

**OXFORD
MOUNTAINEERING
ESSAYS**

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Oxford mountaineering essays by Arnold H. M. Lunn

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P R E F A C E

OXFORD, they tell us, is the home of movements; Cambridge the home of men. Certainly the miniature movement that took shape in this little book was inspired by a Cambridge man. It was at an Oxford tea-party, where the talk had been unashamedly of mountains and their metaphysic, that Mr. G. Winthrop Young gave the first impulse to the scheme that ultimately produced this collection of essays. To Mr. Young the editor and contributors have been indebted for constant help and advice. He has heartened the despondent, and has inked cold daylight into more than one 'sunset' passage.

At Oxford there are a number of Alpine clubs. The oldest and most sedate meets once a year in New College Hall. A less dignified association meets at irregular

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intervals *on* New College Hall and other hospitable roofs. Lastly, there is a genial little society which owed its beginnings to some twenty undergraduates who agreed they could spare an occasional arduous evening to the revival of their Alpine memories. One confiding member bought a lantern, and has since endeavoured—with indifferent success—to recoup himself out of spasmodic subscriptions. We shall none of us forget the first meeting. In our innocence we had hoped that a scientist might know something of electricity, and Mr. Bourdillon was in consequence entrusted with the lantern. After much hissing on the part of the machine, and of the audience, a faint glow appeared on the sheet, and enveloped in a halo of restless hues we dimly discerned the dome of Mont Blanc. A pathetic voice from behind the lantern sadly inquired whether we would ‘prefer Mont Blanc green and spluttering or yellow and steady.’ The chairman then proceeded to read a paper illustrated or rather misrepresented by lantern slides,

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and at the conclusion proposed a very hearty vote of thanks to himself for his interesting and entertaining lecture. The House then divided, and the motion was lost by an overwhelming majority. The minutes also record that a member moved to inhibit the secretary of the Church Union from issuing a printed prayer for 'faith to remove mountains.' This motion was lost, as Mr. Tyndale ably pointed out the value of a publication that might facilitate the transfer of some superfluous mountains from the Alps to the monotonous surroundings of Oxford.

The members of this learned society furnished the majority of our contributors. 'Conscious as we are of one another's deficiencies,' we view with misgiving the publication of these essays. We have no virgin ascents, no climbs of desperate difficulty, to record. Our justification must rest on other grounds.

In a paper memorable for the circumstances of its delivery, and the dramatic irony of its concluding words, Donald

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Robertson pleaded for a simpler treatment of our mountain worship, and claimed that there was 'still room for a man to tell freely and without false shame the simple story of a day among the mountains.' And this is what some of us have attempted.

And further, although there scarce remains a great Alpine ridge untrodden by man, though the magic words—'No information'—are rapidly vanishing from the pages of the *Climber's Guides*, yet as subjects for literary, artistic, and philosophic inquiry, the mountains are far from exhausted. The basic emotions of the hills, at once bold and subtle, remain an almost untouched field, and many a curious by-path in the psychology of mountaineering has yet to be explored.

Those of us who have ventured to approach our theme in such subjective fashion, who have tried to give something more than a plain record of a climb, who may even have attempted to interpret the secrets of the hills, have probably only courted failure and earned

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ridicule. But at least we have started on a stirring venture, and we shall consider it successful if only a word here or there serves to recall some forgotten picture, some early romantic impression, to any reader for whom mountains, nature, or wandering have perhaps lost their first halo of romance.

It may be said that greater and more modest mountaineers have waited the experience of years before embodying their reflections in the written word. This reproof leaves us unmoved, for we are only concerned with the message the hills hold for Youth, a message which Youth therefore may be pardoned for attempting to explain. Each age hears different accents in the mountain voices. To the old mountaineer the riven lines of cliff may speak of failing strength or inevitable decay. For the child the white far gates may hide an unknown kingdom of magic. But active Youth need fear no comparison of strength, need draw no moral from decay. For him the gates that childhood could not pass have opened, and

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disclosed a wonderland 'more real than childhood's fairy trove,' a country of difficult romance, and of perpetual challenge to the undying instincts of knight errantry and young adventure.

A. H. M. L.

February 1912.