Climbing with a Hand-Camera.

(Adapted from a Paper read before the Alpine Club, April 7, 1891.)

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IT is impossible to speak to the Alpine Club on the subject of Alpine photography without recalling to the minds of all our members the name of a friend whose loss is still fresh in our memories. One almost shrinks from a position which might seem to imply that one considered oneself a rival to Mr. Donkin. Let me at once repudiate such an idea. It is enough if I can claim to be a disciple, at however great a distance.

It seems time, however, that something should be said about recent advances in photography as affecting the possibilities of its use by mountaineers. It is more than nine years since Mr. Donkin read his paper on 'Photography in the High Alps,'* and since then, though the photographs taken by climbers have increased much in average merit, and enormously in number, I do not think that any communication on the methods of making them has been laid before the Club. And yet it is precisely the last few years which have done most to bring the thing within the reach of climbers by the great advance which has been made towards the perfection of the photographer's last pet—the hand-camera.

What can the hand-camera do for us? Can it give us first-rate work? I almost doubt it; at least, I am sure that I have not as yet been able to get first-rate work from it. But, after all, it is only a few who can get first-rate work in any branch of art. What the hand-camera can certainly do is humbler, but exceedingly practical. It can enable anyone, almost without any technical knowledge or skill whatever, to turn out a large amount of very fair average work. One can be sure of securing an almost infinite number of memoranda; and a photographic memorandum is not a thing to be despised. It may not be a work of art, any more than one's diary is a first-class novel. Few of us can write novels, but we can all write diaries which will be of interest to us and sometimes even to our friends. For my own part, I look upon my hand-camera above all as a pictorial diary. My only regret is that this particular

* See *Alpine Journal*, vol. xi. p. 61.

form of diary was not invented in time for me to make proper use of it. What would I not give for such a record of my climbs for the last twenty years as I have of my season of 1890?

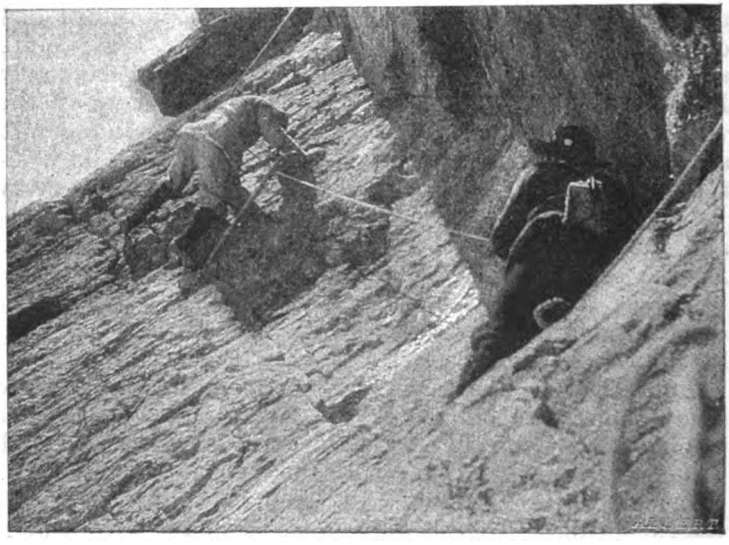
There is, however, a practical use which a snap-shot will serve as well as the most careful and elaborated picture. A snap-shot will often be found to solve a question of topography which might have seriously puzzled one but for an incontestable record taken at the time. Of this I had a striking instance last season.

Our party set out one morning from Mauvoisin to ascend a certain virgin peak numbered 3,509 mètres on the Siegfried map, and called by Conway 'Pointe des Portons.' As a matter of fact we missed it altogether, and went up the next peak to the west. A suspicion of this fact dawned upon me when I carefully examined the map on our return and compared it with our own experiences; but I was quite unable to reconcile our track with the map. Fortunately I had taken a considerable number of snap-shots on the way. I had to wait till I had developed them in order to settle the question. When I had them before me the solution was clear. On my photographs I could identify every point in the neighbourhood with the indications of the map, and there was no doubt as to where our peak was situated. At the same time I found that we were not so much to blame as the Siegfried map, which showed a slight but demonstrable inaccuracy—just enough to mislead us. But for my views I should never have been convinced of this.

Another of my negatives, here reproduced, may serve to save some future climber from a disappointment. In the 'Guide to the Central Pennine Alps' there is recorded a peak named the 'Gran Epicoun,' with the tempting addition, 'no information.' It is situated at the point of intersection of the ridge called 'Tourme de Bouque' with the main watershed, just W. of the peak with many names, which Conway calls the 'Oulie Cecca.' The Gran Epicoun is not marked at all on the Swiss map, and appears only on the Italian; a fact which is in itself sufficient to raise doubts as to its existence. These doubts are fully justified by the appended illustration. The main peak is the Oulie Cecca; of that there can be no doubt, as a careful comparison shows the exact correspondence of every ridge and line with the Swiss map. The rock mass running down to the Glacier d'Otemma on the right is the Tourme de Bouque. The articulation of this ridge with the watershed does not take

place at any peak whatever; it is at best marked by a hardly perceptible snow-mound on the W. arête of the Oulie Cecca. So that the Gran Epicoun may be confidently erased from any future editions of the Pennine Guide.

But there is another wide field open to the hand-camera which to me is most attractive. You can by it secure unique pictures of incidents of actual climbing. The practice is perhaps less attractive to my companions; and here I would give a piece of advice. Always be the one of the party that carries the camera; then you cannot be taken unawares. Do not put yourself at the mercy of a friend possessed with a sense of humour; or, at all events, take care that the camera is not behind you on the rope.



It is only with a hand-camera that it is at all possible to catch such incidents. In the first place they are hardly worth taking, except in places where it is impossible to set up a tripod at all. Secondly, the very setting up of a tripod takes all the truth out of the picture. Your friends pose, and show the most beautiful form, but no life; and, after all, you do not much care about your friends' beautiful form. It would be shameful to sacrifice truth to so vain a shadow. What you want to do is to get them as they are actually moving, and before they suspect your design. This aim can

be reached, and the only merit I would claim for my pictures is the modern virtue of the entire absence of idealism of any sort whatever.

But it must not be overlooked that in taking such pictures you are under one serious disadvantage. You can very rarely be placed in such a position as to get even a reasonably good grouping of your party. Mr. Willink has the artist's privilege of floating in the air horizontally opposite his subject at any distance from 20 to 100 feet that pleases him. Until the photographer can command the services of a steerable balloon, he can, therefore, certainly not attempt to rival Mr. Willink. All he can do is to get himself roped as far back in the party as possible, and look out for chances when an individual figure among the leaders presents itself in a takeable attitude. His party as a whole he can never expect to get, for in any case the most important member of it must needs be left out; and he will find that the moments when his friends and guides put themselves into really artistic attitudes are surprisingly few. In the first place he sees them almost always from behind and below, and it is not thus that we get the noblest aspect of the human frame. In the second place the camera has a singular incapacity for looking upwards or downwards—that is, if you point it up or down when taking your picture the result always looks not as if it was above or below you, but only as if it was on the same level, and violently sloping where it ought to be vertical. Then when you are climbing on a level across a face there are almost always corners which get in your way and prevent your seeing the most interesting points till you are close on them yourself and your predecessors are over them. Furthermore, in such places it often happens that a general regard for the safety of the party must be your first thought. I have several times been tantalised by seeing most lovely bits which I could not take because I had to be hanging on with all my points of attachment to inferior holds, or carefully paying out the rope with both hands. According to my own experience it is only by constant watchfulness that you can hope, perhaps once in two or three climbs, to find yourself on an eligible standpoint with a takeable incident well arranged in front of you.

Nor can you hope to do much better even by climbing in the immediate neighbourhood of another party. The practice is one which is attended with considerable inconveniences of its own; and, apart from this, there are, I

imagine, in the whole of the Alps only a few spots where it is possible to take your stand at about the right distance from another party as they are doing a difficult bit of climbing on a level with you. When you get to one of these, and then only, will you have found the initial conditions for doing work comparable with Mr. Willink's. But there are a few such spots. The top of the Dent du Géant is certainly one. I would suggest to any aspirant that he should climb that peak with another party, as Mr. Donkin did, and take a series of views from the lower peak as his friends go up that apparently vertical wall which leads to the higher. Such a series of snap-shots would be a unique possession.

Such are the somewhat narrow limitations of our work. Let us turn for a moment to the instruments with which we may hope to get such results as are attainable. I have no intention of discussing the rival merits of the thousand-and-one hand-cameras with which the market is now filled; my own work has all been done with the instrument known as the 'Kodak No. 3 Junior,' and I prefer only to speak of what I know by experience. In any case this instrument is that best suited to the beginner who does not want the trouble of learning any technical processes whatever. Most people are by this time familiar with the original 'Kodak,'

the little instrument which no self-respecting American tourist can be without. That machine is, however, worthless for the climber. The little round pictures which it takes are too small in themselves, and not worth enlarging. The technical reason for this is that the lens is of such short focus as to dwarf beyond recognition any objects which are not close at hand. Anything in the nature of a distant view is made simply ridiculous.

With the later and larger instruments of the same class the case is different. They have lenses of sufficient focal length, and produce pictures which will stand in favourable cases very considerable enlargement; and enlargement is now no longer the 'troublesome and expensive process' which it was when Mr. Donkin wrote in 1882.

With these larger instruments the makers (the Eastman Company) carry out the system which they introduced with the original toy-machine: 'You press the button, we do the rest.' When the exposures have once been made everything else can be left to them, down to the production of the finished print or enlargement. But I must confess that to me the development of my negatives has a charm of its own, and I am very reluctant to leave it in the hands of strangers. There is no more interesting occupation for a wet day in a mountain inn, and I think besides that when one has the personal interest as well as a fair amount of skill, one can often save by care and patience many an ill-exposed negative which a mere professional hand would throw away in disgust.

The chief difficulty with which I have had to contend is the extreme rapidity of the film. The light on a fine day among the snows is almost unmanageable even with plates of ordinary rapidity; with the celluloid film, which is much faster than any of the ordinary brands of plates, the difficulty is much increased. It is a great mistake to think that you cannot over-expose when you are taking an instantaneous picture. If your shutter gives an exposure of a tenth of a second when a hundredth would be ample, you over-expose as much as if you gave fifty seconds instead of five. My own camera has, however, means for shortening the exposure. These I unfortunately did not use at first; it was only after developing a number of negatives that I found out how much I had been over-exposing. This, by the way, forms a strong argument in favour of developing on the journey, instead of leaving it all till you return home. It is much easier to turn your bedroom into

a temporary dark-room than the beginner might be inclined to suppose.

A few hints as to development in a bedroom may, perhaps, be useful. I confess to strong preference for the very unfashionable process of development by ferrous oxalate. In the first place it avoids all necessity for carrying anything in solution. With a couple of clean bottles, which one can always borrow at an inn, one can make sufficiently strong solutions of the oxalate of potash and the protosulphate of iron in a few hours. You must be sure, by the way, not to forget to put a fair-sized crystal of citric acid in each bottle. When you have your solutions you have no minute measurements to make; thus you are not in trouble if you break or lose your minim glass, as with pyro development. Indeed, you do not really require a graduated glass at all; the proportion of the two chemicals can be quite adequately measured with a spoon. Another great advantage of the process lies in the fact that the red colour of the ferrous oxalate forms a perfect protection if you happen to have any stray white light about, as you often have when you are making a dark-room with a couple of rugs stretched across a window. I have myself a strong feeling in favour of a certain amount of white, or at least yellow, light when I am developing; it rests the eyes, and makes it easier to find things, which are not always in the most obvious place when one is extemporising arrangements. The only red lamp I use is one of the simple threefold screens with pieces of translucent red fabric let into the sides. This takes no room in packing, and is unbreakable. The piece of tin which is commonly supplied to go over the top—sometimes with an elaborate little chimney—is quite useless, and gets too dirty to go into a portmanteau naked. If you want to cover the top, you can do it with a piece of brown paper or the like. But I generally leave the top open for developing; the light reflected from the ceiling is too weak to hurt your film in the few seconds which are required before it is safe under the developer; of course you would not leave it exposed for any length of time. Your bedroom candlestick will not always go conveniently into one of these threefold screens. An excellent candlestick can, however, be extemporised, if you are carrying a 'Kodak,' from one of the cardboard boxes in which the film is supplied. For a clearing solution after development and before fixing I use a weak solution of citric acid, which is tested by the taste; I should describe it as a fairly stiff

lemonade. One may have it always ready by putting a few crystals of the acid into one's carafe; but the worst of that is that one can hardly resist the temptation to drink off the whole of one's clearing solution when one comes back after a long day's walk. A better plan is to have a small bottle in which one can keep a strong solution. A few drops of this in a good deal of water will give lemonade or clearing solution as may be desired.

The whole of my outfit for developing purposes consists of the following list:—Six papier-mâché trays, four-ounce graduated glass measure, red screen, pair of scissors for cutting film, four dozen drawing pins for fastening negatives up to dry, spare box to hold film when taken out of camera. Chemicals: Two pounds oxalate potash, one pound protosulphate of iron, four ounces citric acid, four pounds hypo. This last must be taken in a glass bottle, as it is very hygroscopic, and would not improve the other contents of the portmanteau if left among them in nothing but brown paper.

These materials are amply sufficient for all the developing which I find time for on the off-days of a month's trip.