

DID YOU KNOW?

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This is a practical article intended to help those who find, to their apprehension and dismay, that they are afflicted with a climbing companion suffering from that worst of all diseases—a ceaseless flow of quotations.

Let me say at the start that the condition is utterly incurable; there is absolutely no way of deterring a really advanced case. Some, indeed, have been known to “murmur in their sleep”—if those aching hours we spend huddled on wooden planks beneath inadequate blankets, waiting for an Alpine awakening, can be called by so blissful a name. No; “since there’s no help” we must ourselves take part in this contest. For by ingenious interpolation, and a nice use of our private stock of quotations, we may finally persuade the sufferer to—

*Creep into thy narrow bed,
Creep and let no more be said,*

or even to leave his poetry behind him when he goes “over the hills and far away.”

For those of us who feel that our schooldays have so thoroughly forsaken us that we are left with nothing from which we can draw inspiration (the reciting of chemical equations and mathematical formulæ will pass unheard by our word-plagued comrade) the suggestions here set down—all short and easy to memorise—may be of some value. I must stress the need of advance preparation. As soon as inverted commas appear in your friend’s conversation you must be able *immediately* to counter with : “Ah, but did you know . . .”

There is one worse maniac against whom I feel you should be warned. This is he who not only quotes but insists on *singing* his verses aloud, and “to a simple and spirited tune of his own invention.” Offset this distressing symptom by remarking—as soon as he pauses for breath—that you too have “a loud voice for singing,” and continue at once with some well-selected words about the weather, this being always a good choice of subject. Perhaps—

*The wind doth blow to-day, my love,
And a few small drops of rain.*

Or—

*Why puts our Grandam Nature on
Her Winter coat, ere Summer's done?
What, hath she got an ague fit
And thinks to make us hov'ring sit
Over her lazy embers?
'Tis so: see, naked Charitie
Starves in this frozen age.*

The former is perhaps the more suitable quotation for the newly-married or those couples one sees "about to tie the knot intricate." And the latter extract will serve a three-fold purpose; it will quieten your companion, remind you of those lesser spirits who are still "nodding by the fire," and spur you on towards your chosen climb on Idwal Slabs.

Perhaps, as you plod on your way to the rocks, your thoughts are preoccupied with problems of luncheon sandwiches, ropes and slings, whether this is really the day to lead your first Severe or whether your Second remembered to put that torch in the rucksack—just in case. Then you may need "simples against forgetfulness," and as you are "treading the well-loved paths" you may pause and say—

*So, even so I remember it—seeing the shadows
Weave on the distant hills their tapestry.*

Or, if you tire of walking, remember that—

*There are sweet fields that lie
Under the mountains,
Where life runs pleasantly
Like little fountains.
There has the sun forgot
His cruel fire,
And the strong air wanders not
From the crag heads higher.*

We all know, too, those days when, as we climb, we find our solitude and peace broken by the trippers from Llandudno or Rhyl. They are most frequently to be met with on the summit of Snowdon, whither (it is rumoured) they have been conveyed by a mechanical contrivance known as a rack-and-pinion railway. For all such there is but one adequate answer—

*Let them come, stick and drum, and assail me across the grey boulders,
I will flutter my toes and rattle the screes on their shoulders . . .
My back shall be blind on their spite, and my rump on their folly,
I will plod up the ridge to the right, past the crimson-green holly.*

Should your companion favour other and even more colourful comment it is perhaps better to restrain him and lead him on towards "the almost purpledicular crags" where he can—

*Climb, or stand perchance
In ecstasy
Fixed and free
In a rhyme,
As poets do.*

Be careful that as you "rattle the screes" you do not endanger a ubiquitous and advanced climber—

*The Cambrian, Welsh, or mountain sheep
Is of the Ovine race;
His conversation is not deep,
But then—observe his face!*

This creature, which has a habit of appearing unexpectedly on narrow ledges, is sometimes mistaken for a climber who has the misfortune to become cragbound. Our Welsh mists may be responsible for the error. For mist has many strange properties; it will bring "a change in all things made," prompting one to cry out that—

*The rocks have evil faces, Lord,
And I am awfully afraid.*

It is at such moments that we should ask—

*What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and of wildness?*

And as we search for that elusive mist-wreathed hold we should remember how often, from "lands less happy," we have murmured—

*Would now the tall swift mists could lay
Their wet grasp on my hair,
And the great nature of the hills
Round me friendly were!*

After all, "it sufficeth that the day will end"—even a wet one—and then there will be "the swing of the accordion in the crowded hut" while our clothes are steaming before the stove and we wave wet socks around the fire.

Perhaps that day will have another following it; an Alpine day, this, when—

*At two in the morning men stir in the bunks,
Look out of the windows, put on their boots,
Exchange a word with the guardian, curse the cold,
And move with a force beyond their own to the high peaks.*

More rarely it may be an off-day, when we can lie and listen while the bees—

*In the warm meridian solitude
Hum in the heather round the moorland tarn.*

But perhaps you remark at this point—

*Though I should sit
By some tarn in the hills
Using its ink
As the spirit wills,*

—yet this is sloth, mere dalliance, and we should be "Away, for we are ready to a man." Our aim should be to go—

*Always a little further: it may be
Beyond that last blue mountain barred with snow,*

—for—

*You can but take it once—
The gentian hour and the sun's light.*

It may be that on your return from a less ideal day—one of those peculiarly wet days of the Ogwen valley, for example—you will need a greeting for your indolent and bridge-playing friends, still encircling the hut fire. Finger-tips, and nose-tips too, will be speaking eloquently for us:

*A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.*

These parlour-game addicts are not infrequently found in our huts; and while they do not, perhaps, seek like others to confound us with their flow of rhetoric, yet it is well to be forearmed. Remind them, if need be, that "there is still gold and silver in the mountains"—more worth than their miserable gamed-for ha'pence; and should they still deride your damp and dripping garments, seeking to prove that you are "home without boots, and in foul weather too," then forego caution and fling your

*natural answer in the wind's teeth,
And care not if it is waste of breath.*

You will see from these suggestions that "I have no strange and subtle thought," and indeed I have found that "any little old song will do for me"; but should you still be anxious for a weapon wherewith to combat your over-wordy fellow climber I will give you one last and authoritative word. Look for it some Sunday, during a rather too lengthy sermon; it's in the Prayer Book:

Set me up upon the rock that is higher than I.

I'm sure you'll find a use for it in some future struggle with a not-so-Moderate chimney.

And there is always the possibility that you'll find, with the others on your rope, that—

They were all of them fond of quotations.

The Taggeron

*Give to me the Diffs. I love
Let Severes go by me.
Give the jolly Rope above,
And the Belay nigh me.
Ledge on the face with room for knee.
Holds for my carefree habits.
There's the climb for a man like me,
There's the climb for Rabbits!*