OSCAR ECKENSTEIN, 1859–1921

NO OBITUARY notice would seem to have appeared anywhere when Oscar Eckenstein died in 1921. He was not a member of the Alpine Club, which, indeed he thoroughly disliked. Yet he knew many of its members and would be found at Meets in North Wales in his later years: he appears to have corresponded with Freshfield whilst on his expedition to K2 in 1902,[1] and Farrar went to visit him when he was dying.[2] He was an original member of the Climbers' Club; he had done much to improve technical aids in mountaineering and had written on these matters in their journal[3]; yet his death passed unnoticed.

The main article on Eckenstein comes from Mr. David Dean, Deputy Librarian at the Royal Commonwealth Society. We follow it by some account of Eckenstein's family background and more detailed notice of his mountaineering activities.

Mr. Dean's paper is based upon a Library Talk given at the Royal Commonwealth Society on November 3, 1959, and runs as follows:

In the past twenty months we have had a number of Library Talks. Their subjects, and their approach to their subjects, have been most varied; but one thing they have all had in common. All have been designed to call attention to some aspect of the Library's resources.

Today we are doing something rather different. This talk will not only, I hope, rescue from comparative oblivion an interesting character, but will also demonstrate some of the ramifications into which a routine library enquiry may devolve.

It started like this. Mr. Whitting[4] came in one day last autumn and asked, 'Who was Oscar Eckenstein?' It will be remembered that Mr. Whitting gave a Library talk last year on Sir Richard Burton, the Arabist and traveller. Well, shortly before the last war, a most valuable—indeed an unique—collection of books and documents by and relating to Burton was presented to the Royal Asiatic Society. This collection, a truly remarkable one, containing not only the different editions but the differing issues of editions of the same work, had originally been the property of O. E. Owing to difficulties during and

[1] *A.J.* 21. 277.

[2] *A.J.* 35. 257.

[3] *C.C.J.* (Old Ser.), Vol. II, p. 144; (New Ser.), Vol. I, No. 1, p. 32; Vol. I, No. 3, p. 77.

[4] Mr. Whitting is Chairman, Library Committee.

after the war the collection remained unexamined until 1958, when Mr. Whitting catalogued it. From this work, two queries at once arose. Who was O. E., and why, and how, had he acquired a collection of this calibre ? The numerous lives of Burton contain no mention of any connection between the two men, nor indeed did it seem likely that they ever met. Burton died in 1890, aged 69, when Eckenstein was 31 ; and during the previous eighteen years Burton had been consul at Trieste (1872–90). Thus, though a meeting would have been possible —physically speaking—between the two men, in view of Eckenstein's youth it seemed improbable that even if one had taken place, it would have had any very compelling impact on him. It does however appear from Penzer's bibliography of Burton, published in 1923, that Eckenstein had assisted him with valuable source material.

It was at this point that enquiries were begun. From correspondence in the Royal Asiatic Society collection it seemed probable that Eckenstein had died some time between 1921 and 1939 ; so the obvious sources, *Who was Who* and the obituary notices in *The Times*, were examined first, without success. Reference to Somerset House elicited the date of Eckenstein's death in 1921.

After a few more checks of this kind, the enquiry rather hung fire ; and it is more than likely that we still would not be able to answer the question put to us if the Library had not purchased last winter an agreeable travel book called, *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*, by Eric Newby. Newby is a young man who took a rather random decision a few years ago to go off to the Hindu Kush with a Foreign Office friend. He had never been on a mountain before ; and solicitous friends took the pair of them down to Wales for some quick practice before they set out. I was glancing over the book when my attention was suddenly caught by this passage (p. 35) :

> ' After a large, old-fashioned tea at the inn with crumpets and hard boiled eggs, we were taken off to climb the *Eckenstein Boulder*. Oscar Eckenstein was a renowned climber at the end of the nineteenth century, whose principal claim to fame was that he had been the first man in this or any other country to study the technique of holds and balance on rock. He had spent his formative years crawling over the boulder that now bore his name. Although it was quite small, about the size of a delivery van, his boulder was said to apparently embody all the fundamental problems that are such a joy to mountaineers and were proving such a nightmare to us.'

Here was a new lead. It seemed likely that if Eckenstein was distinguished enough to have given his name to this boulder, his death ought to be recorded in the pages of the ALPINE JOURNAL. The Journal in fact produced very little about Eckenstein, for reasons which

later became clear, but I did find, in an article called ' Classic Cols ', by J. P. Farrar, in the 1923 volume, the following passage :

> ' I went to see (E) as he lay dying, one summer day two years ago, at the little hill town of Oving. His lungs had gone, he could only gasp ; but his eye was as clear as ever, as dauntless as it had ever been in disadvantages of race, often of poverty, dying a brave man—wrapped up to the very end in his beloved mountains.'

This incidentally illustrates quite neatly the dangers of presupposition in an enquiry of this kind. The whole tone of that passage is very strongly directed towards mountains, and I assumed Oving to be some wind-grieved spot in a remote Swiss canton. In fact, of course, as I later found, it lies 5 miles N.W. of Aylesbury at a height of 478 ft. above sea level

A recent work, *Mountaineering in Britain*, by R. W. Clark and E. C. Pyatt, filled in the picture a little. From it we learned that Eckenstein was the inventor of the Eckenstein crampon, and helped ' to formulate the new balance technique of climbing which was ultimately to revolutionise the standards of rock work . . . (he was) a queer character, a railway engineer who applied to the problems of climbing difficult rocks the principles of stress and strain which he utilised in his work '. Among the illustrations in this book were two group photographs which included a sturdy, pipe smoking, sombre, bearded figure identified as Eckenstein.

After a quick, and fruitless, check in the obituaries of the *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers*, and, for good measure, in those of the Royal Geographical Society, search was made of other books on British climbers, and we learned that Eckenstein had climbed in the Karakorams and in Mexico with Aleister Crowley. Perhaps the Himalayan connection, or the Crowley connection, would provide a link with Burton, for though we were by now well on the trail of Eckenstein as a mountaineer, we had yet to shed any light on our original problem.

We tackled Crowley first. Crowley was a curious, distasteful, extravagant man, a gifted dabbler (or plunger) in the occult, with a single-minded enthusiasm for diabolism. A substantial aid to our search came when we examined *The Great Beast*, by John Symonds (1951). This told us, among other things, that Eckenstein, who was seventeen years older than Crowley and, like him asthmatic, had first met Crowley at Wasdale Head, when Crowley was 23. Eckenstein was already distinguished as a climber, for he had been on Sir William Martin Conway's Karakoram expedition in 1892. Incidentally, both Conway and Eckenstein himself left accounts of the expedition. Symonds says that neither mentions the other in his book, for they

discovered that they disliked each other, and Eckenstein left the party and wandered back home. The dislike was there all right, but it is far from the case that neither mentions the other. In Conway's *Climbing and Exploration in the Karakoram-Himalayas* (1894) he speaks frequently, though guardedly, of Eckenstein, indicating that Eckenstein was so continuously unwell that as leader of the party he decided that it was useless for him to continue, and sent him back to London.

For his part, in *The Karakorams and Kashmir: an account of a journey* (1896) Eckenstein nowhere expresses open contempt for Conway; but it is not hard to find behind his references the profound disapproval of a tough, austere, unorthodox Alpinist for a darling of the Alpine Club. He is irritated by what he thought a failure of nerve on Conway's part while they are crossing a rope bridge. At one stage the party divides up; Eckenstein reaches the rendezvous before Conway, but, he says, unfortunately Conway ' had specially asked me not to do any of the several expeditions I could have made at this time, as he did not want anything of importance done in his absence; so I had to be content to wait till he arrived ' (pp. 195 ff). A week later, Conway having arrived, ' we had a sort of general meeting, at which it was arranged that I should leave the expedition. There had been a good deal of friction from time to time, and as we had now been some two and a half months in the mountains without making a single ascent of importance, having only crossed two previously known passes, I was not anxious to go on, and accordingly we agreed to separate.' Perhaps Eckenstein's view of this *mountaineering* expedition is suggested in the sub-title of his book—' an account of a *journey* '.[5]

It is not a good book. Competent, pedestrian, not very informative, it does throw a little light on its author. He is courageous, an expert mountaineer, physically tough (e.g. his bathe, in company with a small icefloe, in a glacier lake); he is irascible and doesn't suffer fools gladly, he has a sense of humour, and a strong affection for the native. No interest in literature, thought or religion emerges from the book. Indeed, the only literary judgment of Eckenstein's that I have anywhere come across is the unsupported statement of a biographer of Crowley that Eckenstein found Crowley's lyric *Rosa Mundi* the greatest lyric in the English language, though he thought it ' too sacred ' to publish; it should, he felt, be found among Crowley's papers after his death. Crowley in fact dissented from this judgment, at least from that part of it which estimated the poem's relative sacredness; for he duly published it. (Ref. to Cammell: *Aleister Crowley*. Richards Press, 1951).

[5] (Conway looked upon his expedition of 1892 primarily as one of exploration and survey, in what was then almost unknown territory. Mountaineering played a secondary role. See C. G. Bruce's remarks, *Himalayan Wanderer*, pp. 82, 83. T. S. B.)

To return to Symonds's biography of Crowley; he tells how, soon after their Cumberland meeting, Eckenstein and Crowley climbed widely in Mexico, living, according (typically) to Crowley, on canned food and champagne, and breaking several world records. Then, Eckenstein returned to London to organise an expedition to K2, of which he was to be leader and Crowley second-in-command. They set out in 1902; but in Rawalpindi Eckenstein was detained on, it was said, the personal orders of the Viceroy (who was Curzon), and refused entry into Kashmir. There were rumours that he was a Prussian spy, on account of his name; but three weeks later he rejoined the party. He had been down to Delhi and seen Curzon himself to demand a reason for his detention; but apparently Curzon never told him, for he still professed ignorance. I shall have a little more to say about this episode in a minute. The expedition got to nearly 22,000 ft., when misfortune and bad weather drove them down again, though not before Crowley had inexplicably threatened Guy Knowles, the third Englishman in the party, with a huge revolver and had had to be forcibly disarmed, nor before Crowley and Eckenstein had clashed over Crowley's insistence on ' carrying my library with me. . . . Milton and the rest '. (There is a lot of Crowley in the incident; unquestionably a competent climber, he was, as unquestionably, a doggedly persistent *poseur*.)

But the biggest lead from Symonds's book came when I learned that Eckenstein had stayed at Crowley's house at Boleskine, near Loch Ness, with Gerald Kelly, whose sister Crowley had married. Accordingly I wrote to Sir Gerald Kelly asking for help; and he was good enough, though he was only just out of hospital, to ask Mr. Whitting and myself along for a talk about Eckenstein. He received us in bed, and was silent at first as he listened to us sketching in the story and the problem. Then, as I mentioned the Alpine Club, he spoke for the first time. ' They quarrelled; Eckenstein and the Alpine Club quarrelled,' and he began to talk, slowly and deliberately, soon ranging ever more widely, over Burton, over Gertrude Bell, over Lawrence and over Sir Ronald Storrs. He talked of Crowley: ' I had met him in a book shop in Cambridge. I liked him; we made each other laugh; but he was a *poseur*, a great pretender to scholarship and languages. His magic I thought was all bunkum (and so did Eckenstein), but he was, I understand, wonderful on mountains. And that is where Eckenstein came in. He and Crowley went off to Mexico and climbed mountains. At this time Crowley had plenty of money while Eckenstein was poor. I think he lived in lodgings and was a sort of engineer, though not, I think, a very successful one. I admired him for his obvious integrity. He was a very good influence on Crowley; he was a superb climber; Crowley thought him the greatest of all. They were both adventurous

and unorthodox mountaineers and they regarded the Alpine Club rather as the best people, the " intellectuals ", regard the Royal Academy! In himself I think Eckenstein was rather a dull man—I never came across anything to suggest that he had any interest in Burton—and certainly no one ever left his rooms chuckling and thinking of what fun they'd had after a visit to him.'

Two small glosses at this point. A relative of Eckenstein's whom I met later told me that Eckenstein certainly lived, not in lodgings but with his mother in South Hampstead[6] from 1893 until his marriage twenty-five years later. Further, he could not justifiably be called a poor man. He was a member of the National Liberal Club; drew a regular salary from his employers, the International Railway Congress Association; was always able to travel abroad when he wanted to, and my informant, in the fourteen years that he knew him well never came across any suggestion that he was hard up. My informant suggested the reason for the misunderstanding: Eckenstein cared nothing about style in externals, and, in consequence, as he always travelled first class, it became a family joke that the contrast between appearance and mode of transport led him to be regarded, when he travelled overseas, as an eccentric millionaire of the ' mad Englishman ' variety.

As we thanked Sir Gerald and apologised for taking up his time, he waved our apologies aside. ' Not at all. I find it most interesting, the idea of someone's finding anything about old Eckenstein that could possibly interest them.'

Two or three days later I heard again from Sir Gerald: ' Crowley was a rather strange character, but fundamentally very conventional. As undergraduates he and I were friends and we were, I think, fond of each other—he was certainly a delightful companion—but later on in his life he wrote his confessions and took care to write everything he could that he thought would offend and wound me. Fortunately for me it only made me giggle! A good deal of it is nonsense, and some of it is bombastic lies, but he was a genuine and admiring friend of Eckenstein, and it would be worthwhile for you to read this book. Even though I should not execute a mouse on his evidence, I feel you ought to read this fantastic document. Would it be possible for you to call here and let me lend it to you . . . ? '

Sir Gerald was kindness itself when I went to borrow this (indeed) fantastic document. More reminiscences, of Yeats, of Maugham, of Eckenstein himself—including the memory of finding Eckenstein absorbed, at his London home, in Kirkwood's *Schoolgirl Problem*, a complex mathematical problem concerning a girls' school, so that Sir

[6] See Climbers' Club List, in Vol. I of *C.C.J.* The address was: 34 Greencroft Gardens, N.W. In point of fact, the mother was dead by the early years of this century.

Gerald had to stand nervously in the hall as the puzzle was spread out all over the house. I duly bore away the two volumes of the *Confessions*, along with some notes that Sir Gerald had made for me, calling attention to some of the more laughable misstatements in the book, and pointing out, for instance, as a gloss on the passage where Crowley lays claim to an altogether remarkable popularity in Paris, that ' Crowley was widely unknown in the Montparnasse quarter. His French was poor. He was, for the most part, I fancy, *disliked* by the few whom he met.'

I shall have something to say about the *Confessions*, ludicrous rubbish though some of them are, as they contain quite a lot about Eckenstein. But before I do that, I want to say a word about my further enquiries into the mysterious barring of Eckenstein from Kashmir.

An examination of records at the India Office filled in some details, but did not solve the mystery, which indeed remains unsolved. I found a letter from Eckenstein applying for a permit to enter Kashmir, and an answer from the India Office that permits were not necessary, ' so far as this Office is aware '. In the *Friend of India* for May 1, 1902, was a report of the Eckenstein party's embarking on ' the most ambitious climbing feat ever attempted—to reach the summit of Mount Everest ', then another column three weeks later concerning ' a hitch over Mr. Eckenstein's pass. . . . What exactly happened no one seems to know, but it is certain Mr. Eckenstein returned to the plains, interviewed the highest authorities (waylaying one great man, it is said, in the mail train on his way from Calcutta to Simla), and succeeded in getting the matter put right and his pass satisfactorily visa-ed ' (May 22, 1902). No official report of the incident could be traced; and no mention of it appears in the India Office Collection of Lord Curzon's private correspondence with Lord Hamilton, the then Secretary of State for India.

At this point I turned to Crowley's *Confessions*. His account tells of how the D.C. came to their camp beyond Rawalpindi and announced that Eckenstein was not to be allowed to enter Kashmir. Then was he arrested, Eckenstein asked ? ' Heaven forbid,' said the D.C. and Eckenstein chased all round Northern India, finally cornering Curzon who (says Crowley) ' saved his face by authorising Eckenstein to rejoin the party on guarantees for his good conduct subscribed by Knowles (the third English member of the party) and myself '. Eckenstein ' insistently professed himself in utter ignorance ' of the reasons for the incident : ' We could not but connect it with Eckenstein's quarrel with Conway in 1893. We pumped the bigwigs of Kashmir, and we sifted the rumours of the Bazaar, but beyond learning that Eckenstein was a Prussian spy and a cold-blooded murderer, we obtained little information of importance. Eckenstein was the noblest man I have ever known. His integrity was absolute, and his sympathetic understanding

of the native character supreme. I remain unrepentant that the incident was the result of the unmanly jealousy and petty intrigues of the insects who envied him, complicated by official muddle ' (*op. cit.* 2, 129–31).

Some little time after reading this, I was fortunate enough to meet, through the good offices of Sir Gerald Kelly, Mr. Guy Knowles,[7] who had actually been present at the Kashmir episode in 1902, and his view of it, though more temperately expressed, inclined towards that of Crowley, in other words, that Conway, by this time President of the Alpine Club, interposed to put obstacles in Eckenstein's way, and that Curzon, added Mr. Knowles, did not relent until faced with a threat to expose the whole story to the *Daily Telegraph*.

' The greatness of (Eckenstein's) spirit ', says Crowley, ' was not inferior to that of such giants as Rodin ; he was an artist no less than if he has actually produced any monument to his mind. Only his constant man-handling by spasmodic asthma prevented him from matching his genius by master-pieces. As it is, there is an immense amount in his life mysterious and extraordinary beyond anything I have known. For instance, during a number of years he was the object of repeated murderous attacks which he could only explain on the hypothesis that he was being mistaken for somebody else.' (And there follows an account of one such incident ; *ib.*, 1, 210–15.)

' His business in life was mathematics and science, and his one pleasure mountaineering. He was probably the best all-round man in England, but his achievements were little known because of his almost fanatical objection to publicity. . . . He hated self-advertising quacks like the principal members of the Alpine Club with an intensity which, legitimate as it was, was almost overdone. His detestation of every kind of humbug and false pretence was an over-mastering passion. . . .' (*ib.*, 1, 202–3). ' Like Byron, Shelley, Swinburne, Tennyson, I left the University (Crowley goes on) without taking a degree. It has been better so ; I have accepted no honour from her ; she has had much from me. . . . I felt that my career was already marked out for me. Sir Richard Burton was my hero and Eckenstein his modern representative, so far as my external life was concerned ' (*ib.*, 1, 233). With this conjunction of the names Burton and Eckenstein it looked as though the search might be nearing its end, especially when I read the dedication to Vol. 2 of the *Confessions* : ' To three immortal memories. Richard Francis Burton, the perfect pioneer of spiritual and physical adventure ; Oscar Eckenstein, who trained me to follow the trail ; Allan Bennet, who did what he could.' But alas ; it was to prove a mere tantalising glimpse !

[7] See *A.J.* 64. 288 for an obituary notice of Mr. Knowles, who died last year.

Eckenstein ' openly jeered at (Crowley) for wasting my time on such rubbish ' (as magic). In Mexico one evening ' I told Eckenstein my troubles, as I had done often enough before with no result beyond an insult or a sneer. . . . At the end of my outburst, (he) turned on me and gave me the worst quarter of an hour of my life. He summed up my Magical situation, and told me that my troubles were due to my inability to control my thoughts. He said, " Give up your Magick, with all its romantic fascinations and deceitful delights. Promise to do this for a time, and I will teach you how to master your mind." He spoke with the absolute authority which comes from profound and perfect knowledge. And, as I sat and listened, I found my faith fixed by the force of facts. I wondered and worshipped . . . I agreed at once to his proposals, and he taught me the principles of concentration. I was to practise visualising simple objects; and when I had succeeded in keeping these fairly steady, to try moving objects, such as a pendulum. . . . (Then he) put the brake on. One must not overstrain the mind. . . .' (*ib.*, 2, 22–4).

This then was the first glimpse of any intellectual or spiritual interests on Eckenstein's part, and indeed the last, unless one excepts Crowley's account of his desire, not otherwise substantiated, to spend the autumn and winter of life ' in Kashmir meditating upon the mysteries which appealed to his sublime spirit ' (*ib.*, 1, 210).

I went to see Mr. Guy Knowles, who had been with Eckenstein and Crowley in Kashmir. It was a house full of treasures; a Degas bronze, two Rodins, ten Whistlers, and a magnificent Guardi sketch—Mr. Knowles told me that he had been with his father in the 1880's when he had bought the Guardi and a Titian sketch for 12*s.* 6*d.* a-piece. Mr. Knowles, whose father used to shoot snipe on Chelsea marshes and whose great-aunt Carrie danced at the Waterloo Ball, was the source of some entertaining personal detail about Eckenstein, including the fact that he was a special constable in the 1914–18 war; but apart from recalling that he bought *Burtoniana* whenever he came across any, he could throw no light on Eckenstein's passion for Burton.

Incidentally, I never found any corroboration of the 'repeated murderous attacks ' mentioned by Crowley from anyone who had known Eckenstein. Guy Knowles's reaction was typical. He laughed and said,' That sounds just like one of Aleister's stories.'

He did, however, give me the address of Eckenstein's great-nephew, who in due course referred me to his uncle, who later emerged as a man who had for years been fascinated by the Arctic. Eckenstein's nephew filled in the picture admirably.

Eckenstein was born in Canonbury in 1859, educated at University College School and studied chemistry in London and Bonn. He married in 1918 and died at Oving, in 1921. An excellent gymnast in



OSCAR ECKENSTEIN AND HIS WIFE, CIRCA 1919–20.

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his youth, he also played the bagpipes. He smoked Rutter's Mitcham shag unceasingly, and, as a keen amateur carpenter and mechanic had a bed which pulled up on ropes when not in use. My informant was aware of his excellent library, but, once more, could throw no light on the reasons for his urge to collect Burton.

So there the quest for Eckenstein in effect ended, a long way from its starting point, but not a great deal nearer to answering the initial question. And yet—perhaps his nephew himself provided the clue. No, he could give no *reason* for Eckenstein's absorption in Burton; but, after all, take his own case. He had never even seen an iceberg, but nonetheless for many years he had been passionately interested in the Arctic. Could it be that some tiny and long forgotten incident had randomly brought Burton to Eckenstein's notice, and that, in the uncle's case as in the nephew's, the appetite had imperceptibly grown by what it fed on ?

DAVID DEAN.

ECKENSTEIN : THE MAN

The following notes, as will be seen, do not amount to a proper biographical sketch, but they help to fill in the gaps in Mr. Dean's paper. The notes are rather disjointed, and far from complete; Eckenstein remains something of an enigma, and if this article should result in more coming to light concerning him, it will have served its purpose.

Oscar Johannes Ludwig Eckenstein was born in London on September 9, 1859, the son of a German father and an English mother. The father had come to England in 1848 because his socialist tendencies might have got him into trouble in Bonn, where he lived. In addition to the son, there were two daughters, Amelia, who was to marry Dr. Cyriax, and Lina Dorina Johanna Eckenstein, who was a woman of very decided character and attainments. Like her brother Oscar, she seems to have been a natural rebel and she held a prominent place in Women's Freedom movements in England in the early part of this century. She was quite a prolific writer, on such varied topics as Albrecht Dürer, Nursery Rhymes, Egyptology and Women under Monasticism.[8] In view of her brother's later association with and dislike of Martin Conway, it is curious that Lina's first work consisted of notes provided for Conway's *Literary Remains of Albrecht Dürer* (1889).

Lina spent several seasons with the Flinders Petries in Egypt and Sinai; she was a medievalist rather than an Egyptologist, and her name does not occur in Warren Dawson's *Who was Who in Egyptology*. She did, however, contribute one or two technical articles on these topics,

[8] We are indebted to Miss Douie, the Librarian of the Fawcett Society, and to the Keeper of Egyptian Antiquities, British Museum, for information about Lina Eckenstein.

as well as writing (1924) a lighter work, *Tutankh-amen: a Story*, and for the S.P.C.K., *A History of Sinai* (1921). Professor Margaret Murray writes:

> 'She and I were together in Flinders Petrie's camp at Abydos throughout the winter of 1902–3, to both of us our first acquaintance with an excavating camp. . . . She was an enterprising person, willing to travel anywhere. I think she was with the Petries again in 1903–4, at Ehnasya. In 1904–5 she and Mrs. Petrie went from Egypt to the camp in Sinai three days' journey by camel, alone without male escort except the camel men. This was, to my mind, a most remarkable achievement, and at that period very risky. . . .'

Lina Eckenstein was a great friend of Professor Karl Pearson and his family, and Mrs. Hacker, Karl Pearson's daughter, remembers both Lina and Oscar as being highly cultured but eccentric. This agrees with what others say of Oscar; he obviously came of a family with marked intellectual pursuits; he had a great interest in chemistry and in mathematical problems and he struck many who knew him by his extensive knowledge on a wide range of subjects. Dr. Longstaff, Mr. G. D. Abraham and the late G. J. F. Knowles concur on this; Eckenstein was apt to be very didactic and downright in expressing himself, which sometimes irritates listeners, but there was no doubt of his abilities. As is seen, he had no use for Crowley's Magic. As for his eccentricities, his large brown beard marked him out; Mrs. Hacker recalls that he always used a special and enormous cup to drink from; Mr. J. G. Hillhouse, who knew him in New York, remembers how Eckenstein used to walk about the city, in bad weather or good, in straw sandals.[9]

It is unfortunate that so much of what we hear of Eckenstein comes from Aleister Crowley, whose opinions were apt to be extravagant and absurd, and always unreliable. The association between the men undoubtedly did Eckenstein's reputation harm, for Crowley's character was notorious, and the pair were the subject of common talk, both at home and in Switzerland. They appear to have drifted apart later, though it would seem that O. E. was one of the few people for whom Crowley never had a bad word; maybe Eckenstein's refusal to go on the Kangchenjunga expedition in 1905 under Crowley's leadership, was a part cause of their break. Eckenstein, also, was sympathetic towards Crowley's first wife, Rose Kelly, whose tragic suffering under her husband's care was only one of the many tales of human wreckage in Crowley's life.

Late in life, Eckenstein himself married Margery Edwards (on February 6, 1918); there were no children and the widow remarried

[9] We are indebted to Dr. Monroe Thorington for obtaining this information.

after her husband's death in 1921. Mr. Dean has referred to O.E.'s employment with the International Railway Congress Association, and Mr. H. W. Hillhouse of Boston (brother of the J. G. Hillhouse already mentioned) well remembers him when he was the British representative at a Congress being held in the U.S. Mr. Hillhouse writes:

> '. . . I know—railroading having been a hobby of mine for years—that in our many discussions of these problems I found O. E. to be years ahead of the times in thought and scientific invention of devices for the betterment of railroading, exactly as he was for the betterment of mountaineering and climbing.'

Mr. Hillhouse also helps us to fill in to some extent the gap in our knowledge about O.E.'s relationship with Burton, to which Mr. Dean was particularly drawn. Mr. Hillhouse writes:

> 'Sir Richard Burton I never met, but O. E. often spoke of him to me, in our talks about the philosophies of India and the East, and I do know that it was O.E.'s and Burton's intense interest in Eastern philosophies, especially mental telepathy, which brought them together at one time.'

Eckenstein often expressed strongly anti-British sentiments and the name of the Alpine Club was a red rag to him. It does not appear that this was due to the Club having refused him membership; his friend Lorria was a member, but there is no mention of Eckenstein in the lists of candidates, successful or otherwise, to the Club. As is seen, his antipathies may go back at least to 1892, the year of Conway's expedition to the Karakoram. General Bruce makes no complaints about O. E. during the journey over the Nushik La, beyond saying that on one occasion: 'Back we came and found that Eckenstein had, in the meantime, rather characteristically, eaten up the remainder of our food with the exception of a little chocolate.'[10] In private conversation, however, Bruce agreed that Conway and O. E. did not get on at all well together, Conway indeed complaining that O. E. tried to poison him![11] It certainly seems possible that Conway may have influenced Lord Curzon to try and put obstacles in the way of O. E. on the K2 expedition of 1902.

It has to be remembered that Conway and Eckenstein had utterly different outlooks on mountaineering. Conway was essentially a mountain explorer; even in the relatively well-known Alps he had been

[10] *Himalayan Wanderer*, p. 93. Bruce adds (p. 97) that Eckenstein 'had many of the qualifications of a mountain explorer highly developed, but his "make-up" had one small weakness which is a terrible handicap in that part of the world, and that is a delicate interior.'

[11] A. D. McCormick, *An Artist in the Himalayas*, p. 166, says O. E. had to leave owing to 'ill-health and other causes'. Conway says that O.E. had never been well since reaching Gilgit.

that, as his valuable Zermatt Pocket-Book shows, and still more so in the greater mountain ranges of the world. It was, it will be recalled, for a dissimilarity of outlook on mountaineering that Conway and Mummery had agreed not to travel together in the Himalaya. By 1900 Conway was expressing the view that the Alps were exhausted[12] and that the Alpine Club might well become an offshoot of the Royal Geographical Society; and after 1901, Conway, though only 45, virtually ceased climbing.

Eckenstein, on the other hand, though he had made some good climbs in the Alps, appears to have become increasingly interested more in the theory of climbing, in its techniques, and its equipment, than in achievements on mountains in the ordinary sense. Though he continued to visit the Alps regularly, after the turn of the century his actual climbs there were few; but it was in this period that he was perfecting his technique on rocks and his use of crampons. Geoffrey Young[13] pays tribute to Eckenstein's development, if not inauguration, of 'balance climbing', which Young was to expound in *Mountain Craft*, and the well-known Eckenstein crampon was a natural outcome of their inventor's experiments with improvements on earlier means, such as 'Mummery nails'. But it would seem that Eckenstein, though a competent climber, and ever ready to discuss his theories, generally left the lead on a climb to someone else. Mr. G. D. Abraham can only recall a single case, in all the years he climbed with O. E., of the latter leading the climb—Moss Ghyll on Scafell. Most of Eckenstein's new routes at home were done on one mountain, Lliwedd, with J. M. Archer Thomson to lead him.[14]

Opinions on Eckenstein vary. Dr. Longstaff thought him a rough diamond, but a diamond nonetheless. Mr. Nettleton, who saw a good deal of him, did not like him. Mr. Abraham was grateful to him for encouragement, but when O. E. wanted to get him to join the K2 party, considerable opposition was put up by Mr. Abraham's relatives, who did not like O. E. at all, and the project fell through. Professor Finch, on the other hand, liked what he saw of O. E. and Farrar (as quoted elsewhere) wrote of him with obvious appreciation. Mr. H. W. Hillhouse, who knew O. E. outside of his mountaineering interests, considers him a much misunderstood man, largely because he was such a very rugged individualist that he never could bring himself to fall in with many of the conventions of his time.

[12] *A.J.* 20. 295 *seqq.*

[13] *Snowdon Biography*, p. 31.

[14] It is fitting, therefore, that in the ghostly conversation held by J. H. Emlyn Jones with these two climbers (*C.C.J.*, N.S., Vol. XI, pp. 216 *seqq.*), it was Archer Thomson who dominated the situation, not O. E. Though whether Thomson, a notoriously taciturn person, would have held forth so eloquently is a matter for purists to decide!

ECKENSTEIN : THE CLIMBER

Oscar Eckenstein was better known for his work and researches on climbing equipment than for his mountaineering achievements. He designed a pair of ten-point crampons, whose only drawback was their weight, about 3 lb. a pair. These crampons were most effective and so recently as 1924 were described as having ' the merit of being the only claw at the present time in which both the metal is rightly wrought and the points are shaped and placed under the foot with any scientific regard for their use '.[15] Eckenstein himself records[16] that, thanks to the use of his crampons he did not cut more than twenty steps in all over a period of twenty-five years, apart from one unfortunate day when he inadvertently took someone else's crampons instead of his own. The conditions which Eckenstein considered really good crampons should satisfy are set out at length in the *C.C.J.*, 1912, p. 36, and are too lengthy to reproduce here.

He also designed an ice-axe to be used in conjunction with his crampons, the main feature of which was its small size. Karl Blodig records[17] that when Eckenstein showed him one of his axes he ' burst out laughing at the sight of this masterpiece '. The blade had a length of only 18 cm. and the shaft was but 84 cm. long. The whole appearance of the weapon was so peculiar that for a moment Blodig had doubts of Eckenstein's sanity. A trial proved to him, however, that a great advantage of the axe lay in the fact that it could be used with only one hand. Professor G. I. Finch tells of meeting Eckenstein at Courmayeur before the first World War and of being persuaded to have the shaft of his own old-fashioned ice-axe shortened by 18 in. It is clear that here, too, O. E. was a fore-runner of modern developments.

Eckenstein gave much time and thought to the question of the most suitable type of ropes and knots to be used by climbers. His opinions on these matters of mountaineering equipment are to be found in several articles in the *C.C.J.*[18]

Although Eckenstein had no spectacular list of first ascents, he had climbed in the British Isles, in the Alps, in Mexico, and in the Karakoram, but he left no diaries and it is unlikely now, so long after his death, that a full record of his climbing career could be compiled. He went up his first mountain in 1872 but it was not until 1886 that any record of his climbing in the Alps has been traced. On July 30 that year he made a variation on the West ridge of the Hohberghorn with Herr August Lorria. This was a case of going up the wrong

[15] G. W. Young, *Mountain Craft*, p. 288.

[16] *C.C.J.*, 1912, p. 32.

[17] *Die Viertausender der Alpen*, p. 310.

[18] ' Knots with the Lay ', Vol. XI, p. 44 ; ' Claws and Ice-craft ' (New Series), No. 1, p. 32 ; ' The Tricouni Nail ' (New Series), No. 3, p. 77.

mountain, Lorria mistaking the Hohberghorn for the Stecknadelhorn; not reaching the summit till 3.45 p.m. the party was forced to spend a very cold night on the Festijoch. This ascent was noteworthy if only because it first drew Eckenstein's attention to the value of crampons. 'Like most English climbers', he records,[19] 'I had always scorned the use of these invaluable articles, a scorn which was entirely based on ignorance and prejudice. However, I have learned better since then . . . the next season I got some and found after a few days practice that he (Lorria) had by no means exaggerated their virtues.' The accounts of an expedition by different members of the same party often show wide divergences and this expedition was no exception.[20]

On August 7 he and Lorria made the first tourist ascent of the Klein Dürrenhorn; a cairn was found on the summit but it contained neither card nor names. The previous day the two had climbed the Galenhorn.

In 1887 Eckenstein engaged Mathias Zurbriggen and with him made the first ascent of the South-west ridge of the Dürrenhorn, the first ascent and traverse of the Stecknadelhorn, and the first complete passage of the Nadeljoch, between the Lenzspitze and the Nadelhorn; the great protagonist of crampons did not employ them on this occasion but made the ascent by way of some abominable rocks. In September, with Herren Alexander Seiler and Mallinckrodt, under the leadership of Alexander Burgener, he took part in a new and dangerous route up the South-west face of the Dom, exposed almost throughout to falling stones. He was a member of the party that went from Zermatt to the assistance of his friends Lammer and Lorria after their accident on the Tiefenmatten face of the Matterhorn in August 1887.[21]

Two years later, again with Zurbriggen, Eckenstein made a new route on the Dent Blanche by way of the South-east face and the Viereselsgrat, a route described in the ALPINE JOURNAL[22] as 'believed to be the worst yet taken' on the mountain. This expedition, from Zermatt back to Zermatt, lasted 39½ hours, a noteworthy feat of endurance, as the party did not sleep out.

Although achieving no very notable ascents he continued to climb in the Alps for many years. Mathias Zurbriggen records[23] taking him up the Matterhorn with T. Fisher Unwin in 1891, when conditions were so bad that most of the other guides were unwilling to try the ascent. In 1898 we hear of him in a camp at the Schonbühl glacier, where Blodig spent the night with him before his own ascent of the

[19] *C.C.J.*, (New Series), Vol. II, p. 189.

[20] See *A.J.* 13. 521 (Lorria) and *C.C.J.* (New Series), Vol. II, p. 188 (Eckenstein).

[21] *A.J.* 13. 399.

[22] *A.J.* 14. 499.

[23] *From the Alps to the Andes*, pp. 43 *seqq.*

Dent Blanche. The ' hotel Eckenstein ' must have been a very tolerable place, with rubber underlay on the floor of the tent, cork mattress, and blankets, and even a larder in a crevasse well stocked with meat and poultry.

Guy Knowles records that in 1898 he climbed the Weisshorn, Lyskamm and Dent Blanche with O. E., having a porter on the first two, and Zurbriggen with them on the Dent Blanche, when, he says, they had a good deal of climbing on the South face. They also ascended the Matterhorn by the Zmutt ridge and made several climbs (presumably small ones) on the North face.

In 1904 Eckenstein was again with Knowles, guideless, at Saas Fee and Zermatt ; they made several peaks in the Mischabel group, and also climbed Monte Rosa and the Weisshorn.

In 1906 Eckenstein made with Karl Blodig the first ascent of the North ridge of Mont Brouillard and in 1907 the first ascent of a point of the Rocher du Mont Blanc ; later that summer he climbed with Blodig two other points on the ridge.

In those days the problem of climbing Mont Blanc by the Brouillard ridge direct from the Col Emile Rey was still unsolved ; season after season the best mountaineers in Europe came to Courmayeur and went away disappointed, baffled by the apparent hopelessness of the direct route above the col. But Eckenstein, ' the most scientific mountaineer of his time ', had spent long hours examining this section through his telescope and he always considered that it could be climbed by way of a flaw running up the slabs of Pic Luigi Amedeo, if ever the rocks should be free of ice. The wonderful summer of 1911 was to prove him correct ; at the end of July he wrote to Blodig to tell him that conditions were favourable. Blodig hastened to Courmayeur and a few days later with Geoffrey Young, H. O. Jones and Josef Knubel he made the ascent.

In 1912 Eckenstein was responsible for introducing Paul Preuss[24] to the Western Alps.

Eckenstein's relations with Aleister Crowley are dealt with by Mr. Dean. They first met at Wasdale Head, and towards the end of 1900 Eckenstein joined Crowley for some mountaineering in Mexico. They stayed for three weeks on Ixtaccihuatl in a camp at 14,000 ft. and saw an eruption of the volcano Colima, which they subsequently attempted to climb ; they did not get very far as their boots were burned through by the intense heat. Popacatapetl was, however, successfully ascended and a reluctant reporter, who had doubted their mountaineering abilities, was dragged to the summit with them.

It was during the Mexican expedition that the decision was taken to

[24] One of the most brilliant of Austrian climbers in the years preceding the 1914 war. He was killed in 1913 on the unclimbed North face of the Manndlkogel in the Salzkammergut.

organise an expedition to the Karakoram, of which Eckenstein was to be the leader, to attempt the ascent of K2. Mr. Dean has described the arrest of Eckenstein; the expedition was not a success and Eckenstein himself fell ill with influenza. Two members of the party succeeded in reaching a height of about 21,400 ft.

Mr. Dean has also dealt at some length with Eckenstein's earlier visit to the Karakoram with Conway's 1892 expedition. The two had met at Zermatt in the previous summer when Conway suggested that Eckenstein should join the party.[25] Eckenstein's most important achievement on this occasion was to make, with C. G. Bruce, the first crossing of the Nushik La. He described his experiences in 'The Karakorams and Kashmir: An Account of a Journey'.[26]

Crowley invited Eckenstein to join his 1905 expedition to Kangchenjunga, but the latter declined owing to Crowley's insistence on being the leader.

In *Sandow's Magazine*, April 1900, pp. 394 *seqq.*, Eckenstein wrote on *Hints to Young Climbers*. After heaping scorn on all mountaineers who might think differently from him, he proceeds to suggest a course of training, beginning with hill walking in Britain, climbing boulders *en route*, and learning the art of finding your way, first with a map and then without. A month of this sort of work is recommended. Some of his advice about rock climbing would seem unusual today; for example, in severe places use your chin, mouth, elbow or any part of your body to assist you.

Next, one should go to the Alps, where you should begin much as before, and on off days learn to walk about in an ice-fall and gradually acquire practice in cutting steps and, later, using crampons to make step-cutting unnecessary. Get someone to accompany you on snow-covered glaciers and learn to recognise concealed crevasses and so avoid falling in to them. &c., &c.

The general body of O. E.'s advice as here given is quite ordinary for those days, and rather conservative. It compares poorly with the much fuller treatment to be found in other works.

After following Eckenstein's recommendations, the climber is told to try and overcome a serious difficulty—that is, of finding another man as good as yourself to go climbing with.

The style of the article as a whole might lead the reader to expect that its author was a man with a quite outstanding record of first-rate ascents of the greatest severity. Eckenstein's greater climbs were (so far as they are known), as often as not behind a guide.

[25] Conway thought that a scientist (unpaid) would add prestige to the Karakoram expedition.

[26] O.E.'s diary of this is quoted by Conway in *G.J.*, I (1893), pp. 134–5. Bruce refers to it in *Twenty Years in the Himalaya*, pp. 157 *seqq.*

Some mention must also be made of Eckenstein's climbs in Britain. He was an original member of the Climbers Club. In 1887 he and T. V. Scully climbed Lliwedd by ascending the lower part of the Central Gully and then branching out on to the West Peak. He climbed much with J. M. Archer Thomson and with him, in 1896, made the first ascent of the East gully of Lliwedd.

The guide books record the following first ascents by O. E. on Lliwedd:

East half: 1896: East Gully, with J. M. A. Thomson and others.
1903: Route I and, in 1904, Route II, both with Thomson.
1905: Horned Crag; 1906: Central Gully and East Peak.
1907: Bowling Green—Central Gully traverse.

West half: 1887: Central Gully and West Peak, with T. V. Scully.
1905: Slanting Wall.

Like many distinguished climbers, Eckenstein had his quarrels; he had a difference of opinion with the brothers Abraham and took offence at some words in their book, *Rock Climbing in North Wales*.[27] At the Annual General Meeting of the Climbers' Club in 1907 he moved a resolution criticising them, but Ashley Abraham, having expressed regret on the part of his brother and himself that anything they had written 'had caused offence to Mr. Eckenstein', the resolution was withdrawn.

Eckenstein died of consumption on April 8, 1921.

T. S. Blakeney
D. F. O. Dangar

[27] Dealing with the Devil's Kitchen; see pp. 9–14 of their book.