

FRAGMENT FROM A LOST MS,* PROBABLY BY
ARISTOTLE, ENTITLED *περὶ ἀθλητικῆς, κ.τ.λ.*,

OR A TREATISE CONCERNING THE SPORTS AND PASTIMES OF THE
ATHENIAN YOUTH WITH REGARD TO THEIR ETHICAL SIGNIFICANCE.

WE now come to investigate the position of the mountaineer, or climber of hills. Now we may rightly call him the true mountaineer, or climber of hills, who possesses the true love of mountain climbing, which being a mean between two extremes may be fitly termed a virtue. First, indeed, it is right to call the love of mountain climbing an active virtue, and not one of contemplation, for to no one is the ascent of a hill possible by contemplation alone; still the virtue of the mountain climber is of a truth not only active, but is partly contemplative, as we shall show further on.

Moreover, the love of hill climbing, like fortitude or other virtues, has its defect, its mean, and its excess. Now, as we have said, virtue being a mean of which the extremes are the excess or the deficiency, he who is defective in this matter is one who either has not this love of climbing, or is indifferent in the matter; this man, indeed, is pitied by the hill climber, and may indeed be called the 'irrational man.' Now by irrational we do not mean the man who is unreasonable without qualification, but rather the man who is possessed of unreason from the point of view of the mountaineer, and truly amongst 'irrational men' are to be found the fathers of families, many learned men, and others. Moreover, the 'irrational man' prefers rather to ascend hills by means of the telescope, or in a railway train, and, if interrogated on the subject, expresses great scorn for those who rise at midnight or in the early hours of the morning for the purpose of imperilling their lives on the end of a rope. Again, he goes not to places where there are no hostels, alleging that he likes to be comfortable and enjoy himself.

The scarcity of inns, however, in a mountainous country is a matter which in these times has in some few instances been remedied, for we are credibly informed that on the topmost summit of the lofty Mount Snowdon, in the Principality of Wales, an hostel exists, where the 'irrational man' may find gratification for his baser appetites, and perhaps may also at the same time experience, in a limited manner, that happiness which in its full degree is experienced by the true lover of hill climbing, whom we may call the 'mountaineer.'†

Further, the 'irrational man' is inclined often to treat the adventures of the 'mountaineer' as travellers' tales, but in this respect he is unable to rightly distinguish between the true climber of hills and the

* The editor of this fragment prefers to remain anonymous. It may suffice to say that his *bona fides* is vouched for in a letter signed W. C. S.

† The great lexicographer defines the word as 'an inhabitant of the mountains, a savage, a freebooter, a rustick.' Can the word be here used in this sense?—Note by translator.

'pseudo-mountaineer,' who haunts the smoking rooms of certain hostels. This man climbs but in imagination only. He will relate how he has ascended certain high, and difficult, nay, even inaccessible peaks, and will brand the names of many hills on staves that when he returns to his native land he may win much reverence. But although the 'pseudo-mountaineer' pretends to greater things than he has accomplished, and is, therefore, a depraved person, on the whole perhaps he appears more a vain than a bad man, for it is not for the sake of money that he would have the unwary traveller and the people of his native land believe his stories, but for the sake of honour and glory, which in itself is praiseworthy.

Now both the 'pseudo-mountaineer' and the 'irrational man' err by way of defect, being indifferent to the true joys of mountaineering. But the 'mountaineer' is he who has this virtue in the right measure. He delights not in climbing this hill or that, but in climbing itself. He loves to wander in mountainous lands; ascents of great mountains, clad in frozen snow, to him are not unprofitable. Mountain huts ill ventilated, nights spent under rocks amidst snow, wind, mist, or rain, these things will he endure. Moreover, to help him will he even pay much money to the more hardy inhabitants of the hills who are able to guide him with skill and safety through the inhospitable fastnesses which he loves to explore. Thus much knowledge will he gain, making many observations on the heights of hills, the efficacy of meat-lozenges, the movement of glaciers during the day, and of the *pulex irritans* by night. He is a searcher after sensations. But when, owing to misfortune, he finds that his desire for climbing is in inverse ratio to his opportunity for doing so, then will he spend his leisure hours in adorning his maps with red lines, or he will write papers or even books describing his exploits, that perchance other mountaineers may receive benefit therefrom. Or on some Saturday afternoon or summer evening will he hunt up dainty bits of rock climbing, if it is only a precipice twenty feet high; or he ascends to the uplands a thousand feet above sea-level, where it is said 'Black Care'* rarely ventures. Thus does his felicity consist in the pursuit of the unknown.

But, as we have already said, the love of mountain climbing, like fortitude or other virtues, has its mean and its defect; as to the mean, we have seen that it is the virtue of the 'mountaineer,' whilst the defect constitutes the habit of the 'pseudo-mountaineer,' and the 'irrational man.' But the extreme is found in the man who has the desire to climb hills out of all reason, therefore we call him the 'orimaniac,' or he who is incontinent in the matter. He it is who ascends hills upon the wrong side, and cares not to travel in the line of least resistance; also should he hear that a pinnacle of rock is inaccessible he is at once seized with a great desire to climb that rock;

* Probably Horace, when a student at the University of Athens, was in the habit of 'hunting up dainty pieces of rock climbing' upon the sides of the Acropolis or along the lower slopes of Hymettus, for it is only at a later date that he alludes to *Atra Cura*.—Note by translator.

for he climbs not mountains for the exercise or the love of climbing itself, but for the mere base desire to beat records or to out-do an enemy, or that he may see his name blazoned in the local papers. And not unfrequently do accidents befall such an one, and he hurts himself grievously; hence come those accidents which we may call 'indefinite,' for of this kind of accident there is no definite cause, for the cause of it is casual, and that is indefinite. Thus such an one may have fallen. Now if it was not his intention so to do, and he either slipped or was otherwise moved in a direction suddenly downwards, it happened accidentally. The accident, therefore, was generated, and is, but not so far as itself is, but as something else is. Moreover, in this kind of accident, as we have already stated, it often happens that the 'orimaniac' suffers many woes, breaking sometimes a limb, or, if still more unfortunate, his neck, or he suffers mutilation* in respect to his garments. Again, accident may be called that which is inherent in something, and of which something may be truly asserted; as, for instance, if anyone going up one mountain in a mist should, after much fatigue, find himself at the summit of another, the ascent would be an accident to him who climbs the mountain. Nor, if anyone climbs one mountain does he for the most part climb another. Accident is after another manner denominated, that which essentially belongs—'The inseparable,' for instance, the mountains themselves. Hence, indeed, it happens that accidents of this kind are perpetual, which is not the case with any others.

Now, concerning the love of mountain climbing and the excess and deficiency thereof, as well as the mean which is also a virtue, and concerning also accidents both separable and inseparable of mountain climbing let this suffice.

* Of the mutilated we have spoken elsewhere. 'A man is mutilated when some part is taken away, and this not any part indifferently, but which, when wholly taken away, cannot again be generated. Hence men that are bald are not mutilated.' (*Metaphysics*, book v. chap. xxvii.)