

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

BY SIR JOHN HUNT

SINCE I was elected to membership of the Club twenty-three years ago, there have been eight Presidents. Of my seven predecessors in this office, only five have delivered Valedictory Addresses. When I remind you of their names: Strutt, Schuster, Young, Amery, Longstaff, Elliott, Herbert; when you consider some of their distinguished careers in the realms of the Law, Education and Politics, with the immense wealth and variety of experience and knowledge possessed by each one of them, you will, I am sure, agree with me that we have, in the past, been singularly blessed by the learning and wisdom of the men at the helm. It was, of course, like all good things, too good to last. You have now, to fulfil this function tonight, one who is only nominally lettered; who can offer you no texts from the Greek, no precepts from history or mythology; nothing but elementary thinking expressed in elementary language; and the temptation has been strong to follow the example of those two past Presidents, Dr. Tom Longstaff and Sir Claude Elliott who, with far greater scholarship and therefore with far less justification than myself, astutely dodged this ordeal.

Three years ago, Sir Edwin Herbert delivered to the Club a parting message as outgoing President, which most of you will remember and many more will have read in the JOURNAL.¹ He raised to the mast-head the flag of the tradition which the members of this Club have built up and under which, in his view, it must continue to sail in the future, if the future is to be secure. Few of us will dissent from his thesis. The Centenary has provided a proper opportunity for much further tribute to tradition. From Sir Arnold Lunn we have received a masterly history of the whole span of mountaineering and, in particular, of the past hundred years of mountaineering as a sport; it was written specially as a tribute to this Club. In 250 pages packed with perception and wit, Lunn has contrived brilliantly to reveal to us, despite his irresistible excursions down the *piste*, what has moved men in the presence of mountains, not only in the past century but through the ages. His thinking has, like that of Herbert, raised that of his readers to the highest plane. And latterly Geoffrey Young, adding his eloquent testimony to the others, spoke to us with great courage a year ago on this occasion, to wind up our celebrations over the Centenary.²

¹ A.J. 61. 3.² A.J. 63. 1.

All this, and more besides, has been said in the three years during which I have enjoyed the privilege of being your President. Indeed, there is nothing that I could offer you now, on our attitudes to our sport or on mountains as a medium for the uplift of the human spirit—mountains in the fourth dimension—which has not already been said, and said in the recent past with greater literary skill and oratorical art, by greater men; to say nothing of the observations of the many Presidents since the Valedictory Address was instituted over eighty years ago. Not only the content and quality of this thinking, but the timing of it, have made these reflections of my elders sufficient to guide our policy and give point to our society, if not for the next 100 years, at least well beyond this 101st year.

In searching around in some desperation for a pattern as well as a theme, I decided to seek inspiration in Strutt; his profession was the same as my own, and his term of office as President coincided exactly with the first three years of my membership of the Club. I opened Journal No. 256 and read the opening paragraph of the Valedictory Address for 1937³:

‘The period embraced by the Presidency now drawing to a close has been marked by great activities—mountaineering, literary, even controversial. It has been saddened by the death of two most distinguished Presidents, and by the greatest mountain accident of all time.’

History has a habit of repeating itself and these lines, only slightly modified, fit the history of the period now under review, twenty years later, remarkably closely. We have again lost two most distinguished Presidents in Claud Schuster and Geoffrey Young; we have been further saddened by an accident which, if not the greatest, is certainly one of the most tragic—I refer to the story of Haramosh, most movingly told us by Tony Streather a few weeks ago. I am thankful that Strutt’s opening gambit is not valid for tonight in one important respect; we have been virtually free of controversies. We have only been reminded of them; in an exhaustive research and magisterial style by de Beer and Graham Brown⁴; in light-hearted vein and in his inimitable manner, by Arnold Lunn.⁵

Does this signify that the Club is lacking in vigour in its old age? I suggest that the vigour is undiminished, but that we are channelling it to better purpose. Indeed, Strutt’s words ‘. . . great activities—mountaineering, literary . . .’ are truer now than then. To illustrate this belief, I propose, as Strutt and others have done, to look back on the activities of Club members in the past three years. I suggest that it has been a highly gratifying period for the Club. In the Karakoram a British party under John Hartog first reached the summit of the

³ *A.J.* 50. 1.

⁴ *v. A.J.* 62. 184.

⁵ *A.J.* 62. 144

Muztagh Tower in 1956.⁶ It provided a drama which might have given rise to an international squabble for a mountain, but which thanks to good sense and generosity on both sides, ended in a friendly double triumph; for this feat was emulated six days later by members of a French expedition based on the opposite side of the mountain, by a different route throughout. This French ascent was, therefore, a 'première' in its own right. In the third of a series of British-led expeditions to Rakaposhi, Banks completed the efforts of Band in 1954 and of himself in 1956, by reaching the top of that arduous peak with Tom Patey this summer.⁷ Of particular interest is the fact that the Expedition was a joint Anglo-Pakistani effort by members of the Fighting Services of both countries. The weather conditions through which these two climbers pressed on to the top appear to have been such that few climbers would have attempted to continue on an alpine, let alone a Himalayan summit. Charles Evans made the second ascent of Annapurna IV with Dennis Davis in 1957, perhaps the smallest-ever expedition to tackle successfully a peak of this order.⁸ And we were particularly delighted to learn of the success of an Indian party in making another notable second ascent, that of Cho Oyu, a few months ago. It included our late member N. D. Jayal, until his untimely death the best-known and most experienced Indian *amateur* climber.

Among achievements elsewhere, we have seen, in my term of office, the first British mountaineering exploits in the Andes for a long time. Two expeditions from this country, in which members of this Club figured prominently, reached the summits of Huagaruncho⁹ and Pumasillo¹⁰ for the first time. In reviewing the record, it would of course be quite wrong to confine myself to early ascents of specially notable mountains. Of at least equal interest, and possibly greater value, have been the activities of our members in exploring mountain country, including the essential preliminary reconnaissances of mountains which will doubtless be climbed in time to come. In the Andes again, Tilman and Marriott crossed the Patagonian ice cap for the first time.¹¹ In the Himalayas, there have been Hulme's, McArthur's and Solari's explorations in Lahoul and Spiti in 1955¹² and 1958. Shipton was lured back to fill in further blanks in the map of the Karakoram in 1953. Louis Baume took part in the second survey of South Georgia in 1956.¹³ The reconnaissance of the Antarctic peaks rising above McMurdo Sound, in which Hillary and Brooke took part, is of unique interest.¹⁴ An enterprising and

⁶ A.J. 61. 253.

⁸ A.J. 62. 173.

¹⁰ A.J. 63. 9.

¹² A.J. 61. 279.

¹⁴ A.J. 63. 241

⁷ A.J. 63. 159.

⁹ A.J. 61. 435.

¹¹ A.J. 61. 271.

¹³ A.J. 61. 465.

very tough band of soldiers, including Deacock and Mills, climbed in Alaska in 1956, making a first ascent of one peak and prudently returning shortly below the top of another.¹⁵

I commend their prudence. As it was so long ago, I am tempted to refer again to Strutt's Address, in which he similarly commended two other young officers, newly elected to the Club who, with equal reluctance, decided to turn back from a certain high mountain in the Karakoram, at a point not far below the summit and with the technical difficulties behind and below them. The year was 1935 and their names were Hunt and Waller. Such an example today, at a time when the incidence of accidents gives rise to serious concern (reflecting as it does on the prestige of our sport), seems to me to be an important contribution; as important in its way as a successful ascent. So don't let us make the mistake of rating as failures those expeditions which set out with the single-minded objective of climbing a particular mountain, but which did not reach the top. Gregory's and Ghiglione's attempts on Disteghil Sar and Ama Dablam, and particularly that of Noyce, Cox, Roberts, Wylie and Chorley on Machapuchare were notable contributions, paving the way for later ascents and setting excellent examples of sound mountaineering judgement.

There has been an interesting venture, in which six Club members took part, in the Caucasus, where a new route was made on Dych Tau by a party of which Band was a member, while second and third ascents were made on the redoubtable Bezingi Wall by the members of a nine-man party, the first to visit this fine range since 1937.

To sum up so far—Muztagh Tower, Rakaposhi, Annapurna IV, Cho Oyu, Machapuchare, Huagaruncho, Pumasillo, the Himalaya, the Karakoram, Alaska, the Andes, the Far South, the Caucasus—all these provide good illustrations of enterprising climbing and exploration by members in mountain ranges around the globe, in fulfilment of Article Two.

And what of the Alps? In 1938 Strutt wrote: 'of the Alps I shall have little to say. Nothing new remains; in fact little has remained for many years past!' Today, after an interval of twenty years, there will be many of us who, viewing the numerous routes, some of them great climbs, which have been pioneered since those words were uttered, will disagree with Strutt. Many members have been very active in the Alps, some of them making ascents of the hardest technical standards. As an example of this, a third ascent of the VIth grade of difficulty was made last summer on the West face of the Petites Jorasses, by a party which included Ronnie Wathen¹⁶. Many of these climbs have been made with aids which Strutt condemned, but which have now been deemed respectable enough to be employed by the President of

¹⁵ *A.J.* 62. 121.

¹⁶ *A.J.* 63. 244.

your Club. I submit that all this shows how up to date we are and how much more enterprising we have become. I suggest that the view of many of us today would be that, in the Alps, much which is worth while doing remains to be done.

Last, but not least of our activities on the hills, it is worth adding that very many members have continued to seize every opportunity to visit our own mountain districts; here again, some exceedingly hard routes have been done.

Then there are personal records of a different nature. Although they do not fall within the normal activities of the Club, no review of events in the past three years should omit proud reference to the winning of the 3,000 metres in the 1956 Olympic Games by Brasher, or the part played by Hillary, Brooke and Lowe in the first crossing of Antarctica. And lest the readers of this Address who are not members of the Club should suppose that all the headlines have been made by the vanguard of younger men in so venerable an institution as ours, I must mention the astonishing performance of our septuagenarian Piero Ghiglione, who in the last three years has taken part in four expeditions: to Ruwenzori, the Colombian Andes, Disteghil Sar and the recent attempt on Ama Dablam with Gregory.

In the sphere of literature we have, I suggest, continued to fulfil another stated purpose of the Club. From a large choice, I would like to mention again Arnold Lunn's outstanding work, *A Century of Mountaineering*, perhaps the best thing he has ever done, as a great contribution to mountain literature, to the sport of mountaineering and to this Club; the truly remarkable researches of de Beer and Graham Brown into the history of the First Ascent of Mont Blanc; Geoffrey Young's *The Influence of Mountains on the Development of the Human Intelligence*; Noyce's remarkable research into the urge to climb, or fly, or sail the seas, or probe beneath them, *The Springs of Adventure*; Evans' *Kangchenjunga, the Untrodden Peak*; Harold Meyer's admirable translations of Hermann Buhl's 8,000, *Drüber and drunter* and of Eggler's book on Everest *Gipfel über den Wolken*; and A. W. Andrews' delightful book of poems. These seem to me to be good examples of the quality and diversity of the literary accomplishments of Club members.

Last and most important in this field, I would like to refer to our ALPINE JOURNAL. In the continuing high flood of mountaineering in ranges throughout the world, it speaks worlds for our editor and his assistants that they succeed so well in maintaining so complete a record, at such a high standard, and to place it in our hands with such unfailing punctuality. The JOURNAL continues to provide a splendid service to the Club. What is more, reflecting, as it does, the varied interests for which the Club was founded—literary, artistic as well as climbing—it

represents the Club most worthily to the world. Indeed, it deserves a wider circulation and your Committee has been considering ways and means to bring this about.

So far, I have spoken of the activities of individual members of the Club. In a sense, it is false to take credit for these things as achievements of the Alpine Club, in that they have not been sponsored by this society; nor can it be assumed that those whom I have mentioned, as well as others to whom I have not referred, have climbed, explored, painted and written with a conscious sense of representing the Club. Moreover, we have no monopoly of the record, for most of us owe allegiance to other mountain clubs as well.

Nor are the records of others, outside our membership, both at home and abroad, less praiseworthy. We have been able to rejoice with the Swiss on their magnificent performance in making the second and third ascents of Everest and, even more so, on the first ascent of Lhotse. We congratulated the Russian and Chinese party on their double achievement by climbing Muztagh Ata and Qungur for the first time; we now congratulate the Americans, Italians and Austrians each for a first ascent on three Gasherbrum summits; the Japanese for adding Chogolisa to Manaslu among their own pioneering efforts; and again the Austrians, for following up the Oxford party's exploration of Haramosh and reaching the top last summer. We also salute those who have continued to struggle for Dhaulagiri and Masherbrum; the many others who have solved further great problems on alpine precipices. And let us not forget the enterprising lady climbers, Mrs. Dunsheath and others, with their exploits in the Himalaya and the Caucasus. In short, there have been tremendous doings by climbers of many lands, from many clubs, to place with ours in the records.

Yet in another sense I have felt it to be right to claim the credit to the Club for what has been done by its members. Let us never forget that it is not so much the deed that matters as the manner of its doing. I suggest that you cannot read any one of our records in detail without concluding with satisfaction that the attitude was, in each case, in the best tradition of this Club, as it has so eloquently been interpreted for us by Young, Herbert and many others. The urge to be there first is a natural and proper one; it lies very deep in man's nature to reach out beyond himself and his fellow beings, seeking fresh worlds to conquer. This urge has undoubtedly continued to prompt those who first climbed Pumasillo and Rakaposhi, as much as those who first crossed the ice cap in the far south of the Andes and who have attempted to climb still virgin peaks. The urge is unquenchable. It will persist as long as the human race survives and is a condition of its survival. It will continue to prompt us climbers to seek new routes in increasing detail and difficulty, when all the summits, great and small, have been attained.

It is in this light that we should view the use of new tools for our craft; these aids do not necessarily flout our sound traditions. The employment of pegs and *étriers* by our members does not, I suggest, signify that the Alpine Club has sold its soul to the devil. What is fundamental to our tradition is our ability to see the whole mountain and not only its rock, and to acquire that feeling for mountains without which, as Herbert has claimed, no man is a mountaineer. I can vouch for the fact that you can still experience this feeling after you have stood in *étriers*, suspended from a snap link clipped to a peg, inserted temporarily into a crevice.

What is satisfactory is that, as far as I can detect these things, in no instance has the enterprise been prompted by the desire to flaunt personal supremacy, the supremacy of this Club or the supremacy of our country; in no instance has the spirit of competition, of rivalry or jealousy raised its ugly head in the conduct of any of the climbs, big or small, by members of our Club. In this respect I like to believe that tradition has played its valuable part. I hope you will be able to agree with me that this is something of supreme importance, for which the Club should take credit. I would rather that nothing noteworthy was achieved—that we should be content to walk, to breathe the mountain air and contemplate the mountain scene—than that members of this Club should stoop to vieing with one another and with other clubs, on some thinly concealed ladder of prowess.

But we must face the fact that comparisons are made, and this is another reason why I have followed Strutt's pattern in setting out some typical proofs of the active life of the Alpine Club. I hope it will serve as adequate ammunition for all of you to answer the gibes of 'The Old Lady of South Audley Street', 'The Period Piece' and the question as to whether members of the Club really climb at all. Apart from regretting such misapprehensions about our Club in the minds of other people, and where opportune, refuting them with facts, ought we perhaps to go further and seek to remove the causes from which they spring? What, in fact, of our social function—that part of Article Two which speaks of the promotion of good fellowship among mountaineers—in the changed and rapidly changing society of today?

In some respects, I suggest that the past three years have revealed the Club in a tolerably favourable social light. Among ourselves, we have continued to hold a series of evening meetings, many of them of exceptional interest. Examples which come foremost to my mind are the illustrated lectures of Jean Franco on Makalu; of Eugene Beletski on Mountaineering in the U.S.S.R.; of George Lowe on the first traverse of Antarctica; and Gaston Rébuffat's film 'Étoiles et Tempêtes'. The Centenary is too recent and vivid in all our minds to require that I should retell our social activities now, except to refer to the two highly

successful Meets, in North Wales and at Zermatt, a revival of mountain meets after an interval of nine years. Not only did these Meets enable many of us to get to know each other better, but they enabled other climbers to see the Club 'on location' and in action.

I hope you will forgive me if I dwell at greater length on this social aspect of our *raison d'être*, for it is so relevant to our future as a club. Of my duties as President, I have most enjoyed the special opportunity open to me, to strengthen and widen our connections with foreign clubs. I can report with some pride and pleasure that our relations with the clubs in all the 'mountain' countries are excellent. In Austria and France, I have paid visits as President to the headquarters of the Austrian Alpine Club, the Groupe de Haute Montagne and the Club Alpin Français; I have met the President and Committee of the Club Alpino Italiano in Trento; I have visited the Mountaineering Section of the U.S.S.R. in Moscow. I have had friendly correspondence with the climbing communities in Japan, U.S.A., Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway and Canada. Other members have also made or maintained other cordial contacts, in particular the Honorary Secretary and Assistant Secretary.

You will all remember that, at our Centenary Dinner, we entertained climbers from countries stretching from Japan, across Asia to the U.S.A. I was personally delighted that we were able to make a fresh link with the Deutsche Alpen Verein through its representatives at the Dinner. I am certain that more countries would have been represented if we had invited them! It was unfortunate that the Russians were prevented from being with us on that occasion, owing to a crash at Moscow Airport; it was only nine months later that their nominated representatives were able to hand to me the special trophy which they had planned to present to us at the Dinner.

The visit of six members of the Club to the Caucasus was, I believe, apart from the personal experience and fun it afforded to the participants, of real value for the contacts we were able to make, in the ideal context of mountains and mountaineering, with climbers from behind the Iron Curtain: from Siberia, Great Russia, the Ukraine, the Baltic Republics, Khabardaria, Georgia and Czechoslovakia. We found them genuinely friendly, delighted that we had paid them a visit, proud of their mountains and of the achievements of their leading mountaineers. I met several individuals who are much in sympathy with our traditional attitude to the sport; I understand that Sir Edwin Herbert's Valedictory Address was greatly esteemed by some of the Soviet mountaineers. Of special interest to the Club is the respect for such names as Freshfield and Mummery, and for the Club which they represented. In the Mountaineering Section of the U.S.S.R., which controls the sport under the All Union Committee of Physical Culture

and Sport, the place accorded to the Alpine Club as representative of British climbing struck me very forcibly. Believing that this link is worth forging more strongly, our party has invited an equal number of our Soviet friends to make a return visit to Britain next year. Although no obligation rests on the Club as a result of this private invitation, which is unsponsored by any other body, I would hope that the Alpine Club, so highly regarded in Russia, will not be backward in helping to entertain our visitors, always assuming that the processes of Government allow them to make the journey.

I have dwelt on this matter of our relations with climbers in other lands at some length, because I sincerely believe it to be one of the most appropriate tasks and worth-while assets of the Club. Rightly or wrongly, we are regarded abroad in high esteem—in higher esteem than is the case at home. This leads me to consider our social function in this country: our own social amenities and our relationship to the home clubs.

Of our social amenities, I will not venture to say much. I suspect that the germ of controversy lies here and it would be imprudent and unfair on my part, at the end of my term, to encourage it. Your committee has felt that, for the time being, we should retain the valuable asset of our present leasehold, which places us in a position to negotiate for other premises elsewhere at any time when this may seem desirable and possible. So far, we have felt that no opportunity to move has occurred, in any way comparable with that which so nearly materialised in Whitehall Court six years ago. On this matter of premises, I would only express the hope that if—or rather when—an opportunity occurs to obtain a social base more accommodating, more in sympathy with the times in which we live, we will seize it.

I now turn to our relationship to the home clubs. I suggest that it is in respect of establishing close and happier relations with our kindred clubs, that least has been achieved.

It is natural, following my remarks about our standing abroad, to utter the truism that a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country. I offer this observation now, simply to expose a fallacy which may lie at the root of our standing at home. In other words, do the views expressed about our club in other climbing circles at home stem, in any degree, from some lingering, outmoded arrogance in ourselves—in any of our company—as the prophets in climbing doctrine? Or in a persistent, if mistaken belief outside our ranks, that such arrogance exists?

If, as I suspect, there is some cause for this belief, then it needs to be removed. The time is past when this club can afford to maintain a patronising attitude towards the younger clubs. It is as out of tune with the times in which we live as it is between grown-ups and young

people. Today the proper attitude between institutions such as ours, as between individuals, is partnership. Climbing virtuosity exists in abundance in other clubs; indeed, the percentage of active climbers is, naturally enough, greater in the younger clubs than in one as old as ours. Their standard of competence, on rock at any rate, is relatively higher, their achievements are at least comparable with ours, if comparison were necessary.

I make this point to draw your attention to the change which has taken place since the days when a President of the Alpine Club could make pronouncements and strictures on mountaineering matters as from an Olympian height. The proper forum for such pronouncements is one in which these matters may be discussed and agreed with other kindred clubs; and such a forum exists in the British Mountaineering Council, itself the outcome of the vision of a very great past-President. We know this. But attitudes, and the memory of them, die hard. I believe that we need to make it clear that our pride in the past history of the Alpine Club does not imply a claim to pride of place today.

I ask again, are we doing enough to dispel the fallacy? Are we, in fact, playing an adequate social role *vis à vis* the other clubs, as advocated by Schuster sixteen years ago? I am sure it would pay the Club, in terms of goodwill, to be more socially alive than we have been for some years—since Geoffrey Young's war-time Meets in our home hills. The biggest contribution to the future prosperity of the Club would be to increase its membership; the best prospect of doing so is to build up goodwill by pursuing an active social policy, alongside our climbing and other activities. Meets need not be large to give proof of this, but they should be frequent. A Club fixture card for Meets as well as lectures; bookings for the A.C. in the huts of our kindred clubs (with tents for some and hotel accommodation for others!)—these would be eloquent of the Club in action and would bring us many new contacts.

Despite a number of grievous losses, some after the full span of years; others in action on the mountain, in the full vigour of youth, the membership of the Club has increased slightly—but only slightly—since December 1956. If we were to pursue an active programme of Meets and if, following this, a real effort were to be made by the members, each to propose at least one new member, I do not regard it as a flight of fancy that we should, in the next three years, make a net gain of 100 members.

My last act is to thank all those who have served the Club well in the three years of my Presidency. I have been fortunate in those who have served on the Committee. Last year particularly, the work involved by the Centenary made very big demands on your Committee and the

load, though a heavy one, was evenly shouldered. I would like particularly to thank the Officers of the Club: the Vice-Presidents, the Hon. Secretary and the Hon. Treasurer on whom, as always, the lion's share of the work has fallen; and I would like to pay a special tribute, because he is handing over part of his duties, to Tom Blakeney. In ten years' service to the Club as Assistant Secretary, Blakeney has given us an invaluable link, with his encyclopaedic knowledge of mountain history. His heart has always been in the right place, in furthering the best interests of the Club. We are thankful that he is not moving out of 74 South Audley Street, and that we shall continue to have the benefit of his invaluable services in the JOURNAL and the Library.

In conclusion, Gentlemen, despite our losses, despite our difficulties, because of our lively contribution to the sport of mountaineering, because of the sound traditions which we have inherited, the Club lives on. It will continue to flourish so long as our attitude is humble, our spirit enterprising, our friendships many, widespread and strong. Above all, let us strive to seek not only the rock wall and ice slope, not only the mountain, not only the mountain range:

'To each his own Valhalla and release
From perpetuity of petty things,
But we who are the freemen of the hills
Need no such sanctuary. We may not rest
Until we have climbed high enough to see
Beyond the false horizon's beckoning line
Which flatters us in vain, for still we climb.'