

IN MEMORIAM.

JOHN BALL.

MR. BALL's death in London, on October 21, at the age of 71, is an irreparable loss to many persons and many causes, and not least to the members of the Alpine Club. While a full account of his life and labours must be reserved for the February issue of the '*Alpine Journal*,' it is impossible to send forth this number without a few words to the honour and praise of a man whose work in the Alps may perhaps be most fitly characterised as that of the chief pioneer of mountain exploration, whether in its scientific, its practical, or its literary aspects.

It must be left to persons better qualified than myself to speak of Mr. Ball's services to Alpine botany, Alpine geology, and the accurate knowledge of glaciers, whether rendered in the Alps proper, in the Andes, or in the Atlas. In these pages one is bound to think of Mr. Ball as 'the true Alpine Guide in the body as well as in the spirit.'* As a mountaineer his most noteworthy feats were probably the famous passage of the Schwarzthor (August 18, 1845), when he guided his incapable guide through the séracs of the Schwarz Glacier; the ascent of the Pelmo in the Cortina Dolomites (September 19, 1857), when he pushed on alone to the highest summit, leaving his trembling guide behind him; and the ascent of the Cima Tosa, the highest pinnacle of the Brenta Dolomites (August 9, 1865), this last expedition being accomplished in the company of his life-long friend, Mr. W. E. Forster. But though these three climbs were the most considerable he made, we must not forget that, as he told the world in the preface to the first volume of his great work on the Alps, he had (by 1863) 'crossed the main chain forty-eight times by thirty-two different passes, besides traversing nearly one hundred of the lateral passes.' In this respect few of his followers have surpassed him, while I venture to state with the utmost confidence that no one man has ever possessed a wider or a more thorough knowledge of the entire chain of the Alps than Mr. Ball. And this knowledge, gained in the course of many years of travel and exploration among the mountains, was not the knowledge of a Dryasdust, but a real living knowledge, always at his command and generously communicated to all who sought information from him. I remember well being immensely struck by this in a conversation I had with him ten years ago. We were talking of the Maritime Alps, which he had visited many years before, and from which I had just returned, and I shall never forget my amazement at the manner in which, without the slightest need of refreshing his memory, he discussed the topography of the remotest glens, never being at a loss for names or other minute details of a most intricate subject.

This marvellous knowledge of the Alps marked him out naturally as a leader when the taste for mountaineering began to spread. Though not, strictly speaking, one of the founders of the Alpine Club,

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. vi. p. 263.

he joined it early in 1858, when it was only a few weeks old, and on March 31, 1858, received the honour of being elected its first President. Soon after, he became its first Editor, for it was under his name that the first series of 'Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers' appeared in 1859. Its success with the general public was very great; while for mountaineers it is of especial interest as being the original form of the 'Alpine Journal,' of which the first number was issued in 1863, after the further success of a second series of 'Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers' (1862), edited by Mr. E. S. Kennedy, who in 1860 had succeeded Mr. Ball as President of the Club.

Qualified thus by practical and literary knowledge of the Alps as no other man has ever been, Mr. Ball, on his retirement from the Presidency (in 1860), undertook his great work 'The Alpine Guide,' of which the three volumes appeared in 1863 (Western Alps), 1864 (Central Alps), and 1868 (Eastern Alps). This book is the 'Encyclopædia Alpina,' and the first of Alpine classics. Describing the entire chain of the Alps without reference to political boundaries, summarising the work of previous explorers, and letting fall numberless hints for future explorers, filled with a vast store of local botanical and geological knowledge gathered on the spot, and arranged according to an admirably clear system, it is undoubtedly the most valuable work on the Alps in all their aspects that has yet been published. I venture to quote the opinion which I have recently expressed concerning it: * 'Speaking for myself I may say that I have had over twenty years' experience of this guide-book, largely in those parts of the Alps least known even to Mr. Ball; and I wish to place on record my profound admiration of the amazing success with which the author has firmly grasped the main lines of the topography of the most unfrequented districts; so that all his followers have had to do has been to fill in the outline sketched out with so masterly a hand.' It has but one drawback—that it has not been kept posted up to date. The task of revision might well be taken up by the Alpine Club as the most appropriate tribute of respect it can pay to the memory of its first President and first Editor, who knew the Alps as no one else has ever known them, and who, full of years and honours, has now passed to his rest, after a life devoted to the advancement of the scientific, practical, and literary knowledge of the Alps, and of some of the other great mountain chains of the world. Amongst the mountains themselves, the name of the Cima di Ball, in the Primiero Dolomites, will preserve the memory of the greatest of Alpine explorers. W. A. B. COOLIDGE.
