

ALPINE PURITANISM

Being a reply to Mr. Geoffrey Howard's paper *Alpine Uplift*¹

BY ARNOLD LUNN

Read before the Alpine Club, May 2, 1950

THOSE who lay claim to elevated sentiments resent being accused of insincerity, and those who *disclaim* such sentiments are sometimes irritated if accused of sincerity, and though I shall assume, at the risk of irritating Mr. Howard that he meant exactly what he said, I am inclined to suspect that his entertaining paper was an elaborate leg-pull. As such, it was extremely successful. I happened to be sitting next to Lord Schuster, and the atmospherics produced by our rising hackles interfered with the reception at the back of the room but we were both mollified by Howard's disarming reply to our indignant counterblasts. 'I have listened,' he said, 'to Lord Schuster and Mr. Lunn and my head is bloody and slightly bowed.'

Leg-pull or not I propose to reply, not to what he may have meant, but to what in point of fact he said.

Mr. Howard defines 'uplift' as 'a convenient portmanteau to include moral, poetical, sentimental and even spiritual levitation,' an all embracing definition which would include in the Howardian anathemas Mummery's description of his first vision of the Matterhorn and Wills' reflections on his Creator on the summit of the Wetterhorn.

Mr. Howard begins with an *imaginary* contrast between the Alpine writings of the pioneers and of the moderns. 'These pioneers of real climbing kept their private emotions to themselves . . . they were writing for fellow mountaineers who were interested in their climbs and not in their sentiments. Wills, Hudson, Kennedy, Whymper, Moore and Mummery are factual: Freshfield and Tuckett wrote with a vivid appreciation of mountain scenery but made no lofty deductions from it.'

It would be difficult to pack into a few lines more misstatements of fact than have been squeezed into this verdict on the literature of the pioneers. The only pioneer, mentioned in Mr. Howard's list of those who 'kept their private emotions to themselves,' who was strictly 'factual' was Moore and that is why Moore's writings are so dull. Does Mr. Howard really prefer Moore's, 'I had formed high expectations of the scenery of the Val d'Anniviers, and the reality far exceeded my ideal. Nothing is wanting to complete the effect, and rocks, woods, and water combine to form a perfect picture,' to the 'poetical levitation' of Leslie Stephen's chapter on the Alps in winter?

Of course all these writers 'kept their private emotions to themselves,' for otherwise those emotions would not have been 'private'; but presumably Mr. Howard was not favouring us with a glimpse of the obvious, and therefore the word 'private' may be ignored. Whymper,

¹ *A. J.* 57. 1.

recorded not only the 'factual' details of his climbs but also records many of his emotions, but perhaps Mr. Howard would condemn his fine description of a lonely bivouac on the Matterhorn as 'poetical uplift.' If Mr. Howard really believes that Freshfield made no 'lofty deductions' from mountain scenery he should read the passage about the Adamello (*Italian Alps*) the passage which ends 'on its lofty standpoint the mind feels in harmony with the soul of the universe, and almost fancies itself to gain a glimpse of its workings.' Again, if the 'factual' is always to be preferred to 'poetical uplift' Mummery's description of the first impact of the Alps must be condemned as uplift. Here is what he writes :—

'At the age of fifteen the crags of the Via Mala and the snows of the Théodule roused a passion within me which has grown with years, and has to no small extent moulded my life and thought. It has led me into regions of such fairy beauty that the fabled wonders of Xanadu seem commonplace beside them ; . . . My boyish delight in the great white peaks towering above the gloom of pines is still awakened when the lumbering diligence rolls through the gorge of the Diosaz or when the Matterhorn rises from out the foliage of Val Tournanche. I remember, as if it were yesterday, my first sight of the great mountain. It was shining in all the calm majesty of a September moon, and in the stillness of an autumn night, it seemed the very embodiment of mystery and a fitting dwelling place for the spirits with which old legends people its stone-swept slopes.'

After which, no doubt, Mr. Howard will welcome the factual Coolidge :

'It so happens that the first snowy mountains on which I ever set eyes were those of the Maritime Alps. . . . I was accompanied by my mother, my only sister, and my mother's sister (and so my aunt). . . . I must often have seen the Maritime Alps on the horizon. But I paid no attention whatever to them, my mind being absorbed by the scheme (partly carried out) of writing a history of the Lérins islands.'

But perhaps Mr. Howard's principle grievance is directed against the purveyors of spiritual uplift. If so, it is difficult to see why Wills and Kennedy figure in his list of climbers who make 'no lofty deductions from mountain scenery.' Here is Wills' description of his first moments on the Wetterhorn :

'I am not ashamed to own that I experienced as this sublimed and wonderful prospect burst upon our view, a profound and almost irrepressible emotion. . . . We felt as in the more immediate presence of Him who had reared this tremendous pinnacle, and beneath the 'majestical roof' of whose deep blue Heaven we stood.'

According to Mr. Howard 'God's in his heaven' and all's right with the Alpine world provided God stays in his heaven, and does not

intrude into Alpine literature. Nobody will quarrel with his right to state his credo, but he should allow a similar freedom to others, and should not attempt to censor the expression of genuine emotions of awe and reverence by a cataract of pejorative epithets. Protestant clergymen wandering through the Alps 'bubble with high-flown sentiment and self-righteousness.' *Self-righteous*, a word of which he is very fond, does not seem to have much meaning in this context. Was the Psalmist 'self-righteous' when he wrote 'Thy righteousness is like the great mountains'?

Hudson, who figures in Howard's list of 'factual' writers, concludes a description of Birkbeck's escape from death on the Col de Miage by a passage which Howard would no doubt condemn as 'spiritual uplift' or condone as 'simply vocational, the kind of thing that was expected from clergymen.' 'To whom, then, is due the praise for all these mercies? Surely to Him who guides and protects us day by day. To Him, then, let us give all glory and thanks. . . .' Simple piety such as this has not yet vanished from the world, but it has vanished from papers read before the Alpine Club. It would be interesting to discover what was the last occasion when God was mentioned in an Alpine paper. We are all slaves of fashion and it is of course largely a question of fashion whether we express or suppress spiritual sentiments but I, at least, prefer the fashion which permitted Hudson to express what he felt than the modern fashion which forces people to pose as tough-minded sceptics.

One thing is certain. The passage I have quoted was not written for effect, for Hudson was incapable of insincerity. He was, to quote Stephen, 'as simple and noble a character as ever carried out the precepts of muscular Christianity without talking its cant.'

Kennedy, included in Howard's list of factual writers, has some very distressing allusions to his Creator in his account of his night out on the Bristenstock. Elliott who made the second ascent of the Matterhorn from Zermatt confessed that it was his own fault if the beauties of the Alps did not raise his 'heart in deeper thankfulness and truer affection to the great and loving Father whose hand is visible everywhere.'

So much for Mr. Howard's first point, that the pioneers were factual in their writings and did not indulge in 'moral poetical, sentimental and even spiritual uplift.'

Jowett when asked for a definition of a tragedy replied, 'A beautiful hypothesis killed by a fact.' Mr. Howard's hypothesis that the pioneers were factual writers is not particularly beautiful, and it is therefore no tragedy that it is killed by the facts. It is equally incorrect to assert that 'a straight forward narrative' of mountain adventure is the most popular form of Alpine literature or that the average reader skips 'mystical emotions and elevated thoughts.' Narratives of great adventure will always sell, as was the case with Whymper's *Scrambles*, but now that the novelty of mountain adventure has worn off, it is the books to which Mr. Howard objects which seem to be the most popular.

There are two tests of popularity which only the odd book in a thousand can pass ; the first is being reprinted or being still in print after the lapse of a quarter of a century, and the second is translation. There may be Alpine books, published in this century, which consist of purely factual accounts of adventure which fulfil *both* these tests. If so perhaps Mr. Howard can name them. I cannot, for the only books I know of which fulfil both these tests contain all the varieties of 'uplift' which he mentions.

So far as the first two points in Mr. Howard's paper are concerned, the alleged contrast between early and modern Alpine literature, and the alleged preferences of the average reader, the refutation is easy and decisive, for as Burns said, 'facts are stubborn things' and the facts refute this prophet of the factual. Where, however, Mr. Howard attempts to diagnose and discredit the motives which lead men to write in a way of which he disapproves, factual refutation is less easy, perhaps because some of us are not prepared to be quite so dogmatic even about our own motives as Mr. Howard is about the motives of other people.

Briefly, Mr. Howard's thesis is that mountaineers may be divided into tough guys who are far too preoccupied with the exacting problems of severe ascents to indulge in uplift, and mediocre performers who 'compensate for a lack of hard achievement by a display of personality . . . we must not exclude as a possible cause of these displays, either frustrated ambition or lack of achievement. One is inclined to wonder whether a writer who feels that his climb hardly justifies his narrative, may not be tempted to use spiritual experience as a substitute for physical attainment because, self-righteously, it enables him to claim competitive superiority over the supposedly un-uplifted.'

Neither 'frustrated ambition' nor 'lack of achievement' account for those writings of Guido Rey and Frank Smythe, which Mr. Howard would certainly classify as specimens of Alpine uplift. It would be embarrassing to invite his opinion on the living, but I can think of at least one Alpine classic, which contains no story of pioneer climbs or super-severes but which the most acid of critics would not classify as inspired by the mean motive of 'self-righteously' seeking to 'claim competitive superiority over the supposedly un-uplifted.' There are, of course, competitive mountaineers for whom the Alps are a mere arena for the gratification of ambition, and the kind of mountaineer, whom a guide summed up as a man 'who loved mountaineering but not mountains,' could hardly be expected to understand what the late F.W. Bourdillon described as 'the unreasoning, uncovetous, unworldly love of mountains.'

If you are one of those who would suffer from 'frustrated ambition,' if your name never figured in a Climber's Guide, you will not easily understand the 'uncovetous love' of the mountains or the urge to pass on to others the revelation which you have enjoyed.

Mr. Howard, incidentally, forgets that the man whose supreme ambition is to write does not measure himself, if a climber, against

other climbers but against other writers. Every Alpine valley produces its quota of sturdy peasants who can beat our best amateurs in the leading of super-severes, but the gift of evoking mountain beauty in prose or poetry is comparatively rare, and in so far as a mountain writer suffers from 'frustrated ambition' it is perhaps because he has failed to write anything within measurable distance of the description of the Alps from the Jura by a man who never climbed, Hilaire Belloc.

Mr. Howard, who affects to believe that 'lack of achievement,' 'frustrated ambition' and 'self-righteously seeking to claim superiority' are the motives which inspire the Alpine uplifters, might be faintly nettled if the indignant Uplifter applied the Howard formula to explain the Howard attack. British reserve, as Leslie Stephen somewhere says, is very convenient for those with no emotions to conceal. If you have nothing to express worth expressing you can always boast of your 'reticence in matters of the spirit' and you can find pleasure for 'frustrated ambition' in 'self-righteously seeking to claim superiority' over the unreticent.

The real trouble with Mr. Howard is that he is a Puritan. Whereas every true mountaineer is an ascetic, since asceticism consists in the sacrifice of a pleasure, admitted to be legitimate, as the price to be paid for supreme happiness (*i.e.* the sacrifice of a bed in return for a fine ascent beginning with a bivouac) the essence of Puritanism is to condemn legitimate pleasures because they do not appeal to you. Mr. Howard is not content to explain that certain kinds of writings do not appeal to him. No, being a Puritan he must condemn the legitimate pleasure which is afforded both to the writers and the readers of what he calls 'Alpine Uplift.' Every Puritan is a born iconoclast seeking to destroy the beauty which he cannot understand, the beauty which reproaches him precisely because he cannot understand it. The iconoclasm which swept away some of the finest sculpture and stained glass in our islands is closely akin to the iconoclasm which would reduce Alpine literature to the Calvinistic plainness of a purely factual account of physical experience. And just as the Puritans attribute the lowest motives to those whose aesthetic sensitivity they secretly envy, so Mr. Howard questions the sincerity and casts aspersions on the motives of those who aspire to interpret the beauty of the mountains.

The faint noise of rising hackles reaches me from the chair in which Mr. Howard is listening to this attack with growing irritation. It may therefore be as well to pacify him by conceding that my account of his motives is no more (if no less) plausible than his account of the motives of Alpine Uplifters. The skilful prejudice-creating use which he makes of the word 'uplift,' is I believe, a brilliant leg-pull and not as it seems, an example of Nature's kindly habit of compensating for inferiority by the armour of pejorative epithets. It was the defence mechanism of the unmartial which explains the immense popularity of Colonel Blimp as a butt, of the philistine which enriched the English language with the word 'high-brow' and of the unspiritual which was responsible for the word 'uplift.' Words such as 'Blimpish,'

'Highbrow,' 'Uplift' act like morphia. They deaden the pain of envy, the envy of the uncourageous for the courageous and of the philistine for the cultured. Students of the new science of Semantics should incidentally note the controversial effect of inverting 'lift up.' Compare, for instance, *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills* with *Alpine uplift*.

Mr. Howard's paper raises once again the question as to whether the sneer or argument is most effective. I believe that rational argument is ultimately more effective, but the clever exploitation of the sneer, especially where, as in Mr. Howard's case, it is softened by urbanity, good humour and wit, ensures an initial tactical advantage. The victim finds himself forced to choose between shrugging his shoulders or appearing to boast. Colonel Blimp must choose the former alternative for he can hardly reply 'you dislike me because I am courageous and you are not.' It is easy and captivating to proclaim oneself a man too well bred to air his emotions, embarrassing to defend the legitimacy of communicating a revelation. Mr. Howard, for instance, ends by assuring us that he too has elevated thoughts 'but I keep them to myself.' It would not have been easy to rise from the floor of the house and remark, 'I have even more elevated thoughts and I have no intention of keeping them to myself.'

My chief quarrel with those who exploit the semantic possibilities of the terminology which is nothing more than a camouflaged defence mechanism is that they aggravate the difficulties of rational discussion. No question is more important than the question as to whether the spiritual is a mere by-product of the material, and, if not, the degree to which the spiritual realities are veiled or revealed in the world of sense experience, but the intensely personal tone of what may generically be called the anti-Uplifters makes it very difficult to discuss spiritual problems without appearing to claim to be spiritually minded. So much so that one can hardly use the word 'spiritual' without both causing and feeling embarrassment. And this is really a very great nuisance indeed.

It is perhaps not surprising that Mr. Howard, who is more concerned to attack those with whom he differs than to state the problem dispassionately, should suggest that Alpine Uplifters are mainly concerned with 'a display of personality.' Style is personal and therefore it is impossible to write without a 'display of personality,' but the discerning critic will distinguish between passages in which the display of personality is incidental and those in which the author is more concerned to exhibit his personality than to communicate a revelation. Wordsworth was a supreme egoist, but in his most inspired moments he was merely the medium for 'some force working through him.' Shelley's prayer, 'make me thy lyre even as the forest is' sums up the ideal of all great art, for the great artist is an instrument through whom beauty is revealed.

Wordsworth was at least as interested in his personality as Byron but, at his best, an infinitely greater poet simply because, at his best, he

was content to communicate a revelation. Who thinks of mountains when they read Byron's ?

I live not in myself but I become
Portion of that around me and to me
High mountains are a feeling but the hum
Of human cities torture.

and who remembers egoistic Wordsworth when he reads his lines on the Simplon ?

The immeasurable height
Of woods decaying, never to be decayed
The stationary blast of waterfalls,
And in the narrow rent, at every turn
Winds thwarting winds bewildered and forlorn.

If Mr. Howard had been content to discriminate between those passages of Alpine literature in which the author communicates a revelation and those in which he is mainly concerned to display his personality his paper would have been more valuable, but though he makes a few tactical reservations to provide himself with a secure line of retreat from an untenable position, these reservations, such as his gracious permission to poets to write poetry about mountains, have no real effect in counteracting the main thesis of his paper which is not merely that 'uplift' is a peculiarity—so far as sport is concerned—of Alpine literature but also that Alpine literature would be all the better if it was free from uplift as the literature of golf.

Surely we should seek to understand rather than to deride what a reviewer in the *Oxford Magazine* called 'the strange mysticism which sets mountaineering apart from all other sports.'² For men who have no sympathy with and even men who are actively hostile to institutional religion have felt the influence of mountain mysticism. Mr. Geoffrey Young, for instance, refers to the 'mystical attractions of mountaineering,' to the 'religious fervour' of its first devotees and to the fact that its history, has 'the character and many of the phases of a religious movement' (*Spectator*, September 23, 1949). Mr. Amery describes mountaineering 'as a form of worship as well as a sport . . . a communion with the innermost heart of things.' Even Tyndall's scepticism melted in the presence of the mountains. 'Some people,' he said to Newman Hall, 'give me little credit for religious feeling. I assure you that when I walk here and gaze at these mountains I am filled with adoration.' Tyndall was often regarded as an exponent of scientific materialism but in his 1874 address to the British Association he insisted that 'it was not in hours of clearness or self vigour that this doctrine commends itself to my mind.' On the contrary the doctrines of materialism dissolved 'in the presence of stronger and healthier thought as offering no solution to the mystery in which we dwell.' It

² My own explanation was given in a paper on 'Alpine Mysticism' which was published in the *A.J.* and republished in my book *Mountain Jubilee*.

may well have been the mountains which provided the antidote of 'healthier thought' in which materialism dissolved. Tyndall had too clear an intelligence to believe that a scientist could give a complete explanation of reality in general or of mountain beauty in particular. The materialistic explanation of natural beauty is as complete and as satisfying as would be an explanation of Giotto frescoes in terms of the chemical analysis of the paints employed. Materialism was never supported by a shred of valid evidence and is easily refuted by the methods of science, the mathematical refutation based on the index of dissymmetry in living molecules being perhaps the most satisfactory, a refutation for which we are indebted to Du Noüy.³

If the purely physical analysis of a mountain is as unsatisfying as the purely chemical analysis of a painting, the key to our appreciation of beauty, whether this be the beauty of nature or of art, must be metaphysical. Metaphysics, by definition, is that which is 'beyond physics,' and *Alpine Uplift* is merely the translation of *Alpine Metaphysics* into defence-mechanistic terminology. Mr. Howard is, in effect, initiating a campaign to keep metaphysics out of Alpine literature, or at least to confine it to poetry or to vague mountain essays unrelated to the account of a particular climb. He cannot see why the story of a day among the mountains should be spoiled by what he calls 'sentimental preciousness' or 'sentimentality.' Leslie Stephen defined sentimentality as indulging in sentiment for its own sake, but Mr. Howard makes no attempt to distinguish between the expression of genuine sentiments and in the indulging in sentimentality, and he has no use for the principle *abusus non tollit usum* objecting equally to the 'usus' of Alpine metaphysics and to its 'abusus.'

It may help to clarify the discussion if I submit to Mr. Howard and to you an actual example of what he would call 'Alpine Uplift.' The late F. W. Bourdillon was a poet, and those of you who have read the specimens of mountain prose and poetry from his pen either in their original setting or in the anthology *The Englishman in the Alps* (which incidentally contains the passages from Freshfield and Donald Robertson quoted in this paper) will probably agree with me that Bourdillon like Ruskin wrote far better mountain prose than poetry. Incidentally if Mr. Howard's dogma that mountain uplift should be confined to poetry had been enforced on Ruskin we should have been deprived of his magnificent mountain prose and had to content ourselves with the poetry, the publication of which by his father provoked Ruskin to justifiable fury.

Mr. Bourdillon was a modest unambitious climber who was, so I believe, perfectly happy so long as he was among the mountains. But if Mr. Howard's thesis is to be believed, the famous paper which Bourdillon read to the Club represents the *De Profundis* of frustrated ambition.

Here is an extract from Bourdillon's 'Another Way of Mountain Love' (*A. J.* xxiv):

³ In his book *Human Destiny* (Longmans).

' We have all had our " moments," either on the mountains or perhaps in some distant view of them, when life and joy have assumed new meaning and the world's horizons suddenly broke down and showed us realms of dream beyond and yet beyond. Sometimes it is on the top of some lonely peak, when the world seems at our feet, and the blue dome of space an appreciable thing ; sometimes it is among the hush of snow-fields and glacier-walls, with icy peaks above and moonlit mists below us ; sometimes it is from some lower height, where suddenly a panorama of silver tops breaks on us, or we see the far-distant snow peaks mirrored in sunny lake waters. . . . That is the ideal joy that only mountains can give so that some moment in a smoke-grimed railway carriage, when in the pure morning air the far-off cloud of Mont Blanc suddenly hung above the mists as we rounded the curves beyond Vallorbes, or still fairer, from the slopes of Neuchatel, the whole Bernese range slept dreamlike in the lake at our feet, lives in our memories above a hundred more selfish, more poignant joys ; and we feel that a world that can give such rapture must be a good world, a life capable of such feeling must be worth living.'

The attempt to impose rules and restrictions on those who have seen the vision and who cannot rest until they have tried to communicate what they have seen is to betray a fundamental misconception of the conditions under which imaginative writing is produced, for the Artist, using the word in its most general sense, works in the medium most appropriate to his mood and talent, prose or poetry, oil or water colour, marble or bronze. The moments ' when life and joy have assumed new meanings ' may occur on a mountain top or in ' a smoke-grimed railway,' and there seems to be no logical basis for the doctrine that they may be described if they occur on the plains, but must be suppressed if they occur in the course of a climb.

Mr. Howard's prejudice against the metaphysical emerges in the enthusiasm with which he endorses John Addington Symonds' remark that the ' proper attitude of the soul among the Alps is one of silence,' but Mr. Howard is unlucky in the witnesses he subpoena's for there was nothing reticent about Symonds attitude to the mountains—here is one of many passages of ' uplift ' from his writing :

' The only prospect of obtaining spiritual tone and health seems to be in the discovery of some immaterial altitudes some mountains and temples of God. As I am prostrated and rendered vacant by scepticism, the Alps are my religion. I can rest there and feel, if not God, at least greatness, greatness prior to and posterior to man in time, beyond his thoughts, not of his creation, independant, palpable, immovable, proved. The sense of the Alps was a long time coming to me. Perhaps even now that grander sentiment is on its way.'

Mr. Howard also quotes a remark ' in the matters of the spirit I believe in reticence ' salutary perhaps in the context in which it was

uttered but absurd as a general principle. It was not 'reticence' but the urge to communicate which gave us not only the Psalms, the Fourth Gospel and the *Confessions of St. Augustine* but also those masterpieces of art and literature in which men have tried to communicate their fleeting vision of the things which are beyond the physical. It is indeed precisely this intuition of the universal which informs all particulars that differentiates the supreme artist (in paint or in song) from the near-great. Fra Angelico, for instance, whose *Crucifixion* is a window opening on the Platonic world of timeless beauty from Watts whose *Hope* is a mirror reflecting Victorian sentiment; or Hilaire Belloc's description of the distant Alps from Whymper's description of the view from the Matterhorn.

Mr. Howard refers with approval to Charles Robertson's famous paper on *Alpine Humour* but that paper was a protest against the 'factualism' which Mr. Howard commends, and against the 'rigid acceptance of the scientific rule.' It was not only a negative protest but a positive demand that 'the best pens in the Club' should retell the story of a day among the mountains 'without false shame,' that is without the self-conscious fear of being branded as 'uplifters.' Not until men can say 'what they have found of beauty and delight,' he insisted, shall we have an account of a climb which those who do not climb will accept 'as a worthy vindication of our creed.'

But 'beauty and delight' wither at the cramping touch of Alpine puritanism, a puritanism which would restrict our stories of Alpine adventure to within the narrow limits of the physical and factual.

It is, of course, precisely because mountain literature has never suffered from the sterilising effect of puritanism that it is unique in the literature of sport, unique for its immense range of interests, physical and metaphysical. Men of the most sharply contrasted philosophies have contributed to our corpus of mountain literature. The true mountaineer welcomes with delight the Catholic mysticism of a Hilaire Belloc, the urbane humanism tempered by an unacknowledged mysticism of a Geoffrey Young, the unqualified humanism of a Graham Brown whose admirable Brenva poems are variants on the Sophoclean theme, 'there is nothing more wonderful than man, marvellous indeed is his ingenuity and his skill', and the austere mountain atheism of Llewelyn Powys, Lucretian in its refusal to hope for a friend behind phenomena. There is beauty in Powys' vision of the mountain firs that 'lift up patient heads of endurance in an astral universe without an end or a beginning, in a universe that to the fugitive race of men subject to death must for ever remain incomprehensible.'

Naturally I prefer effective humanism to the mysticism which misfires, the Hermes of Praxiteles for instance to the conventional (and disadorning) statues of the Sacred Heart for which there is such a distressing vogue at the present moment, or, to revert to Alpine literature, Graham Brown's poems to the kind of Alpine religiosity which deserves all that Mr. Howard cares to say about it. But the attempt to banish metaphysics from Alpine literature would, if successful, result

in dire impoverishment. Fortunately the attempt is doomed to fail. It is, for instance, impossible to describe the visible world without unconsciously betraying your attitude to the invisible.

'Something infinite behind everything appeared,' writes Traherne of his youth, 'which talked with my expectation and moved my desire.' To Traherne, as to Wordsworth, the visible beauty of the world was a *promise* of a beauty which time could not corrupt. To the Greek, visible beauty is a fleeting *possession* as ephemeral the beauty of a boy. All the difference between the Greek's appreciation of nature and the mystical interpretation of natural beauty appear in the contrast between Traherne's

'The corn was orient and immortal wheat
which never should be reaped nor was ever sown'

and the Homeric hymn to Earth, the Universal Mother,

'From thee
Fair babes are born and fruits on every tree.'

If I had time, and you will be relieved to hear that I have no more time at my disposal, I would quote passages from Alpine literature representative respectively of the mystical and the classical attitude to nature,⁴ but all that now remains is to point out that the very success of Mr. Howard's paper disproves his main thesis that mountaineers are not interested in what he calls Alpine uplift and what I call Alpine metaphysics. If metaphysics were not more interesting and infinitely more important than physics his discussion of Alpine metaphysics would not have been the outstanding success that it was. I certainly have seldom been more interested by an Alpine Club paper. 'Interested' is the operative word, for I cannot boast the detachment which enables good men, according to Aristotle, to be happy on the wrack or a modest exponent of Alpine Uplift to enjoy without reservation the cheery insouciance with which Geoffrey Howard trod on his most sensitive corns, but if I have been half as successful both in provoking and stimulating Geoffrey Howard, as he was in provoking and stimulating me, this paper will not have been written in vain.

⁴ A sequel to this paper, in which this contrast is developed will be published in this year's *British Ski Year Book*.