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IN MEMORIAM

WILLIAM BELL

During the war many men died unheard and unknown. It is particularly tragic that William Bell should have survived those years only to die on the Matterhorn at a time when the realisation of his life as a poet and mountaineer was only beginning. But Bell, unlike many of those with whom he served, left his mark. His poetry will survive, and so will his memory among his friends and those who climbed with him.

Few people knew him really well. He was modest, rarely speaking of himself, never seeking to display his powers. But the flowing energy of the man impressed his personality on others. He was always doing something, climbing quietly over College roofs, leading some mad midnight expedition on the Cherwell, or putting forward a new idea on any subject from Knight’s Move on Grooved Arête to the theory of relativity. All who were with him at such times quickly came to prize his friendship. It taught them something and he became part of their lives.

He was never a gymnast on rock, but by taking thought he added inches to his stature. He was always steady and cautious; even on practice boulders he would climb down rather than jump off, and he had a peculiar quality of perseverance which usually brought him to the top of any route he attempted. Climbs which demanded this quality he always liked and remembered best. He had little use for severe routes which did nothing and led nowhere.

On the higher mountains, however, things were different. He had immense stamina which usually brought him to the hut long before the rest of the party in spite of his sack always being the heaviest. He was in his third season in the Alps when he died, and behind this lay considerable experience of winter mountaineering in Wales and Scotland. On snow and ice he was fast becoming an expert. He loved to launch out onto a difficult slope, cutting with one hand and using his axe as
precisely and easily as if it weighed no more than a walking stick. His caution remained but his energies seemed to increase. Few could have bettered his lead of the north peak of the Aiguilles du Tour when inches of fresh snow lay on the rocks, or the artistry he showed in carving a way up a heavily iced chimney on the east ridge of the Aiguilles Dôres.

Looking back, it is impossible to think of him as anything but a great mountaineer. He could not display the list of first ascents and new routes which creates the prestige of the modern expert. His only conquest of this kind was of a small warty pinnacle at the head of the Trient glacier which was ascended in a blizzard and promptly dubbed Pic Bell. But his approach to the hills was that of the great mountaineer. He came to them with the right ideas and left them with the right results. There was no hard competitive spirit or feeling of conflict between man and mountain, simply a deep appreciation of their beauty and a robust enjoyment of the pleasure they gave him when he climbed on them. This remains in the memory above all other things. To have his rotund frame and healthy spirit in a climbing party was always an inspiration. Unwittingly, he gave others something of his appreciation of the hills. Men who climbed with him felt their senses sharpened and he transmitted to them his cheerfulness and confidence. He climbed as a poet should, not for glory or a sense of achievement, but for the sake of climbing, with humility, yet with determination.

J. C. HOLT.

ARTHUR W. WAKEFIELD

The announcement of Dr. Wakefield's death, at the age of 72, on 23rd February, 1949, caused not only sorrow but surprise. One thought of him as being as impervious as his native rock to the major ills, and as being likely to continue for an indefinite period with an activity maintained by his powerful will against the increasing stiffness of his joints. From Sedbergh School, where he was Captain of Football in 1893, he went to Trinity College, Cambridge. Here he rowed Head of the River in the Lent Races of 1897, in which year he obtained a Half Blue for cycling. This possibly explains his lifelong devotion to that arduous means of progression. In 1898 he boxed as a middleweight for Cambridge against Oxford. Continuing his training
at the London Hospital after serving as a trooper in the South African War, he was Captain of Rugby Football in 1903 and, next year, won the United Hospitals boxing championship as a heavy-weight, whilst in 1906, he was Captain of the United Hospitals Swimming Club.

In 1904, he made the first of his well-known record fell walks, setting up figures which were unbeaten (except by himself in 1905) until 1920, when he helped to pace Eustace Thomas during his successful attempt on the record. In his 1905 walk Wakefield covered about 60 miles, and made 23,500 feet of ascents in 22 hours, 7 minutes.

His degrees and qualifications (M.A., M.D., M.R.C.S., and L.R.C.P.) show that all this time he was equally active and successful in academic and professional work.

In 1908, after a first visit to the Rocky Mountains of Canada, during which he made a determined attempt, alone, on Mount Field, in very bad weather, his ideals of service and adventure led him to the job of Medical Officer to the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen in Labrador, until the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. He served in this in the Newfoundland Regiment, and as a Captain in the C.A.M.C. and the R.A.M.C., being mentioned in despatches in 1917.

I think it must have been at a Fell and Rock C.C. Meet, early in 1919, that I first met Wakefield.

One heard little of his previous adventures except through an occasional story. Thus a pre-war tour of Germany on a "proper-bike" (he refused to call these instruments "push-bikes"), was the occasion of the running over of the dachshund with the bark sequence: bark, bark, gasp, bark, gasp, bark bark . . . ; Africa was represented by the account of the decapitation of a crocodile which had attempted to interfere with his bathing; of Labrador he said little beyond recalling the deplorable tea-stewing custom of the inhabitants and their methods of keeping warm. Of the Great War he scarcely ever spoke, but he accurately assessed the Germans, and, on the other hand, was full of admiration for the French, as a great, intelligent and highly civilised people.

We began a climbing partnership in the Lake District in which he was an ideal companion for the new ascents on Doc
Crags, Gimmer and Esk Buttress, and the many repetitions of older climbs on which we and other friends then embarked.

Good tempered, never worried, always showing pleasure at being out climbing whether the circumstances were favourable or adverse, encouraging the upward move by his perfect confidence, but never questioning a retreat even indirectly, and always remembering and chuckling over past climbs, those days with Wakefield were a joy from the time he arrived in his slack-jointed open car until the evening. Then, after a typical Lakeland tee, in Langdale or at Cockley Beck (with his: “Yes, I will have a second cup”—for the sixth time or so), or after one of Mrs. Harris’s famous spreads at Coniston, and after he had lit his old pipe with the perforated metal bowl cover, and we and our familiars had talked climbing, past, present and future, we returned to our respective bases, he in his car, tolerated only because of its usefulness, and I on my not unloved motor cycle.

He climbed neatly and safely, and although a man of such deep convictions, he was quite open-minded about equipment, and quite unmoved by such club-cleaving controversies as boots versus rubbers, rope versus line, or belt versus braces. The question of pitons naturally never arose, but if it had, I think he would have sided with the angels rather than with the blacksmiths.

In 1921 he was Surgeon to the Canadian Pacific Railway, and went to the Canadian Alpine Club Camp. Although some of the expeditions were second ascents, the climb which seems to have given him perhaps the greatest pleasure during the Camp was an unsuccessful but strenuous attempt on the virgin peak Mt. Eon. He traversed Mt. Assiniboine, climbed Mt. Magog, traversed Nainet Peak and Mts. Terrapin and Magog, traversed Mt. Sturdee, and, later on, from Banff, ascended Mt. Rundell.

A member of the second Mount Everest Expedition in 1922, he, in the words of Captain Farrar, “ rendered yeoman service and reached the North Col”—at the age of 45.

He was an honorary member of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club, and President, 1923-5. In 1924, joined by Chorley, we had our only joint holiday in the Alps, at the Montenvers. The weather was, on the whole, bad, and Wakefield had a carbuncle on the back of his neck all the time which would have
prevented any ordinary person from even thinking about climbing. But Wakefield's only reaction was to buy a suction cup in London which I operated each evening whilst, during each day in that exacting district, he climbed without a grumble and with his customary perfect reliability. Nothing in Wakefield's remarkable career has impressed me more than his fortitude during that fortnight, when we climbed the Aiguilles du Peigne and Ravanel, the latter glazed in places after a night of storm.

Attempts on the Blaitière and the Aiguille sans Nom were stopped by hopeless weather, but never did any suggestion of its hopelessness come from Wakefield.

In 1926-9 he was with Bentley Beetham in several Alpine districts, in many cases big peaks being climbed on consecutive days, and the list included inter alia:—


In 1926 he was a member of a happy party which climbed the Central Buttress of Scafell, and, in 1937, we climbed Eagle Crag, Buttermere, by the Western Route.

In the 1939-45 War he was a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Home Guard. During his last years he was increasingly troubled by arthritis, and eventually was unable to walk on the hills.

He continued to attend to his patients with the devotion which characterised all his doings and, by some miracle, was able to ride his "proper bike" to the end. He is survived by his widow, two sons and a daughter.

GEORGE S. BOWER.

Arthur Wakefield was a contemporary at Trinity, Cambridge. A short broad-shouldered, curly-haired, good-looking Northerner, with an attractive smile and an equable temper, he was
We also regret to report the deaths of E. Heptonstall, who
joined the Club in 1941; of A. F. Sherrard, who joined in 1948
and of whom there is an obituary notice in Cambridge Mount-
aineering, 1948; and of H. C. Lowen, who had been a member
since 1901 and was Vice-President 1927-30. It is hoped to
publish a notice of H. C. Lowen in next year's Journal.

With the Journal already in the press, news has been
announced of the death of R. A. Hull in an accident on the
Italian face of Mont Blanc, on 22nd August, 1949. Hull had been an active member of the Club since 1937, and had had several notable seasons of Alpine climbing since the war. A notice of him will appear in the next number.