

THE ALPINE CLUB PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION, 1961

BY G. N. CARRELL

‘PLEASANT words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.’¹ There is perhaps no very strong evidence that these words hang as a framed text at the foot of every professional reviewer’s bed. But for an amateur, who does his stint so near Christmas, to disregard them would be churlish indeed, and it is hoped that their sense touches even those passages where, in the interests of truth, the praise given has been temperate; for whether it is because we have still not recovered from the effort made for the Jubilee Exhibition, this one held less interest and variety than most of those I have had the pleasure of describing. Let us deal with some middle-aged masters first.

Douglas Milner seems to have retreated still further into his redoubt of academic formalism; a kind of ivory—or rather, limestone—tower, whence emerge essays on tone, mass and spatial relationship; and if the reviewer finds these donnish developments to his taste, and gives them first place, it is to express a personal preference, and no more than to admit that he and I are growing up at the same rate. I liked ‘Monte Cristallo’ for the delicacy of its middle tones; ‘Dolomite Skyline’ for its balance—the simple weighing of *this* against *that*; ‘Loft Crag and Gimmer’ for a mood of dark mystery, and ‘Bheinn a Bheiffir’ for one deep wintry light.

Mountains exist so strikingly in three dimensions when we are up against them (and it), that we tend to forget that their distant view, with us often and scarcely changing during a long climbing day, is virtually in two; many of Milner’s pictures remind us of this, and with pleasure.

In sharp contrast—and this is the relevant phrase—but in their way of as high a quality, were the prints sent by W. Kirstein and Alfred Gregory, and, one may add, B. Dickson’s of the big stride on Crib Goch Buttress; a great improvement on that in the bar of the Bryn Tyrch. Kirstein gave us the summit view from the Zinal Rothorn which, understandably, turns up at every show; but his—one in monochrome and one in colour, both brilliant prints—gave an interesting choice between the two media. Alfred Gregory is establishing himself as the British Bradford Washburn, giving us work of professional

¹ *Proverbs*, xvi. 24.

excellence from negatives of comparatively large size. The best were *tours de force* of complementary techniques. 'Snow Cornice, Ben Nevis', a beautiful, obliquely-lit high contrast rendering of snow, in which darkroom skill came first; and 'Nuptse', where only a balancing skill in the field could have caught the peak at such an evocative moment. 'It almost defeats its own ends' was the comment of a member studying the sun-struck upper snows, hanging like a silver jewel above a velvet pool of night; but not quite: you could find detail everywhere in the deep shadow, and what a fine carbon it would make. Other good prints testified to versatility; 'In Nepalese foothills' might be called an 'artistic' shot; 'Ripima Valley' was in colour as good as Kirstein's, and 'Everest and Lhotse' proved, surprisingly, to be the best study of a horse shown at the Club so far.

Last of the acknowledged experts, Basil Goodfellow showed a brilliant print of 'Oberland ridges' and in 'Grande Sassièrè, East ridge' three figures either examining snow or testing a cornice, and acceptable in either sense.

After this the standard of achievement fell off rather steeply, nor were there any slides or stereos to support interest. It is becoming common practice for the children of climbing parents to start before their teens.² The selections from the Lambley family album, shown over the mantle, could scarcely claim to be unusual, or of interest to other children's aunties and uncles, and Professor Wade's interesting views from Austria and the Americas all had their corners cut off by a failure in lens/condenser covering power.

Mr. P. Wild can make the best of a view; of his ten prints, none perhaps remarkable, all could claim sound composition, and all but three had a decoration of cloud. Into his quiet idiom, 'Fletschhorn' fitted the most suitably; the rest could have done with more punch; for example, 'Mont Miné Glacier' might have borrowed strength from Hugh Merrick's not dissimilar 'Mont Blanc from Aiguille du Midi' which, like his other prints, was characteristically 'right' in quality. Is there a would-be Professor Parkinson ready with a law relating, directly, the popularity of a peak with the difficulty of photographing it? If so, the Matterhorn must be the test; and if Merrick stumbled, it was by equating an augmented cross with a diminished mountain, and including cables.

F. E. Smith gave us a group of small photos; of these only 'Finsteraarhorn' seemed too harsh, an unexpected lapse in a set bearing the stamp of taste, notably 'Avalanches on Mont Collon', and an unnamed shot—of a Scottish scene?

² The writer's son had done the Tschingelhorn from Fafler-Alp by the age of 12, and the six easterly Saas peaks by 14; and Stationmaster Bumann, of the Lange-Fluh, first did the Nadelhorn-Lenzspitze traverse when he was 11.

Standing Monte Viso-like above these foothills of modest endeavour, and bearing a professional gloss, were two winter and two summer studies by Richard Cook; chancing his arm on the Matterhorn and bringing it off by shooting from Findelen against the evening light. A technical achievement of an opposite kind was F. Solari's panorama from the head of the Thurot Nala; and one may close³ by mentioning the remarkable illusion—like a sawn-off tree trunk—of Robert Langford's 'Twin Peak', from the Cambridge Baffin Island Expedition, 1961.

³ Modesty has prevented Dr. Carrell from making mention of the distinguished group of photographs exhibited by himself.—EDITOR.