

BOOK REVIEWS

MOUNTAIN CLIMBING Godfrey Francis *E.U.P.*, 7/6

This latest book on mountaineering technique is an addition to the "Teach Yourself" series of books published by the English Universities Press, and has the sponsorship of the British Mountaineering Council and the Association of Scottish Climbing Clubs. It is a welcome addition to the series, concise and inexpensive, and will prove most useful to newcomers to the mountains for whom Barford has been for quite some time unobtainable. This book, then, arrives on the scene at a good moment.

'Teach Yourself Mountaineering.' Even in the dark ages, before courses of instruction run by various official bodies to cope with the greatly increased popularity of climbing came into being, could it be said that anyone ever "taught himself" mountaineering *in vacuo*? Mountaineering skill, to say nothing of mountaineering wisdom, is absorbed by experience and imitation rather than by formal instruction, and the abilities of this or that climbing club are the results of the accumulative sharing of experience among its members. This, of course, does not dispense with the appreciation of "theory"; and a generation who have read Peacocke and Barford with profit may now turn to Dr. Francis in order to keep abreast of newer techniques.

I suppose these new techniques are, in a sense, the justification for a new climbing textbook, yet sensibly the author places them in their proper perspective so that they do not obscure the need for understanding the basic requirements of a competent mountaineer. Through these Dr. Francis leads us step by step, being content to teach the alpinist as well as the British cragsman the essentials of his craft before dealing with modern advanced techniques on rock. The author does not enter into too much detail here, but what there is, is clear. The chapters on snow and ice climbing are good and contain several useful hints; a most realistic amount of space is given to crevasse rescue, pointing out not only how the various methods of decrevasing are supposed to work, but how, after all the many possible snags that rescuers may encounter have been overcome, the crevassee may finally be deposited, exhausted or dead, on *terra firma*.

There are useful chapters on equipment and mountain rescue, but that on hill walking seems all too short. No doubt this is because of all aspects of the craft hill walking is the least easily acquired by reading, and the most difficult to write about. The information given in this chapter will, however, be found of general use.

In general the book is very readable, though at times personal reminiscence and formal instruction are found together in unhappy juxtaposition, giving rise to a certain unevenness in style. This is a minor fault which could easily be rectified in future editions. There are eight good photographs and the many drawings by Erik Thorn are clear and lucid. Indeed, they add greatly to the book's value. There is a brief and conventional bibliography, and an unusual feature is an appendix listing the many climbing clubs, from the Achille Ratti to the Yorkshire Ramblers. Lastly, it will fit in an anorak pocket.

M. H.

SHADOW BUTTRESS Showell Styles *Faber & Faber*, 15/-

By the time this notice appears in print the author of *Shadow Buttress* will be the president of the M.A.M., and this fact alone calls for a certain circumspection in reviewing. Not only this, but the author-president is a predecessor of mine in the editorial chair, and it is a very strict maxim among editors that "dog don't eat dog." Happily in this case the imitation of Agag is unnecessary, as this brief novel with its setting in the Highlands is a delight to read. The story is a simple one, abounding in whimsical climbing characters, based not only on the author's observation of the breed at large but also, I suspect, on reality in the case of one of the characters—perhaps more. The central characters of the novel, a local Scottish guide in whom the onset of blindness before his ambition to make the first ascent of Shadow Buttress on Sgurr Mor is realised leaves a lingering bitterness, and the girl he is eventually to marry—to say nothing of the dog—are dispassionately drawn, and the minor characters, nearly all climbing types of varying abilities, are ingeniously brought in to make this novel with its authentic setting a very pleasant one to read in an idle moment. The story moves ahead with the habitual Styles gusto, full of action and uncomplicated by the need to draw any moral save that which will be found elsewhere in the *Journal*, and expressed by the same author, that Top People do not use artificial aids : *sans piton et sans reproche*.

M. H.