



'Bold, innovative, and inspirational'  
Peter Gillman, *Introduction*

# CLIMBING EVEREST

THE COMPLETE WRITINGS OF  
GEORGE MALLORY

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**‘Compelling.’**  
**STEPHEN VENABLES, MAIL ON SUNDAY**

**‘Expressive and emotionally literate.’**  
**SCOTTISH MOUNTAINEER**

**‘Inspirational.’**  
**PETER GILLMAN, MALLORY BIOGRAPHER**

George Leigh Mallory was both the first modern climber and the last towering figure of the Great Age of Exploration. His death in 1924 on Mountain Everest continues to fascinate climbers, journalists and film makers, as he may have been first man to reach the highest point on earth.

For Mallory—as for the explorers who preceded him—earth was still a heroic place with hidden parts promising unique experiences in the eyes of history. All his writings have a rare freshness—the ones that started as daily letters he wrote from the mountains he climbed to his wife Ruth.

*Climbing Everest* gathers for the first time Mallory’s influential essays from their disparate locations in archives, including the last piece he wrote days before he died.

*George Leigh Mallory* was born on 18 June 1886 in Mobberley, and died on 8 or 9 June 1924 while climbing Everest. He coined the most famous words in mountaineering when answering why to climb a mountain: ‘Because it is there.’ Mallory’s skill was legendary, and one partner described Mallory’s unique movements as ‘almost serpentine in their smoothness’. Mallory developed his passion for climbing as a schoolboy at Winchester. He was a teacher at Charterhouse, Godalming, and served in the Royal Artillery as an officer during the battle of the Somme.

*Peter Gillman* is an author and journalist who with his wife Leni wrote *The Wildest Dream* (2000), the prize-winning standard biography of George Leigh Mallory.

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# *Climbing Everest*

by

GEORGE LEIGH MALLORY

Peter Gillman  
Introduction

GIBSON SQUARE

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## INTRODUCTION

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Peter Gillman

On 12 April 1922, George Mallory sat down to write a letter to his wife Ruth. The British Everest expedition had just reached the Tibetan fortress town of Kampa Dzong, having fought its way through a blizzard which had obliterated their tracks and rendered the Tibetan plateau into a wasteland of snow and ice. As Mallory related, he was wearing two sets of underclothes—one wool, the other silk—flannel shirt, a sleeved waistcoat, a lambskin jacket and a Burberry coat, as well as plus fours, two pairs of woollen stockings, and a pair of sheepskin boots. Yet his hands were so cold, he told Ruth that he could hardly manage to grip his pen.

It says a great deal about Mallory's tenacity and dedication that he completed his letter, telling Ruth about 'the shadows of mountains moving over the plains' and the 'delicate shades of red and yellow and brown' of the landscape before the snow came. It also reveals much about Mallory's view of himself as writer. In the first place, he regarded it his duty to posterity that he should faithfully record the sights and events the 1922 expedition encountered on its arduous five-week trek to Everest. In those days when history was still inscribed in pen and ink, letters were seen as vital links in the testimonial chain, and Mallory certainly had a sense of the expedition's part in the developing saga of human exploration.

His writing also met more personal goals. George and Ruth Mallory had married in July 1914, on the very eve of the First World War. As an artillery officer, Mallory spent a year and a half, with intervals, on the western front. Throughout that period he and Ruth had sustained their marriage by writing to each other regularly—in Ruth's case, every single day. Thus when Mallory departed for Everest, doing so three times in the space of four years, they continued the practice as a way of keeping their relationship and their love alive.

Both during the war, and while Mallory was away on Everest, their exchanges were always endearingly intimate: Ruth tells George about the latest doings—and misdeeds—of their three young children, Clare, Berry and John. She recites her domestic concerns, her encounters with George's parents and with hers, the state of the garden at their home in Godalming, Surrey. George is almost gossipy in response, giving his views of his brother officers on the Western Front and his fellow climbers in Tibet, as well as describing the more momentous progress of both the war in the France and the expedition in Tibet. Their letters are all the more poignant given that their love was doomed to end when Mallory disappeared near the summit of Everest a little less than ten years after they were married.

Once back home in Godalming, Mallory—to use a very modern phrase—recycled his letters to provide his contributions to the official books of the expeditions. Although he removed the less discreet references to his fellow-climbers, the thrust of the narrative, and the quality of his descriptions, are essentially the same. The account which constitutes six chapters of *Everest Reconnaissance 1921* shines even more by contrast with the eleven flat, tedious chapters written by Col Charles Howard-Bury, the expedition leader, which Mallory justly described as 'quite dreadful and bad'.

It was in response to this kind of monotonous prose, devoid of all affect, that Mallory had been developing his own theories of writing. It also stemmed from his involvement with the Bloomsbury

group and what was termed the Cambridge School of Friendship, where emotional openness and honesty were all. Mallory believed it was vital that mountaineering writing should function on an emotional level, disclosing the participants' feelings and attempting to evoke them in the reader. Not for him the stiff upper lip of traditional mountaineering prose, whose authors did their best to conceal their sentiments behind layers of irony and understatement.

Mallory liked to conjure new epithets too: at the tiny settlement of Shilling during the approach march in 1921, he wrote how the wind, a relentless, ever-present force, swept over the sand of a riverbank so that it rippled like a sea of watered silk. Such descriptive touches illustrate Mallory's primal delight in savouring new experiences, one of the key motivations of his life, and his determination to render them in a way that others—starting with his beloved Ruth—could comprehend.

Mallory had embarked on this process at least a decade before. His published canon is not large: he wrote a total of six articles for the two principal climbing publications of the day: the *Alpine Journal* published by the Alpine Club, and the *Climbers Club Journal*. The first of these, *The Mountaineer as Artist*, written in 1913, illuminates his theories about both mountaineering literature and writing in general.

Mallory's immediate topic was the meaning of risk in mountaineering. It is significant that he should address this, as mountaineering's practitioners can attempt to delude themselves—and families and friends—into believing that theirs is not an unduly dangerous pursuit, providing only that they obey the safety rules. Equally telling, Mallory wrote his article at a time when the select coterie who comprised the core of British mountaineering were reeling from the deaths on several of the members in climbing accidents in Snowdonia and the Alps.

Geoffrey Winthrop Young, one of the impresarios of the British climbing world, and the principal sponsor of Mallory's career, was among the most distressed at the deaths, observing that they marked the end of climbing's age of innocence. Mallory courageously grappled with these issues in the article scrutinising the validity of the climbers' experiences, and producing the metaphor of a symphony to represent the rhythms of climbing's aesthetic and emotional appeal. Although Mallory was uncertain whether his article had succeeded in its aim, it represented a prescient attempt to identify the emotional core of all sporting experiences which prefigures the recent wave of sports writing.

Mallory resumed these explorations in his second article, 'Mont Blanc from the Col du Géant by the Eastern Buttress of Mont Maudit', written in 1917 while he was away from the front at an army training camp in Winchester. Mallory had observed that the terminology of conflict and war was habitually deployed to create an antagonism between mountaineer and mountain. His article describes an ascent of Mont Maudit and its neighbour Mont Blanc which he had undertaken with two friends in 1911. This time he portrays the climb as an inner journey, mediating his actions through his emotional responses to the sequence of events, from his guilt at kicking over the breakfast stove, to his alarm over the most dangerous section of the climb. Then, at the summit, Mallory rejects the notions of victory and conquest. In the most-quoted passage of his writing, he wrote: 'We're not exultant; but delighted, joyful; soberly astonished.... Have we vanquished an enemy? Not but ourselves....'

It was not long afterwards that Mallory attempted to forge a career based in part on his writing. He had been a teacher at Charterhouse School in Godalming but resigned to join the first British Everest expedition, the 1921 reconnaissance on which Mallory was to play the key role in identifying the potential route to the summit from the north. His plan was to make a living from writing and lecturing about both his exploits on Everest and broader topics, such as an entry for an encyclopaedia about the Himalayas, and his article for the US-published *Asia* magazine in 1923. Sadly, he did not make the income he had hoped, and in autumn 1923 he and his family moved to Cambridge, where he took up

post as an extra-mural lecturer in history.

It is a terrible irony that one reason he was compelled to renounce his career as a writer was the parsimony of the Mount Everest Committee, which organised the three expeditions in which Mallory took part. When Mallory provided his chapters for the account of the 1921 reconnaissance, he did so on the clear understanding that he would be paid for his work. By November 1923, just three months before he departed on his third and final expedition, Mallory had still not been paid. But when he pressed the committee he received a dusty answer. The committee revoked the previous undertaking and told Mallory no payment would be forthcoming—while sanctimoniously adding that it ‘fully appreciated the value of your contributions’.

Whether the committee did appreciate the quality of Mallory’s contribution is far from clear, since it was so radically different from the turgid account by Howard-Bury, the reconnaissance leader. This represents the best of Mallory’s writings, a pacy narrative, composed in the form of a quest, that occupies a mid-point between his experimental writing and his more pragmatic journalism. It is all the more remarkable for capturing the sense in which the 1921 reconnaissance was a venture into the unknown. No westerner had been within 60 miles of Everest, nor did it appear on any detailed map. For much of the trek through Tibet the expedition was unable to see the mountain as it was obscured by clouds.

As both adventurer and writer, Mallory was waiting for Everest to come into view. He wanted there to be a moment of revelation, providing him with a construct to counterpoint the frustration he and his companions had experienced to that juncture. On 12 June he and his partner Guy Bullock climbed a hill above the Yaru river and looked in the direction of where Everest should be. Over the next hours the clouds gradually parted, at first giving fragmentary glimpses of glaciers and ridges, until the mountain’s great north face and its summit pyramid were finally revealed.

He described the unveiling of this vision in a letter to Ruth on 15 June, which he reworked when he came to write his chapters for the expedition book. He also deployed a simile which was central to his motivations and his life. ‘Mountain shapes are often fantastic seen through a mist,’ Mallory wrote, ‘these were like the wildest creation of a dream.’

The notion of the dream occurs in several of Mallory’s previous letters and articles, but here it achieves its greatest force. The drive to fulfil his dreams inspired Mallory’s decisions and actions, and provides a key to understanding both him and his colleagues in their venture into the unknown. In their willingness to confront the dangers that lay ahead, they serve as a testament to the optimism and defiance that are at the core of human nature.

There is a small postscript I should like to offer. In 2000, the biography of George Mallory, *The Wildest Dream*, written by myself and my wife Leni, was published. We were delighted and flattered by its reception, above all when it was awarded the Boardman Tasker prize for Mountain Writing. We were soon convinced that there was a second book to be published—the collected writings of our protagonist and hero. What ensued is the familiar and wearying tale of attempting to find a publisher who shared our belief. We were turned down three times and then moved on to another project. It was thus with delight, tinged with envy, that we learned that Gibson Square Books was publishing the collection of Mallory’s writing. We trust and hope that its readers will share our view of the qualities of George Mallory, bold, innovative, and inspirational in his writing as in his life.

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## *Climbing Everest*

‘From Everest we expect no mercy.’  
*George Leigh Mallory*



## THE MOUNTAINEER AS ARTIST

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I seem to distinguish two sorts of climber, those who take a high line about climbing and those who take no particular line at all. It is depressing to think how little I understand either, and I can hardly believe that the second sort are such fools as I imagine. Perhaps the distinction has no reality; it may be that it is only a question of attitude. Still, even as an attitude, the position of the first sort of climber strikes a less violent shock of discord with mere reason. Climbing for them means something more than a common amusement, and more than other forms of athletic pursuit mean to other men; it has a recognised importance in life. If you could deprive them of it they would be conscious of definite degradation, a loss of virtue. For those who take the high line about it climbing may be one of the modern ways of salvation along with slumming, statistics, and other forms of culture, and more complete than any of these. They have an arrogance with regard to this hobby never equalled even by the little king among grouse-killers. It never, for instance, presents itself to them as comparable with field sports. They assume an unmeasured superiority. And yet—they give no explanation.

I am myself one of the arrogant sort, and may serve well for example, because I happen also to be a sportsman. It is not intended that any inference as to my habits should follow from this premise. You may easily be a sportsman though you have never walked with a gun under your arm nor bestride a tall horse in your pink. I am a sportsman simply because men say that I am; it would be impossible to convince them of the contrary, and it's no use complaining; and, once I have humbly accepted my fate and settled down in this way of life, I am proud to show, if I can, how I deserve the title. Though a sportsman may be guiltless of sporting deeds, one who has acquired the sporting reputation will show cause in kind if he may. Now, it is abundantly clear that any expedition on the high Alps is of a sporting nature; it is almost aggressively sporting. And yet it would never occur to me to prove my title by any reference to mountaineering in the Alps, nor would it occur to any other climber of the arrogant sort who may also be a sportsman. We set climbing on a pedestal above the common recreations of men. We hold it apart and label it as something that has a special value.

This, though it passes with all too little comment, is a plain act of rebellion. It is a serious deviation from the normal standard of rightness and wrongness, and if we were to succeed in establishing our value for mountaineering we should upset the whole order of society, just as completely as it would be upset if a sufficient number of people who claimed to be enlightened were to eat eggs with knives and regard with disdain the poor folk who ate them with spoons.

But there is a propriety of behaviour for rebels as for others. Society can at least expect of rebels that they explain themselves. Other men are exempt from this duty because they use the recognised labels in the conventional ways. Sporting practice and religious observance were at one time placed above, or below, the need of explanation. They were bottled and labelled 'Extra dry,' and their valuation was accepted as a premise for a priori judgments by society in general. Rebel minorities have sometimes behaved in the same way, and by the very arrogance of their dogmatism have made a revolution. The porridge-with-salt men have introduced a fashion which decrees that it is right to eat salt with porridge, and no less wrong to conceal its true nature by any other disguise than to pass the bottle from left to right instead of opposite-wise. This triumph was secured only by self-assured arrogance. But the correct method for rebels is that they set forth their case for the world to see.

Climbers who, like myself, take the high line have much to explain, and it is time they set about it. Notoriously they endanger their lives. With what object? If only for some physical pleasure, to enjoy

certain movements of the body and to experience the zest of emulation, then it is not worth while. Climbers are only a particularly foolish set of desperadoes; they are on the same plane with hunters and many degrees less reasonable. The only defence for mountaineering puts it on a higher plane than mere physical sensation. It is asserted that the climber experiences higher emotions; he gets something good for his soul. His opponent may well feel sceptical about this argument. He, too, may claim to consider his soul's good when he can take a holiday. Probably it is true of anyone who spends a well-earned fortnight in healthy enjoyment at the seaside that he comes back a better, that is to say a more virtuous man than he went. How are the climber's joys worth more than the seaside? What are the higher emotions to which he refers so elusively? And if they really are so valuable, is there no safe way of reaching them? Do mountaineers consider these questions and answer them again and again from fresh experience, or are they content with some magic certainty born of comparative ignorance long ago?

It would be a wholesome tonic, perhaps, more often to meet an adversary who argued on these lines. In practice I find that few men ever want to discuss mountaineering seriously. I suppose they imagine that a discussion with me would be unprofitable; and I must confess that if anyone does open the question my impulse is to put him off. I can assume a vague disdain for civilisation, and I can make phrases about beautiful surroundings, and puff them out, as one who has a secret and does not care to reveal it because no one would understand—phrases which refer to the divine riot of Nature in her ecstasy of making mountains.

Thus I appeal to the effect of mountain scenery upon my aesthetic sensibility. But, even if I could communicate by words a true feeling, I have explained nothing. Aesthetic delight is vitally connected with our performance, but it neither explains nor excuses it. No one for a moment dreams that our apparently wilful proceedings are determined merely by our desire to see what is beautiful. The mountain railway could cater for such desires. By providing view-points at a number of stations, and by concealing all signs of its own mechanism, it might be so completely organised that all the aesthetic joys of the mountaineer should be offered to its intrepid ticket-holders. It would achieve the object with a comparatively small expenditure of time, and would even have, one might suppose, a decisive advantage by affording to all lovers of the mountains the opportunity of sharing the emotions with a large and varied multitude of their fellow-men. And yet the idea of associating the mechanism with a snow mountain is the abomination of every species of mountaineer. To him it appears as a kind of rape. The fact that he so regards it indicates the emphasis with which he rejects the crude aesthetic reasons as his central defence.

I suppose that, in the opinion of many people who have opportunities of judging, mountaineers have no ground for claiming for their pursuit a superiority as regards the natural beauties that attend it. And certainly many huntsmen would resent their making any such claim. We cannot, therefore, remove mountaineering from the plane of hunting by a composite representation of its merits—by asserting that physical and aesthetic joys are blended for us and not for others.

Nevertheless, I am still arrogant, and still confident in the superiority of mountaineering over all other forms of recreation. But what do I mean by this superiority? And in what measure do I claim it? On what level do we place mountaineering? What place in the whole order of experience is occupied by our experience as mountaineers? The answer to these questions must be very nearly connected with the whole explanation of our position; it may actually be found to include in itself a defence of mountaineering.

It must be admitted at the outset that our periodic literature gives little indication that our performance is concerned no less with the spiritual side of us than with the physical. This is, in part,

because we require certain practical information of anyone who describes an expedition. Our journals, with one exception, do not pretend to be elevated literature, but aim only at providing useful knowledge for climbers. With this purpose we try to show exactly where upon a mountain our course lay, in what manner the conditions of snow and ice and rocks and weather were or were not favourable to our enterprise, and what were the actual difficulties we had to overcome and the dangers we had to meet. Naturally, if we accept these circumstances, the impulse for literary expression vanishes; not so much because the matter is not suitable as because, for literary expression, it is too difficult to handle. A big expedition in the Alps, say a traverse of Mont Blanc, would be a superb theme for an epic poem. But we are not all even poets, still less Homers or Miltons. We do, indeed, possess lyric poetry that is concerned with mountains, and value it highly for the expression of much that we feel about them. But a little of it can be said to suggest that mountaineering in the technical sense offers an emotional experience which can not otherwise be reached. A few essays and a few descriptions do give some indication that the spiritual part of man is concerned. Most of those who describe expeditions do not even treat them as adventure, still less as being connected with any emotional experience peculiar to mountaineering. Some writers, after the regular careful references to matters of plain fact, insert a paragraph dealing summarily with an aesthetic experience; the greater part make a bare allusion to such feelings or neglect them altogether, and perhaps these are the wisest sort.

And yet it is not so very difficult to write about aesthetic impressions in some way so as to give pleasure. If we do not ask too much, many writers are able to please us in this respect. We may be pleased, without being stirred to the depths, by anyone who can make us believe that he has experienced aesthetically; we may not be able to feel with him what he has felt, but if he talks about it simply we may be quite delighted to perceive that he has felt as we too are capable of feeling. Mountaineers who write do not, as a rule, succeed even in this small degree. If they are so bold as to attempt a sunset or sunrise, we too often feel uncertain as we read that they have felt anything—and this even though we may know quite well that they are accustomed to feel as we feel ourselves.

These observations about our mountain literature are not made by way of censure or disappointment; they are put forward as phenomena, which have to be explained, not so much by the nature of mountaineers, but rather by the nature of their performance. The explanation which commends itself to me is derived very simply from the conception of mountaineering, which, expressed or unexpressed, is common, I imagine, to all us of the arrogant sort. We do not think that our aesthetic experiences of sunrises and sunsets and clouds and thunder are supremely important facts in mountaineering, but rather that they cannot thus be separated and catalogued and described individually as experiences at all. They are not incidental in mountaineering, but a vital and inseparable part of it; they are not ornamental, but structural; they are not various items causing emotion but parts of an emotional whole; they are the crystal pools perhaps, but they owe their life to a continuous stream.

It is this unity that makes so many attempts to describe aesthetic detail seem futile. Somehow they miss the point and fail to touch us. It is because they are only fragments. If we take one moment and present its emotional quality apart from the whole, it has lost the very essence that gave it a value. If we write about an expedition from the emotional point of view in any part of it, we ought so to write about the whole adventure from beginning to end.

A day well spent in the Alps is like some great symphony. Andante, andantissimo sometimes, is the first movement—the grim, sickening plod up the moraine. But how forgotten when the blue light

dawn flickers over the hard, clean snow! The new *motif* is ushered in, as it were, very gently on the lesser wind instruments, hautbois and flutes, remote but melodious and infinitely hopeful, caught by the violins in the growing light, and torn out by all the bows with quivering chords as the summit one by one, are enmeshed in the gold web of day, till at last the whole band, in triumphant accord, has seized the air and romps in magnificent frolic, because there you are at last marching, all a-tingle with warm blood, under the sun. And so throughout the day successive moods induce the symphonic whoa—allegro while you break the back of an expedition and the issue is still in doubt; scherzo, per hap as you leap tip the final rocks of the arête or cut steps in a last short slope, with the ice-chips dancing and swimming and bubbling and bounding with magic gaiety over the crisp surface in their mad glissade; and then, for the descent, some times again andante, because, while the summit was still to win, you forgot that the business of descending may be serious and long; but in the end scherzo once more—with the brakes on for sunset.

Expeditions in the Alps are all different, no less than symphonies are different, and each is a fresh experience. Not all are equally buoyant with hope and strength; nor is it only the proportion of grim to pleasant that varies, but no less the quality of these and other ingredients and the manner of their mixing. But every mountain adventure is emotionally complete. The spirit goes on a journey just as does the body, and this journey has a beginning and an end, and is concerned with all that happens between these extremities. You cannot say that one part of your adventure was emotional while another was not, any more than you can say of your journey that one part was travelling and another was not. You cannot subtract parts and still have the whole. Each part depends for its value upon all the other parts, and the manner in which it is related to them. The glory of sunrise in the Alps is not independent of what has passed and what's to come; without the day that is dying and the night that is to come the reverie of sunset would be less suggestive, and the deep valley-lights would lose their promise of repose. Still more, the ecstasy of the summit is conditioned by the events of getting up and the prospects of getting down.

Mountain scenes occupy the same place in our consciousness with remembered melody. It is all one whether I find myself humming the air of some great symphonic movement or gazing upon some particular configuration of rock and snow, or peak and glacier, or even more humbly upon some colour harmony of meadow and sweet pinewood in Alpine valley. Impressions of things seen return unbidden to the mind, so that we seem to have whole series of places where we love to spend idle moments, inns, as it were, inviting us by the road side, and many of them pleasant and comfortable. Gorphwysfas, so well known to us by now that we make the journey easily enough with a homing instinct, and never feel a shock of surprise, however remote they seem, when we find ourselves there. Many people, it appears, have strange dreamlands, where they are accustomed to wander at ease where no 'dull brain perplexes and retards,' nor tired body and heavy limbs, but where the whole emotional being flows, unrestrained and unencumbered, it knows not whither, like a stream rippling happily in its clean sandy bed, careless towards the infinite. My own experience has more of the earth. My mental homes are real places, distinctly seen and not hard to recognise. Only a little while ago when a sentence I was writing got into a terrible tangle, I visited one of them. An infant river meanders coolly in a broad, grassy valley; it winds along as gently almost as some glassy snake of the plains, for the valley is so flat that its slope is imperceptible. The green hills on either side are smooth and pleasing to the eye, and eventually close in, though not completely. Here the stream plunges down a steep and craggy hillside far into the shadow of a deeper valley. You may follow it down by a rough path, and then, turning aside, before you quite reach the bottom of the second valley, along a grassy ledge, you may find a modest inn. The scene was visited in reality by three tired walkers at the end

a first day in the Alps a few seasons back. It is highly agreeable. When I discover myself looking again upon the features of this landscape, I walk no longer in a vain shadow, disquieting myself, but delicious serenity embraces my whole being. In another scene which I still sometimes visit, though not so often as formerly, the main feature is a number of uniform truncated cones with a circular base of, perhaps, 8 inches diameter; they are made of reddish sand. They were, in fact, made long ago by filling a flower-pot with sandy soil from the country garden where I spent a considerable part of my childhood. The emotional quality of this scene is more exciting than that of the other. It recalls the first occasion upon which I made sand-pies, and something of the creative force of that moment associated with the tidy little heaps of reddish sand.

For any ardent mountaineer whose imaginative parts are made like mine, normally, as I should say, the mountains will naturally supply a large part of this hinterland, and the more important scenes will probably be mountainous—an indication in itself that the mountain experiences, unless they are merely terrible, are particularly valuable.

It is difficult to see why certain moments should have this queer vitality, as though the mind at home contained some mystic cavern set with gems which wait only for a gleam of light to reveal their hidden glory. What principle is it that determines this vitality? Perhaps the analogy with music experience may still suffice. Mountain scenes appear to recur, not only in the same quality with tunes from a great work, say, Mozart or Beethoven, but from the same differentiating cause. It is not merely the intensity of feeling that determines the places of tunes in my subconscious self, but chiefly some other principle. When the chords of melody are split, and unsatisfied suggestions of complete harmony are tossed among the instruments; when the firm rhythm is lost in remote pools and eddies, the mind roams perplexed; it experiences remorse and associates it with no cause; grief, and it names no special event; desires crying aloud and unfulfilled, and yet it will not formulate the object of them; but when the great tide of music rises with a resolved purpose, floating the strewn wreckage and bearing it up together in its embracing stream, like a supreme spirit in the glorious act of creation, then the vague distresses and cravings are satisfied, a divine completeness of harmony possesses all the senses and the mind as though the universe and the individual were in exact accord, pursuing a common aim with the efficiency of mechanical perfection. Similarly, some parts of a climbing day give us the feeling of things unfulfilled; we doubt and tremble; we go forward not as men determined to reach a fixed goal; our plans do not convince us and miscarry; discomforts are not willingly accepted as a proper necessity; spirit and body seem to betray each other: but a time comes when all this is changed and we experience a harmony and a satisfaction. The individual is in a sense submerged, yet not so as to be less conscious; rather his consciousness is specially alert, and he comes to a finer realisation of himself than ever before. It is these moments of supremely harmonious experience that remain always with us and part of us. Other times and other scenes besides may be summoned back to gleam across the path, elusive revenants; but those that are born of the supreme accord are more substantial; they are the real immortals. Sensation may fill the mind with melody remembered, so that the great leading airs of a symphony become an emotional commonplace for all who have heard it, and for mountaineers it may with no less facility evoke a mountain scene.

But once again. What is the value of our emotional experience among mountains? We may show by comparison the kind of feeling we have, but might not that comparison be applied with a similar result in other spheres?

How it would disturb the cool contempt of the arrogant mountaineer to whisper in his ear, 'Why not drop it and take up, say, Association football?' Not, of course, if a footballer made the remark because the mountaineer would merely humour him as he would humour a child. That, at least, is the

line I should take myself, and I can't imagine that, for instance, a proper president of the Alpine Club if approached in this way by the corresponding functionary of the A.F.A., could adopt any other. But supposing a member of the club were to make the suggestion—with the emendation, lest this should be ridiculous, of golf instead of football—imagine the righteousness of his wrath and the majesty of his anger! And yet it is as well to consider whether the footballers, golfers, etc., of this world have not some experience akin to ours. The exteriors of sportsmen are so arranged as to suggest that they have not; but if we are to pursue the truth in a whole-hearted fashion we must, at all costs, go further and see what lies beyond the faces and clothes of sporting men. Happily, as a sportsman myself, I know what the real feelings of sportsmen are; it is clear enough to me that the great majority of them have the same sort of experience as mountaineers.

It is abundantly clear to me, and even too abundantly. The fact that sportsmen are, with regard to their sport, highly emotional beings is at once so strange and so true that a life time might well be spent in the testing of it. Very pleasant it would be to linger among the curious jargons, the outlandish manners—barbaric heartiness, mediaeval chivalry, 'side' and 'swank,' if these can be distinguished in their various appearances—and the mere facial expressions of the different species in the genus—and to see how all alike have one main object, to disguise the depth of their real sentiment. But these matters are to be enjoyed and digested in the plenty of leisure hours, and I must put them by for now. The plain facts are sufficient for this occasion. The elation of sportsmen in success, their depression in failure, their long-spun vivacity in anecdote—these are the great tests, and by their quality may be seen the elemental play of emotions among all kinds of sportsmen. The footballers, the cricketers, the golfers, the batters and ballers—to be short, of all the one hundred and thirty-one varieties, all dream by day and by night as the climber dreams. Spheroidic prodigies are immortal each in its locality. The place comes back to the hero with the culminating event the moment when a round, inanimate object was struck supremely well; and all the great race of hunters, in more lands than one, the men who hunt fishes and fowls and beasts after their kind, from perch to spotted sea-serpent, fat pheasant to dainty lark or thrush, tame deer to jungle-bred monster, all hunters dream of killing animals, whether they be small or great, and whether they be gentle or ferocious. Sport is for sportsmen a part of the emotional experience, as mountaineering is for mountaineers.

How, then, shall we distinguish emotionally between the mountaineer and the sportsman?

The great majority of men are in a sense artists; some are active and creative, and some participate passively. No doubt those who create differ in some way fundamentally from those who do not create, but they hold this artistic impulse in common: all alike desire expression for the emotional side of their nature. The behaviour of those who are devoted to the higher forms of Art shows this clearly enough. It is clearest of all, perhaps, in the drama, in dancing, and in music. Not only those who perform are artists, but also those who are moved by the performance. Artists, in this sense, are not distinguished by the power of expressing emotion, but the power of feeling that emotional experience out of which Art is made. We recognise this when we speak of individuals as artistic, though they have no pretension to create Art. Arrogant mountaineers are all artistic, independently of any other consideration, because they cultivate emotional experience for its own sake; and so for the same reason are sportsmen. It is not paradoxical to assert that all sportsmen—real sportsmen, I mean—are artistic; it is merely to apply that term logically, as it ought to be applied. A large part of the human race is covered in this way by an epithet usually vague and specialised, and so it ought to be. No difference in kind divides the individual who is commonly said to be artistic from the sportsman who is supposed not so to be. On the contrary, the sportsman is a recognisable kind of artist. So soon as pleasure is being pursued, not simply for its face value, as it is being pursued at this moment by the

cook below, who is chatting with the fishmonger when I know she ought to be basting the joint, not the simplest way, but for some more remote and emotional object, it partakes of the nature of Art. This distinction may easily be perceived in the world of sport. It points the difference between one who is content to paddle a boat by himself because he likes the exercise, or likes the sensation of occupying a boat upon the water, or wants to use the water to get to some desirable spot, and one who trains for a race; the difference between kicking a football and playing in a game of football; the difference between riding individually for the liver's sake and riding to hounds. Certainly neither the sportsman nor the mountaineer can be accused of taking his pleasure simply. Both are artists; and the fact that he has in view an emotional experience does not remove the mountaineer even from the devotee of Association football.

But there is Art and ART. We may distinguish amongst artists. Without an exact classification or order of merit we do so distinguish habitually. The 'Fine Arts' are called 'fine' presumably because we consider that all Arts are not fine. The epithet artistic is commonly limited to those who are seen to have the artistic sense developed in a peculiar degree.

It is precisely in making these distinctions that we may estimate what we set out to determine—the value of mountaineering in the whole order of our emotional experience. To what part of the artistic sense of man does mountaineering belong? To the part that causes him to be moved by music or painting, or to the part that makes him enjoy a game?

By putting the question in this form we perceive at once the gulf that divides the arrogant mountaineer from the sportsman. It seemed perfectly natural to compare a day in the Alps with a symphony. For mountaineers of my sort mountaineering is rightfully so comparable; but no sportsman could or would make the same claim for cricket or hunting, or whatever his particular sport might be. He recognises the existence of the sublime in great Art, and knows, even if he cannot feel, that in this manner of stirring the heart is altogether different and vaster. But mountaineers do not admit this difference in the emotional plane of mountaineering and Art. They claim that something sublime is the essence of mountaineering. They can compare the call of the hills to the melody of wonderful music, and the comparison is not ridiculous.

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Published as 'The Mountaineer as Artist'  
*Climber's Club Journal*, March 1914.

It may be said at once that this is the most important work on mountaineering which has appeared this generation. The statement is not strictly true, for it has not yet appeared.<sup>1</sup> But the long-deferred fulfilment of our hopes is at last within countable weeks. And we are not to be disappointed. The book is no less important than it sets out to be. It is all and more than all that we had a right to expect.

Mr G.W. Young, besides being the principal author, is also editor of a series of articles by collaborating hands. Experts have been pressed into the service. They supplement Mr Young in the matter of pure technique, Captain Farrar about equipment, A.H. Lunn about mountaineering on skis, and Sydney Spencer on photography; and they deal with regional peculiarities outside the Alps and the British Isles: Mr Wollaston with tropical countries, Mr Martin Conway with Spitzbergen, Mr Raeburn with the Caucasus, Mr George Finch with Corsica, Dr. Longstaff with the Himalaya, Mr Slingsby with Norway, Mr Malcolm Ross with New Zealand, Mr Claud Elliott with the Pyrenees, and Mr Mumford with the Rocky Mountains. The editor presumably esteems it no small part of his success that he should have spurred his experts to such a high level of performance. He might indeed have added to his chapter on the art of managing an alpine party an appendix on the art of managing collaborators. Evidently they have been well managed, as they would no doubt admit—or even claim. The regional articles fulfil two functions. They are valuable introductions to the study of different regions where the mountaineer of leisure may project campaigns, or at least allow his arm-chair mind to summon imagined pleasures; and they summarize mountaineering experience in those regions for his practical guidance. I am myself of a practical turn of mind, and I shall keep this second part of *Mountain Craft*, so to speak, on the shelf, until I am actually making my plans for the Himalaya, or it may be for Spitzbergen or Popocatepetl (which does not, however, appear in the index, where I hoped to make certain of its orthography). Nevertheless I have derived much enjoyment, and I hope some profit, from reading these chapters. It is a limited view of mountain craft that would look no farther than the British Isles and the Alps; the mountaineer who believes in his art will, presumably, pursue it for its own sake to these distant heights, even though he should prefer the word ‘craft’.

I am not, as may be seen, attempting to review this work. Reviews are no less useful in the world of mountaineering than other worlds, as affording opportunities for the younger and humbler generation to make retort, with the customary jargon of Olympus, in qualified praise for advice received. It would be impossible, however, in this case to have the reviewer’s satisfaction; for the weight of advice offered in these pages could be compensated by no amount of praise and qualification. And there is a further difficulty: I believe as little in impartial friendship as in partial criticism. I refuse to look down from Mount Olympus on Mr Young, because I have had the privilege of climbing mountains with him; and I should inevitably be condemned in the ascent by that standard of mountaineering to which he lays down in this book.

I prefer to assume that the summit in question is occupied by him. He occupies it, I need hardly say, in the most graceful imaginable manner. It is not apparently a summit where he would wish to stand, and he seems unconscious of any such throne. The reader, however, can hardly forget the circumstance. Evidence is constantly accumulating before his eyes of remarkable qualities in Mr Young’s ascent thither. The book is an ordered survey of mountaineering practice and principle; but it is no less a record of the author’s experience, which lies behind all his theories and judgements, and



supremely interesting for that reason. To those who accept as a matter of course the brilliant record of an individual mountaineer and explain it to themselves by some simple formula—saying perhaps that it proceeds from a happy combination of gifts, an unrivalled enthusiasm, a splendid physique and a daring imagination—to casual critics, it may be surprising to learn by what detailed and patient art the results were achieved. The table of contents is itself a revelation. Eighty pages, we find, are devoted to ‘Management and Leadership’; nearly fifty to ‘Climbing in Combination’; more than twenty to ‘Corrective Method’, an analysis of the attitude and extraordinary precautions which prevent accidents; ‘Reconnoitring’ takes some thirty pages; and beyond all this the technique of snow and ice-craft, of rock climbing and the use of guides, are subjects treated at length in separate chapters. All the method is nowhere diffuse; it is a concentrated, well-winnowed style packed with observation and illuminating analysis; a fullness based not only upon opportunities of experience, but upon experience itself that comes of mental alertness on every occasion and with regard to every detail of mountaineering practice; and upon reflection after the event stimulated by a conscious and insistent desire to discover principles where principles are discoverable, to master every aspect of this complicated art—one might almost say to create it.

In one direction, especially, Mr Young has indisputably created an art—in his psychological attitude towards mountaineering. He cares supremely for personal relations in a party of climbers. No previous writer has so emphasised their importance. Here chiefly, he persuades us, lies the secret of success, and he examines them courageously in detail, in the details even of what we call manners. The standard laid down is one with which we are familiar, that of civilised men not competing, but co-operating. It might seem at first sight hardly necessary to tell us, for instance, of the etiquette which should be observed as we walk a shepherd-track on a hill-side. But this point is fully dealt with. It is possible in some small ways to irritate a companion or on the other hand to promote comradeship. We must obviate the least occasion for friction and do everything for harmony. Smoking is enjoined for its social utility, so that a man may sustain his part in the ‘effortless silence’ which is a condition of comradeship, and chattering forbidden (how grateful I am for that!) whenever the leader is in stress or difficulties. Open rather than expressed criticism is advocated, and a law of reciprocity in abuse hinted at, though scarcely formulated.

It is evident that the writer’s emphasis on the minutiae of personal relations proceeds from the premise that the effort and concentration required by mountaineering inevitably string up nerves to a state of high tension. Everything must be done to guard against the dangers from mental stress. The first chapter on ‘Leadership and Management’ analyses the conditions under which these dangers may arise, the effects of boredom and ill-temper, the situations created by over-excitement and the causes of friction in a party, most dangerous when suppressed. It is possible by taking thought to avoid or at least to minimise the attendant evils; a climber by watching his own mental states, and those of his companions, may promote the collective confidence upon which the success and safety of all largely depend. In the leader this duty is supremely important. And it should be his care, too, so to order the details of organisation as to rule out, so far as possible, the occasions of friction and worry.

Perhaps no prospect can be so appalling to the mountaineer as the volume and complexity of the matter about which he is required to think, especially if he be—neither manager nor leader quite high on the mark; I will say therefore—‘boss’ of a party. To read these pages at home in hours of well-merited repose after the strenuous and perhaps not simple mutations of an Alpine season, can lead to but one conclusion in any man who has taken a share, however humble, in controlling the climbing destiny of himself and his companions. His insufficiency is too manifest, it is probably notorious. He must abjure that leading role, absolutely and for ever. Or he must pocket his pride and leave his hopes in the

hotel, all the highest, all but the meanest. The ambition of great enterprises must be banished even from his dreams. For him there can remain, if he is to have any responsibility, only the association with stoical comrades who have determined by the same stern law with himself to travel where indeed of quality is demanded, the quality of patience, but none besides. Or, at best, he may be the humble member of some sober party whose range of aspiration is one degree more adventurous. The rest is for men of leisure, or men of genius, or preferably for men of both, who have eleven months in the year for recreation after a month's ambitious and exhausting mountaineering, and an infinite capacity for becoming exhausted.

The inevitable pursuit of these gloomy reflections must lead at last to a ray of hope. The psychological art created by Mr Young (from the voice of an inward groan I seem to hear the suggestion), is it in reality created for us all or only perchance for Mr Young himself? Is it not possible that other men may achieve the same result by other methods—may learn by some broad gesture to sweep away complexity, to achieve a well-balanced and calm simplicity; and yet be competent, with the multifarious omniscience required of a modern leader bearing, in every and even the most trying situation, his companions' ill-temper and even his own? For my part I entertain no such illusion. I am convinced beyond argument by the writer's reasoning. For me the broad gesture could only mean the unshouldering of responsibilities in a golden dream. It may, and indeed it must be, a personal question as to how exactly the approach shall be made, that delicate approach to comrades' spirits when they are excited in the heat of action, or cold from inactivity, or irritable from misadventure, or jaded from disappointment, or merely weary because the way is long and stony and tiresome or snow is deep. It is in the creed of every mountaineer that he should steel himself against the power of circumstances. But, as Mr Young tells us, he has a further duty: he must learn no less to steel others. There is no simple way of avoiding this care; it cannot be left to chance. Some climbers may be so fortunately compounded of sympathy, indifference, and invincible breeziness that their task will be comparatively light. But no one is so splendid on every occasion that he can afford to neglect the chance and the dangers of 'preventable humours'; and no simplification can secure for him without effort his own maximum coefficient of harmonious behaviour.

But if this thesis be not chimerical, and I think it is not, a small hope of escape may yet be found. Mr Young, though he advises fencing for the body as a 'training in rapid adjustments and lightning reactions', says nothing of any such training by fencing or otherwise for the mind. It is the only criticism of his book that I have to offer, and I offer it not in humility, but in pride. In the course of reading these chapters by the editor I found myself on more than one occasion discovering, as I thought, an omission, some further consideration that might have been added here or there; but invariably as I read on I found my own thought expressed elsewhere, given its proper dignity under a different heading, or introduced as a more apt illustration of a different point. It was an irritating experience seeing that I was projecting an article. But at last I have found an omission—the only one it surely must be; and since Mr Young has omitted to make any recommendation for the training of our minds I shall take upon myself the privilege of offering an unaided suggestion.

Alpine seasons are all too precarious and life too short for us to develop in the scenes where it is most required a sufficient measure of psychological adaptability. But something, I believe, might be done in England. A party, let us suppose, of four men might arrange to use the weekend opportunities for expeditions to be carried out under particular rules which would demand the exercise of the qualities to be induced. Imagine them on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, on one of those days not infrequently provided by our temperate climate, with the temperature not so very low, but the air moist and raw; imagine them setting forth from the charming ease of a bright Surrey residence for the

sufficiently distant ascent of Hindhead, and envisaging at the end the cosy reward of comfortable afternoon tea. Two of them will be clothed as it were for midsummer, in the gauziest garments shorn of indecency, and two as it were for the Arctic, muffled in furs; two will be equipped as to the feet with sand shoes, and two with Carter's Dreadnoughts; one of each pair will carry a portentous rucksack; and the leader will have been chosen by mutual consent as being the man who is freest from prejudice about the route, and by the same token knows least about it. All are pledged to abide by these conditions, and it has been further arranged that they shall be overtaken on the way by a succession of sumptuous motor-cars, whose great-hearted occupants will offer them the bounty of a lift. The climax arrives when they find these motorists, whose offers they necessarily disdain according to their own hard rules, in occupation of every haven convenient for their repose. I suggest that these not impossible conditions, with their by no means improbable end, and not least the imaginable situations *en route*, would afford opportunities for preliminary training in reciprocal mentalicity. Mountaineers, I trust, not less earnest, and more ingenious than myself, will contrive a system by some such devices—a system whose aim is no more than a habit, but a habit whose service is the higher harmony.

Mr Young will forgive me, I hope, if I labour this theme too much. It has coloured his writing so distinctly—I don't say so highly—it is so arresting, so important, and has consequences so far-reaching in our whole attitude towards mountaineering, that one neither treats it lightly nor lightly abandons it. Nowhere perhaps is it so important as in all he tells us about guides in the Alps, their training, their mental attitude, and their worth; and in no part of this book is he more profoundly wise and more convincing than where he speaks from experience and study uniquely interesting of the relations that may and should and do exist between guides and amateurs. He neither condemns nor recommends guideless climbing. All depends on the party and the expedition in view. His interest is to determine with regard to these conditions, firstly, under what circumstances a guide should be taken, and, secondly, in what way responsibility should be divided between professional leader and amateur director. No such detailed discussion, so far as I know, of the guide and his uses has been published before, and no man who takes mountaineering seriously can afford to neglect it. The study of this book may lead him to alter his practice in more respects than one, and not least in this matter of guides.

On more purely technical questions Mr Young is more authoritative, and yet hardly less personable. The experience of climbers in the pure craft of climbing has been crystallised to a point where authority is undisputed about many matters of importance. The accomplished mountaineer, while he is grateful for the clear statement of much that has never before been stated, will find himself agreeing very largely with the author. But he will scarcely be less interested for that reason; and he may usefully ask himself such a question as—How many climbers of my acquaintance still sit, whenever they can find a seat, to bring up the man below, or how many are really competent to make proper use in the manner so carefully explained, of unsound holds? The chapter on 'Ice Craft' especially will meet with general agreement; as to the use of crampons, the manner of walking in steps, the correct way of cutting them, besides much else. But beyond an almost undebatable ground, individual judgment has a large part to play. Opinions differ, for instance, as to the correct use of the rope on ice. Mr Young lays it down quite definitely as a general rule that the pick should not be used as a belay on hard ice, and maintains that the rope should be held in the hand; he rejects the theory that a slip cannot be checked on ice except by using the axe, and contemplates the possibility, or perhaps even the probability, that it may be checked by a climber who remains firmly balanced in his step and can easily check the jerk with his arm. As experience on this head is not generally sought, it would be interesting to know what have been Mr Young's experiences, and those of any climber who has succeeded in

checking a slip on ice. It is only by detailed consideration of such points that we can arrive at a method in climbing.

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The most audacious section of this chapter deals with glacier work. It corresponds, no doubt, to audacity in practice. If the reader has felt elsewhere perhaps a trifle chilled by the restraints imposed upon him, he is warmed by encouragement when he will be most in need of it. With favourable circumstances he is urged forward into the intricacies of a broken glacier, among 'the wettest, bluest and nastiest-looking *séracs*.... With a good axe, good claws, and a good friend, to set one's foot on the crisp spring of moving ice and feel battle joined with the white, blue, and silver giants of a glacier face. I know no excitement so sanely joyous; and no sound so thrilling as the clean, hollow smack of an axe and the bell-like rustle of the falling ice-chips returning from the deep crevasse; and yet again, no exultation more healthy than to look back through the glittering labyrinth of turquoise and green precipice, of sapphire chasm, fretted spire, and lucent arch, flake and buttress, and see the little serpent of our blurred blue steps edged with the tiny winking prisms of sunlit ice-dust, soaring, dipping, circling, hazarding on its absurd adventure; surely a connected thread of very happy human purpose, asserting its gay consequence triumphantly through the heart of the wildest and most beautiful of the conflicts between nature's silent armies.' The happy human purpose, of course, might have an unhappy end. But why should it? We can see and appreciate the dangers; there are none uncountable here; we can avoid the malice of those we know.

The essence of Mr Young's teaching about safety lies here. We must distinguish between the knowable and the unknowable dangers; these knowable ones we must probe and calculate to the farthest point, we must become fully conscious of them all, and take our precautions accordingly. For the unknown and unknowable we must have, as we say, our margin. Nothing is more difficult to contrive in practice on big mountains. But there is a way even to this; it is the way of speed. A section of this book is devoted to 'Pace', and it is perhaps the most valuable of all; the power and practice of pace by sustained rhythm (and not by a headlong rush) is the biggest factor of efficiency in a party, and there can have been no greater service to mountaineering than Mr Young's advocacy of this thesis. Probably many of us at different times have felt vague doubts about it. If we develop speed shall we not sacrifice safety—some factor of restraint which is in itself a precaution? And shall we not lower the whole value of our pursuit by sacrificing enjoyment itself—some quality of contemplation which is so much the essence of enjoyment that the mere suggestion of hurting it alarms us, and we hold up our hands with horror at the picture presenting itself in antithesis, the American tourist in his automobile. But Mr Young answers these questions with complete success. By pace he means a synthetic movement actuated by a finer concentration and advancing rhythmically, with a rhythm more definitely imposed and more compelling, so that we attain in our progress a more perfect touch, a more absorbing harmony with all that is about us; as our contacts are made more swiftly, perception too is quickened, and the contacts themselves are more accurate; they are more accurate so long as we retain rhythm, for rhythm is the necessary control and fixes the limit of acceleration for the individual climber. Thus we may proceed not with more danger, but with less, not with less enjoyment, but with more, so far as climbing is concerned, while we save time for what is enjoyed incidentally, for the unhurried halt in the later stages, the pipe of unshadowed peace when the end is assured; and we secure our safety; we can spend our saved time on the great difficulties, or we have it to spend for the unforeseen.

I cannot turn from this chapter without one regret. I could wish the author had allowed himself to express—though it was beside his technical point—something of his personal response, to twinkle with his gay crystal phrases, ring the silver bells for us, and make us leap a little in the delight of me

motion with his poetry of speed—the swiftness which is indeed untamed when we march with the wind, but not uncontrollable, and prouder on a mountain side, a ‘skiey speed’, but not insensible. He has, alas(!) inhibited what must have been his impulse.

But he has not spared his hand when he comes to ‘Reconnaissance’, and I find no part of his book more agreeable. I have always said to myself that I have a good eye for a mountain, and explained the matter quite simply. I look at mountains geometrically. It sounds a lamentably unpoetical statement, and has required some courage: but one sometimes discovers agreement in unexpected quarters. Mr Young has revealed himself also as a geometrician, or perhaps I should rather say ‘cubist’, with regard to mountains. He sees them as a complicated problem in lines and angles, a sort of stupendous ‘rider’. It is true that I find here little enough support for my premise. My eye perhaps is less good than I thought it. I am for the most part satisfied to observe intuitively. But Mr Young is conscious of his interferences; he classifies them and tells us how they are made. He tells me how many of mine own are made, and not only delights me by the process, but encourages me to think I may observe more in the future. His own observations at all events are no less numerous than interesting, and the reason that he is so keenly conscious of the process—and also of course that he sees the mountain as a ‘rider’. Would that I could expound this art of his at greater length—but that must be left for a future article entitled, ‘The Cubist Movement in Orosophy Unmasked’.

Of the other articles, that by Mr Spencer on photography is probably in its sphere no less authoritative. Of that I am quite unable to judge, though I believe I can appreciate to the full his glorious frontispiece. It may be said, however, that the least expert of amateur photographers may learn a great deal from Mr Spencer, and the experienced photographer will find much to interest him.

Captain Farrar on equipment is another authority not to be questioned where mountaineering practice has established anything; and his article is full of useful information as to what is the best of its kind and how to obtain it. On the delicate question of boots’ comfort, however, there are limitations within which it is impossible to lay down indisputable laws. We may all agree that they should fit round the instep, be roomy in the toes, and have narrow welts; but feet are individual, and when it comes to a test for the toes that they should have room to ‘crumple up inside the boot’ one suspects that opinions may differ. For my part I can’t say offhand whether or no my toes would crumple up; but I suspect they wouldn’t, and that I should be sorry if they could. And I can say that I have tried socks of cork, of leather, and of fibre, on a number of occasions; but far from endorsing the practice Captain Farrar recommends, I have come to a determination to eschew them utterly. As to nails, no two climbers may be expected to agree, and I am certain no one will agree with me. Tricounis, for all that may be said in their favour, do wear down—to an abominable smooth hard surface, which may indeed give the best grip on pudding, but not on anything worthy to be called rock. And yet they have quite special advantages. Accordingly I prefer a hotchpotch—a selection of the most beautiful nails artistically arranged to meet all sorts of contingencies. And raiment, lastly, how impossible to standardise! For raiment again is individual, as Mr Young is the first to admit, for he inserts by Captain Farrar’s permission certain ‘alternative suggestions’ which are an invaluable record of his personal habits. I confess I agree with both and yet with neither of these experienced mountaineers, and I hope the time may never come when I must entirely agree with either. For then I should be compelled on the one hand to wear a waistcoat, a garment I could only bring myself to wear when ‘frozen frore’ in hell-fire’s icy alternative, or, on the other hand, discard my warmest friend, the blessed shirt and in either case I should have to abandon my plus fours, the latest incontrovertible delight, and abandon too, I fear, as the final reserve in my rucksack, a shirt of fine-spun silk.

One more chapter remains to be mentioned, Mr Lunn’s about mountaineering on ski. It is admirable

for compressing a large matter into a small space and an illuminating introduction to a most interesting subject. As I have never visited the Alps in winter and don't propose to ski there in summer, I will say no more. The regional articles, it is to be hoped, will find their measure of appreciation and criticism in a future number of this journal, or in that larger and more splendid organ to be created by the united will of mountaineering clubs.

Meanwhile Mr Young still sits on Mount Olympus and is equally tired of sitting and of the view. He will descend of course by the method he describes, and his readers too, who have followed him to these high places, will climb down regretfully, but still delighted, through the pages of his collaborators by the 'pleasure of quick light contacts', among mountains from Spitzbergen to New Zealand, down 'like the spokes of a revolving rimless wheel', gaily and happily, wiser but not too wise, nor in any sense fatigued, ready when they meet his smile on the plains again to be kindled once more to a fresh desire for mountains, sane mountains, sane enterprise, and sane companions.

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Review of Geoffrey Winthrop Young's *Mountain Craft*  
*Climber's Club Journal*, December 1920.

# NONE BUT OURSELVES

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## *Mont Maudit, 1916*

The expedition recorded in the following pages came as the culminating event for three fit men in the splendid August of 1911. The party were R.L.G. Irving, H.B.G. Tyndale, and G. Mallory, the present writer. They believed themselves to be making the second ascent of Mont Blanc from the Col de la Tour Ronde over Mont Maudit. In point of fact it was probably the third.

We knew only of Burgener's party of 1887. They—Herr v. Kuffner, Alexander Burgener, and two other men—had started from a bivouac on the Mont de la Brenva and followed the narrow arête crossed by the Col de la Tour Ronde, near which they bivouacked a second night.<sup>2</sup> Their account was very present in our minds both in planning the expedition and in achieving the ascent.

The second ascent,<sup>3</sup> we subsequently learned, was made by SS. Canzio and Nondini with Herr Brocherel in August 1901.

It is not often, I suppose, that a member of the Alpine Club finds himself, several years after the event, writing the account of an expedition in the Alps from an unaided memory. Perhaps it is overbold to attempt such a thing. But, since I am determined to attempt it, I have ventured to adopt for literary aid an unusual form—one that differs from the straightforward narrative commonly used in this Journal to express the facts of adventure; a form better fitted as I think to express rather distant memories among which few details survive and are clearly seen; happily a few such do still exist—but many thoughts and feelings. I have chosen it for another reason too. In the May number of this year (1917) *Alpine Journal* I read an article by my friend R.L.G. Irving, in which he told us about the first battle in the Alps of two young men, since killed at the front. And, 'Happy men,' I thought, 'that they met the Alps first.' Perhaps I was not alone in making that mental exclamation. At least I cannot doubt that many would approve the thought—many of the younger members who have shared the common lot of young men at present, who have lived in grim and desolate scenes and been comforted by the mountains. For it may happen that mountains too distant to be seen present themselves beautifully to the imagination for wholesome cheer; and it has seemed to me that an expedition, the memory of which has been a friendly companion, ought properly to be connected with those unbeautiful places where I have best remembered it.

*Pages from a Journal*

France, Autumn 1916

Dreariness, Monotony, Sloth! These I suppose should be the headings of the new chapter. Truly the rains have come and the season of opaque mists; the spells of long, damp waiting and cold inaction. An adjustment is necessary. Perhaps G.H.Q. will oblige with a pamphlet, 'Rules for the sober fortitude of those who prefer excitement'. How do men exist, I wonder, the zest of action almost extinguished by 'Boredom', that odious and too common word! Do they go back simply to that? Thank God, I'm not bored. Perhaps men only pretend to be bored because they think it unmanly to be childishly amused. Secretly perhaps they indulge visions of delight. In any case I'll be nothing but grateful for my vision of the supreme good fortune of Alpine memories. I can look long at my mountains without being bored. And yet it is not wholly satisfying merely to look at them. However sharply I distinguish those mountain-scenes a certain vagueness remains to be dispersed. And why not clear it up—see on

vision clearly in its true perspective of deeper suggestion? I will record for my own intenser light, on a splendid day, all the facts and thoughts, as I remember them now, completely and exactly. Facts and thoughts! A mere jumble at first sight as I look back. Do the facts exist for me independently? If I view them detachedly, as historically happening to historical people, the Graham, the Harry and the me of five years ago, they seem to lose their significance, to have no interest for me, no meaning. I can bring myself with an effort to think about them like that, but it is not so that I remember them. They passed into my mind, not as things that I witnessed, but as thoughts that came to me. What moments after all are the events of life than moments in the stream of thought, which is experience? It is this experience, in this sense, of an Alpine expedition that I want to recall. But can I recall it? As the day even now begins to take more definite shape before me, I find not only reasoned thoughts such as may easily be expressed in words, but thought less tangible, less precise, thought that would rather be called feeling. A stream of feeling I seem to recall. But am I feeling now what I felt then? I can't be sure of that. Perhaps, through the strange contrast between those scenes and this world about me, my present emotion is further from the cold light of reason; I am troubled by the marvellous reappearance of so much lost beauty, so many loved shapes. And then, being human, I am subject to change; each day the sum of experience adds up to a different total. Decidedly the total of today is not that of five years ago; probably an emotion can never be exactly repeated or reproduced; the same chords may be struck, the music has altered tones. And yet there is ultimate truth in experience recalled—if not quite recaptured. It is only from what was originally thought and felt that any present emotion exists. The past may live again—with a difference; and what lives is true. And if I am condemned, in spite of my remembrance, to see that day through the more travelled eyes of now, it can only live for me again through those other eyes—the eyes of one who stood in the sun and looked upwards with fear and hope, and who sat in the shade of rocks with half a world beneath his feet; I must stand where *he* stood in the sun, sit where *he* sat in the shade; inhabit the places where he most intently thought and felt and there look through his eyes.

Up and beyond a great tower of rock, not long after midday, he surveyed the first stage of the expedition duly accomplished. The efforts of climbing had been exhausting; now his limbs were folded restfully against the rocks where he lay niched beneath a granite wall; their dragging weight no longer counted. An unconsciousness almost of sleep had all his tired body and his spirit had the freedom of dreams.

The hewn forms on every side defined themselves insistently; there was pain in seeing them so acutely, like seeing suddenly into a man's soul, full of strange beauty and sorrow. The walls of a vast couloir guarding this side of the Brenva; the Brenva glacier itself, and beyond; the Péteret—all the world of white and black and blue loomed more and more fantastic. He seemed to hear the hiss of a monster steam-saw cutting the titanic members for a world of ice and rocks. Then came utter riot and chaos. He opened his eyes again and saw things normally. A spirit of insolence took him. Those straight-cut rocks beyond the basin of snow, how smooth and steep! Probably vertical! They meant to be terrible. Yet men existed, he would wager, able to conquer them, who would, perhaps, scale them.... And the Brenva (he noted the exact curve with which the ice arête bit the slope).... What was it? A staircase for men to walk up and down. Lies, all lies! To think at all of mountains in such terms was a lie. The whole mood was a lie, mean, vaunting, blasphemous.... The dignity and peace of the mountains from height to depth, from sunlight to shadow! The still glory of such a host, unmasked and beautiful? All the patience and wisdom of the ages seemed to be graven here, all the courage and endurance and all the travail. These forms had listened to the jar of terrible discords and the music of gentle voices, had seen the hard strokes of cruelty and the forgiving gesture of pity. They could be



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