

The *Alpine Journal* and its Editors

1. 1863–95

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Six Editors of the *AJ* cover the period given, the *Journal* itself being a continuation of *Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers*, already issued. So much were the *PPG* volumes regarded as virtually part of the *AJ* that when the consolidated index to Vols 1–15 of the *Journal* was issued in 1892, the three vols of *PPG* were included. It is true, there was not a complete continuity of dates, as *PPG* i was issued in 1859; *PPG* ii and iii in 1862, while the first issue of the *AJ* was in March 1863. John Ball edited *PPG* i and E. S. Kennedy the 2nd and 3rd vols; these two men were, respectively, the first two Presidents of the Club.

H. B. George (1838–1910) was the first Editor of the *AJ*, from 1863 to 1867, and responsible for Vols 1–3, the latter not being issued in separate parts (Nos 17–20), but being produced as a single bound volume. The only equal to this has been the Club's Centenary issue (No 295 in 1957), which was printed and bound as a single volume (No 62).

George opened Vol 1 with an Introductory Address, explaining that it had been thought worth making more widely known 'the amount of geographical and other information' annually acquired by members of the AC. Narratives would be written by members of the Club, but it was hoped that by 'Alpine Notes and Queries' to have a very useful portion of the *AJ* open to anyone. Though many great peaks in the Alps had already been climbed, there were still whole areas, such as the Dauphiné, that were very little known, and even some of the more familiar giants awaited conquest, while the Himalaya and other ranges were becoming increasingly accessible.

The Editor had a rich harvest; first ascents of the Bietschhorn, Dent Blanche (from p 36 it would appear that Wigram did not himself actually go to the summit of the latter peak), Dent d'Hérens and Jungfrauoch are but a few outstanding articles. Nor was the old tradition of scientific objectives forgotten; there was a report of a special AC Committee on Ropes and Ice-axes; an echo of earlier discussions on glacial theories, in a note on Lyell's *Antiquity of Man*; accidents and their causes, including specially the death on the Haut de Cry of J. J. Bennen (surely rather an overrated guide?), which was put down to a rope, while William Longman, describing an accident on the Aletsch glacier, draws attention to the remarkable practice of a guide attaching himself to his client by nothing better than a handkerchief held between them!

The indefatigable F. F. Tuckett shows his powers as an explorer of the less-visited areas, such as the Dauphiné, Ortler and Monte Viso regions. Adams Reilly makes a first attempt at a map of the Mont Blanc range.

To describe in detail subsequent volumes would be tedious and unnecessary

but Vol 1 set a fashion that to a large extent was followed. New ascents; exploration as distinct from climbing; equipment, not only in terms of ropes and the development of the ice-axe from the old alpenstock, but problems of camping out (tents, sleeping bags, cooking apparatus, and so on), at a time when huts or cattle sheds might be few and far between, also receive attention. The 'Notes', 'Queries' and 'Summaries of new expeditions' filled in many minor gaps in climbing history.

Not that Vol 2 had not its tales of drama to match anything in its predecessor. Whymper's ascent of the Matterhorn, though relegated to 'Short Narratives', is as graphic as anything he wrote on the subject, being a reprint of his letter to *The Times* in August 1865; and A. W. Moore had a good tale to relate about the Brenva route up Mont Blanc. Leslie Stephen, when writing of the ascent of the Zinal Rothorn, took the opportunity to have a dig at scientists like Tyndall: Stephen exaggerated about his lack of climbing skill as compared with a guide; later in the volume (p 274) he coined the phrase 'easy day for a lady'. In his discussion of 'Alpine Dangers', Stephen dealt with roping, and the guide or guideless question, and claimed that amateurs were not worthy to be ranked with second-class or even third-rate guides.

Both in his 2nd and 3rd vols, H. B. George went well outside the Alps, dealing with the Caucasus as well as the outlying Alpine areas to which Bonney or Tuckett were attracted; and there is a steady move towards still more distant ranges, such as the Himalaya (Kulu, Kashmir and Ladakh).

George must be counted fortunate in the years of his editing, including as they did the 'vintage' years of 1864 and 1865. The *AJ* as he established it had a style that it was long to lose, if indeed it ever completely did so. George himself was a Fellow of New College from 1856 to 1910 and helped to transform it from a small exclusive society of Wykehamists into one of the largest Oxford Colleges. A History tutor, he encouraged writers in the *AJ* to show their interest in the history of the areas they visited. Most of the climbers of his day employed guides, but we need to remember that the latter, by later standards, were often none too competent. The amateurs tended to discover the new routes, leaving the guides to act as executants, and it was hardly before the advent of Alexander Burgener (a dozen years after George's editorship) that new skill and daring among guides began to assert itself.

George was himself a fairly typical AC member of his day; a scholar, a solid rather than a light-hearted writer, he was not involved in any particular quarrels or disputes, such as enlivened some later editorships. Nor had the day arrived when mountain masses were to become increasingly sub-divided until every point or declivity had its name as a peak or a pass.

Leslie Stephen (1832-1904) succeeded George as Editor of Vols 4 and 5 (1868-72). Though he has a more distinguished literary reputation than his predecessor, it cannot be said that these two are of greater interest to readers. No doubt this was due to the greater lack of novelties in the Alps in the way of major first ascents: some articles describe repeat ascents of already-known

routes (Matterhorn, Aiguille Verte). Some outlying regions find mention, such as Stephen's own contribution on the Peaks of Primiero; also, Corsica, Lofoten Isles and Popocatepetl are treated, while W. E. Hall takes us far away to places we now associate with Eric Shipton, round the Straits of Magellan.

Vol 5 introduced a new feature, by printing AC Proceedings, later to become a substantial element in an *AJ*. Whympers writes of Greenland, and also embarks on a controversy with Tyndall about the Matterhorn in 1862. Old scientific friends, such as glacier theory, or the determination of heights, put in an appearance, and one notices some fresh names beginning to obtrude in the records. The old climbers, the Mathews, Kennedys, Moore, Bonney, and Tuckett, are still with us, but now one notes Freshfield coming into the picture, and the first mention of Coolidge.

Vol 6 (1872-4) was the first from the editorial hands of D. W. Freshfield (1845-1934), who held the post till Vol 9 (1880) and whose influence on the *AJ* extended far beyond that date.

Winter climbing had already received passing attention from A. W. Moore in 1866, but Coolidge went in for bigger things when he essayed the Wetterhorn and Jungfrau. A striking contributor to this volume was the famous Richard Burton, on Fernando Po Peak; it is not always remembered that Burton, so much more famous for his explorations towards the source of the Nile, or for his translation of *The Arabian Nights*, was a prospective member of the AC, though he never completed his membership (*Mumm*, Vol ii). It comes as a surprise to find that a mountain so familiar to visitors to Zermatt as the Rothorn had not yet been ascended from that side, though climbed from Zinal as early as 1864. C. T. Dent and G. A. Passingham joined forces for the Zermatt route; Passingham was noted for his liking for ascending his peaks direct from his hotel without sleeping out, and was a tireless exponent of this practice. On the Rothorn there was a trio of guides whose presence, as Dent observes, made success a foregone conclusion: 'Franz Andermatten, tough, compact and weather-beaten; Alexander Burgener, the embodiment of strength, endurance and pluck; Ferdinand Imseng, of activity and perseverance'. They succeeded, but the climb was not the most famous in which Imseng was involved that year (1872), for only a few pages earlier C. Taylor had described the ascent of Monte Rosa from Macugnaga.

In Vol 7 (1874-6) we find the Chamonix Aiguilles coming more into view, with E. R. Whitwell's ascent of the Blaitière, where it was shown that an amateur with guides might nonetheless take over the lead on a difficult pitch. A very early attempt on the Dru is noted on p 66, and the famous row over Middlemore's crossing of the Col des Grandes Jorasses, and the criticisms of Stephen and Freshfield, were opposed by those of Dent, Heathcote, Stogdon and Hinchliff, the President (Raymond Bicknell's later verdict on this col may be compared—*AJ* 33 366).

Probably the most significant matter in Vol 8 (1876-8) was the first guideless ascent of the Matterhorn, by Cust, Colgrove and Cawood. Not only Cust's

own paper read to the Club is printed, but also an anonymous letter to *The Times* that had resulted in some Press denunciation of such ventures. The AC itself praised the expedition, and even so conservative a writer as the Editor voiced a general opinion that any expedition of moderate difficulty could be undertaken by experienced amateurs.

Historically, the most interesting article—a supplement to the volume—was William Longman's sketch of the history of the AC, prefaced by an account of the ascents (largely of Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa and the main Oberland giants) of Alpine peaks before the formation of the Club. This study of the founding of the Club must always rank high as an authority on that topic, which was the subject of an article in the Centenary issue of the *AJ* in 1957 (Vol 62).

Freshfield's final volume (No 9, 1878–80), like its predecessors, covered a wide field. Areas outside the Alps, such as the Rockies, or even Afghanistan, are included. But as regards new developments in purely Alpine climbing, C. T. Dent (who also contributed an article on 'Alpine Climbing—Past, Present, Future') on the first ascent of the Dru, and the advent of A. F. Mummery (Matterhorn by the Zmutt ridge), may fairly take a leading place. Guideless climbing also showed it was developing, in Frederick Gardiner's writings and in Charles Pilkington's account of the ascent of the Meije without guides. Not inappropriately, W. A. B. Coolidge was well in evidence, and he was to take over the editorship from Freshfield.

Douglas Freshfield was a member of the Club for 70 years (Hon Member for the last ten). Scholar and man of means, he devoted himself to geography and mountaineering, the two combining in him in a rare degree. It is difficult, indeed, to say which was the greater; his service to the AC or to the RGS. In the latter body he was Hon Sec from 1881 to 1894; a Gold Medallist (1903), Vice-President 1906–13, and President 1914–17. In the AC, he was, apart from his editorship, Vice-President 1878–80 and President 1893–5. In both bodies he was, all his life, constantly in demand for information and advice; numerous other institutions similarly drew upon him.

Freshfield was never a brilliant climber; it was as a mountain explorer and traveller that he made his mark. The four volumes of his editorship (of which only some highlights have been indicated above) were notable for the wide range of their contents, and anything from the Editor's own pen was always distinguished in style, though by later standards he often seemed ultra-conservative in outlook. To young climbers he may have appeared rather Olympian and aloof, though this was said to be due to a basic shyness: to be introduced to him was like a royal presentation. Yet, if his interest was aroused, he could be unsparing of advice, verbal and written (if you could decipher his handwriting!), and Frank Smythe testified that no one gave him more valuable help when he was preparing for *The Kangchenjunga Adventure*,¹ and that Freshfield's own book, *Round Kangchenjunga* (1903), was the only really accurate one he had found.

¹ C. G. Bruce's parting advice to Smythe on this venture was said to be of a gastronomic nature—'always carry a mincing machine'.

Freshfield's climbing began with an ascent of Snowdon in 1850 and ended with a visit to the Canadian Rockies in 1920. For years he was the *doyen* of British mountaineers, if not indeed of the climbers of the world. It was entirely in keeping with his status as such that, when he was received by his fellow-mountaineer, Pope Pius XI, in the 1920s, formality was promptly laid aside and Freshfield treated as the unique person he had become (*AJ* 51 1).

W. A. B. Coolidge (1850–1926), who was to become a legend in his lifetime, was Editor of five volumes of the *AJ*, from 1880 to 1889. He devoted himself to the study of the literature, old and new, connected with Alpine history and topography and Switzerland in general. His own climbing was concentrated largely on detailed exploration and recording of unclimbed or little visited peaks, especially in the less popular areas such as the Dauphiné and Cottian Alps. Not that he disdained the greater centres, such as the Oberland, and he kept his ear very close to the ground for any news of fresh or unusual climbs, whether by members of the AC or not.

Theoretically, this should have made him an ideal Editor, nor can it be denied that his volumes are replete with information of all sorts. Though outside the Alps Coolidge's interest was more perfunctory, the years of his editorship were notable for many expeditions in more distant ranges. Whymper's expeditions in Ecuador occupy a large amount of space in Vol 10, and the steady advance of mountaineering in the Caucasus, or Sikkim or New Zealand, finds place under Coolidge. *In Memoriam* notices to dead climbers, including guides, if not quite new, were considerably developed by Coolidge. The future prospects of the AC were discussed in more than one volume, by C. E. Mathews, Bonney, Dent and Martin Conway. Since Coolidge and George Yeld were showing how much there was still to be done in the less-frequented parts of the Alps, there was good reason for Conway's opinion that the Alps were far from exhausted, and there remained 'multitudes of new combinations of the greatest future utility' to be accomplished.

Freshfield, now Hon Sec of the RGS, was a great standby for Coolidge and wrote lengthily and variously on numerous topics, such as the Caucasus (which he knew), or Mount Everest (which he did not), or about Hannibal's route over the Alps, if he chose to delve into history. Technical topics, such as breathing at high altitudes; the value or not of alcohol as a stimulant in climbing; or the way to prevent snow burning or blistering, also found their place. So too did concern for the increasing death roll in the Alps. Illustrations, also, were becoming common.

Since a biography of Coolidge has been written by Ronald Clark, *An Eccentric in the Alps*, it is needless to go into great detail about this formidable Editor. What are principally remembered of him today are his quarrels; it was wittily said of Coolidge that he could do anything with a hatchet except bury it; he seems to have enjoyed having feuds, and his correspondence is ever a source of exasperating amusement to readers. He never pulled his punches, and though he seems occasionally to have refrained from doing battle with others (Tuckett, for example), his notion of even mild criticism is shown in his remark once to

Freshfield (who thoroughly enjoyed it)—‘it is notorious, my dear friend, that your accounts of your climbs are *frightfully vague*’. As Freshfield put it in his own obituary notice on Coolidge (*AJ* 38 285), like one of the characters in *The Mikado*, ‘his taste exact for faultless fact amounts to a disease’. Unfortunately, the facts had to be as Coolidge interpreted them, and though always prepared to advance reasons for his opinions, his views were all too apt to be biased by his like or (more usually) his dislike of a person.

Of more importance, perhaps, is a glance at a schedule of *Notes* regarding the *AJ*, compiled by Coolidge, and now in AC Archives, Vol B9. These run to nineteen separate items, a number of which can be ignored (names of printer, or publisher; dates of publication, and so forth). Coolidge seems to have wished to standardise *AJ* methods by having these *Notes* passed on from Editor to Editor.

Coolidge’s dependence upon Freshfield for help is indicated in several notes, and he considers carefully the position of the Editor *vis-à-vis* the AC Committee. He observes that the Editor is nominated by the Committee and there is no confirmation needed at a General Meeting: the Editor has not of right a seat on the Committee, but in practice is usually elected an Extra Member. He holds office indefinitely at the will of the Committee. He can revise or correct manuscripts and proofs at his good will (save perhaps ‘Proceedings of the Club’, to which later reference is made). The Editor’s correspondence is very considerable and he learns to avoid being too long-winded. He must keep up with Editors abroad (mostly Coolidge thinks in terms of European clubs) and there are some useful foreign correspondents. ‘The privileges of the Editor are few and the annoyances many’.

Obituaries (then as now) are judged one of the most difficult parts of the work. Accidents are usually collected into a separate section; as they often have to be gathered from newspapers, comments on accidents need to be made with care.

The most troublesome section of the *AJ* is ‘New Expeditions; Coolidge found that it was necessary to enforce strictly precise topographical details; picturesque details can be reserved for full papers. The section is one for reference, not mere reading.

A note by A. J. Butler, Coolidge’s successor, says he has now lumped most ‘New Expeditions’ with ‘Alpine Notes’, to save the labour of verifying the novelty of a route, many of which he thinks are unimportant and not worth separate treatment. Coolidge himself had regarded ‘Alpine Notes’ as a section for odds and ends (such as huts) and miscellaneous gleanings from journals, and not so much for routes.

Reviews and notices of books had been largely created by Coolidge and resulted in many more books being sent to the AC. Coolidge lists all the main reviewers he employed, according to the countries or mountain ranges in which they were particularly interested. Coolidge himself did a good deal and handled most of the foreign journals.

'Proceedings of the AC' is specially dealt with. Over this Coolidge had a row with W. E. Davidson, the Honorary Secretary. The latter used to send in a record of Club proceedings, and claimed that the Editor was not entitled to amend them. Coolidge in his note (No 16) refers sourly to this matter, although in fact he rather than Davidson (who resigned the Secretaryship in 1885 in dudgeon) was supported by the Club Committee. For Coolidge to find any sort of grievance here was quite needless.

Of particular interest is note No 19, Coolidge's last, in which he lists 'Contributors who require *tender* handling'. The names include F. T. Wethered, A. Cust, C. D. Cunningham, C. T. Dent, J. O. Maund, J. W. Hartley, W. E. Davidson, E. T. Compton and C. E. Mathews. A pencil note in A. J. Butler's hand adds:

'*Very tender*—W. A. B. Coolidge! For goodness sake do not say I passed this on'.

All these hints from Coolidge are endorsed:

Passed on by A. J. B(utler) Nov 1893. —
 Recd. by G. Y(eld) Dec '95.
 Recd. E. L. S(trutt) 1/1/27.

A. J. Butler (1844–1910), Editor of Vols 15 and 16, was a man of varied attainments. Examiner in the Government Education Dept, Publisher (Rivingtons, Longmans and Cassell); Editor of State Papers in the PRO and Professor of Italian in the University of London. He was a noted Dante scholar. His mountaineering career was spread over some 40 years, but he seems to have avoided the popular climbing centres. His editorship of the *AJ* covered the years 1890–3, and the main points of interest therein were accounts of non-Alpine climbing, including Haskett-Smith on Cumberland, thus marking a revival of interest in British climbing. The Caucasus bulk quite large also, with the death of Donkin and Fox as the most dramatic event there. Martin Conway on the Karakoram, and C. G. Bruce on the Hindu Kush emphasised the growing interest in these great mountain regions; still further east, Walter Weston drew attention to the Japanese Alps. Among Alpine papers one may note Mummery's classic on the Charmoz and Grépon, and Ellis Carr's 'Two Days on an Ice-Slope'; Conway wrote a controversial paper on 'Centrists and Excentrists', to which J. H. Wicks (one of the famous guideless brotherhood of Wicks–Wilson–Bradby and others) made rejoinder. The steady growth of the Conway–Coolidge guide books to the Alps is noticeable.

Martin Conway (1856–1937) is the last of our Editors in this period, and for one volume only (No 17, 1894–5). So short-lived an editorship could hardly leave much mark on the *Journal*: it maintained the standard but did not add anything very new.

Conway was a man of mixed character and achievements. He was written up in the *AJ* obituary notices (Vol 49) with considerable fervour, though Claude Wilson, the main contributor, hints at qualities not exactly endearing. The

later (1966) study, from the skilled pen of Miss Joan Evans (see *AJ* 72 345) produces a reaction. Fortunately, one can say that in mountaineering Conway showed at his best; if not an eminent technical climber, he was a fast goer and at heart not so much a mountain climber as a mountain explorer. He rendered valuable service to Alpine climbing by his *Zermatt Pocket Book* (1881), the forerunner of the Conway-Coolidge *Climbers' Guides*, which have fathered a large family of increasingly detailed mountain guide-books. Conway's Karakoram expedition in 1892 was useful in making the mountains of India familiar to European climbers as no one before had done. Andes, Tierra del Fuego, Spitsbergen illustrate his versatility, as indeed had his climbing in the Alps, where he was a vigorous exponent of Ex-centricity—i.e. of not sticking to one area, but moving on to various other regions if weather or circumstances made it desirable. As a mountain topographer he has left his mark on Alpine maps, for such well-known peaks as the Wellenkuppe, Lenzspitze or Dent du Requin, owe their names to him. When he laid down his editorial pen to George Yeld, he was to leave the *AJ* to the longest period of editorship (though a shared one) that the *Journal* has enjoyed.