

wonder had replaced the feeling of safety. An eerie and mysterious light revealed the wide and deep mountain-side: we knew it so well, but thought we beheld it for the first time. . . .

To our right the S.E. arête rose in suave steps towards the summit. To the left, below an abrupt cleft of the ridge and a kind of gap, stretched out the *Schneeegrat* of the ordinary and classic route. We could not hesitate: to continue to the summit by that way we had discovered four years ago⁴ was perhaps too much for our powers and moreover might expose us after all these delays to the worries of a search-party. Still more did Water summon downwards.

At 5.30, after a slow descent and a halt by every torrent, we arrived at the Trift Inn and so on to Zermatt by 8.30 A.M.

On August 28, 1933, accompanied by the young porter Richard Pollinger, we succeeded in combining the 1928 and 1932 routes. We left the base of the E. face at 7.30 A.M. and attained the summit of the Rothhorn at 6 P.M. The wall was scaled at a point rather to the left, S., of the 1932 route. The rocks there are better. The S.E. arête was gained above the first gendarme after the beginning of the *Schneeegrat*. The weather was warm and fine and stonefalls were rare.

THE ROPES IN THE MATTERHORN ACCIDENT OF 1865.

By H. EDWARDS.

I HAVE recently come upon a copy of the *Journal de Zermatt* of August 1895 amongst some old papers, and find in it an article by the late Mr. Edward Whymper entitled 'La première ascension du Mont Cervin.' I venture to think that, if read in connection with the following, it sheds a little fresh light on the catastrophe—viz.:

- (1) Whymper's *Scrambles Amongst the Alps*.
- (2) Captain Farrar's article on *Charles Hudson* in 'A.J.' 32, 1-36.
- (3) *Report on the Official Enquiry into the Accident on the Mont Cervin in July 1865*, published in 'A.J.' 33, 234-250.

After so long a lapse of time it is hoped that the subject may be discussed without hurting the feelings of any relative of those chiefly concerned—most of whom have passed away.

On July 12, 1865, Whymper transported his stores, tent, ropes, etc., from Breuil to the Schwarzee chapel, with the assistance of Lord Francis Douglas, one of Peter Taugwalder's sons, and a man

⁴ *A.J.* 40, 378.

lent by the Breuil innkeeper. 'Of rope alone there was about 600 feet. There were three kinds. First, 200 feet of the Manilla rope; second, 150 feet of a stouter and probably stronger rope than the first; and third, more than 200 feet of a lighter and weaker rope than the first, of a kind I used formerly (stout sash-line).—*Scrambles*, p. 370 of the 4th edition.

[There is a slight inaccuracy here. If the total 600 is correct, the sash-line must have been nearer 250 than 200 ft.]

At p. 361 Whymper had said, 'In 1865 we carried two 100 foot lengths of the Manilla rope.' In the foregoing passage he treats the two lengths as one rope. This turns out to be of importance.

On July 13 the caravan, consisting of Hudson, Whymper, Hadow, Douglas, Croz, Taugwalder and his two sons, started from Zermatt, 'picked up the things which were left in the chapel at the Schwarzee, at 8.20, and proceeded thence along the ridge connecting the Hörnli with the Matterhorn.'

'... Before 12 o'clock we had found a good position for the tent, at a height of 11,000 feet.' Croz and young Peter went on to reconnoitre, and returned some 3 hours later with the report: 'Nothing but what was good; not a difficulty, not a single difficulty! We could have gone to the summit and returned to-day easily!'

July 14. It was decided to take young Peter as a guide, 'and his brother returned to Zermatt.'

I had thought it likely that the party left behind one of the 100 ft. Manilla ropes, but the Editor suggests that the youngest Taugwalder took it down to Zermatt, as the guides' report showed that there was no need to carry up the whole 600 ft. That it was one of the Manilla ropes, will be shown later. At first sight it may seem odd that neither Hudson¹ nor Douglas contributed any rope, but the reason is obvious; Whymper had more than enough, and it was already on the spot.

For, if we assume $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft. for each waist-loop and 20 ft. between each pair, seven persons would require $7 \times 4\frac{1}{2} =$ say, 32, and $6 \times 20 = 120$; total, 152 ft.² Thus the remaining 100 ft. of Manilla and 150 ft. of stouter rope would be ample for connecting purposes. For fastening ropes to rocks in difficult places there was the sash-line.

Pp. 375–380 of *Scrambles* tell us that 'for the greater part of the way there was indeed no occasion for the rope, and sometimes Hudson led, sometimes myself.' After a halt at 14,000 ft. the order was changed. Croz, Whymper, and Hudson were the first three; Hadow and old Peter came last. Finally, 'the slope eased off, at length we could be detached, and Croz and I, dashing away, ran a neck-and-neck race, which resulted in a dead heat.'

¹ I have seen it stated in a French book or periodical, I think, that Hudson had provided quantities of *wire* rope!—*E. L. S.*

² The *Journal de Zermatt* article gives the distance between Douglas and Taugwalder as 5 mètres = say, 17 ft.

As Mr. Whymper so excellently illustrated his own book, the illustration at p. 378, 'Croz! Croz! come here!'—may be referred to with confidence. It shows Croz and Whymper at the summit, each with a rope round his shoulders; while that at p. 380 shows four other figures—unroped. It may be assumed that Croz had the (first) Manilla rope of 100 ft., and Whymper the stouter rope of 150—with which he tied himself to young Peter, when about to descend.

When, an hour later, the descent from the summit began, all seven would have been on one rope, but for someone asking Whymper to leave their names in a bottle for a record. This, by preventing Whymper from roping to old Peter, indirectly led to the accident; for in that case Whymper would have noticed any use of the sash-line and stopped it. Five of the party moved off, leaving Whymper and young Peter behind. Whymper says he was more than 100 ft. away while the party was roping. 'Croz and old Peter no doubt tied up the others.'

Croz, Hadow, Hudson, and Douglas were tied with one rope (100 ft., Manilla); and Taugwalder says in his evidence at the Enquiry that this was done by Croz. Taugwalder then tied himself to Douglas with the sash-line, because (he alleged) there was none of Croz's rope left.

Whymper's narrative continues thus: 'A few minutes afterwards I tied myself to young Peter, ran down after the others, and caught them just as they were commencing the descent of the difficult part' (*Scrambles*, p. 384).

The situation then was as follows:

(1) Croz, Hadow, Hudson, and Douglas were tied by the Manilla rope of 100 ft.

(2) Douglas and Taugwalder by part of the sash-line of (?) 200 ft.

(3) Whymper and young Peter by the stout rope of 150 ft.

Assuming that the first four were tied at intervals of 20 ft., and used $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet each for loops, they would have used 78 ft. by the time that Douglas had tied on to Hudson. The balance of the 100 ft. rope, 22 ft., ought to have sufficed for old Peter to tie on to Douglas. But it is just possible that Croz, knowing there was another long rope with the rear men, may have wound some of the 100 ft. rope round his own body before tying on Hadow, Hudson, and Douglas; and not left enough for the Douglas-Taugwalder link.

We have now to deal with the descent, and will first quote from the *Journal de Zermatt*.

'Après une heure d'admiration et d'extase, nous nous préparons à redescendre; nous decidames que Croz descendrait le premier, Hadow le second, Hudson le troisième, Douglas le quatrième, puis Taugwalder père. Ils s'attachèrent les uns aux autres, pendant que je prenais un croquis du sommet. Je ne remarquai pas s'ils avaient été attachés par Taugwalder ou Croz, et de quelle manière,

ils l'avaient été. Ils étaient prêts à partir, quand nous remarquâmes que nous n'avions pas, comme c'est l'usage, mis nos noms dans une bouteille. On me demanda de faire la chose, et pendant que je la faisais, ils partirent les premiers, me laissant sur le sommet avec le fils Taugwalder.

‘ Quelques minutes après, je m'attachai avec le jeune homme et suivis la caravane. Quand je les rattrapai, ils étaient sur la pente, du côté de Z'mutt; ils descendaient très lentement, prenant les plus grandes précautions. Je les suivis pendant cinq minutes environ, sans me lier à eux, ayant l'intention de continuer ainsi la descente. Mais Lord Douglas me demanda de me faire attacher à Taugwalder, avec eux, “ Parce que,” dit-il, “ si quelqu'un glisse, il ne sera pas assez fort pour le retenir.” De plus, il était inquiet par la démarche chancelante de Hadow. Alors je m'attachai au père Taugwalder, faisant ainsi corps avec le reste de la caravane.

‘ À peu près cinq minutes après, voici ce qui arriva : Croz avait lâché son piolet et s'occupait de placer les pieds de Hadow à l'endroit le plus sûr. Il se trouvait pour faire lui-même un pas en avant, quand Hadow glissa, tomba sur le dos et avec ses pieds, frappa violemment Croz dans les reins et le projeta sur la déclivité, la tête en avant. Hudson fut entraîné à leur suite, puis Douglas. La secousse effroyable atteignit Taugwalder père, qui leur faisait suite; heureusement qu'ayant vu la glissade de Hadow, il put se tourner sur lui-même, les jambes croisées, et embrasser convulsivement un grand rocher qui se trouvait à côté de lui. Pendant une seconde, il soutint ainsi les autres qui étaient pêle-mêle, sur le dos, le long de la pente, mais la corde se rompit brusquement, à moitié de la distance entre Douglas et Taugwalder, soit à 2 m. 50 de ce dernier, les deux extrémités se repliant violemment, en sens inverse, comme un fouet.

‘ Les quatre malheureux descendirent alors, précipités sur le dos, faisant des efforts désespérés pour se retenir aux aspérités et conservant à peu près leur distances respectives, sur une pente de 45 degrés, toutefois sans jeter un seul cri. Arrivés au bord de l'abîme effroyable, ils culbutèrent l'un après l'autre et disparurent dans le vide, au milieu d'un grand tourbillon de pierres.

‘ Nous restâmes plusieurs instants dans l'horreur et la stupefaction, sans pouvoir prononcer une parole, inertes, anéantis. Puis, je demandai à Taugwalder père de me faire passer le bout de corde qui l'attachait à nos amis. J'avais, en effet, apporté trois espèces de corde, celle du Club Alpin anglais, faite exprès pour les ascensions, très résistante et capable de supporter un poids de 2000 kilos, une seconde d'égale grosseur mais moins forte’ [*Scrambles*, p. 370, says it was probably stronger!], ‘ et enfin une troisième, plus faible, d'un centimètre de diamètre, destinée à être coupée et abandonnée, après la descente, dans les endroits trop à pic, et qui n'était pas fait pour supporter un homme. Il me la donna sans hésitation, et je vis que c'était justement la plus faible avec laquelle avaient été

attachés nos amis, sans savoir par qui, comme je l'ai expliqué plus haut. . . . Alors nous continuâmes la descente, pas à pas, suivant le chemin que nous avions pris en montant, et dont les traces étaient encore visibles. De temps en temps nous fixions la corde aux rochers, pour nous soutenir, et en coupions les extrémités que nous laissions en arrière. Les fragments en sont restés une douzaine d'années, parce que personne ne voulut plus passer par là ; ils ont marqué ainsi longtemps les traces de notre ascension. Plus tard, un Anglais les recueillit, comme souvenir de la catastrophe.'

Mr. Whymper's narrative in *Scrambles* is now continued. 'Great care was being taken. Only one man was moving at a time ; when he was firmly planted the next advanced, and so on. They had not, however, attached the additional rope to rocks, and nothing was said about it. The suggestion was not made for my own sake, and I am not sure that it even occurred to me again. For some little distance we two followed the others, detached from them, and should have continued so had not Lord Francis Douglas asked me, about 3 P.M., to tie on to old Peter, as he feared, he said, that Taugwalder would not be able to hold his ground if a slip occurred. . . . Michel Croz had laid aside his axe, and in order to give Mr. Hadow greater security, was absolutely taking hold of his legs, and putting his feet, one by one, into their proper positions. So far as I know, no one was actually descending. I cannot speak with certainty, because the two leading men were partially hidden from my sight by an intervening mass of rock, but it is my belief, from the movement of their shoulders, that Croz, having done as I have said, was in the act of turning round, to go down a step or two himself ; at this moment Mr. Hadow slipped, fell against him, and knocked him over. I heard one startled exclamation from Croz, then saw him and Mr. Hadow flying downwards ; in another moment Hudson was dragged from his steps, and Lord F. Douglas immediately after him.* All this was the work of a moment. Immediately we heard Croz's exclamation, old Peter and I planted ourselves as firmly as the rocks would permit : † the rope was taut between us, and the jerk came on us both as on one man. We held, but the rope broke midway between Taugwalder and Lord Francis Douglas.

* * * * *

'At last old Peter summoned up courage, and changed his position to a rock to which he could fix the rope ; the young man then descended, and we all stood together. Immediately we did so I asked for the rope which had given way, and found, to my surprise—indeed to my horror—that it was the weakest of the three ropes.

* Note : . . . 'Old Peter was firmly planted, and stood just beneath a large rock, which he hugged with both arms.'

† Note : 'Or, more correctly, we held on as tightly as possible. There was no time to change our position.'

It was not brought, and should not have been employed, for the purpose for which it was used. It was old rope and, compared with the others, was feeble. It was intended as a reserve, in case we had to leave much rope behind, attached to rocks. I saw at once that a serious question was involved, and made him give me the end. It had broken in mid-air, and it did not appear to have received previous injury.'

* * * * *

The frontispiece to *Scrambles* shows the survivors, after arrival at the Shoulder, gazing in amazement at the vision of the fog-bow. Whymper is wearing two haversacks whose straps cross at his back, and a coiled rope lies at his feet. This must be the 150 feet rope. Old Peter has another round his shoulders—the remains of the sash-line. Young Peter has no rope; which seems to confirm the theory that only three ropes were taken on the climb, the third having fallen with the victims.

The survivors were benighted on the ridge, and descended to Zermatt next day.

Parts of the sash-line were seen by Javelle, attached to the rocks, as is recorded in his *Alpine Memories*; and a much longer piece was brought down by the guide Alois Pollinger, sen., as the Editor informs me, from one of the early ascents. The list of Matterhorn ascents in *Scrambles* is not complete, as is shown by only one of Mr. Mummery's *seven* ascents being recorded. It is singular that neither Mr. Leighton Jordan who descended a little way on the Zermatt side when he had reached the top from Breuil in 1867 ('A.J.' 30, 316); nor Mr. Elliott who ascended from Zermatt in 1868, these being the first since 1865 to view the scene of the fatality, mention these cords in their accounts, though Jordan speaks of 'Taugwalder's rock.' Nor does Tyndall who crossed the mountain from Breuil to Zermatt in 1868, but *he* found the slope deep in snow.

It is unfortunate that Whymper, neither in *Scrambles* nor in the *Journal de Zermatt* article, specified WHICH were the ropes brought down by him and the Taugwalders after the accident; but the photographs of the ropes at pp. 386, 391 and 393 show that they were the 150 feet and the sash-line remnant. At the finding of the bodies nothing is said as to any rope, but the *Journal de Zermatt* article states that they were about 20 metres apart, and that their clothes had been stripped off and lay around them. As Douglas's body was never found, the connecting rope must have been torn to pieces.

In giving these photographs of the ropes Whymper says, 'All those who had fallen had been tied with the Manilla or with the second and equally strong rope, and, consequently, there had been only one link—that between old Peter and Lord Francis Douglas—where the weaker rope had been used.' (*Scrambles*, p. 391.)

That the second and equally strong rope survived—150 feet—is shown by the photograph at p. 393, which was taken *after* the accident.

‘ This had a very ugly look for Taugwalder, for it was not possible to suppose that the others would have sanctioned the employment of a rope so greatly inferior in strength when there were more than 250 feet of the better qualities still remaining out of use.’

[In writing thus Mr. Whymper overlooked the fact that he with the 150 feet stout rope was more than 100 feet distant when Taugwalder tied himself to Douglas.]

‘ For the sake of the old guide (who bore a good reputation) and upon all other accounts, it was desirable that this matter should be cleared up ; and after my examination before the court of inquiry which was instituted was over, I handed in a number of questions which were framed so as to afford old Peter an opportunity of exculpating himself from the grave suspicions which at once fell upon him. The questions, I was told, were put and answered ; but the answers, although promised, have never reached me.’

* * * * *

Nine years after Mr. Whymper’s death in 1911, that is no less than 55 years after the accident, the *Report of the Official Enquiry into the Accident*, obtained through the ‘ indefatigable industry ’ of the late Mr. Montagnier, appeared in the JOURNAL (33, 234–52). It was easy for foreigners to make such mistakes as ‘ Wimper,’ ‘ Whimper ’ and ‘ Hadou,’ but the error of ‘ Cropt ’ for Croz is more difficult to understand, seeing that the Report is in (very bad) French.

Question 11 to Mr. Whymper was : ‘ De quelle manière est arrivée la malheureuse catastrophe ? ’

The reply contained these sentences. ‘ Mais je crois que Michel Cropt avait placé les pieds de M. Hadou sur les points de rochers et venait de se retourner pour faire un pas en avant lui-même lorsque M. Hadou glissa, et dans sa chute, renversa Michel Cropt. Ce double poids entraîna M. Hudson et après lui Lord Douglas [*sic*]. Les quelques instants que cela dura donnaient temps aux 3 qui étaient en arrière de prendre pied ferme, si bien en effet que la corde se brisa entre Lord Douglas et Taugwalder père.’

Q. 24 to Peter Taugwalder, père (translated from the German).

‘ Qui a attaché les personnes avant la descente du sommet ? ’

R. ‘ Les 4 premiers hommes de la caravane, composée du guide Cropt, Hadou, Hudson et Lord Douglas, ont été attachés par le guide Cropt, et je me suis attaché à Lord Douglas par une corde spéciale.’

Q. 25. ‘ Qui a été accordé [*sic*] le premier ? ’

R. ‘ Je ne me rappelle plus bien qui a été attaché le premier à la corde par Cropt.’

Q. 26. ‘ De quelle qualité était la corde employée à cet effet ? ’

R. ‘ La corde à laquelle étaient attachés Cropt et les 3 touristes était une corde tout à fait neuve et solide.’

Q. 27. ‘ Qui vous a attaché à Lord Douglas ? ’

R. 'C'est moi-même.'

Q. 28. 'Pourquoi a-t-on employé une autre corde entre Lord Douglas et vous ?'

R. 'Parceque la première corde n'était pas assez longue pour pouvoir m'y attacher.'

Q. 29. 'La corde employée entre Lord Douglas et vous était-elle, suivant vous, assez solide ?'

R. 'Si j'avais trouvé que la corde employée entre Lord Douglas et moi n'était pas assez solide, je me serais bien gardé de m'attacher avec elle à Lord Douglas, et je n'aurais pas voulu le mettre en danger, pas plus que moi-même. Si j'avais trouvé cette corde trop faible, je l'aurais reconnu comme telle avant l'ascension du Mont Cervin et je l'aurais refusée.'

Q. 33. 'Au moment de la chute des touristes, la corde était-elle tendue ou non ?'

R. 'Elle était tendue.'

Q. 34. 'Quelle est votre opinion sur la rupture de la corde ?'

R. 'Je ne puis le dire, mais le poids des trois [*sic*] personnes avec la force de leur chute aurait pu briser une corde bien solide.'³

Alexander Lochmatter (translation from the German) was asked :

Q. 47. 'Les trois victimes, étaient-elles ensemble ou séparées ?'

R. 'Elles étaient tout près l'une de l'autre.'

In the 'second interrogatoire' Taugwalder was asked (translated from the German) :

Q. 64. 'Avez-vous quelque chose à ajouter ou à modifier à vos dépositions qui précèdent ?'

R. 'J'ajoute que, pour me maintenir plus solidement, je me suis tourné contre la montagne, et comme la corde entre Whymper et moi n'était pas tendue, j'ai pu heureusement la rouler autour d'une saillie de rocher, ce qui m'a donné la force nécessaire pour me sauver. La corde qui m'attachait à Douglas et les autres personnes m'a donné par la chute de telles secousses que je suis bien souffrant à l'endroit où la corde a passé mon corps.'

Anyone who has been present at a climbing accident will not be surprised that the accounts of this tragedy differ. The account supplied to *The Times* (August 8, 1865) would leave the impression that the elder Taugwalder and Whymper withstood the shock of the fall, without handhold. And the younger Taugwalder's hold on the rope is ignored. The notes that were added in *Scrambles* reveal that old Peter hugged a large rock with both arms.

The account in the *Journal de Zermatt* states that old Peter 'put se tourner sur lui-même, les jambes croisées, et embrasser con-

³ Taugwalder's opinion appears to us perfectly justifiable.—
Editor.

vulsivement un grand rocher qui se trouvait à côté de lui.' Finally, old Peter's reply to Question 64 says he was able to pass the rope round a rock. Of course he may have *then* hugged the rock with his arms.

Who started the foul and absurd rumour (afterwards perpetuated by Chamonix) that Taugwalder *cut* the rope? Whymper's emphatic denial in *Scrambles* ought to have been sufficient. Yet, forty years later, one of the most famous guides, in discussing the accident with me, darkly hinted that there were ways of weakening a rope to make it snap under a sudden strain.

The *Journal de Zermatt* account, and Taugwalder's answer to Question 64, seem to establish as a *fact* that the rope which broke did not break at all easily under the strain of the fall of four men. May it not be accepted as a corollary that Taugwalder did *not* make use of that rope with any idea of saving his own life, in case of a slip by one of the four men in front? Had he thought of doing so, he could have no foreknowledge that the slip would occur when he was in so favourable a position to withstand the shock. Had he not made use of the good handholds that he did, in all probability he, Mr. Whymper and young Peter would all have been dragged down *without* the rope breaking.

In any case it is impossible to explain why (at least in a note in *Scrambles* or in the *Journal de Zermatt* article) Mr. Whymper did not correct his mistake in saying that 'there were more than 250 feet of the better qualities remaining out of use' when old Peter tied himself to Douglas.

In 1895 Mr. Whymper's memory seems to have failed him at times, as he thus ends the *Journal de Zermatt* article:

'Le retentissement fut si grand qu'une foule de personnes voulurent voir le Cervin, et cet affreux malheur contribua à faire le renom de Zermatt. Je fus harcelé par les journalistes, mais je donnai seulement au *Times* un récit qui tint environ deux colonnes, et qui fut reproduit par tous les journaux anglais d'abord, puis par ceux du monde entier. Depuis ce jour, je suis revenu souvent à Zermatt, que j'aime beaucoup, mais je n'ai plus voulu faire l'ascension du Cervin, tant le souvenir de la mort de mes compagnons est resté profondément gravé dans mon esprit.'

Yet he *had* made a second ascent of the mountain, in 1874, as is recorded in *Scrambles*.—See plate, 'A.J.' 32, facing 28, taken by Whymper himself in 1892.

It was one of life's ironies that the extra rope (sash-cord) employed to make assurance doubly sure should have been the chief cause of the accident. Another irony was that Douglas should fall a victim, when apparently well-guarded, after having escaped a deadlier peril exactly a week before on the Ober Gabelhorn.⁴

⁴ And Captain Farrar spoke truly when he wrote, 'The death of Hudson and of Croz held up the tide of mountaineering for fully half a generation of man.'—*A.J.* 32, 26.