'ANYWHERE, ANYWHEN'[1]

Perfecta est sapientia, creaturam creatori pie subdere; discernere conditorem a condito, artificem ab operibus. Qui commiscet artifice opera, nec artem intelligit, nec artificem.

—ST. AUGUSTINE, *Sermo cclii.*

THE stout little man, lurching along the narrow pavement of a street in Lima, had been celebrating Peru's rupture of relations with the Axis, and he was looking for Germans to insult. His technique for identifying German citizens was to thrust two fingers, extended in the symbolic shape of a 'V' into the face of passers-by and to study their reactions. Mine failed to satisfy him, but when he finally realised that I was English he melted into a flood of tender remorse. '*Mi amigo.* All English my friends.' '*Muchas gratias,*' I replied, '*A Dios.*' But he would not let me go. 'You are my friend. Anywhere, anywhen.' His heart was in the right place, but his feet were not; and by the time I had rescued him from a passing car, his affection was dynamic in its energy. Seizing me by the arm, he propelled me through the front door of his own shop. I disengaged myself as the champion of the democracies collapsed on to the sofa. 'You are my friend. Anywhere, anywhen.' I looked up and my eyes came to rest on an advertisement for the Leica, an enlargement of a Leica snapshot of the Wetterhorn from Grindelwald. And, for one vivid moment, I had a sense of bilocation as if part of me was in Grindelwald and part in Peru. 'My friend. Anywhere. Anywhen.' Fifty years have passed since I first saw Grindelwald, and few indeed are the human friends whose company I would prefer to the Wetterhorn. And yet what, in the final analysis, is the Wetterhorn? A lump of limestone plastered with snow and ice. Could anything be less rational than to claim friendship with a rock? 'These men are really atheists,' said Clement of Alexandria, 'who with a silly pretence of wisdom worship matter.' But do mountain lovers worship mountains? And, if not, what is the explanation of this sense of communion with a shadowy personality or, with the shadow of a Personality, which we experience among mountains?

I think it was St. Thomas Aquinas who said that it was the province of theology to explain, not God but the world, and if this be so, theology might explain the Wetterhorn. There was certainly no

[1] From a forthcoming book, 'Mountain Jubilee,' to be published by Eyre and Spottiswood.

shortage of theologians at Grindelwald during those early summers of my boyhood, but the theologians who met every summer to discuss Reunion at the Grindelwald conferences were too busy explaining themselves to have any leisure for explaining the Wetterhorn.

Unlike many of those who are surfeited with religion in their youth, I neither reacted violently against nor in favour of religion. I was not sufficiently interested to be attracted or repelled. My own interior life was unaffected by my father's ecclesiastical enthusiasms. For me the Fathers of the Church were the pioneers of the Alps, the Alpine Club was the body of the faithful, and the Alpine Journal my variant of Migne's Library of patristic literature. Leslie Stephen's *The Playground of Europe* was my breviary, a selected portion of which I read every evening.

I preferred Stephen to Whymper or Mummery, because his *Playground of Europe* is no mere record of adventure. It was indeed the quasi-religious note in his finest essays which attracted me. This agnostic who had left the Church in which he had taken Orders to write *An Agnostic's Apology* had tried to find among the mountains a substitute for his lost faith. To Leslie Stephen the mountains spoke 'in tones at once more tender and more awe-inspiring than that of any mortal teacher.' He was the interpreter for whom I was searching.

I developed a cult of Leslie Stephen, and by the time I reached Oxford I had read all his literary criticism and most of his philosophical works. His portrait had a place of honour in my rooms at Balliol, and when his nephew, the late Mr. H. A. L. Fisher, read a paper in my rooms to a society of which I was the secretary, his uncle's portrait attracted his attention, and, long after the meeting had ended, we continued to talk 'Stephen.' On his return home he told Mrs. Fisher that he had met an undergraduate who knew more about Leslie Stephen's work than he did himself. Mr. Fisher was the editor of the Home University Library, and it was to this chance meeting and to my knowledge of his uncle's work that I owed the invitation to write the volume on 'The Alps' for that series.

I not only read Leslie Stephen. He was my model and my inspiration when I tried my prentice hand at mountain writing. Essays of which the headmaster thought highly were copied by their proud authors into a morocco-bound book, kept in the Vaughan Library. My father was proud of the fact that an essay of mine, on 'Snow,' was honoured in this fashion, and he insisted on showing the essay to a friend of his, Father X, a fine judge of literature. 'Father X,' said my father, 'has no future in the Church of Rome. His Bishop

doesn't trust him. He's not submissive enough. He is suspected of modernism.'

A few days later Father X came down from London and had tea with us. After tea he took me into the garden. 'Your father,' he began, 'has shown me your essay. You seem to have a great admiration for Leslie Stephen. Have you ever read his book, *An Agnostic's Apology?* You can get it for sixpence in the cheap reprints issued by the Rationalist Press Association.'

I took his advice, invested sixpence in Leslie Stephen's apologia, and embodied some of his more mordant remarks about Jehovah in an essay which did not find its way into the morocco-bound volume of choice Harroviana.

My father, of course, was very angry with Father X, but Father X was unmoved by his reproaches. 'Arnold's real religion is a kind of mountain idolatry, all that Leslie Stephen has done is to eliminate the faint Christian flavour which he has acquired from his environment. He can now start from scratch in his search for truth, unhampered by any Protestant prejudices. He will end a Catholic.'

'I used to think,' said my father, when he told me this story some years later, 'that Father X's Bishop did not make proper use of his brilliant gifts. But maybe the Bishop was right. He was a bit too brilliant. And I've never met a Catholic priest who wasn't profoundly shocked by his recommending you to read that book.'

Leslie Stephen had convinced me not only that I could no longer believe, but also that I had never really believed. I discarded Christianity with no fuss and with no regrets, but a curious experience among the mountains helped me to understand, by analogy, the tragic sense of loss which many of the great Victorians experienced when they faced life without the sustaining power of the ancestral creed.

I was eighteen at the time, and I was returning with my brother from a climb in the Wildstrubel range. I had not slept well in the hut, and I had forgotten to protect my face against the sun, and the scorching snows of the Plaine Morte exacted the full price for my carelessness. By the time we reached the rim of the glacier, I was tired, sleepy and slightly feverish as the result of severe sunburn.

We sat down and rested. From our lofty outpost we looked on to one of the noblest panoramas in all the Alpine chain. I looked at the shapely pyramid of the Weisshorn, and there was no beauty in it. Far away in the West the silvery dome of Mont Blanc floated like a cloud above a canopy of sun-tinted mist. 'It's ugly . . . it's all ugly,' I muttered despondently.

I tried to reason my way back to the threshold of faith by analysing the form and colour of this noble mountain view. In vain. My

doubts hardened into sullen negation. The beauty of the mountains was a myth, their loveliness an illusion. 'But even if mountains are ugly,' I persisted, 'it would still be fun to climb them.' 'Fun?' sneered the Spirit that denies, 'why?' 'Why is it fun to climb? Oh, because . . . because . . .' I tried to remember what Leslie Stephen had said, but his apologetics for the mountain faith seemed as unconvincing as Paley's apologia for Christianity. 'But even if mountains are ugly, and even if there's no point in climbing them, life is still worth living; it still has a meaning.' 'A meaning? what meaning?' asked the Spirit that denies. I could not answer. I was overwhelmed by the sense of dereliction. I felt as if the Universe had lost its soul.

I hated every step of the downward tramp to Montana. Once home, I went straight to bed and did not awake until the dawn. I got out of bed, and went to the window. The morning star still lingered in the thinning darkness, and then suddenly Mont Blanc saluted the sun. The mountains had never seemed so lovely. Nothing remained of the darkness of doubt, nothing but a shadow which only served to intensify by contrast the shining splendour of faith restored. Wonder had returned to the world, and life again had a meaning.

Leslie Stephen converted me to agnosticism. Haeckel, whose *Riddle of the Universe* was also issued as a cheap reprint by the R.P.A., all but converted me to materialism. Materialism, an old heresy, had a special appeal to Victorian Escapists from the complexity of life. The dynamic energy of the great centuries had spent itself, and an age which was mentally tired was in search of short cuts, such as over-simplification. Marx attempted to simplify history by eliminating all factors save the economic, Darwin tried to simplify Evolution by ignoring all agents save Natural Selection. Freud explained all philosophy, excepting, of course, Freudianism, as a mere by-product of sex. The Materialists denied the reality of spirit; the Christian Scientists denied the reality of matter.

True simplicity has an aesthetic quality, and even false simplicity has a certain meretricious appeal, but it did not take me long to discover that Haeckel had failed to solve the problem which interested me beyond all others. He had not explained the Wetterhorn.

I remember, as if it were yesterday, the moment when I threw aside materialism for ever. I was nineteen at the time. My brother and I were returning from a great climb, and we were smoking a quiet pipe on a pass a few thousand feet above the valley, plunged in the rich gloom of an Alpine twilight.

The evening breeze served as a soft pedal to the music of a glacier

stream which faded into piano when the wind rose. Sixty miles away the white bar of the Oberland responded to the farewell of the sun. The golden glow subdued the massive ranges and dissolved the solidity of rock and earth into a succession of luminous planes melting into a background of ever deepening shadow. A white speck that was Chillon stood out against the deep purple of the lake. The whole vast shadowed landscape was haunted by something of which visible beauty is only the sacramental expression. I thought of Haeckel's dusty nonsense and laughed aloud, and from that moment I discarded materialism for ever. An experience such as this helps one to understand by analogy the sudden passage from doubt to faith which is the essence of evangelical conversion. These moments of spiritual intuition are valuable not only because they are completely convincing to the individual concerned, but also because they should encourage one to continue one's search for the objective and the impersonal arguments which are independent of personal intuition.

It is, of course, easy to refute Materialism without that appeal to personal experience which as I know (by personal experience) only serves to exasperate those who have never shared the experience in question.

Materialism is a disease of the great cities and does not flourish among men who are in close touch with Nature. I remember a night on an East Coast Convoy, when we were expecting an E-boat attack, I asked the Captain, as he peered out into the star-reflecting waters of a calm but sinister sea, whether he had ever met a sailor who was an atheist. 'No,' said the Captain, 'not one. Sailors have time to think.' Mountaineers, like sailors, have time to think, and like sailors they are in close touch with that Nature which is 'the art of God.' And though some mountaineers incur the reproach of St. Augustine by failing to distinguish between the Art and the Artist, there are many more who are only restrained by shyness from admitting that they have felt among the mountains, and perhaps only among the mountains, a sense of communion with the Lord and Giver of life. Let me recall an experience which every true mountain lover could parallel. An April sunrise on the shores of an Alpine lake, set among hills which rose through a gradation of tone from the glory of vivid green near the water's edge through the parched browns of the higher slopes from which the snow had just retreated to the gleam of the summit ridges where winter still resisted the sun. In the west the last lingering stars surrendered. In the east the finite and the infinite met where the clear-cut lines of the summit ridges showed sharp against the unending distances of pure space. At noon the sky is a roof, at dawn an emptiness with-

out end. There was promise rather than revelation of colour in sky and in lake, and the silence was only ruffled but not broken by the little wind which goes before the dawn. The solitary chirrup of an impertinent bird was suddenly suppressed as if by an unseen baton. Nature was waiting. Hill and lake and every feathered thing seemed poised in expectancy.

Then the wind began to make patterns on the lake, and the water darkened where the breeze touched it.

Suddenly the rocky crest of an eastern peak burnt up into a halo of flame. Rays from an unseen sun radiated into the eastern sky. The grass stirred to meet the dawn, the flowers opened a little wider and the mountains seemed to stand at the salute. At such moments one knows beyond all need of proof that a veil has been drawn aside, and that the barrier between the things which are seen and the things which are unseen has been lowered for an instant:

> Such harmony is in immortal souls,
> But whilst the muddy vesture of decay
> Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

Among the hills we wear our muddy vesture with a difference and hear the distant notes of immortal harmony.

If the essence of mystical experience be the certitude that the world of sense is only a veil which masks the ultimate reality, the mountain lover is, I suppose, a mystic of sorts, even though he be confined with the catechumens to the atrium. For myself I would not claim ever to have had any religious experience, in the usual sense of the term, other than these moments of intuition among the hills. But such moments have given meaning to the passages in which the great mystics have struggled to communicate the incommunicable. It is a pity that many of those who have written of mountain mysticism have never studied the subject of mysticism in general, for it is only lack of knowledge which tempts people to imply a contrast between mystical and institutional religion. It is precisely within the framework of rigid and dogmatic systems that the greatest mystics have developed their genius.

Some people are content to feel; others cannot rest until they have accounted for their feelings. In the Victorian age scientists were emotional about science and unscientific about their emotions, and the interpreters of mountain mysticism were the victims of a bad tradition. And it was because mountaineers had failed to explain the Wetterhorn that I finally turned to the theologians and philosophers and sought in their works a key to the mystery of mountain beauty and to the influence of mountains on the mind of Man.

ARNOLD LUNN.