HOW I BECAME A FAMOUS MOUNTAINEER

BY

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I WILL open this little paper for "The Billionaire" [The "Billionaire" has nothing to do with it. But it hurts Mr. Newlands to talk about things that cost less than a guinea. ED.] by remarking that mountaineering fame shares the great advantage of the Order of the Garter—there is no d——d merit about it.

Speaking personally, I took it up because in the first place the dear King likes to hear me chat about mountains, which he himself, dear old chap, is hardly the figure to climb; and in the second place there is a certain curious pleasure in the art of writing in a very even flowing continuous style, like a placid river whose banks are adorned at due intervals by the flowers of felicitous quotation. [We have cut two-and-a-half miles of said flowers—mostly Greek and Latin poetry—with which Mr. N. had embellished his manuscript. ED.] Of course I have always had such a number of friends that mountaineering has been very easy. All my relations are very highly placed in the various services all over the world,—it facilitates things immensely. Our family has always been very well, and it is a great advantage to have friends and relations in high places. At the same time it gives me real pleasure to say that I have become sincerely attached to many simple Swiss peasants, which shows conclusively to any unprejudiced mind that I am far from being a snob, and though some have thought, no doubt, that I lose dignity by addressing François Dévastation (for example) as "vieux chameau" or "mon coco," have we not the very similar instance of the touching friendship between the late dear Queen and John Brown?

I have never had any ambition to climb mountains, but accident (as it were) has at one time and another brought me to the top of a good many. It is really a very pleasant and exhilarating mode of mild exercise. A skilful guide never jerks the rope or slacks it suddenly, so that there is one long even strain upon the waist—not at all unpleasant, but, *au contraire*, rather suggestive of the embrace of a mountain-spirit.

No: I have never taken any active steps to become a famous mountaineer, except to make it my habit to speak authoritatively on all these questions just as if I were one, a most impressive course of action; and to take quite a little trouble to expose all sorts of impostors. What can Mr. Eckley mean (by the way) when he says that this habit of mine shows my strongly gregarious instinct? I grasp it, as it were, you know, and then I seem to lose it again.

It was I that exposed de Rougemont, and Landor, and Graham, and ever so many more. Now this Mr. Eckley is always attacking me; he has not that sense of *comme il faut* that the dear King (for example) has; his controversial manners have not that repose that marks the caste of Vere de Vere. Why do I not expose him? Why do we allow ourselves (I speak for the Alpine Club) to be called common cheats and impostors in the public press year after year without a word of reproach or denial?

It is the Christian spirit, my dear readers; and when we turn the other cheek, this Vulgarian—nay, hush, hush, I must not use such terms—this charmingly witty controversialist says "No wonder! I couldn't buffet all the cheek you've got from now to the Last Trump." It is disheartening; kindness does not melt that flinty heart; nothing will content him but one thing.

"Let Englishmen climb mountains unaided," he says, "just as they are unaided in every other sport; and with those Englishmen I will shake hands. I think even Mr. Newlands would kick if I hired Hayward to bat, and Haigh to bowl for me; while I, sitting in the pavilion, had their records published as my own, and went about the world as 'the famous cricketer.' Which is exactly what these heroes of the Alpine Club do. They hire one man who climbs rocks, another who can cut steps, and the only thing they do themselves is to take the credit. And because mountaineering (as distinguished from the everlasting repetition of well worn routes) is a sport needing high qualities of brain in a great degree, and high qualities of body in a small degree, therefore the Moral Science Tripos is a better school for the mountaineer than Sandow's, and the English amateur who has studied mountains in mass as well as in detail becomes a very much better man than the Swiss professional who has nothing to guide him but rule-of-thumb. A club of such

amateurs might be formed in two years, were it not for the dishonest and unsportsmanlike methods of the Alpine Club in discouraging the production of genuine climbers from the matchless raw material which England can supply. It was the end of Rome when her citizens paid substitutes to fight; it will be the end of England when professionalism has eaten up all her sports, as mountaineering is already swallowed whole."

These are not his actual words, of course—his method is more lurid—but I think it fairly represents his case. He forgets, like all Radicals, the question of vested interests. The Alpine Club has invested many thousands of pounds in Reputation. If we once admitted that mountains could and should be climbed by Englishmen without aid, all this money would be irrevocably lost—worst of all, lost out of the country. So that Mr. Eckley, under the guise of patriotism, is really sapping the very foundations of our National Wealth: in an earlier sterner age he would have passed through Traitor's Gate and suffered the supreme penalty which awaits the wretch who plots against his fatherland!

The matter is an exceedingly ticklish one; if we admit the existence of even one guideless climber, our whole position is threatened. We have to get out of it by saying that he was a wonderful genius, and an exception to all rules. But to admit two, three, twenty would sweep us away.

So we have to conceal the existence of the hundred or so first-class amateurs of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. We have to prevent it becoming known that nearly all first-class climbing is now done by guideless parties. We keep it dark that amateurs hold all the world's records except one; and we cover with calumny and reprobation the aspiring youth who proves intractable.

We were at one time in most serious danger. Mr. A. F. Mummery was an Englishman, and could not be so easily ignored; it had become notorious that no Alpine guide—though he had formerly climbed with guides—could be considered in the same class with him: and unfortunately some of our young bloods who had been investing very largely in that sensitive stock Reputation, had made things much worse by under-estimating his importance, and trying to extinguish him in the usual way by blackballing him for the Alpine Club. Of course one could not openly blackball him because of his guideless propensities; so the inaccuracy—I must confess the inaccuracy—that he was a bootmaker was sedulously circulated, and the result achieved. Luckily, the simple, good-natured fellow accepted our apologies for the "mistake," and consented to join us. Had he found out the real secret of the Alpine club before his admission we might have been badly off indeed—the value of our securities down to nothing! But his loyalty prevented him from giving us away too dreadfully, though that terrible last chapter of his book came as a great shock to many of us. However, we got out of it by saying "what a brilliant mountaineer he was; and of course one could excuse a little unsound theory in so wonderful an exponent of the sport." And we put it very neatly, I think, and rather turned the tables, by saying that he was an example of the way in which an exceptionally gifted amateur could become after long practice very nearly the equal of the best Swiss guides. However, I have wandered much from my subject. Yet I must flow on—it is the law of my nature—and the truth of the matter is that "How did you become a famous mountaineer?" is answered in a phrase (as above) by referring to my habitual tone of authority; while the question "How do you propose to remain a famous mountaineer, with people like this Mr. Eckley about?" is one which takes all my time and thought to answer. Even my little jokes are turned against me. The other day I said in the Geographical Society that "I think people should say Mount Everest, not Everest *tout court;*" for I have just seen in an account of some climbs in Canada, where there is a Mount Newlands, [What incomparable puppies these people are, who give these personal names to presumably dignified peaks! ED.] the phrase:

"Newlands has proved to be rather an impostor. I hope the same may never happen to Colonel Everest."

And the wretched newspaper fellow comments:

"Nobody appears to have laughed. Perhaps they were thinking it over."

[B]

BY SIR MEDIUM COELI

IT was an ingenious thought of my mother's—for I was so unfortunate as never to know my father—to christen me Medium Coeli, for the astrologers [With Reason! ED.] prophesy honour and glory to the lucky children at whose nativity this house is on the cusp of the ascendant. But on no natural grounds should such a prediction have been formulated; for my story—it is nearly a case of "From Log Cabin to White House," though the local colour is wrong—is one long (and stirring) example of the triumphant conquest of difficulties (of course I do not mean mountain difficulties) by persistence, judiciousness, and adroit manipulation of facts. Indeed the "great natural defect" of George Washington, that "he could never tell a lie," has at no time thrust its ugly head in my path. Nor was it, as ordinary people might be tempted to think, such a great drawback that I never possessed the smallest natural gift for climbing or mountaineering, or the wish or ability to learn these (to the dilettante) fascinating subjects.

Even at this day, when my name is practically synonymous with the sport, I am as ever quite incapable of climbing the simplest rocks, or even of descending unaided an unusually rough mule-track, while the ensanguine banner hung out in my cheeks is invariably blanched at the very suggestion of a native bridge. [Brandy does pull one round.] But my intellect was naturally acute, and, on looking round the world of sport, I soon fixed on mountain climbing as the only one in which an absolute duffer can acquire fame. It is quite impossible to pass oneself off as a fine cricketer—people look up your average; but a climber can do his work secretly, and the Alpine Journal which seeth in secret will reward him openly. I speak of the man who goes exclusively with guides; for the guideless man has friends who cannot be bribed to silence. Everybody will remember poor Smith, and the trouble he had about that guideless ascent of the Steinbockhorn, which read so well in the pages of the Journal, when his honest but deluded companions found out that they had not been to the top of the mountain, and that Smith knew it.

In fact, young Lazarus and his brother deserve a great deal more credit than myself; for they have worked up a reputation in the English hills where an honest body can hardly announce having made a new climb without a yapping chorus of "To-morrow we'll all come and see you do it."

In my own case, I had merely to engage competent guides and wander about the Alps. It was easy to do new climbs in those days, once the idea of varied routes was hit upon. My guides pulled me up a few dozen, and in due course I was admitted to the Alpine club.

To throw a little variety into things—in England at that time it was not good enough to be solely an athlete—I got a little reputation by a really good work on a quite different subject—I forget exactly what; though, owing to the disgusting conduct of one of her relatives, I have every reason to remember the name of the lady who wrote it. (Of course the title-page would not refresh my memory on the point.) It is a genuine example of actual memory on my part, and I confess to an honest pride in the matter.

I am even prouder of my next step. Merit alone is useless without money, and I was in sore straits. But the distinguished mountaineer was as rare a bird in the 'seventies as the successful general in the days of Venice, and I was able with my tale of moving accidents by field and flood, to swoop down on a stray Yankee heiress, and hustle her into the halls of Hymen before the Hon. Patrick N. O'Flaherty (essentially of Tammany Hall, and incidentally her father) came upon the scene.

I had not bargained for quite such a vulgar fellow; of course we had to compromise, but his idea of compromise was this: "Waal, young f'ler, I had calculated upon my daughter marrying a peer; I guess you've done me there; but every red cent you get from me has got to be honestly laid out in running for the House of Lords, and don't you forget it!"

And I had been looking forward to a quiet life! No more beastly mountains! No more filthy Swiss inns! No more hunting for impoverished persons of talent to write my books! The Club, and the Park, and——O! my heart is breaking. The worthy Boss mapped out my life from day to day; and before long some silly fool hammered it into his head that the best chance of a peerage for me was that I should go exploring to all the most inaccessible regions of the uninhabitable globe! Useless to point out that I had no scrap of ability in this direction; that plain lump sums to a party caucus would be a more efficient means to the end. He was adamant, and after a week without—my blood boils!—without the very commonest necessaries of life, I gave up and started for New Guinea or some beastly place like that—I forget where,

it's all in a book of mine that I never could read—though I have several times honestly tried to do so; people will question one about one's exploits.

So the devil of it was that at the very moment when I was on the top of Mount Thingumbob, I was actually recognized in Coney Island by an Alpine Club man, and, as they have to draw the line somewhere, that did in my chance of becoming President. If Pa found out about that—why, I'm afraid to think about it.

The next few years are a positive nightmare. I was driven from one end of the earth to the other; some of the expeditions I actually had to do, because there were English people all over the starting-point. Then I had to invent the most ingenious explanations about things; one time they actually sent Englishmen with me—that was the most awful experience of all. However, I managed to get rid of one by disgusting him with my mismanagement, and persuading the others that he was bad-tempered. A second I bribed to quit; a third luckily damaged his leg; and I was left with only a fool artist who knew even less about mountains than he did about art, and was easily bamboozled into thinking that the snow-hump we struggled up was a great peak![1] But fate was against me; my faithful guide was *got at* in England by a friend of my very worst enemy, and blurted out the whole story under the influence of alcohol. Oh, the terrible curse of drunkenness! Oh, that man should put an enemy into his mouth to give away my game!

In this heartbreaking manner year after year flew by, and the House of Peers seemed as far off as ever. Pa knew more about England by now, and the wealth of Pittsburg or wherever it was swelled the party chest [I forget which party—I could never understand politics]. We spent thousands—thousands, I tell you! of what ought to have been my money on contesting hopeless seats. At last it was intimated that I might look for my reward. I made all sorts of inquiries in the ermine market, and Benson's sent me a really reasonable estimate for a coronet. Then the blow fell. A Knighthood! A knighthood for the Hercules of the Himalayas, the Charlemagne of the Caucascus, the Attila of the Andes and the Alps! A knighthood. Think of it, dear readers—a knighthood. A common cheap calico knighthood. The sort of thing they give away at Harrod's Stores to all purchasers to the value of over Five Pounds!

[However, when abroad, I may be able to pass as a baronet.]

There was only one advantage to be got out of it—I would settle Pa. I settled him. Of course, I said sarcastically, I *can* go down the crater of Vesuvius if you *like*. But it won't do any good. You haven't bought the British Empire, and you can't, and they've done you, and that's all there is to it. I'm tired; I'm going to sit down a bit, and you let me have a decent allowance, or I'll blow the whole gaff, and show up your silly vulgar ambitions and then where will your daughter be, and that's all there is to *that*.

He consigned me, I regret, to a hotter place than Vesuvius, but he gave in, and there are ripping easy-chairs in the club. If I could only shut that beast Eckley's mouth I should be perfectly happy; but it don't really cut any ice [I picked up this language to try and appease Pa], for the Britishers are that easy it takes a thousand years to nail a fakir to the counter.

After all, then, I really am an example of a great and famous mountaineer, and let's leave it at that!

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[1] The author is not quite frank here, perhaps. The natives who were with him have lost all memory of the snow-hump.—ED.

[C]

BY THE BROTHERS LAZARUS

I MUST apologize to ladies and gentlemen who read this for using “I” instead of “we” but nobody can distinguish between my brother and me when we write and it's all very confusing but it only makes one mountaineer the two of us. I am born of poor but honest parents in the country so a kind gentlemen said we were both Arcadians like some people in a book because I was so simple-minded sincere and guileless. We never knew why they laughed so when he said it but that doesn't matter what I want to say is we were really nicely brought up, and have always been brought up to be respectful to ladies and gentlemen and I hope we shall never speak rudely that is why I am so much liked by ladies and gentlemen who buy our beautiful pictures. Of course we would not lie about anything for I have been brought up very strictly and the camera cannot lie. I always use the camera to prove our statements for though as we said it cannot lie it can be inclined in all sorts of directions and this is very useful. If a lady or gentleman is lying on a floor and you take a picture of them and then look at it sideways it looks as if they were climbing up a perpendicular wall or climbing down it head first.

Like all great discoveries (a gentleman told me one day) this is very simple and was made by accident. I once took a picture of a lady climbing a rock needle and we didn't know how to use a level so it all went wrong and the picture came out with the needle all cock-eyed but the lady liked it because it was so much steeper than it looked we mean than it looked when you looked at it. So there was a very nice gentleman called Jones who couldn’t climb rocks but was very clever at jumping up them when he caught hold of something he got up and when he didn't he fell down and hurt himself so he was making a tremendous reputation. So I said to him we'll photo you all over all the rocks and we'll tip the camera so that it always looks as if you were on an overhanging precipice. So he said yes and I went into partnership and it was all very famous. But there were rude people who wanted to do new climbs and so we had to prevent them climbing things until we had jumped up them. There are some horrid rocks that you must climb because there is nothing to jump at but our partner found a good way to get round that. I used to go out with him (he was a very nice gentleman and treated us quite like friends) and we would stand at the top and let him down by a rope and he would go up and down and up and down and up and down hundreds of times till it was quite easy for him you know it is only a new rock that is difficult because as a kind gentleman told me one day if you don't know exactly where the handholds and footholds are you waste a lot of strength in trying useless things and you get tired and when the pull comes you are too tired to do it. So I kept it all frightfully secret and by and by our partner would say at breakfast “I think I'll stroll over to Gully X to-day and have a look at it.” Now everybody would know that Gully X had never been done and was awfully dangerous and all the ladies would begin to cry and say Dear Mr. Jones don't go to that awful place! And a gentleman friend of Mr. Jones's (though he wasn't really a gentleman only a farmer) would say “If you climb that place I'll never speak to you again” and everybody would look pale except us and I would try not to laugh. So we would all go to see it and Jones would take his coat off and just cast one glance at the rock as if to take it all in and go straight away up without any hesitation at all and everybody would clap their hands like mad and say what wonderful skill and there would be Mr. Jones at the top not out of breath even and call down it's quite an exhilarating little climb and everybody come up it's quite easy. So everybody would just worship him and when a rude man would say go up that other little gully at the side which would be a much easier place really he would say no it would look like showing off and give the other men a chance. And get out of it that way. And everybody would write in the book what wonderful skill and strength and all that. And the way I would prevent other people doing climbs by climbing was we would make great friends with everybody and say quite secretly I know a gully that hasn't been climbed in such and such a place and we want to do it with you don't tell anybody. So he would be awfully pleased and treat me quite like a friend and I would say the same to everybody but there would always be a reason why we couldn't actually go and try and I would say the same to everybody and by and by Mr. Jones and us would do it and be famous. Because having arranged to try with us the others were too honourable to go without me.

There were rude people who said no we always climb by ourselves and your old gully isn't one you found. It's in the book and was described ten years ago, and the only reason it hasn't been climbed yet is

because of your dirty tricks taking advantage of people's ignorance and their sense of honour to run your blackguardly advertising scheme to boom Jones.

These people were not real gentlemen we feel sure though they had been to Oxford and Cambridge and all I can say is if they are we're very glad I'm not.

So sometimes other people would do new climbs and it was horrid but we went and practised them and wrote in the book how easy I wonder people are so vain as to record such silly things. Anyway we got a lot of new climbs to ourselves and got very famous. It was very nice for us because I never took any risks and we knew I should have the field all to ourselves soon because I knew Mr. Jones would kill himself one day the way he jumped about instead of climbing and sure enough he did.

We had a dreadful fright one year everybody knows that if you sleep with your window open you go into a decline and die but there was a gentleman who said rubbish you won't and my brother believed him just because he was a gentleman though we know now that a gentleman can be wrong just like common people. So one night he said his prayers twice over and opened his window nearly an inch but it was no good he went into a decline and went to the Alps as a last chance and spat blood and all the ladies said poor poor boy to die so young and he got thinner and thinner. So a medical gentleman said send him to what's his name where there weren't any doors or windows and my poor brother was out in the rain all the time with only a towel on and they fed him on twelve raw sheep a day and he came back so fat I didn't know him and his cheeks flapped against his waistcoat and he broke the weighing machine at the station and we were afraid the railway company would put me in prison.

So then we went to everywhere and tipped the camera more and more every time and learnt to scratch out things in the picture that prevented it looking dangerous and I did a lot more new climbs on the old plan and read Professor Collie's nice articles and Mr. Mummery's nice book which is in very much that style and Mr. Jones' nice book which is a very careful imitation of that style and so we learnt that book by heart and wrote a book in the same style with the same kind of photographs in the same type and the same binding and printed on the same paper and sold at the same price and you can't tell which part I wrote and which part my brother wrote because it isn't our style (this is our style) but Mr. Jones' nice style and even that isn't his nice style but Mr. Mummery's nice style, and even Mr. Mummery owes a little to Professor Collie's nice style.

And that is how we became a famous mountaineer.

[D]

BY MADAME BOCK BRUNE

HOW sweet it is in the starry morning to set out from some daintily furnished club hut with one's faithful guides! Deliciously primitive, in a strange sad way, to lick the last drops of fragrant olive oil from the slim svelte tin of sardines on the frowning brow of some historic peak, as, lying with one's dark sweet face to the blue azure of the cerulean sky with its cobalt-ultramarine shade of hyacinthine—hang it all! blue again; there are no more words—between one's faithful guides one can reflect upon the deep problems of Life and Death, and above all, marriage. [Better have reflected on grammar.—ED.] Yes! I have been married twelve times; but what is marriage after all? Surely a husband is less intimate, far, far less intimate in many, many ways than one's faithful guides! With a husband, if the rope breaks, one can get another; but there are so few, few faithful guides, none as faithful as mine! Such are my reflections as I lie between—[Possibly. This is not *at all* the kind of article we want. Don't maunder, tell us how you became a famous mountaineer and I'll make it a dollar.—ED.] Very well, that's talking. I've done some of the commonplace climbs that everybody from cows to Alpine Clubmen has been up millions of times every year, and written about them in the style you don't seem to appreciate. That's straight. [It is. We understand. Here is the dollar. Thank you. Good-morning.—ED.]

[E]

BY MRS. BLOOMER-GREYMARE

CONFOUND and dash these drivelling newspaper donkeys! George! What am I to say, I wonder? George—G-e-o-r-g-e! What the deuce was I about when I married one of these scurvy, feckless, futile, scrimshank, scallywag men? George! Oh, there you are! Take that, then! And that! and that! and how dare you come to me with your tie all round at the back of your neck! No, don't speak—nothing but gabble, gabble, gabble all day long—why aren't you some use? I pulled your tie and collar awry, did I? Then why did you make me do it? I've told you a thousand times if I've told you once, that I won't have it, you idle gawky good-for-nothing stuck up idiot? Why did I marry you? tell me that! [No answer; but a profound feeling that in a previous existence he must have killed his father and mother, or a holy universal King, or wounded the body of a Buddha!] And on the top of everything the *Daily Mail* wants to know how I became a famous mountaineer. Will you write the article now at once? Mind what you say! Enlarge on the natural timidity of woman, and the wonderful courage—What! speak up! and don't stare and yammer like a dropsical owl! O! Of course!—an appointment in the City! Oh, yes! I know what men do in the city—you can't deceive me. But you'll write the article in the afternoon, eh? Will you? Yah! you idle silly gowk. What? Do you want me to take the stick to you? I see you remember! Oh, you're no good—I know the sort of wishy-washy muck you'd ladle out to the public—leave it to me! I'll show them what a good true tender beautiful woman can do. Oh, you men! Why, you even kicked at calling the silly mountain Bloomer-Greymare after me! And you positively wouldn't call the other one Lavinia though I beat you till the very coolies ran away for shame! I know you did climb them and I didn't but what's that got to do with it. What the public wants is the Poetry of Married Life and the spectacle of a timid shrinking woman doing what has beaten all you hulking bullying brutes of men—see? you pasty-faced monkey jumping about like as if you were on hot bricks. Stop it now or take that! and that! Get out, can't you? How the blazes can I write my article with you maundering about all the time muddling my mind with your cackle cackle cackle. . . . . .

[And that is how *she* became a famous mountaineer. ED.]