

A NIGHT ON THE TILES.

By E. L.

On Saturday evening the air in the "Tyn-y-Coed" was thick with mountaineering "shop." References to "thread-belays," "Longlands," "Maggi," "the Cioch Direct," "Gordon and Craig," "C.B.," and so on, falling from thirsty, moist and eager mouths, were punctuated by blasts on the hunting horn and anxious cries of: "Five more pints, please, Miss," "A bottle of rum and a box of Swan Vestas, please Miss," and "I'm sure your clock's fast again Miss."

It must have been this atmosphere that turned our thoughts from staid routes on Glyder Fawr to the more romantic climbs on Lliwedd, and so, on a misty Sunday morning five of us arrived at the foot of the East Peak. To our disgust, the rocks adjacent to Central Gully were completely draped with ice, and ominous tinkles suggested that the whole of the upper cliff was in a similar condition. Reluctantly, we moved across to the West Peak.

Over towards Slanting Gully we found some promising scratches, which led us upward for a 100 feet round an exciting corner, up chimneys, walls and slabs to the foot of an awkward bulge. This brought the leader to a halt and almost into reverse, but the second made light work of it, and of the slimy groove that followed.

A few easy pitches quickly led us to Pinnacle Corner, where a halt was made for a long overdue lunch. The third course was rudely interrupted by a shower of stones from a party above, and after our vocalist had described the nature of the projectiles and their projectors to everyone in Cwm Dyli we once more got under way.

The ridge directly above Pinnacle Corner looked attractive and by means of arêtes and grooves we moved merrily upward to emerge on a small grass ledge below a formidable looking slab.

The leader tackled this half-heartedly by a wide crack on the right-hand side. However, after 20 feet it began to overhang uncomfortably. Once again the second came into action, and with the leader jammed in the crack worked out a route up thin holds on the slab for about 50 feet and then traversed into the upper reaches of the crack, above the overhang.

From below the situation looked distinctly airy, for the top part of the crack was vertical and had four sloping steps about three feet apart. Each of these swayed the body out over the grass ledge, whose area seemed to vary inversely as the square of one's height above it. On gazing at the two nailed boots ahead and the three figures crouching expectantly on the ledge below, one was reminded vividly of A. E. Elias' impressions in the old Lliwedd guide.

There was a great sigh of relief when the stalwart second completed the last balancing movement and embraced an enormous solid spike of rock. Our troubles, however, were only beginning, for by the time the last man was safely ensconced on the chock-stone it was dusk and rapidly becoming dark.

The attractive continuation of the ridge had to be abandoned in favour of an easier and grassier route, but even so we were above the snow line and the going was slow. Soon it was completely black.

A council of war was called, and soon decided that it was far too cold to remain inactive for ten hours. Then followed heart-breaking efforts to find a fault in the wall of blackness above. At last an unlikely looking upward traverse led to a hopeful grass fault, and slowly, ten or twenty feet at a time, we proceeded from belay to belay.

The humour of the situation relieved the tension considerably. Shadowy forms of grotesque shapes loomed out of the darkness, striking matches to find the belay, and far below our vocalist was rendering "Clementine" in every possible key.

We had previously considered Lliwedd a cold, aloof maiden, who rejected advances with vigour, but on this occasion we found her reluctant to release her fond embrace. At last we did manage to shake ourselves free and emerged at the summit cairn in an icy cold wind.

Then followed the weary trudge down. The rope was retained, 20 feet between each man, as a means of communication, and we stumbled on over the East Peak and downwards, missing the track down to P.-y.-P. and becoming completely lost. There followed a heated discussion as to which was the North end of the compass. Two said the black end, two the white, and the odd man swore that it was neither. We decided to keep going downhill, and eventually found ourselves in the woods above the Gwynant Valley, stumbling over branches and into streams and ditches.

At last we reached the road and solemnly unroped, to the astonishment and horror of a yokel returning home from a tryst or a carousal, judging from the wild look in his eye.

Numbers four and five made a heroic effort and reached the P.-y-P. within an hour, bringing back the car to collect our bodies from a heap of slag by the roadside.

And there remain the memories of an overwhelming welcome at Gwern-y-Gof, boiled eggs and bread and jam; and of course, although all the Swan Vestas had died in the battle, their equally noble partner was still alive to give us strength for the journey home.