REVIEWS

An Eccentric in the Alps, the Story of the Rev. W. A. B. Coolidge, the great Victorian Mountaineer. By Ronald W. Clark. 8vo. pp. 217, with illustrations and index. Foreword by Sir Arnold Lunn. Museum Press, London. 1959. 35*s.*

ANYONE who has held office in an Alpine Club, particularly in editorial capacity, knows that mountaineers are individualists whose rivalries at times make them difficult. Indeed, one becomes aware, on examining Victorian writing, that the mountaineering scene occasionally resembles a battleground, scarcely Napoleonic, but rather comprising a series of skirmishes in back fields, with now and then a hive of bees overturned.

This is a biography of the Rev. W. A. B. Coolidge, American by birth, an introvert, a climber by chance, stateless and, in the end, almost friendless through indifference. Yet he became the greatest Alpine historian, and something of his life, however remotely, has touched the mind of nearly every mountaineer of the last century.

There are few intimate details of his youth, so few that he seems always to have been the elderly gentleman as D. W. Freshfield depicted him:

> ' In mien, a Don pedantic,
> Bespectacled and short;
> At heart a climbing antic
> Of quite the maddest sort;
> By heart a Transatlantic
> Moored in a British port.'

Coolidge, of Dutch ancestry, to which he himself attributed his stubbornness, was born near New York in 1850, and attended St. Paul's school; but when he was fourteen his family, with the exception of his father, who never re-enters the picture, removed to Europe where they remained. There may have been other reasons for this than the alleged delicate health of the boy, the *ménage* consisting of his mother, his sister, his aunt Miss Meta Brevoort, and himself. It was his aunt who became the dominating influence in his life.

A visit to Zermatt, two months after the Matterhorn tragedy, intensified an interest in the mountain world which had already arisen in the mind of Miss Brevoort, and thereafter, until her death from rheumatic fever in 1876, Coolidge and his aunt carried out mountaineering campaigns as often as opportunity and finances permitted.

Coolidge continued his education at Oxford and became the first American Fellow of Magdalen (1875), the year in which his mother died.

After the death of Miss Brevoort in the following year, being practically friendless and homeless, he was impelled to take Holy Orders although, as Sir Arnold Lunn notes, 'He was High Church in doctrine and no church in practice'.

Space does not permit a review of his mountaineering record of more than 1,200 ascents, or of his immense literary output (230 items in *A.J.* alone), or even of the controversies which he precipitated and prolonged. He became known as 'the young American who climbs with his aunt and his dog', the dog being the famous Tschingel. Their important meeting with Christian Almer created a lasting partnership, and while Coolidge had persistence and great power of endurance rather than expert climbing ability (he would never have made a leader), this curious group must nevertheless be credited with three things: popularisation, if not initiation of winter mountaineering; the use of high bivouacs; the exploration of the Dauphiné.

Miss Brevoort, twenty-five years older than her nephew, in addition to her many climbs (which included the first traverse of the Matterhorn by a woman; 1871) has two further claims to memory. In 1873 she was contemplating a book on *The Perils of the Alps*, and in 1876, shortly before her death, was considering the possibility of an expedition to Mt. Everest.

Throughout his residence at Oxford, Coolidge never climbed in Cumberland or Wales, and never set foot in Scotland. The Caucasus and Andes aroused no emotion, and even the early attempts on Everest left him unmoved. After the loss of his aunt he was desolate, until subsequent acceptance by the Gardiner–Pilkington circle showed him at last that he could enjoy travel in the Alps with someone other than Miss Brevoort.

A significant event took place in 1880 when Martin Conway suggested the *Zermatt Pocket-Book*, which was followed by the Coolidge and Conway series of Climbers' Guides. Coolidge's ascents between the ages of thirty and forty-six were planned to check guide-books and to settle points of history. With this background it was fitting that he should become editor of *A.J.* (1880–89), succeeding Freshfield.

Because of indifferent health he left Oxford in 1896 and settled in Grindelwald, where his most important books, *Simler* and *The Alps in Nature and History* were written. He was weighed down by his own knowledge, topographical exactitude and historical accuracy being more important to him than aesthetic impressions.

J. P. Farrar said: 'He enjoyed a good fight and was seldom without one.' The fantastic quarrels in which he became involved almost defy psycho-analysis: the libel suit arising from Cunningham's publication of Almer's *Führerbuch*; his enmity toward Davidson over Mummery's candidature for the A.C.; the wrangle with Whymper about

Almer's leap on the Ecrins; his several resignations from the A.C. He could not take Tuckett's advice, ' Do leave historical accuracy to take care of itself for a bit,' and Farrar's ' deadly true is deadly dull ' never induced Coolidge to bury the hatchet. He died in 1926, having survived his aunt by almost half a century.

As the author says, ' he had been a legend within his lifetime, and now that he could no longer present his version of the legend it began to grow in curious ways . . . the medieval ferocity was remembered; the kindly aid, given to all who sought it, was quietly overlooked.'

Despite this, Coolidge remains an enigma. In youth he had lived an unnatural life, shielded and surrounded by women. There is nothing in this book that suggests games, music, laughter or a love affair. Meta Brevoort seems to have been an ambitious, possessive woman, and when her death broke into his aunt-fixation, the same insecurity that induced him to take Holy Orders was at least partially responsible for the irritability in some of his contacts. A passion for accuracy is a *sine qua non* in compilers of guide-books, and this reviewer knows from experience how difficult it is to secure journal contributors whose papers can be successfully interpreted by a guide-book editor. It can be frustrating to the extent that murder would be a happy recourse. One must have sympathy for the man on this score. A collision between his unfortunate temperament and Victorian snobbery does not explain W. A. B. C.; the strange thing is that twenty years of exposure to Oxford left him untamed.

Mr. Clark again exhibits genius in discovering new and interesting illustrative material. The book itself is a courageous effort. Through no fault of his, however, Coolidge does not emerge as a rounded figure. The light touches that might make him a more sympathetic subject are unobtainable, and perhaps had no reality. His biography is that of one who was largely lacking in charm, a literary curiosity for those interested in Alpine history. Let us be content to say that the unique pattern of this man can never be repeated, and that we remain in his debt for the meticulous recording of material that would otherwise have been lost. It is in such understanding that mountaineering friendship will continue and the hatchet of the Grindelwald sage remain decently interred.

J. Monroe Thorington

Himalaya Venture. By Fritz Kolb, translated by Lawrence Wilson. Pp. 147, 15 plates, 3 maps. Lutterworth Press, London, 1959. Price 15*s*.

Between the wars, two Viennese teachers, Fritz Kolb and Ludwig Krenek, spent their long vacations leading N.U.S. parties from Britain in their native Austrian Alps and practising the arts of frugal mountain living and travel. Their ambitions, however, were not to be satisfied within the Alps, and the Himalaya beckoned. The usual financial problem beset them to a particularly acute degree, and their solution was to organise and lead an N.U.S. tour with four British clients, none of whom had had previous Himalayan experience. They chose Lahul as providing a combination of accessibility (and so moderate cost), tolerable weather during the summer holidays, and virgin territory culminating in the fine summit of Mulkila, 21,380 ft. They attained their objective on September 7, 1939, to learn on their descent that war had been declared a week before. The war years were spent in various internment camps in India.

On their release in 1944, they obtained temporary teaching posts while hoping for early repatriation. So, in spring 1945, Dr. Kolb took what he thought must be his last chance to see the Himalaya. Severely restricted time and means led him to make a solo march to the Pindari glacier. The hazards of the journey were infinitely complicated by the suspicions of the local authorities, yet he reached the Pindari and was highly rewarded by a glimpse of Nanda Kot.

The aftermath of war dragged on and 1946 found both Kolb and Krenek still in India. They joined forces once again, to explore the Bhut Nala which drains a substantial tract of the south flank of the Great Himalayan Range some 80 miles north-west of Lahul. Their approach via Kishtwar took them up the Chenab over harder going than that found further upstream. For part of the time they had as companion a third Austrian, Fabian Geduldig, with whom they explored the Bhazun Nala, the north-west tributary of the Bhut, in an unsuccessful attempt to find an approach to the dominant peak (21,570 ft.) of the region. Then, with time running out, they sought in vain the Muni La which the Survey of India map would have you believe once led to Zaskar, and finally made an astonishing double traverse of the Great Himalayan Range in five days, by the Poat La to Padam and back by the Umasi La.

Throughout, the story is told with gusto and a fine humour, even when telling of hardships willingly undergone or adversities unsought. They achieved much at remarkably little cost in mere cash through severe personal discipline which enabled them to travel with a bare minimum of support and to cover prodigious distances when necessary. And they were no casual travellers. Their geographical observations were of a high order and have been reported in appropriate journals—the author's aesthetic response to the appeal and challenge of these mountains is here charmingly and infectiously recorded for a less specialised public. Perhaps delight has been heightened for the reviewer by recognition of familiar places and faces—from the ' majestic glacier ' and ' boldly shaped mountain ' (p. 42) which he was privileged to visit in 1955, to the Ang Tsering who was still going strong in 1958, But there is inspiration for all who would climb and travel in the Himalaya on limited means in this testament to the delights and power of the small party.

The text was originally published in Munich in 1957 under the title *Einzelgänger im Himalaya.* The present translation is faithful and reads happily, all but one of the original plates are well reproduced, and the three maps are good but might have been larger. Some place-names appear in unusual forms when the Survey of India spelling would have been more recognisable to English-speaking readers.

F. SOLARI.

Mountaineering in Britain. By R. W. Clark and E. C. Pyatt. Phoenix House Ltd., London. Price 45*s*.

THE claim of this book to be ' a history from the earliest times to the present day ' is certainly well justified; those two indefatigable researchers, Clark and Pyatt, have covered the development of mountaineering in the British Isles in a comprehensive way, a remarkable achievement in the space of rather less than three hundred pages. The main threads are identified as they appear and followed from then on: in particular, the authors bring out the way in which the centre of gravity of the sport has progressively shifted from area to area—from Wales before the First World War to the Lakes in the '20s and back to Wales in the '30s. But they avoid the mistake of twisting their history to fit their thesis. Nor have they confined themselves only to the mainstream of mountaineering development—there are useful chapters also on outcrop and sea-cliff climbing, and walks and records, while Scotland, seldom either a backwater or a forerunner of progress, is well covered too. All the great names are there and many more besides, and though there may be emphases with which one could not agree (which is hardly surprising considering how recent in historical terms much of this ' history ' is) they are all none the less fairly treated. It is a tribute to the authors' ability that a book so full of erudition and carefully annotated statement is so easy to read. This is partly because many a long-forgotten anecdote or incident has been brought once more into the light of day, but also because of the excellent collection of photographs. These range from delightful early shots like that of the Abrahams climbing on Saddleback in 1890 (later jokingly described by George Abraham as ' how not to climb '), to Spillikin ridge in Camaderry, one of the major modern rock climbs. Many are of groups of real historical interest—like the Westmorland family after their ascent of Pillar in 1873—or those taken at Wasdale Head, Pen-y-Pass and Pen-y-Gwryd, where the individuals have been carefully and usefully identified. A possible criticism is that the authors have throughout drawn on information for the most part printed already elsewhere; even in the chapters on recent development, where the authors must know the climbers concerned, there is little added as it were from the authors' own experience. But the counter-balancing advantage is the detached historian's unbiased writing, and the scholarly integrity of this valuable and much needed work.

A. Blackshaw.

The Exploration of New Zealand. By W. G. McClymont. Pp. xiii, 125. Illus. 2nd Edn. O.U.P., 1959. Price 21*s*.

The first edition of this admirable book, published in 1940, has long been virtually unobtainable, so that a revised second edition is very welcome. Not that there was much to revise: Mr. McClymont's extensive researches in the great libraries of New Zealand and also in Britain had given him an unrivalled knowledge of his subject, and all the experts have acclaimed his unimpeachable accuracy in the use of his sources, while the only significant item of exploration since 1940 to be added is the fascinating story of the discovery of the Takahe (*Notornis hochstetteri*), long thought to be extinct, in the Fiordland National Park in 1948. Is it too fanciful to hope, that by the time a third edition is called for it will be able to record the survival of the fabulous Moa in the still unknown portion of this impenetrable bushland?

To condense the history of the exploration of a country larger than Great Britain into a readable narrative in 120 pages is a remarkable feat. Yet the author has constantly found room to include some vivid phrase from a letter or report of long ago to give life to what might tend in less skilful hands to become a catalogue of names. But to appreciate at their true worth the daunting difficulties and exertions encountered by the missionaries, miners, farmers and surveyors in their search for souls, gold, stock routes and data for maps, the reader needs to have an extensive first-hand knowledge of the country or at least a large-scale map. The maps of the North and South Islands provided in the book are on such a small scale as to be useless for conveying any idea of the lie of the land.

The mountaineer will learn with interest, that, though sailors had been active off the west coast from 1770 onwards, the gigantic bulk of Mt. Cook attracted no attention till Capt. Stokes of the *Acheron* sighted it in 1851 and named it after his illustrious predecessor. The book only allots one short chapter to the Southern Alps, but a useful bibliography is appended, which will enable the interested reader to delve deeper into a great story of human endeavour.

H. E. L. Porter.

Le Col Alpin franchi par Hannibal–son Identification topographique. By M. A. de Lavis-Trafford. Pp. 95. Illus. Maps. Librairie Termignon, St.-Jean-de-Maurienne. 1956.

THE author's method of identifying Hannibal's pass consists in quoting extracts from the texts of Polybius and Livy treating only of the actual crossing of the pass, and analysing the merits of a few passes in terms of a questionnaire. No attention is paid to the approach march from the Rhone to the pass, and everything else about the itinerary is tacitly assumed to fit into the author's conclusion that the pass was that known until the nineteenth century as the Little Mont Cenis (not the present Little Mont Cenis), called by the author the Col de Savine-Coche, 800 m. west of the Col Clapier. Its altitude is not specified but appears to be 2,471 m., or over 500 m. below the snow-line of today and of Hannibal's time. The pass was even lower before a fall of rock raised its level.

This pass can only be reached from the Rhone up the valley of the Isère, but there is no mention of the fact that the suggestion of the Isère is based on no evidence at all and on no manuscripts, but only on the deliberate emendation of the texts by the sixteenth-century editors, who were ignorant of the identity of the river called *Skaras* by Polybius and *Arar* by Livy. No reference is made to the evidence of distances given by Polybius which show that the key-point of the itinerary, the ' Island ', was as far from the crossing point over the Rhone as it is distant from the sea: viz. 4 days' march at 14 km. a day. No attention is given to the proof supplied by Livy that the ' Island ' was situated *south* of the territory of the *Tricastini* or St. Paul-Trois Châteaux and therefore *south* of the Isère: that the fertile highly-populated triangular-shaped ' Island ' cannot be brought into agreement with the poor, stony soil in the area (which is not triangular) between the Rhone and the Isère, but agrees entirely with the very fertile and frequently flooded triangular area enclosed between the Rhone, the Aygues, and the Baronnies; no attention is paid to the identity established by documentary and philological evidence between Polybius's *Skaras* and the Aygues, nor to the line of march given by Livy as having led through the territory of the *Tricorii,* which is that of Gap in the valley of the Durance; nor to the fact that olive branches which the treacherous Gauls brought to Hannibal grow in the valley of the Durance but not in that of the Isère; nor to the scientific evidence that a river in spate in October was more likely to be the Durance than the Isère; nor to the evidence of Silius and Varro who both indicate a ' Durance ' pass; nor to the altitude with respect to the snow-line required of a pass which caused very heavy casualties and preserved snow of previous winters *converted into ice*; nor to the fact that the *Bagienni* who lived at the source of the Po, being Ligurians, were a branch of the *Taurini* (cf. *Ptolemy,* III, 1, 31) and eligible for Hannibal to descend among them. All the evidence on the approach march shows that Hannibal never went up the valley of the Isère at all, and, therefore, that he could not have reached the Col de Savine-Coche.

It is unfortunate that the solution of a problem should be sought in an examination of only part of it, and that terminal, regardless of whether the remainder of the evidence makes it relevant or not. Hannibal *had to get to his pass*, and the problems presented by his approach march must be solved independently and in the order of succession of the march itself. It is not legitimate to skip any of the evidence in order to concentrate solely on the final hurdle, and it is even more inadmissible that when the criteria of the requirements of the pass itself are given so much importance, some of the passes from which a view of the plains of Piedmont is visible are not even considered or mentioned at all.

GAVIN DE BEER.

Guest of the Soviets. By Joyce Dunsheath. 182 pp., 12 photographs. Constable. 18*s*.

IT is Mrs. Dunsheath's misfortune that her visits to the Caucasus in 1957 have not been sufficiently recognised. The strong British party the following year stole her thunder, and the publicity given to its achievements obscured the fact that Mrs. Dunsheath was, we believe, the first Briton to climb in the Soviet Union since 1938. Not only did she have the enterprise to negotiate almost single-handed the permission to visit the Caucasus alone with Russian official escorts, but when this visit had suddenly to be curtailed she went out a second time very late in the season, achieved the ascent of Elbrus and crossed the range into Svanetia.

This book now tells the story, giving with feminine perception the details of every incident from her visit to Moscow to the climbs she made. The narrative is strictly factual and does not attempt to search far below the surface. Thus as a commentary on the Soviet peoples, their thoughts and attitude to life, this book disappoints; moreover it comes too late, as the professional observers have been given a better run of Soviet Russia for the last year or two.

Nevertheless, we must pay the tribute due to Mrs. Dunsheath for the determination and endurance which enabled her to reach the summit of Elbrus in late October in virtually winter conditions, with extreme cold and high wind. Her principal companion was, of course, our good friend Eugene Gippenreiter, that stalwart worker for closer Anglo-Soviet relations, and much of the book is about him and her other Russian and Georgian companions.

B. R. GOODFELLOW.