CORRESPONDENCE

Alpine Club,
74 South Audley Street,
London, W.1.
September 14, 1955.

The Editor, *The Alpine Journal.*

DEAR SIR,—The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research publishes every year an admirable survey of mountaineering activities under the title *The Mountain World.* As a tribute to the Alpine Club, which will celebrate its centenary in 1957, this Foundation will publish a special volume, which Sir Arnold Lunn will write, and which will be entitled *The Alpine Club: A Century of Mountaineering Achievement.*

The Foundation intend to be generous in the matter of illustrations and are particularly anxious to secure good period photographs of famous mountaineers of the past (not necessarily members of the Alpine Club) and famous guides.

If any of our members possess photographs which they believe might be suitable, the Alpine Club would be most grateful if they would write to Mr. T. S. Blakeney, The Alpine Club, 74 South Audley Street, and give a detailed description of the subject of the photograph and its state of preservation. If it appears that good use can be made of the photograph or photographs in question, the owners will be informed, and the photographs, when used, returned by registered post.

Yours faithfully,
E. S. HERBERT,
President of the Alpine Club.

To The Editor, *Alpine Journal.*

MEMORIES OF COOLIDGE

DEAR SIR,

As doubts have been cast (*A.J.* 60. 122) on the story which Coolidge told me about faking the ballot at which Mummery was elected, I should be grateful for a little space to vindicate my belief in the accuracy of Coolidge's statement.

My first contact with Coolidge was in the course of a controversy in *The Field*, in which Colonel Strutt had stated that ski were only of use for reaching Alpine huts and that no ski-runner had equalled Coolidge's winter ascents on foot. This I ventured to doubt, and the lack of reverence, if not of respect with which I referred to these ascents produced a characteristic reply from Coolidge, in which—I quote from memory—he said, 'Mr. Lunn tells us in *Oxford Mountaineering*

Essays that he was four at the time of the Grindelwald fire. He must therefore be only twenty-one today. He tells us that he climbed his first peak at the age of fifteen. He can therefore only have had six years' climbing experience. And yet this young and inexperienced mountaineer ventures to, etc.'

The Field used to send me mountaineering books to review, among them two of Coolidge's. I gave him full marks for erudition and for his pioneer work as a winter mountaineer, but hinted that the entertainment value of his books left something to be desired.

Many years later I settled in Grindelwald and was curious to meet the old sage. I had made a solitary ascent of the Wetterhorn and, as my game leg was troublesome, I was not looking for unnecessary difficulties. Coolidge's account in his *Climbers' Guide* is misleading, for there are three couloirs, not two, as he says, and I followed the one to the left and did not, as it happens, climb by the normal route. I therefore wrote to him with deep respect suggesting that there might be some slight rectification needed in his next edition and expressing my gratitude for all the pleasure which his books had given me. He replied, ' I am puzzled by your letter. You pay me compliments for which I thank you but can you by any chance be the same Arnold Lunn who in *The Field* of . . . wrote . . . and in the issue of . . . wrote . . . and who in *The Alps* wrote of me as follows :

> " My friends tell me, writes a well-known veteran, that I am singular in my strange desire to avoid meeting the never-ceasing stream of tourists, and I am beginning to believe that they are right, and that I am differently constituted from other people. The author of this trite confession has only to study travel literature in general and Alpine literature in particular to discover that quite commonplace people can misquote the remark about the madding crowd, and that even members of the lower middle class have been known to put the sentiment into practice. A sense of humour and a sense for solitude are two things which their true possessors are chary of mentioning."

' Can it be that the Arnold Lunn who pilloried me in this fashion can be the Arnold Lunn who now writes of me with flattering respect ? '

The old boy had kept a complete dossier of me and my works and my allusions to him had all been carefully tabulated. I wrote back at once : ' You are right. There are two Arnold Lunns : A. L. the first, an irreverent bumptious youth who recently died, and A. L. the second, who has a proper respect for his elders, and a proper reverence for the works of one of the great pioneers of the Alps.'

Mollified by this grovel, the cantankerous sage allowed me to call, and thereafter for some years I used to spend an hour or two with him every week throughout the summer months. In his case familiarity did not breed contempt, but still less did it breed respect. Vanity is a universal failing, but Coolidge was pathological in his vanity. His Christmas card, one year, consisted of his complete entry in *Who's Who* surrounded by a border of edelweiss. Any form of mountaineering

activity in which he scored no marks, guideless climbing, for instance, or ski-mountaineering, was swept aside as improper. Now, never was his vanity more deeply wounded than when Sir Edward Davidson added ' the usual spelling among Germans is Schreckhorn ' to an entry by Coolidge in which he had accidentally omitted the first ' c ' in Schreckhorn in Christian Almer's *Führerbuch*. Coolidge often spoke to me with genuine friendliness of mountaineers with whom he had quarrelled for fun, and his references to Mummery were so consistently friendly that the slight breach with him can have hardly ruffled him, but his hatred of Davidson was intense. He recurred to this vendetta again and again.

Now, Davidson was responsible for the blackballing of Mummery and even had Coolidge really disliked Mummery, which he certainly did not, he would have loved to fake Mummery into the club to spite his arch-enemy. In my book *Switzerland and the English* I have described Coolidge's career and vendetta and have commented on various objections which have been raised to his claim to have faked the ballot. I should like to add that though Coolidge was often unfair and madly biased in his comments on mountaineering I have never known him tell what could be defined as a lie. Even the story about Whymper's relations to Moore, which I mentioned in my contribution to your last issue, may have been completely accurate, or at the worst a deduction by Coolidge from facts reported to him.

It is very difficult for those who have actually seen a witness to convey to others the impression conveyed of veracity, or the reverse. I shall never forget the joyous chuckles with which Coolidge described his faking of the ballot, and I find it impossible to believe that he invented the whole incident. My expression of doubt, which Mr. Blakeney quotes, was provoked by a dogmatic statement to the effect that only the President could have faked the ballot. I now know that this statement was incorrect and I therefore reaffirm my belief that Coolidge was telling the truth.

Yours truly,

ARNOLD LUNN.

Hotel Eiger, Mürren,
July 15, 1955.

Pen y lan
Meifod
Mont.
1 June 1955.

The Editor, *The Alpine Journal*

DEAR SIR,—I am grateful to your reviewer for treating my book with restraint. I wish I could say that his censure of my inexcusable inaccuracies in the quotations from the works of Mr. Winthrop Young is ill deserved.

There is, however, as your reviewer detects, a fundamental divergence between his view and mine. He likes to classify the attitudes to mountains as the ' familiar ' and the ' unfamiliar,' putting *High Mountains* in the latter category, which he admits he finds much less easy to follow. On the other hand, I differ from him in that I think that these two categories should be compatible and indeed complementary. It seems a pity that they are so often opposed. There is, unfortunately, at least one variety of the ' familiar ' attitude that has long been noticeable. It is of a kind that is often marked by intolerance, and consists in a refusal to take mountains at all seriously except as a playground or else as a gymnasium for exercising physical and moral qualities. This attitude appeals very much to people who pride themselves on their common sense, and it derives from a sort of shrinking prudery in dealing with ideas that may be involved with emotions, either secular or religious. My book is an attempt to indicate a less exclusive point of view, but it certainly does not claim to be an attitude that is ' unfamiliar ' to members of the Alpine Club.

May I add that your reviewer in discovering among my quotations a phrase which he declares ' one clutches gratefully at ' took the first three words of Smythe's comment on the cold weather on Mount Everest right out of their context. The whole passage, as written by Smythe, has by no means the flatness which the misleading extract made by the reviewer implies. It deserves to be quoted correctly :—

> ' It was cold. Space, the air we breathed, the yellow rocks were deadly cold ; there was something ultimately passionless, eternal in this cold. It came to us in a single constant note from the depths of space.'

It is obvious that the full quotation has nothing of the reassuring familiarity of platitude, but as a record of experience Smythe's words are worth more than a weather report.

Yours faithfully,

C. F. MEADE.