

ALPINE ACCIDENTS IN 1903.

At the close of another season of much bad weather and great loss of life we are driven to ask once again the question, Why is it that Alpine accidents show an increase out of proportion to the augmented number of those who make mountain excursions? The answer—we fear there is little that is new to be said—would appear to be as follows:—

Because the modern tiro (and even some of those who ought to know better) is in far too great a hurry. He cannot wait for the weather to settle and for his peak to get into condition. And, of course, amongst would-be mountaineers there are some whose holidays and purse are not long enough to allow them to wait for any considerable length of time; but we may point out in mitigation of their ill-fortune that there are probably few members of this Club who have not had in one season or another to return home without the wished for tale of peaks and passes.

Because he is, perhaps unconsciously, influenced by the prevailing practice of pushing rock-climbing to the extreme verge of human powers, and being possibly accustomed to hear difficulties made light of by men of experience (not that they have the least intention of minimising them), he thinks that he himself may make light of them. In so arguing he entirely loses sight of the fact that their experience permits them to regard as easy what the novice would find decidedly difficult. It is very possible too that the increasing success attained by guideless climbers may have diminished the novice's respect for guides, and exalted his ideas of what he should be able to do himself.

Because the modern guide (for the most part)—no longer engaged year after year by the same climber and disciplined by the old friendship which used to exist (and, of course, still exists, though in much fewer cases) between traveller and guide, and which was almost in itself a liberal education to a guide of ability and character—has not the same feeling towards his Herrschaft as the old guides had. They treated their travellers more or less as their children, watched them incessantly, and offered help whenever they deemed it wise to do so. The modern guides, as a class, are comparatively forgetful of their employer. Their chief anxiety appears to be to get back as soon as possible, so as to be ready for another engagement. Nor is this altogether the fault of the guide, for the young climber nowadays often objects to be helped or instructed. But the men who made the reputation of this Club never suffered from such false shame.

Nor is sufficient attention always paid to the fact that the easiest mountain may become at times very dangerous; one might almost say that the less difficult it is in its usual condition the more dangerous it may be on extraordinary occasions after bad weather. Here too familiarity may, and does frequently, breed contempt—to be followed too often by a terrible reckoning.

Then too the modern guide is not—we speak of the majority—so often taken away from his home to climb amongst mountains he has never seen, as the old guides used to be. He knows the way up his own peaks well in fine weather, but he has not the resource which is possessed by guides who have visited strange mountains and had to fight, perhaps, against bad weather amongst them. To take a comparison from the schools, he knows his prepared books, but an 'unseen' floors him, and in bad weather his own peaks are practically 'unseens.'

The climber who has a real love for mountaineering hates to be defeated, but he should hate still more to bring his favourite sport into contempt. Most experienced mountaineers at one time or another have probably been guilty of an imprudence, but prudence is their habit, imprudence the occasional lapse from the proper course, whereas it would appear from the accident lists of this and last year that imprudence is now the vogue. We need not labour the point by quoting particular accidents.

No member of our Club has perished in the Alps this summer, though we have to mourn the loss of one deeply regretted member on our own Scafell in company with three companions, who, though not members of this Club, were all of them climbers of experience amongst the British mountains.

Heaven forbid that we should any of us pose as the Pharisee, but if there is one thing that has been impressed upon us more than another by our leaders it is the need for prudence. Nor have they stood alone in their exhortations. The late Signor Q. Sella, a former President, and Signor Grober, the present President of the Italian Alpine Club, to quote instances which at once occur to us, have ever insisted on the same need. The perils of rashness have been pointed out time after time. They have been sadly emphasised this year by more than one accident to experienced climbers. And though the good-natured critic may point out that rashness is but the excess of that quality without which climbing could hardly continue—courage—yet he who transgresses the bounds, well defined, and so often insisted on in these pages, within which the mountaineer who cares for the good name of his favourite sport must keep himself, practically acts as the traitor who opens the postern of the citadel to the enemy.

'Surtout il faut être prudent,' said the old guides, and they with their Herrschaft conquered the Alps with a loss of life that at the present day surprises those who read their story by its smallness. Energy, endurance, enterprise, courage—how excellent are they! But to be excellent to the full they must add prudence to their company. 'Surtout il faut être prudent.'

To sum up. It would appear that the main causes of this year's accidents, apart from bad weather, are (1) an increase in the quantity and decrease in the quality of guides; (2) the growing popularity of guideless climbing among a class who may without offence be described as unequal to the demands thus made upon them. Especially is this the case in a district which has produced

some of the finest and most daring climbers. We mean the Austrian Alps, where the custom of 'Weg-markung,' whatever its advantages, gives much encouragement to ill-qualified and often to solitary tourists to attempt ascents not free from difficulty even to fair climbers; (3) there has, too, we fear, arisen in the perfectly natural zeal to find new routes up old peaks—a zeal not confined to the Alps—at least the suspicion of a spirit of personal rivalry, involving the acceptance of risks which cannot be accepted with a proper regard for the rules of climbing.

THE ACCIDENT ON THE CRASTAGÜZZA.

On August 27, 1903, the Rev. S. Hartley, Vicar of Exton, left the Boval Hut at 2.30 A.M., with the Pontresina guides Christian Schnitzler and Sebastian Platz, to ascend the Crastagüzza.

They followed the usual route, which traverses the peak from E. to W. All went well till about 8 A.M., when Schnitzler, who was leading with Mr. Hartley next on the rope, was about to step from the highest slab on to the top ridge. Here he heard a slip behind him, and was dragged backwards 30 or 40 ft. down the steep rocks. He fell past his companions on their right (N.) side, when the rope between him and Mr. Hartley must have hitched over a rock and broken. Schnitzler was brought up short, but the other two fell over the enormous precipice to the left, which at this point overhangs the upper end of a very long steep couloir running down to the Scerscen Glacier. He heard the sound of falling stones, but got no reply to his cries.

Badly bruised, and with the bone of one heel broken, Schnitzler was unable to descend the steep slabs alone; he therefore climbed up to the ridge, and came down by the comparatively easy western side to the Boval Hut. There he found Mrs. Hartley, who had spent the previous night with them, and was awaiting her husband's return.

She brought the news on to the Morteratsch Restaurant at 4 o'clock, whence it was telephoned to Pontresina.

A party of guides started with commendable promptitude to make the détour to the Italian side by the Sella Pass, but they wasted what might have been valuable hours waiting at the Mortel Hut for the President of their Society, Martin Schocher.

Dr. E. Kingscote, Mr. C. C. Branch, and some other gentlemen found them there at midnight, and it was not till Schocher's lights were seen approaching from the Tschierva Glacier that they consented to start. Under his lead, however, they worked with a will, and, crossing the Sella Pass, reached the foot of the big couloir at 6.45 A.M. Here the two bodies were found lying in the snow below the double bergschrund about 25 yards apart. They were terribly mutilated by their fall of over 2,000 ft., but there is every reason to hope that death must have been instantaneous. The loops of rope were still round both bodies, though Platz's coat was torn off and his waistcoat rucked up over the rope, which was

broken a few inches from the knot. On the other side of Mr. Hartley it was broken about 7 ft. away, and it was also nearly cut through in another place between Mr. Hartley and Platz. The rope was of the Club pattern and nearly new.

The bodies were conveyed back over the frontier to Pontresina the same day, and both were buried there.

Nothing further transpired at the post-mortem inquiry to determine exactly how the slip occurred. Mr. Hartley, who had had several years' experience of the Alps, had made some of the most difficult ascents in the Dolomites, besides others in Tirol and the Engadine. The nails were freshly torn from the toes of both his boots, but whether this had occurred in the ascent or the fall it was impossible to decide. Although they had passed the slab which constitutes the greatest difficulty of the ascent, they were still in a spot where only one person should be moving at a time, and perhaps the safest arrangement on such a wall would be guide, guide, amateur on a rope not less than 100 ft. long.

Platz left a wife and family, who have been liberally provided for: and Schnitzler, who is unlikely to climb again, has also received assistance.

This is the first fatal accident which has befallen a Pontresina guide.

THE CATASTROPHE ON SCAPELL.

On September 21 occurred, for the first time in this country, a fatal accident to a regular party of climbers. Unhappily it resulted in the loss of no less than four lives. One of the number—R. W. Broadrick—was a member of our own Club, and also, like the other three, of the Climbers' Club, to which very many of our members belong. There was not a weak man of the party. Messrs. A. E. W. Garrett and H. L. Jupp had climbed together for several years, doing all the best things in Cumberland and Wales. Mr. S. Ridsdale, the least experienced of the four, had led up many good climbs, was a well-known swimmer, and excelled in various sports; while Broadrick was, of course, quite an exceptional climber and athlete.

The Scafell Pillar is a bold and lofty buttress carved out of the N. face of Scafell by two gullies. Steep Gill, on the E., is narrow and almost vertical; Deep Gill, on the S.W., is a huge ravine which, cutting further back into the crag, lies at a more moderate angle. The arête between these may be reached with no great difficulty from Steep Gill, but from Deep Gill the ascent is over exposed and difficult slabs. It was explored by Messrs. Hopkinson and by Mr. O. G. Jones, who in 'Rock-Climbing,' at p. 83, gives a good photograph of it. On the morning of the fatal day the party had already made the climb there shown, and descended again to the foot of the rock for luncheon, which they took in company with Messrs. W. E. Webb, A. J. Slade, and H. Williamson. These gentlemen then went a few score yards E., and climbed for two or three hours without seeing or hearing anything of the others; but

on their way home, returning about 5.30 P.M. to pick up a bag, they caught sight of their late companions lying in Lord's Rake, very near the spot where, in 1893, Professor Marshall fell while taking a photograph. They had evidently been attempting some variation of the climb described by Mr. Jones on p. 84 of his book and figured at p. 73. The rope was unbroken. Three bodies were already cold; Mr. Ridsdale was still alive and conscious. The memory of his heroic endurance of his own sufferings and unselfish anxiety that attention should be given to his comrades before himself is one that no mountaineer will willingly let die. On the discovery of the accident great quickness and presence of mind were shown. Mr. Williamson, the youngest of the three, was instantly sent down to the valley, and made such good speed that in little more than an hour Dr. Fearnhead was already on his way up the mountain. Other visitors hurried up, eager to assist, and a second medical man—Dr. Meade—fortunately cycled into Wastdale Head in time to overtake a party of local men carrying up a gate, which was to be used as a stretcher for the injured man. Meanwhile Messrs. Webb and Slade having done all that was possible for the dead and for the living, watched beside them in the darkness and cold for several hours. The gate party made very slow progress, and it was not possible to make a start downward till some six hours after the first discovery of the disaster. In the darkness the steep and rough descent presented great difficulties, and the valley was only reached after some four hours of great toil. Some of the bearers had on only thin cycling shoes, and several had cheerfully given up their coats for the comfort of the injured man; but he did not reach the valley alive.

Next morning the toilsome task of bringing down the other three bodies was performed by a party of dalesmen with that neighbourly readiness to give practical help in time of need which seldom fails among mountain men.

Several explanations of the accident have been put forward. The early reports spoke of a change of leadership during the progress of the climb, but clearly this was not the cause, for the start of the climb which was to prove so fatal was seen by a third set of climbers. Broadrick was then leading from Deep Gill just above the lower pitch, and being shouldered up by the rest. Failing to effect a lodgment on the rock above, he came to the ground again, and Garrett, taking his place, began the climb *de novo*, with Ridsdale third and Jupp last. Much too was said at the inquest about the high wind which prevailed that day in the valley, but though on the very top of the crags it was violent Mr. Webb's party, climbing close by, found no inconvenience from it either on the rocks or in Lord's Rake. Nor is the place one where stones are likely to fall. (Mr. A. Abraham, who has closely examined the scratches left on the rock, tells us that they cease about 40 ft. below the Hopkinson cairn.) In all probability the leader fell when pretty high above the rest, and swept them off. The second man, who seems to have been climbing without boots, and had recently cut his hand in a bicycle

accident, would be at a twofold disadvantage in the event of a sudden jerk on the rope; but in any case the rock here is so steep and smooth that at many points the use of a rope gives no protection to the leader, and if anything goes wrong then the larger the party the wider is the area of disaster. When a climb answers this description, surely it cannot be justified. The risk is one which no degree of skill can control, and no true friend of climbing should attempt it or encourage it.

W. P. H.-S.

OTHER ACCIDENTS.

We do not propose to give here a list of accidents, but we cannot pass by in silence the accident to SS. Casati and Facetti on August 25, whereby the Italian Alpine Club, with whom we heartily sympathise, has lost two well-known members, climbers of 'eccezionale valentia.' Dr. G. Casati was the conqueror of one of the peaks of the Dames Anglaises, and S. A. Facetti had made amongst many other climbs a new ascent of the Monte della Disgrazia. The two climbers had started from the Colle d'Olen, and their bodies were found about half an hour from the Capanna Gnifetti. They had fallen from some rocks to the Indren glacier. The accident is inexplicable, as both the climbers were men of exceptional ability and experience, and there was nothing in the difficulty of the climb or the general conditions to make such an accident in the least degree probable. Death was instantaneous.*

Another accident on the Rocca Bernauda (10,594 ft.) on September 7, in which S. G. Pollano was killed by the fall of a block of ice, is chiefly remarkable for the courageous endurance of one of his two companions, S. G. Cornaglia, who, with the help of S. A. Perotti, the third member of the party, managed, though in great pain from a broken leg, to descend a great part of the mountain till a spot was reached where he could be left while help was being obtained.

Another very sad accident on Piz Blas to a party of pupils of the Higher Gymnasium of Zurich, who were accompanied by several professors, in which owing to an avalanche two travellers were killed on the spot, whilst a third died whilst being conveyed to Piora, and a fourth succumbed to his injuries three days later, shows how dangerous the mountains may be in June. The accident happened on June 26. The number of mishaps to gatherers of edelweiss shows no sign of diminishing.

NEW EXPEDITIONS IN 1903.

Valpelline District.

TOUR DE CRÉTON (BECCA DE CRÉTON Italian map) 3,583 m. = 11,756 ft.). *August 29.*—Mr. G. Yeld, with François Pession, of Val Tournanche, left Prarayé at 8 A.M. They passed by the highest

* See Rivista Mensile, C.A.I., September 1903, pp. 344-6.