capable of drawing a trigger on a fox (and, by an odd chance, on my first visit to the climb of which this was written we encountered the corpses of two shot foxes), yet the practice is very rarely and very carefully used, and does not constitute any danger to the purity of rock-climbing in this country.

Turning from these rather disjointed general remarks to the Welsh hills themselves, I find myself wondering whether it may not be the difficulty of the subject as much as diffidence in speaking of it which has deterred people better qualified than myself from attempting it more often. It is not exactly true to say that one rock climb is very like another, but they at any rate have this in common, that there is none of them which by itself could properly fill a whole paper ; and it is hard to find the peg on which half a dozen of them would hang easily together. There is the further difficulty that exciting incidents, as distinct from exciting sensations, have no business on a British climb ; either it is within one's powers and all goes well, or it is not and one should turn back. It is tempting to continue with both feet on the comparatively safe ground of generalities ; and if I venture, instead, to attempt some description of the way in which recent rock-climbing developments impinge upon an ordinary, if fairly assiduous, climber, my excuse must simply be that such a treatment may be less tedious ; on the principle that the virtue of a rope, even of line, does not lie, as one might have supposed, in the three solid hemp strands, but in the thin red thread which runs through them. Perhaps I should say that for me the piton has only occasionally been a matter of practical concern. I did once drive a piton into a small, steep cliff on the banks of the River Plym in Devonshire, a spot so remote that the question of ethics could be permitted to sink itself under the more material problem of the overhang above ; and I must confess that my main recollection of the act is of the simple pleasure of hitting something repeatedly with a hammer. For the rest, I have twice in Wales come across a piton to which I have been thankful to attach myself, knowing it to be no fault of mine if such things were met with exactly where they were wanted.

A glance at the map will explain why it is natural for an Oxford man to write of the Welsh rather than the Lakeland rocks. Whatever compensating advantages the members of the Oxford University Mountaineering Club may have enjoyed, geography denied them ' the magnificent opportunities for learning to climb rocks which the situation of Cambridge, almost equidistant from North Wales and the Lake District, uniquely affords.' A difference of seventy or eighty miles by road drew one more naturally from Oxford to Nant Ffrancon Pass than to Wasdale Head, and the bias in that direction was confirmed by the hospitality of the Climbers Club hut, close beside the Holyhead

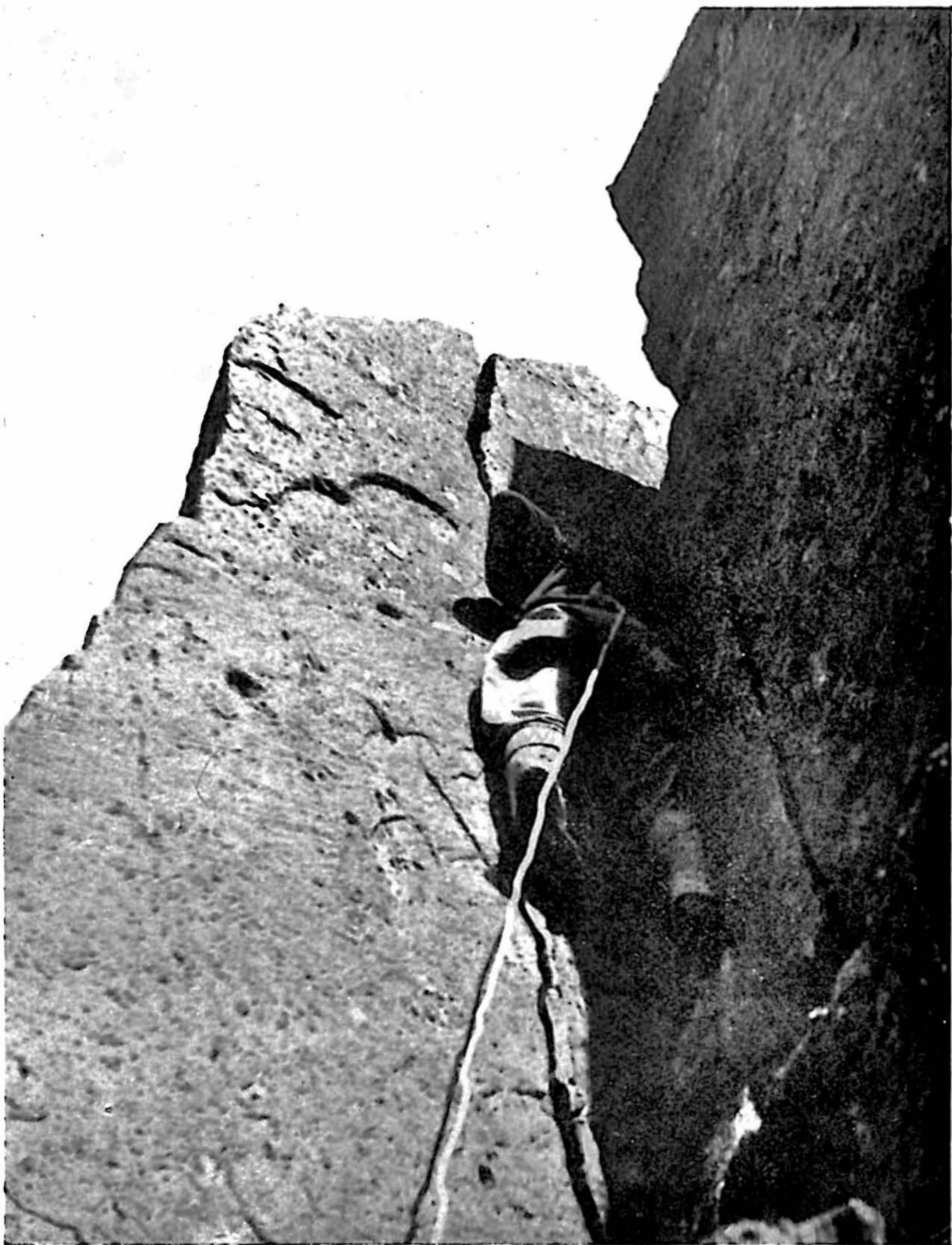


TENNIS SHOE ON IDWAL.



MALLORY'S SLAB.

[To face p. 118.]



FINAL CRACK OF DIRECT, GLYDER FACH.

road ; for at that time the Fell and Rock hut, Brackencluse, had not been built. The period at which my generation of the O.U.M.C. first began to go to Helyg was at the close of the years 1927-1933, which may be taken as probably the busiest period of exploratory activity since the last war. To distinguish these few years is perhaps rather arbitrary, for important discoveries had been made before, and have continued to be made since. But it is certainly true that in 1927 there were great areas of rock which for one reason or another had not yet been explored at all, and were likely to feel the impact of the next seventh wave of climbing impulse. Some indeed of the areas now to be opened up were blanks which had survived on climbing grounds already well known. Near the top of the N. Buttress of Tryfan, the Terrace Wall—the best 150 feet of rock on what can be a sunnier face than any in Wales—had remained until now practically intact. The supporting East Wall of the Idwal Slabs was quite untouched, although it directly faced the hundreds of parties who must have come up through the cwm to the foot of Faith, Hope and Charity. These two cliffs, each of which was to yield some half dozen climbs, may be taken as examples of one type of exploration in this period. They are small cliffs in vertical height, and if the bold nose of Belle Vue Bastion must sometimes have raised a question, it is very probable that earlier climbers had not considered the Idwal East Wall seriously at all ; pretty certainly, I think, they would not have regarded either cliff as a profitable field for the making of so many routes. Each had, no doubt, also been protected by its steepness, a factor which gave the new climbs a particular charm, merely as paths for balanced movement. This was perhaps the primary justification for the making of so many variant routes upon such comparatively restricted areas of rock. Their attraction, of course, did not lie solely in their difficulty, for rocks always possess an indefinable character of their own, irrespective of the accident of the holds, and it is no more true of these climbs than of any others that the hardest were necessarily the most pleasant to climb. At the same time, I should say that to each climber according to his powers difficulty in a climb is an attraction, although one which often may not suit his mood of the day ; and this type of rather small cliff, providing short, rather concentrated climbs, did derive more of its merit from the element of difficulty than do most climbs on bigger cliffs. I understand a difficult climb to be one which can be climbed easily, but only by a good climber climbing at the top of his form ; for one quickly realises, watching a man moving without effort over rocks generally considered very hard, that ease and difficulty are not very far apart, and that violent struggle should only have a part in rock-climbing in quite exceptional places. The pleasure of what is known as severe climbing does not lie in the necessity of making desperate efforts or of risking life and limb—it would be strange if it did—but precisely in avoiding any such necessity ; in the physical satisfaction of moving safely and easily on holds which call for a fine adjustment between the climber and the medium on which he is climbing.

The explorations of the period 1927-1933 did also break away from the older climbing grounds altogether, to open up crags which until then either had not been considered or had defeated the attempts made upon them. The earlier generation could afford to climb for the most part only on the pick of the cliffs, which were generally also the most pleasing aesthetically, and often led straight up on to a ridge-crest or mountain summit. A surprising number of cliffs had escaped attention completely, for no other reason than that they did not lead anywhere. That the ascent of a cliff should lead somewhere had never, of course, been a *sine qua non*—witness Kern Knotts or the Milestone Buttress; obvious superiority of form and, even more, ease of approach had sometimes been a sufficient credential. The one recommendation was obviously better than the other, and modern climbers, in applying more widely the principle that climbing opportunity in the British Isles must be accepted wherever it is offered, have done so with some discrimination. The magnificent steep rocks of the Columnar Cliff, for example, facing S. across the Llanberis Pass, are attaining a popularity which the straggling, formless line of Creigiau Gleision above Llyn Cowlyd is not likely to rival. The climbing given by the large number of cliffs newly explored is very varied in quality, and although a fairly common feature of it has been a quantity of vegetation and rotten rock, this disadvantage, except in one or two instances, is probably no greater than it was in the early days on Lliwedd; nor is it in all cases a disadvantage.

The best of the new cliffs, however, were naturally those of whose attraction there had never been any doubt, if only they could be climbed. One such was the central Nose of Dinas Mot, in the Llanberis Pass, the first complete ascent of which, made in 1930, was long commemorated by the leader's bloodstained sock, lying at the top in a little ash-tree, 'which,' he noted, 'will doubtless grow into a splendid belay.' This direct route up the Nose gives at any rate a partial illustration of the way in which the climbers of each generation start, in their standards of difficulty, from the shoulders of the generation preceding. There are good things in the upper portions of the climb, in particular a very strenuous giant version of the familiar Parallel Cracks pitch⁵ on Hope, but the key to the ascent is near the top of the

⁵ *Pitch*. There seems to be some doubt as to the precise meaning of this word, and as to its worthiness to be accepted as a regular mountaineering term. It has been held that 'pitch' is an expression which should be confined to Cumbrian gullies, and that its modern meaning is equally well expressed by the less local term 'step.' 'Pitch' is, indeed, originally a Lakeland term, used of steep places in gullies; cf. the Badminton *Mountaineering* definition (1892), 'a small cut-away cliff in a gully,' or the definition in Claude Wilson's *Mountaineering* (1893). But it will be very widely agreed that it has come to be no longer particularly associated either with the Lakes or with gullies, and that it is now almost invariably used to mean the distance between one stance, or belay, and the next. In this sense it is perhaps the commonest of all British climbing terms. 'Step' can scarcely be used in the same way, for a step is surely one of two things: a single stride from one hold to another, or a steep rise between one platform and another. A pitch is neither of these things,



Photo, F. S. Smythe.]

LOOKING S.E. FROM THE SUMMIT OF CARNEDD DAFYDD.

To face p. 129.



: [*Photo, F. S. Smythe.*]

THE SHOULDER BETWEEN LLIWEDD AND SNOWDON.

second pitch. A slanting gangway, simple in rubbers, leads up for 70 ft. above the belay, to a point at which previous climbers clearly turned back. Some 15 ft. higher is a tempting, secure recess. To reach this, it is necessary to make a very delicate move, unprotected, across a slab into a corner, and then to work back diagonally by an awkward, slanting hand traverse, leading up to the stance. The first lead of this short section, made without the certainty that it could be done, called for a high degree of climbing judgement if it was to be done, as it was, without risk. Today, only ten years after the original ascent, this place is climbed perhaps a dozen times in a year. The place itself has not altered, since it was quite free of vegetation from the beginning, and one can only assume that the fact that one good climber has shown a thing to be possible brings it automatically within the powers of a number of other climbers, who lacked the extra spark of genius which was needed to make the first passage. The gradual rise in standard has always been largely due to the few leaders in each generation who are capable of climbing things a little more difficult than their predecessors—and are so capable because they themselves have climbed in the regular way the places which their predecessors made possible for them.

The climbers of thirteen years ago were fortunate, for among the cliffs which had been looked at but left intact was one which, with Lliwedd and Craig yr Ysfa, ranks among the three finest precipices in Wales: Clogwyn dur Arddu, the exploration of whose twin buttresses was undoubtedly the most rewarding venture in Welsh climbing since the performances of the Archer Thomson generation on Lliwedd. Dur Arddu is a cliff which gives point to the sometimes rather loose term 'rock architecture.' The shapely E. Buttress, with its sweep of almost vertical slabs and the effect of its sharp final pyramid scarcely disturbed by the grass gallery at two-thirds of its height; the W. Buttress, a great formless mass of rock, the line of its slabs tilting irregularly leftwards at a high angle: their scale would make each impressive singly, and they are so grouped that by their very contrasts they show to better advantage. Five hundred feet below their base lies the little lake in the floor of the cwm; nor, surprisingly, is the more distant view from them appreciably the worse for the little trains which ply assiduously up and down the Llanberis ridge a mile away.

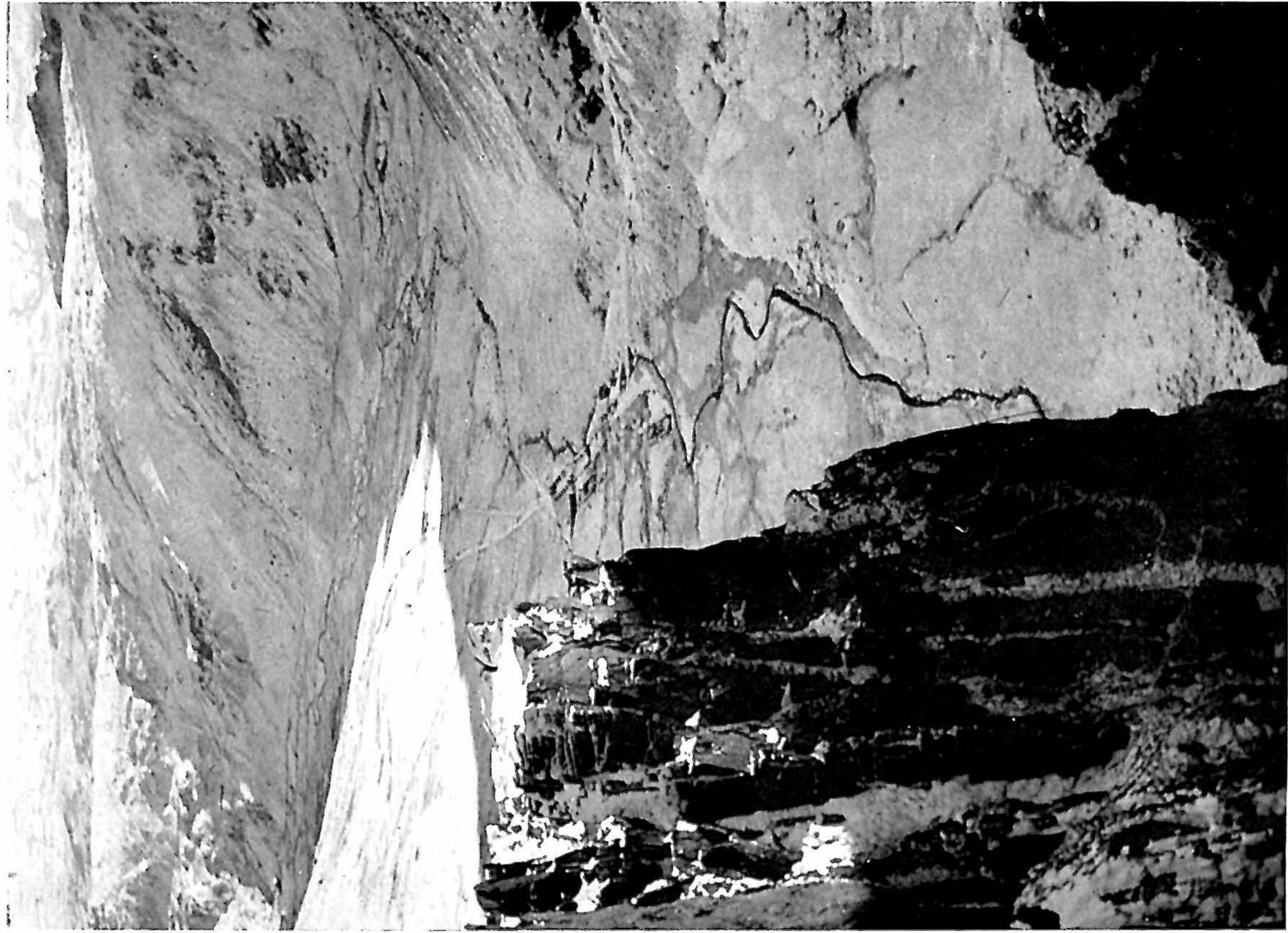
The climbing on the W. Buttress is essentially slab climbing. With many slabby cliffs, the Pinnacle face on Scafell for example, the expanse and uniform angle make possible a good deal of rather unsatisfactory variation, but on the W. Buttress of Clogwyn dur Arddu the much though one might on occasion wish it were. Many a long stride would seem shorter if it were indeed a complete pitch, many a pitch more accommodating if one could count on an ample platform above and below. A step such as the two obstacles on the N.E. ridge of Mount Everest may contain several pitches; or a pitch several steps, whether of the one kind or of the other.

For editorial sanction for the term, see *A.J.* 26. 29; 27. 384 *sqq.*, *passim*; 32. 159; 33. 166 *sqq.*, *passim*.

climber is held pretty closely, for the most part, to a single line of possibility, for the reason that the Buttress is composed of a sheaf of narrow slabs which so overlap each other, from W. to E., that the dividing walls are very difficult to cross. The angle is high—perhaps 60° or 65° —and the leftward tilt of the cliff gives the climber a curious sensation of being continually forced out to the left, above the overhanging drop on to the next slab; an effect which heightens the feeling of exposure induced by the size and steepness of the slabs. The E. Buttress is very differently, and more simply, constructed. Its steepness is such that, broadly speaking, it can only be climbed where it is split by cracks or chimneys; and there is a number of these running cleanly up two-thirds of its height to the grass gallery where most of the climbs end, a matter of 250 or 300 ft. As on the W. Buttress, but for a different reason, there is very little opportunity for deviation, and chimneys of this scale and steepness, more continuous probably than anything of the kind in Britain, provide situations equally fine.

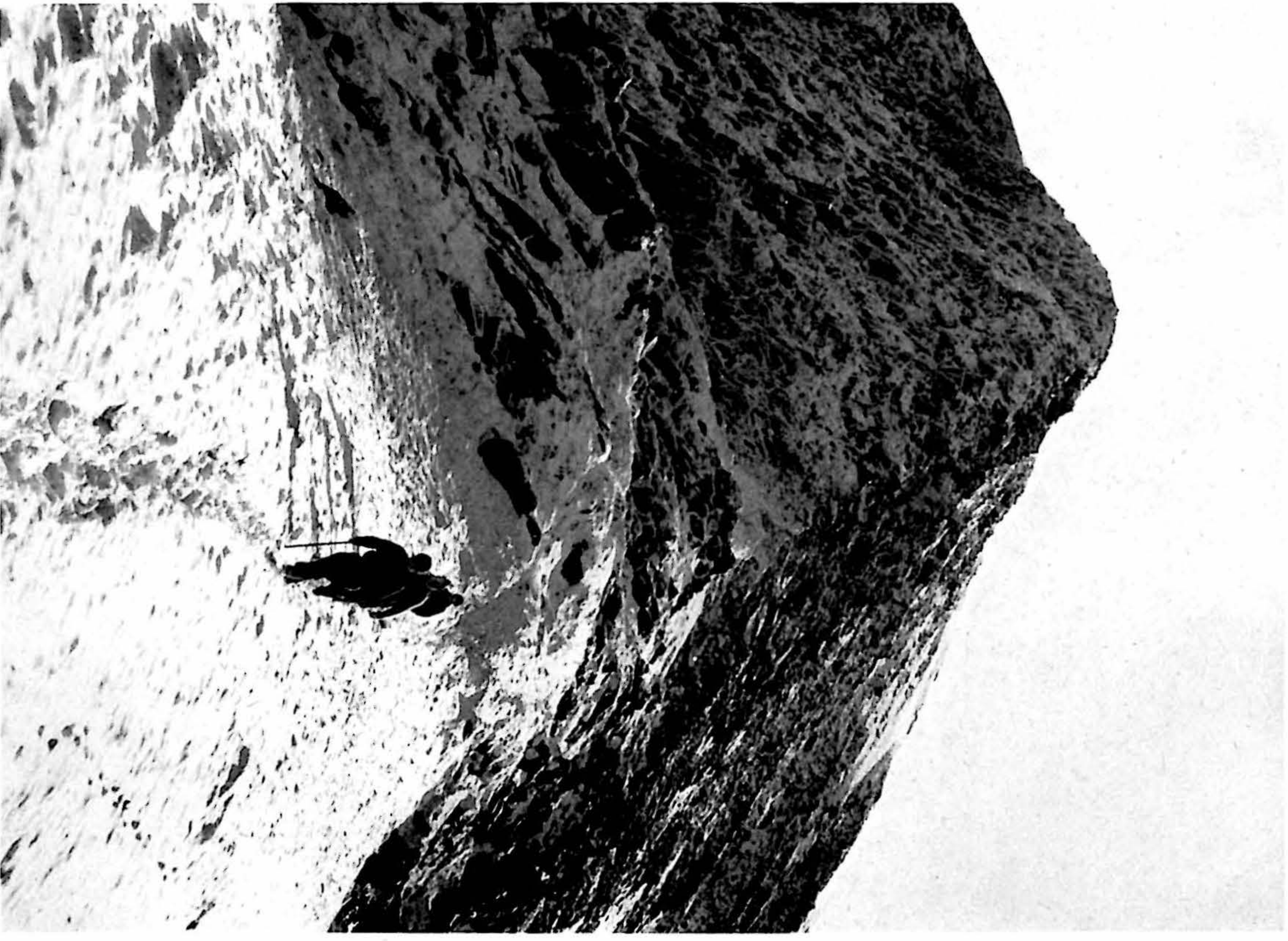
The climbs made on these cliffs by 1933 were already something of a legend. No description of them had, of course, appeared in any guidebook, and information was mainly gathered from the hut book at Helyg, a source which too often afforded nothing better than two empty pages labelled 'Please leave blank; new climb on dur Arddu.' But there was talk of more than one human pyramid, of inserted chockstones, of rope-throwing and a broomstick and faith and friction; reports at first more than sufficient to keep the O.U.M.C. from aspiring to see for itself what sort of climbs really lay behind these deterrents. It was the enthusiasm of a new member of the Club, John Hoyland, who was later killed on Mont Blanc,⁶ which first suggested that these routes ought not to be allowed to frighten us off without even an inspection. As a matter of fact our first visit gave opportunity for a much more thorough inspection than we had bargained for, as a combination of bad conditions and our own stupidity landed us in an almost all-night session in drizzling rain on ledges of Longland's route on the W. Buttress; an experience which should perhaps have afforded us proof of our inadequacy. But it was obviously the kind of climb which it would be good to do again in daylight, and two days later I was led up it again by Hoyland, under conditions still rather messy, but with fine weather and unlimited time. For about 300 ft., the climb lies on first one and then another steep, narrow slab, leaning always to the left above a magnificent drop. To the right it is bounded by a low wall over which there is no escape, until an improbable overhanging passage of 15 ft. just below the top leads suddenly out on to easy ground. This place is of happy memory to me, as one on which I have on three occasions trusted entirely to the rope and been pulled up swinging clear. But ordinarily it is a luxury rather than a necessity to go up by this method, on which the leader may have views; and the appetite for fine situations should have been satisfied by some of the airy stances

⁶ *A.J.* 46. 415 *sqq.*



Photo, F. S. Smythe.]

FROM CRAIG YR YSFA LOOKING DOWN CWM EIGIAU.



Photo, F. S. Smythe.]

PEN HELYG FROM CRAIG YR YSFA.

on the slabs below. Yet there is nothing desperate about the actual climbing, which lies for the most part on holds so perfectly cut that, small though they are, one could not wish for them to be bigger.

These first tastes of what is considerably the easiest of the three existing routes on the W. Buttress left us with an unforgettable impression of the quality of the cliff. In its non-artificiality and its continuously superb situations, this climb was clearly superior to anything we had been on before; and later experience was to show that these two features are strongly characteristic of all the climbs on Clogwyn dur Arddu. These attractions, and others more subtle, gave the place a kind of fascination for us, which is, I imagine, felt by most of those who have once climbed on it. The cliff had something of the character of an Alpine peak in the matter of weather; nearly all the climbs needed several consecutive fine days for them to be in safe condition, and were sufficiently long and unescapable to make it very disquieting if one should be caught on them by a change of weather. Good condition was also necessary for the members of a party; and the rare coincidence of these two desirable factors meant that a climb on Clogwyn dur Arddu generally came as a reward for long patience.

Once, indeed, I was taken up two climbs there on a first day—my first, in fact, for nine months. I forget whether a cow actually has been, or merely could be, taken up the Matterhorn by a sufficient team of Zermatt guides; but this country can rarely have seen a nearer approach to this feat than my own progress up the walls of the E. Buttress at the end of two ropes compellingly operated by Robin Hodgkin, who was leading. For me, it was a wholly pleasurable experience, and was capped that night by another of a different order—a violent storm of rain, thunder and lightning, whose flashes afforded us brilliant glimpses of the cliffs, seen through the darkness from our tent. This visit and one or two others, spaced at wide intervals, increased our knowledge of Clogwyn dur Arddu; and in the summer of 1937 we planned, with favourable weather, to camp for a week by the lake at its foot. On the heavy walk up the path from Llanberis we were overtaken by an American, walking at great speed, who enquired the whereabouts of the nearest church to Snowdon, explaining that it was his ambition to climb the highest mountain in England and Wales and attend a religious service in Welsh within twenty-four hours of landing from the States. We were unable to help him over this, but gave a reassuring answer to a second enquiry as to the condition of the glaciers ahead. He left us at a speed which suggested that he would accomplish both his objects with some hours in hand.

For the whole week we were exceptionally lucky with the weather. On the one or two days on which there was a slight drizzle, we went over either to Clogwyn y Ddisgl (where we made and named a new climb, whose full description we subsequently discovered to have been twenty years in print) or to Lliwedd; but on each of these occasions we were able to come back and climb on Clogwyn dur Arddu later in the day. On one of these evenings we found Longland's Climb in

perfect condition, and the four of us (Clare and Beridge Mallory, Hodgkin and myself) went up in an hour and a half, an ascent so smooth in comparison with stormier previous passages that, like a successful ski run, it has left no impression beyond a general memory of active pleasure. Another evening, we discovered a climb on the E. Buttress which really was new, a very steep crack, but not hard, and so liberally filled (by nature !) with chockstones that when we were spread out on it our rope seemed threaded to it all the way up, like a drainpipe clamped to a wall. We christened it Sunset Crack, since it was eight o'clock before we even started on it ; as our own climb, it was attractive, though much slighter than the other E. Buttress routes. Two of these, the Chimney and the Curving Crack, had given us chimney climbing *par excellence* ; the former a magnificently direct line up the middle of the cliff, the latter a very steep V-groove of 250 ft., formed where an immense detached flake of that height leans against the main wall. My chief recollections of this climb are of Hodgkin pausing, half way up the 30-ft. layback with which it starts, in order to pull up his socks, and, higher up, of the infuriating and recurrent necessity of wiping one's muddy hands on one's hair in order to prevent them slipping on the cleancut little holds of the two side walls. These two climbs are no longer than a considerable number of others in Wales, but they gain their height so quickly, wasting no time on gentle preliminaries, that they seem a good deal longer than they really are. By the same process a third climb which we did, which really was a full 500 ft., appeared, on rather a cold day, almost interminable. We started from the lowest point of the E. Buttress, up A. S. Piggott's original route, the climbing on which is at first much more open than the confined chimney work of the rest of the buttress ; but, as if in compensation, for some 80 ft. immediately below the Green Gallery there ensues an exceptionally strenuous crack, not more than an inch or two in width. Of this place we had had unhappy experience on a previous occasion, and Hodgkin, out of desire to avoid it, took to the extraordinarily impressive open wall round a corner to the right, a very delicate lead on new ground, which brought us across into the upper part of the Chimney Climb. We took in the two long extra pitches of this gratuitously, because after the previous passage they should have been easy ; regretted it ; and, above, out of mere obstinacy refused the usual easy escape of the Green Gallery, and finished in a raw mist direct up the final pyramid to the top.

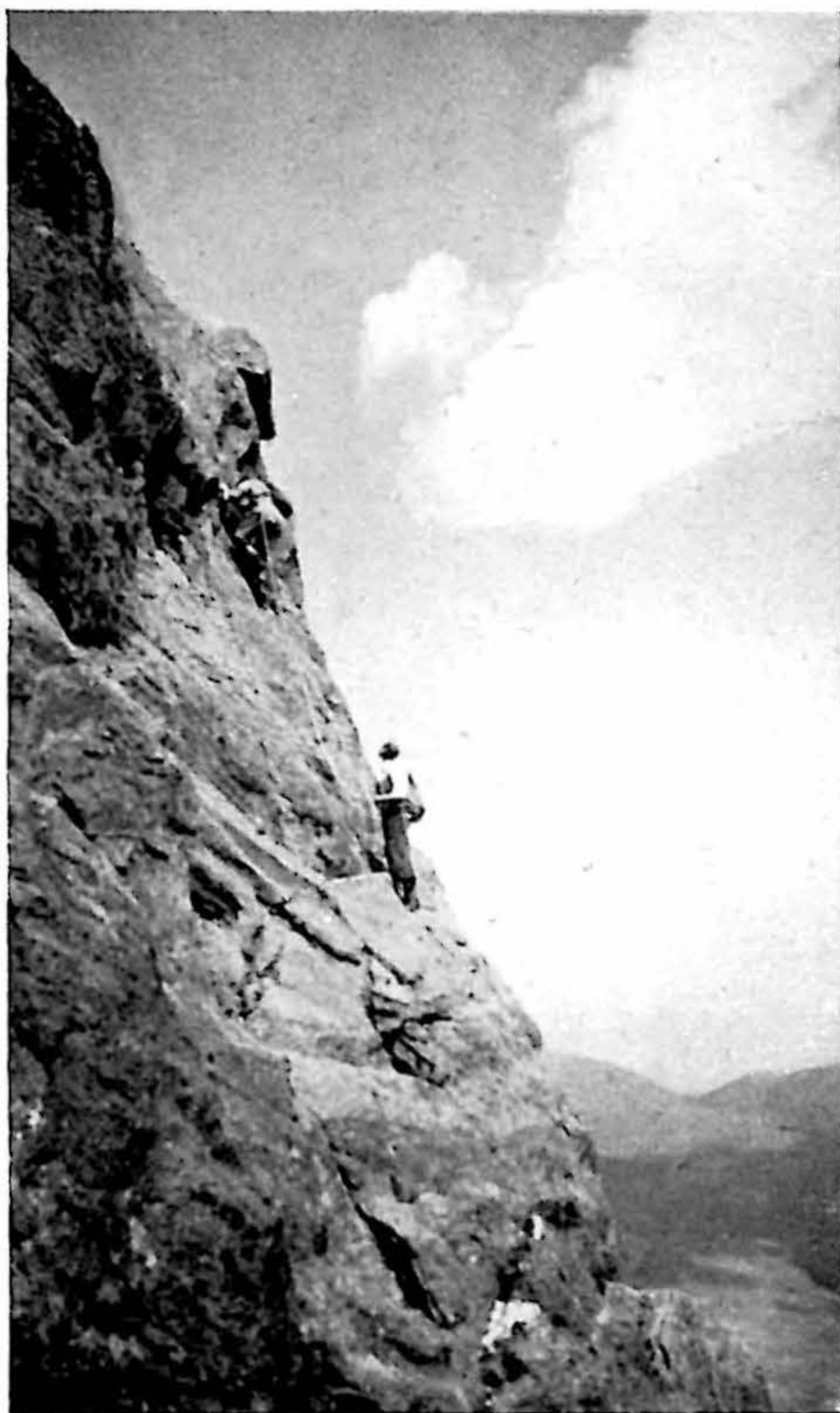
This was a fine climb, in spite of our own and the weather's perverseness ; it was continuously steep, contained some magnificent bits, and gave probably as long a route as one could find on the E. Buttress. But for sheer exhilaration it could not compare with the longest of the W. Buttress climbs, the Great Slab, which we had been on two days before. The W. Buttress is heavily undercut along the whole length of its base, and the other two routes on it are forced to find their way out on to the face from the E. terrace on its flank. At one point, however, a kind of rock pillar provides a fortunate flaw in the defences,

and from this it is possible in a few feet of climbing to traverse out on to the rocks above the overhang. The Great Slab climb thus starts a long way to the right of its nearest neighbour, and remains in the same isolation for the whole height of the cliff. For the first 300 ft., the route follows an intricate zigzag course, in order to reach the foot of the actual Slab, which, although itself some 250 ft. in height, only begins half way up the Buttress. On the first ascent of the climb, 150 ft. of rope had to be run out in a single lead from the pillar. The ascents of a number of parties before us had unearthed a good belay which divided this prodigious pitch, and had further eased it by providing a well kicked ladder of steps up the back of the long caterpillar of steep turf which is its principal feature. But already, at its top, the steepness and isolation of the face gave us a remarkable sense of remoteness; and 150 ft. higher, when the diminishing series of ledges on which we had been climbing gave out, we seemed to be miles from anywhere. In fact we were 100 ft. horizontally from where we wanted to be, the right-hand bottom corner of the Slab, and we could see no possible line for the complicated down-and-up traverse which we knew to lie between us and it. An apparently smooth white slab, which in fact concealed adequate holds if we had gone and tried it, persuaded us that the last party had kicked away a vital turf ledge; and, in this conviction, Hodgkin had no alternative but to force a different, rising traverse of horrible difficulty, as it seemed to us following. This at least brought us to our immediate objective, and we assembled like protesting crows in the corner of the Slab, on a triangular patch of sloping grass which seemed like a meadow by comparison with the way we had come. The four of us were climbing on over 300 ft. of rope, and we settled down to a long halt while we unravelled the muddle caused by our haphazard arrival. The next pitch, direct up the corner, with an extreme straddle at the top to avoid an overhanging block, was very thin, but not so unreasonable as its predecessor; and the final 200-ft. stretch on the Slab itself was sheer pleasure. A combination of straightforward rocks and the magnificent exposure of the upper sweep of the buttress gave a delightful sensation of controlled relaxation after the previous difficulties, and we emerged contentedly into the late afternoon sun on the last 30 ft., after 4 hours' climbing in the shadow.

Fortunately this compressed account of some of the climbs on Clogwyn dur Arddu does not suggest itself as a starting-point for an elaborate comparison between rock-climbing in this country and climbing in the Alps. But since the Clogwyn dur Arddu climbing is typical of the more ambitious recent Welsh rock-climbing, it may be made the pretext for some isolated remarks, as a less wearisome substitute for that fruitless task. British rock-climbing is often regarded as too specialised. Rock-climbing pure and simple could, of course, never be anything but a specialised branch of a sport which primarily embraces the climbing of peaks of mixed rock, snow and ice. The charge, then, is not one of concentrating exclusively on the climbing of rocks, for it would be difficult, in most months of the year, for a

climber in this country to do anything else, but of attaching too much importance to the single element of difficulty ; a vice which lies the wrong side of a line extremely hard to draw, and one incidentally at least as commonly found in the sport as a whole as in the British corner of it. My own feeling is that there is very little tendency in this country towards the cultivation of the extreme ; that there is an excellent safeguard, for one thing, in the weather, which will always force the British climber, however viciously inclined, to find pleasure in the ordinary climbs, on which willy-nilly he will spend the majority of his climbing days. I should rather say that the tendency in recent years has been to divide the two aspects of British mountaineering—rock-climbing and hill-walking ; the product being not so much two classes of men, the people who climb and the people who walk, as a single class, liking both its climbing and its walking as before, but now dichotomous, preferring to make either the one thing or the other the centre of any given mountaineering day. This is only the broadest generalisation, so broad that it is possibly untrue of the majority of climbers, but relevant, I think, to the attitude of those who enjoy the harder modern climbing. It is a tendency which may to some extent be due to ignoble motives, but by no means entirely. It represents a desire to make either the climb or the walk the expedition of the day, according to the party's mood, just as in the Alps one might choose either to do an easy peak for the pleasure of being carefree or a difficult one for the pleasure of achievement. A party in Wales will often drive by car as near to the foot of its climb as the road will take it, perhaps out of laziness, but also, possibly, because for that day it is wanting primarily to climb ; by no means because it dislikes walking altogether. A climb of several hours, such as one may have on Clogwyn dur Arddu, is better made by untired men, who have been able to leave their rucksacks at the bottom of the rocks and are concentrating for the moment solely on the climb. These, of course, are the longer climbs, and are comparatively rare ; but the same is often true of the shorter hard ones. A single severe climb of a hundred feet gives little satisfaction by itself ; three or four such climbs make a decent and varied climbing day, worth while for its own sake ; just as a long day's walking over the outlying summits of the Carnedd's is not a hotchpotch, but a full day, worth having. Nor is a day of which the climbing is the central feature incompatible with two hours' walking over the tops in the evening, a combination which is in many ways ideal.

The British climbs cannot, of course, offer more than a faint imitation of some of the attractions of the Alps ; the combined pleasure of snow, rock and ice ; the attainment of a peak by climbing ; the collective movement of a rope going smoothly ; the rapid gaining of height on a ridge or face, or the being at a height for hours continuously on a summit ridge. But in compensation they do give certain slighter pleasures of their own. One may climb hard rocks deliberately, pitch by pitch, for their own sake, with the pleasure unspoilt, as it so often is in the Alps, by an uncomfortable suspicion, turning too late to



TERRACE WALL, TRYFAN.



DINAS CROMLECH (COLUMNAR).

[To face p. 126.]



Photo, F. S. Smythe.]

SNOWDON FROM CRIB GOCH, N. FACE, WITH GLASLYN BENEATH.

certainly, that one must have missed the route. One may be entirely leisured, not rushing the difficulties, stopping where one likes for as long as one likes, knowing that there is no competition with the clock. And one is climbing light, possibly without sack, almost always without the infuriating clank of an ubiquitous axe against the rock. These, indeed, may only be the virtues of our home mountains' defects, and an insufficient compensation ; but they combine to give the very positive pleasure of a sense of intimacy with the rocks, whether hard or easy, which one cannot ordinarily look for in the Alps. This is the particular charm of our actual climbing ; the charm of the hills themselves, impossible to pin down, has much the same character. Nor is there anything new in this. One criticises and one analyses, and one weighs the trend of recent developments ; but the more one does so, the less significant does the change seem to have been. The whole *raison d'être* of British climbing, as of all mountaineering, remains, happily, defiant of dissection, now as before, and one is content to accept it as a true part of the satisfying indefinable whole.

THE ASCENT OF PICO BONPLAND IN THE ANDES OF VENEZUELA

BY A. E. GUNTHER

THE visit to the Andes of Venezuela in February 1939¹ had been in the nature of a reconnaissance. It had left the last of the giants, Pico Bonpland, unclimbed. In the Sierra de Merida there are four great glaciated peaks. The highest, Pico Bolivar (5005 m.), was first climbed in 1936 by Dr. Franz Weiss ; the second, Pico Humboldt (4945 m.), by Dr. Alfredo Jahn in 1911 ; the third, Pico la Concha (4922 m.), by Weiss and myself in 1939 ; the fourth, Pico Bonpland (4894 m.), and a subsidiary peak to the Bolivar, the Columna S. Peak (4900 m.), remained to be climbed. There are now left but a limited number of pinnacles on the arêtes of the main peaks such as the Grand Gendarme (Piacho Vertigo) and the Dames Anglaises on the Concha which offer first-rate climbing.

Communication with Merida, the hill station from which expeditions into the Sierra start, has improved again since last year. The petroleum companies operating in the Maracaibo basin have constructed for the Venezuelan Government a magnificent highway cut die-straight through the bush for many kilometres down the E. side of the shore of the Lake of Maracaibo, passing through each of the great oilfields

¹ A.J. 52. 70 *sqq.*, in which will be found sketch maps and other necessary references for this article.