# SHOULD THE MOUNTAIN BE BROUGHT TO MAHOMET ?

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THERE have been many changes, even in mountaineering, since I was last invited to make remarks to the Club some thirty years ago. In selecting one of these that might be worth notice I have been helped by Charles Meade's excellent book *Approach to the Hills.* His vivid retelling of a number of recent climbing performances suggests that some change in modern mountaineering values may in fact have taken place, and if so, it is one upon which we are bound to form a judgment.

In a sense the approach cannot be called modern. There has always been in climbing an element of competition, an element of the assertion of individual prowess, an element of 'stunting,' and of aiming at success in an ascent for its own sake. Few of us can have mountaineered long and hard without recalling instances in our own islands, and often in our own cases, when we have deliberately 'shot the moon' in a climbing sense. Sensational climbing, even if then unassisted by the mechanisms now used, was enshrined for us in that strange volume *Empor*. It was a memorial to the lonely prodigy, Georg Winkler, and was significant of continental rock climbing in a phase still foreign to our own. The eccentric stunters or 'lone horses' upon rock have been always with us. I can remember well back in the 'nineties we already had a name in Wales and the Lakes for these self-sufficing meteors, we called them the 'two year men.' In a period when we knew, or knew of, every other climber in the islands, they would dawn loftily on our sky, illuminate an outstanding problem or two, and again vanish, satisfied that climbing held no more than that for them or anybody else.

A change has come nevertheless. It is that this class of performance, reinforced by auxiliary mechanisms, has now been thrust upon the greater Alps in a collective or group form, and that we are almost at the point of being asked to look upon it as a new development in greater mountaineering, deserving of respect as in a progressive tradition, and as possibly holding something 'from which we may all learn.'

I propose to examine its claim only as it is presented to us as a *movement*. For the reason that I know from many talks that we may no longer treat the fashion as only an exoteric continental variation. There are those among our younger climbers who are half seriously disposed to concede the claim that this is *the* new phase in mountaineering, to which all may in time have to conform. And I remember that one of the best of our younger climbers, one of the finest personalities I have met since the last war, was killed on the south face of Mt. Blanc, through stumbling in his first Alpine season upon a false and suggested line of mountaineering ambition entirely foreign to his high-minded and modest character. I believe we can show that it is a false line, in a mountaineering sense. And if we can do so, I believe also that we should say so, and prevent so far as we may such misleading. At present we are too ready to be over-broadminded about what we know to be only a narrow path of mountain safety. We are also too ready to agree at all seasons that any change favoured by a proportion of the youthful mind must be more right than our own tradition. And the result, even internationally realised, is not always happy.

Mountaineering was handed on to us by the last generation as a *sport*, ' as strictly a sport as cricket, or rowing, or knurr and spell.' So it is as a game that we may first examine its characteristic, and then adjudicate upon how far the new development really belongs to it or improves upon it ' as a game.' And first, what *is* a game ? Madariaga, in a brilliant and short book, *The Englishman, the Frenchman and the Spaniard*, discovered to me for the first time what an immensely complicated civilising process an English child has to master in the course of learning to play any team game. We learn so much by group tradition, by what is ' done ' or ' not done,' in England, that it was not until I had read his account and watched the difficult process in many children, that I understood its intricacy and the close relation it bears to our whole social and political system, and our method of collective living. There is first, of course, the learning of the rules and the technical tricks, for the skill of the individual. Then, more difficult, the learning to subordinate one's play to that of the team. Thirdly, the learning to pay respect to opponents, however hated, and to concede their equal claim to consideration if not to victory. So far was familiar ground. But then Madariaga goes on to show that there is a fourth lesson which we learn, one which dominates all the others, namely the respect for the game *as* a game *in* the playing of it. It is this, he points out, which is the vital matter. From it develops the whole principle of ' playing the game,' the ' spirit of

fair play,' and the like. It is this which insures for us, no matter how we ourselves or our opponents are playing on the day, what we call 'a good game.' A second's thought will show how far this is also the political spirit which has guided us in the development of all our free institutions. It is not, as learned foreigners have maintained in books, that our political institutions have grown out of our games-playing, and that therefore, if they took over our games, they too would learn self-government. The learning of the spirit of playing the game has equally belonged to every branch of our national growth. It is our art of living together, unconsciously learned in all our common activities, and especially in those practised in youth.

Now, how far is this spirit understood or actually developed in countries other than our own ? And, when we come to consider mountaineering, how far does the way of climbing followed by certain continental peoples in the Alps or the Himalaya comply with the conditions of a game as played among us or outlined by Madariaga ?

Games are a very recent development abroad. I can recollect when the first games of football were played in Germany, and I saw many of the first efforts at hockey and lawn tennis in France and Switzerland as well as in Germany. Their merit for the individual physical development was easily understood by reformers concerned to remake their peoples. In like manner the advantage of team play, if success was to reward individual prowess, was quickly appreciated. But the two last principles ? and especially the one of whose existence I myself had to learn from Madariaga, the respect for the game in the playing, the spirit of the game as we say ? Where the playing of games had not grown up as an organic part of the social growth of the people, and the transplanting was little more than a hygienic expedient, this was the tradition least capable of transfer. By taking over the rules of the game *en bloc*, strict justice, indeed, must have seemed to be ensured for both sides. But with the advantage of a game to the individual development, and the better realisation of that advantage in team play with others, as the predominant purpose, it is comprehensible that, to the foreign importer, the justification and meaning of the whole process should seem to lie in the *winning* of the game, since by winning alone could the excellence of the performance be proved. The attitude of mind that attends more to how the game is played than to how it results found no root, and indeed very little understanding, among peoples of a less developed social and political tradition.

Some of the results of this partial exportation of ' sport ' are apparent to us at each Olympic Games or international match, in which emotions are aroused stronger than rules alone can govern. And I have been a witness of all too many competitive games abroad which exemplified the failure of the multiplication of rules to keep a game a ' game ' where the spirit has never germinated.

We have never reaccepted from abroad any game or ' sport ' refashioned by new rules to supply a lost spirit of the game, any more than we have yet acknowledged a fashion of playing any game or sport which pays more attention to the result than to playing in the spirit of the game. Are we, then, to reaccept a mountaineering tradition which, similarly, attaches only importance to the result, to the having-got-up ?

Mountaineering is only a recent exportation, as a difficult pursuit, into other countries than our own. I can recollect when, apart from an individual Parisian, Italian, Swiss, Hollander or South German encountered here or there, the higher climbing or pioneering in the Alps was our British preserve. It was only at the turn of the century, when the period came for a general adoption of our health and games training of youth, that climbing in like manner was enthusiastically introduced as a popular sport into many countries, especially those near the Alps.

It was inevitable that this adoption should follow similar lines to that of games. The getting up the mountain became at once equivalent to the winning of the game. A ' conquest ' alone exhibited and justified the skill and training of the climber. In this also the rules, as they had been worked out by our pioneers, were taken over and at first religiously observed. But that ' spirit of the game ' which had also been developed by our first pioneers, out of the lessons of their own everyday sporting and social ways of living, was naturally far more difficult of export, and slow of introduction, particularly in a single field of activity. The ' sporting ' competition for great peaks, which existed among and is retold in the works of the climbing fathers, not unnaturally confirmed the idea that such rivalry was essential, and perhaps a part of the ' rules.' But the equally characteristic carelessness evident, say, in the narrative of Whymper, or Stephen, or Freshfield, as to whether they reached a summit at all, and whether or not someone else had reached it before, escaped notice or was misunderstood. It seemed perhaps, if noticed at all, to be another instance of the failure of the English to realise fully the ' sporting ' character of one of their own accidental inventions. If Shakespeare has been adopted as a German because Germans

feel they can appreciate him more exactly, mountaineering also might find elsewhere a fuller understanding of its potentialities.

A further distortion in the conception of games playing, and of mountaineering as a game, has been produced by the coming of publicity, and especially of an international-competitive publicity. A local public can learn, and in turn witness, *how* a game is played, as apart from its result. It can become in a sense expert, and can continue to exercise a restraining or educative effect upon the players and upon the fashion of their playing. But publicity, the Press, cannot make its wider public witness the actual play; for it, there can only be the excitement of the result. It therefore has come to attach even in our own country an altogether exaggerated importance to the result, to the winning. In spite of this, in many games, and even in international games, there remains a sufficiency of expert witness of how the game is played, to prevent the disregard of all considerations but that of the result. The opposing sides also exercise some check upon each other as to the 'how.' But in mountaineering there are no spectators, or they are remote and few and unaware of any of the niceties in the climbing. The mountain, also, has no voice in the matter. Once, therefore, there began an interest by the public and by the Press serving the public, we find an exclusive importance beginning to be attached to the result alone, whether that be the conquest of a summit, or a notorious rock feat, or some ending in sensational catastrophe. How should a public be interested in the *manner* in which a party who failed comported themselves? The most it can imagine is how much the adventurers may have suffered, in the course of some long disaster.

But this public interest cannot now be kept from following every feat that can be given sensation or news value. And 'sport' has been translated to the continent simultaneously with this publicity atmosphere. The result has been the further stressing of the winning, of the result, to the sacrifice of every other value, in the development of continental games and mountain climbing.

The young continental climber has been exposed to another and subtle misleading. I am thinking of those who have had no choice, of late years, but to view all activities with what we call the Communist, the Nazi, or the Fascist mind; for all alike accept a State super-personality, of which they form part, to which all their own individual activities are subservient. This mind, or its partial infection, is commoner in our own country, also, than we recognise. A modest man or boy might well hesitate to throw away life for a momentary and useless 'success,' such as getting up a mountain, merely as an assertion of his own victorious-

ness. He would have a better sense of his own value as a living worker, and of his unimportance as a glorious symbol, than to hazard his life and those of good comrades for the vanity of public acclaim upon having got up a wall. But—and herein lies the subtle trap—when he has learned that all he does is done solely in honour of his State, that it constitutes an aggrandisement of a National Principle or Honour, his own vanity in the conquest becomes sublimated in stupendous fashion. He need no longer confess to himself any vanity in feeling pleased with himself, since all that he feels is so much more contributed to the honour of his State and countrymen. So he can proceed to the sacrifice of his own life and many others, in a vain or insignificant or even cruel enterprise, in the supreme confidence that it is all a noble gift on his part to heroism and history. If he can but reach a summit, and stick a national flag on it, he may shout himself hoarse over his own vainglory, and be persuaded that it is noble patriotism.

These limitations, these sublimations, are all present, I think, in these stories of modernist climbing. We must, then, before we can appraise their value as a development in mountaineering, clear them of many corrupting elements and false motives, and then see if anything remains of novel inspiration or of imitable performance.

I have spoken with a few of those whose names have become known in these contexts. Others have written or issued their own tales for our reading. Upon these records, I feel we must refuse to recognise as mountaineers at all a considerable number who have, by their own accounts, climbed on a public demand or for the rewards of notoriety in employments or money or medals. Profitable nationalism is no qualification for mountaineering credit. Where there has been no preparatory study of the craft of climbing, no progressive interest or mastery in the elements which compose it, or in the conditions which affect it ; where the only training has been that of the muscles required, and in the endurance that may be called for, upon a particular notorious attempt ; where the attempt is one dictated by public greed for sensation, and where, but for that publicity, the unlikely problem might never have been known even by name to the climber qualified neither by experience nor tradition nor even by mountaineering enthusiasm to attempt it—I think we may say that the ' result ' of such climbs has no mountaineering value, and that this class of climber may not claim from us more credit than we pay to ordinary ' stunters,' a sword-juggler or a week-long waltzing-Matilda.

But when we have excluded this not inconsiderable class, there are a number left of whom we feel that, although the fact that we know of them at all is due to their having selected some notable or conspicuous climb to achieve glory, this has not been their exclusive interest in climbing. They have climbed also for the adventure, and because they are fine-hearted fellows, and in consequence of their success they have loomed large for a space in the mountain sky. Ought we now, merely because they have succeeded and so become known to us, to be accepting their way of triumph as a new mountaineering departure, from which as an improved tradition we have something to learn ?

If I am right in considering Madariaga's analysis as applicable to mountaineering no less than to games-playing, it is just also to apply this test, of ' how ' the game was played, to such climbs and such climbers. The individual performance and hardihood we must declare at once to have been often prodigious. In the same manner, on the second point of importance, the team spirit was in the majority of cases firstrate, although even in this, I think, there have been deviations from our own accepted tradition. But—the regard for the opposing side ? Our unhappy Alps !—the majority of these exploits have seemed never to have considered any aspect of the mountains but their eligibility as patient matter to endure unlimited muscular violence. Weather and every natural condition have been over-ridden, and every mechanical interference with the native surface except a funicular railway has been introduced, in order to modify the mountain as it is, to alter the rules of the game, and to force all natural opposition to conform with an unrelated, ill-adjusted human demand.

In reading these tales I have sometimes had a picture unwillingly in mind of now one, now the other sister of Cinderella, desperately trying to fit the glass slipper on to her clumsier feet by cutting off here a heel and there the toes. It is the same substitution of force for any fitting adjustment. Yet in this case it is the lovely mountainside, and not the unsympathetic sisters, which is being brutalised into conformity.

Of course a modern climber may well smile at this, at the absurdity of claiming rights for the inanimate rocks, of expecting for them, or for ice and snow and angle, the respect due to living opponents in a game. I am not so absurd : there is no conscious playing on the side of the hills, and their counterstrokes when they make them are without personal design. But the fashion of treating the hills in the process of our climbing, and the amount of interference and alteration we impose upon their natural conditions in order to achieve a particular aim of our own, do, on the

other hand, come very much into question when we are considering the fourth condition of a game, to which Madariaga has attached principal value. Does such climbing *in extremis*, gallant and enduring very often, but with unlimited mechanisms, with success for whole justification and object, and with life and every sense of its proportionate values thrown with each cast of the die, each ram of a piton, fulfil the principle of playing according to the spirit of the game itself ? Does it make a good game of mountaineering, or a better game than it was in the past ? Does it leave a feeling afterwards, whether the result has been victory or defeat and the players in form or not, of having been an uplifting process, a better way of spending vital hours and days ?

I think we must all have in memory some occasion on a climb when the conditions or our own emotional excitement carried us beyond the point of controlled adventuring or of sane enterprise ; when we defied consequences as we knew they were deserved, and perhaps only owed our ultimate safety and success to some accident, some turn of fortune, some extraneous cause other than our own foresight, power or craft. I think we must all have felt some slight embarrassment upon reflection, and yet some personal pride in our survival and victory. It was a successful assertion of self, we feel, over circumstance. But I do not think that any of us, fairly reviewing such a memory, will claim for it that we played the game of mountaineering better, in allowing ourselves to be forced beyond our self-control. I think we shall all feel that our ascent, wrenched from a mountain wall by force, by the help of happy accident, and undeserved by our skill or prevision, could be no cause for mountaineering pride or remain a high point in our mountain memories. We know, as our little flare-up of vanity dies down again, that we were left with little, after such a climb, but a sense of happy release, of personal puff-up.

And all such climbing, I suggest, which neglects the natural conditions of mountain form and structure, and of altering season and weather, and which substitutes mechanical auxiliaries for experience and fine craft, does not represent any advance in the mountaineering game. It does not further the spirit in which the game is played or the mountain climbed. It injures it. It is no argument, even if we are discussing mountaineering only as a game, to claim that rules can be altered to suit a changing age. We will all admit that they can. In America the rules governing our imported game of Rugby football were altered once every five years about the end of the last century, in order to reinforce now the defence and now the offence, and so protect life and reduce injury. But such changes only revealed more clearly each time that no

rules are of avail to protect from abuse a game which is not played in its native spirit. In like manner, altering our accepted principles of mountaineering could only be of effect if it were to follow some fundamental change in the whole purpose of mountain climbing—if, say, we were to re-begin mountaineering simply as a test for rope-makers, or to save our families on principle the care of our old age.

I am still considering mountaineering only as a game, and examining how far this modernist interpretation complies with the definition we accept for the playing of games. No one, I hope, will claim for any game, or sport or exercise, that it should make the supreme claim upon any human life, that it should have an equal right to demand the sacrifice of time, labour and life itself, with the long duty which a man owes to his creative labour, his social responsibilities, or his own enduring part in vitality, in consciousness and in hope. If we begin to accept an interpretation that justifies young men in wagering duration of life and the duty owed to it upon a haphazard adventure so unchancy that it exacts, sooner or later, the penalty of death from a large proportion of the players, we are outside any definition that seems applicable to the idea of a 'game.' If, again, we accept an interpretation which defends such sacrifices just because the venture has in it something more than a fight between man and matter, because the game is symbolic, in it a conquest glorifies the man himself in the semblance of his State and Leader, and, in it, a failure means the tribute of a death to a great tradition of subordination which will in itself confer immortality, then our onetime simple and happy mountain enthusiasm is, in fact, getting very near to a return to the worship of Moloch, and kindred rites. And in those rites, whether they were symbolical games or not, if an even smaller proportion of the victims survived upon this earth, they would seem to have been compensated by a more confident belief in the effectiveness of the process for ensuring a second attempt.

There is a way of pursuing an activity—and we all know it—in which our aim is to assert ourselves, our own superiority, to subdue, to smash anything that opposes us into submission. And there is another way of activity in which, whether it be our object or not, we find that we ourselves become submerged. We lose ourselves in our interest, in our pursuit. We earn our reward in this very absorption : it is the transfiguration which attends the practice of all the creative arts.

To command success has never a lasting benefit for ourselves : to have deserved it means to have been long in contact with transforming forces for good. The two schools of climbing of

which we are speaking belong to these two categories : the one would force the conditions of angle and structure to yield to its own imposed conditions, it would command success ; the other seeks to earn it by the manner of its interplay with mountain form and forces, content, if success be denied, with the enriching process of the interplaying.

That the first school should have come into existence at all, as a new mental approach to hills, we must attribute to the circumstance that the actual approach to hills has in great part disappeared altogether. I have written of this more fully elsewhere, but the point may be mentioned here, because to grasp the reason for the supposed change of attitude is to see that it is the outcome of a lesser, not a better knowledge of mountains.

Facility of access and transport is of course responsible for eliminating all the middle distance in our approach. We no longer pass from the near familiar scene, into and through foreign regions peopled by stranger inhabitants even though only in the next county, until the mountain range breaks high in the distance, invested with all the mystery of the long approach and the altering view. So the mind no longer has its gradual introduction to the hill, as an aspiration, and as a fulfilment of difficult attainment. There can be now no tuning up of the cords of the imagination, to vibrate to the awe of the unknown or the unfamiliar, or to catch the fainter, finer emanations which radiate in widening circles of gradual preparation from height and depth and natural beauty.

As we are, almost in our city selves and humour of the plain, we are plumped down at the foot of our mountain or in the middle of our range. We have merely to change our boots and start up. Where, thirty years ago, we could come at the most three times in the year, with effort, preparation and high expectation, we can now descend upon any chosen week-end of sun. Frequentation has banished the nervousness of height. Confident movements, by custom, infection, and imitation, have become the rule. Imagination now works upon the climber's side and no longer against him : his eye of imagination pictures himself overcoming the difficulty, not, as before, failing at it.

With this change, which has done much to raise the average standard of climbing as a craft, has come also the inevitable change in mental approach. Those who, as it were, take on the hills and their sport wholesale, and hail them as a human training ground at their back doors, very naturally seldom find among them impressions or an impressiveness for which not even the actual way of approach has prepared their minds.

Some alteration there had to be in the new-generational view of

natural beauty. The modern countryside has changed character in feeling, in atmosphere, as much as it has in appearance. The penetration of fast road traffic, its concomitants and appurtenances, has served slightly to distort the timing of all rural life. It has been steadily eliminating local characteristic. It is all now country in which we feel that the country belongs to the people, is regimented by its inhabitants. Only in the remote ingles of our islands or on the far west coasts do we still have the sense that the people are living at the same pace as their scenery, does the look of the land still tell us that it is the people who belong to their scenery and to their soil. And between these two atmospheres there is all a world of difference.

To a yet greater degree mountains have begun, in all their nearer ranges, to come under the yoke of roads, of traffic and of the changed local life among them. The new mountaineers find all the greater difficulty in keeping a respect for them, as opponents of unknown force and equal honour with themselves in the great game they play. They can approach them no longer with exploratory skirmishing and trials of mutual strength. They are among them, treading them down, from the moment of their resolve to climb. And by hook of iron or by crook of dural the wall or rock which opinion may have proclaimed as worthy of their 'steel' is subjected to the confident imposition of their agility. I do not think it is unfair to say that the younger prophets of this climbing phase—in so far as it is claimed to be a mountaineering phase—are seeking to force the Mountain to come at the beck of their magisterial Mahomet.

Had Mahomet more the right of it when, according to the legend, he decided that his end would be more certainly achieved by himself going all the way to the Mountain ?

I believe myself that, while we can show that mountaineering, even regarded simply as a game, is inadequately understood by the new fashion of play, it is possible also to show that there is a principle behind the character and playing of all games, and to a yet greater degree within the practice of mountaineering, which makes the spirit in which we play games, the way in which we conduct our relationship with hills, an influence of deeper significance. I believe it to be a natural opportunity given to us, in which we can realise, and to an extent cultivate, elements in our own nature which have their part in more continuous laws of life, and ultimately in the ordered principle which animates the universe.

When I was still very young in the mountains I see that I wrote : 'I had to learn when among mountains to accept their moods. . . . In time I grew content to be more theirs than

they mine.' We find this sense of a sympathy, of a communion being experienced during good moments of climbing days, in the writings of most of our mountaineering authors. The word 'ecstasy' does not surprise us by its appearance even in very modern and cool-headed authorities. Now, is all this just phrasing ? or sentimentality ? or, as we used to be told, the mis-projection of our own stimulated sensations into the dead matter of our mountain ? And what, then, is the matter of a mountain ? And how can we say that it is more this or less that than the sensation which tells us all that we know about it as a mountain ?

Without using difficult terms, and without trespassing upon more particular doctrine, I suggest that when we climb a mountain or play a game, we are doing more than merely exercise our activity. I do not mean that we are doing anything symbolical or mystic ; but that we are obeying laws of movement and of lively inspiration which have correspondence with the same principles on a deeper plane of existence. Behind and within every other law of our universe there is a principle of continuity, of going-on-ness. We may call it aliveness, or movement, or progress, or the will-to-live. It finds its outward expression, its vehicle, in every form, line, colour, living object, action or thought of living nature. It has one characteristic, other than its continuity, that which we call a rhythm, an order of movement, of life and death, of season, of change, of reproduction, and of shorter or longer coincidence between its various rhythmic expressions : the coincidence of a single life with the passing moment of a racial history, of the brief sensitiveness of the human eye to the light-beam from a star.

By a strange law of natural order this underlying continuity is, so far as concerns our visible universe, only expressed in, and transmitted by, terminable or temporary forms. All our world is subject to birth and decay, although its forms take life from and themselves transmit a greater continuity of law or life.

Human lives, to which alone so far as we know has been given the gift of consciousness and of understanding of their own transience, belong, ironically, to the more ephemeral of the vehicles of life. Our human rhythm of life and death coincides only for the briefest of instants with the longer, but transient, rhythms co-existing on the earth around us, the lives of the trees or hills. It is natural to ask why, when a human being has realised this, he does not prefer to live out his own short span agreeably with the easiest passage through coloured irresponsible moments to his assured oblivion ? The answer is that all life is designed to be contributory to the great continuity, and to be in its activity creative or reproductive. So, in every man are born certain urges

stronger than himself, the urge to keep alive, the urge to realise himself in some creative form that shall outlast him.

These urges he has the power to resist. But he will not, because it was so designed that man's strange gift of consciousness should discover for him, and to him, that, if he fulfils these urges toward a better self-realisation, he can attain moments, moods, states, of a higher and happier quality than any attainable in inaction or in a renunciation of full living. These moments are his rewards : they make a short life worth living out : they are the justification for pain, discipline, sacrifice and even death ; because they assure him of his essential community with a principle beyond all these.

It is in fact in these moments of active creation, of strenuous devotion of his whole living personality to a pursuit, that he becomes aware of being at times absorbed into deeper rhythms of life. He belongs to them also, he feels, but they are more enduring, more exalting than his normal order of living. And his awareness of this coincidence with them, of this harmony of himself with something beyond him, in beauty, in expression of a sublimer law, may give him a further assurance, that these rhythms, in their turn, are the longer-lasting but still terminable expressions of an even greater law, of the rhythm of an eternal principle.

The inspired creative moments of the great artists we can all understand, and their power to give a life more lasting than their own to clay or colour or sound. We are not all great artists ; although a larger number than is generally supposed have creative gift sufficient if cultivated to be able to contribute actively to enduring beauty. All, however, have a power of appreciation ; all can learn to place their aliveness in contact with already existing beauties of sound and music, of sight and movement and colour, of heroism or thought. By so doing they not only experience the lively reward, they are serving to perpetuate, by their recognition, some beautiful or more lasting rhythm.

I do not think we can explain in any simpler way the sensation we all feel, in these moments of translation into a finer self, of the revelation in us of what Plato called an 'idea,' or it may be only of a feeling of utter happiness in being alive. Now it is only in the active concentration of the whole of our personality, upon these creative contributions, that the full realisations are achieved, the great works of art, the deeper discoveries, the ecstasies of feeling. Our wholeness of being, of action and concentration are indispensable to such creation.

We also know that by concentrating our effort in one department of our activity we can establish a similar, if only partial, contact with an inspired moment. The active exercise of the

mind alone, or of imagination, can, with no active participation of the body, reach an almost trance-like condition of identification with some rhythm of thought, or of religious vision. Similarly, the body alone, our active muscles, can in coordinated movement achieve a delight of rhythm that may reach almost to ecstasy, as in the dance. Our separate limbs, too, can find lesser instants of it, in an adroit stroke of hand or racket or bat, or in a coincident rhythm between ball and foot. I have not forgotten, after twenty-five years, the rapturous feeling of the curve of resistance between moving body and moving ground, as I jumped from a fast omnibus and alighted on the road in the sway of balance. These commonplace instances are not insignificant. If by devoting only a part of ourselves, a single faculty, we can move into a rhythm beyond ourselves, it suggests that when we throw ourselves wholeheartedly, with every fibre and faculty in action, into a pursuit which can occupy them all, as mountaineering can, we are able to find a deeper and very real consonance.

In learning to play a native game, we are responding to this urge to make contact with, and contribute to, an inner rhythm which is important to a racial perpetuation as well as to an individual development. We play it according to the rules, which keep it to appropriate hours and place and within right limits of risk and endurance for its object of exercise and fun. We secure from it those instants of pleasure born of the happy coincidences of ball and foot or racket, and the longer concords that come with good team play. Our limited objective for the game itself is to win; and from that we get satisfaction, the satisfaction of the artist in the completion of his single work of art or craft. But we have also always the possibility, if we play according to the spirit of the game, of reaching to something further and finer. Whether we win or lose, and whether the other team has earned our respect or not, we can by the right spirit of our play attain to the consciousness that it is, and will remain in memory, a 'good' game, that we have taken part in a process which has swung us up on to a finer curve of active living, and has left us there after the game has ended.

In mountain climbing also there is this limited objective, to reach a summit, and to show individual and team prowess. But there is, besides this, a greater opportunity than in any formalised game of penetrating to deeper chords of response. When we place ourselves actively in contact with a hillside, associate our brief activity with the slower rhythm of change of the life within it and upon it, our eyes with its forms and colours, our ears with its sound and silence, our hands and feet with its modulating surface—in a word, when we set our wholeness of conscious life

in continuous moving contact with its differently timed existence, we are establishing a relationship between the mountain personality and our own ; by which I mean between the rhythm of life and order which governs the mountain shape and duration and that by which we live. St. John, you will remember, postulated this λόγος, continuous principle of order, behind and within all living. To make contact with it, to arrive at consciousness of our community with it in other living forms of creation, is our reward for living contributively and vitally ; it is the assurance to us of our participation in an eternal principle, call it beauty or truth or what we may.

We must not confuse our limited objective with this further purpose of our creative activity. The lines of a mountain, for instance, are downward lines as well as upward lines ; the structural rhythm is continuous, up, down and onward. We can, of course, for the convenience of our day's climbing make our limited objective the end of the upward lines, and consider that we have won the game of the day when we reach a ' summit.' But it is an arbitrary point, even more arbitrary than the umpire's whistle in a game which declares the side with the major points at that instant of interruption to have ' won.'

Many of us when we have reached a summit at the cost of much planning and effort must have felt, combined with our momentary satisfaction in the attainment of our day's objective, an under sense of regret, even of deprivation. It is the same which all artists who create with brain or hand feel at the completion of a particular work of art. Something has been taken away from the artist, interrupted in his creative life, by the finality of a product. I take the sense of loss to be the recognition in ourselves that the contact we were maintaining during our creative activity with the inner rhythm of inspiration in our art has been ended. In like manner in those wonderful mountain days, when all our forces physical and mental are in perfect accord, when we are moving continuously within ourselves, and with all about us visible or heard or felt in like accordant movement, on such a day the summit brings us only a neutral and passing feeling. It is not until the magical rhythm of movement is really broken off, by night or by the hut, that our sense of transfiguration dissipates again into our common selves.

I am not attempting a philosophical theory. I am restating our common mountain experience and connecting it with our experience in other productive work. The structure of a solid block of mountain does affect us in some way spiritually. The effects we know to be there and to be real, and that they follow

upon a certain quality of association between ourselves and the mountain. All that is discoverable of what we call truth must lie along such lines of coincidence, as we establish them between our brief creative activity and more lasting expressions of creative law.

Those would-be mountaineers, then, to whom the summits or the tops of buttresses or walls are the only objective, and whose aim is the gratification of their own power, or of its haloed reflection in a form of patriotism, never give themselves the chance of opening a way to the inner responses of great mountaineering. Machines deprive them of any preparatory approach to their climb, and they are not even concerned to maintain the contact during their actual climbing hours. The rhythm to be found in the hills is continuous, up, down and prolonged; but such a modernist feels free, once his peak is gained, to swing himself down by ropes as best and quickest his mechanism and protective garments will allow. To the up-climbing also the infection spreads, and he practises more and more to substitute foreign attachments for his human touch. It is not inapt to recall that a silver cup shaped by the hand has life transmitted to it, and is alive to our eye, but that no machine-made cup is anything but dead and unbeautiful. If we may assume that any principle of beauty and life inspires the forms and surface life of hills, the more we interpose mechanisms between our natural senses and their rhythmic lines and planes, the less chance is there of a real interplay being established, or of our uncovering its pleasure.

I know that it is difficult, in the abstract, to draw lines of distinction between such artificial aids as contribute only to our safety and those which, by their interposition, help too much towards our 'success.' But if we hold it in mind that our gain from mountaineering comes not from subduing summits but from the process of climbing up and down them, that is, if we climb only in the 'spirit' of the mountain game and value only the continuous right manner of its playing, I do not think that in practice the difficulty arises. At the one end of the scale: if a life is in jeopardy then all the æsthetic values in mountaineering fall into abeyance, and we use any mechanism we can lay hands on. Similarly at the other end: if we deliberately set out to do a stunt climb which cannot be done or even attempted without mechanical provision, we are from the start renouncing all profit from the mountain except the chance of one moment of gratified power and vanity. The practical distinction is generally as clear in all the more doubtful cases between these two extremes. We accept the security of nailed boots, for instance, just as we accepted special football boots. But tent-pegging ourselves to the ground

would not be tolerated in a football scrummage, to secure our hold at the point to which we have pushed back an opposing team ; and pegging-in should not be found more tolerable in matching ourselves fairly against a mountain. In all arts or pursuits or games, in which the spirit is still alive, we can count upon tradition and detachment of mind guiding us moderately right.

I do not believe that climbers would ever multiply appliances and debase their mountaineering if they had cleared their minds as to what constitutes their real aim among mountains : if they had once discovered that only in a certain close and continuous relationship, unbroken by mechanisms and the reaching of limited objectives, can they experience those moments of selfless delight that come of unity with the spirit of the mountains.

I have made the same mistaken approach myself, of recent years, and for that I can criticise it the better. A last ascent of a great Alpine mountain some few summers ago discovered my mistake to me and, incidentally, threw a grateful light upon the varied values of my half-century of high mountaineering. The personal anecdote must be forgiven for its moral.

I was returning after an interval to the Alps under happy conditions, the renewal of a triple partnership with Josef Knubel and Marcus Heywood. They were conditions likely to mislead, since they reproduced uncritically the youthful atmosphere and even the jokes of twenty-five years earlier. Further, in one-legged climbing, I have been much helped by the fact that when I envisage a peak I feel about climbing it much as I did of old. The fearsomely greater demands which it will make in action suggest themselves only unreally, with the unreality which has made me seem a stranger to myself in all my later climbing. Even when I had two legs it always seemed a miracle that I should be able to get up anything as high and as steep as 'that,' and now I only count upon the miracle more largely and vaguely in anticipation. The truth being that, while on the level I can swing along at a half to two-thirds the pace of a fair two-legged walker, this decreases with the angle or broken surface, until upon steep slopes my fastest rate is reduced to between a fifth and sixth of my former normal progress. Upon loose steep slopes I may take eight to ten times as long.

I fixed hopefully on the Zinal Rothorn, because it fitted our short holiday convenience and had never taken me long. And my feeling as I looked up at the 'great moraine' refused to remember that, upon one-legged ascents of the Wellenkuppe and Weisshorn in previous years, this same moraine alone had given me five to six hours of fierce acrobatics.

Knubel and I started at ten in the evening, and climbed quietly through the night. With no one else to compare by, except his always tactful self-suppression, I felt myself to be going a tremendous pace. But as the morning hours followed, the other parties, including Marcus and our second guide, broke as moving lights far below in the darkness, and became overtaking shadows, and then passed on ahead. The hours of effort went on with daylight, unpausing. The snowy small glaciers proved to be loathsome to cross, covered with frozen ' Hubel ' or ' Hebel,' those dislocating hummocks. As the slopes steepened, and softened with the sun, and we crawled up the snow-hangs to the shoulder, every step with the metal peg became a gymnastic contest ; and Marcus, with the considerate hope, I think, of making retreat easy for me, asked me if I was really getting any fun out of it ? I looked rather hopelessly up to the awful remoteness of the V-notch, æons above, and after serious thought decided that I was. The hard conquest of each step, and always another wrenching step, gave at each foot gained a set-teeth satisfaction that weighed the scale down, moment by moment, on the side of liking it more than hating it. The rock ridge, when space infinitely relented at last and we reached it, went much more easily, for one could use the hands and swing up in as good time as the last of the other parties already far ahead. But the ascent took between thirteen and fourteen hours, allowing for one longish rest on the shoulder. And yet I had felt to be moving at express speed, and going as hard as I could ever remember in the past.

On the very summit block I lay long, and looked out over the head of the Zinal valley : all the long half-circle from the Grand Cornier to the Matterhorn and beyond, which had been my first revelation of the great Alps as a boy. And every recess almost in the great snows held a memory, and on the majority of the ridges there had been some adventure still lively in mind.

I felt a rather stern, unlit satisfaction in having got up, in spite of every handicap, and of fate. And I felt that the others were as conscious of the effort to come, in seeing me safely down, as of the effort it had been to get me there. And I recognised that all this was not the least like the sort of luxurious, rapturous transfiguration, with the rhythm of movement still tingling in the muscles and the song of life humming through the silence in one's ears, which had surrounded such high moments in the past. A good deal of doubt suddenly crystallised. I felt there was something wrong with my mountaineering. So wrong that, with a quick swing of imagination forward through the future, I saw that, though I did not know yet what was wrong, nothing could

ever set it right again, give me back the right feeling. What, then, if I were to determine on this high summit never to climb a great peak again ? I put the question to myself, testing its reaction ; and instead of an indignant clamour of refusal and impossibility—I had expected that—I felt only a curious quiet, almost of relief, that I might so decide. I could not doubt any more. There and then, as I lay and rested and looked out, I determined that this should be my last great ascent.

Then I looked round slowly, one after the other, at all the mountains of that wide view. Not a high summit or skyline but held for me some story ; and I knew what my feelings ought to be at the sight and the memory. But they were not. I felt only slightly impatient of the eternal child in oneself that could put the decision to this sentimental test. The mountains looked to me—just mountains. Not to this, nor upon that well-known and royal wall or glacier-hang could I bring back the old glamour and the magic lighting, even at this dramatic moment of a farewell. They looked to me just good mountains ; and they were not even well illuminated, for structure and coloration, by the dull diffusion through the ash-gold cloud-flocks of a white-sunned Pennine afternoon.

Something must be very wrong indeed ; and I had to discover what it was. After over forty years of vital living among these ranges, that I should find myself able to break off their intimacy without emotion—did it mean, possibly, that in some way unknown and unacknowledged our parting had come in fact before ? During these last years of concentrated struggle to regain the most precious of friendships, had I never in reality gripped more than instants of a shadow, of a memory, of a reflection of myself out of the past, unaccompanied, moreover, by any like reflection of the past glory of the Alps ?

As we started down the rock arête, I knew that the hours of long toil ahead would be well occupied in thinking where my mountaineering had gone wrong. If I could discover that, I should be throwing a welcome light in addition upon the nature of my own earlier mountaineering, that is, upon the nature of all right mountaineering.

So, during the long hours of descent—some twelve I think, for the expedition took over twenty-six—and until I grew too tired to see anything but the light of the Trift upon further darkness, infinitely remote and never nearer through the stumbling night hours, while I moved more and more upon the strength of my companions, I returned once and again to the problem. And it came to me in slow flashes, that what had been happening was

that I had been steadily but unknowingly falsifying a relationship. My former relationship with mountains had been long and happily based upon a capacity, physical and mental, on my side to associate with them on certain terms. A happening had made it impossible for me ever to recover the wholeness and coordination essential to the establishment of a human climbing rhythm capable of coincidence with that of great and difficult mountains. I had been trying to regain it by force, using artificial means such as my friends, the rope, sheer muscular acrobatics : in fact, I had been 'stunting.' And for what end ? To reach a point of accepted height and conquer the impossible like an enemy. I had not done it, I knew, for an audience or a public, since none but the few one-legged can ever assess the performance of the one-legged ; but I had most certainly been playing to myself, listening to the challenge of my former self demanding the triumph of a come-back. In a word, my Alpine mountaineering had come down to climbing for a limited objective only, for a result, a personal success. Consequently I had never rekindled, or deserved to rekindle, that fire of delight which could be born only of the right contact between my own lost rhythm of activity and that of the mountain vastness. In glimpses of escape from the deadening downward jar, I began to see that the magic of climbing does lie wholly in the nature and depth of the relationship maintained between the man and the hill. It is not inherent in the nature or beauty of the hill as a whole existence, nor is it projected into his mountaineering from the wholeness of the man at his most vital. It grows out of the interplay of the personality of the climber in rhythmic action with the slower rhythm of the resistance of the mountain, and it can become what sober mountaineers are prepared to call ecstasy when—and while—these rhythms are accordant. We may compare this interplay to the third and finer personal life together produced by the harmonious union of two single human lives.

Our relationships, to each other and to our creative work, are the most beautiful elements in our lives, the only elements which we might feel deserving of immortality. But they must be natural relationships ; between human beings the outcome of the devotion of the wholeness of personality on either side, and between man and his creative work the product of a similar identification. The artist, the inventor, the scientist, profits by no inspiration and achieves no truth unless when he is attuned to the rhythm of the order of life he is investigating, or of the beauty he is creating. These relationships, attunements, are only possible to complete sincerity and self-dedication, and they are easily falsified.

Deliberate attempts to mould the other partner to our own will must destroy any reality of human relationship, and to force contact with or dictate to inspiration kills all but mechanical production.

This had been my mistake. Misled by the fact that I still went on feeling precisely the same in myself about my relationship with hills, while I was not even a quarter as capable of maintaining my part of it in action—that I was, in fact, in myself discordant as a mountaineer—I had inevitably produced only some detached sporting results, and had failed to awaken any resonance from the mountain heart.

The young assailants of the Eiger or the Watzmann facets might well claim that my mistaken approach was worse than theirs, for I had had long experience of a true mountain way, upon which they had never even started. I am content to use my second Alpine approach as a warning ; because the fact that it has enabled me to compare the two different approaches has gone far towards clearing ideas for me as to mountaineering values in general.

There is for every man a type of climbing, a degree of mountaineering resistance, with which he is fitted to match himself profitably when he is mountaineering at his all-round best, within himself physically, and able to preserve a mental detachment sufficient for a continuous appreciation of what he is doing, of what he is seeing and of what is emerging as ennobling sensation from his active relationship with the mountain.

Every man has to find this, his own maximum rhythm in climbing. It is right that he should make every active trial, and risk his own failures, within the limits of an elastic sanity and of a danger proportionate to the adventurousness and agility of youth. But he must find for himself this limit, beyond which his effort is convulsive or artificial and fails to achieve either its own continuous rhythm or the pleasure from the mountain response. It is entirely wrong that he should cease to exercise his own freedom of self-exploration, no less than his freedom of mountaineering discovery. For him to accept from others, as many young climbers now accept, standards of possibility no matter how high they may be set, and standardised mechanisms to boost them up to those standards—in a word, to accept dictatorship as to what is or is not to be climbed—is the enchainment of that Freedom which of old stood on the heights. To climb by the group mind, to acknowledge as worth doing only single steep objectives or graded lists fixed by a collective or contemporary opinion, or it may be by a mere public notoriety, should be, of all human adventures, most repugnant to the mountaineer, independent in his pursuit by tradition, by artistic prerogative and by lonely circumstance.

In the past, many of us resisted the introduction of climbing guide-books for the reason that we feared, even then, that they would help to restrict that free entry to the hills which demands a discovery of new romance and difficulty in accordance with one's own powers. I have now learned that they contained a yet greater peril, the threat to our hope of self-discovery, to our finding of a relationship with the mountain rhythm such as can heighten all existence for us.

Our forefathers, even of the Alpine Club, have not been always above criticism in their maintenance of this principle of an individual relationship. Many of them elevated their respect for their guides into a ceremonial observance, one which challenges comparison with the modernist subservience to fixed grades of merit and standardised machineries. But the guides were at least human instruments, and in so far they interfered less in the establishment of a lively continuous contact between each human being of a party and his own mountain opposite.

On the other hand, the Alpine Club, in its reasoned, or unreasoned, resistances to the successive introduction of mechanical aids, to pitons at all times, to crampons at one time, to ski at another, has been loyal to the highest duty of all organically developed British institutions. It has exercised the conservative function of the brake upon change, which checks the pace of alteration until it can be shown to make for individual freedom and not merely to be designed to suit a collective or bureaucratic convenience. Since every substituted mechanism must in effect contribute towards standardisation and monotony, it cannot but serve in some way to restrict human variation, individual liberty and mountain realisation. To remain free, every mountaineer has to find for himself the degree of resistance in the mountain which calls forth his best powers and builds up his own confidence. That can only be done by human trial and human error with a living mountain; not by the use of mechanical short-cuts to arbitrary climbing objectives.

Only when a climber has established that knowledge of himself and of the mountain can he begin to know, multiplying between himself and the mountain he is climbing, always more frequent and durable hours of delight, which are the artist's and the thinker's, and indeed everyman's reward who contributes creatively to the continuous order during his own brief part in living.

With time we learn that the relationship with mountains can alter its active character, with the modifications imposed by years, and yet retain its quality and beauty. As in a human relationship, the element of romantic action, and of passion, transmutes into a sensitiveness to finer shades of mountain loveliness and response.

We discover that there are degrees of mountaineering difficulty which can be associated productively with every stage of our altering energy, and that a new perspective and a nearer intimacy of detail reward our later years of gentler approach. For twenty years, while I was still driven by an unconquerable hope and trying to recover the high Alpine magic by force of will and muscle, I knew also that I had but to walk alone on the easier upland and downfall of our own hills to find a rhythm accordant with my later reality of movement; one, too, capable of producing a self-forgetfulness and a restoration of values as wholesome if not as dazzling as my earlier enchantment.

> Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
> and barren chasms, and all to left and right
> the bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
> his feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
> sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels. . . .

Those lines sound the jubilant assonance from the cliffs which any whole-hearted mountaineer can awaken from the unknown world of hills in his days of vigour, when the adventure must be keen, and the forces of rock and ice meeting him must be felt to be as vital and passionate and personal as his own human grip and stride and intimate cling and sway. And no meaner spirit in climbing youth, no egoism to which the cliffs are only a sounding-board to return the echoes of its own achievement upon its own or a public ear, can ever penetrate to where these responses sound about our passages.

Mahomet, as he grows older, is tempted less and less to force the Mountain into being something special for himself, to summon it as a platform for his own mountain prophesying. He goes to it unquestioningly as it is, and accepts from it a companionship more tranquil if less exalting. It is happier for him, no doubt, if the succeeding modifications in a long relationship come imperceptibly, and not as in my case with confusing abruptness. But, if he accepts them and continues to measure his strength intimately with the right measure of the hills, the inner music can never become inaudible, and it may retain for him even its quality of discovery and surprise. Tennyson, you will remember, followed the familiar lines I have quoted with a musical and retarding change, the transition, for the mountaineer, to a serene revelation of winter and evening:

> And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
> and the long glories of the winter moon. . . .