

## REVIEWS

*Norway, the Northern Playground.* By W. Cecil Slingsby, with a biographical notice by Geoffrey Winthrop Young. Basil Blackwell (Mountaineering Library), Oxford, 1941. Price 7s. 6d. net.

SLINGSBY'S *Norway* of 1903, edited by Slingsby's daughter and introduced by his son-in-law and our President. A reverent reviewer is needed. I am reviewing because the Editor asked me to, and because I could not resist the chance of thinking and writing about Slingsby, not because my opinions about Norway are based on much knowledge or are worth much consideration. I have only had one short season there in my life on Slingsby's high tracks, and one earlier low level visit that introduced me to some of his bases; and I have never seen Skagastölstind or been north of Trondhjem. Worse still for me—the editor's need to condense the book into about half the length of the original has led, quite properly, to the cutting out of the single district, Söndmöre, in which I did once follow the pathfinder, and so of his—and my—back-side route up what he called 'the most beautiful mountain in Norway,' Slogen. It is a gully route made and repeated in what I have heard the President call 'the great gully age.'

However, I have pored over so many of Howard Priestman's photographs that I can fancy that I have climbed Skagastölstind, and even that terrible peak Stedtind, almost as easily as King George IV. could fancy that he had fought at Waterloo.

One story of Priestman's may be added to the Slingsby saga that Slingsby began, with his joy in the fight and the world, his directness and unselfconsciousness, which the President has carried on with warm affection and more art. When an Englishman in the old days wandered into an obscure Norwegian valley—and Priestman had been in many—the people would say 'Are you Slingsby?' and would be sadly disappointed when you were not.

'The best beloved of all mountaineers,' the President writes. However slightly you knew Slingsby, however seldom you heard his happy bubbling speeches, however little susceptible you might be to love at first sight, you loved him from the start. And I am as proud as a small boy who has collected the autograph of some athletic idol to remember that his seventeenth-century signature is on my nomination paper to the Club. It must be on very many others. He wrote me one of his delightful notes and congratulated me on having so many cols on my list and not the Matterhorn. I mention this because it adds a little line to the picture of him.

For the whole portrait go to the President's notice and the book. Not necessarily first to the great new ascents, not even first to the solitary finish of the conquest of Skagastölstind, though no one can omit that. I rather think that the man and the mountaineer stand out most complete—fearless, joyful, with the seeing eye and the splendid visual memory—in two chapters, one of which is not about mountaineering in the narrow sense, Chapter X, 'Round the Horungtinder

in Winter,' and Chapter XI on routes made among the snowfields and icefalls of the Justedalsbrae. The fight in Chapter X down the precipitous snowy gorge, and by the pillars of frozen fosses many hundreds of feet high, is a magnificent story. In Chapter XI you can read how he perfected his snowcraft and icemanship. If ever I see again those majestic Justedalsbrae falls—I first saw them nearly fifty years ago when in my ignorance I could not conceive that any man could make a way through their thousands of feet of tumbled ice—they will be haunted, like a certain ice slope in the Alps, by 'the swing of Slingsby's axe,' the axe made for him in his home at Carlton in Craven.

Presumably a reviewer must show his critical faculty. The condensation for the reissue was inevitable. The inclusion of the *A. J.* article on Arctic Norway is judicious. But the maps! The fault of costs and publishers no doubt. The reference in the original Preface to 'the excellent maps which so much enhance the value of the book' has been retained, perhaps as a memorial to Priestman whom Slingsby thanked for them; but it has been impossible to retain the maps themselves. The reproduction of the Jotunheim map—the only one—is not too clear, and the sketch map of Norway does not tell you even where, for instance, Söndmöre and the Lyngenfjord are. That said, as part of the duty of the conventional reviewer, I return to thank Slingsby's daughter and son-in-law for bringing me again into his company in these bad times, times which would have hurt him more than most. But we know how he would have met them.

J. H. CLAPHAM.

*Mountaineering.* By T. A. H. Peacocke. Pp. 212, with 13 illustrations and 16 line drawings. Adam and Charles Black, London, 1941. Price 5s. net.

THE publishers rightly claim for Mr. Peacocke's book that it is a 'concise and very comprehensive introduction' to mountaineering, though I doubt whether many will agree that it is of very great value to 'even the most advanced climber.' Books on mountaineering technique are often the province of seasoned veterans who generously endow the rising generation of climbers with the legacy of their hard won knowledge and experience. Mr. Peacocke is a young and active climber at the height of his career. The latest practices and equipment all find mention in his book: 'souliers Vibram,' rope-sling and *Karabiner* belays and rappels, mechanical aids to safety, Charlet's method of roping down over bergschrunds, the direct assault of ice slopes in crampons without steps and with pitons, and the Bilgeri and Prusik knot methods for escaping from crevasses.

In his introduction Mr. Peacocke acknowledges his debt to the President of our Club for *Mountain Craft*, but he draws the greater part of his subject matter from his own experience. He brings the right emphasis to bear on all the essential features of our sport, and has done a great service by bringing British cragsmanship into its

correct relation with mountaineering as a whole. His style is easy and conversational; in fact, at times he errs on the side of oversimplification and sketchiness, and his approach to the æsthetic and philosophical aspects of climbing is often superficial. No reviewer could resist the temptation to pick out one or two lapses which in places may mislead the reader in matters of detail. To quote examples, Geology: 'These rougher (granite) rocks are called conglomerates by the geologist because they have at least two independent substances which make up their composition'; 'Scree: small stones similar to shale.' (This latter quotation is taken from a glossary of terms at the end of the book, which might well have been omitted as most of them are explained in their context.) Glaciology: 'The stones (dragged off the rock over which the glacier moves) collect underneath, are finally brought to the surface and form the lateral moraines.' Sunburn: 'By far the best protection is Pomade Sechée (*sic*) which is coloured pink and so absorbs the ultra-violet rays which do the damage.'

The chapters on rock climbing, snow and ice technique, mountaineering in winter, and weather are the best. Professor Finch's method of direct assault on snow and ice slopes is advocated against the traditional zigzag technique. In cutting steps downhill, emphasis is laid on the importance of moving the inside foot down first, but in the illustrative line drawing it will be seen that after this has been done, the climber will have to stand on one foot to cut the next step. Surely it would be safer to cut *two* steps before moving down?

On the question of food, as on all matters, Mr. Peacocke is essentially practical, rational and scientific. After an interesting discussion on calories, food values and vitamins, he describes a soup, the recipe of a 'famous climber,' concocted of Maggi, chopped onion, bully beef, condensed milk, lemon and cheese! I remember Professor Finch once describing how he developed incipient scurvy during a long absence from the amenities of hotel civilisation, but in 99 per cent. of cases I do not think that the Alpine climber need concern himself with the vitamin content of his foods. For expedition work I can recommend Multivite pellets (British Drug Houses, Ltd.). The table of comparative food values of various mountaineering foodstuffs on p. 204 is invaluable, and it would have been more helpful if more importance had been attached to porridge, oatcake, wheatcake, Ovaltine, Bournvita, lentils, rice and fruitcake.

The photographs are more functional than artistic, though those on Tryfan and the Brenva ridge are admirable. But surely the leader on the Gambit (p. 26) should have brought his second to the belay before continuing, and does not the technique of the rock climber on Srona Ciche (p. 41) leave much to be desired?

Mr. Peacocke has written a most readable and practical book which brings out all the essentials, and I would not fail to put a copy into the hands of a young British cragsman who was contemplating taking his first season in the Alps.

J. R. JENKINS.

*Five Miles High.* Edited by Robert H. Bates. Pp. 319, illustrations, maps. Robert Hale Ltd., London, 1940. Price 15s. net.

THE first purely American expedition to visit the Himalaya set out in 1938 for the Karakoram under the leadership of Charlie Houston with the avowed intention of prospecting K<sub>2</sub> for future attack, but in actual fact it made a magnificent attempt to reach the summit. The W. ridge was forbidden by the presence of steep ice on the slope to the Savoia Pass, and inspection of the N.E. ridge did not suggest its practicability as a climbing route. The party therefore decided to make its attack by the S. arête which had been attempted by the Duke of the Abruzzi in 1909. The route was not without its dangers from stonefall, but determined, and in places difficult, climbing eventually established the leading pair, Charlie Houston and Paul Petzoldt, in their highest camp at 24,700 ft. For so small a party to have established a camp at this height on such a ridge will always rank as one of the greatest feats of Himalayan climbing, and it must have been with bitter regret that they had to decide to retreat in view of the state of their provisioning against approaching bad weather which might be prolonged. But before retreat was commenced, Houston and Petzoldt made a higher exploration, when Petzoldt reached a height of about 26,000 ft. and found a possible site for a final camp. That, in a few words, is the story of one of the most successful Himalayan ventures, even although the mountain was not conquered, and this book, in which the members of the party collaborate, gives, in a quiet but curiously vivid manner, the narrative of what must have been a very happy expedition. It may be that present circumstances give an additional attractiveness to books of adventure, but when the present reviewer laid this story down, it was some little time before 'today' was able to reassert itself in thought. The book is excellently illustrated and has adequate maps; it deserves to rank in the highest class of its kind.

T. GRAHAM BROWN.

*The New Zealand Alpine Journal.* Jubilee Number, June, 1941.

'ALL members of the Alpine Club will wish prosperity to our hopeful offshoot.' So the Alpine Club received the news of the arrival of her first daughter,<sup>1</sup> but like a good many mothers she was not quite sure what to do with it, nor was she sure how it would grow up. For it was a precocious infant. Ought it to be kept strapped to a team of guides and walk in a crocodile like a well behaved young lady? In those days many opposed guideless climbing in any form. Instead of that some young men, inspired by the visit of the Rev. W. S. Green<sup>2</sup> with the guides Boss and Kaufmann and by their attempts on Mt. Cook, determined to try for themselves. There were no guides and no one with knowledge of snow and ice work, though some surveyors endeavouring to find an icefree route for stock across the Alps had pene-

<sup>1</sup> *A.J.* 15. 558.

<sup>2</sup> *A.J.* 11. 1, 57, 129 (consecutive articles); 428, review of *The High Alps of New Zealand*.

trated into the glaciers. There were no books on climbing apart from two pages in *Hints to Alpine Travellers*, so they had to read accounts of climbs and learn what they could. How they set to work and how nearly they succeeded is told in Mannering's *With Axe and Rope in the New Zealand Alps* (1886-90). In 1894 a New Zealand party made the first ascent of Mt. Cook<sup>3</sup> by a route from the other side (Hooker Glacier). They were by no means slavish followers of the past, for in 1893 they were using homemade ski to cross the soft snow of the Plateau on the Tasman side of Cook. This must have been almost the earliest use of ski in the High Alps. In 1889 A. P. Harper, who had had two seasons in Switzerland, joined them. In 1893 he joined C. E. Douglas, who was exploring and surveying the West Coast valleys and glaciers. His book *Pioneer Work in the Alps of New Zealand* gives an account of the difficulty of getting to the glaciers from the west, difficulties which still, with few exceptions, are much the same.

In 1891 the N.Z.A.C. came into existence, and alone of the daughter clubs requires a qualification, though she has Associate Members. Once the bugbear of Mt. Cook had been disposed of, the next few years saw many first ascents and expeditions to other parts of the chain. For the New Zealand Alps are 200 miles long. Then for one reason or another the original climbers were scattered and the club became dormant. In 1914 it was revived and then the war held things up. In 1921 the Journal reappeared and the club is very much alive. Motor transport and the bridging of many of the rivers have reduced the time factor in getting to the mountains, a very important point for those who can get only a fortnight. Within the last fifteen years Tramping clubs have been formed in all centres within reach of the Alps. As in most cases members of the N.Z.A.C. had a good deal to do with their early days, perhaps the A.C. is now a grandmother! They together with the N.Z.A.C. have been opening up Alpine valleys by the erection of huts; if they began by tramping on the foothills, they soon tramped to the glaciers and then on the glaciers, and are doing good work. There is room for both and they are all federated to protect the rights of climbers in the Alps. They with the N.Z.A.C. hold schools of instruction, and climbing is in a very healthy state. To the visits of H. E. L. Porter they owe the introduction of modern technique. Also a word must be said for the guides J. Clark and the Grahams, who in the 'dark days' kept and handed on a fine tradition. Mannering and Harper are still alive and active in spite of their years, and both are Honorary Members of the A.C. If the A.C. was, officially, a little anxious about her firstborn when she appeared, she is indeed proud of her now and congratulates her wholeheartedly on her Jubilee. If fifty years seem suggestive of 'middle age,' a club that finds it necessary to publish articles on bushcraft and the use of the rope in fording rivers still retains its youthful vigour and that carefree disregard of discomfort which will keep it from becoming middle aged.

H. E. NEWTON.

<sup>3</sup> *N.Z.A.J.* vol. ii, pp. 29 *sqq.*