

ALPINE ACCIDENTS IN 1888.

It might have been hoped that the extremely unfavourable weather of the past season would have had at least one good result—the diminishing of the number of Alpine accidents. This, however, has not been the case, and it is once more our sad duty to record the loss of many lives in the course of mountain excursions. It is to be noted, however, that but two, or possibly three, accidents (those in the Tatra, on the Lahnscharte and on the Dachstein) seem to be even indirectly due to the remarkably bad weather of the season. Further, with a single exception, all the accidents we have heard of occurred below a height of 10,500 feet, that is, not on any of the higher and more difficult peaks.

This single exception is the accident which occurred on the Weiss-horn near Randa. Herr Georg Winkler, of Munich, climbed the Zinal Rothhorn from Zinal on August 14, without companion or guide, and on the 16th started to ascend the Weisshorn from Zinal in the same solitary fashion. As nothing was heard of him for several days, search parties were sent out, one of which found, on August 29, a woollen cap and a photograph (both identified as belonging to him) in the remains of a recent avalanche, which had doubtless overwhelmed and carried away the unfortunate climber. It is conjectured that he had not reached a greater height than 3,800 mètres (12,468 feet). A full account of the search will be found on pp. 227–8 of No. 3, 1888, of the 'Echo des Alps' just published. Herr Winkler, though a young man, was a very expert climber, and of remarkable bodily strength. During the last two seasons he had successfully assailed the most difficult rock peaks in the Dolomites, but had not much experience on ice and snow. It is scarcely necessary to point out that solitary ascents of great peaks, though now and then successfully achieved, are the most dangerous form of climbing. Solitary climbing on ice and snow-slopes sets at naught all sound rules of mountaineering, and combines in itself every conceivable danger which may possibly befall the rashest adventurer.

On August 20, Michael Innerkofler, of Sexten, one of the best and most widely known guides in the South Tyrol, lost his life under the following distressing circumstances. He had successfully made the ascent of the Monte Cristallo (3,260 mètres = 10,596 feet) from Schluderbach along with two travellers from Munich, Herren Rudolf Wiesbeck and Gustav Dimroth, the rope not being put on at all. The descent was commenced at 7.45 A.M., the rope now being employed, and the Cristallo Pass (2,826 mètres = 9,272 feet) regained about 9 A.M. About 50 mètres (164 feet) below the pass on the Schluderbach side, a great crevasse stretches across the entire breadth of the glacier at the head of the Val Fonda. According to P. Dimai, the guide, it was 18 feet (3 klafter) broad and 120 feet (20 klafter) deep. This was the scene of the accident, which is thus described by Herr Dimroth in a letter printed in No. 18 (September 15, 1888) of the *Mittheilungen* of the German and Austrian Alpine Club (p. 222). (This account is

naturally of higher authority than several others which have appeared in the papers.)

In a quarter of an hour we came to the crevasse which stretches across the entire glacier, and which is usually crossed by a snow-bridge, a course we had taken on the way up. I went first, then 4 mètres (13 feet) behind came Wiesbeck, and 5 mètres (16½ feet) behind him was Innerkofler. The slope just above the upper lip of the crevasse is very steep, so that it is necessary to cut steps. I descended and stepped gently, without jumping, on the snow-bridge, which at once broke in under me. My two comrades were pulled down after me, even Innerkofler not being able to get a firm hold in the ice-step with his axe. Wiesbeck and I fell down, on the snow which had formed the bridge, about 15 or 20 mètres (49 to 66 feet), but were lucky enough to keep in a standing position, so that we received only unimportant injuries. Our unfortunate guide fell a mètre (3 feet) further, head foremost, into a crack, but he had already had his skull fractured by coming into contact with the ice-wall. We pulled him up at once and set him on his legs; he still showed signs of life, but was unconscious. We untied the rope and shouted for aid. Twenty minutes later the guides P. Dimai and Siorpaes arrived, having in that short time descended from the summit (which they had reached with two other parties). They let down two ropes, to which we tied Innerkofler. Scarcely had he been drawn up than we heard the cry, 'He is already dead!' We were drawn up in turn, and, after waiting till the other travellers rejoined us, went down to Schluderbach. The guides came in with the body at 4 P.M. The doctor found that the skull and ribs had been fractured.

The body was later taken on to Innerkofler's house in Sexten, and buried in the churchyard of his native village (which he had steadily refused to quit for Schluderbach) in the early morning of August 22. The funeral was largely attended, the German and Austrian, and the Austrian, Alpine Clubs being represented. Innerkofler was rather over forty years of age, of very powerful build (though of middle size only), and of enormous strength. He was the first to ascend the chief mountains of his native valley, such as the Zwölferkofel (in 1874), Elferkofel (in 1878), and Sextner Rothwand. Two of the Drei Zinnen, the Croda di Lago (in 1884), the Croda Rossa from Schluderbach, and the Grohmannspitze were all first climbed by him, while he had discovered two new ways up the Monte Cristallo. He was passionately fond of chamois-hunting. He was unmarried and it is stated that he was fairly well off, having saved most of the money he had earned as guide.

According to Herr Dimroth's account, the accident seems to have been due to a bit of ill-luck. A bridge broke through which had been crossed safely in the morning. In such a case, one man can scarcely hold two falling suddenly, unless he has a firm hold. Herr Dimroth, however, expressly states that Innerkofler could not get such hold despite several attempts ('auch der Führer konnte nicht widerstehen, da er auf der Eisstufe trotz vorherigen Einstemmens des Eispickels keinen festen Halt fand'). There appears to be no ground for the imputations of carelessness which have been made in several foreign papers, though we cannot but be surprised that so brave and skilful a mountaineer should have fallen a victim in a comparatively easy place. A snow-bridge is always a more or less dangerous obstacle, for it is very difficult, sometimes impossible, to say with certainty whether it will bear or not, even though it may have been crossed quite easily a very few hours before.

According to a Vienna telegram in the 'Standard' of October 9, a Viennese climber, Herr Reinhold, lost his life recently on the Cimon della Pala (3,186 mètres=10,453 feet, according to the latest survey), in the Primiero Dolomites. He had been missing for a week past. The body was found fearfully mutilated, having been torn and gnawed by wild animals. The unfortunate man must have missed his footing in making the ascent of the mountain alone, and have fallen a considerable depth. He was not killed by the fall, but was frozen to death. The Cimon was formerly considered one of the most formidable peaks of the Alps, but of late years has been so frequently climbed that it had lost most of its terrors.

Two lives were lost on July 25, on the Dachstein (9,829 feet), in the Salzburg Alps. We take the following details from the narrative given by Herr Schönmetzler, one of the survivors.* A party, consisting of that gentleman, Herr Tannheiser, and Dr. Zeidler, with the guide Johann Steiner, had the intention of ascending the Bösenstein (8,035 feet), but decided to try the Dachstein from Schladming, although there was a great amount of snow on the mountain. The snow proved to be very deep, but the summit was successfully reached. On the descent, the party had passed the spot where iron clamps have been fastened into the rock, and were going down a snow-slope, the guide in front, cutting steps, when Dr. Zeidler slipped and fell over a short snow-field and down a precipice, dragging with him Herr Tannheiser, who had tried to help him. Herr Tannheiser was killed on the spot; Dr. Zeidler died soon after his comrades had come down to him. It would seem that the party were unprovided with a rope, and that the guide alone had an ice-axe; so that, taking into account the bad state of the snow and of the mountain generally, the causes of this sad accident are but too clear. It is sometimes absolutely necessary to take special precautions on a comparatively low peak, while on a great peak no one would think of neglecting to use rope and ice-axes.

Two accidents are reported to have taken place on the Dent du Midi (3,260 mètres = 10,596 feet). We are enabled through the kindness of Mr. R. F. Ball to give the following authentic account of the first of these mishaps, most incomplete and misleading notices of which have appeared in the papers.

My brother Mr. Llewelyn Ball and I, starting from Champéry with a guide early on the morning of August 11, gained the summit of the Dent du Midi in seven and a quarter hours and, after three-quarters of an hour's rest, retraced our steps to the Col des Paresseux.

I here dismissed the guide, and we went on without him towards the pastures of Salanfe.

A long and gradually decreasing incline of snow, ending in a plateau of plainly visible rocks, tempted us to glissade, which we had many times successfully done together, both on this day and on previous excursions. My brother seated himself behind me. We started slowly, and slid for some distance at a steady rate, when he began to swing to one side, and our pace consequently increased. I then found that the surface-snow was moving with us, and my ice-axe, striking an ice-coated rock concealed by the snow, was

* Printed in No. 16 of the *Oesterreichische Touristen-Zeitung*, August 15, p. 193.

orn from my hands. My brother at the same moment lost his alpenstock, and we were separated, sliding on to the bottom of the slope about ten yards apart from each other, he going feet first, I head first. The latter part of our descent was checked by the decreasing slope, and I finally stopped on the plateau of rocks, one of which cut my forehead, but I received no other injuries. My brother unfortunately fell into a small couloir, not more than five or six feet broad at the top, which we had not seen from above. I saw him go down and at once searched the couloir, but was surprised and horrified to find no trace of him. The stream of snow, though very slight, had been sufficient to cover him, and I can only suppose that he had also been embedded in old snow in the couloir. I obtained assistance as soon as possible from the neighbouring chalets, and guides from Salvan and Champéry, and further search was made; but the body was not recovered until August 15.

On August 20 five German artisans, of Montreux, were following an English party up the peak when, above the Col des Paresseux (which is 3,001 metres = 9,847 feet in height, and but a little way below the summit on the ordinary route from Bonavaux), one of them, a young fellow 18 years of age, A. Pietri (or Pétri) by name, stepped on a steep snow-slope and fell over lofty precipices on the Salanfe side of the mountain. The body was found immediately afterwards. It is said that the young man was making his first 'grande course,' and was not a practised climber. It is stated that the party were unprovided with a rope or ice-axes, having only alpenstocks.

Among the many fatal accidents on minor heights, the following may be mentioned.

In the early part of this year a young French officer, Lieutenant Meyer, of the 158th Foot, in command at the Fort de l'Olive, not far from Briançon (Dauphiné), disappeared. As no traces of him could be found after careful search, a court-martial at Grenoble condemned him to six months' imprisonment and loss of his commission for the offence of being absent without leave for over three months. Towards the end of August, while a party of the 30th battalion of 'Chasseurs alpins' was passing beneath the Fort de l'Olive, on their way from Monestier to Plampinet, one of the pack-mules fell down a precipice. The animal was killed, but when some soldiers went down to bring up its load, they were amazed to find the body of an officer of the 158th regiment. This was soon identified as that of the unfortunate Lieutenant Meyer, who had perished accidentally in some unknown way.

On August 6 M. Abel Bergaigne started at 8 A.M. from La Grave in Dauphiné, to take a walk in the forest opposite the village. As he did not come back in the evening a search was instituted, and his body finally discovered in a ravine on the south side of the valley of the Romanche, opposite the waterfall of the Sault de la Pucelle near the little village of Les Fréaux, at a place known as the 'Ruisseau des Vaches.' He was probably climbing up some rocks in order to return to La Grave by way of the beautiful lake of Puy Vacher. He is believed to have slipped on a rock and to have fallen down a slope of 300 feet, followed by a rock precipice of a few feet, his head striking against one of the great stones in the stream, and death resulting at once from a fractured skull. M. Bergaigne was fifty years of age. He was the professor of Sanskrit at the Sorbonne in Paris, and (since

1885) a member of the Académie des Inscriptions. An English literary journal speaks of him and his works in the following terms:—

He was, perhaps, the best known of the younger school of French 'Indianistes.' His most important work was an examination of the religion of ancient India from the materials supplied by the Rig Veda (3 vols. 1878-1883), in which he enounced views of a very novel character. Latterly he had devoted much attention to the decipherment of the inscriptions from Cambodia.

On the way over the Forcola di Cristallina (8,481 feet), an easy pass between Bignasco and Airolo (Ticino), Signor Attilio Sirtori, member of the Milan section of the Italian Alpine Club, was killed on August 25. He had started early up the Airolo side of the pass, and had gained a height of about 7,874 feet, when at a point where the path leads above a rock wall he lost his footing and fell into a mountain torrent, which carried him down to a shelf of rock where he was found, with his skull fractured.

A young lawyer, Herr Albert von Brandis, of Cracow, started on July 18 from Bad Schmecks to make the ascent of the Gerlsdorfer Spitze the highest point (8,000 feet) of the Tatra range (Carpathians). He was accompanied by Johann Mahler, the most experienced guide of the district. The weather was very unfavourable when they started. That same night at 11 P.M. they were found in a terrible state. The guide was dead; the traveller very much injured. It appears that they had been overtaken, during the ascent, by a terrible hailstorm; but, as darkness was coming on and it was very cold, they dared not halt, and came to an icefield, which gave way under them. They were precipitated 100 klafter (600 feet), and it was only after many hours that the traveller's cries for help were heard, and a rescue party discovered him and his unfortunate guide.

On September 24, two officers of the Pioneers in garrison at Pettau, Lieutenants Valenta and de Vall, started alone from Raibl (in Carinthia) in order to rejoin at Weissenfels (in Carniola) some comrades with whom they had been taking part in artillery practice. They intended to cross over by the hut built on the Manhart or Mangert (2,678 mètres = 8,787 feet) in the Julian Alps by the Villach section of the German and Austrian Alpine Club. All went well till within half-an-hour of the hut, when they turned to the right instead of to the left and lost their way. Finally, after losing two hours, they resolved to cross the Lahnscharte (2,250 mètres = 7,382 feet). By this time mist and storm had come on, and they only once caught sight of the Weissenfels lake below. They appear, after many wanderings while going down from the pass, to have attempted to descend by a wrong route (too far to the east) through a grassy *combe*, which ends in *éboulis* and steep rocks. Lieutenant Valenta went first, aiding himself by means of his sword, but slipped and fell about 50 mètres (164 feet), and was killed, his skull and ribs being fractured. His companion, alone at an height of 2,200 mètres (7,218 feet) retraced his steps, but had to spend the night alone high up without food or covering. He regained Raibl next day and search parties were sent up, which recovered and brought down Lieutenant Valenta's body. It is said that the way over the

Lahnscharte is rather hard to find, and a little while before some other officers lost their way in that quarter.

Several accidents to youths and boys engaged in gathering eidelweiss are also reported.

On September 14 Mr. George A. Rudd, an American artist, left Ala for Bormio in the Valtellina, where he was to have rejoined his family on the 18th. As he did not arrive, search was made for him. It has been ascertained that he reached Tione in the diligence, passed through Pinzolo at noon on the 15th, and left the same evening for the Bedole hut at the head of the Val di Genova and at the foot of the Adamello. He slept there on the night of the 15th, and left at 7 a.m. on the 16th, after writing his name in the book. His name has also been found scrawled on the door of the Leipzigerhütte (then closed) 2½ hrs. higher up; but despite the most careful search, no further traces have been found. It is known from his statements at Pinzolo that he intended to cross the high but easy Passo di Presena (9,764 feet) to Ponte di Legno in the Val Camonica. On the N. side of the pass it is necessary to cross a level glacier, where the unfortunate traveller may have perished. He was a member of the German and Austrian Alpine Club.

The following may be more fitly described as deaths occurring on the mountains than as Alpine accidents. Herr Rudhard, a local Government official, was found dead on the path between the Ester Alp (4,167 feet) and Barmsee (3,071 feet), after having made the ascent of the Krottenkopf (6,946 feet) in the Bavarian Highlands, not very far from Ober Ammergau. As the path is perfectly easy, and Herr Rudhard, though no longer young, was a good climber, it is supposed that he succumbed to a sudden illness. On August 11, three young girls—two sisters and a friend, Fräulein Adele Kaida—all of Gratz (Styria), and spending some time at Wald (Styria), made the easy ascent, without any companions, of the Zeyritzkampel (6,972 feet). On the way up, Fräulein Kaida had complained of want of breath and rapid beating of the heart. She, however, reached the summit, but about a quarter of an hour after starting on the way down, and while a discussion was going on as to the right way, she suddenly fell to the ground. Her friends tried by every means in their power to revive her, but in vain. The body later slipped down some rocks, and received several external injuries, but the medical examination showed that death was not caused by the fall, but by heart disease, aggravated by tight lacing and the great heat of the day. On August 17, Mr. J. J. Reynolds, of Hereford and London, aged 64, died suddenly on the summit of the Schafberg (Austria); and on July 29, a French tourist, M. Longuer, died at the Bel Achat hut (6,975 feet), on the Brévent, after a night of great suffering. In the course of October the body of Dr. Victor Schieck, of Döbeln in Saxony, was found on the Sursass Alp, on Swiss territory, above Remüs in the Lower Engadine. It is feared that he has been either murdered by some shepherds, or robbed by them after succumbing to sudden illness. Two men have been arrested on suspicion.

Such is the death-roll in the Alps during the summer of 1888. It may be well to consider a little more closely the precise causes of this lamentable loss of life.

In one of the mishaps enumerated above (Innerkofler), the breaking of a bridge of snow was the occasion of death, one member only of the party perishing, though all three fell together. In another (Mr. Ball), a glissade down a gentle snow-slope ended fatally. It would appear from the authentic accounts of both mishaps that the unfortunate victims met with their deaths through mere mischance, and not by any fault of their own.

The rest, however, of the fatal occurrences we have chronicled came about through the deliberate breaking of well recognised rules of mountaineering. It is to be hoped that these repeated examples of the consequences attending the neglect of the precautions warranted by the accumulated experience of several generations of climbers, will weigh with even veteran mountaineers (still more with those of fewer years' standing), and make them realise that it is their duty to enforce the observance of such precautions, not only by precept but by example. Thus, the absence of the rope on the Dachstein and on the Dent du Midi (the Pietri accident), and in the latter case also, apparently, of an ice-axe, was the direct and certain cause of the catastrophe.

By far the larger number of these accidents were, however, the direct result of the dire and growing fashion of solitary climbing, which cannot be justified on the score of economy (as may conceivably be the case with guideless climbing), and seems to be due either to a sensational desire for notoriety or to sheer inexperience and recklessness. Visitors to Zermatt in 1887 will remember the sensation caused by solitary ascents of the Rothhorn, of the Weisshorn and of the Matterhorn. It is true that on August 10-11, 1888, M. Pierre Puiseux, alone, succeeded in safely ascending Mont Blanc by way of the Aiguille du Goûter, a case to be carefully distinguished from Mr. Morshead's accidental solitary ascent on July 21, 1864, but very much the same as that of Mr. Mather on August 22, 1873.* But it is also true that Herr Winkler on the Weisshorn and Herr Reinhold on the Cimon della Pala did not return alive from their solitary expeditions. While mountaineers are practically unanimous in most strongly condemning solitary ascents of high mountains, particularly of snow peaks, less may be urged against solitary wanderings below the snow-line. Yet though it has its pleasures, it has its dangers also. Sudden illness may entail fatal results to a solitary traveller, as in Herr Rudhard's case, where there might have been some chance for him if he had had a comrade. A slip even on a path may, as on the Cristallina Pass, end in the same way, owing to the absence of any help. Travellers, too, who are not experienced climbers, may perish in the course of an easy walk alone, like M. Bergaigne and Mr. Rudd. All this serves to show that, as a rule, solitary climbing, even below the snow-line, cannot be recommended generally, and has special dangers of its own :

* See M. Durier's *Mont Blanc*, 2nd edition, p. 183.

above the snow-line it is the height of folly. This seems to us the main lesson to be learnt from the Alpine accidents of 1888, and it is all the more important to insist on it, because at the present time there seems to be a distinct tendency to advance from guideless mountaineering to companionless mountaineering. No doubt the mountains are better known than formerly, but mountain dangers in themselves remain the same; and though experience diminishes the risk for a party going together, it does not do so in the case of solitary climbers—rather the contrary if it leads a practised mountaineer to depend solely on himself, instead of sharing the perils and fatigues of an ascent with a trusty comrade, whether he be a guide or an amateur.

NEW EXPEDITIONS IN 1888.

[The expeditions recorded in the following pages are believed to have been made for the first time by English or foreign mountaineers. In cases where foreign climbers have preceded English travellers, and in some other instances, references to the original accounts have, as far as possible, been given.]

Cottian District.

ROCCIE FOURIOUN (3,113 mètres = 10,214 feet, New Italian Survey); LA GUARDIA DEL PORCO (3,090 mètres = 10,138 feet, Signor Bossoli's panorama). *August 28.*—The Rev. W. A. B. Coolidge, with Christian Almer, jun., climbed this peak in an hour by its S. ridge from the Colle del Colour del Porco. The route lay over easy broken rocks. A ruined cairn of unknown origin (probably built by a hunter) was found on a lower point rather to the N. of the summit.

To the N. of the peak is the Col Isaia, crossed by MM. P. Guillemin and A. Salvador de Quatrefages on September 23, 1877.* The new Italian map is wrong in attributing a height of 3,070 mètres only to the nameless rocky peak between the Col Isaia and the Col de la Traversette, for it is distinctly higher than the Roccie Fourioun, and is crowned by a cairn. (Possibly the heights of the two peaks should be interchanged.) It might be allowed to retain its old name of Monte di Marte, which appears, with a height of 3,100 mètres, in Signor Bossoli's panorama from the sanctuary of San Chiaffredo.†

PASSO DELLE FORCIOLLINE (c. 3,050 mètres = 10,008 feet). *August 29.*—The same party, starting from the inn on the Piano del Re above Crissolo, crossed the col between the Viso Mozzo (3,018 mètres) and the Viso itself (ascending the Viso Mozzo *en route* in just under an hour) to the two small lakes just beyond the Lago Grande. Thence ascending by a long and lofty couloir (then nearly filled with snow), they gained the S.E. ridge of the Viso (1 hr. 20 mins. from the lakes) at a point S. of and much higher than the Passo delle Sagnette. The new pass (for which the name of P. delle Forciolline is proposed) is separated from the Sagnette by a rugged rocky peak. The descent to the great Forciolline lakes took only 15 mins., as the débris were thickly covered

* *Annuaire du C. A. F.*, 1877, p. 586.

† *Bollettino del C. A. I.*, 1875, No. 24.