# GAIT AND STYLE.

By F. W. BOURDILLON.

(Read before the Alpine Club, June 6, 1916.)

ON the last occasion when I had the honour of reading a Paper before the Alpine Club, I found to my regret that its title had been regarded as somewhat ambiguous. I have endeavoured, therefore, to find for the present paper a title conveying a clear idea of its contents. There is a familiar Scots phrase, 'To gang your ain gait,' which expresses the hearty desire of every climber, though it is not always realisable in a mixed party; and there is an equally well-known French phrase, *Le style c'est l'homme*, which has cheered many a fine writer with the reflection what a fine fellow he must be. In the phrase 'Gait and Style' then—at least until the spelling reformers have reduced all identical sounds to identical spelling—there should be no ambiguity, though in the collocation of the two words there may be the suspicion of a pun.

The word Style, it is true, has been applied to other displays beside that which the literary man makes of himself; and in a certain country of which we have heard much lately a Paper on style for mountaineers would no doubt be an imperially inspired attempt to prescribe for mountain-climbers the method of progression and the manner of costume considered imperially appropriate: such as perhaps the goose-step—a happy name for it if attempted (say) on the Brenva arête; and the spiked helmet, which might have its uses in getting out of an overhanging bergschrund.

Among British climbers, however, it would be ridiculous to use the word 'style' in this sense. It has, no doubt, occasionally occurred to many of us to regret that there is no prescribed style for climbers, to wish that certain costumes were forbidden, certain equipment made obligatory. To help a lady up or down a difficult bit of rock, when her long skirt catches in every jag and sets every loose stone rolling, and when her narrow un-nailed shoes, with high heels that only want shaving to become spikes, require taking off every five minutes to empty out the stones or gravel—to make this kind of mountaineering enjoyable the lady must be super-charming or the mountaineer hyper-susceptible.

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However, the female of one race will contrive to look neat and seemly and attractive in any costume, however unsuitable to the occasion; while that of another will appear the opposite, however appropriately clad.

On a certain mountain—I will not give the most distant clue to the scene or actors of this terrible tale—two climbers with two guides came across another party of four persons, a husband roped to one guide and a wife roped to another. They were going separately. And to the casual observer it looked as if they had decided that one or other of them should not return alive. If so, the lady evidently had a very clear notion of which was to be the survivor. She was beautifully dressed in brown velveteen garments—knickerbockers of the most correct—everything complete. She looked like an active boy, and raced to the top and down again in really surpassing style. The husband was less fortunate. He did not achieve the summit at all. On the descent he was descried by the aforesaid party of four undergoing the following trying experience. There was a very steep ice-slope with a thin covering of loose snow, along the very top of which it was just possible to walk gingerly on a sort of precarious ledge of trodden snow. The four spectators had negotiated this; and from a point further on, and rather below, watched the unfortunate man and his guide endeavouring to pass it. The guide let out rope and sent his *Herr* on to the treacherous pathway before him. A few steps, and down he went, slipping to the full end of the rope. The guide hauled him back and started him again. Again he slipped, again stopped at the end of the rope, and was again hauled up like an exhausted salmon. When this had happened three or four times, and it was evident that the poor man's nerves must be in rags, the onlooking party in pity detached a guide to go up and help; and eventually he was got across, *tellement quellement*, and, later, rejoined his wife at the mountain inn below. She was radiant—not with joy at his appearance, which indeed was pitiable—but with her own success and the record time she had taken over the ascent and descent. But her own appearance—how find words, even faintly to suggest it, without shocking? Her face was scarlet: her orange-red hair had broken loose from all fastenings, and roamed like Sargasso seaweed in the neighbourhood of her shoulders. Her clothes had suffered much—no doubt from the swiftness of her descent. There were rents here and gapings there. White raiment showed, draggled, torn and dirty; garments displayed unblushing frills, and deeply blushing limbs beneath.

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And still—such was the pride of success, the joy of victory over a mountain and a man-husband, that the lady herself appeared absolutely indifferent to her own appearance, and strutted and crowed ecstatically without, while the poor much-worse-half sat miserably within, consoling himself with coffee.

One of the spectators was unconscionable enough to perpetrate the following libellous epigram:

> 'O Woman, in a nurse's dress
> Retaining some retiringness!
> And even on a motor-bike
> Occasionally lady-like!
> In knickers on the mountain's brow
> How little like an angel thou!'

To avoid misconception, I may perhaps mention that the lady in question did not appear to belong to any of the countries now known as the Allied Nations.

But with 'style' in this sense of the word the present Paper has nothing to do. Its subject might perhaps be stated as the relation of Legs to Letters, of the climber's muscles to the climber's mind. Just as a small child who has scrambled for the first time on to a chair calls to everyone, 'Look at me,' so climbers, children of Nature, often seek to express themselves, their feelings and their doings, for the benefit of the public. What is their best method of expression, the best style for a climbing Paper? If the style is indeed the man, what is the climbing style that is the climbing man?

I need make no apology to the members of the Alpine Club for offering them a discourse mainly literary. Every true Alpinist is, we all know, at heart a poet; and although there are, mercifully, many who only think their poetry and do not pen it, that is no doubt due to the modesty, self-restraint, and consideration for others which (with so many other virtues) are fostered and developed by the habit of mountain-climbing. The very birth, or at least conception, of the Alpine Club took place, we are told, in a house which had been the home of a poet; not a very great poet, perhaps, but of one who carried his poetry into the things of common life, and who left the impress of a poet's personality on the house in which he had lived and the gardens which he had laid out, in pleasances and pleached walks, in pools and cascades and statues and inscribed stones, one of them bearing an inscription immortally beautiful. There has always been about the Alpine Club a pleasant savour of literary taste and poetic feeling, which I think shows itself

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unmistakably in the general tone and literary quality of the twenty-nine volumes of the ALPINE JOURNAL.

It is a fertile subject, the literary expression of the love of mountains. There have been, of course, and no doubt always will be, some who have in them the love of mountains and all the gifts of the climber, the strength of limbs, the tenacity of character, the endurance, the boldness, the spirit of comradeship, but who yet lack altogether the gift of expression, and who can neither draw a recognisable mountain nor write a readable account of their feats or their things seen, and whose description of a climb reads almost like a page from a scientific text-book :

'Woke at 1, off at 2, on rocks by 3, on glacier by 4, in couloir by 5, arête by 6, col by 7, top by 8.'

Between this and the account of a climb (say) by Leslie Stephen what a world of distance! And yet both had probably much the same feelings during the climb—anxieties, hopes, disappointments, pleasures, and exhilaration.

But such baldness is not very frequent. Most climbers are born with some descriptive power, which even a Public School education cannot wholly destroy, and which in many of us is developed by the profession to which we may happen to belong, and takes a particular tinge or character from it. There is the dry scientific style ; the didactic tutorial ; the formal or persuasive of the two branches of the legal profession ; the sermonesque of the clerical ; the sensational of the journalist ; the imaginative of the novelist ; and lastly, in a class by itself, the style of those who describe graphically what they have never seen, which may be called the Ouida-esque.

Well, different as the styles may be, there are enough people in the world to provide readers and listeners for all of them, and whatever may be our own opinion we may safely say of all that 'For those who like that sort of thing, it is just the sort of thing they would like.'

And yet, I think, without being either ill-natured or 'superior,' we may reasonably claim that some styles are better than others, more elevating and worthier of their subject. It may be the painful necessity of some to have to cheapen their style to suit their audience, to provide sensation or romance for the *Daily Mail* or the weakly female. But except for these hard-driven slaves of King Demos there is no excuse for writing ignobly when writing of mountains.

No excuse ? Why, yes : excuses enough ! What pastime in the world brings such gay spirits as that of climbing ? And

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gaiety of spirit tends to levity of lips. In the exhilaration of a climb who is there among us who has not talked nonsense, made feeble jokes and bad puns? At moments when life itself is as champagne, such things are the froth and foam of it. Only, if we attempt to preserve or reproduce them, how flat, stale, and unprofitable they are apt to become! What was humorous on the mountain pathway seems pointless in the London street. What seemed witty in the hut becomes merely jocose in the drawing-room. 'Jocose!' Horrid word—odious thing! but sometimes a fatal snare to the immature or ungifted writer, seeking to enliven his simple narrative or brighten the plain description of his ascent. How well it would be if the youthful climber, inexperienced in writing, before embarking on his account of some new climb, daring, brilliant, and hazardous, would go through a course of study in the best Alpine literature, and saturate his mind in Forbes or Leslie Stephen or Whymper or . . . but time fails to name them, the glorious host who have fascinated us and thrilled us and provoked us to envy and longing by the splendour of their feats and the magic of their description.

But there is, for the inexperienced or unskilful writer, a further pitfall, another tempting snare—that of the rhapsodical. For an untimely or distasteful rhapsody may jar even worse than an unseasonable jest.

*Non cuivis homini contingit adire Corinthum.*

It is not given to every man to approach—in style—the Epistle to the Corinthians. It is not granted to all—indeed it is granted to very few—the skill to translate rapture into rhapsody, to reproduce emotion in language which affects without boring or disgusting, if the reader happens not to be tuned to precisely the same pitch. Training and study of style can do much, especially in producing taste, sobriety, and self-restraint, in teaching how to suit the style to the subject, to be terse and graphic in representing the thrill of stress and action, and suitably expansive in reproducing the calmer joys of scenery. But no effort or pains can enable anyone not dowered with the poet's birth-gift to write such a description as the following; and woe be to the rash wight who seeks to imitate it!

'Mürren faces the Jungfrau. This glorious creature is your one object of interest from morning to night. It seems so near that you could fancy a stone might be thrown across to it. Between you and it is a broad valley: but so deep, and with sides so precipitous, that

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it is entirely out of sight. So the Jungfrau *vis-à-vis*-es you frankly through the bright, sweet intervening air. And then she has such moods; such unutterable smiles, such inscrutable sulks, such growls of rage suppressed, such thunder of avalanches, such crowns of stars. One evening our sunset was the real rose-pink you have heard of so much. It fades, you know, into a deathlike chalk-white. That is the most *awful* thing. A sort of spasm seems to come over her face and in an instant she is a corpse, rigid, and oh so cold! Well, so she died, and you felt as if a great soul had ebbed away into the Heaven of Heavens; and thankful, but very sad, I went up to my room. I was reading by candlelight, for it gets dark immediately after sunset, when A. shrieked to me to come to the window. What a Resurrection—so gentle, so tender—like that sonnet of Milton's about his dead wife returning in vision! The moon had risen; and there was the Jungfrau—oh chaste, oh blessed saint in glory everlasting! Then all the elemental spirits that haunt crevasses and hover around peaks, all the patient powers that bear up the rock buttresses and labour to sustain great slopes, all streams, and drifts, and flowers, and vapours, made a symphony, a time most solemn and rapturous.'[1]

Such a description as this is not a thing that can be imitated; it is a sudden flowering of a poet's mind, not an artificial or laboured production; just a page in a private letter to a sister, and followed by an apology:

'Forgive my rhapsody; but, you know, you don't get those things twice.'

Could mountain-lovers have a finer lesson in style—the consummate description on the one hand, and the warning on the other?

A strange thing this 'style' in literature, in writing! The ordinary plain man, especially the ordinary plain Englishman, the type of the imaginary John Bull, is rather apt to despise it, and to be secretly of opinion that any writing but the simplest matter-of-fact statement, preferably in monosyllables, is mere affectation. 'Call a spade a spade' is one of his most frequently quoted proverbs. All the same, if you say to John Bull 'That's a lie!' he will knock you down; whereas if you say 'I fear, sir, you are indulging in a terminological inexactitude,' he will only laugh. Phrases cannot alter facts; but they can largely influence our view of facts. Otherwise there would be little livelihood for lawyers, and none for politicians.

[1] *Letters of T. E. Brown*, vol. i. pp. 75, 76. [Written October 1874 to Mrs. Williamson, his sister.]

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In practice everyone is conscious of the effect of style, of the different feeling produced if the same fact be stated in serious language or flippant, in Shakespearean manner or Gilbertian.

De Quincey, one of the great masters of prose style in the English language, insisted on the actual artistic value of style, which he says 'is able to yield a separate intellectual pleasure quite apart from the interest of the subject treated,' and he ranks 'style, or the management of language,' among the fine arts, among which you will no doubt recollect that he also—in a celebrated paper—ranks murder. There has been a noticeable tendency in modern times to consider style, as De Quincey considers it here, as a thing separable from subject, and to value it for its own artistic quality, and not merely as a vehicle of expression. This view is akin to the cry raised some few years ago, 'Art for Art's sake'; but surely the man or woman inside the clothes must count in any consideration of the costume.

The true value of style consists in its enhancing and reinforcing the value of its subject, as the wood of a musical instrument reinforces the sound of the strings, and even varies it according to its own shape, of harp or piano, violin or guitar, or banjo. We appreciate style according to its power of stimulating emotion, of adding effectiveness, of quickening visualisation, of creating an atmosphere, and producing by suggestion in the hearer or reader a frame of mind suitable for the subject or the occasion.

If indeed there be a separable Art of Style it is more akin to the art of the gardener than that of the craftsman. For human speech is a living thing; if used mechanically it loses all its power. The parts of speech, words, phrases, expressions, so far from being parts of a machine, as some would treat them, are more like living organisms. They are born, they grow, they die—we may almost say of themselves. Words have wills of their own, syllables have souls. They even have faces, or features that seem like faces, just as the face of a clock seems to wear different expressions at the different hours of the day. Consider any page of print, and see if the actual words have not some look about them like a facial expression, familiar or strange, friendly or hostile, stiff or intimate.

Even a coined word, apparently a mere artificial production, if it attains currency, will take charge of itself, and grow, and change, often beyond recognition. For some unknown reason the coinage of new words seems always entrusted to pedants

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and dull wits. Never, perhaps, was there evolved a more fearsome collocation of syllables than the word Kinematograph. But once out in the world it quickly made a million little friends of its own, and with their aid transformed itself into Cinema, with a subtle attractiveness in the associations of the first syllable. Some brain equally ponderous devised for a baby's use the philosophic-sounding word Perambulator. But to fit itself for the lips and taste of its principal follower, the nursemaid, this mouth-filling pente-syllable had very soon to drop dignity and become the humble and slightly vulgar morsel —Pram.

One objection to the schemes of spelling-reformers is that they overlook this facial expression of words, and in fact would simply destroy much of its charm and most of its usefulness by insisting that all syllables pronounced the same should be spelt the same. This is very much like insisting that all persons bearing the name of Smith must present the same appearance and dress alike. What trouble it would give the eye and brain! Instead of the instant lightning-like recognition and identification, there would be delays, mistakes, puzzles, confusion, vexation, even scandal; as with persons, so also with words.

For instance, there is a monosyllable of everyday necessity to a large part of mankind, which professes to consign people and things to a dreadful future. It is used to all sorts of creatures and things, animate and inanimate—laundresses, compositors, tax-collectors, eyes, flies, golf-balls, men who roll rocks on you, and in fact anything and anybody at the moment troublesome or inconvenient. In practice the little expletive has become hardly more than an instinctive relief of a slight nervous irritation, like a cough to get rid of a tickle in the throat. Still, however, in what our forefathers called 'ears polite,' it retains a certain savour of wickedness, and from some lips would even now sound shocking to most people. Now, as written and printed—for nowadays it gets itself printed in full—this little horror of a word was most appropriately born with a tail, and wears the letter N in addition to the three letters necessary to its being. And as there is another word of precisely similar sound, meaning sometimes the mother of a sheep or other animal, and at others a device used by beavers and engineers to store water, it is very seemly and useful that the wicked little word should be so conspicuously marked off from its sedate and respectable homonym. In oral speech there is occasionally some ambiguity. For instance: in one of our

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most beautiful Sussex parks there is a golf-course laid out, on which the chief features offering natural bunkers used to be one or two ponds of artificial origin and divers gnarled and storm-beaten old oak trees. In written speech these features can be very simply described without shocking anyone. But when, after playing a bad round, a perturbed and heated golfer is heard telling a friend that the bunkers were all dammed ponds and blasted oaks, you feel that he is not only stating the facts but also relieving his feelings. It is evident, then, that in a system of uniform spelling there lie hidden dangers to morality as well as to æsthetic taste.

But I only draw attention to this point to emphasise what I mentioned before, the vitality of words, the fact that they require to be treated as living things, not as mere parts of a machine, to be assembled mechanically, as cog-wheels, bolts, or levers. Even proper names, in spite of the well-known statement in Logic, that they 'have no connotation,' have certainly associations and a vitality of their own. Otherwise why should not human beings merely bear numbers, like the number of one's motor-car or one's store-ticket? There is a fitness, an expressiveness, a beauty often in the mere name of a place; and in some languages there is often the opposite. What barbarous tongue was it that named the loveliest lake in Europe the *Vierwaldstättersee*, when the musical syllables of *Lucerne* are ready to hand? Those of us who have climbed the Matterhorn must, I think, sometimes regret that they did not climb the Cervin instead.

Well, style is the deft employment of words, and the utilisation of this living power in them. And although numerous writers have discoursed on the subject of literary style, I do not call to mind any special treatment of the matter in connection with mountains and Alpine climbing. There seems room, therefore, for a few desultory remarks on the style suitable for the description of mountain scenery and mountain climbs.

Presumably all description of these is intended to produce an impression on the imagination, and not to be a mere register on the mind's index. A description may be designed for either of two purposes, literary or scientific; either to help visualisation and call up a picture on the mental retina, or else simply to classify and identify the object. But we do not usually write descriptions of the Alps for this second purpose, or enumerate the features of a mountain as botanists do those of flowers; though much of the botanist's vocabulary might be applied to mountains and to climbers; mountains might be described

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as serrate—crenulate—bijugate—multidigitate—multidentate; and certain phrases employed about plants irresistibly recall certain attitudes in climbers: 'erect, when they ascend perpendicularly'; 'procumbent, when they spread along the ground the whole or the greater portion of their length'; 'prostrate when they lie still closer to the ground.' Or again: 'When they simply climb without twining they support themselves by special clasping organs, or sometimes by small excrescences.' Nor do we identify mountains by minute individual details, as a policeman does criminals; though many of us can no doubt, on our old garments, identify special rents left by particular rocks, like the finger-prints of a criminal—a dearly loved criminal, whose very crimes are endearing.

The scientific description of mountains belongs to the domain of the geologist, whose nomenclature—though awe-inspiring—is less fearsome than that of the botanist. But on this occasion we are concerned only with literary description: description for the purpose of visualisation, of presenting an image to the mind's eye.

In literature there are two broadly distinguished styles, both of which may be employed for descriptive purposes, viz. prose and poetry, or, as Douglas Jerrold said, Prose and Worse. The two often pass into one another; prose becomes intentionally poetic, and poetry unintentionally prosy. The most recent invention of our wonderful age in this direction is a curious hybrid between the two, which comes—or at least has received its name—from France, that land of hybrid roses. This hybrid style has been named *Vers libres*, and may be regarded as the realisation of the old desire of M. Jourdain, in the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, when he desired to address the *belle Marquise* in a style *ni prose, ni vers*. It is at present somewhat of a rarity, and has the attractiveness of a novelty and a curiosity. Whether it will prove, like other hybrids, barren and sterile, remains to be seen. But anything in the nature of a mule begins life with a bad reputation. The ALPINE JOURNAL has wisely and steadily refused to admit a 'Poet's Corner'; and no doubt the Editor is keeping his weather eye lifted against any stealthy incursion of this new poetry, so written or printed as to appear mere harmless prose. Except under this insidious guise there is little fear that the serpent verse will steal into our well-kept garden; at least so long as we severely keep the Eves of mountain climbing to their own separate Eden.

There is, however, other mountain literature than the ALPINE JOURNAL, and some of it has taken the guise of verse: not a

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large proportion, and comparatively little first-rate. This is rather a curious and striking fact. I suppose most people would agree that the two natural features that inspire very much the same feelings of sublimity and magnificence, and fill us with the same love and awe, delight and exhilaration, are the Sea and Mountains. They have indeed often been coupled, as by Wordsworth :

> 'Two voices are there; one is of the sea,
> One of the mountains, each a mighty voice.'

It is therefore rather surprising to find how much poets have written on the subject of the sea that is impressive, suggestive, inspiring, and how little of the same kind and worth about mountains. Are there anywhere to be found lines that fill the soul with such a vision of the hills as do the lines of Keats with a vision of the sea ?

> 'The moving waters at their priest-like task
> Of pure ablution round Earth's human shores.'

One turns to Tennyson—that wonderful word-painter of landscape—and finds a few rare and precious gems of description, such as that of the glacier :

> 'the firths of ice
> That huddling slant in furrow-cloven falls
> To roll the torrent out of dusky doors.'

But Tennyson seems never to have felt the friendliness and intimacy of the Alps, which mountain-lovers find there, but to have been mainly moved by their coldness and terror.[2] The mountain picture in the Palace of Art showed :

> '. . . a foreground black with stones and slags,
> Beyond, a line of heights, and higher
> All barr'd with long white cloud the scornful crags,
> And highest, snow and fire.'

If we take up a mountain anthology such as Mr. Brett James' 'The Charm of Switzerland,' we cannot fail to be struck with

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[2] In a few remarks at the end of the meeting when this paper was read Mr. Solly expressed a kindly dissent from this point, reminding us most happily of the exquisite stanza in 'The Daisy' :

> 'How faintly-flush'd, how phantom-fair,
> Was Monte Rosa, hanging there
> A thousand shadowy-pencill'd valleys
> And snowy dells in a golden air.'

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the comparative scantiness and poverty of the verse beside the richness and abundance of the prose.

It is perhaps rash to suggest any explanation of this. Everybody would probably have one of his own. And our old friend the Man in the Street would say that of course poets—people with long hair and weak legs—could not write about mountains, as they would be afraid to go near them. At the same time there seems ready to hand a simple and natural explanation, viz. that poetry is the art of awaking and re-awaking feeling, by mental stimulus and sympathetic suggestion. Now the feeling produced by mountains is one that no suggestion can awaken in those who have not felt it; while for those who have, little stimulus is needed to re-awaken it: a single word, a mere name, will do this, while a page of poetry will seem vapid. The very words 'ice-slope,' 'couloir,' 'arête'; the mere names Bernina, Dent Blanche, Finsteraarhorn, these conjure up in a moment pictures more living and thrills more vivid than any elaboration of words or craft of poet language can possibly produce; and beside these mind's-eye pictures the most skilful and suggestive word-painting seems tawdry and impertinent.

The poems most successful in awaking or re-awaking the emotions of mountain scenery are those which rather take it for granted than try to describe it; poems such as the 'Prometheus' of Æschylus, or Lermontoff's 'Demon,' in which by a touch here and there we are made conscious of the atmosphere of the mountains around us, feel the breath of the mountain air, and instinctively fill up the picture for ourselves out of our own stored impressions.

In the sister art of prose quite another state of things prevails; beautiful and suggestive passages abound; and the difficulty of an anthologist is *embarras de richesse* and of an essayist classification. For there are many different styles. Minds differ as do beasts of the field—the swift, the slow; the dull, the nimble; the coarse, the dainty; and they require different food and methods of feeding. Writers must provide divers styles of mental pabulum as farmers provide varying diet for their live-stock—roots, or grasses, or clover. The scientific mind likes getting to the root; the tourist on holiday enjoys the sensation of being out at grass; the climber on good rock or hard snow considers himself in clover.

And in this great Noah's Ark of a world in which we have to huddle together with all sorts and conditions of beings, like or unlike ourselves, in as friendly toleration as we can, it is well to bear in mind continually the homely old adage,

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'One man's meat is another man's poison.' The cheapness and vulgarity and tawdry sentiment which sicken and disgust the refined soul provide entertainment and delight for those whom we may call by the general name of 'The Gallery.' And despite all the efforts of doctrinaire educationists, it is sadly probable that the majority of mankind will always remain 'The Gallery,' and can never be educated out of their hankering after mental fried-fish and tripe-and-onions. The best we can do is to keep the higher style at a high standard; to be tolerant even in our distaste, good-humoured even in our critical judgments; and ready to lend a helping hand to every soul, however different from ourselves, who turns wistful eyes towards the more excellent way.

Flattering ourselves, therefore, that we are of the Refined and not of 'The Gallery,' we may leave out of our view the vulgar and the tawdry, and all literary atrocities akin to the art-atrocities of comic postcards, those postcards which depict the loveliest of mountains with the vulgarest human features, and over-coloured descriptions like chocolate-box pictures in the flamboyant style of certain popular lady-novelists; and we will confine our discussion of Style to such literature as a self-respecting A.C. can read—and be seen reading.

There have been many stylists and many styles in English prose. There is the highly artificial style of Euphues: 'Easier to write than to read, yet easier to read than to imagine any reason for writing.' There is the resonance of the *Religio Medici*; the eloquence of John Milton; the humour of Charles Lamb, wistful, pathetic, playful, all at once; the rhetoric of Macaulay—rhetoric in the best sense; the dyspeptics of Carlyle; the easy word-mastery of De Quincey. Nearer the present day there have been writers conspicuous for style of one kind or another. We all know the deft craftsmanship of Robert Louis Stevenson, the exquisite atmosphere-painting of Walter Pater; the mental torture-engines, rack, tongs, and pincers, of George Meredith. Which, if any, of these should the Alpine writer choose for reading or for imitation? The answer is: For reading, All; for imitation, None. In verse or in prose the writer with a marked style of his own is *sui generis*, a unique specimen, not a type. Imitation always results in either parody or mere plagiarism.

Now I am not going to be presumptuous enough to offer guidance or instruction. Members of the Alpine Club are just as good judges of Style as myself, or better, and every writer must grow his own style for himself, or it will not be

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his own. But I think that for descriptive writing, whether of the mountains themselves or of adventures on them, we should all agree that there are, broadly speaking, two distinct styles which have been used by others, and may be used by ourselves, with greater or less success according to our brains and our pains. These are:

The Realistic or pure photographic, the aim of which is a simple, literal, uncoloured presentment of what the writer saw or heard or performed.

The Emotional, which aims not only at presenting scenes and facts, but also at suggesting the feelings aroused by them. This style would better be called the sentimental or æsthetic, were it not that both these words have been dismissed from service with bad characters.

For the account of a new climb or an interesting expedition the former—the photographic presentment (but in careful focus)—is naturally the best, a simple relation of facts in orderly sequence, unrolled like a cinema-film, uncoloured, unheightened, the simpler the better. There are many fine examples of this style at its best in the ALPINE JOURNAL, and in those numerous books on climbing exploits which every climber prizes. But even this simple style is not easy to all writers. It usually requires a pen practised in selection and restraint, a judgment quick to distinguish the telling detail from the trivial, and a view large enough to see the whole, and the parts in due proportion to the whole.

Such a description is, so to speak, the dry bread of Alpine Literature; the Staff of its Life indeed, and satisfying enough to the keen appetite of the climber; but apt to seem a little savourless and stodgy and untempting to the general public. And there are, it must be remembered, very many readers who love mountains without climbing or wishing to climb them, or whose climbing desires are limited to an ascent to a view-point, or to the solitude of some Alpine slope where they may be alone with Nature,

> 'And live awhile in Eden dreams
> Among the gentians and the streams.'

Who is to write for these? Are they to be left to the mercy of the semi-religious sentimentalist, or else to the literary hack, the professional magazine-writer, the sensational journalist, who will 'get up the subject' out of Alpine Club papers and books on climbing, and dress an appetising dish compounded of hashed fragments and other people's leavings,

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disguised by skilful seasoning out of all natural savour and simplicity? These lovers of the Hills deserve better than that, for they are true lovers. And for them it is right and well and fortunate that many good climbers and true, even members of the Alpine Club, have abandoned at times the severer style, have come down from the cold regions of pure climbing thought, and clothed their experiences and their descriptions in language that makes more appeal to the, emotions.

Of such is the great bulk of Alpine Literature. And a noble literature it is, worthy, or almost worthy, of its grand theme; and in English at all events, of which I am mainly speaking, it shows a perceptible standard of taste and elevation of style, which I venture to think has been largely owing to the influence of the Alpine Club and of those distinguished men who, from the first, devoted to its service not only superlative limbs and muscles but also unusual literary abilities.

But for all lovers of mountains, whether they climb them or not, there is one pre-eminent writer, apostle of their creed, prophet of their visions, interpreter of their dreams—John Ruskin. There were lovers of the Alps before him, in whose pages we find some glow of the mountain spirit, the flush before the dawn; but in all writers since, it is his spirit, his example, his enthusiasm, which have been the inspiration of their pen and the standard of their style.

Well may it be so! For it is to Ruskin more than all others that mankind owes the re-discovery of its long-lost heritage, called in the beautiful old story The Garden of Eden; owes the awakening to realise that this Garden of God is not one small particular plot on the earth's surface, remote, undiscoverable, with gateway waved over by the flaming brand; but is simply the Earth itself,

> 'Wherever flowers in beauty grow,
> Or wood-birds sing, or waters flow,
> Or uplands clothed in forest rise,
> Or snow-peaks range on sapphire skies.'

The fame and repute of Ruskin have undergone strange vicissitudes. In his earlier career it was the current estimation of him that his views on Art were sound and valuable, but his ideas on Political Economy were mere piffle. Nowadays an opinion exactly opposite is widely held, if not quite universal. The art critics—little realising how largely their principles are founded on Ruskin's ideas and teaching—make light of



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his writing on art-subjects; while, on the other hand, numerous eager disciples profess adherence to his somewhat communistic (and wholly unworkable) theories of Political and Social Economy. But for many of us, though we may disagree with some of his tenets, and have outgrown or further developed others, Ruskin is still Arch-Priest in the Temple of Earth's beauty, chief Flamen before the altar of the hills. Devoted to Art, devotee of Nature, devout in love and duty to God and his neighbour, he seems to me (for all his frequent wilfulness and in spite of the final loss of mental balance) to be pre-eminently sane in his adjustment of these varied relations of Humanity—to Nature, Art, and Religion, including in the last the service of Man as well as of the Temple. Nature is at present the best word to express the Universe of Phenomena of which Man himself is but a morsel, though in his own eyes a morsel of supreme importance. For Ruskin, Nature came first and came last. Art and Religion were the exponents of Nature to man, Art to his intellectual soul, Religion to his spiritual. All the pleasures of Art, in which he found and expressed so great pleasure, were secondary to the joy in Nature. To destroy or mar a beautiful landscape or inspiring bit of scenery was in his eyes a greater iniquity even than to ruin a picture by Turner. And this is, I think, the inner feeling of all mountain-lovers; and it is because Ruskin has expressed his feeling, and clothed the expression of it in language glowing with the same joy and enthusiasm, that he holds such a unique place in the hearts of all Alpinists and lovers of natural beauty.[3]

Here my paper should end; but if I am not wearying you, or keeping you too long, I should like to add a postscript.

Members of the Alpine Club do not concern themselves much, perhaps, with the merely popular in mountain literature. Of late years there has been a large output of such books, usually on heavy loaded paper, with misrepresentations of mountains, plain or coloured. And some of us must have occasionally regretted the good old days when no book could be printed or published without royal or official permission. Just as I knew an old fellow who used to murmur when driving perilously through a school swarming out on to the road,

[3] To avoid possible misconception, it may be as well to say that there is no suggestion here that a writer should try to imitate Ruskin's style. The words above on the inimitability of any marked style are quite as applicable to Ruskin's as to any writer's.

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'Oh for the days of good King Herod!' In retrospect a despot's power often seems alluring. We have seen strange curtailments of English liberties in these days. And it is not beyond hoping for that some day all books on mountains and climbing will have to come before the Committee of the Alpine Club, and receive the Pontifical imprimatur of the President.

Nor is it only the light and rubbishy in mountain literature that some of us would like to see restrained. Are there not nowadays too many guide-books and hand-books published —trustworthy accounts of actual ascents, and painstaking directions for particular climbs? It is very difficult to draw the line between accounts and directions of real value and need and those which in effect if not in intention spoil a climb for others by vulgarising it, turning it into a beaten track, each foothold noted, each hand-grip suggested; here turn the body, here throw the arm over the blocking boulder, here leave the chimney, here use the knee and here the eyelid. Might not much of this matter, accurate and instructive as it is, be kept locked in the climber's breast, allowed to lie, where Wordsworth says the child does,

'In Abraham's bosom all the year'?

Otherwise there seems no end to the books that might be written, and the places that might be spoiled.

I confess I tremble every publishing season lest some hand-book appear to the climbs on the chalk cliffs, and some profaning pen enumerate and detail all my own pet rambles and scrambles on Beachy Head, where the foxes used to lie or run sure-footedly, although once indeed I saw one have a fall. All round the coast, wherever it is precipitous, there are to be found minor delights for the climber, places where angels yet fear to tread; and long may it be ere foolscap rush in!

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## Himalayan Scrambles in 1914.

By CAPTAIN H. D. MINCHINTON
(1st (K.G.O.) Gurkha Rifles).

IN 1911 I had arranged to join the late Captain Todd, of the 5th Gurkhas, in the Kaghan Valley, but had to forgo my leave at the last moment, and it was not until 1914 that I again had the chance of two months' leave.

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