

EDWARD WHYMPER : AN INTERESTING SIDELIGHT.¹

[JAMES ROBERT COOPER, Edith's father, was staying at Zermatt with his younger daughter Amy when, on June 24, 1897, he went out from the hotel and never returned.² . . . Edward Whymper . . . had interested himself in the disappearance of Mr. Cooper and had carried out inquiries in the face of local indifference, writing to *The Times* and insisting that the mystery should be cleared up. . . . Though the actual discovery of the body was accidental,³ the Michael Fields felt deeply grateful to him and in December wrote :]

DEAR MR. WHYMPER,—We are all delighted to welcome you on Monday. . . . I am not surprised though deeply moved at what you say about repayment [they had offered to reimburse his expenses and he had refused]. A friend of mine who has encountered sore trials abroad said to me a few weeks ago, that relatives had ever failed her, and the people of the country had failed her, but always some one person had come forward—'a divine stranger.' These were her words, and I thought while she said them that we too had met our divine stranger—happily one no more. You have wiped away from my mind a very black page against humanity, by your action and the great spirit of your action.

Always in gratitude beyond any return,

Yours sincerely,

E. E. COOPER.

He (Whymper) comes fresh and gaping from half a day's Turkish bathing. He fights a tendency to stoutness with the patient force that got him to the top of the Matterhorn. He is a curious triune being—one-third hero, one-third old bachelor, one-third mysterious man of business and lecturer.

¹ From *Works and Days* : from the Journal of Michael Field. Edited by T. and D. C. Sturge Moore. Pp. xxii + 338, with two portraits. London : John Murray, 1933. Reprinted in *A.J.* by courtesy of Mr. Sturge Moore and Sir John Murray.

[Miss Edith Cooper and her aunt, Miss Katherine Bradley, wrote jointly under the name of 'Michael Field.'—*Editor, A.J.*]

² *Op. cit.* p. 223. *A.J.* 18, 479.

³ The body of Mr. Cooper was found in a lonely wood between Zermatt and Taesch, in the forest of the Tufteren Alp. He had, to judge by appearances, fallen from a rock above—a distance of 15 metres. His money and articles of value were found on the body. [This was on October 25, 1897.] *A.J.* 18, 567–8.—*Editor, A.J.*]

His head is combative—some of the rock of Bradlaugh's head about it, but with refinement softening the fierceness. A great scar on the right temple marks him as a soldier of the Alps; the hair is a well-bathed silvery silk on the skull, the eyes are blue, reticent of glances, but each glance is frank and has the modesty of genuine manliness, though there is a whimsical care for recognition, as an homage to personal force, in his nature. The nostrils are loops, the mouth a thin rock fissure—thin with volition not meanness. The features will not stamp memory—each time they are seen they are a surprise. They give the sort of vague impression one would have if a giant were smothered in rose leaves. The smile comes rarely but it is royal, the gift of a king when it is bestowed. Like all people of fine strain who live much by themselves his talk is often on the things he likes to eat and drink and he has many fads. His sugar must be sifted that he may have only a suspicion of the fattening sweet in his tea.

He rolls on the couch, bows over Musico and kisses my little hound.⁴ When the hour comes for dressing he asks whether we have a strong desire to see a black coat—'I don't think it a pretty thing to see, but if you wish it shall be put on.' We pray him to do as he likes, and he wears a grey suit for dinner.

He likes his dinner. I have paid 8s. for his golden grapes—the only other fruit, tangerine oranges! In the midst of dining he breaks out, 'Now don't give me tea to-morrow morning.' We are instructed in the kind of toast to offer, 'And an egg?' Michael suggests 'Two eggs.' Michael and he have their weed together and a suggestion is made that he should get us, the infirm, to the top of Mont Blanc for a contract—dead or living. 'And the dogs?' 'That, Madam, would add considerably to the contract.' When Michael leaves the room Whym. asks if she has been married. At the negative answer he appears astonished and remarks, 'I don't know why I should think so, but she has the appearance of a married lady.' . . . The hero of the Matterhorn is not punctual at breakfast—the coffee grows cold and the eggs grow cold!

All the morning he is studying our Swiss bills, disentangling them as if they had been sent to him. We take him up Reigate Hill; our discourse is simple and most friendly. When he goes after lunch, we miss the only guest who has given us the feeling of whole-hearted sunshine.⁵

⁴ A chow and a Basset hound; the death of the former was commemorated in a volume of sonnets entitled *Whym Chow* (1914).—*Editor, A.J.*

⁵ *Works and Days*, pp. 228–30.