

***“Ja, es geht,
aber Ich gehe
nicht.”
The ‘Alpine
Club’ and the
origins of
Modern
Mountaineering***



by Christopher T. Carey

PART ONE: IN THE BEGINNING

The memorable quote in the title of this piece (above) is reported as having been the utterance of one of the greatest of the early Swiss Alpine climbing guides, Melchior Anderegg, during a discussion of the possibilities of ascending the *Dent Blanche* massif via the arduous *Zmutt arete*. Anderegg, although an extremely gifted and talented climber, was noted for having an over-abundance of caution on the high peaks of the Swiss Alps...a quality quite amusingly expressed in his statement *“Yes, it (the route) goes, but I do not!”*

Melchior and an equally famed guide named Christian Almer are generally acknowledged as being the two best climbing guides of the Victorian era decades spanning 1860 through 1880. Today, the Swiss climbing guides found in the expensive resort hamlet of Zermatt, cradled in the shadow of the immortal Matterhorn, are professional mountaineers of the highest caliber who take justifiable pride in being among the best of the best and they all invariably *will* go! It wasn't always so, however, and not the Swiss but the venerable Victorian English bear both the honor and responsibility for having set in motion one of today's most 'extreme' modern sports, that mountain activity generally known as 'climbing'.

Since the official founding of the English Alpine Club in 1857 (over 153 years ago) through the present date, the sport of climbing (or 'mountaineering', as it was known earlier in its history) has undergone a tremendous change in virtually every aspect of its nature and substance. Since a complete historical overview and assessment of what all has transpired over that century and a half is more appropriately the subject of a lengthy book, rather than a brief and informal article, my intent here is far more modest. In the following paragraphs we will take a casual look at the very early years of climbing when mountain ascents were still in their infancy and standard climbing attire consisted of ordinary street clothing (albeit of wool, since *most* articles of men's clothing were made from various woolen weaves at

that time) and high topped shoes fitted with nailed soles for traction.

EARLY HISTORY, BEFORE THE VICTORIAN 'GENTLEMEN CLIMBERS'

Man has had a fascination for high places since the earliest dawn of civilisation, judging from accounts of written history that survive today, and from stories, myths, and narratives that have been preserved. In some of the earliest recorded writings of ancient civilisations (e.g. Ancient Greece, Roman, et al), mountains were viewed with substantial trepidation and generalised anxiety as the special abode of supernatural forces. The Greeks believed that the highest mountain summits were the home of the gods and that the lesser peaks (of Europe) were dwelling places for a host of dragons and other terrible, fearsome creatures. Even after Christianity was introduced to Europe via Roman converts from former pagan religions, this supernatural fear of the high mountains prevailed undiminished among the majority of people.

This wide-spread fear of high places among ordinary people did not deter, it should be noted, the ancient Romans from traversing some of the higher Alpine passes (such as the *Theodule Pass*, near Zermatt, the earliest traverse actually documented as having taken place in 1524 by Tschudi of Glarus) in their trading journeys, for even today an occasional Roman coin or two may be found on those high places where they may have been dropped by a pilgrim or trader traveling from what is now Italy to modern Switzerland. In fact, some Christian religious orders even established (at a much later date) abbeys and settled refuges along some of those ancient high trading routes over the Alps. The Augustinian Abbey of Saint Bernard is perhaps the most well known of these high alpine monastic refuges (located at the Grand Col-du-Saint Bernard, at 12,000 feet elevation).

The indigenous population actually living amongst the high Alpine places spared regard for the high summits as anything other than occasionally nuisancesome 'natural features' of their home environment, a sort of hazy if scenic backdrop to the pressing daily tasks that were requisite for survival in such climatologically challenging. Individuals in the flatter and lower elevations, who normally had no need to concern themselves with the Alpine heights at all (but who occasionally found themselves in need of traversing the lower Alpine passes such as *Mont Genevre* and the *Great Saint Bernard* on trading or religious pilgrimages) generally regarded the high peaks with uncertainty and anxiety, relying upon the wisdom of local Alpine dwellers to provide them with guidance and assistance on these passages. Perhaps understandably, the locals, being as keen on economically exploiting others' vulnerabilities in the time-honored manner, as are all people everywhere, did nothing whatsoever to discourage their fears and anxieties and if anything, merely fed them with further tales and rumors of supernatural and sinister goings-on in the high places as it suited their whim.

In Josias Simler's *De Alpibus Commentarius* (1574) exists the earliest known descriptive advice to business travelers and religious pilgrims passing through the higher Alpine passes, mentioning the reliance upon locals for guidance, suggesting use of ropes, alpinestocks, wooden hoops laced with twine to prevent sinking into the snow (the first recorded mention of snow shoes), darkened glasses to help prevent snow-glare, extra clothing to help insulated against severe cold, and even a primitive treatment

for frost-bite! Several other similar and contemporaneous accounts also exist, demonstrating that even if those who lived in the shadow of the high mountains maintained a more functional, pragmatic view of them, those traveling under their summits were acutely aware of their brooding presence.

By the end of the 16th Century, the previous era of traditional supernatural fear of the high places gradually yielded to a more generalised and less primitive fearfulness about the Alpine summits among most ordinary people (who, at least in the case of those living among them, were too preoccupied by daily survival to waste much time on idle speculations about demons and devils on the summits). In the local villages, supernatural traditions managed to linger on sufficient to prevent most villagers from actively considering ascents of high mountains, but as much for climbing peaks being totally unnecessary and fruitless activity as from fear of the unknown. Given that many of the Alpine village priests of the period were not well educated themselves, Christian beliefs likely did little to discourage fears of the supernatural among villagers, at any rate.

For the most part, however, despite the coming of the new ages of philosophical enlightenment and reason (followed closely by the rise of science and industry) on the Continent, the ordinary people populating provincial Switzerland and the Alpine regions of France and Austria retained to no small extent their natural abject supernatural awe and anxiety about the high mountain summits they lived among (for the above reasons). These high Alpine villagers generally accepted the fact that to climb *too* high amongst the peaks *might* bring them face to face with unknown phenomena (despite Christian reassurances) but also felt that climbing high summits could serve no practical purpose whatsoever, additionally, so they advised flatlanders when asked to avoid any travel higher than the known confines of the 'high pastures' (*hoch alm*) where they grazed their flocks of goats and sheep in the warmer seasons.

In urban England, the virtual birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, and elsewhere in major metropolitan areas like Paris and Berlin, enlightened scientific inquiry and the rise of economic industrialism began to produce an entirely new class of educated individual who viewed the high European Alps not with anxiety, but with fascination. In England this group included what we today know as the Victorian adventurers, those quirky, eccentric gentlemen amateur explorers who began to view the entire world about them within the new focus of scientific inquiry and set out to investigate the wonders of a natural world previously regarded with more than a little fear or disapprobation at worst and disinterest at best.

While there have always been individuals rising above the enslavement of ignorant superstition and uneducated custom by virtue of their superior intellectual abilities, in Victorian England this sudden wide-spread interest in the wonders of the natural world blossomed into an especially diffuse and intensive phenomenon among the well-educated. Due to a great proliferation and concentration of wealth among the English upper classes brought on by the dawn of industrial mercantilism, a great many upper class Victorians found themselves suddenly endowed with the financial means to favor their newly found interests in amateur adventuring and enjoying leisure time.

Nowhere was this development more notable than among a specific class of gentlemen amateurs who fancied hiking and mountain travel on foot. The activity, first finding substance in what is still today somewhat quaintly known in England as 'hill walking' and practiced in such places as the English Lake District in rural Northwest England, quickly gained interest. The English Lake District region, comprising an area of approximately 885 miles square (34 miles across), is the result of ancient periods of glaciations (the most recent of which occurred approximately 15,000 years ago) and is a scenically beautiful mix of rolling moorland and high, rocky 'fells'. Due to its high annual rainfall, much of the lower Lakes District area is somewhat boggy and filled with heather and bracken flora. Its higher crags of glacier carved rock offered very sportsmanlike challenges for what the English soon came to term 'rock scrambling'.

By the early 1800s, interest in this region as a convenient venue for recreational activity had grown substantively, and a significant number of upper class men from the greater London urban area with time and money to spare found hill walking in the Lake District to be wonderfully relaxing and an exceptionally invigorating pastime for both mind and body. By the third decade of the 19th Century, with industrial fortunes starting to enable more and more adventurous upper class leisure travel, it was perhaps only natural that Victorian attention should settle and focus on the spectacular Alpine heights of Switzerland, the Tirol, and their adjacent mountainous areas.

Before long and with the growing travel opportunities enabled by steam-powered railways, the more economically well-endowed and adventurous Victorians began to visit the Alpine areas on prolonged holidays. There, they journeyed up into the higher valleys and ravines to the small villages such as Zermatt, Saint Nikolas, and Randa, creating the earliest expression of Alpine tourist economy known. Earlier 18th century scientific interest in such high mountain massifs as Mont Blanc by Paccard-Balmat, Saussure and others focused on the 'geo-physicality' of high altitudes (as well as interest generated by very early guide books to travel on the Continent, such as those by Wyttenbach, Wagner, and Windham-Martell, to mention only a few of those first appearing in the 17th century), prompted 'ordinary' Victorian adventurers to visit these high Alpine regions with an eye to the possibilities for an adventurous ascent of the peaks that were found there. By mid-century, mountaineering as an entirely new and stimulating activity was already emerging as a formal and specialized form of vigorous outdoor sport among gentlemen. Before long, a number of the more modest Vallaisian summits were successfully ascended as more and more English found the Swiss Vallais to meet their requirement for healthful alpine recreation.

The first successful ascent of Mont Blanc, Europe's highest summit at 15,781 feet (or 4,810 meters), occurred in 1786 and opened the door to further serious interest in scaling the higher, more spectacular summits, but it needs mentioning that this and several other ascents were promoted by scientific inquiry, rather than pure recreational sport. History records that in 1800, three English sisters named Parminter ascended the Buet, near Mont Blanc, and a Chamonix village girl named Maria Paradis was the first woman to summit Mont Blanc shortly thereafter. By 1842 the peaks of the Monte Rosa massif were reached and a number of other significant first ascents had been carried out, many of which had been undertaken in the name of discovery and motivated by the broadly respectable impetus of scientific inquiry. Climbing for the pure joy and challenge of climbing, something engaged in without

regard for any self-conscious need to 'legitimise' the undertaking, was still in its infancy.

THE END OF THE 'GOLDEN ERA' AND THE RISE OF MODERN MOUNTAINEERING

It is generally regarded as true that most early climbs (those that took place before roughly the late 1950s) were accomplished by continental adventurers and gentlemen explorers. Although a few Englishmen did undertake climbs and participate in several of note, by far the preponderant majority of pre 1850 climbers (such as they existed in those archetypal days) were of the French, Italian, German, and Austrian nationalities. The Alpine Club (as the very first *organized* mountaineering club, the English did not specify their nationality in their group's name...to them it was merely *the* Alpine Club) regard John Ball, their first president, as perhaps their single most conspicuous founding forebear, although there is little question in anyone's mind that AC member Albert Smith (1816–60) substantively prepared the way for mountaineering to gain more popular, general interest among the non-scientifically inclined. By creating a significant public interest in the Alps as a venue for climbing purposes, with his widely attended and animated public presentations on the Swiss interior at the Egyptian hall in London, Smith demonstrated that adventures of this sort could be both diverting, fulfilling, and a source of great personal pleasure. Since Smith portrayed his mountain experiences with the flamboyance and flair of a skillful showman (not least for the purpose of making gainful income from their presentation), he was regarded by many other Victorian era gentlemen-climber peers as being somehow a bit *beneath* their more erudite and refined social station (sniff, sniff!).

The Victorian sport of mountaineering was, after all, regarded as the proper proprietary venue of the well-educated, higher classes of English society, carrying with it a sort of *sniffy*, self-actualised cachet of class respectability and seriousness of purpose that was not all that unusual in the more elevated levels of class-conscious England. The ranks of the pioneering English alpinists of that day included many of the clergy (as well-educated graduates of English public schools) and it was not at all unusual to read of several participants on a particular alpine climb of the 1850s with the honorific title 'Reverend' preceding their names. Snobbery of this sort, whether an appropriate thing in and of itself or not, was very much a part of the early foundations of what became the 'Alpine Club' and had much to do with who was allowed to become a member and who was not.

By this time, several well written guides to Continental travel had already come out (not least those by Baedekker) and fairly detailed maps also had been prepared of both lower and higher elevations on the Continent. Thus, the way had been prepared not only in terms of directing popular attention to the Alps as a new potential playground for the wealthy, but also in terms of providing the material wherewithal (topographical maps, guides, and perfunctory descriptive documentation) to enable it. By virtue of Ball's own 'Alpine Guide', a comprehensive treatise that included many aspects of Alpine flora, fauna with climbing lore, John Ball was invited by the 12 originating members of the club to sit as its President, even though he was not at that time an actual member. In the year or two immediately prior, there had in fact been much private discussion among 'gentlemen-climbers' about the need for starting a climbing club. In view of the strong 'clubby' nature of the English that has always been part of the Anglo-Saxon

culture, the formal establishment of an English mountaineering club was just a matter of time, of course.

In the Winter of 1857, the first formal meeting of the original members of the club (a group of upper class English gentlemen friends who had all participated in early Alpine climbs) was called to order and served as a venue within which to formalise, set-forth, and establish the founding articles and by-laws of the club. One of the articles (specifically Article 7) stated that membership was only open to those who had successfully 'ascended to the summit of a mountain 13,000 feet in height'. By insisting upon establishment of this membership limitation, the English club would set itself apart from all other subsequent mountaineering clubs in that none of *them* required actual mountain climbing experience for purposes of joining. This fact would later be seen as somewhat disadvantageous in that revenues otherwise gained from memberships by mountain enthusiasts who lacked actual high altitude experience would be denied dues-paying association with the club, thereby serving to limit funding in all areas of the group's activity (ranging from the purely social to actual expeditionary efforts). The various subsequently founded national mountain clubs (e.g. the Swiss, German, Austrian, Italian, and many other national clubs) would benefit substantially in ways denied the English club, by opening their membership to any and all who merely professed a love of mountains and mountaineering and were willing to underscore their enthusiasms with hard currency. One might say that this was simply another expression of that previously cited 'sniffy' sense of class the Alpine Club simply reeked of, but viewed in another, perhaps more objective context, it was mostly a serious effort to assure the fact that the membership was comprised of *actual* climbers and not simply vicarious enthusiasts and excitable dilettantes.

Although the Alpine Club formally came into existence in London, the practical 'club room' of the organization very quickly became established at the *Seiler Hotel Monte Rosa*, located in the then very small and unpretentious little Vallaisian hamlet of Zermatt, located at the upper end of the *Zermattental* canyon and only some six miles from the imposing summit of the Matterhorn massif. As visiting tourists and mountaineers gradually began to find their way to Zermatt in the third decade of 1800, an enterprising villager named Herr Lauber opened up a small formal inn for their benefit. The Victorians, of course, were used to the niceties of civilized upper class living and there simply was no place in Zermatt to take 'high tea' after a day's climb. Having to settle for the often flea-infested and Spartan confines of space rooms and stables provided by local villagers was a hardship even for most English men, but once the English ladies began to visit, it was clear more substantial amenities were required. To address this need, an enterprising Zermatt Gemeinde burgher named Herr Lauber established a small three room inn, providing a modest, if slightly more accommodating premises as the hamlet's first official English style hostelry. In 1853, with the much increased clientele of Victorian English on holiday (who were used to standards of cleanliness, hygiene, and cuisine of a more substantial nature than local offerings provided), one Alexander Seiler acquired the older Lauber establishment and built a multi-floored hotel he named the Hotel Monte Rosa, that was soon to become adopted as the Swiss headquarters of the English Alpine Club. By the time the first successful ascent of the Matterhorn had been accomplished (by Edward Whymper and party of 6 others, in 1865), Mr. and Mrs. Seiler had literally become the father and mother figures of all Alpine Club members who registered at his Monte

Rosa and the typical daily registry was for several decades thereafter full of those either directly or indirectly associated with the club.

Climbing standards of the English Victorians were, in contrast to today's era of high-tech equipment and extreme climbing techniques, rather distinctly old fashioned in that although the predecessor of modern climbing axes was in use, many still preferred the older and longer alpenstock (a long pole fitted with a spike at one end). In addition to ropes of all sizes and dimensions, heavy wooden ladders were also carried to bridge the more yawning spans of frequent *bergschrunds* and the occasional glacial crevasse. There were few uniform gear standards evident, although the ice axe (an outgrowth of the French Chamonix wood cutter's axe) tended to have a head shaped much like a modern *mattox* (ditch digging tool) and was usually at or longer than about 40 inches in length. Clothing of the period favored the sort of heavy woolen rural clothing common to the English countryside, complete with hob-nailed boots; strange and of somewhat ancient appearance in the old photographs, when accented by the heavy, full beards worn by most men in those days. Photographic images of the early pioneering women climbers of the mid-to-late 1800s reveal thick, heavy woolen dresses of the sort typically worn on cold English days in both city and countryside; not attire that would have been either comfortable or suited to the sort of personal mobility climbing required. This extreme inconvenience did not seem to deter them, however, since as already noted, a number of women were climbing and had achieved notable ascents, alongside men.

Most of the heavy loads for climbing parties were carried by porters selected and supervised by the local guide hired to navigate the route by visiting climbers and heavy loads they often were, with elaborate provisioning that not infrequently included several dozens of wine bottles filled with the local cuvee (in the case of the Canton of *Vallais*, usually *Walliser Dole*, a delightful red Rhone alpine variant). Basket loads of fresh vegetables and live poultry were routinely portaged staples of the Victorian diet on such excursions. In the event climbers were excessively portly or of stout physical substance, devices similar to sedan chairs slung between poles could be used to carry patrons higher, but no Alpine Club worthy of his membership would, of course, resort to such extreme measures. In the earlier decades chairs of this sort were still occasionally seen on the twisting higher trails. Grapnels and hooks on heavy cord were also devised, some of the more clever ones devised by Edward Whymper (first summiter of the Matterhorn).

Initially, rope technique usually consisted of a climbing party joining themselves together simply by virtue of grasping a shared rope by hand, although later the more common practice consisted of tying the rope to each climber's waist. It was also not unusual for larger groups to tie themselves together in this manner and only much later that "ropes" were limited to small groups of about four to six individuals. On glaciers, this could have distinct advantages to help assure each person's safety around hidden crevasses, but on steeper, higher routes this practice could result in disasters such as that which had enveloped Whymper's Matterhorn team on its descent from the summit. The wide variety of ropes in use also posed considerable additional hazard, since there were practical no safety standards in force at that time. On this last note, no trip to Zermatt is complete without a visit to the small Alpine Museum located there (near the English Church). Examples of many old ice axes, alpenstocks, and ropes are to be

viewed among the exhibits, including the infamous failed rope that parted upon impact, on Whymper's successful 1865 climb of the Matterhorn.

Perhaps surprisingly, women were not infrequent participants on these climbs, with a number of very noteworthy women climbers of the period evident, such as Lucy Walker (who with her father and brother climbed everywhere in the Swiss Vallais). Lucy Walker was in fact the first woman to ascend the Matterhorn in 1871, but she was only one of a dozen or more formidable Victorian women who pioneered the high routes almost equally with men. One English woman, the heiress Miss Stratton, achieved fame by being not just the first woman, but the very first *climber* to surmount formidably icy Mont Blanc in the winter of 1876. It doesn't take much imagination to understand that in Victorian England, a woman had to be very formidable and doubly determined in order to counter extant male chauvinism of that period. Not to be outdone by her human female counterparts, a small canine bitch named *Tshingel*, belonging to Alpine Clubber W. A. B. Cooledge, between 1868 and 1876 accompanied her master on no less than 55 substantial climbs, including nine different four thousand-meter peak ascents!

THE SAGA OF THE FIRST ASCENT OF THE SWISS MATTERHORN (1865)

Edward Whymper, now immortalized as the first man to successfully ascend the Swiss Matterhorn in July of 1865, was a young man of 23 when he first came to the Swiss Alps. Sent there on commission, to do sketches for English news illustration engravings, while so occupied he became quite enamored with the splendid scenic vistas afforded by the Swiss Alps and began to climb whenever his time constraints permitted. Whymper very quickly proved to be a skillful rock scrambler and recurrently frequented the Vallaisian area near and about Zermatt, gaining a reputation as a climber as well as an expert engraver of illustrative material for books and publications back in England.

The looming bulk of the Matterhorn, its unmistakable and unique profile dominating the area, quickly caught Whymper's imagination and held it, as much for its formidable beauty as for its reputation for being unclimbable. Thus he began a series of attempts to scale it via its most apparent classic routes, the Hornli, the Lyon, Furggen, and Zmutt ridges. These attempts began in 1862 and finally ended on July 14th, 1865, when Whymper and his small party of fellow amateur English climbers finally reached the summit. The successful route, known as the 'Hornlirutte' followed the northeast ridge of the Matterhorn to its summit, but it was only after repeated failed attempts to achieve the summit by other routes (notably the *Col du Lyon* route, following the northwest ridge) that he met with success on the Hornli. Viewed from Zermatt, the spectacular foreshortening effects of perspective had made the successful Hornli route appear to be too steep to be possible, but Whymper's success on it soon revealed its actual suitability.

Whymper's final and successful ascent of the mountain (his seventh) with the Rev. Charles Hudson, Douglas Hadow, Lord Francis Douglas, guides Michel Croz, and the Taugwalders (father and son) via the now standard Hornli Route (that leads from Zermatt) has been exhaustively analysed, examined, narrated, and retold so many times since 1865 that there is no need to repeat details of the feat here.

Suffice it to say that Whymper scorned the widespread belief that the mountain was an impregnable fortress and therefore, at slightly after noon on the 14th of July, in beautiful weather, the feared summit was finally achieved. Heady with exuberance over having accomplished what many devoutly felt was impossible, Whymper's party spent an hour on the summit before beginning to descend the route they had come up, retracing their steps back to Zermatt. Inexplicably, at some point on that part of the route that briefly crosses the steep uppermost segment of the North Face known as the dachel ('roof'), it is thought that young Douglas Hadow (an inexperienced young climber brought along at the behest of Reverend Hudson at the last minute), lost his footing and fell. The force of his unexpected fall caught all of the others off balance and it was only due to the fact that the rope joining all together parted between the lower four (Hudson, Hadow, Douglas, and Croz) and the upper three climbers (Whymper and his guides, the two Taugwalders) that Whymper and his Swiss guides managed to survive the fate of the unfortunate lower four, who fell 4000 feet to their deaths down the Matterhorn's steep North face.

Once returned to Zermatt, it was found that a heavier rope had been joined with a weaker one that had not been intended for primary climbing use. Thus, when the impact of Douglas' fall came, the smaller diameter rope had parted where it was joined to the thicker rope, taking all four of those tied to it to their deaths. Several consequent searches of the Matterhorn Glacier that lies below the North face of the mountain begun immediately after the disaster yielded the broken bodies of all but young Douglas, whose misstep had caused the accident. It is thought that whatever is left of his body still lies somewhere on the jagged rock of the austere and impressively steep North Face.

Upon return to England, Whymper, never known for his genial manner or as a socially adept individual in any favorable sense whatsoever, received heavy and unrelenting censure from the public and even many of his fellow alpinists, the onus being placed...fairly or unfairly...solely upon *him* for the catastrophe. So profound were the emotions aired over the whole unhappy affair that the Alpine Club literally went into a brief eclipse of several years as a direct result. Queen Victoria, who penned an expression of personal shock into her personal diary shortly thereafter, had even considered issuing a Royal Opinion that such extreme adventures should not thereafter be engaged in by English climbers, although fortunately for the Alpine Club and the future of mountaineering, she was advised that as dramatic an act as that by the reigning Queen would *not* be a productive or advisable one for her to undertake. As for Whymper, he simply retreated further into himself, remaining a very penurious and self-absorbed individual, despite the fact that he did continue to climb and achieved further successes in the South American Andes

Nevertheless, for fully 10 years following the scandalous dismay that arose from this most famous first ascent of any of the major alpine peaks, the reputation of the Alpine Club faded into a sort of public eclipse and continued to receive much unfavorable notoriety from the public. Membership dropped significantly from an original roster of about 29 members, as well. However dramatic the final 'conquest' of the Matterhorn and the totally unexpected consequences of its disastrous outcome, for the most part the hard core of the Alpine Club membership remained steadfast in their love for peaks and climbing, and after about a decade, the membership had once again risen from about 29 to over 275 members.

In the years subsequent to 1875, and disregarding the club's public disapprobation, members of the Alpine Club began to explore other parts of the globe, seeking out high peaks on all continents, including those in the Andes and in the Himalayas. Ever fractious (not exclusively a Victorian trait, but certain a noteworthy one), the Alpine Club membership seemed to suffer particularly from a dichotomy between its older and more conservative members and those who were younger and full of spirited desire to approach things differently. The older conservatives felt that the proper venue for the club's efforts should remain the Continental Alps, where the club had essentially begun, while the newer and more radical upstarts favored expanding explorations and expeditions, proposing ascents in other areas of the world. In examining this nuance of the early Alpine Club, it can't help but be noted that a comparative dynamic exists in all organizations comprised of a mix of younger and older individuals. There appears to be a process of natural *ageism* at work that has as much to do with the satiation of experience and maturity as with youthful impetuosity and the thirst for new forms of stimulation. Thus, it might seem natural that the older, more senior members favored traditional practices, resisted change, and wished to maintain custom, whereas many of the more youthful members, with the keen enthusiasm of youthfulness, lacked any sense of the experiential constraints felt by their seniors.

So substantial was this division of prevailing sentiment that applications of certain individuals could be and often were deliberately blocked (the contemporary term was 'blackballed') from gaining admission to the club by an expression of bias on the part of a small number of members. In later years, such belatedly recognized and highly gifted climbers as A.F. Mummery initially lost favor among their Alpine Club peers owing to biases often founded not in factual climbing ability, but in pure personal *dislike*. To say the English Alpine Club was (and in many ways still is) a highly class-conscious and socially stratified organization is not misstating fact, and in fact a reflexive bias against anything that smacked of radical innovation in terms of either technique or equipment would frequently create intense and heated friction over the least important issues (such as...in the earlier years...a strident argument over whether step-cutting in ice or the use of artificial climbing aids like crampons was preferable technique).

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[Next: PART TWO, THE ALPINE CLUB ENDURES AND MATURES]