

Valedictory Address

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(Read before the Alpine Club on 3 December 1982)

Presidents of the Alpine Club have been saying goodbye for rather more than a hundred years. The custom was started by Charles Edward Mathews, the eighth President of the Club, who at the end of his presidency on 15 December 1880 read a paper to the Club entitled 'The Growth of Mountaineering'. He began his address with the following words: 'It is not unusual in ordinary literary or scientific societies for their presidents to call public attention to the various matters of interest and importance which have occurred during their period of office; and I venture to think that it might be of considerable practical utility to us if we established such a custom in connection with this association . . .' In a reference to the role of the President Mr Mathews continued: '. . . Surely his colleagues have a right to expect something more from him when he is on the point of handing over the reins of government to his successor, and beginning to pale his ineffectual fire, than that he should slink away like the Ghost from the battlements at Elsinore, feebly muttering—Adieu, adieu, adieu, remember me.'

I am happy to think that subsequent experience shows that the President's departure on these occasions is marked not so much by an 'adieu' as by an 'au revoir'; and this is borne out by the continuing involvement of our past presidents in club affairs and the presence here today of one of my distinguished predecessors, who occupied this high office over 25 years ago.

I propose to divide my address into three parts. First of all I think it is right that I should, as it were, deliver an account of the housekeeping undertaken on your behalf by the officers and committee of the Club over the past three years. In doing so I want to underline once more the enormous debt which is owed by the members of the Club to those fellow members who devote much of their time and efforts to the affairs of the Club, thus ensuring the smooth running of our many activities. This is no mere formal expression of appreciation. I hope it will be taken as an emphatic recognition of our thanks and gratitude to all those concerned in this way. Our Honorary Secretary, Harry Archer, is now retiring after five years in office and the Honorary Treasurer, Joe Kretschmer, after four years. Edward Pyatt, who during the year relinquished his post as Honorary Editor, had filled that role for over twelve years, a record only surpassed by George Yeld. Previously he had acted as the Club's

Honorary Librarian from about 1963. In this latter role he acted jointly with Frank Solari who is another of our stalwarts who has been actively concerned with the Club's affairs in one capacity or another for over 20 years. I must also mention the House Committee chaired until recently by Robin McCall and now by Bob Lawford. This Committee deals effectively and unobtrusively with the day to day running of the Club's premises which provide the focal point for the Club's activities. We are, of course, admirably served by our salaried staff, by our Assistant Secretary Jean Fielding, by Mrs Johnson, the Librarian, and by the housekeepers; but it is true to say that the Club could not survive in its present form without the services of its honorary officers who have devoted over the years a large part of their spare time to looking after our affairs.

The state of the Club's finances is apparent from the annual accounts which you have passed earlier this evening. During the past three years it has proved necessary to take a realistic look at the subscription rates and it is very gratifying to report that the increases proposed have been, on the whole, cheerfully accepted by almost the entire membership. I was going to say accepted with resignation, but that would not be the correct word to use since only about half a dozen members were actually led to resign albeit reluctantly from the Club at the time when the new subscription rates came into force— and only one of them attributed his resignation to the increased subscription. It can, I think, be claimed that the Club now finds itself on a firm financial footing, at any rate for the time being, subject only to a question mark which hangs over the long term future of the Club's premises. This is a matter to which I shall need to return in a few moments.

Another step forward which we have achieved in the club administration has been the tidying up of the club rules, the major part of which we dealt with at the Annual General Meeting last year. I had hoped to complete the process this year by cementing the relationship between the Alpine Club and the Alpine Climbing Group and thus completing the work of simplification of the club's rules. As you will now know this has unfortunately not proved possible, apparently because some voices have been raised within the Alpine Climbing Group which are opposed to these most recent proposals. This makes me particularly sad. It so happens that I was a founder member of the ACG when it was first established in 1952 largely on the initiative of Hamish Nicol, the late Tom Bourdillon and the late Goff Francis. Most of the founders of the Group were members of the Alpine Club. In those early days the Group had a rule which led to retirement at the age of 40 so I did not last very long. On Sunday 26 June 1966 I drove up with Anthony Rawlinson to Darley Dale near Derby, representing the Alpine Club, to attend an historic meeting with Brailsford, Alexander and Sullivan, who were appointed as representatives of the ACG. Following that meeting proposals were put forward and later accepted by both sides for a

qualified form of merger between the two bodies. Over the following years I have become increasingly convinced of the need to complete the process which we started at that time. Quite clearly the Alpine Club has had good reason in the past to admire the contribution which members of the Group have made to the development of British mountaineering. A complete merger of the Group within the Club would be seen as a recognition of the support given by the mountaineering establishment to those who are active at what has been described as the sharp end of British mountaineering. The Club would clearly benefit by holding in its embrace many of the younger more active climbers who might otherwise not be interested in membership of the Alpine Club in circumstances where they were not able to meet their friends and contemporaries. But the advantages of the full merger do not lie solely on the side of the Club. Not to put too fine a point on it the ACG would not claim to be a well run organisation. They appear to have very little corporate activity and no new members have come forward for election since 1979. I am told that the attendance at their recent General Meeting was sparse and the debate inconclusive. I do not intend these remarks to be interpreted in any way as criticism. Members of the Group, or some of them, are not 'association-minded' and their main interest understandably lies in climbing mountains rather than sitting in committee rooms. Yet I believe the Club has a great deal to offer to the Alpine Climbing Group in that it is able to provide an administrative back-up for the Group's activities, thereby keeping members of the Group informed about what is going on, by whom, when and where. These are matters which formerly might well have appeared in *Alpine Climbing*, the bulletin of the ACG, the separate publication of which would appear to be beyond the resources of the ACG alone.

You will understand therefore why I so much regret that at this late stage the prospect of a complete merger has at any rate for the time being receded. The signs however are not entirely gloomy and it is hoped that the *Alpine Journal* will include in its sections on expeditions or Alpine notes a number of ACG items for which Phil Bartlett has offered to serve as an assistant Honorary Editor. I therefore with regret hand over this piece of unfinished business to my successor and to the new committee, which you have elected this evening, in the hope that it may still prove possible to iron out the remaining difficulties and to remove the fears or suspicions felt in some quarters of the ACG.

Next I want to refer to the library. It is now rather more than ten years since the Alpine Club Library was established as a separate charity under the control of its own council of management. Its first Chairman was our past President Lord Tangleby who had to resign on the grounds of ill health in 1972. Since that date the Council has been under the Chairmanship of our distinguished Honorary Member Sir Douglas Busk who has presided over every meeting of the Council and directed its affairs with tireless efficiency. It is very largely due to his efforts that

the library has been able to build up funds from various charities and other sources including some substantial contributions from a few club members. The library itself is unique and is almost certainly the most comprehensive collection of literature on mountains and mountaineering to be found anywhere in the world. The earliest books date from the sixteenth century. There are complete runs of most of the leading mountaineering journals, already more than 4000 volumes, and at the present time more than 50 journals are regularly received in more than half a dozen languages. One of the outstanding achievements of the past few years has been the production of the first volume of a modern catalogue of the library, the first to be published since 1899. That catalogue had a little over 2000 entries whereas the present volume extends to more than 19,000 entries including only printed books, climbing guidebooks and periodicals. It runs to some 600 pages indexed by author and subject. But this represents only a start and a further volume of the catalogue is proposed, to include manuscripts, maps, slides, photographs and a large collection of miscellaneous learned papers and letters, guides, Führerbücher and private diaries. It will be seen, therefore, that the library is going to need the financial support of members for many years to come. In connection with the publication of the catalogue an exhibition was staged in the club rooms this time last year in which many of the treasures from the Club's archives—and not only items in the library collection—were put on display. We are again indebted this year to Peter Bicknell, Charles Warren, Bob Lawford and Frank Solari (how often these same names keep cropping up) for staging yet another exhibition which has been open to the public throughout this week and has attracted much favourable attention.

The importance of the library cannot be over-emphasised. Its future is inextricably linked with the future of the Club and it is in this context that I return to the question of the club premises which I mentioned a few minutes ago. In this part of my address I shall refer to matters which are highly confidential and ought not to be discussed outside the ranks of the membership. I would therefore ask any guests of members who may be present if they will kindly listen to what I have to say and then promptly forget it.

. . . The President went on to refer to the Club's lease of the South Audley Street premises, which runs until the year 2009 and to the need to consider action now to safeguard the future of the Club and to protect the interests of future generations of club members. The working party set up to consider the matter had reached certain provisional conclusions generally approved by the club committee. These conclusions recognised the need for the library to remain in or near central London and the desirability of housing the club headquarters with the library. Various options were under consideration, of which the President presented a brief outline.

The President continued . . .

These then are some of the ideas which have been exercising the minds of the Committee. I mention them now in order to give you some idea of the problems and some indication of the general line of thought. It may be that there will be nothing to report for some time but if and when a future committee is minded to make any recommendations those of you who are present tonight will not at any rate be entirely in the dark. Of one thing I am certain. More money will be required and will have to be provided either by way of an appeal for a capital fund, or by a substantial increase in subscriptions. In the meantime I am quite sure that the Committee of the Club will be very willing to receive any comments and observations together with any suggestions as to a long term solution to the problems. I would merely add that such an opportunity should not present itself at the end of this address, which by long standing tradition is allowed to pass without discussion.

There is a further event to which I should refer, although it may not strictly come under the heading of housekeeping. The Club enjoys a full programme of meetings and meets organised by our assistant honorary secretaries. For one of the meets in 1981 we broke new ground by going to Nepal. I think I can safely say that the Nepal meet was an outstanding success. A full account of it has appeared in the *Alpine Journal* so that it becomes unnecessary for me to describe our activities in any detail. It gives me an opportunity however to follow up a topic which was raised by Peter Lloyd in his address to the Club three years ago, namely the effect on the Nepalese people and their economy of the recent expansion in tourism and the extension of expeditions in the hill regions of the country. I was lucky enough to be one of the first explorers of this marvellous country. Until 1949 Nepal was closed to the outside world apart from a British Post in the capital Kathmandu which by that time had achieved the status of an embassy. The only other country represented in Nepal was India and their nationals were reasonably free to come and go. The only maps available at that time were maps prepared by the Survey of India based on plane table and theodolite traverses during two or three succeeding summers in the 1920s carried out by native Indian surveyors. In 1950 Kathmandu itself, the capital city, was accessible only on foot. Travelling from India involved a 25 mile journey on a narrow gauge railway, a further short stage in a truck or lorry and a day's march over 2 high ridges leading into the valley of Kathmandu itself. Goods were transported over this last section by means of a primitive aerial ropeway with a load limit of about 5 cwt. When Bill Tilman and Peter Lloyd obtained permission for the first time for a British party to move out of the Kathmandu valley into the hills they became the first foreigners since two Jesuit Missionaries in the seventeenth century to visit the hinterland of Nepal. This was an historic breakthrough coming as it did at a time when Tibet became closed to the outside world. At the end of their expedition to the Langtang Himal,

Tilman had an audience of the Maharajah and asked for permission to take another expedition the following year into the area of Manang Bhot on the N side of the Annapurna range. Permission came through in February of the following year and I had the great good fortune of being invited to join that party. At that time there was of course no tourism and no hotels, and our party stayed at the British Embassy. At the same time the French expedition under Maurice Herzog had received permission to visit the valley of the Kali Gandaki with Dhaulagiri as their main objective, and Annapurna I as a further option. While members of our party were seeking a way up Annapurna IV I crossed the Thorong La with a small party of porters to the sacred shrine of Muktinath. Charles Evans, Bill Packard and I subsequently returned by way of the valley of the Buri Gandaki to Kathmandu.

On my second visit to Nepal in 1959 there had been many changes. The Rana dynasty had been removed and the country was now ruled by the King with a council of ministers. The Indian Government had helped with the construction of a road through to Kathmandu; an airfield had been built and this opened the way for the start of the tourist industry. A few hotels had sprung up and visitors were beginning to explore the valley of Kathmandu. Walking parties into the interior were still comparatively rare.

It was a great pleasure to me in 1981 to arrange for our party to follow a complete circuit of the Annapurna range, thus retracing many of the steps I had taken over 30 years before. The changes were profound. On our first visit to Manang we were the first travellers from the outside world to be seen in the villages along the route. There were no schools or doctors outside the capital. The hill people lived at a subsistence level but still contrived to sell flour and other crops to supplement our supplies. Communications across the country were by runner although there were two single telephone lines which ran the length of the country east and west from Kathmandu with two or three posts connected along the way. In 1981 the route was thronged with trekking parties, and the dangers of disruption of the local economy were self evident. Nevertheless the Nepal authorities have done a remarkable job in improving the general welfare of the population. Schools are scattered along the way and children are expected to attend if they can reach the nearest school in a walk of less than two hours. There are hospitals and doctors as well as police posts exercising some control over the trekking parties. The general standard of social hygiene, which is one of the subjects taught in the schools, seemed to be remarkably high and the children all appeared healthy. We saw no evidence of goitre which was very prevalent 30 years ago. We have a clear duty as a Club whose members take part in expeditions to Nepal every year, to do what we can to ensure that our presence does as little as possible to impede the development of the local people or to aggravate the difficulties under which they live. From our experience last year it would seem that the

trekking agencies co-operate in a most responsible way with the Nepalese authorities and seek to minimise the disruptive effects of the Western influence. As a small example of this concern we were urged not to give sweets to children along the route, and the main demand which we received was for pens. Nevertheless the problem of deforestation remains a terrible threat as it does indeed throughout the sub-continent. Trees are being felled at an alarming rate with all the consequential dangers of erosion and periodic flooding. It is difficult to see what can be done by travellers except to ensure that as far as possible wood fires are replaced as often as possible by imported liquid fuel. It is comforting to realise that the authorities in Nepal are well aware of the problem and are seeking, by a programme of education, to enlist the support of all sectors of the population.

The main party on the Nepal Meet completed the circuit of the Annapurna group without engaging in any mountaineering in the true sense. A small climbing party attempted Chulu East (6059m) but were turned back by bad weather and the tightness of their schedule. A few days later however a party led by Hamish Nicol and Lord Hunt, who had quite separately organised a circuit of Annapurna in the opposite direction, completed this ascent—an example of a worthwhile expedition carried out by a party who have moved on from major Himalayan expeditions. Of the latter there is much to report of activity during the past three years; and here I come to the second part of my report.

Perhaps the most important development has been the opening up of China to mountaineers of the outside world. The outstanding achievement has certainly been the first ascent of Mt Kongur (7719m) in Sinkiang in China, by the British party in July 1981, led by Michael Ward. The Alpine Club congratulates him on his award of the Founders Medal of the Royal Geographical Society in recognition of his long service to the cause of high altitude medicine. The ascent of Kongur represented a splendid achievement on one of the highest unclimbed mountains in the world. The expedition organised by the Mount Everest Foundation and sponsored by Jardine Matheson, followed in the steps of a reconnaissance expedition in the previous year. A feature of the ascent was that the four members of the climbing party led by our Vice President, Chris Bonington, having reached the main summit spent the night in a snow hole just below the top and on the following morning proceeded along the ridge for two hours to the NE summit in the belief, later proved to be mistaken, that it was the highest point. Henry Day led an Army expedition to Jiazi, a peak of 6540m, also in China, in 1981. The Himalayas have seen a remarkable series of ascents of most of the main peaks which included a new route on the South Pillar of Everest by a Polish expedition in May of 1980. Reinhold Messner climbed Everest from the north solo and without oxygen in August 1980. This was his second ascent of the mountain. Alan Rouse, Joe Tasker and Paul Nunn attempted a winter ascent of the W Ridge of the mountain in December

1981 but were turned back by terrible weather. In the spring of this year Doug Scott, Alex McIntyre and Roger Baxter Jones completed the first ascent of the S face of Shishpangma (Gosainthan) in three days with two bivouacs on the way up and one on the way down—a true Alpine style ascent. In the meantime the main body of British mountaineers continue to cover the Alps from end to end. Their achievements are far too numerous for me to mention individually and the same must go for the long record of Himalayan ascents.

These have not been achieved, however, without cost and during the last three years there has been a sad toll of members of the Club who have lost their lives in the hills. In the last year we have had to record the deaths of three amongst our most experienced younger members, Joe Tasker, Peter Boardman and Alex MacIntyre. Some of these losses have been incurred by members of small expeditions on large mountains and there has been a certain vogue for what has been described as an Alpine style ascent of a Himalayan peak. Strictly speaking 'Alpine style' seems to me to involve a continuous upward march with bivouacs as necessary on the way. Within this definition many of the smaller recent expeditions have not been 'Alpine style' in as much as they have involved the setting up of camps and the return to lower levels from time to time. Nevertheless the size of an expedition, whatever style it may adopt, poses problems of organisation and support. Where accidents happen there is thus a tendency to look for the reasons and to point to lessons to be learnt. In our attitude to mountain accidents I think that we tend to show some inconsistency. On the one hand where accidents lead to no serious injuries or to death the matter is treated with some levity as a source of amusement. References to the yo-yo in rock climbing circles is an illustration of this fact. There is the famous account in 'Peaks, Passes and Glaciers' of the accident to Mr Birkbeck on the Col de Miage in 1861—not perhaps amusing at the time, but certainly enjoyed by subsequent generations. You will recall how Mr Birkbeck had occasion to withdraw from the rest of the party which had halted for a second breakfast on the Col de Miage. The unfortunate fellow missed his footing and was subsequently found 1800 feet lower down amongst the crevasses on the Miage Glacier, with his trousers around his feet, and suffering from contusions to the lower part of his body. From this plight he was safely rescued.

But when on the other hand some outstanding ascent is successfully completed, we hail the event as a great achievement carried out with courage and resolution. The solo ascents of Reinhold Messner in the Himalayas—he has now climbed seven of the world's fourteen 8000m peaks, many of them solo—earn general admiration and deservedly so; and the successes of many other small expeditions are similarly recorded with congratulations. On the whole, there is no voiced concern about errors of judgment on the mountain which do not result in serious accident. When accidents occur, however, it seems to me that there is an

unfortunate tendency to assume some error and to seek to establish what went wrong by implied—or even expressed—criticism. The story of Joe Tasker and Peter Boardman on the north east ridge of Everest is fresh in our minds. If they had succeeded, and they came so near to it, their achievement would have been hailed throughout the mountaineering world as a brilliant success, by a new route on an unknown ridge of the world's highest mountain. By suggesting that something went wrong I think there is a danger that we do less than justice to the memory of our friends. Mountaineering is a sport which carries with it danger to life and that is a fact which we all recognise. It was true before this latest crop of fatal accidents as it is still true today. If we are honest most of us can recognise that we have been in situations where, if the luck had gone slightly the other way, our own names might have been added to the long list of mountain casualties. It is a sobering thought that mountain accidents will continue to happen and the only way to avoid them is to place the mountains out of bounds as *The Times* hinted in its historic first leader following the Matterhorn accident in 1865. So the question is not new. By a coincidence Charles Edward Mathews 100 years ago wrote in the *Alpine Journal* of 1882 an article on 'The Alpine Obituary'. In the three years 1880-1882 there were seventeen fatal accidents in the Alps including seven in 1882; Professor Balfour with his guide Johann Petrus on the Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret; William Penhall with Andreas Maurer on the Wetterhorn and Mr W E Gabbett with the two Lochmatters on the Dent Blanche. Mr Mathews thundered 'There can be no doubt that in these days men climb Alps who are not fitted for it, and who would be much better at home . . . accidents do not happen to men who understand their business and do not neglect reasonable precautions . . . Mountaineering is not dangerous, provided that the climber knows his business and takes the necessary precautions—all within his own control—to make danger impossible. The prudent climber will recollect what he owes to his family and to his friends. He will also recollect that he owes something to the Alps, and will scorn to bring them into disrepute. He will not go on a glacier without a rope. He will not climb alone, or with a single companion. He will treat a great mountain with the respect it deserves, and not try to rush a dangerous peak with inadequate guiding power. He will turn his back steadfastly upon mist and storm. He will not go where avalanches are in the habit of falling after fresh snow, or wander about beneath an overhanging glacier in the heat of a summer afternoon. Above all, if he loves the mountains for their own sake, for the lessons they can teach and the happiness they can bring, he will do nothing that can discredit his manly pursuit or bring down the ridicule of the undiscerning upon the noblest pastime in the world.' I am afraid that I find rather a quaint ring about these words written by my distinguished predecessor.

Some explanation of Mr Mathews's attitude can be detected in the closing words of the passage I have quoted, 'Do nothing that can

discredit his manly pursuit or bring down the ridicule of the undiscerning upon the noblest pastime in the world.' Perhaps the sting in *The Times* leader's attack on the Alpine Club still lingered. I do not consider that in today's circumstances our need for self-justification warrants the attempt to attribute mountain accidents to some breaking of the rules. In the case of our latest three casualties these were all men of considerable experience. Alex MacIntyre was hit by a falling stone (how many of us have the stones just missed?) and Joe Tasker and Peter Boardman had acquired almost unequalled knowledge and experience of high altitude mountaineering. And I think we owe it to their memory to proclaim that they did not recklessly throw their lives away through ignorance or carelessness.

Having said all that I do not mean to suggest there are never lessons to be learnt—for example as indicated by contributions made by Sir Jack Longland and Michael Ward to the discussion at the last meeting of the Club. The British Mountaineering Council collects details from time to time of mountaineering accidents both in this country and abroad. I am sure that this exercise can be a useful one. I merely want to express the hope that in analysing the circumstances which have led to the deaths of climbers we can learn any lessons there are to be learnt without implying unjustified criticism of those who have died.

This reference to the British Mountaineering Council leads me to report another development which has taken place during the last year. As members of the Alpine Club will know, the establishment of the British Mountaineering Council in the 1940s was a direct result of initiatives taken by this Club at the time and most notably by the foresight of Geoffrey Winthrop Young, Jack Longland and others. The BMC began as a federation of British climbing clubs as Peter Lloyd pointed out in his valedictory address three years ago. There were in 1945 23 clubs in the federation claiming to represent some 7000 climbers. Today there must be over three quarters of a million people who climb or walk regularly in the hills of this country. In April of this year the BMC adopted a new constitution in which the special rôle of the Alpine Club as founder parent is no longer recognised. At the same time membership of the BMC is being extended to cover individuals. The original concept of the Council as a federation of clubs is thus being eroded. This development I recognise as a necessary stage in the evolution of mountaineering. There has grown up over the years a multiplicity of small local climbing clubs and there are many thousands of hill walkers who belong to no clubs at all. Inevitably therefore, a need arises, for machinery to look after their interests and to speak for this vast multitude of those who use the hills for recreation and leisure. I have said in another context that I find it difficult to accept a claim that the BMC can be regarded as the governing body of the sport, since I do not think that mountaineers and climbers are really susceptible to government, nor is there a set of rules as is to be found in most other

sports. The BMC nevertheless can speak with authority as a representative body of mountaineers and the clubs will still have an important rôle to play in their representation on the various committees. The BMC is thus, I think, about to change its character, but these steps are inevitable and the mountaineering fraternity has long ceased to be a closed family. If the BMC did not exist it would certainly be necessary to invent it in something like its new form.

I come now to the final part of my address in which I consider the future of the Alpine Club. The rôle of the BMC which I have just been describing is certainly not a rôle which the Alpine Club is qualified to fulfil. Nor would its members wish it to do so. The Club can be proud of its position as the world's senior mountain club and I think it can truthfully claim to be the custodian of the ark of the true covenant. We are regarded with affection and respect throughout the world and indeed include members from about 30 different countries within our own ranks. The cherished traditions of mountaineering continue to develop and members of the Club have taken and continue to take a prominent part in their evolution. But the Club remains above all a club, an association of friends who share a common interest and take pleasure in each other's company. This is the rôle of the Alpine Club which I would wish to see flourish.

As I look back on nearly 40 years membership I find that all the closest friends which I have made during that period are members of the Club. As with advancing years the scope of one's mountain activities is inevitably diminished, the value of mountain reminiscence is correspondingly increased. This year marks the centenary of the first ascent of the Viereselgrat on the Dent Blanche on 11 August 1882 by Stafford Anderson and G. P. Baker, with the guides Ulrich Almer and Josef Pollinger, when Almer made the classic remark on the summit '*Wir sind vier Esel*'. At the second general meeting of the Club that I attended as a newly elected member on the 2 May 1944, shortly before many of us departed for the continent of Europe, a talk was given by a Belgian member of the Club serving with the Belgian Armed Forces, Lieutenant Paul Philippson. As recorded in the proceedings of the Alpine Club, he read a short paper on the ascent of the Dent Blanche by the Viereselgrat. At the end of the meeting a tall gentleman in the front row rose to his feet and said how much pleasure it had given him to attend the meeting. It was in fact G. P. Baker, one of the *vier Esel*. As the proceedings were recorded in the Alpine Journal, 'Mr. Baker mentioned that he had made the same ascent 60 years ago'. So that is my personal link with the Golden Age of Alpine exploration. Membership of the Alpine Club has been one of the most significant events of my life crowned by the honour you have done me in electing me your president. At the end of his Presidency in 1949 the inimitable Dr Tom Longstaff referred to his great ambition 'To have been President of the Alpine Club'. That is an ambition which I am about to realise and it is with

great pleasure that I shall look back on my period in office. I am very conscious of the fact that through much of what I have said I have been looking back. To record history is generally a safer undertaking than to prophecy the future. It was, after all, Craufurd Grove, the tenth President, who is reported to have said: 'it must be taken for granted that no human being could walk to the top of Mt Everest'. One can be excused for wondering what the President's Address in the year 2081 will contain. Will he be referring to the latest attempt to complete, within a week, the ascent of the six summits, Mt McKinley, Aconcagua, Kilimanjaro, Mt Cook, Mt Everest and Mont Blanc, or the latest explorations amongst the Mountains of the Moon? Or will he be pronouncing on the ethics of artificial back pack rocket elevators? One thing I believe I can confidently predict. If mankind has learnt to live together in harmony, the mountains will still be there and the human spirit will continue to extend the limits of human endeavour and achievement in mountain exploration. There will still be an element of mystery in some of the high, wild and lonely places of the world. The great ice walls and precipices of the Himalaya will still present a challenge. The rock walls of the Yosemite may have become an easy day for some ladies, but will remain a hard day for many gentlemen. Above all it will still be possible to stand on the rocky pinnacles of the Black Cuillin and watch the western sun sink into the great Atlantic beyond the string of the outer Hebrides. And finally the wet Welsh rain will still wash the crags and gullies of Lliwedd and the Mountains of Eryri where as boys we rode bareback the daft and happy hills.