

WHYMPER AND MUMMERY

By T. S. BLAKENEY, Assistant Librarian.

THE Alpine Club has received from Mr. Roger Ellis, of the Public Record Office, an interesting acquisition in the form of Whymper's own copy of Mummery's *My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus* (Second Edition, 4th impression, published by T. Fisher Unwin in 1908). The book was sent to Whymper for review, and the MS. of the review (published in *The Sphere*, January 30, 1909, p. 110) is with the book. In addition, Whymper embellished the volume with MS. notes expressing his views on Mummery.

The volume was bought later by Francis Newman Ellis (see *A. J.* 47. 133), the grandfather of the donor of this valuable gift to the Club Library.

It is needless to list all the marginalia in the volume, but two are worth quoting, as giving a key to Whymper's outlook. On page xvii of J. A. Hobson's 'Appreciation,' against the statement that Mummery had a disposition for seeking difficulties for the joy of overcoming them, Whymper makes the comment: 'In an ordinary life there are quite sufficient difficulties without seeking more.' On page xxv, where Mrs. Mummery quotes D. W. Freshfield's tribute in the Alpine Club on December 16, 1895 (*A. J.* 18. 2), ending with the words (which Whymper underlines), 'His untimely death is a grievous loss to the Club,' there is a single, pungent entry: 'I do not agree.'

We are thus prepared for a distinctly original review, nor are we disappointed. Since this has been published in *The Sphere*, it is unnecessary to reproduce it again; but some of its more striking phrases may be noted. Whymper opens by calling it a 'vicious' book and prophesies that it will sell well: those who read it, he thinks, will benefit from it. This apparent inconsistency would seem, from the later comments, to mean that readers will benefit by noting what not to do, in much the same fashion as Sherlock Holmes told Watson that he had sometimes been helped by the latter's deductions, and, when it became necessary to be more explicit, explained that what he meant was that, by noting Watson's fallacies, he was occasionally guided towards the truth.

Whymper's prejudice against Mummery rather interfered with his powers as a reviewer. He considered that because Llewellyn Davies had made no 'fuss' over the first ascent of the Täschhorn, there was no need for the account of the Teufelsgrat. A memorandum pasted inside the volume shows that in the event of any remarks being called forth by his *Sphere* review, Whymper intended to try and belittle Mummery by quoting 'my times across the Col Dolent against his across the Col des Courtes, and my times on the Aig. Verte against his times.' No

allowance is made for comparative standards of difficulty or for the possible advantages of a guided against a guideless party.

The review ends with the reiteration that, though the book is vicious, it will do no harm if Mummery's fate is remembered. Then follows a passage a little surprising even in days of more trenchant reviewing than we are apt to see today, when one remembers that Mrs. Mummery was alive to read it. Whympers proceeds to speculate on the condition Mummery's body is likely to be in, should traces of it ever be discovered below Nanga Parbat. 'It will be,' he says, 'in the shape of a dislocated skeleton, one bone here and another there, scattered over a considerable area. The stomach and heart will be nowhere.'

He concludes the review by postulating that, in certain important matters, Mummery was insane!

It is probable that, in allowing himself to dwell on the gruesome details likely to be attendant on Mummery's death, Whympers was drawing upon his own recollections of the condition of his companions killed on the Matterhorn in 1865. In *Scrambles* (edition Tyndale, page 327), he merely says that as they came in sight of the scene of death 'we saw one weather-beaten man after another raise the telescope, turn deadly pale, and pass it on without a word to the next. . . .'¹ But in a letter dated May 20, 1911, to Sir Edward Davidson, Whympers writes in greater detail:—

. . . 'When we recovered the remains of this grand man [Croze] he was, like the others, completely smashed. All were naked and it was difficult to distinguish one from another. I could only identify Croze by his beard. Part of the lower jaw remained, but the upper part of the head had disappeared.'

Whympers's point is clear enough; Mummery is held up as an awful example of what will befall a rash climber; his imitators may expect to meet the same sort of end.

¹ See also, 'Edward Whympers,' by F. S. Smythe, p. 199.