

a slender link between the Alpine cairn and the background of contagious magic which I have tried to outline; there may well be other examples that have escaped my notice. Another link, unsubstantial but significant, is the survival among European climbers of the legend that it is lucky to add a stone to the summit cairn, while the practice of bringing back a stone from the summit of a newly won peak and planting it on the mantelpiece of the Alpine Club is an excellent example of homœopathic magic.⁶

But all this gives only half the answer to the question how the summit cairn became established as a convention. If in a certain measure the summit cairn may derive from the cairn on the pass with its magical origins, it must be more nearly related to the cairn as landmark or boundary stone. It is not easy to carry the argument further. On Alpine summits the habit of building a cairn as a mark of a first ascent goes back a long way but does not seem to have been taken for granted by the pioneers. Leslie Stephen describes the building of cairns on the three summits of the Bietschhorn in 1859, and Kennedy built one on the Dent Blanche in 1862 as we know from Whymper's story. Tyndall, however, says nothing of having built a cairn on Monte Rosa, and on the Wetterhorn Lauener and Bohren carried up their 20-30 lb. iron *Flagge*, while Almer of course had his fir tree. Tyndall, we may presume, was too occupied with his hypsometer to give thought to other things, while the Grindelwald guides must have wanted to prove their ascent not only to later climbers but also to the whole of the village. So too Michel Croz, when in his triumph on the Matterhorn he used his shirt as a flag. But the practice of carrying up flags and fir trees can never have appealed strongly even to the hardest of guides, while leaving shirts on the summit must have had its disadvantages, and so, when mountaineering became established as a sport the rock cairn must soon have been accepted as the inevitable victory sign of the first ascent.

WHYMPER AGAIN

By HERBERT E. COOKE

IT is sixty years since, in the year 1880, when the Alpine Club itself had but recently attained its majority, there appeared in the pages of the *Boy's Own Paper*, then in its infancy, a stirring article by Edward Whymper, evidently drawn from *Scrambles*, describing his adventures in the Alps and the first tragedy of the Matterhorn, which had occurred only fifteen years previously. This made a great impression on its numberless boy readers. Doubtless many climbers owe their first aspiration to this source, and as their pocket money

⁶ In this connexion, one may recall the paper-weight which stood always on the study table of Pope Pius XI: a fragment of rock taken from the highest point reached on Mt. Everest in 1922. Also, in a somewhat different spirit, the brisk trade in 'actual summits' of Aconcagna conducted, to his personal profit, by Matthias Zurbriggen at Mendoza and in Chile (*A.J.* 50. 330).—
EDITOR.

grew, developed by natural metamorphosis from the inexpensive cult of tree and College roof climbers into expert mountaineers. But owing to lack of means and leisure many fall by the way. On my first visit to Zermatt a Cambridge don said to me: 'Mountain climbing is rather like drinking wine—when you are young you can't afford it, and when you are old your health won't stand it.' As in the classic reply to the question 'Is life worth living?' the middle-aged might retort that a great deal depends on the liver.

After the passage of years contemporary criticism gains a new and historic interest. What did the leaders of thought write or the public think about such Titans in their several ages as Turner and Beethoven, Shackleton and Nansen, Whymper and Tyndall? To those pioneers in uncharted tracts, whose audacity and foresight proved them in the end true seers and adventurers, the greatest honour is due. They were the first to climb their peaks. On the other hand some sad amusement and profit may now be got from mistakes in premature judgment. Space does not permit an exhaustive inquest, but with the Editor's permission I propose to review an ancient, a modern, and a medieval commentary on the Matterhorn disaster, not included in Mr. Frank Smythe's admirable *Life of Whymper*, covering though it does so much new ground in its well balanced history of a long controversy.

I. In the year 1865 Charles Dickens had severed his connexion with *Household Words* and his old publishers, and was the conductor of a new magazine called *All the Year Round*, in which his *Tale of Two Cities* first saw the light. Although this journal (weekly, price two-pence) is nearly forgotten the Editor's fame is imperishable. On an old bookstall in Weybridge lately I picked up a bound copy of *All the Year Round* for 1865, in which appear two articles severely commenting on what was the talk of the town at that time—the Matterhorn accident, then barely five weeks old. One or both of these articles may be written by Dickens himself. In any case they doubtless express his opinions, and were probably framed to meet the views of his readers.

The number of *All the Year Round* then for August 19, 1865, contains an article called 'Hardihood and Foolhardihood,' beginning:

'The month of July, 1865, when noted down in the annals of English families, will bear the black record of four lives, belonging to young, robust, intelligent, hopeful men, swept away. And for why? Because of foolhardihood.'

The writer goes on to say (with more 'for whys') that there was another Swiss household last year laid waste by the death of Bennen, Professor Tyndal's (*sic*) guide.

'But then the Professor, if too eager in adventure (we recollect a terrible account of his creeping round an ice column with his heels higher than his head), has some reason for his temerity, as one accumulating scientific facts with regard to the singularities and the exceptions of the rock and glacier land. Only it is fearful that, with no very great result hitherto promulgated to the

world, an excellent, faithful, and trustworthy being should have paid the penalty.'

Be it noted that an excuse for climbing at that time was considered necessary, and science was the scapegoat.

After much strong language about the nonsense of 'Peaks and Passes,' ghastly contempt for human life, false pretences and bragging vanity, the writer compares the mountain climber to the gambler at Baden-Baden who blows his brains out should Black win too often, and he politely adds :

'After all, the most aspiring member of the Alpine Club is beaten in endurance, and thus according to the code of honour competition and glory, by the hook-swingers of the East, and the Red Men of the woods, from whom mortal tortures fail to extort a cry.'

After a dissertation on DUTY, and a very unfavourable comparison between mountaineering and the charge of Balaclava, with a hint of 'secondary and selfish interests or advantages,' our moralist continues :

'It is time, the apotheosis of foolhardihood having been closed by a dead march, the echoes of which will not cease during the lives of those whom they concern—that its triumphs should be displayed in their real colours, and not those of red fire, blue fire, and green fire, which accompany, theatrically, every coronation of theatrical success.'

But we must be just to the author, as he tries to be to us, for in his last paragraph of a long paper in which 'the bragging vanity of Foolhardihood' is his answer to still another 'for why', he concludes :

'The Alpine Club has had nothing to do with the fever of competition which the last few years have seen. There is hardly one of the apologists, be it also noticed, who has not to tell of some narrow escape of life, due to his own judicious management of ropes and crampons, and the rest of the machinery got up in London for the use of the foolhardy.'

A fortnight later, in the issue for September 2, 1865, this journal returns to the charge in an article headed 'Foreign Climbs,' in which the writer deploras the ambitious adventurer coming from afar, with money and curious appliances for the sake of scaling, with no practical object or end except the gratification of his personal vanity, peaks and pinnacles never scaled before, and says he is no more a mountaineer than Blondin, wheeling a child in a barrow along his tight-rope, while his example is inducing other weak simpletons to come after him and do the same. But perhaps his former strong language has evoked protest, or on second thoughts regret, for he asks and answers the question 'Does our snarling philosophy, then, mean to prohibit the pleasures of Alpine excursioning? Certainly not,' but subject to the delicious limitation that all Switzerland vertically (like all Gaul horizontally) be divided into three parts 'suspended one over the other at different altitudes,' namely :

'The first—the Switzerland of ladies, children, elderly gentlemen, and ordinary folk in general . . . The second region, sometimes dovetailing with the first, sometimes soaring above it, takes in the localities which cannot be reached in carriages, but to which prudent lads and lassies may roam on foot or on horseback, with proper precautions.'

From this safe zone the Gemmi Pass is expressly excluded. He goes on :

'Our third and uppermost Switzerland supplies the Alpine Club with spots where human foot has never trod, or where the number of its footprints may be counted. It furnishes peaks ascended only by scientific men and human donkeys . . . A late secretary of the Alpine Club leaves unanswered the very natural question, "What is the use of scaling precipitous rocks, and being for half an hour at the top of the terrestrial globe?" alleging that these are questions of sentiment, and do not admit of conclusive arguments on either side.'

And so on, *ad nauseam*. I have tried to quote our author fully and fairly, I hope, because it may be good for 'Alpine Clubbists,' as he calls us, to eat humble pie and as in Robbie Burns's lines to a Louse,

To see oursel's as others see us !
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
And foolish notion.

The answer to the old gibe asking the good of climbing cannot be given better than by Mr. R. L. G. Irving in his new book *The Alps*,¹ which among many good illustrations gives the finest photograph of the Matterhorn I have ever seen :

'The stillness, the absolute purity of the snowy floor, the lovely curves of the steepening walls that rise from it, the beauties that the winds and frosts have hung upon them, the golden light that plays among their corniced crests ; to be with these is to be in the bosom of the Alps. And there is no danger shared, no victory won, that can bind you to a friend so fast as the unuttered thought that fills your mind and his : "It is good for us to be here."'

II. Now let us glance at the work of a new journalist, and a somewhat notable one too. Mr. Charles Graves, who himself does not appear to be a mountaineer or to have read much on the subject, writes in his book *Swiss Summer*, in 1938, on the authority of 'I was told at the Alpine Club,' as follows :

'As you may know, Carel (*sic*) and his party were trying to climb the mountain from the Italian side at the same time as Edward Whymper's party on the other side. Whymper, having reached the top and seeing the opposition on the way, actually started to throw stones at them. The Italians promptly turned tail and returned with the legend that the mountain was indeed infested with devils as the local tradition had always maintained. There seems no possible defence for Whymper's conduct. You may say that the sport of climbing was new, and that feelings ran high. But even then it was positively murderous to do what he did.'

To those who may read these lines there is no need to refute this calumny, based on hearsay : nor the insinuation on page 219 of the same book, 'Before we go into the matter of Edward Whymper, who oddly survived the death of his four friends, I must etc.' Those who saw recent films taken on the Riffelhorn and purporting to portray the Matterhorn with fabulous details may think that the latter mountain is not much larger than the Nelson Column, and that Alpine climbers by looking round the corner can see their rivals in another kingdom, and simply by prizing away the cornice can send those rivals spinning ! What

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 11.

is 'positively murderous' is to defame the memory of the dead who can no longer defend themselves, but unfortunately this is becoming more and more common. One can imagine how scathingly Whymper, who was always scrupulous and generous in mountain etiquette, and who never suffered fools gladly, would have fought in defence of his honour.

III. And now to turn for a few moments for a breath of fresh air to a pleasanter topic before conclusion. I venture to call the following a medieval episode in climbing literature. Dr. George Forrest Browne was Bishop of Bristol from 1897 to 1914, and became President of the Alpine Club in 1905. He at any rate knew what he was writing about. After describing in his book *The Recollections of a Bishop*,² 1915 edition, p. 104, 'the most interesting meeting of a scientific association which I have ever attended,' the Helvetic Natural Science Societies at Geneva in 1865, where the only Englishmen present were John Tyndall and himself, the Bishop continues :

'While we were thus engaged, the terrible accident which accompanied the first ascent of the Matterhorn took place. It was well that Tyndall at least was safe at Geneva. Charles Hudson, the leader of the party, was a schoolfellow of mine, about four years my senior, our very best athlete. I remember being very proud of being sent as a small boy for the cricket tape to measure one of his impromptu long jumps in ordinary boots : twenty-one foot six, as I seem to remember. Whymper had become a friend for a curious reason. He was marvellously clever with his pencil, and he was quite sure that he could graphically "square the circle." He used to come to Cambridge now and again on Alpine matters, and always used to put in a little visit to me on this hopeless quest of his. I had only by chance missed meeting Douglas at breakfast on the day when he started for the Alps.'

It should be premised that Dr. Browne at one time of his distinguished career was a Fellow and Proctor at Cambridge University. He proceeds :

'When the news came down to Geneva that all the party except Whymper and the two Taugwalders were lost, and that the remains of Douglas could not be found, Tyndall was sure that he knew a ledge of rock on which the body must have been caught, no great distance below the lip of the precipice. He borrowed my club rope, and all the other club ropes he could borrow in Geneva, and made off with them in a sack or sacks to Zermatt, determined to be lowered down to the ledge to recover the body. The Syndic of Zermatt fortunately found out what was going on, and sent him and his ropes away : they had had plenty of Englishmen killed there : they didn't want any more.

'As Whymper had got into the way of consulting me about matters other than Alpine, I was the first person to whom he gave a full account of what really took place. He came to see me in Cambridge. He had sealed up the bag in which he had the remains of the rope. He came to consult me on two questions of casuistry, on at least one of which he did not take my advice. Often and pleasantly as I met him through many years,³ he never returned to the subject with me.'

² *A. J.* 30. 84.

³ The entry in Whymper's diary for August 30, 1895, states that he and Dr. Browne had not met each other for 31 years. See *Scrambles*, 1936 edition, p. vii, footnote.—EDITOR.

There we must leave the matter. Whympers, with his sealed bag, went his way. The Seiler Museum at Zermatt contains a severed piece of the sash-cord, miscalled rope, which united the lost and the saved, and which, as Whympers says, 'was not brought, and should not have been employed, for the purpose for which it was used.' The chief actors have all left our stage. *Omne exit in mysteria.*

THE VALLEY OF THE ORBE

BY BENSON LAWFORD

OF the many pleasure-seekers who travel from Paris to Lausanne each year, how few know anything more of Vallorbe, that cheerful little town on the Swiss frontier, other than that the train hangs about there an unconscionably long time, while luggage and passports are being examined; and that, if you are lucky, you may get a fragrant cup of coffee and fresh rolls to while away the time, even at five or six o'clock in the morning. And yet anyone who will leave the train here, and walk or drive the three or four miles to Ballaigues, a pleasant village on the other side of the great ravine of the Orbe, will find this a delightful part of the world in which to spend a quiet holiday; and the place has yet another merit, especially in these troublesome days, which is that you can live there very comfortably at small expense.

Three-quarters of a mile beyond the village of Ballaigues, the Pension Maillefer stands by the roadside, an unpretentious old-fashioned house, from whose back door you may step immediately into the pine forest, where the pleasantest little paths wander in every direction. If you elect to turn uphill, half-an-hour's steady walking will bring you to La Bessonaz, whence on a clear day you have an incomparable view—wooded slopes dropping away at your feet down to the great plain, with little towns and red-roofed villages dotted here and there, a gleam of Neuchâtel's lake in one direction, that of Geneva in another, with the magnificence of Mont Blanc on the far side; beyond the plain, the blue foothills rising ridge upon ridge, until they culminate in the giants of the Bernese Oberland, Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau, and only less beautiful than these, the billowing snowfields of the Blümlisalp. For those sound in wind and limb, a further two hours' easy walk may be recommended, over 'alpine pastures wet with dew' where the cattle are feeding, and through pinewoods to the summit of Mont Suchet, the highest point hereabouts, whence the field of vision is greatly extended.

On August 1, which this year (1931) fell on a Saturday, the Swiss celebrate their Fête Nationale. In the evening we walked up towards the village, where the band was playing, flags and paper decorations adorned all the houses, and as dusk fell there was a mild display of fireworks. Later, bonfires were lighted on every point of vantage, and we could see some fifteen or twenty beacons in different directions. But finer than all man's puny efforts was nature's magnificent display