

the directions are too long for reproduction here. It is some compensation to be told that the *Soldanella*—the ‘slender, pensive, fragile flower’ so lovingly described by Ruskin *—is ‘of quite easy culture’ if the needful precautions be taken.

We have found this little book full of interest, and can recommend it warmly to all lovers of the Alpine garden.

It should be added that the author gives full lists of plants suitable for ‘sandstone or gritstone rockeries facing full south,’ for ‘limestone rockeries facing full south,’ and for ‘north-west and south-east aspects.’ Mr. Clarence Elliott’s illustrations deserve a word of praise.

Le Tour du Mont-Blanc. Par Emile Daullia. 8vo, pp. vii, 307; ill.
(Paris: C. Mendel. 1899. Fr. 7.50.)

This pleasant, appreciative, and humorous account of a tour round the range of Mont Blanc is the very book that one would wish to have at hand by the fire-side on a winter’s night, to provide a gentle stimulus to the imaginative memory in recalling the charms of scenery, the smaller pleasures and annoyances of peaceful travel over well known ground. The tour was new to the writer, and he is able to convey to the reader the freshness of his own impressions. The photographs by the author add to one’s pleasure, representing as they do old scenes from new points of view.

CORRESPONDENCE.

ACCIDENTS.

To the Editor of the ALPINE JOURNAL.

SIR,—Owing presumably to the terrible increase of late in these fatalities, it has not been the custom for the ‘Alpine Journal’ during the last two or three years to give much space to accounts of accidents in which no English climber has been concerned. I venture, however, to send a few remarks on the disaster which occurred on the Königsjoch on July 18, when I was staying at Sulden, since it seems to me to forcibly illustrate a local custom of the Tyrol guides, and the dangers of which that custom may be the cause.

Somewhere about 1893 † complaints began about the custom of the Ortler guides (though not confined to that district of Tyrol) of roping in parties of two, even on crevassed névé. It was then stated ‡ that the D. u. Oe. A. V. ‘expressly recommends guides not to go alone with a single traveller on to névé.’ Nevertheless in 1896 § we find Mrs. Dickinson Berry writing to complain of the same

* *Froudes Agrestes*, 6th edition, 1882, p. 129.

† *Alpine Journal*, vol. xvii. p. 452.

‡ *Ibid.* p. 510.

§ *Ibid.* vol. xviii. p. 135.

pernicious practice, which still remains in full force, even at this moment.

This summer two acquaintances of mine were taken up the Ortler. Their guide, who had his son with him as second, has a name well known in Switzerland, has travelled for years through and through the Alps, and has occupied the position of head guide (Obmann) of the district. Nevertheless, they were separated into two parties of two, both for the ascent and the descent.

Now, Sir, I have nothing to add to the excellent and forcible comments of your editorial note to Mrs. Berry's letter with regard to going on *névé* in pairs, but it seems to me that this custom involves a second, and at times more serious, danger, which has not been touched upon, and which, in my opinion, was the cause of the disaster in which Herr Weigand and Moser lost their lives.

The point is this. Given the customary party of one guide and one traveller, *who comes down first?* From what I saw, and from what I heard, the *guide almost invariably leads, even in the descent.* Twice I saw guides of good reputation going down snow and rock, on easy ground be it admitted, leading their employers behind them. In one case the employer afterwards told me that he always insisted in difficult places on descending first, but he allowed that he did not always find it easy to get his way. On a third occasion on which I was present, the traveller did so insist, and the guide was miserable—as miserable as a coachman put inside a brougham and expected to drive out of the window. He kept coming up to the side of his Herr and being ordered back. If some question about a bridged crevasse arose, instead of offering advice from behind with a tight rope, he came up alongside, as if to practically test the bridge by giving it two bodies to bear instead of one. Under these circumstances the surprising thing is not that there are so many, but that there are so few accidents in the Eastern Alps. Most of the Tyrol mountains are small enough and easy enough to be quite fairly climbed by a party of two with due precaution, *but* the weaker man *must* lead down.

Take now the Königsjoch accident in the light of this knowledge. Herr Weigand and his guide had crossed the Suldenspitze, Schrötterhorn, and Kreilspitze. The snow was very bad, and that, or fatigue, or both together, made them abandon their contemplated ascent of the Königsspitze. There is a difference of opinion among the guides as to the exact spot from which they fell, some holding that they fell from the ridge itself. This seems unlikely, as Herr Weigand was a fairly experienced climber and the ridge is easy. The opinion of the majority is probably correct, that they fell while cutting steps on the slope leading down, not from the Königsjoch proper, but from the notch just to the east of it, and divided from it by the curious pinnacle known as the Königsmändl. They may have begun to descend at this point, with the idea that they would save time by not going on round the Königsmändl to the regular col, or because they feared that stones might fall from the Königsspitze on the ordinary route.

Then comes the point, Who cut the steps? The guides unani-
mously declared that the Herr was not sufficiently experienced, and
therefore Moser must have done so. Immediately the danger of
being only two is obvious; the slip which could have been
instantly checked from 15 ft. above becomes a fall of 30 ft., and a
jerk which would tear anyone from his hold on a steep ice-slope.

I have, I hope, made it sufficiently clear where the danger lies:
it is not so easy at first sight to find a satisfactory remedy. But I
have little hesitation in asserting that the rule lately promulgated
by the D. u. Oe. A. V. is a step in the wrong direction. This
rule, which has been conspicuously posted all over Sulden, forbids
a single guide to take two travellers up Cevedale. (It has been
suggested that this may have encouraged the two and two system
by making the guides think that no guide must ever find himself
on the same rope as two travellers, even though other guides be on
it too!) The rule, I am informed, also applies to the Ortler and
the Königsspitze. All these mountains are very easy in the ordi-
nary sense of the word, and the absurdity of a rule is obvious which
would compel, say, Mr. Walker and Mr. Pilkington to take two
guides, when a hopeless duffer who has never seen the Alps before
need only take one.

At the same time, as I have pointed out, there are so many easy
expeditions which may fairly be taken by a party of two, that to
say one guide shall *never* go alone with one traveller would seem
nearly as absurd. I venture therefore to think that a remedy may
be found by laying down as an absolute rule that 'the guide in
charge of the party shall in all cases descend last.' Switzerland
(and England) learnt the lesson once for all when Croz and the
others perished on the Matterhorn in 1865. Tyrol is still ap-
parently fifty years behind. Look at the accidents on the
Zugspitze,* or on the Eisjoch!† In each case only two on the
rope, with apparently the guide leading down, and so unable to
stop in one case a slip, in the other a premeditated but dangerous
glissade. Cannot the D. u. Oe. A. V. be induced to put a stop to a
state of things which by the guides' own admission is universal?
From every guide came the same surprised answer when I criticised
the custom of coming down in front of the Herr. 'We all do it,
always.' Some of the more experienced amateurs know enough to
remonstrate, but the poor beginners, for whom the rule is most
needed, know nothing. 'If the blind lead the blind . . .'

The effect of such a rule, if passed, will be to throw the re-
sponsibility on the guide, which is exactly what is wanted. Then
if an unknown traveller asks a guide to take him alone on a difficult
expedition, the guide will either ask for a trial trip on some easy
mountain, to see whether his Herr can be trusted to lead down, or
will insist on a second guide.—Very faithfully yours,

GEORGE BROKE.

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xvii. p. 565.

† *Ibid.* p. 566.