

ALPINE CLUB CENTENARY MEET IN ZERMATT

I. THE DINNER

BY T. A. H. PEACOCKE

THE Alpine Club Centenary Meet at Zermatt started with an official dinner at the Monte Rosa Hotel on August 19, 1957. Eighty-five members were present, twenty-six official guests and six members' guests. The following official guests were present: Herr Staatsrat Dr. O. Schnyder, Herr Dr. Theo Biner, Herr Dr. Franz Seiler, The Rt. Rev. the Lord Bishop of Leicester, Hochw. Pfarrer Gregor Brantschen, M. Egmond d'Arcis, Herr Karl Weber, Dr. W. Rütymeyer, Herr Schneller, Herr Eggler, Prof. Ed. Pidoux, Dr. M. Oechslin, Dr. W. Kämpfen, Herr Tichelli, Herr Alfred Sutter, Herr Bernard Seiler, Herr Dipl. Ing. Alex Perrig, Herr Gottlieb Perren, Herr Bernard Biner, Herr Theo Welschen, Herr Joseph Knubel, Herr Ernst Feuz, Herr Winterhalter, Herr Luchsinger, Herr F. Rufenacht, Herr Medard Julen. General Henri Guisan and Herr Christian Rubi were prevented from attending at the last minute. Among the members' private guests special mention should be made of Dr. Wyss-Dunant, leader of the first Swiss Everest expedition. The presence of a large number of members from overseas and from Continental countries was a particular pleasure to the British members.

The proceedings started with an *apéritif* of Cordon Rouge in the Matterhorn Stube of the Mont Cervin Hotel, where the members and guests were formally received by the President and the two Vice-Presidents at 6.30 p.m.

At 7.10 p.m. the party set out for the Monte Rosa Hotel, conducted by the Zermatt band, who subsequently played outside the hotel during the first part of the dinner.

The dining room of the Monte Rosa had been specially arranged for the occasion with one long table stretching the full length and seven short tables at right angles to it. It was only by this arrangement that so many could be accommodated in this room. The decoration had been done with great care and the result was perfect. Swiss flags and Union Jacks adorned the wall opposite to the main table. Wild flowers were arranged in a pattern at intervals along all the tables and a great vase of flowers stood on one side. Grace was said by the Rt. Rev. the Lord Bishop of Leicester.

The Menu

Régal du Valais

 Tassette de consommé

 Selle de veau de notre élevage
 Berggut zum ' Schalli '

 Jardinière de légumes
 Pommes parisiennes

 Vacherin glacé Jubilé
 Friandises

The dinner was quite first-class and it was served on such a liberal scale that few members could do full justice to it. The wines were well chosen : Fendant pétillant, Les Murettes, was served with the hors d'oeuvre and soup ; Dôle, Clos du Château, with the main course ; Riesling with the sweet ; and Mont d'Or as a finale.

A one-metre-high relief model of the Matterhorn, coated with chocolate and sugar, and with the Hörnli hut made of solid chocolate, was brought in and placed before the President with the sweet. It remained in the dining room for the next fortnight. This was followed by the Zermatt choir, who sang beautifully to us for ten minutes.

Next followed the speeches. The loyal toasts to the President of the Swiss Confederation and to Her Majesty The Queen were proposed by the President and Herr Alfred Zürcher respectively. Then the President invited the Honorary Secretary to read out some congratulatory telegrams which had been received. After the telegrams, Herr Alfred Zürcher proposed the toast of the Alpine Club. He spoke in English and stressed the value of tradition and finished by saying that he hoped the younger members would strive to maintain the traditions and character of the Alpine Club. He was warmly applauded for his well-phrased speech. He was followed by Dr. O. Schnyder, who spoke in German, and who felicitated the Club for its leading part both for setting and maintaining a standard of ideals and for its achievements.

The President replied to these speeches in which he expressed his gratitude to all concerned for the success of the evening and said how touched he was by the warmth of feeling shown by everyone in Zermatt. He finished by saying, ' Last year while staying in a hotel in the Bernese Oberland I saw a notice translated into English which read as follows : " Visitors are earnestly recommended not to promenade the couloirs in boots of the ascension before the hour of 6 of the morning ". May I exhort all members of this Club to ignore such notices ! ' He hoped that many fine climbs would be made before the end of the Meet.

The President was followed by Dr. Franz Seiler, who made a remarkable speech in English, remarkable not only for what he said but for the way he said it; it came from the bottom of his heart. The text of Dr. Seiler's speech is printed below.

After these official speeches there were a number of others. Dr. Theo Biner, seated on the President's left, expressed a warm welcome on behalf of the Gemeinde of Zermatt and presented a handsome framed oil-painting of the Matterhorn. Next M. Egmond d'Arcis spoke on behalf of the World Association of Climbing Clubs, of which he is the President, and presented an attractive framed print of Zermatt and the Matterhorn. Then Dr. W. Rütymeyer made an excellent speech in German on behalf of the Swiss Alpine Club, of which he is Vice-President. Lastly, Herr Tichelli spoke on behalf of the Monte Rosa section of the Swiss Alpine Club and presented a large pewter wine jug, suitably engraved.

The President made a short final speech of thanks, in fluent French and German, for the presents which he had received on behalf of the Club. He then declared the proceedings at an end, the time being 11.30 p.m. However, a number of members and guests, feeling that the night was yet young, adjourned to the bars of the Mont Cervin and other hostelries and did not depart to their beds before 2 a.m.

In conclusion it should be stated that the cost of the evening per head to members was only 10 frs. This did not even cover the cost of the dinner, and all wines, cigars and entertainment were provided free. We feel most deeply grateful to all concerned.

II. THE MEET

BY E. BENTLEY BEAUMAN

ON the next day [after the dinner] there was another most successful event, this time in the open air: a raclette party up at the Riffelalp. Two train-loads of members and their friends, and a number of the more energetic on foot, made their way up to the hotel there, so well known to climbers. On the slopes in front of it they were received by Dr. Franz Seiler and his sister, Frau Tschokke. Here a large and cheerful gathering enjoyed a picnic lunch in bright sunshine, with the big mountains all around looking their best. And it was with considerable reluctance that early in the afternoon the climbers tore themselves away from such pleasures to start their plug up to the huts for the next day's ascents.

On Sunday, the 25th, the little English Church was full for the Commemoration Service held by the Rt. Rev. R. Williams, the Bishop of Leicester, who has always shown a great interest in the Club. In his opening remarks he said it was doubtful whether the Church would be

as full again for another 100 years! The text of his sermon is reproduced below.

After the Service the last formal function was held in the Seiler tea gardens. Here the Monte Rosa section of the Swiss Alpine Club, under their President, our member, Dr. von Tscharner, entertained members and their friends to an *apéritif*, which turned out to be a choice of several excellent wines of the Valais.

Before this there had been a tour of the small Alpine Museum, which is fortunately not being dispersed as was thought possible at one time, but is shortly being moved to another site to make way for some new buildings.

This Museum, which must surely be unique, was full of interest to the mountaineers present. There is, for instance, an ice-axe of Whymper's with the inscription on it: 'When I have used this piolet, I have always succeeded.' Another exhibit is the thin line which broke during the tragic first ascent of the Matterhorn in 1865. There, too, is evidence of a recent break—the fixed rope on the Italian ridge which parted and caused the death of the well-known Zermatt guide, Otto Furrer. Other relics even more macabre include the waistcoat of Mr. Gabbett, who in 1882 fell with his two guides 3,000 ft. from the Dent Blanche. The hat and crampons of a well-known member, the late F. S. Smythe, are also shown.

But once out in the sunshine and among the green trees again these old tragedies were forgotten and the morning ended with many regrets that the last of these most enjoyable functions was over.

One important local event coincided with the Centenary Meet: the opening of the cable-railway to the Schwarzsee. It is now possible to reach that historic spot in about 20 minutes from the village, instead of the previous two and a half hours' hard foot-slog up the steep zig-zags. Incidentally the ancient Schwarzsee Hotel was completely destroyed by fire later in the year. Perhaps a new ski 'palace' will soon rise in its place? How the Victorian mountaineers must be turning in their graves at the thought of such changes! It was very pleasant to see such a large number of American members at the Meet. Most of them had travelled great distances to pay tribute to the occasion. (I was told that on the way over the first airborne meeting of the American Alpine Club was held at a height of 23,000 ft.) Many climbers from other countries were there too—from Switzerland, France and Italy for example, and everyone was pleased to welcome our Centenary Vice-Presidents: Herr Alfred Zürcher and Count Aldo Bonacossa. The most significant impression carried away from this highly successful Meet was how much the Club seems to have mellowed during the second half of its century. No longer at the Monte Rosa Hotel is there a special table reserved solely for the use of members of the A.C., although this old tradition lasted almost

until the Second World War. Gone, too, are the days when some of the senior members waited for a formal introduction to their juniors before speaking to them. Everyone from the most newly-joined member to the President was at his friendliest, both on and off the mountains.

May the next Centenary Meet be as distinguished.

APPENDIX I

(Speech by Dr. Franz Seiler on the occasion of the Alpine Club Centenary Meet at the Hotel Monte Rosa, Zermatt, August 19, 1957.)

It is with a thankful heart that I associate the Seiler family and myself with all well-wishers to the Alpine Club on its Centenary.

Two years have passed since in this same room we celebrated two Centenaries, the Centenary of the first ascent of Monte Rosa by British amateurs and Swiss guides and the Centenary of the opening of the Monte Rosa Hotel by my grandfather. It was very significant that these Centenaries should coincide, thus symbolising in a way the link between the Monte Rosa Hotel and the Alpine Club. You will all remember the nice things which Whymper wrote about my grandfather, and Whymper did not always write nice things about everybody. Today the Seiler family is represented by my cousin and friend, Alexander Perrig, whose mother was one of the many daughters of my grandfather, and by myself—the third generation—and by my nephew Bernard Seiler, now general manager of our Zermatt businesses—the fourth generation. We have very much at heart to continue and foster the friendship shown by the A.C. to our family for the last 100 years. I count this reciprocal friendship, which is essentially rooted in human affection and affinity, among the happiest experiences we have reaped in the course of the history of our enterprise.

We are very proud of the fact that you have chosen Zermatt and our dear old unchanged Monte Rosa Hotel for your Continental celebration of your Centenary and we believe that in your choice you have been influenced by sentiments such as those expressed by my friend Sir Arnold Lunn in his book *Zermatt and the Valais*, in which he writes :

‘To mountaineers of my generation the Monte Rosa Hotel is not only a hotel but a shrine, a temple of the A.C. consecrated by immortal memories.’

Those who were present two years ago will never forget the address given by an ex-President of your Club, Mr. Leo Amery. He spoke about his memories of the Vispertal and all that mountains had meant to him, and he did it with such wonderful simplicity, lucidity, noble wisdom and warmth of heart as can only come from a truly great mind. Echoes of that unforgettable speech still haunt this hall and I thank God that I had the privilege of enjoying the friendship of so great a man.

Somehow I could not help feeling that the qualities for which your Club stands found expression, too, in Mr. Amery's political life. It would not perhaps be a bad thing if men who had proved themselves among the mountains played a more prominent part in world affairs.

At that same meeting Mr. Amery read us a friendly message from Sir Winston Churchill who was an old visitor to Zermatt and who climbed at least one big peak. I like to think the Alpine Club is a kind of concentrated and sublimated synthesis of the character and greatness of the British people. Memories are short and many people are perhaps not too sorry to forget what would have happened to the free world, Switzerland of course included, but for the pluck and stubbornness which prevented your country surrendering in 1940.

Mountain people are sometimes accused of having rather too long memories of their grievances. May be it is so, but they have also long memories for their friends, and we in this country and in this valley will never forget all that Churchill's immortal speeches meant to us, and all that we owe to those who fought on and continued the gigantic struggle for freedom of man when the night seemed unlit by a ray of hope. And we know that the world still needs the wisdom and statesmanship which the British people have acquired in the centuries and we are sure that you will find a way out of your present difficulties as you did in 1940.

Just as Whymper, in spite of many set-backs, lived to conquer the Matterhorn and just as your countrymen, after many failures, at last reached, under the inspired leadership of Sir John Hunt, the summit of unconquered Everest, and just as so many other English mountain climbers co-operating with outstanding guides distinguished themselves as audacious and most intelligent routefinders, so must Great Britain continue in the van if the ideals of human dignity and decency, tolerance and free competition are to be saved.

I have spoken of Anglo-Swiss co-operation. This valley has seen many examples of that in the relations between your members and our guides. Nobody has written about those relations with more truth and more feeling than Mr. Geoffrey Winthrop Young. I began to read English mountain books when I first began to climb, at first in translation and later in English, and I would like to mention particularly all that Young has written about the guides Josef Knubel and Franz Lochmatter. We are all very sorry not to see Mr. Young here tonight.

Let me end by expressing the confident hope that the Alpine Club will remain the invigorating fountain of mountaineering tradition. In that little room upstairs, the ' Whymper-Stube ', we have made the beginning of a collection of pictures to keep alive the memory of great mountaineers of the past. I am sure that the coming century will add names worthy to be remembered as upholders of the same great tradition. On behalf of the Seiler family I thank you, Mr. President and Gentlemen, for the honour you have paid us and I express the very fervent wish :

Long live Great Britain and the Alpine Club!

APPENDIX II

(Sermon preached by The Lord Bishop of Leicester (The Rt. Rev. R. R. Williams, D.D.), at the English Church, Zermatt, on the occasion of the Alpine Club Centenary Service, August 25, 1957.)

HEBREWS xii. 27 : *This word signifieth the removing of those things that can be shaken, that the things which are not shaken may remain.*

THE Alpine Club was born in a brilliant and memorable decade of English history. The Victorian poets, Tennyson and Browning, were producing their masterpieces, some of them under Alpine inspiration. At the beginning of the decade, in 1851, the Exhibition was held, a symbol of Britain's economic and industrial prosperity. We emerged successfully from the Crimean War and from the Indian Mutiny, though both may be considered portents of twentieth-century anxieties. The general atmosphere was one of confidence and hope and in this atmosphere a number of schoolmasters, clergymen and other professional men, finding themselves in those days relatively well-off, found an outlet for their surplus money, energy and adventure in Alpine exploration. It was a development from the Grand Tour of Europe which had been part of the nobleman's education and now in its Alpine form became a sport and recreation for the upper middle classes. In the event the sport threw off by-products of a more serious character, feats of unselfconscious heroism, lasting friendships, the development of the honourable profession of the Alpine guide, serious geographical and botanical research.

After a hundred years it is fitting that we should take stock. We shall find that while much is altered, much abides. Things which could be shaken have been shaken ; things which cannot be shaken remain.

Let us consider the elements of change and of permanence in a number of directions.

(a) *The economic position of the Englishman abroad*

A hundred years ago this was a position of relative strength. The client of the early guides was relatively a rich man. This was reflected in the relations between the guide and his client, although almost at once when guide and client were faced with common hazards in the high alps the relationship became one of mutual trust and respect.

Today, some of this is changed. Two wars have reduced the value of the English pound. Taxation has abolished lavish wealth for all except the great industrial magnates. There has been a levelling up all round. Ski instruction in winter has reduced the guides' dependence on summer climbing. Much has been shaken. What remains ? There can remain those great moral traditions among climbers of courtesy, of quiet orderliness and religious faith, a faith which is lived rather than paraded. The Alpine Club can do much, as it always has done, to strengthen these elements in days when tourism appeals to the masses and no longer only to a select few.

(b) *The position of alpinism itself*

A century ago the first ascents of the great Alpine peaks presented themselves as major challenges to the human spirit. To achieve such victories great efforts were made and sacrifices demanded as the tablets and graves of this church make clear. The knowledge and experience so far acquired was so limited that the joint support of English traveller

and Swiss guide were almost invariably required. Today all these great ascents are accomplished almost daily. Guideless climbing has come to stay. The snow of Himalayan peaks has crunched beneath the tread of human feet and leaders of the Alpine Club have played a noble part, both in the years gone by and in the recent achievements of this great enterprise. But it must be admitted that as the art of pioneering untrod heights alpinism has had its most glorious day. What remains? To preserve and pass on to new generations the quality of mountaineering as the Alpine Club has tasted it and in large part created it. Love of the mountains, combined with respect for the mountains' power to kill as well as to make alive, true comradeship, particularly between Alpine climbers of different nations—these things cannot or need not be shaken. The twentieth century needs them as well as the nineteenth. The Alpine Club can do much to preserve and develop them.

(c) *The position of Zermatt itself*

Here, too, the older order changeth. Zermatt grows rapidly and one by one the goals of former arduous pilgrimages are brought within the reach even of those who can only sit in an armchair. How easy it is to be nostalgic for the past, but for our nostalgia to fix upon the moment when we first got to know Zermatt! Few who deplore the Luftseilbahn are ready to regret the railway from Visp. The next generation will certainly begin where we leave off. Change is inevitable. Much is shaken. What remains? The spirit of Zermatt can be preserved. Great efforts are being made to pass over into the new technological Zermatt without losing the essential features of the Zermatt we have loved and known. We believe and trust that this can be done. It will not be easy, but Zermatt can count on the support of the Alpine Club and of all true alpinists in preserving, even at financial sacrifice, those features of Zermatt and its mountain scenery without which it could never be quite the same again.

(d) *The religion of the alpinist*

Services were held at Zermatt, though not in this church, from 1857 or '58, just about as long as the Alpine Club has been in existence. The English gentleman abroad in the nineteenth century needed and desired his church and before very long this church came into existence to meet the need. It now needs extensive repairs and I am grateful for the £150 or so already contributed by members of the Alpine Club to what has sometimes been called The Alpine Club's Parish Church. But money is the least important thing I want to mention now. My question is this, and it is a searching one. If the Alpine Club were being founded now instead of in 1857 would the presence of its members require, demand and produce a Church of England here in Switzerland? My brothers, you must forgive me if I have my doubts on this point. We all know that religion is not so firmly established in our country as it used to be. Merely conventional churchgoing has been shaken, but perhaps this is not so great a loss. But what of the faith itself? Can we live in the

atomic age, the age of the cold war, without the faith of our fathers? You know that we cannot. God's righteousness still stands like the great mountains and His judgments are still like the great deep. They cannot be ignored. They must be respected. But His mercies still reach to the heavens and His faithfulness still reaches to the clouds. Let Christ our Saviour, the great pioneer of our faith, lead you on day by day until, like Mallory and Irving on Mount Everest, you disappear into the mists, passing from human sight, still climbing, still hoping, still expecting the vision of the King in His beauty.

Then all the halls of Sion
For ay shall be complete
And, in the Land of Beauty
All things of beauty meet.

APPENDIX III

LIST OF MEMBERS PRESENT AT THE ALPINE CLUB CENTENARY DINNER HELD AT ZERMATT ON AUGUST 19, 1957

I. G. Aitchison	H. R. Herbert
Walter Amstutz	J. S. Hobhouse
Richard Ayrton	D. A. Hodgkinson
A. W. Barton	Sir John Hunt
Wing-Comdr. E. B. Beauman	J. A. Jackson
A. M. Binnie	Rev. F. L. Jenkins
Major L. W. Bird	J. H. Emlyn Jones
T. S. Blakeney	J. M. Kay
W. E. M. Blandy	F. H. Keenlyside
Rev. A. T. I. Boggis	W. Kirstein
Count Aldo Bonacossa	S. Kuffner
J. G. Broadbent	Marcel Kurz
W. D. Brown	Peter Lloyd
John Byam-Grounds	Sir Arnold Lunn
R. D. S. Carpendale	H. McArthur
J. C. Case	G. Graham Macphee
O. Eaton Cromwell	J. A. Marsden-Neye
R. S. Dadson	R. C. Martin
Comdr. G. L. Densham	J. F. Mawe
B. Donkin	R. L. Mitchell
G. A. Dummett	S. E. P. Nowill
C. M. D. Eales	N. E. Odell
J. R. Fearon	T. A. H. Peacocke
Lt.-Col. J. R. G. Finch	L. R. Pepper
H. N. Fox	P. Picard
Col. J. M. L. Gavin	Bernard Pierre
Basil Goodfellow	D. F. de V. Powers
Rev. J. E. Grosvenor	H. L. Pryce
Henry S. Hall, Jr.	F. A. Pullinger

H. Rast
 A. K. Rawlinson
 B. L. Richards
 D. R. Riddell
 M. H. W. Ritchie
 H. L. Roberts
 E. B. Robertson
 André Roch
 G. S. Roger
 Lt.-Col. D. Ross
 R. Schmid
 P. D. Schoch
 H. J. Sedgwick

A. D. B. Side
 T. H. Sinclair
 M. H. Slater
 F. K. Sugden
 E. V. Townshend
 H.-F. von Tschärner
 J. B. Tyson
 C. B. M. Warren
 Bradford Washburn
 J. A. F. Watson
 C. G. Wickham
 Alfred Zürcher

(This list is probably not 100 per cent accurate ; clerical records took second place to more congenial activities at Zermatt—*Editor.*)