

To the actors themselves, failures hold little of romance, and they usually receive scant or no mention, whilst we of a later generation tend to forget the frustrated attempts which have led to ultimate success, and thoughtlessly accept a first ascent as the beginning of the history of a route. In the present case, the early failures were really achievements which we may assess properly only if we remember the undeveloped technique of the day. It would be ungrateful to let these attempts pass into oblivion, because we now enjoy their fruits. Had men not been found to attempt such 'great routes' of modern standard long before the time was ripe, the earlier technique would have remained what it was—adequate enough for the usual ascents; and there would have been small cause to improve it to the level of efficiency necessary for these longer and more exacting expeditions. It was only the strongest and most adventurous climbers of their generation who could have brought themselves face to face with Mont Blanc from the Innominata basin under such conditions. If for no other reason, it has been a privilege to remember them here.

FOOTNOTES TO ALPINE HISTORY

By E. H. STEVENS

2. PORTRAITS OF WHYMPER

IN the admirable review⁹ of Mr. Smythe's biography of Edward Whymper—a review which is surely one of the best things ever written about Whymper—there is a striking comment on the early likeness of him that appeared in the *ALPINE JOURNAL* in February 1912. The reviewer, referring to 'the wonderful portrait of Whymper at twenty-five,' goes on: 'That face, so utterly unlike all later ones, is the face of a young Achilles or Alexander, sensitive, spiritual, shining with the

the lower basin of the Fresnay Glacier, thence ascending the Péteret arête with one bivouac upon it (Louis Kurz, *Guide to the Chain of Mont Blanc* (Climbers' Guides), 1892, p. 111). A few subsequent attempts on the route by the original line were frustrated by bad weather, and the third ascent in all was not accomplished until 1921, when Courtauld, Finch, and Oliver repeated the route by Eccles' line from a bivouac at Col Eccles (*A. J.* 34. 117, 170). In 1928, after a failure in 1926 with Bickhoff, the fourth ascent in all was made from the Gamba hut direct by August and Hugo Muller with Clavel, the original line of Eccles again being taken (*Die Alpen*, 6. 1). In 1932, Brauner and Fraisl more or less repeated Gruber's route (*Alpinisme*, 9. 470), but by the improved line which H. O. Jones had discovered in 1909 for an ascent of the Aig. Blanche de Péteret (*A. J.* 24. 577; 25. 510). To the best of my knowledge, these five ascents (thus including that of Eccles himself) are the only occasions up to the time of writing (winter, 1939) on which this fine route has been climbed—five ascents in sixty-two years!

⁹ *A. J.* 52. 150. Few, however, would agree with the reviewer that on the descent from the Matterhorn Hadow should have led down.

fire of conquest,' and speaks of 'the brief flowering of high adventure,' of 'the boy *conquistador*.' These eloquent words do no more than justice to a likeness the mingled strength and charm of which must deeply move all who look upon it. It was taken by the well known photographer Boissonaz of Geneva in 1865, the year of the Matterhorn catastrophe—in all probability *before* that tragic disaster—when Whymper was a few months more than twenty-five. The photograph, which was of carte-de-visite size, was in the possession of Dr. Alexander Seiler. From it, Dr. Atkin Swan made a fine platinotype enlargement for Sir Edward Davidson (then President of the Club), who, as he said himself, was 'an old friend of Whymper's of many years' standing.'¹⁰ The original photograph, nearly fifty years old, was much faded, and it must have needed all Dr. Atkin Swan's acknowledged mastery of photographic technique to achieve so effective a reproduction. The enlargement was shown in our Photographic Exhibition in May 1911 and was presented by Sir Edward Davidson to the Club.

Being at that time by way of giving occasional lantern lectures on mountaineering subjects, I asked Sir Edward if he thought Whymper would allow me to make and show a lantern slide from the newly discovered photograph. He was good enough to write for me to Whymper, who replied that 'I might do as I liked with him,' and added to this kindness by sending me an autographed copy, dated 1910, of his latest likeness (the one reproduced in the *ALPINE JOURNAL*,¹¹ and not that so dated in Mr. Smythe's book). Accordingly I had several lantern slides of the early portrait made,¹² and sent one to Whymper, who acknowledged it as follows¹³:

To E. H. Stevens, Esq.

Teddington,
July 22, 1911.

DEAR SIR,—I do not understand from yours of yesterday whether you do or do not wish me to retain the lantern slide. If you do, you are welcome to it, and it shall be returned.

There is a considerable difference in public opinion between now and 50 years ago in regard to mountain exploration. Some of the things said about me were rather stiff. It was remarked either by the *Daily Telegraph* or *Daily Chronicle* in 1861 that 'although there have been fools before, and very big ones, Mr. Whymper is the biggest of the lot.' I thought this smelt of libel.

Yours very truly,

EDWARD WHYMPER.

The reference to 1861 is surprising, for Whymper's only notable exploits in that year were the first ascent of the Pelvoux, and his first attempt on the Matterhorn. It seems unlikely that either could have attracted such abuse in the popular press as was formerly lavished on

¹⁰ *A.J.* 26. 104.

¹¹ *A.J.* 26. 58.

¹² Two of these are now in the collection of slides of the Alpine Club.

¹³ The letter must have been written shortly before Whymper left England on what was to be his last visit to the Alps. He died at Chamonix on September 16, 1911. Before that I had heard, I think from Sir John Withers, who had just come from Chamonix to Pontresina, that Whymper was sleeping badly, and was troubled, for the first time in many years, by nightmare dreams of the Matterhorn disaster. Perhaps the end was a merciful release.

those who were ' " mad " enough to risk their lives and those of their guides ' on Mont Blanc.¹⁴

The only other early photograph of Whymper that is known appears to be one dating from 1864,¹⁵ which suggests a different side of his character from that of the ' boy conquistador.' The strength and determination are there, but not the inspiration or the charm.

Of the portraits of 1865 and 1910 another very interesting interpretation was given by Mr. Winthrop Young in *The Cornhill Magazine* (1923), and is quoted by Mr. Smythe. The 1910 photograph, Mr. Young says, shows ' the Titan in age, with the leonine head, the granite jaw, the penetrating eyes,' and comparing it with the youthful portrait he wonders ' which won, the eyes of the prophet or the mouth of the man ? ' Perhaps the answer is to be found in the reviewer's remark¹⁶ that ' all the criticism and innuendo that followed [the Matterhorn accident] permanently embittered him.' The letter I have quoted might serve to bear this out.

IN MEMORIAM

ROBERT CORRY

1866-1941

ROBERT CORRY, who died on April 4, 1941, at the age of 75, was the eldest of the five sons of the late John Corry, and a member of a family which has been interested in shipping for nearly a century. His grandfather's firm were timber merchants in Belfast and first became interested in shipping by the acquisition, for the purposes of their business, of a half share in a schooner of 60 tons. The expansion of their shipping interests resulted, in 1880, in the formation of the Star Line.

Robert Corry entered the London office and was for many years a Director of the Commonwealth and Dominion Line—now known as the Port Line—which maintains a large fleet of steam and motor vessels engaged in the Australian and New Zealand trade, and which is now associated with the Cunard Steamship Company. Corry loved his ships and took a keen interest in everything pertaining to them and to the manning of them. He made a point of visiting every ship belonging to the Company which came into the Port of London, and of going over her with his characteristic thoroughness. He was a member of the Committee of Lloyd's Register and of the London General Shipowners Society, of which he was Chairman in 1923-24.

¹⁴ The date should be 1862, as shown in Whymper's volume of newspaper cuttings.—EDITOR.

¹⁵ *A.J.* 32. 220.

¹⁶ *Loc. cit.* p. 150.