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THE FUTURE OF THE ALPINE CLUB.

BY SIR MARTIN CONWAY AND DOUGLAS W. FRESHFIELD.

(Read at the Winter Meeting, December 17, 1900.)

THOUGH the Alpine Club arose during the struggle for the conquest of the Alps, and took its name from the great European range, there is evidence enough that, in the mind of its founders, mountains in general, and not only the peaks of Central Europe, were objects of interest. The title page of the 'Alpine Journal' and many of the papers in its early volumes are proof sufficient of this statement, if proof be needed.* It was only as the minute exploration of the Alps proceeded, and the proximate exhaustion of unclimbed peaks within holiday range of England concentrated attention on the details of what are known as 'Mountain Form' and 'Records,' that the Club as a corporate body became so thoroughly Alpine as it for many years remained. Thereupon the idea seems to have taken root in the minds of certain of its leading members that, with the completion of Alpine exploration, the *raison d'être* of the Club would cease, and the supply of materials for papers and a magazine would dry up. It was held that if the Club continued to exist, it would be only as a meeting-place for men interested in a common sport, who would find pleasure in occasionally dining together, but the practice of whose sport would produce nothing worthy of continuous record. Even when the Caucasus was revealed as a possible substitute for the Alps as a place of holiday resort, it was still maintained that the number of Caucasian climbers must always be few, and the record of their achievements interesting only to themselves.

* See also early Club Circular, cited *infra* by Mr. D. Freshfield.

One thing these prophets of evil failed to foresee, the growth of photography and the development of the magic lantern, and this failure has vitiated their calculations. They were right enough in foretelling that the large majority of the members of our Club would be unable, at all events within the time of the present generation, to take their holiday in the remoter mountain ranges of the earth. What they did not conceive was that, if the Club could not go to the Himalayas or the Rockies, the Himalayas and the Rockies would come to the Club. It happens that snowy mountains are the most photographable things in the world. It happens also that all snowy mountains, whether in the Arctic regions, in the tropics, or in Europe, possess the same general features in common, so that a man familiar with any one range, and acquainted with glacier phenomena in any place, finds himself able to realise the meaning, and even in his own mind to reproduce the scale, of any photographically depicted snow mountain in any part of the earth.

The Alps themselves are so extensive that few amongst us can possibly know more than a small part of them. If a paper were to be read on the Levanna or the Rheinwaldhorn, for instance, it is probable that to nine out of ten of the Club audience the aspect of the mountain in question would be as unknown as that of Ruwenzori or the Mustagh Ata. In either case, therefore, the interest of the paper must depend upon a basis of maps and photographs. When by such means the Club audience has been made to realise the nature and aspect of a peak, they can follow the story of its ascent or exploration with exactly the same kind of interest, whether the peak in question be within or outside Europe. Photography has thus enlarged the horizon of the Alpine Club, and correspondingly magnified the scope of the 'Alpine Journal.'

The exploration of the Alps is nearly complete. It is doubtful whether an institution, in many respects characteristically English alike in its weaknesses and in its strength, an institution moreover essentially non-local in contrast with the foreign Alpine Clubs, which are essentially local and concerned each with a special area—it is doubtful, I say, whether such an institution is suited for the minute, accurate, and perhaps (in a literary sense) somewhat dull work of completing the last stage of Alpine exploration. The co-ordination of the scattered records of multitudinous expeditions, often varying very slightly from one another, is matter for Climbers' Guides and learned monographs rather than for the pages of a Journal whose primary subject is 'Mountain Adventure.' If

the proposition which I made to the Alpine Club some fifteen years ago had been accepted, that I should present to it the copyright of such Climbers' Guides as had then been issued, and should continue to edit the series for it, the pages of those little volumes (since slaughtered by the new edition of Ball) would have relieved the 'Journal' from the need to record a mass of small new expeditions, and would at the same time have preserved them from oblivion. As it is, the proper place for such not unimportant topographical minutiae is, in my opinion, the pages of the Journal of that particular foreign Alpine Club within whose domain the area in question falls.

As a matter of fact the exploration, above the snow-level, of the mountain ranges of the world outside the Alps has thus far been made chiefly by our members. By accident, not by design, the Exploration of the Mountains of the World has become a characteristic work of our Club, and the first record of such explorations is the noteworthy feature of our 'Journal.' I maintain that the time has now come when this spontaneous development should be adopted as the Club policy, when the Club should frankly look beyond the Alps, and constitute itself the centre and chief home of mountain exploration in general. In the nature of things, for the Royal Geographical Society, to which mountain explorers owe so much, mountain exploration must always be and remain matter of secondary interest. The bulk of its Fellows are not, and never will be, mountaineers, and the broad interests of geographic science in general must be matter of prime importance to that powerful body.

Here, then, is the Alpine Club's chance, and now is its time. If we fail to assume the rôle thus open to us the Geographical Society will, of course, do its best to take up the work which the Alpine Club might do much better, and of which the Geographical Society would gladly be relieved. Every year the mass of the material with which the editor of the 'Geographical Journal' has to deal increases in amount. He would be happy enough to find the whole subject of mountain exploration taken over and properly handled in our 'Journal.' If, however, this is to be done it must be made the main subject of the 'Journal' and the chief business of the Club. I do not think that this is possible with the staff now at our disposal, or by merely voluntary effort. The income of the Alpine Club is increasing, and if we chose to open our doors a little wider it might be further increased. I am not familiar with the details of our finance, but it can-

not be doubtful that if money were required to enable us to fulfil the important function I suggest it would be forthcoming; and money would be required.

It is not necessary for a learned society to consist of learned members. The essential thing is that it should possess at least one permanent paid official, who should devote all his time to the study of the subject with which the Society is concerned. Such an official must be sought amongst and must remain a member of the Club. In our case he would edit the 'Alpine Journal,' and it would be his business to make himself acquainted with everything connected with mountain exploration occurring in the world. To take a concrete case: On the day when I was preparing this paper I received the four great and richly illustrated volumes containing the case of the Argentine Government in its frontier dispute with Chile. These volumes describe with great minuteness the southern part of the Andes ranges. From them I learn that during a long series of years exploring expeditions have been visiting those ranges, and gradually revealing their structure. Yet of these explorations, which we ought to have known of from year to year, no mention has been made in the 'Alpine Journal.' There will, I suppose, be a corresponding publication issued by Chile, containing the record of similar Chilean expeditions, of which likewise we know nothing. Our paid permanent official, if we had one, watching the serial publications of the very active South American Geographical Societies, would have been fully informed of such expeditions. Moreover on the appearance of these important works it would be his duty, and he would have the time, to read them through and present to us at all events an abstract of the account they give of one of the most remarkable mountain regions in the world.

Such a man, devoting his time year after year to these studies, would very soon become the acknowledged expert in his subject. He would probably become attached as an authoritative reviewer of new mountain literature to some of the principal Journals. He would find materials for interesting and useful books growing upon his hands. He would thus be enabled not merely to obtain a position of authority and distinction, which the Club would share, but to add materially to the salary which we should be able to offer him. His position would be as honourable to himself as to us.

I must guard myself against the misapprehension which might arise in the mind of a careless listener that I am

desirous of transforming the ordinary member of the Club into a man of science or a topographical expert. All I suggest is that we should select a single member and transform him. The rest of us would remain the simple amateurs that we now are ; some loving the mountains as a field for sport, others loving them for the beauty of their wild recesses ; all of us, as far as our powers admit, climbers, and only admitted to membership as climbers, except, as now, under the occasional artistic and literary qualification. In my own opinion the present climbing qualification is unnecessarily high. It has been relaxed in the case of men who have explored remote mountains, and it might with advantage be relaxed nearer home. The guarantee that we really require of our members is that they should be mountain lovers, who, by repeated visits to mountains and ascents made while amongst them, have proved the reality of their devotion. I hold that it is of no importance whether the mountains climbed be easy or difficult. So long as we have proof of a sufficient number of ascents made in a series of not less than three seasons in the mountains we have proof of a candidate's suitability. The keenest readers of the '*Alpine Journal*' and the best lovers of the Alps are by no means the most gymnastic climbers ; but every such person climbs whenever he can. It has been my good fortune to come in contact with several such men, whom lack of means alone prevented from accomplishing our costly qualification. One such individual, who had never left England, was a true mountain explorer at heart. His enthusiasm for our sport was so great that, unable to afford to purchase the first ten volumes of our '*Journal*,' he went month after month to a public library and solemnly copied them out. So keen a mountain lover as he, nurtured only on a short annual holiday in Wales, is far better qualified than most of us, with our wider experience, to attend our monthly meetings and listen to our papers.

Just ten years ago, at the annual meeting of 1890, I read a flippant paper * to the Club for the purpose of stirring it up and stimulating discussion, as I hope to do to-night. Many things have happened to us in the last ten years. We have moved into premises suitable to our greater activity, and capable of adaptation to a yet wider usefulness. A much larger proportion of our number has gone a-wandering over the face of the earth. Mountain exploration is now a respectable occupation and is no longer regarded as the wild

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xv. p. 397.

folly of a crank. If the future of the Alpine Club is to be worthy of its past, and if it is to develop in the next quarter of a century as it has in that which is closing, it must be alive to its opportunities and ready to seize and make the most of them. I plead, therefore, for a somewhat opener door, and for a wider geographical horizon. I have suggested a means whereby that may be obtained. It may not be the best means. The suggestion, however, whether good or bad, is, I hope, good enough to form a basis for discussion, and as such I humbly submit it to this meeting.

[At the conclusion of Sir M. Conway's paper Mr. Douglas Freshfield read the following note.]

In the brief, but suggestive, paper we have just listened to Sir M. Conway has laid down two distinct propositions. No doubt they are connected in his mind by financial considerations. But they are in themselves essentially distinct, and I think it may be as well to consider them separately and on their individual merits.

His first proposal is that it is expedient to make the 'Alpine Journal' a complete record of the progress of mountain exploration in all parts of the globe, and for this purpose to appoint a permanent paid editor.

His second proposal is that it is expedient that the qualifications for the Club should be modified.

With regard to the first I can speak with some experience, inasmuch as it fell to my lot, when Honorary Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, to carry out a precisely similar alteration in the character of its 'Proceedings.' I made them a Geographical Record while preserving the original character of the publication as a memorial for Fellows of the Proceedings of the Society. Such a conversion can be effected simply and yet successfully. The practical step necessary is to appoint as editor or sub-editor a gentleman who will make it his business to provide in the form of 'Notes' and 'Lists of New Publications' a summary of the work accomplished in the field and the study since the last issue. In our case I should be disposed to retain an amateur Editor and to appoint a Sub-Editor, who might serve also as Assistant Secretary. His function would be to bring out the facts of interest to mountaineers in works of general travel, and to keep an eye on the Proceedings of Geographical Societies and foreign Alpine Clubs with the same object. The cost to the Club would be the increase of his salary beyond our present

Assistant Secretary's, and the additional printer's bill. I calculate it roughly at about 200*l.* per annum.*

There seem to me two arguments which are likely to be adduced against this suggestion. It may be urged that we can well afford to leave the record of the exploration of distant ranges to the 'Geographical Journal.' But the geographer approaches our work from a different point of view, weighs it by a different standard, and sometimes fails to appreciate it accurately, while the Alpine enthusiast has, in the 'Geographical Journal,' to pick out the mountain Notes from an enormous mass of miscellaneous articles on subjects which he naturally looks on as beside his purpose, if not beneath his notice.

Another objection that may perhaps be put forward is that the bulk of our Members have no interests beyond the Alps. If that be true the sooner they learn to have wider interests the better and the happier for them, and we ought, in my opinion, to spare no pains to this end.

I am brought then to the conclusion that this suggestion of Sir M. Conway's is good in itself—if the Club can afford to carry it out.

The second proposition put before us is that it is expedient that the ordinary qualification for the Club should not necessarily involve ascents of an arduous nature, but that in the Alps, as beyond them, the Committee should be at liberty to look at a candidate's claims from a wider point of view.

Before we consider this, which will appear, perhaps, to some of our younger members a startling innovation, I would invite you to a retrospect. Let us look at the first words of the first circular issued on behalf of the Club in 1859. It runs as follows:—

'The Alpine Club invites the membership of all who have explored high mountain regions. It facilitates association

* I am informed that a gentleman ought to be found who for 200*l.* to 220*l.* per annum would give sufficient time to look after the foreign section of the *Journal*, and act both as Assistant Editor and Assistant Secretary. As the Club fixes the present Assistant Secretary's salary at 120*l.*, this would involve an extra 100*l.* A second 100*l.* should be allowed for occasional translation work, extra printing, and cheap lithographed maps. If this expense should seem at present excessive, as it well may, a competent person might be found who for 20*l.* per annum would compile a quarterly summary of current mountain exploration with adequate references. The issue of such a summary would probably increase the sale of the *Journal* sufficiently to pay for the extra printing cost.

among those who in their admiration of natural grandeur possess a similarity of tastes.*

After reading this sentence we must, I think, admit that what Sir M. Conway asks us is not whether we will set up a new standard, but whether we are prepared to return to the original standard of our founders. This original standard is illustrated by the early Club lists. We shall find there many names (amongst them that of at least one President, the late William Longman) who could not possibly have come in on the present climbing qualification. It is even doubtful whether John Ball would have passed the Committee on it. According to an *obiter dictum* we have heard to-night climbs in the 'Titlis, Tödi, Locarno, and such like districts' might have been ruled out as non-Alpine.

The next stage in the progress of the Club was of the nature of a compromise.

Some of our Members wanted a high climbing qualification; and they obtained it, subject to the concession that not only artistic and literary claims in connection with the Alps should continue to be recognised, but that travel in more distant ranges should also be a ground for admission.† This system has now been in force for many years. Probably nine-tenths of our members have been elected on a climbing qualification, to which, however, the good sense of successive Committees has given a certain limited elasticity. With a proper disregard for formal consistency—generally a stupid thing—they have occasionally made allowances for age or health on the part of the candidate.

Still the Committee have felt bound to maintain—and the books show that they have on the whole maintained—a very high climbing qualification.

Is it expedient that we should authorise them to relax it? I agree, on the whole, with Sir M. Conway, and reply, Yes, for the following reasons:—

First, a high climbing qualification has become, to a great extent, a money qualification. A candidate nowadays cannot, as a rule, go up great peaks without making large payments to guides; unless, indeed, he begins at the wrong end and goes up them without guides, a course only justifiable when he has friends as good as guides ready to teach him the craft of mountaineering.

* This circular was first sent out by the Acting Secretary, Mr. T. W. Hinchliff, in 1858; it was subsequently reissued.

† See *A. J.* vol. xviii. p. 407, vol. xi. p. 435, vol. xii. p. 207. See also Longman's *Modern Mountaineering*, p. 86, in vol. viii. of this *Journal*.

Then, again, any written list of expeditions has become a purely illusory test. A candidate may have a dozen big peaks to his credit, and yet as a mountaineer be a dangerous fraud. What do the guides say? A friend of mine, no mountaineer, was being taken up the Matterhorn. He said to his guide, 'Are you not afraid of going with a novice like me?' My friend's nervousness and pride were simultaneously dissipated by the guide's reply, 'With the mountain in this condition I would take a cow up.'

Lastly, I demur to a purely climbing qualification, because I think it tends in the present condition of things to encourage that rash climbing which has led and is leading to deplorable results. We want here to make mountaineers, not acrobats.

No one can turn over our modern mountaineering literature without noticing a new tendency in it. The old spirit was breathed in Forbes's maxim, 'Freedom from casualty is to be obtained by a conviction of the dangers to be encountered.' The note of the modern climber, on the contrary, is a self-confidence which has unhappily proved to be, in not a few instances, over-confidence. The distinction between the two schools is brought out in the Badminton volume on Mountaineering, which, as a whole, may be taken as a manifesto of the old school. I find in one of the chapters written by its Editor the following sentence:—

'The climber urges, "Go on, because it is possible to do so;" the mountaineer says, "It is possible, but it is unwise and imprudent; therefore we will turn back."' Now this very passage is quoted in the September number of the 'Climbers' Journal,' with the characteristic comment: 'Who after that would be a mere mountaineer?'

Here surely we have the folly of the crude climber in its most naked form. One is little surprised afterwards to read that particulars of three fatal accidents that occurred among British mountains last summer are wanted by the editor of that Journal.

But have we not suffered in this Club also from the Modern Spirit—the spirit that does without, if it does not despise, the rules of our craft, that ignores or depreciates dangers? It has been my business lately to read up the Alpine books of the last ten years. The aim of some of their authors seemed to me not to conquer with the least possible risk, but to run every risk up to the last margin. And what has been the result? The margin has been overstepped. We have lost my friends Mr. Mummery and Mr. Cockin, Mr. Norman

Neruda and Mr. Jones. I might add other names; I have mentioned only authors. Now I do not attribute blame to any individual in any particular instance. I look broadly to the result. And I say that any step on our part that will emphasise the fact that this is no mere Climbers' Club but a Mountaineers' Club will be a good step. Let us leave youths who depict themselves engaged in 'Stable Traverses'* (where, let us hope, a soft and convenient receptacle awaits members of unstable equilibrium) to be reformed by their President, Mr. C. E. Mathews. If any one is capable of the task he is. But let us preserve our primitive tradition and maintain this as a Club of mountain enthusiasts, open to all who have explored and climbed, or haunted, high mountain regions, not to please a publisher or to become a subject for paragraphs in the penny press, but for the love of Nature; let us keep it as a refuge for those who like to meet and talk over their past pleasures with sympathetic acquaintances, amongst whom they may, perchance, make, as most of us have made, life-long friends.

In conclusion I must guard myself against being supposed to argue for the abolition of any qualification to membership of the Alpine Club beyond the subscription, or to wish for the assimilation of our Club in this respect to the foreign Alpine Societies. What I desire is that the Committee should be assured that they are authorised to consider the qualifications of candidates who have not climbed—or let us say more truthfully, been taken to the top of—a series of great central peaks. The inward grace we require is a love of mountains. I hold that the habit of frequenting them should be taken count of among the outward signs of this grace.†

Whether the general knowledge that the Committee are not restricted in their consideration of candidates by any hard and fast climbing test would bring in a sufficient addition to our membership to provide funds for the proposed development of the 'Journal' I do not presume to prophesy. Such a development seems to me a worthy object, but not one worth obtaining at the sacrifice of the Club's original character, and I should, I hope, be the last to propose any step likely to lead to this. The adoption of Sir M. Conway's

* See the *Climbers' Journal* for September 1900.

† Any fears that the Club membership would be thereby increased beyond the capacity of our hall may, I think, be dismissed. So long as the Committee does its duty the increase will, I believe, be gradual, and it could at all times be met by a limit to the membership.

second proposal in the sense I give it ought not to bring about any such result; it would rather confirm the Club in its original character. If the funds for improving the 'Journal' are not found in this way other ways may be devised in which they can be secured. That its condition now is not altogether satisfactory is obvious. The task of Editor is more than can be fairly thrown—without paid aid—on any Member who cannot afford to make it, as Mr. Coolidge in his day did, one of the chief occupations of his leisure.*

MOUNTAINEERING IN THE HIMALAYAS.

BY MAJOR THE HON. C. G. BRUCE.

(Read before the Alpine Club, December 11, 1899.)

I WAS originally asked to read a paper on Military Mountaineering, but I am afraid that mountaineering, as understood by this Club, is for India and its frontiers unnecessary. It must be borne in mind that the Himalayas are not the Alps; that India is not divided by one narrow ridge of high mountains from another civilised Power, as is the case between certain countries of Europe; that it is not necessary to hold high passes by special corps of trained Alpine troops; that what is wanted is not Alpine troops, but very active and highly trained hill troops.

It would be incorrect to describe to this Club the work necessary for the Indian frontiers as mountaineering. What, however, is of value is the educational side of mountaineering. The actual effort of climbing up steep ice or rocks is of little importance, most of the hill men, of whatever race, enlisted into the Indian army being excellent walkers and capable of covering steep, rocky hill-sides and every description of broken ground at a great pace.

It will, however, be allowed that mere activity is not everything in a mountain guide or a hill fighter.

There is probably no training so good as the practice of mountaineering for developing the path-finding instincts, for helping a man to readily pick out the right route or the safest route across a new country.

I do not suppose there are many members of the Alpine

* For the discussion on this subject see the 'Proceedings of the Club,' p. 352.