MOUNTAIN ADVENTURES AT HOME & ABROAD GEORGE D. ABRAHAM



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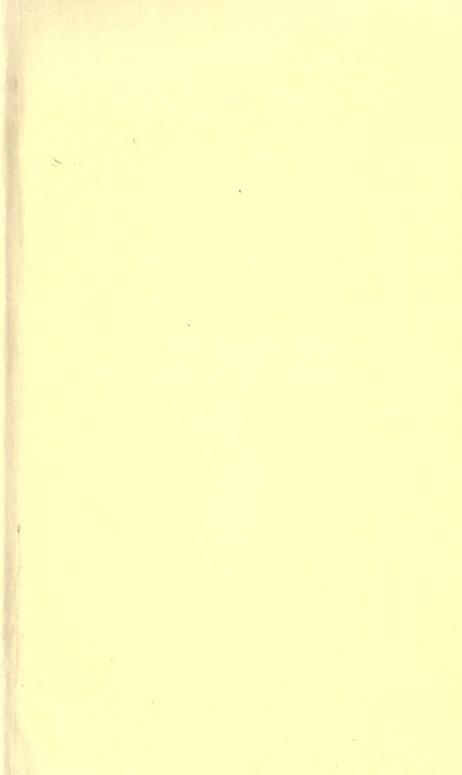
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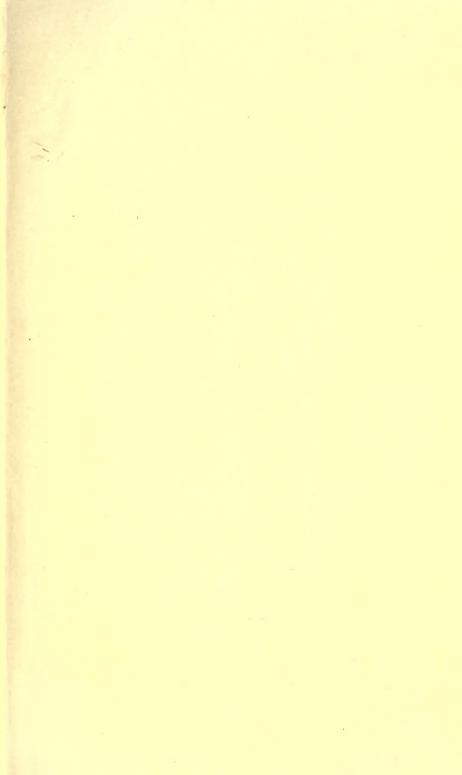
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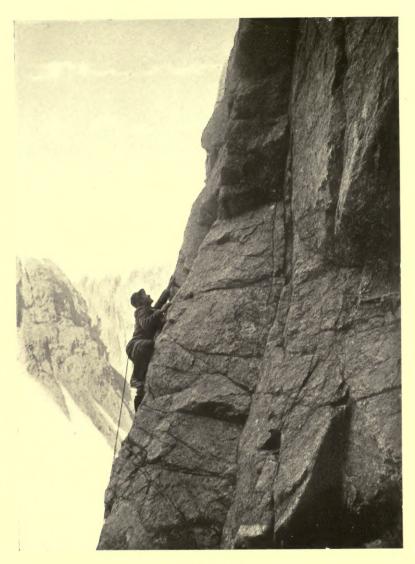




MOUNTAIN ADVENTURES AT HOME AND ABROAD







WILL IT GO? ON THE MEIJE, ABOVE THE PROMONTOIRE HUT

MOUNTAIN ADVENTURES AT HOME AND ABROAD

· Coller.

BY

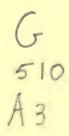
GEORGE D. ABRAHAM

HON. MEMBER OF THE FELL AND ROCK CLIMBING CLUB; MEMBER OF THE CLIMBERS' CLUB; THE SWISS ALFINE CLUB, ETC. AUTHOR OF "THE COMPLETE MOUNTAINEER"

ETC. ETC.

WITH TWENTY-SIX ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE

THOUGH as yet comparatively few mortals know the actual joys of mountaineering, there is a large and growing popular interest in the doings of its devotees. For such this book is primarily written, though the writer is not without hope that its many records and adventures may appeal to his fellow-climbers.

Many friends have rendered invaluable assistance, and thanks are especially due to Messrs. A. E. Field and Signor Guido Rey. Permission to use small extracts from various articles has been kindly given by the editors of the following magazines—the *Pall Mall*, the *Strand*, *World's Work*, and the *Leisure Hour*; whilst interesting portions of articles by the late Owen Glynne Jones are published by permission of the *Westminster Gazette*.

G. D. A.

IDWAL, CHESTNUT HILL KESWICK

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MOUNTAIN ADVENTURES

CHAPTER I

THE JOY OF THE MOUNTAINS

"To me, high mountains are a feeling."

THUS sang Byron; but in his days this feeling was comparatively rare, and, along with Wordsworth, he might almost be placed in the forefront of literary pioneers to discover that there is joy and mental uplift in those great phenomena of nature. The "horrors of the mountains" were then too much in evidence. It is only the closer contact with, the actual knowledge of, the rocks themselves, that has dispelled the superstitions of our ancestors. No longer are fearsome dragons blamed when a Swiss peasant disappears in a crevasse or falls over a cliff when suffering from an overdose of *vin du pays*.

One of the earliest inklings that mountains are something more than the waste places of the earth appears in 1838, in Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in Switzerland*. Referring to the ascent of Mont Blanc, it said, "All who have succeeded

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have advised no one to attempt it; however, when again in safety, they said that the fatigue was infinitely exceeded by the gratification." Yet nearly twenty years later the same book actually informed the reader that "it is a remarkable fact that a large proportion of those who have made this ascent have been persons of unsound mind." Nowadays this imputation has entirely disappeared, and the opposite obtains. Men of the greatest light and learning have "lifted up their eyes to the hills," and found health and recreation in conquest.

Of late years mountaineering has become strikingly popular. Thousands who have never undertaken any actual climbing take an interest in the sport and realize its fascinations. Then, perchance, an accident occurs; the danger of careless trifling with the laws of gravitation asserts itself; the gloomy side of the sport is too fearfully accentuated. Then well-intentioned friends come along and ask, "Why do you climb? Is it worth the risk?" To the latter question I should answer, "Yes! a thousand times!" To deal with the former is more difficult.

Why do strong, healthy men hit a small, white ball across a field with a peculiarly shaped stick until it is dropped into various holes? It is just as difficult to say why we play golf, cricket, football, or numerous other sports which have so largely helped to mould our national character. There is no denying the fact that the average Briton prefers something with a spice of danger in it,



Mountaineering has uncertainties which charm the adventurous spirit; if it were always easy and safe, few men would follow it, and enthusiasm would languish. In climbing, the exploratory instinct is also in evidence. An authority classes amongst the primordial motives of mankind an unquenchable curiosity to see what is within the tied-up parcel-to find out what is hidden around the next corner. It is the same curiosity which will drive men on until the eternal snows of highest earth are vanquished. Perhaps it is also the old fighting spirit in us all which makes us revel in the attack on some barely accessible crag, and in the surmounting of almost insuperable difficulties. This, and the mental and bodily healthfulness of the pastime, is probably the greatest joy of the mountains from the practical standpoint.

On the æsthetic side the vast storehouse of nature is the climbers' playground; the prospects near and far are almost overpowering in their magnificence. No two days are alike on any mountain, but all are delightful. An ascent may be made on a day of cloudless sunshine, with rocks dry and warm, when everything "goes" like clock-work. On another occasion the same rocks may be wet and slippery, clouds may blot out all the view, and the enervating influence may affect the powers and tempers of the party. Perchance a loose rock may be carelessly handled, and as it crashes on the crags in too dangerous proximity the air becomes sulphurous with flying fragments.

Or again, the rough grasp of the storm-fiend

may seize the mountain and the puny mortals who "brave the perils of the icy steep." The summit may be won, but the descent may possibly resolve itself into a grim struggle with the forces of nature and the aggravated difficulties of downward progress. The clash of the elements and the altered appearance of former landmarks may lead to waywardness, and exhausted energies whilst trying back for the proper route. These are the times when a man knows himself : he is tried in the furnace : let us hope he be not found wanting. Self must sink its assertiveness for the common weal of the party. The highly trained expert, be he amateur or professional, must stand or fall with his weakest comrade. Men who have worked together under such conditions know the worth of those priceless mountain friendships formed and ripened in the hour of danger. What climber would forfeit his recollections of those glorious struggles, or not long to fight them o'er again ?

The mountaineer's greatest pleasure in life is to find himself at the head of one of the many Alpine valleys, with the huge encircling peaks towering heavenwards. The call of the heights is irresistible. Let us in imagination join him and his tried companions as they wend their way upwards through the pine forests intent on the morrow's assault on one of the greater Alps.

Wondrous peeps through the woodland glades of snowy domes and splintered rocky spires charm the eye, and the ear is gratified by the distant tinkling of cow-bells, fainter and farther away as the slow, steady, upward trudge continues. Some may miss the song of the wild birds and other sounds of the homeland woods. Here there seems an almost oppressive stillness, though, should the afternoon sun bathe the mountain-side, the song of the wind through the pines may seem the sweeter music. The heated climber is apt to think of practical matters; a cooling breeze is grateful and comforting, and dulls the energies of those innumerable flying insects which sample mule and man voraciously.

As height is gained these troubles cease; the trees gradually thin away to a few storm-shattered sentinels, and the slight path emerges on the open breast of the mountain carpeted with gentians and the wondrous Alpine flora. The heat is now tempered by the breath of the glaciers, which, perchance, are seen crouching amongst the rocks away overhead. A halt is called for refreshment at the highest Alp, where the kindly peasant tenders milk as fresh and warm as his welcome to those who bring news of his family far down in the valley. Away up above a thousand feet of broken rocks, where vegetation clings sparsely, a tiny hut peeps over the edge of a great buttress. These are our night quarters, where we must rest to recuperate for the attack on the great peak, which, though yet invisible by reason of its remoteness, thrusts its icy crest far into the ethereal blue.

Merry tales enliven the halt, and possibly the novice of the party is struck with the lonely

peasant's primitive means of livelihood, and he asks how he manages to live in such a place. The leader of the party may accentuate the reply by telling of the seaside visitor who, after hearing of the "drefful" bad times, asked the seasoned old salt what he managed to live on. The reply came : "Herrins in winter, sorr, and i' summer the likes of you !" This serves as a hint that our hospitality needs acknowledgment. Then, after each has gathered a bundle of firewood from the plentiful, natural store close at hand, and adjusted it firmly on the already heavy load of provisions, etc., we bid au revoir to our host. His "Bon voyage, messieurs," floats up to us through the still evening air as we mount the slopes where gaudy butterflies and insects of a thousand hues now flutter drowsily through the chillier atmosphere.

A small, stony valley stretches down on the right, and the glacier torrent roars wildly below as the narrow path skirts the rocky wall. Gradually we draw up towards the snout of the glacier. Some old snow forms a natural bridge across the torrent, and a rough scramble up some easy, rocky bluffs leads to the narrow platform whereon stands the little wooden hut, our home for the present.

Presuming that our party is an "early season"¹ one, the first thing to do will be to clear from the chimney of the cooking stove its accumulation of winter snow. This done, whilst a fire is burning merrily and the blankets from the straw beds are

¹ The writer has now in mind some recollections of an ascent of the Ober-Gabelhorn from the Trift in 1899.

hung out to dry in the evening sunshine, a drowsy feeling of repose may creep over the party. However, there are important matters to be dealt with; the mention of the next morning's early start in the darkness recalls the necessity for prospecting and laying out the route while yet daylight lasts. The view from the little platform outside the hut may be enthralling, but practical ways and means predominate the outlook.

A peep down over the slender hand-rail reveals the gloomy, twilight-filled valley, three thousand feet below, whilst, high above our heads, the peak of our ambition rears its graceful cone into the clear sky with all the crimson glories of sunset adorning its icy magnificence. It seems strangely close, but there may be six or seven hours of strenuous but soul-satisfying toil ere the rocky terminal arête is underfoot.

Vastly complicated glaciers swathe the lower slopes; verily a mail of ice defiantly masks the monster's lower extremities, seeming to forbid human assault. Yet the expert quickly descries the weak point in the armour; a long moraine, partly snow-covered, curves up into the heart of the world of shattered ice and thundering avalanche. This gives access to the upper snowfields, and thence to a long, steep ridge of weathered rocks which lead apparently to the highest crest. Though fearsome-looking in their grand upward sweep, their very ugliness, which would jar on the lay mind, appeals strongly to the mountaineer. The huge ridge with its vertical directness and continuity acts as a sort of challenge. Coming night is forgotten. The hands long to grip those weathered slabs; feet seem to feel for tiny ledges. Suddenly a dark night-cloud obscures the sun, and thoughts of sunny summits give place to those of sloppy soup and damp blankets.

Perchance, whilst the practical culinary matters are being arranged, the leader may wander off for an hour or so to pick out the best way to the foot of the moraine; for stories are told of parties who have strayed in the early morning darkness amidst the wilderness of stones. Precious hours may thus be spent, and when daylight comes the unlucky mountaineers may find themselves in a subsidiary valley cut off from their peak. Instead of the Heights of Hope they have nought but the Slough of Despond.

A few compass bearings, a small cairn or two at crucial points, and a suitable place at which to cross the higher torrents may be all that is necessary, and the leader may return contentedly, to find his companions sleeping peacefully. Perchance with reflections on the difference between the comforts of an Alpine hut in the early season and its miseries on a crowded August night, he joins the devotees of Morpheus.

Oblivion soon supervenes, and perchance in dreams he, light of hand and foot, is scaling those fascinating summit rocks. Then, horror of horrors, there is a crash! He sees a great rock coming hurtling down upon his head. He feels the blow, and awakes instantly to find a climbing boot on his pillow. A companion has found the handiest substitute for an alarum clock, and after ricochetting off the wooden wall, it has effectually driven sleep out of the leader's head. High spirits and the 'smell of cooking soup pervade everything. "Two o'clock and a perfect morning," is the only answer to his remonstrances.

Immediately subsequent events may be passed over; suffice it to say that after a hurried breakfast and a collection of personal belongings for the work ahead, the party launches out into the night. To act as a "guiding star," a candle is lit and stood on a rock with a bottomless champagne bottle over it to act as shield should a breeze arise. Two lanterns are carried, but the rough nature of the ground calls for careful attention, and an attempt to look around on the impressive scene may result in sudden contact with mother earth, or more probably rock.

A slight track is in evidence at places, but it branches off and leads to another long and more frequented moraine. The point of divergence to the left is of vital importance, and whilst bearings are taken aided by the tiny light from the hut, now far below, there is time to look around.

The moon is rising behind us, beyond a lofty range bounding the opposite side of the deep valley where friends slumber. The hut and all around and below us seems swathed in black darkness, which is accentuated by the silvery summits straight ahead bathed in the cold rays of the rising moon. On the left, at present dominating everything, a huge black peak of grisly aspect, with its fantastic, splintered skyline effectually cuts off the longed-for light of the moon. Thus the passage up the rough moraine in the darkness is a trial of patience and temper; but it must be endured, for neither faith, nor the lack of it, moves mountains on this occasion. Rather is it the clumsy tread of the leader, who upsets a mass of loose rock, much to the pain and discomfort of those below. Moreover, "the peace that is among the lonely hills" is disturbed by more than the sound of falling stones, for human beings are prone to say what they mean on such occasions. Yet no serious harm is done, and gradually we rise up into the brighter light. Vast pinnacles of splintered ice and maze-like crevasses crouch on either hand. Yet the friendly moraine, now partly snow-covered, leads us easily and quickly upwards, until, suddenly steepening, it ends on a long snow-slope crowned by a massive buttress. Tremendous as it looks in the dim light, we know it to be only a lower offshoot of our peak. A movement away to the left is necessary, and the smooth-looking snowfield above the weirdlyriven ice of the glacier suggests an easy passage.

After a second breakfast the rope is now tied on, and some partially hidden crevasses call for great care. The bergschrund is spanned by a bridge of snow upheld at either end by fantastic icicle supports. Like the proverbial cat on hot bricks, we crawl gingerly across the frail structure. Curiously enough, each man in the act of crossing becomes nervous, and declares it to be horribly unsafe; but once traversed, it becomes as "safe as a house," and he has all sorts of reassuring advice for those behind. The last man has to make use of what is left of the bridge; he is supported by much good advice and little else except the rope.

Time has passed swiftly during this passage, and the dim light of dawn suffuses the high surroundings with a steely greyness whilst the long tramp across the snowfield continues. The golden glow of sunrise is softened and screened by layers of fleecy morning mist, which rise lazily out of the dim, mysterious depths of the valley.

Only the soothing, rhythmic sound of our footsteps crunching the hard, frozen snow disturbs the oppressive stillness. Towers of imperturbable silence surround us; the grip of the ice-king holds sway in his kingdom of the eternal snows. Yet hark! the softer rule of the king of day ere long proclaims his coming—even here warmth is life, or, alas! death for the unwary mortal who ventures too near the lowering portals of that cliff to the right. Faint noises are detected in the higher regions, and the clatter of falling stones is heard with growing insistence. Day has come. Through a break in the swaying, filmy mist we gaze upwards to the roseate-tipped summit-line,

> "The glimmering verge of Heaven, and then The columns of the heavenly palaces,"

by which we must mount.

Ere long the aloofness of the snow-festooned

precipice becomes less pronounced. From a snowy hollow in the skyline straight ahead, a ridge of black-looking rock slants back at a more inviting angle. Its crest is worn and shattered into the gigantic profile of a titanic staircase. At last only a steep slope of crisp ice separates us from the first stair. The ice-axe swings with a ready force, for at each step thus far we have imbibed strength and desire for the real struggle, the true joy of conquest. Slowly we rise with feet firmly planted in large steps cut in the frozen breast of the mountain, the rope held taut whilst chunks of hard ice, solid and at times painful evidence of the skilful stroke of the leader's axe, whizz fiercely past. The slippery staircase grows apace-one by one we move upwards, the rope securing us man to man, and, let us hope, prompting that delightful feeling of perfect reliance in each other's powers.

Spiky rocks soon peep through the ice, and we are quick to use these natural belays for the rope, whilst the leader attacks the bulging base of the ridge straight ahead. Matter-of-fact conversation now ensues. "What's it like? How goes it?" shout those below. As so often seems appropriate at such times, the answer comes in deep, panting German, "Gut! gut! sehr gut!" whilst the leader gains abdominal support on a painfully projecting buttress, and finally drags himself over its tip by obviously welcome hand-holds. Then, after a searching glance up the ridge, he calls down reassuringly, "Clean rocks to the skyline; very little ice!"

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At last the warm sunshine floods the peak, and now is the time to enjoy our mountain sport to the full. Great brown rocks look down defiantly and beckon us forward to taste the "joy of life in steepness overcome." Up and up we go, now clinging almost lovingly to some engrossing section, where we hang apparently in mid-air on holds of full sufficiency, with prospect wide, and especially deep; anon struggling keenly with the hidden inward intricacies of some icy chimney or crack.

In such places there is a glorious feeling of satisfaction even in the hardest toil. New life for further conquest of mountains and everyday duty is inhaled into the gasping lungs when difficulty calls for extreme muscular exertion even to the verge of exhaustion. There is a fierce joy in feeling every muscle and limb attuned to the work they may be called upon to do. The tiniest excrescence may support but the outer nails of the boot, and the fingers may grip the smallest of ledges, yet there is no thought of the fearsome consequences should either fail for an instant. That wondrous feeling of confidence and self-reliance, begotten of an innate understanding of mountains and their moods, is worth the trials of attainment. Few men but are the better for it both physically and morally.

However, the summit still calls us. Closer acquaintance with the upper reaches shows that our prospected ridge soon widens out into innumerable buttresses split by icy slopes of forbidding steepness, and intersected by narrow ledges of hard, frozen snow. Interest is sustained by the demand for a skilful selection of the best route. Loose, unstable sections intervene, and the "tail of the rope," in the form of a human tongue, wags vociferously when those above dislodge the smallest fragments. Gradually the long, supporting buttresses of our peak sink downwards, the northerly breeze sings faintly over the ridge above our heads.

Suddenly we emerge on its sharp crest, and greet a new outlook over vast regions of glacier valley and soaring peaks, which stretch to the illimitable distance. But we must not linger, for the crux of the day's work awaits us. The actual summit is close at hand, but the way to the next point lies along and amidst treacherous eaves of snow which overhang the abyss threateningly. We may have heard stirring tales of how these cornices have suddenly collapsed under the weight of those who treated them disrespectfully.

The lower peak is soon underfoot; not so the summit. This is only a few yards away, and its superiority may be scarcely more than a matter of a few feet. "So near and yet so far" appropriately describes the scene, for the final passage is evidently dangerous. A thin, fragile ridge of snow, fortunately free from cornice, connects the peaks. Its sides are almost vertical on either hand, and the foundations appear so inappreciably broader than the crest that a moderate wind might almost seem able to fling this wall of



TESTING THE SNOW CORNICE ON THE SUMMIT RIDGE OF THE AIGUILLE VERTE

THE DENT DUCEANT IS PARTIALLY AISHELE ON THE ENTREME LEFT, MONT PLANC RISES ON THE RIGHT

frozen snow over into the abyss. If corniced to any great extent, the passage may be impossible.

The sunny side of the ridge lacks firmness, but on the other the hard, icy crest yields satisfying foothold. Slowly and silently we move across the flimsy structure.

There is an ethereal feeling of remoteness from mundane things as we hang suspended 'twixt earth and sky. A great calm surrounds us; only the hissing downward flight of small, detached, icy fragments breaks the stillness. A glimpse beyond the little recess which holds the foot reveals nothing but apparently bottomless, blue depths of frozen precipice. Overhead, so strangely close seems the deep purple of the Alpine sky, that an outstretched hand might almost grasp the curtain of infinity and draw it aside. Yet it is evident that one false step would result in a more effectual revelation. The whole position suggests a sensation of floating in aerial space on a filmy white feather of snow. But alas! to some the thought is fraught with danger; it is a precursor of giddiness. Action is the antidote.

We move forward by hooking the right arm over the tip of the ridge, and the other hand wields the ice-axe where steps are necessary; for the iron-shod toe of a climbing boot often fails to make impression on the frozen wall. The balance is extremely delicate, and movement is laborious withal. At almost every advance the ice-axe has to be driven up to its hilt into the hard snow to act as a precarious support. With a sigh of satisfaction we eventually stride across to the solid mass of the highest peak, and the joys of the summit attained are ours!

Fortunately, the austerity of this pinnacle of isolated ice is relieved by the possession of some sunny rocks, where the persistent embrace of the northerly breeze may be defied. Here we recline, and enjoy an hour of glorious ease, whilst light clouds of tobacco smoke float lazily around and below in the leeward calm. Far down valleywards, whence we have come, fleecy mists gather and disperse as they rise, softening the too clear outlines. Yet higher, peaks of a hundred shapes arise far and near, and their familiar forms recall days of closer kinship. Harsh, repellent outlines predominate, and gigantic precipices which have claimed their toll of human life look severely cruel in their magnificence. Yet, like human character, many a mountain belies its appearance. Close at hand are peaks with soft, gentle outline and amiable aspect, but treachery lurks amongst their snowy recesses. The most harmless-looking of these has a fearful way of casting its corniced summit ridge and its human burden, when climbers trespass too much on its good nature.

But such thoughts vanish like the morning mist as we revel in the real joys of attainment, that keen, simple sense of standing on the highest height. Even childhood may catch something of its charm and express it vividly. One of us recalls the sight of a brown, curly-headed little maiden of four summers struggling bravely with the crumbling steepness of a pointed sandhill. At last she stands proudly on its top. Surveying the world at large with a face alight like an Alpine afterglow, in a fervour of pleasure she calls, "Oh, daddy! the heaven of tippy-top!" Few men visit the high places of the earth without experiencing the feeling.

Shakespeare has said-

"Are we not high? High be our thoughts!"

But animal spirits usually supervene, and the solemn echoes are more likely to be stirred with laughter and merriment. The exhilaration of the thin air makes the thinnest of jokes palatable. Maybe the forces of nature rebel against such frivolity, for suddenly a hissing noise arises apparently just below our feet. It is an avalanche in embryo. The gathering warmth of the early morning sun is loosening the grip of the frostking; the snow is softening. We must away ere that nerve-trying ridge becomes unsafe. Then up speaks a young comrade with that dangerous enthusiasm begotten of success, alas! often the parent of disaster. He suggests an alternative descent by the terrific icy slope on the opposite side of the mountain. The eye of faith discerns a way of passing the repulsively difficult gendarme which guards the lower reaches; thus a record may be broken. But the leader grimly suggests that other things may be broken, and, following the example of a famous guide, says firmly, "Es geht, aber ich gehe nicht!"

Thus we return the way we have come. The steps on the mauvais pas hold firmly, so facilitating the passage to the lower peak and thence to the verge of the rocks which dip so finely over to the glacier. One by one we lower ourselves over the edge and continue steadily down the cliff. The route-finder of the party moves unerringly. The smallest boot-nail scratches on the rocks never escape his watchful eye; an odd stone or two placed at crucial stages during the ascent corroborate his judgment, and, below, the footsteps on the glacier indicate the general line of descent. The work is of absorbing interest. Away to the left the rocks fall now and again with a thundering roar and splash on to the glacier. This acts as a warning, and recalls the fate of others who have wandered thoughtlessly out on to the loose face of the cliff in order to make a tempting short cut by slanting down to the upper snowfields.

Gradually down and down we go, the surrounding peaks slowly rising and overlooking us until the distant horizon is lost to view. Every care is necessary, for the rocks are bereft of their frosty binding. Loose sections are watched critically by those below during the descent of the last climber, and there are fine opportunities of practising selfrestraint when odd fragments are dislodged.

At last the rocks are overhead and the doubtful pleasures of the snow-world are ours. The surface is soft and yielding. At first, as we hurry onwards and downwards, impromptu flounderings create amusement, especially to those not immediately





GLISSADING ATTITUDES-A SOFT SNOW COULOIR

concerned; but ere long we realize that this kneedeep trudge through the wet snow is the most tiring part of the day. The faint tracks of the morning usually provide the best means of passing the crevasses, which are difficult to discern from above. The widest of all, that with the uncertain bridge, gives us considerable pause, and a detour has to be made to find a safer crossing.

On the long, steep slope above the moraine the surface is firmer, and all gladly realize that the hard work of the day is over. With a boisterous suddenness the leader in one and the same breath suggests and starts a glissade; moreover, as the rope yet binds us, we must perforce follow. The treacherous surface gives way unexpectedly beneath our feet, and we go head over heels helter-skelter down the slope, the rope meanwhile spoiling all steadying efforts. If one attempts recovery and tries to keep his head, he probably stands on it the next instant. Shortly a lack of interest in such things supervenes; all are content to take to the last resort and trust in Providence.

Fortunately, no rocks disturb the final rush down to an easier slope of drifted snow, where we land spluttering and kicking but unhurt. The affair is treated jocularly, the more so as about three hundred feet up the slope the leader's axe is seen caught in the snow. As he climbs wearily up again for the lost property, we agree that the punishment fits the crime. He talks no more of glissades.

Later on, as we walk contentedly down the stone-covered moraines, we realize the dampness of things: every article of clothing is thoroughly soaked. But what matters it? We have reached saturation point, and there is at least no need to trouble about suitable crossings for the glacier torrents. We plunge carelessly through the icecold eddies, and emerge on the other side to revel in the change of water.

At the hut spare belongings are gathered up, dry stockings adopted, appetites partly appeased, and then ensues a stampede for paths and flowery pastures. Home thoughts perchance prompt us to linger by a bed of glowing gentians, those frail flowerets which seem to reflect the wonderful blue of the Alpine firmament. The temptation to thin their numbers is not resisted, for we know full well that in far-off England their arrival will awaken mountain memories and cheer the hearts of those who wait.

Two hours later, instead of "the mountain wind solemn and loud," we are listening to the strident notes of a German orchestra, and the handiwork of an expert *chef* is unsuccessfully attempting to allay the hunger of the hills. Perchance we sigh for the roast beef of old England, and the peace and quiet of a lonely mountain inn in a Cumbrian dale.

Later in the evening our sun-ravaged complexions and rock-riven tweeds may be looked at askance by the fashionably attired crowd who haunt "Brighton-by-the-Mountains" in the early season. Then let us away to realize how true it is that "something attempted, something done, hath earned a night's repose." Ere we live over again in dreams

the wonders and glories of the heights, we may recall those words long ago spoken by a famous climber of the old guard: "There is no sport in the world so invigorating, so capable of creating and strengthening muscular tissue, and of instilling into a man the virtues of soberness, patience, endurance, unselfishness, true charity, true heroism, and a true love and reverence for his Creator, as the sport of mountaineering."

CHAPTER II

RECOLLECTIONS OF A GREAT CLIMBER

"The hills purify those that walk on them." R. JEFFRIES

E NGLISH rock-climbing may be said to be old enough to possess a history of its own, and an illustrious one withal. Since the Wastdale days of "Auld" Will Ritson, a generation of climbers has come and, with few exceptions, gone. Some have taken unto themselves wives, and cannot come; others, in life's work and duty, have been scattered to the uttermost corners of the earth; whilst a comparatively small minority—for these mountain men cling long to life as well as to hand-holds have passed to that "bourne from whence no traveller returns."

Wastdale Head, in Cumberland, may be looked on as the birthplace of British climbing. There it was that climbers first realized that the higher technique of the sport might be followed on the surrounding crags with almost the same pleasure and interest as pertain amongst the great Alps.

Experts in gullies, trods, and traverses from Moses¹ to Mummery, from the Patriarch of the

¹ The smuggler of the Ennerdale Crags.

Pillarites to Pendlebury, and many other men of greater renown in the outside world, have helped to hand down to us this heritage of the hills. This splendid initiative also spread to the peaks and precipices of Arvon. Moreover, stern Caledon, with the jagged Coolin as its crowning glory, has felt the influence of the early Wastdale enthusiasts.

In the early nineties the fascination of Cumbrian rock-climbing was known only to a comparatively small and select few. Information was difficult to obtain, and though that ubiquitous pioneer, Mr. W. P. Haskett Smith, had brought forth his small handbook, the sport made little progress and few new converts. The principal routes were already discovered, and their discoverers strayed afar in search of new worlds to conquer. Then there came a sturdy, muscular Welshman, heart aglow with fierce enthusiasm, and features bespeaking unmistakably that keen Celtic courage and determination which conquers crags and builds Budgets. Such was Owen Glynne Jones. It was quickly realized that here was no ordinary man. Along with marvellous natural aptitude, his scientific training and remarkable physical powers conduced to his success. For years he studied the crags in all their moods, perfecting old routes and discovering new ones; and the outcome was his remarkable and original volume, the first of its kind published. Nowadays Rock-Climbing in the English Lake District ranks as a mountain classic with the works of the greatest Alpine writers. The modern popularity of British rock-climbing owes its inception

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either directly or indirectly to the life-work of Owen Glynne Jones. His favourite theory was that all men should climb, and they would be the better for it. This was in contradistinction to the somewhat dog-in-the-manger idea which then prevailed, that the joys of the mountain were only for men of liberal education and of the higher walks of life. Would that he could see the fruition of his wish!

One of his earliest visits to Wastdale, and probably the first experience of the valley in wintertime, was with a fellow-master of the City of London School. This friend knew little of real climbing, but wrote a most entertaining description of his adventures in the *Gipsy Journal*, now defunct. Scarcely any one is aware of this unique story, which now possesses such interest that I include it almost in full.

"Faraday¹ and I had been ten days at Wastdale Head. The cold was fearful, even for January; but indoors we had been comfortable enough, since for the latter part of the time we had the hotel to ourselves. Two or three professors from a northern college had come to the end of their scanty vacation. Some schoolmasters had gone home to read their work for next term. A party of Cambridge undergraduates, who had slithered down the Sty Head Pass, and arrived bleeding, had departed the next day. We were alone, and Faraday was in his glory. For myself, winter mountaineering was a new experience, and such indeed was mountaineer-

¹O. G. Jones.

ing of any sort. I was bred in Essex, and though I deny that my country is, as a whole, flat or uninteresting, I admit that it presents few opportunities for rock-work or fancy walking. Nobody in Essex is fool enough to walk if he can afford to ride, and I abominated pedestrianism from my youth up.

"Faraday, on the other hand, is the native of a barren, mountainous district-in fact, is a sort of chamois. I had been enticed into Cumberland by his descriptions of enjoyment. The miseries I endured would soften the heart of the Gable Needle. I had been dragged up Deep Ghyll and pushed down Broad Stand-I had been hauled violently over one obstacle and left to freeze for half an hour at a time while Faraday tried a fancy route over the next. I had been alternately plunged up to the neck in snow and ground to pieces on frozen scree. My sufferings would fill a book, but I had professed to enjoy them, on the hac olim meminisse principle; and indeed I had come off pretty well. I was all over bruises and frost-bites. My clothes were in rags, and my boots cut to bits; but I was left with life, and that was something. We were to leave next day, and I thought the bitterness of the thing was past; so when, after lunch, Faraday proposed a last stroll round by Windy Gap into Mosedale, I assented cheerfully. He took me straight up Yewbarrow from the hotel. It is steep, and he had an aneroid. If this instrument did not mark a sufficient number of feet every five minutes, Faraday insulted me. I arrived, perspiring. Next came a

barefaced attempt to take me to Red Pike by a course well to the left of Baddeley's. After frightful escapes we gained the top, to find a thick, driving mist which shut out all the view and chilled me to the bone. We could not see more than sixty yards in any direction. My companion, however, led on confidently along the ridge, and I followed, being assured he would recognize Windy Gap in any weather. Whenever we came to a particularly bad snow-shoot, going perpendicularly down into abysmal mist, Faraday would take his axe and practise step-cutting, while I shivered. I can never feel sure whether it was the result of this distracting amusement, or whether he was intending it all along-but it so happened that, in about half an hour, he admitted he did not know where he was, and said he must get down below the mist and take bearings. We consulted the compass, chose a likely gap, and descended some five hundred feet of scree into an unrecognizable valley; then farther over rock and grass, still in doubt, but beginning to gain more and more certainty that we were altogether out of our route, until finally all doubt was at an end as we opened out the profile of the Angler's Rock in Ennerdale Water, cut sharp against the sunset.

"It was a glorious sight. Ennerdale is grandly stern and wild at all times, but is seldom seen so well as when the winter's sun gleams into it from sea-level, lighting up gold and pink flushes on the snow, and glinting on the opal of frozen becks, while the mist cuts off the tops, and leaves

the imagination to create stupendous heights. Moreover, it deepens the frown of precipice and chasm, and makes you stand in humble reverence before the eternal majesty of nature, if the night is closing in and you are, alas for human weakness! an indefinite number of miles from your hotel.

"Faraday said there was nothing for it but the Black Sail, so up the Pass we went, and were lucky enough to strike the track, though it was already pitch dark. Faraday had the air of being afraid he would have to carry me, and indeed it was probable. The provoking thing was that he seemed to regard it all as a scientific experiment in corpore vili. The human fancy has been fond in all ages of picturing the future punishments of evil-doing. Such sufferings cannot, on the cold side, be realized by one who has not come down the Black Sail in snow, and ice, and darkness : ice at an angle of forty-five degrees, snow hiding a litter of stones as big as portmanteaus, darkness such that I could not see my feet-and as I crawled and stumbled along, cold, empty, bruised, and strained in every limb, the eternal click of Faraday's ice-axe always twenty yards ahead-Sisyphus would have pitied me.

"If I thought to sit down and die quietly, so that my blood would be on Faraday's head and my ghost haunt him, he would suspect my intention, and come back, to ask with bland superiority, 'How are you getting on?'

"After a time I seemed partly to lose consciousness and to struggle on in a dream. I hardly remember the last three miles, only that I was half surprised when we actually reached the hotel. Then we had a great and foolish feed. Next day, Faraday was as fresh as a daisy, and I was like a channel boat. One ought to train before going out with Faraday."

My first meeting with Owen Glynne Jones was during the Easter holidays of 1896. Without any foreword he called on us in Keswick in the early hours of a beautiful April morning after a long night journey from town. In two hours' time mutual keenness had promoted friendship, parental misgivings had been overcome, and we were off to Wastdale. My brother, who made the third member of the party, had met our leader at the Napes Needle the year previously, and told me inspiring tales of Jones' personality and how he had climbed the famous rock up and down again in a time which it would be dangerous to mention in these competitive days. Suffice it to say that the feat was accomplished in fewer minutes than there are fingers on both hands. This was intensely impressive, for a short time previously, with photographic intentions, we had sat and starved on the "dress circle" watching the painful and unsuccessful efforts of two of the most famous experts to climb the lower crack. After his remarkable exhibition Jones had told some stirring stories of his adventures, one of which my brother recounted with wonder. This is worth repeating. It was on one of the greater Alps, and the late

Dr. John Hopkinson and his son, who were lost in 1898 on the Petite Dent de Veisivi, formed the rest of the party. In descending a steep, narrow snow couloir with Jones as last man, the snowy surface suddenly swept away from off the bare retaining ice, and the whole party went sliding down to apparent destruction. With astounding presence of mind and almost superhuman strength Jones was able to jam his ice-axe across the narrow gully, and by hanging with all his bodily might upon it stop the human avalanche. Small wonder our youthful enthusiasm prompted a form of hero-worship for such a man.

To return to our first day's experience, on the top of the Sty Head Pass we met a well-known pioneer, the late J. W. Robinson. Our hopes were shattered by hearing him say to our leader, with a look in our direction, "There are some Alpine Club men at Wastdale; one of them is my friend Mr. —" (mentioning a well-known name). "They want to try some stiff courses!" In youthful innocence we felt that with such prospects some polite hint would be given that we were not wanted now. We had suffered many a rebuff before, and resignedly offered to turn homewards. Our leader looked very serious, and then to our surprise came the answer, "Ah, well! we can manage very well ourselves!"

The sight of Kern Knotts turned the conversation in that direction. Robinson held strong views about the unwisdom of making the ascent of Kern Knotts Crack. It was then unclimbed, and he urged that its conquest would lead to unjustifiable attempts by other less skilful climbers, and disaster would result. Again Jones disagreed. I remember Robinson's last "Parthian shot," as he turned towards Borrowdale. "Well, Jones," he said, smiling, "if you climb that crack, I'll never speak to you again !" Two months later Kern Knotts Crack was added to the list of Cumbrian courses. Though exceptionally difficult, it now ranks high in fame and favour.

After this encounter we passed across the screes of Great Gable to the foot of the Napes. The initial climb to try our powers was to be a visit to all the ridges consecutively. Jones started first up the Eagle's Nest Ridge, watching us somewhat critically, but only at the outset.

In an hour and three-quarters we had also surmounted the Needle and Arrowhead ridges and descended twice by the Needle Gully. For a party of three this was remarkably quick time. After years of experience I would urge that this performance was scarcely to our credit. Yet that first day with Owen Glynne Jones meant much more than wrestling with those glorious crags, every muscle and sense alive to instant action as to method of rope and rock-work. Our real selves stood revealed, and a friendship was formed which proved in after years to be the most valuable possession of life.

In the evening we strolled down to Wastdale, and after tea were disporting ourselves on the now famous Barn Door Traverse. Meanwhile a party of climbers returned from the Pillar. They were unknown to us, and the Barn wall evidently



OWEN GLYNNE JONES LEADING UP KERN KNOTTS CRACK, GREAT GABLE

seemed to them poor game after the Pillar Wall. That same evening during dinner I asked one of the party if they had tried the Barn Door Traverse. The answer came in superior tones, to my utter discomfiture : "Well! Ah, no! We don't do that sort of thing !" The ensuing coolness disappeared later on after closer acquaintance in the melting atmosphere of the billiard-room, where first ascents of the Table Corner and Doorway Traverse afforded warming exercise for the artistes and amusement to the spectators. Next morning some of us were up very early. Then we saw our new acquaintances, alas! vainly attempting the traverse up into the Barn Door. At breakfast our leader spoke up and inquired who the climbers were that had been trying the Barn Door Traverse. For a moment the situation was strained, but Jones cleared the air with a hearty laugh, in which all joined.

In those days the billiard table ranked as such and not as a fives table as at present, yet it gave endless amusement. When attempting the corner vault, which was then much in favour, the cloth was torn as a result of a faulty jump. This damage was never properly repaired. It marked the first step in the decadence of the billiards at Wastdale. Dr. W. Collier and Mr. A. D. Godley introduced billiard fives the following Easter. Jones also performed a surprising feat that holiday. After negotiating the "Doorway," he was moving down the corridor in chimney fashion with feet on one side of the wall and back on the other. Suddenly and unexpectedly he came to the lath and plaster partition, and there was immediate confusion and consternation. His feet had crashed through the wall of the smoking-room, much to the discomfiture of some ladies who were having tea therein.

Most of the climbs of that holiday are now too well known to be mentioned here, but an exception may be made of the ascent of Collier's Climb, which impressed me personally more than any of the others. This course had a terrific reputation in those days, and justifiably so, for the lower thirty feet were made repulsively difficult by an overhanging bulge of rock, which has since fallen away from above the critical point, thus facilitating the ascent. Jones' description of how he overcame the mauvais pas is one of the most characteristic and entertaining portions of his book. There is an interesting feature of this ascent which should be noticed, and that is the comparative safety obtained in the upper part by threading the rope. Our leader arrived above the most difficult stretch in a somewhat exhausted condition, and as there was evidently a very steep and exposed finish, he hauled up the free end of the rope from below and passed it behind some stones, which were wedged in the narrow crack on his right. The rope then came down to us, and we held him in perfect safety. A slip on the last part would have been comparatively harmless, as he would only have fallen a few feet past the wedged stones. This is the first time our leader had followed our advice on this point; we had tested its efficiency several times previously, and the use of this security proved the secret of many a succeeding success. British climbing accidents were unknown in those days. Would that others had adopted this means of safeguard. It is sad to think that some small foresight of this kind might have prevented, or at least mitigated, the terrible catastrophe on the Dent Blanche.

The following Christmas we were again at Wastdale. An adventurous expedition to the Shamrock Gully is worth recounting. It was a south-wind day of cloud and meagre sunshine, and the first outlook on the frost-bound front of the Pillar Rock from the High Level exit was profoundly impressive. The gale raged overhead, but all was calm below. Our approach was heralded by a distant cannonade of falling rocks. The noise culminated in Walker's Gully, and multitudinous masses soon came crashing down into the snow-slopes. So fierce and unbroken was their flight, that sight failed to locate them until they dashed into the white surface with a mighty splash. This display soon subsided, and we looked around. It was a scene of destruction and savage grandeur. To the left, the huge hollow of Great Doup was vapourfilled; to the right, fleeting mist-wraiths clung to the sharp profile of the snow-flecked Rock whose sombre mass upreared itself in front. The den of Ennerdale lay below, barren and wild, and the whole scene recalled Shelley's lines-

> "And in its depths there is a mighty rock Which has from unimaginable years Sustained itself with terror and with toil Over a gulf, and with the agony With which it clings seems slowly coming down."

Yet there was plenty left for us that day, as will presently appear. We had started out with the intention of climbing the Shamrock Chimneys, but on nearer approach, Jones, despite his inferior eyesight, avowed that he could see black ice on the most awkward section. The others were sceptical on this point. Now we had been chatting on the way along the High Level, and I rather think that my mention of the fact that the left-hand side of the Great Pitch in Shamrock Gully was yet unclimbed had made that ice seem so impregnable, that Jones, with his usual ardour, must choose something much worse.

Truth to tell, the whole prospect was not promising. Icicles, gregariously arranged, glistened in every corner, and all the ledges were erminecoated; in short, the rocks were horribly out of condition. These were just the times when our leader rose to the occasion; he revelled in a battle against adverse circumstances. This probably accounted for his choice of that pitch in the Shamrock Gully which on arrival looked utterly hopeless, clad as it was in its icy mail. No lifting help could be obtained from the small quantity of snow which covered the bed of the gully, and the frosted appearance of the large chock-stones eventually induced our leader to start up a shallow groove on the left wall. This seemed fairly clear of ice. About 30 feet above the start a ledge promised the possibility of a return traverse to the higher part of the pitch.

The groove proved excessively difficult, but the

hopeful look of the ledge, and probably our encouragement, tempted our friend upwards against his better judgment. About 25 feet above us no progress was made for some time, and after considerable delay we called up to him inquiringly. No answer came; but at last the oppressive silence was broken by the words : "I cannot get up or down safely!" The position was alarming, for the jaws of the gully dipped deeply below, and, though the rope was secured to us and the great boulders, a fall would have been serious. A few moments later Jones, with remarkable foresight and judgment, espied a small piece of jutting rock no bigger than the top of an egg-cup. This was just above him on the right, but it was possible to swing the rope up to and over it; and he began the ascent thus secured. We paid the rope out from the cave, and all went well for a time. Then suddenly there was a cry of warning, and something of a more solid nature appeared. "Hold tight!" was the startled shout, and Jones came swinging in pendulum fashion across the wall with astonishing impetus. The rope held over the belay, and he crashed pell-mell amongst us in the bed of the cave. We collapsed like ninepins, sprawling in all directions. In the mêlée the rope flew out of my hand, and I well remember how Jones sat up presently on the snow, rubbing his bruises, and accusing me of losing my head and the rope simultaneously. Considering that his climbing boot had played a species of football with my parietal, there was some truth in this. However, after inspection it was evident that we were "all there," though rather the worse for wear.

In due course we returned to the attack, and by building a species of human ladder our indomitable leader forced a way up the left-hand side of the obstacle. Those who know the excessive difficulty of the place in summer-time will realize that under icy conditions this was a remarkable performance, the more so as the place had never been climbed previously. The snow-slope above the obstacle was almost as hard as ice, and prolonged stepcutting was necessary. The mist grew thicker, and darkness was setting in rapidly as we mounted to the well-known ledge which slants down the crest of the Shamrock, affording an easy descent to the Great Doup. Sleet began to fall, but Jones led onwards confidently until familiar landmarks failed to appear. Some one shyly suggested that local knowledge was sometimes useful. Yet he held on his way, literally, for all were soon clinging to some awkward rocks, and ere long a hopeless, icy buttress loomed through the gloom. Then the tail of the party peered downwards over the edge, and about 60 feet lower the snowy ledge of the Shamrock Traverse was just discernible. A short distance below us an overhanging ice-chimney plunged over on to this ledge. Time was getting precious; we carried no lantern, and as the chances of becoming benighted dawned upon us, few words were wasted : "Over you go," said Jones, and one at a time, by means of the rope, he slung us down the glazed rocks, fairly revelling in the excitement of

it all. An ice-coated pinnacle stood at the top of the chimney. Using a doubled rope, around this he steadied the last man down with a run, his face alight with satisfaction at the smart recovery of the route. It was an exhilarating experience, and as we picked our way down to the High Level our leader recounted several similar descents in the Alps.

But the most exciting part of the day was yet to come. It was pitch dark when at last we struck the line of cairns that marks the indefinite track, and almost immediately we were in difficulties. The conditions were rare and remarkable, for as the sleety rain fell, it froze on the screes, thus at places presenting a desperately dangerous slope of ice. One by one, often crawling at the worst places, we felt our way from cairn to cairn. Slips and slithers became so frequent that the rope was again tied on, and but for its aid some of us would scarcely have taken any further interest in the proceedings.

After nearly two hours of stumbling, and even creeping, we became absolutely lost. As far as could be ascertained, we had arrived on a kind of rock gully. Jones said we must either descend into Ennerdale or spend the night out. Wet through and half frozen, hungry and somewhat worn and hard beset, either alternative seemed insufferable, and I craved for one last effort. The idea was to leave the gully, and, tying on the full length of our rope, work around in a wide circle with the hopes of striking something recognizable. The suggestion was favoured, and I ultimately crawled carefully upwards to the full length of the rope. Storm gusts kept swirling around, but suddenly a strange sound was heard higher up. With every nerve alive, I listened during the succeeding lull. The song of the gale as it whirred through the wire fence which follows the crest of the mountain was borne downwards. Verily I have not heard sweeter music anywhere. It was the work of a moment to rouse those below and call them up to enjoy the Valkyrian harmony.

Then up and up we scrambled to the welcome landmark. What mattered now the terrific gale of wind and half-frozen rain which, like veritable imps of darkness, was flung shriekingly upon us? Already we almost smelt the hot soup of Wastdale. Anyhow, the warmer wind was soon felt as Looking Stead was left behind, and the rain-sodden path of Black Sail was under foot and even hand, for in several places we had to feel for the track. It was the blackest night imaginable.

Only one more surprise awaited us. The welcome light of the inn shone ahead, and at last we were moving down the final incline to the river bank. All the time it had been impossible to see each other, and we kept together by occasional calls. The sound of many waters was in our ears. Somewhere near the foot of the slope three of us stopped, and Jones called back to the fourth man, "Are you there?" There was no reply, but curious noises seemed to come from below. Presently, from underneath our feet apparently, a still, small,

watery voice was heard, "Here am I!" Then we understood that we were standing by the small slab-stone bridge that carries the path across the tributary stream, which was in high spate that night. We quickly realized that the missing man was in the water; but anxiety soon vanished as he struggled out and up to us. It seemed that he had walked, or rather tumbled, into the stream, and been swept down and under the bridge before recovery was possible. The escapade was treated as a huge joke. All hilarity vanished when we reached the inn. The door was locked; the place was in total darkness. At first no answer came to our repeated knocking, but eventually an upper bedroom window was raised, and the mild voice of the landlady sounded through the storm. In astonished tones she called down, "Oh dear! is that you, Mr. Jones? It's almost midnight. We thought you had slept out!" Then we proclaimed our presence in no uncertain tone. It is unnecessary to say more than that we received a true Cumbrian welcome that wild winter's night. Thus ended the most memorably exciting day I have ever known, alas! irreparabile tempus.

Jones was one of the kindest-hearted of men. His remarkable physical powers and that absorbing delight in matching them against almost insuperable difficulties constantly led to trying and hard-won conquests. At such times his thoughts were always for the weaker members of the party; on more than one occasion expeditions that were easily within his powers were given up for the sake of his less

capable companions. The following incident will illustrate his strong altruism. It was in one of the notoriously unstable Scree Gullies, and the two of us came to a characteristic pitch. This was composed of the usual big chock-stone crowned with tons of loose rocks, awaiting the slightest touch to send them down on any one below, since no shelter was available. Jones inspected the place. The climbing was easy, and I urged him to proceed. This he absolutely refused to do for fear of harm befalling his companion. The outcome was that he persuaded me to go first, whilst he himself cheerfully took the risk of dodging the falling masses. A serious accident has since occurred near this very place. However, Jones came off practically scatheless on this occasion. Such was only one of numerous similar incidents, which taught never-to-be-forgotten lessons of selfsacrifice to many a companion.

His dominant idea was that the expert who took out climbing parties in Britain was just as responsible for their welfare as the leading guide in the Alps. This was why he often argued against guideless climbing abroad and scarcely undertook any such expeditions. The answer given to an inquiry on this point was: "In the long-run it comes to this: some one has to do the guide's work and take the responsibility, and I never could feel equal to that." Yet if ever there was a man really capable of ascending the most difficult climbs in the world without guides, it was Owen Glynne Jones.

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His true unselfishness was unmistakable. Whether the party was struggling up a waterfall, resting shivering and drenched under a huge chock-stone, or clinging desperately to a windswept ridge, every one felt happy with such a man as their comforter and leader.

The great secret of his almost unequalled success as a rock-climber was his abnormal fingerpower, and an exceptional gift of balance on small foot-holds. A trying experience of frost-bite on the Dom and the resulting cure by dipping his fingers into boiling glue had left them somewhat twisted and out of shape. Thus he "clasped the crags with crooked hands," and small excrescences, placed at awkward angles for most men, seemed to make Jones happy where others felt the reverse. Of course great strength was also present. The billiard room was sometimes the impromptu gymnasium at Wastdale, and one Christmas-time an ice-axe was arranged as horizontal bar. Some marvellous feats were shown by experts, but Jones, who had been watching retiringly from the end of the room, came forward and astonished everybody. He grasped the bar with three fingers of his left hand, lifted me with his right arm, and by sheer force of muscular strength raised his chin to the level of the bar three times.

Such physical powers very often conduce to clumsiness in climbing; and though Jones was sometimes apt to scorn foot-holds and trust to his powerful arms, his style was neat and deliberate, with that steady slowness that goes hand in hand with safety. Amongst his Cumbrian courses Walker's Gully was always referred to as the "grandest day of all"; whilst of his Welsh climbs, Jones held in highest esteem the direct ascent, throughout, of the Great Gully on Craig y Cae. Though he first learnt the use of hand and foot on the Cader Idris group, his knowledge of the other Welsh crags was, comparatively speaking, not very extensive.

My last holiday in his company was in the Ogwen Cottage district. One of those days possesses most exciting memories. The overhanging nose of Tryfaen's North Buttress had defied our best efforts for over an hour. A small crack trended up its right-hand side, and all this time we had clung and struggled therein, with sensational downward glimpses meanwhile into the misty recesses of the retaining gully on our right. Mr. J. W. Puttrell was "sheet anchor" and main support of the party, for he held most of my weight, whilst Jones alternately used my extended hands and the slabby buttress above as foot-hold. The sharp nose of the arête rose to the left of our leader, and time after time he attempted to effect a lodgment upon it. Finally, we urged him to risk the crucial movement, for the place looked feasible from below; but his better judgment prevailed, and we descended. Some years. afterwards I was lowered from above as far as this section. Had we persisted, the result would have been calamitous; the rocks above are singularly polished and holdless.

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But we were not altogether defeated that day. A few feet around the left or North Gully side of the Nose, some steep, smooth, and difficult slabs provided many exciting moments. The beginning was probably the most technically exciting portion; it was overcome by practical adoption of the old advice that "two heads are better than one" -though the second head was only used as a foothold. This start landed us all into a most precarious position on the great wall. Meanwhile Jones vainly tried to reach the steep, but more weathered, arête on the right. No anchorage was available : a slip by one of us would have given the Buttress the victory; so he forced a less promising but safer way up to a small platform whence sprung an embryo chimney. This was climbed with excessive difficulty as far as a tiny recess with a sloping floor. The slight roof scarcely overhung, but it bulged forward in an annoying fashion, and hand-hold was evidently out of reach. Another head would have solved the problem, but Jones refused my offer to advance. He called down: "There isn't room even for a mouse up here; we must give it up again!" Miserable and wet-for a drizzling rain now enwrapped us-we resigned ourselves to defeat; but suddenly a cry of satisfaction came from above. It seems that our leader had found a small rock spillikin in the recess, and round this he was now hitching the rope close to his waist. Thus, hung up Prometheus-like, he coached me upwards until it was possible to grasp his ankle. Then I practically climbed up my friend, probably a first ascent,

until a hand-hold was available on the right, and his comforting long arms steadied my feet for the final pull up to a fairly safe ledge. This proved the crux of the climb, but for fully 50 feet higher extreme care was necessary. The whole route was so exposed and so dangerous that little mention was made of the climb, and on another visit a more reasonable course was found, commencing a few yards farther to the left.

Some days later Jones sat with me above those huge bastions of Twll Du; we had just come up the Devil's Staircase. In high spirits he was unfolding his plans for our proposed expedition to the Himalayas.

Man proposes, God disposes—our last climb together was over.

CHAPTER III

UP THE DENT BLANCHE IN APRIL —AND AFTER

"Yet sometimes come the footsteps of the brave Who dare the perils of the icy steep; Joy, health, and fame we give them—or a grave. The good we welcome, but the best we keep."

BY a curious coincidence Owen Glynne Jones began and finished his Alpine career on the mountains which dominate the Evolena valley. In 1891 his first important peak was the Grande Dent de Veisivi. That day's wondrous view of the haughty, ice-crowned Queen of the Val d'Hérens, with her majestic western precipices, was never forgotten. Many a time and oft, her fascinations and those of her vassal peaks drew him to wander in this delightful district, to taste "the joy of life in steepness overcome" and "breathe the nearer heaven."

It is also a remarkable fact that the ascent of the Dent Blanche in April was his first really big climb, and certainly the most noteworthy landmark in eight years of strenuous work in the Alps. The annals of Swiss mountaineering record few such unique achievements. This, and the terrible disaster on the West Ridge, will always serve to wed the name of Owen Glynne Jones with that of his first love, the beautiful but cruel peak of the Dent Blanche.

Shortly after this *tour de force* he wrote the following practically unknown but interesting description, which came into my possession shortly after his demise. It was written in Evolena :---

"The astonishing dry weather during the last few days has rendered the condition of the peaks, passes, and glaciers of Switzerland very exceptional for this season of the year. The mountains are not necessarily much easier of access than usual, but in special cases they have recently been rendered passable, even though rarely so during the climbing season.

"The Dent Blanche is the example contemplated. There are many climbers who have sat at the feet of this haughty Queen of the Val d'Hérens for days and days during fine summer weather down at Ferpècle or Evolena, waiting for a really fit opportunity for a personal introduction. Some few have had the privilege accorded them, and have thankfully and safely achieved their quest. Many, however, have departed sorrowfully without a chance. Not all who have ventured on the climb, even in best of form and under happiest auspices, have returned successful: not all have returned uninjured. Sudden storms are frequent even in apparently settled fine weather; our guides can curl our hair with stories-and they dearly love to do so-of Lochmatter, who met his death in that particular cheminée on the final ridge; of So-

and-so, who was actually struck by lightning close to the first gendarme, and had to spend the night with his companions in an awful little traverse across the face of the rocks; of this guide, whose ears were black with frost-bite for weeks after his terrible exposure on the Dent Blanche; and that one, whose missing fingers on the right hand tell of a still worse experience. There is a grand brutality in the general aspect of the mountain seen from a distance, and the impression is rendered permanent after a struggle with its difficulties. The mountain is as treacherous in its weather as its near neighbour, the Matterhorn, over across the Zmutt Glacier, and much more difficult. No doubt Zermatt and the Schwarzsee are more conveniently placed for the Matterhorn than Evolena or Ferpècle for the Dent Blanche, but for every ascent of the latter there are thirty or more up the Matterhorn.

"The question of endurance decides the point for many who reach the summit of the Cervin and of their climbing ambition at the same gasp. They can achieve this from the Schwarzsee and be back again at the expense of fourteen hours' steady work, and perhaps 100 francs for each guide taken. But the lower tariff of 80 francs for the Dent Blanche settled, by the way, long before proper comparisons had been instituted—is not of itself a sufficient temptation for an attempt on the rival peak. Though it is some 400 feet lower, nineteen hours for the journey from and to Ferpècle (height 16,000 feet) is good time under favourable circumstances, without allowing many halts for breathless admiration of the scenery or for discussion of the names of the scores of glittering peaks all around.

"The crux of the climb taken by the ordinary route, that up the south arête from the snowy Wandfluh ridge, is condensed into about 500 feet of rock-work, that starts at a height of 13,200 feet or so. These rocks are never easy: a slip of one member of the roped-up party would in many ticklish places involve the death of all; and they are such that only when perfectly free from snow can skill be relied upon. With half an inch of snow sprinkled over them, or, worse still, with a thin glaze of ice produced by nightly freezing of the daily thaw after such snow, good management is a poor second to good fortune. Rather than trust to so doubtful a companion as the latter, the climber should give himself another chance of life and renounce the enterprise. Yet it tears one's heart-strings to do so after having come so far ; and indeed it often requires more courage to turn back than to go on. But in my recent expedition there happened to be no special necessity for turning back prematurely. I had long hoped that the fine weather was improving the condition of the Dent Blanche, and at the earliest opportunity found my way back to Evolena. Arriving there on Sunday afternoon, 23 April, I found my old friends Bovier and Gaspoz as excited as good guides care to show themselves. They were confident that the gendarmes could be safely turned, and predicted that we should take twenty-six hours over the

course. They proposed to start on the following afternoon, rather than to run any risk of change of weather by further delay.

"It is scarcely wise to embark on a heavy undertaking at a great height without any training at slightly lower elevations for a few days beforehand; mountain sickness is generally the result of such sudden change, and is likely to spoil the enterprise. In this case, however, the issue justified the venture, for no *mal de montagne* took away our appetites or spoilt our nerves, and the whole party remained in excellent working order throughout. Bovier and Gaspoz had both ascended the Dent Blanche some three or four times previously. Bovier *fils* came nominally as porter, actually for educational purposes, as he intends qualifying as a guide next year.

"We started from Evolena at 3.30 p.m. on Monday, the 24th. To the villagers our object was unknown; perhaps we might, if the weather and snow would let us, try the Tête Blanche or even the Grand Cornier. A shrugging of our shoulders implied absolute ignorance of what was in store for us. Yet we might be very tired for the next night, and they were not to expect us back for certain then; the Châlets de Bricolla would be too inviting, and we should spend our second night there. After that they might come and search; our traces would be clear enough, and they could not fail to discover us. Then, on the other hand, we should surely be back before they had any cause for alarm.

"We carried about fifty metres of rope (165 feet).

Our provisions consisted of four loaves, a little cold mutton, some chocolate, butter, and honey, and eight litres of wine. We had also the opportunity of munching occasionally the dry raw goat's flesh, the *Walliser rohfleisch*, that is held in such high esteem by the guides in these parts.

"The empty hotel at Ferpècle was passed shortly before six o'clock, and the Alpe de Bricolla (7,760 feet) reached soon after dark. Here there are four huts of stone, tenanted in summer by cows and herdsmen, and most conveniently placed for the thirsty mountaineer descending the valley after a hot day's work. We found them cold and barren; but that was expected. We found them filled with drift-snow; this was sadly unexpected. However, we had not meant to use them much, and no doubt should have found them damp and draughty. With such comforting reflections we proceeded to bivouac outside.

"In the twinkling of an eye a fire was lit with loose sticks and logs lying around, and each with a plank to sit on we enjoyed a supper of hot chocolate with bread and meat, and then felt better able to adapt ourselves to the queer surroundings. The extremes of temperature between front and back suggested engine-driving. It was necessary to rotate periodically to avoid roasting on the one side and freezing on the other. Sleep under such circumstances was impossible, and we didn't look for it. The talk was chiefly concerning the dreaded gendarmes, with occasional reminiscences of past climbs. The night was clear, and the moon nearly full; the Dent Blanche towered above us a miracle of beauty of the 'faultily faultless, icily regular' type. The whole aspect of the gaunt rocks and glittering ice was one of extreme desolation, and we talked much to relieve the loneliness. We longed for midnight to come, as we might then begin preparations for our departure. The plan was to reach the difficult part of the glacier by dawn; anything earlier would be useless, as the intricacies of the ice-fall could not be overcome without daylight to help us.

"At last it was time to start, and we were glad to go. Leaving our camp-fire blazing brightly, we marched steadily across the snow, in the direction of the upper glacier. The snow was soft, and frequently let us down suddenly to our knees. This was tiring, but promised to be worse on the return. It would then be much softer, and we ourselves not so fresh. But we had not yet ascended the mountain, and deferred all consideration of the descent till the summit should be reached. At three o'clock a short halt was called for breakfast. It lasted only six minutes, just enough time to take an aneroid reading (9,780 feet), a few notes on the route, and then a hurried meal of bread and butter, honey and eggs, all hard frozen. We did not dare to stay longer; a gentle breeze was blowing down from the ice, and our hands and feet were quickly becoming benumbed. So we started again, and soon the crevasses commenced. We roped together in this order-Bovier, Gaspoz, myself, and young Bovier. The rope remained on us for the next

sixteen hours, the work being such that this safeguard was continually necessary.

"It is a pretty sight to see a clever guide dodging his way up an ice-fall. He works so confidently, and yet his moves are frequently so unexpected. Unexpected, indeed, are one's own moves, if the mind is allowed to wander far from the feet; and a sudden departure towards the centre of the earth through the thin crust of a snow-bridge is the usual consequence of absent-mindedness. The sensation of coldness about the dangling lower limbs, when in that embarrassing position, up to the chest in snow, is too unique to be described easily.

"But the overhanging towers and pinnacles of ice, around and up which Bovier steadily cut his way, were threatening enough to remind us of caution. Moreover, the ice-bridges at that early hour were strong, and carried us safely. In due course the upper glacier was reached, and then a monotonous grind ensued up the steep snow-slopes to the final bergschrund. This special crevasse, separating the highest portion of the glacier from the lower and less steep parts, is often a most formidable barrier. Fortunately, the heavy winter snows had bridged it over in several places, and walking delicately we crossed easily.

"From thence to the ridge the labour was greater. An ice-slope stretched steeply upwards, and it was necessary to cut steps up to a thin rocky rib that pointed down towards us. Each one of the party helped to widen out the steps, for the sake of an

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easier return. But in spite of this self-imposed labour, and in spite of continual kicking of feet into the steps, there was the utmost difficulty in keeping warm. After two hours' ceaseless kicking, the rocky rib was reached ; in another half an hour its crest was gained (8.30), we were above the Wandfluh, and came in full sight of the south-east side of the mountain. Labour of one kind was at an end; the first arête rose steeply above us, and we had next to contemplate the active employment of every finger and toe in the possession of the party. The temperature up here was mild, for a faint breeze from the south-east kept us comfortably cool in the sun, and after a quarter of an hour vigorously spent at second breakfast we prepared to give practical evidence in favour of Darwinism.

"As for the condition of the rocks, they were perfect where free from ice; and though they were glazed heavily on the left face, Bovier managed to force a route half-way round the base of the first tower of rock and then straight up to the ridge beyond it. This was the most serious piece; it was just 150 feet high, and we all knew that a slip of one would bring disaster to the whole party. The feeling of responsibility in such a situation is an education in itself; but it is a higher education that cannot be recommended to the nervous. There were plenty of holds, but all were small. If the hand could not be inserted, perhaps three fingers might, or at any rate two. Each hold required testing before it could be trusted ; sometimes it was found wanting, and with a hiss the dislodged

boulder would fly away down to the glacier hundreds of feet below.

"On the crest the work became safer. There were two sides possible for a fall, and uncertain Fortune took time to decide which we should utilize. In the meanwhile, we had mounted higher and reached the second gendarme. Its left side was completely glazed over, and so prevented a passage by the ordinary route. On the right, an irregular cliff wound its way horizontally across the face of the rock. The route along this looked unsatisfactory enough, but was the only thing feasible. The component boulders were spiky and loose, and the mode of motion adopted was that of crawling on all-fours along these spikes like a cat crossing a muddy road. The view vertically downwards from the ledge was singularly extensive, but we did not stop to contemplate it. After this, the ridge was again within access, and the main difficulties of the rocks were over. Care had to be taken in ascending the Lochmatter Chimney, but otherwise the party continued their course freely and rapidly. By midday we had cleared the rocks, and nothing was left but an ice-slope leading to the summit. Nothing but this; yet at a height of 14,000 feet, step-cutting in hard ice after continuous exercise of every available muscle for several hours, becomes labour incredible, and our party will not soon forget the last 500 feet of the ascent. Close on the right was a beautiful overhanging cornice of hard snow stretching away upwards to the summit, and we kept as close to this as safety would permit, for

the sake of slightly greater ease in step-cutting. At two o'clock we reached the summit (14,316 feet); its aspect was that of a sharp knife-edge of ice. Place for rest there was none, but just below the crest a few boulders cropped up out of the ice, and we sank on to these without comment.

"The view had been most extensive all along the arête, but till the summit was gained nothing could be seen of the Oberland or of the nearer magnificent peaks around Zermatt. The sky was cloudless and exceedingly clear. The winter snows were everywhere very thick, and perhaps added to the grandeur of the scene. But such sights more than absorb all our faculties of appreciation, under whatever aspects they may be witnessed, and it is impossible to compare the charms of winter and summer Alpine views with the same humanly elementary principles of art that we carry with us to the Academy.

"We started away down almost immediately. Our ascent had taken seventeen and a half hours of actual going—twenty-three altogether from Evolena —and there was much to do before dark. Our upward route was retraced almost step by step. The intrinsic difficulties of the descent were somewhat greater than those of the ascent, especially down the steep ice-slope, but on the whole less fatiguing. It was thus possible to go on continuously without any halt whatever till the difficult rocks were passed and our breakfasting-place reached again. It was now a quarter to six, and daylight was gradually fading. We had yet the séracs to pass, and halted only twenty minutes for another meal. Since the second breakfast at nine in the morning we had only taken a little chocolate and some wine.

"Then on again down the long ice-slope and snowy glacier. The snow was horribly soft, and progress was very wearisome. The séracs were descended at a different spot. Bovier thought he would like a little variety-but the darkness nearly introduced further trouble. By eleven o'clock we were outside the Bricolla huts again, and almost exhausted with the long struggle through the soft snow. Again we lit a fire and made some hot chocolate; none of us wanted to eat. At midnight we broke up our camp and made our way steadily down the dark valley to Evolena by a quarter past three on Wednesday morning. We had been thirty-six hours in the open; the ascent had been successfully accomplished, and, leaving the feeling of satisfaction till it could be better enjoyed, we went to bed and slept.

"Two days afterwards, when we were up on the Dents des Bouquetins, a heavy fall of snow fell in the neighbourhood and on the Dent Blanche. At the time of writing it has a wintry whiteness entirely forbidding, and no doubt will remain practically inaccessible for many weeks to come."

Eight years have passed. Evolena is peacefully enjoying the day of rest, and sweltering drowsily in the pitiless heat of the August sun. Energy is

at a discount, but strenuous life and action are personified in the three well-known guides, Jean Vuignier, Elias Furrer, and Clemenz Zurbriggen, as they wave adieu to their friends, and, laden with the implements of their craft, stride off up the valley to Haudères. Their healthy faces lighten with anticipation as the glittering tip of the Dent Blanche gradually rises above the nearer slopes. The West Ridge is soon seen almost in profile; the jagged rocks are black and bare—the conditions are perfect.

Up from the great precipices into the cloudless firmament wisps of morning mist rise lazily, and the guides' spirits rise in unison. At Haudères, where the Ferpècle and Arolla valleys divide, a party of Englishmen soon arrives. Their glowing, suntanned faces and sprightly movements indicate perfect physique and perfect health. The peaks of Arolla have been their training ground. After a hurried farewell, most of the travellers continue downwards. Two-Owen Glynne Jones and Mr. F. W. Hill-are left behind. Soon the little hamlet is disturbed. A party is starting for the West Ridge of the Great White Tooth, and the wherewithal is required for spending a night out on the rocks above the Alpe de Bricolla, or Abricolla, as it is now commonly called. A porter is procured, and these various matters are soon settled.

Four hours later, after a tiring climb through the heavy air of the narrow valley, they emerge from the friendly shade of the pines. Before Abricolla is reached, doubts arise as to the advantage of the higher gîte, the enervating influences have done their work, and Owen Glynne Jones comes to sleep the second and last time at the well-known châlets. Whilst the evening meal is being prepared, he strays from his companions and looks forth on the enthralling prospect. The shattered surface of the Ferpècle Glacier lies below in the gathering gloom. The sweeping curves lead the eye skyward, and around the vast upper amphitheatre of the great peaks that

"like giants stand, To sentinel enchanted land."

All the old friends are here, from the bulky form of the Veisivi and the spiry needle of the Za to the overpowering mass of the Dent Blanche, each with character marked in everlasting form. Perchance he recalls the joyous days spent on ridge and summit; the pulses quicken, and the hour-glass runs in golden sands.

Then, as darkness creeps slowly upwards, they sit around the dying embers of the fire, chatting keenly, and at times merrily, of climbs and climbers. Probably the young amateur recalls the joke about his April ascent of the Dent Blanche: how the guides quelled the doubts of their parents by hinting at an attempt of the Tête Blanche, feeling all the while that this would be the full extent of the "mad young Englishman's" powers. How his eyes twinkled when he mimicked the guides' astonishment as they gradually realized that they had "caught a Tartar." Even at the last gendarme they looked back inquiringly, but it was ever, "Lead on !" The cry, "Hold ! enough !" came not until the actual top was reached.

But the Dent Blanche is still there; it awaits their coming. At 3 a.m. the next morning the party quits the last rough signs of civilization, and launches forth into darkness made visible by the light of Alpine lanterns. The faint glimmer of dawn sees them threading the maze-like ice-fall. The deep silence is broken only by the swishing smack of the ice-axe as steps are hewn, now on some icy ridge with unfathomable blackness below on either hand, or anon across the frost-bound breast of some slippery crevasse. At times towers of ice loom threateningly, their impending snowy crests apparently on the verge of falling. The danger is almost negligible at this early hour, but the travellers are aware of its presence.

"In single file they move, and stop their breath For fear they should dislodge the overhanging snows."

Away behind and below, the crash of falling fragments bespeaks that ceaseless mountain warfare where, slowly and stealthily, the creeping glacier monster thrusts itself through the rocky jaws between Mont Miné and its neighbour. The guide's instinct prevails unerringly. Gradually the party draws up to the base of the titanic ridge whose foot cleaves the icy pedestal to invisible depths, and whose crest towers upwards to heights now also invisible.

At the foot of the rocks a short discussion arises. The only other party to ascend the mountain

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from this side has obviated the lower, third portion of the ridge by passing up the snow and ice slopes to the right. Not so on this occasion. The West Ridge must be conquered in its entirety. Soon the party is at work in real earnest, and dawn comes on apace. The lanterns are packed away, for

> "Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops."

At first progress is fast and almost furious ; the conditions are perfect, and everybody is in high spirits. But ere long the mountain asserts itself; huge, smooth, steep slabs bespeak serious difficulties. A certain section entails assistance for the leader, and those who follow realize that the trusty Alpine rope is a friend in need and a friend indeed. Thus far the climbers have moved on two ropes. The last man of the first three bends down breathlessly after a tough struggle with an overhanging corner, and suggests to his friend below that the two ropes should be joined. In this way time will be saved, and there is no hesitation in the acceptance of the proffered help. Thus the large party is roped for the last time in the following order: Furrer, Zurbriggen, Jones, Vuignier, and Hill.

The mighty ridge yields all those glorious opportunities which delight the expert mountaineer. Roughly speaking, though built on extensive and complicated lines, it resembles a huge Cyclopean staircase. The riser of each step is usually broad and vertical, and the tread consists of a sharpcrested arête.

The latter portions usually delay the party little; the way is obvious, almost painfully so where they sit astride its pointed tip, and edge onwards and upwards. Where the narrow portion abuts against the steep extended face, smooth slabs intervene, and here the uncertainties of ways and means call for much skill and discrimination. At one puzzling place Furrer unropes and makes a solitary excursion on the great crags in order to find the best point of attack. After a long horizontal traverse across the face, he finds a chimney leading ahead, and calls on his companions to follow. They are soon united, and up, ever up they go, now on the crest of the ridge again supreme above, and thoughtless of "the sudden deeps, where slip or fall brings swiftly crashing end." Wherever the almost holdless slabs permit, a way is forced up the central tip of the ridge; but many a time and oft in the upper reaches the leader has to be pushed or assisted up overhanging pitches, where all but the last man are also glad to turn a companion into a human footstool.

Higher and higher they move; the work is of enthralling interest, and time speeds swiftly. At these loftier altitudes ice begins to mask some of the holds, and for some time a repulsive-looking gendarme towering above has been causing misgivings. At last Furrer, Zurbriggen, and Jones emerge above a bulge in the ridge, and the *mauvais pas*, the last of all, stands revealed in front, 60 feet or so away. A gently inclined ridge of rock gives access to its base. Few words have been spoken thus far, but at this point Hill calls up to Jones to ask the time, as his own watch has been left behind. "Almost ten o'clock," comes the reply. Then, his face glowing with characteristic enthusiasm, Jones glances down the tremendous sweep of the almost conquered ridge, and cries, "Isn't it glorious?" These are practically the last words that pass between the friends.

When the last man arrives above the steep step in the ridge he sees the others advancing to the attack. On the left, the mountain's tremendous northerly precipice descends in one mighty leap to the glacier; on the right, the downward gaze is arrested by the savage recesses of the great couloir, an almost vertical funnel of ice, 2,000 feet deep. In front rises the great gendarme, its closeness, as is so often the case, minimising the appearance of difficulty. It has an extended front, and is bounded on the right by snow and ice slopes which would give a long, uninteresting, and tedious route to the top. The gendarme seems more tempting, and the obvious way appears to lie up a sloping chimney on the right side, but this is glazed with ice and now impossible. About 30 feet to the left of this chimney a smooth buttress attracts the leader's attention. It must be noted that Jones offers no advice on the choice of route. The bête noire of the ascent is scarcely more than 10 feet. in height, but the finish verges on the impossible by reason of the tiny hand-holds. It has not yet been ascended, though the descent has been effected by means of a doubled rope. In the exhilaration

of hardly-won success the climbers scarcely realize this fact.

From a distance of about 60 feet Hill watches the proceedings. As a base of operations, Furrer, Zurbriggen, and Jones make use of a narrow, uncomfortable ledge which affords a traverse below the buttress: about half-way between the last man and the others, Vuignier occupies a good standingplace, with the rope hitched around the rocks behind him.

Now Furrer mounts the buttress slowly and deliberately, for the situation is severely sensational. The small hand-holds prove insufficient, and Zurbriggen jams an ice-axe against the rocks to support the leader's wavering feet. This proves unsteady, and Jones is called away from a more secure position to assist. No obvious belay for the rope is available. With the support of the axe, now firmly held, Furrer feels anxiously above; again and again his hands wander over the buttress in search of a satisfactory grip for the fingers. The buttress bulges forward awkwardly; there is a sense of peril at every inspiration. The next upward movement is obviously the crux of the climb. A good ledge is seen a few inches higher; the very shortness of the stretch is its most insidious danger. At last Furrer moves; his foot almost leaves the ice-axe. At that moment his fingers suddenly slip off the insufficient holds. Before the terrible calamity is realized, he has tumbled backwards on Zurbriggen and Jones, and all three fall together. The others are in a position of utter helplessness.

No climbing-rope can withstand the strain; human aid is unavailing. The last man turns away and instinctively grasps the adjacent rocks. So sudden is the crisis that no human cry stirs the vast solitudes. He hears Vuignier go, and expects every instant to be torn from the rocks and hurled into space. Again the unexpected happens: the strain never comes. He looks around. A glance below reveals the broken rope swinging slowly across the face, and still farther down his companions are visible crashing lifeless and helpless down the mountain.

The human intellect is slow to realize the extent of such an awful catastrophe. In the present case, so far as the survivor is concerned, the uppermost feeling at first is one of astonishment to find himself still alive. Utter despair and collapse would seem inevitable in such a fearful situation, but soon the natural thought of self-preservation arises. Iron nerves and physical fitness at last assert themselves, and the problem ahead is faced in desperate earnest. It is hopeless to attempt to ascend where the guides have failed; to descend is obviously impossible; the only alternative is to find a way up the deep snow and ice slope to the right of the gendarme. A kindly Providence watches over the brave climber; he hits on the very route which is now considered the only safe way of passing the mauvais pas. Earlier in the day a party has been seen on the ordinary south ridge, and the thought of joining them lends strength and speed to his efforts.



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An hour later he stands on the deserted summit. He calls loudly and frantically, but no answering cry breaks the overwhelming stillness: the other party are out of sight and sound. He turns to the descent and follows in their footsteps with all reasonable haste, hoping to overtake them. But all in vain. On the lowest gendarme a sudden mist enwraps the mountain, and the way off the rocks is indiscernible. Fortune now seems to desert the climber; a snowstorm borne on the wings of a lifechilling breeze sweeps across the ridge. Shelter is found in a recess on the lee-side of the rocks, and here, practically devoid of sustenance except for a few raisins, he spends the ensuing night.

The mist clings to the crags until the following midday, Tuesday, but then it clears and a start downwards is made. At last the snow-covered rocks are passed, and the lower part of the Wandfluh reached. After two or three hours of futile efforts, a route is found down 'the cliff by way of a series of chimneys leading to the surface of the Schönbühl Glacier. At sunset he passes wearily along the high moraine of the Zmutt Glacier. Later on, the light in the Staffel Alp acts as a guide, but it goes out early, and the way thence is lost. Stumbling and falling occasionally, the climber, now more or less delirious with the terrible experience, is at last overcome with fatigue, and perforce spends another night by the side of the torrent. He awakes late next morning, but help is now close at hand. The path is soon found, and before midday Zermatt is stirred with the terrible

story of disaster. The news flashes far and near. Within a short space of time search-parties consisting of guides and willing experts start both from Zermatt and Evolena.

The arduous and dangerous work of recovery is well and nobly done. The fallen guides are laid to rest in their native valleys. Owen Glynne Jones sleeps in the little God's acre at Evolena. Nature's sweetest and grandest music hovers ever around. Through the light air floats the chant of the wind through the swaying pines, and the song of many mountain waters fills the valley, but, above and beyond all, the voice of the Dent Blanche roars forth intermittently in thunderous avalanche. The path to the mountains runs almost within touch of his resting-place. The heavy tread of the climber's foot and the click of the ice-axe are often heard as they pass. Now and again strong men with weathered, sun-tanned faces turn aside and bow their heads in silence over the plain, stone slab; let it not be accounted unto them for weakness if they pay their homage of tears before they go.

CHAPTER IV

TWO FAMOUS WELSH CLIMBS

"The hills, where the wind has a scent of sunbeams." **R.** IEFFRIES

T was the Easter of 1897. Owen Glynne Jones had elected to initiate my brother and myself into the charms of Welsh climbing, and we had spent a week of storm and sunshine on Cader Then by way of Bettws-y-Coed we came to Idris. Penygwryd, or P.Y.G., as the habitués are wont to call it, in a springless cart on a sunless day of swirling Snowdonian storm. Soaked and shaken, we were in the best mood to appreciate the sight of the long-looked-for little mountain inn, that Mecca of Welsh climbers, from Kingsley and Tyndall to Haskett-Smith, Jones, and Robinson. There it lay in a fold of the hills, not a house or hamlet at hand, stone-built in a world of stone, grey in a world of grey. On the right-hand loomed the Glyders, on the left the sombre slopes of Moel Siabod, whilst in front the giant slopes of Snowdon's satellites gradually circled round to the snow-capped summit, gulfed in storm.

The hotel was well filled, and, despite bad weather, the succeeding days went merrily enough. We made the acquaintance of Lliwedd, that grandest of Snowdon's buttresses, and the most impressive crag in all Wales. Its most famous and precious possession in those days was a terrific gully with a sanguinary record for inaccessibility. The Slanting Gully, or the Slantingdicular, as some used to call it, had defied numerous expert parties, and attacks on this and the equally notorious Devil's Kitchen on the Glyders were, in Jones's words, the principal object of our visit.

One evening there was a great gathering of the clan in the smoke-room. The smoke-laden air seemed to quiver with adventure as we listened to mountain-stories of world-wide travel from Coolins to Caucasus, from Helvetia to Himalava. The conversation turned to the Slanting Gully. Our spirits sank to zero as a notable expert with practical knowledge of the place declared it impossible. He spoke slightingly of English rockclimbers; and our Alpine Club heroes, whose names we almost worshipped, were summarily described as incapable of "looking at such a place as the Great Cave Pitch in the Slanting Gully." "Yes," he said, "I know all about the best rock-climbers." Then, after mentioning some well-known names, he continued, "Purtscheller is far ahead of any of these, even he could scarcely manage the Slanting Gully. I have never yet seen the man who could do it!"

Our leader was so impressed by this opinion, that two days later he left Penygwryd and moved

on to Cumberland earlier than he had intended. The two main items in our programme had not even been inspected. His last farewell advice was, "Leave the Slanting Gully alone." Simply as a joke we called back in reply as he drove away, "We'll send you a wire from the top of Slanting Gully!"

As days went by, inquiries were made about the *bête noire* of the district. The fatal accident to **Mr**. Mitchell in 1894 had produced a profound impression on the climbers, yet we learnt that before he fell he had stood on a ledge for half an hour. This information, and the fact that the ill-fated pioneer was climbing alone, reminded us of the fact that "a mouse may look at a king." Loftily, haughtily, and repulsive as seemed that great rift in Lliwedd's visage, surely we could at least go and have a look at that ledge.

Conversation with the natives brought forth less practical, but more romantic, information. They had a strangely superstitious fear of the face of Lliwedd. Local traditions told of the last battle of King Arthur on the Beddgelert slopes of Lliwedd, hence the name Bwlch y Saethau, the pass of the arrows. A large cairn, Carnedd Arthur, stood on the present site of the Gorphwysfa cottages at the top of the Llanberis Pass. No man would pass the heap of stones without saying the Lord's Prayer nine times. After the burial the warriors climbed to the top of Lliwedd and descended the face to a great cave, evidently that in the Slanting Gully. When all had entered, the mouth of the opening was almost blocked up, and a bell hung in the hole. The men fell asleep, leaning on their shields in order to be ready for Arthur's second coming.

Some years previous to our visit a sheep fell over the precipice, and a local shepherd was lowered to the ledge to recover it. He saw a light burning inside the mountain, and a further glance revealed the men asleep. In attempting a closer view his head knocked against the bell, and the whole army awoke with a terrifying shout. The shepherd never recovered from the shock. This was the story told us by the Owens at Penygwryd; our incredulity was answered by references to Mr. Mitchell's accident. The place was evidently bewitched!

Such things were forgotten, as, on a beautiful spring morning, we set forth from the hotel, informing inquiring friends that we were off to "potter about on Lliwedd." There was no lingering for penance or potations by King Arthur's cairn at Gorphwysfa. Onward was the call—

> "On and up, where Nature's heart Beats strong amid the hills."

Soon the great three-headed mountain loomed ahead, dim, dark, and mysterious in the opposing glamour of morning sunlight. Three great rifts split the precipice, ours was the one to the right.

Those were the days of Lliwedd's supremacy, fancy routes were as unknown as power stations

or light railways; the solitude and beauty of Llyn Llydaw were as yet unspoilt. As we strode up to the base of the crags, the only ugly thing to jar on our youthful enthusiasm was an aggressive white monument erected in memory of Alfred Evans, who was killed in 1888, when attempting an ascent of the central gully. Yet doubts disappeared when we thought of the unfair way in which disaster was courted. The friend of the illfated climber scrambled to a point above and proffered the use of the rope, but this was refused. Whilst attempting to follow his leader, the last man slipped, and fell over 200 feet, with instantly fatal results. We learnt later how unpleasant it is to be clinging desperately to that great cliff, when a downward glance for a foothold reveals nought but a slanting, doubtful support, and below that a tiny white speck, Evans's cross, of woeful import.

On reaching the foot of the Slanting Gully we realized that on mountains things are not always what they seem; there was little evidence of extreme difficulty. The wide cleft sloped back at an easy angle until the Cave Pitch broke its continuity. Yet the lower part provided steep enough climbing on smooth rocks to play our muscles into form. Half an hour later we arrived at the foot of the famous obstacle, and fell to wondering whence its name; there was very little "cave" about it, and probably the name came from Arthurian tradition. Roughly speaking, it was a deeply cut, eightyfoot crack, which started two or three feet wide and gradually narrowed to vanishing-point up above, where, when seen from lower down, it seemed to overhang ominously. On the left rose a great, smooth slab; on the right the rock construction was entirely different, spiky, undercut masses jutted downwards and formed a raggedlooking side to the crack. Unfortunately, these rocks seemed to have been laid the wrong way; could they have been turned the other end up, a kind of felstone staircase would have been available. The crack up which we had to climb seemed a species of fault between the two formations.

The lower part of the crack was smooth, and lubricated with slimy mud, so my brother steadied me up the left wall, whence it was soon possible to scramble on to a broad quartz ledge that ran across the slab on the left. The next few steps ahead looked smooth, so my henchman also came up to the quartz ledge. Suggestive marks and scratches on the slabs farther to the left inclined us to keep in the crack as far as possible. This plan may not have been the easiest, but it had the merits of safety, for the rope could be belayed around some firm rocks, which were wedged in the crack. A piece of the right wall protruded downwards in front, hiding the upper section and necessitating some awkward steps to the left on the exposed slabs. Then back I went to the friendly crack, where a mass of jammed splinters attracted attention. After careful testing, these were declared firm enough, so I undid the rope, threaded it up behind them, and re-tied the end round my waist. How strange no other parties should have

noticed these splinters; they proved the key to success.

The views all round could now be appreciated in safety. The bend of the crack had brought us out above the huge slabs, which plunged grandly downwards. A small dislodged stone fell, not into the lower part of the "cave," but far down into the lower reaches of the gully, over 200 feet below. Glorious as was the scene from this aerial perch, with the gloomy lake of Llydaw nearly 1000 feet below, the cloud-wreathed shoulder of Snowdon 1000 feet above, its full enjoyment was deferred.

My brother had meanwhile arrived at the wedged splinters, so, with parting instructions regarding the steady paying out of the rope, I launched into the unknown to taste to the full—

> "The stern joy which warriors feel In foemen worthy of their steel."

A step upwards and round a protruding section of the right wall revealed the final part of the crack. It was about 40 feet in height, smooth in structure, vertical at first, and slightly overhanging at the finish. Just for a moment there was a feeling of folly in farther advance, but "courage mounteth with occasion"; once agrip with the intricacies of the ascent, all doubting thoughts vanished. Inch by inch, foot by foot, the rocks were overcome, trusty hobnailers bearing most of the strain, for strength of arm must be conserved against the strain of the final pull. At last this

was reached with painful suddenness, for my head tested the solidity of the overhang. It was now advisable to gain a position of comfort, if the word may be applied to a human being hanging 'twixt earth and sky. In looking around for the wherewithal to jam my body securely in the crack, my hand unwittingly touched an iron piton, which must have been very insecurely fixed, for it fell and went clattering downward to lodge on the quartz edge. Its presence immediately turned the thoughts to Mitchell's attempt. His farthest point had been reached. About a yard away to the left, on the exposed face of the slab, there was an unmistakable ledge which bore the traces of The rocks below were scarred boot-nail scratches. with long, straight, ugly marks as though of sliding Instantly the thought came that the boots. climber who deserted the crack for that exposed ledge would scarcely be able to regain his position, should upward progress prove impossible. An awkward bulge in the slab would prevent the return. Thoughts flash quickly at such moments : this was the rough theory quickly formulated on the spur of the moment as to the cause of the disaster. I see no reason now to alter it.

My only hope evidently lay in following the crack. The start was auspicious, for a partially wedged splinter left just sufficient room between its side and the wall of the crack for the thrust of a bony knee-joint. With this jammed in the crevice, all was firm, and the body could be raised until a small wrinkle was just available for the fingers of

TWO FAMOUS WELSH CLIMBS

the left hand. The last stretch seemed now so near, that, with arms comparatively untired, there was a dangerous temptation to "rush" the finish. This was the time to remember

> "Who overcomes By force hath overcome but half his foe."

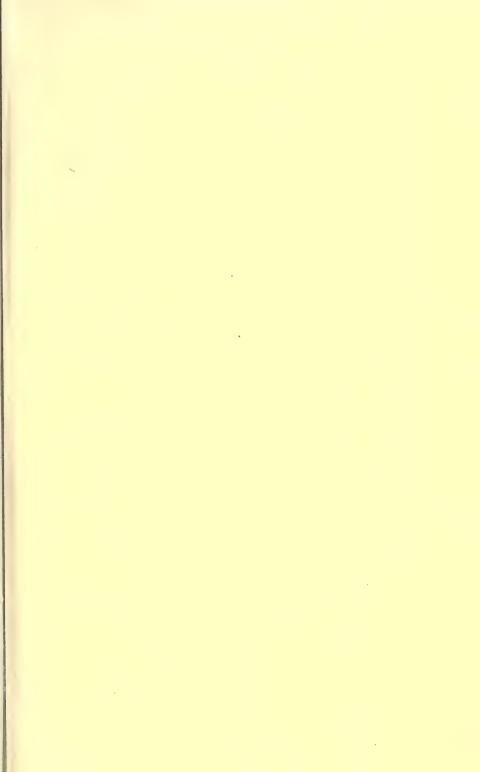
The other half would certainly have been the victor on this occasion, for slow and deliberate movement, with right arm and leg doing the bulk of the work, showed a hopeless finish to the crack. Now came the call "to stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood." The last swing out on to the slab on the left tested the arms terribly, for the feet flew back into space; there was a strange sensation of emulating a fly crawling along a ceiling. Gravitation created an ugly backward pull until the body could be raised and steadied to a balance on a small foot-hold on the slab. Hereabouts several excrescences gave splendid help; the fingers gripped exultingly in a deep crevice behind some wedged boulders. The Slanting Gully was conquered.

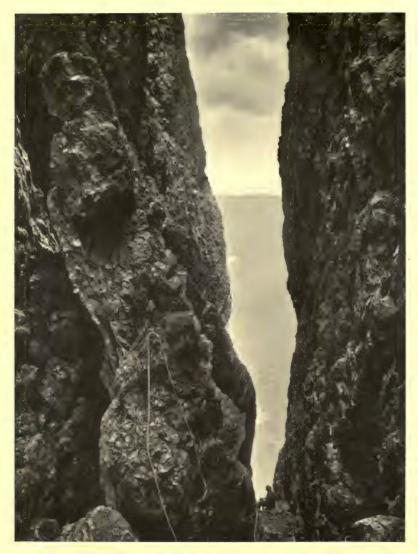
A hoarse shout of success put an end to my brother's long period of suspense. He was out of sight, but my instructions to recover the piton were heard and acted upon. The trophy now hangs at home.

After feeling inquiries regarding my holding powers, he mounted quickly up to the level of Mitchell's ledge, which natural tendencies led him to explore with unpleasant results. Thence to the top of the obstacle he seemed glad of the presence of the rope. We had been told that the upper part of the gully possessed no difficulty. This proved true, and in less than an hour we emerged on the summit of Lliwedd, having shed the last vestige of respectability amidst the muddy intricacies of a slaty pitch, composed largely of vegetation and loose rock. There were rejoicings that evening at "Wastdale Head," as well as Penygwryd, for the promised wire failed not of its message.

The Devil's Kitchen, or Twll Du (Black Pit), provides an ascent of an entirely different nature. Climbers of the Slanting Gully enjoy a sense of airy isolation, clinging, as it were, almost in mid-air, to just sufficient hold, they may cry in the fierceness of endeavour, "All earth forgot, and all heaven around us." But the Devil's Kitchen is a dark, damp, dismal place; explorers realize the aptness of the name, Black Pit; the problem is to climb out of it.

The great cleft, which overlooks Llyn Idwal, and may best be approached from Ogwen Cottage, is recognized as one of the grandest sights in Wales. Huge felspathic bastions rise on either hand, and the upper part of the gorge is blocked by a gigantic boulder which overhangs for nearly 18 feet. The full height of the obstacle is over 80 feet. A fairly expert, roped party can scramble up thus far with safety. They will then notice that a deep cave about 50 feet high is formed below the boulder, and a curtain of water usually falls gracefully over the outer end of the impending





A PEEP OUTWARDS FROM INSIDE THE DEVIL'S KITCHEN-BELOW THE GREAT OBSTACLE

THE "LOOK-OUT PINNACLE" IS SEEN ON THE LEFT; THE LOWER CRACK, BY WHICH THE ASCENT IS BEGUN, IS JUST OUT OF SIGHT ON THE RIGHT

roof, thus making internal exploration uninviting. The walls on either hand are smooth and hopeless; there is no way straight up from the cave. A few feet lower down the gully on the right-hand side,¹ a detached rock, known as the "Look Out Pinnacle," is worth climbing for the view it affords. Having negotiated this, the party would be well-advised to return down to the open slopes above Llyn Idwal, the way they came. In short, the completion of the ascent is nowadays considered too dangerous and difficult to be indiscriminately recommended. A really expert party, after due training and consideration, might attempt it with greater justification than some of the new Lliwedd climbs which have received authoritative recommendation. The key to the ascent lies in a crack which runs up the left wall from a point almost opposite the "Look Out Pinnacle." This cleft is climbed for about 25 feet until a sloping ledge affords an indifferent resting-place. Then the crack is continued again as far as another small ledge on the great cliff, where further progress straight ahead is barred by overhanging rocks. This ledge is scarcely large enough to accommodate two men; it is firm and grassy. The climber is now about 80 feet above the floor of the Kitchen and almost on a level with the top of the Great Boulder. To reach this it is necessary to make a sensational traverse for nearly 40 feet across the vertical face.

In making this ascent of the Devil's Kitchen,

¹ Looking upwards.

there are two excessively difficult places. The first is at the top of the lower section of the crack, where it emerges on the sloping ledge. The crack becomes too narrow to accommodate a jammed knee or leg, and for the final pull up on small, slippery hand-holds the body is inclined to swing outwards to the left. A slip here must prove disastrous for the leader, as the trend of the crack to the left has brought him above an unnerving drop into the lower part of the gorge. It was from this point that Ronald Hudson fell, with fatal results, in 1904. The next most difficult section occurs where the traverse starts from the upper grassy ledge. This place was responsible for another accident a few years later. D. Southgate had climbed thus far successfully, but somehow or other he slid off the corner, and crashed down on the pitiless rocks 80 feet below and almost at the feet of his friend.

Both of these unfortunate climbers were young and inexperienced : they failed utterly to realize the risks they were negotiating. The life of Southgate would certainly have been saved had he threaded the rope through a hole behind a partially detached portion of the body rock, which formed part of the upper ledge. Without using this anchorage no climber is justified in attacking the Devil's Kitchen.

It stands entirely to the credit of the late Owen Glynne Jones as a sound mountaineer, that in 1895 he climbed the cracks thus far, and returned without making the traverse.

The place was then unclimbed, and his descrip-

tion seemed to have so disheartened climbers that no serious attempt was made on it, until in 1897 my brother persuaded me to go along the traverse from above the chock-stone; with a rope held from there the passage was made without serious difficulty, though great care was required in testing all the holds and removing vegetation. A curious, prominent, unstable looking buttressbarred passage on to the ledge reached by O. G. Jones. However, after careful inspection, its firmness was proved, and I swung cautiously across to join the route made by my friend. Thus we knew that the ascent of the Devil's Kitchen was possible. The return along the traverse proved more difficult. I was impressed with the sensationalism of the whole movement. The rope was really almost a useless ornament, for collapse would have sent me swinging like a fish on the end of a line, and, pendulum-like, down under the fearsome depths below the waterfall. The deafening roar of the water and the breeze-borne spray, which made every hold slimy, all added to my unpleasant impression of the place.

It was not until the Easter holidays of 1899 that we were able to unite these two explorations in one complete climb. Our leader was O. G. Jones, and he still retained such displeasing ideas of the traverse that the following compact was made between us. His part was to lead as far as the upper ledge : it was mine to complete the traverse. We were a party of four. Mr. J. W. Puttrell came third on the rope, and Mr. F. W. Hill, who a few months later figured so vividly in the Dent Blanche accident, came last. The lower pitches were soon passed, and on arrival below the forbidding obstacle we realized that a little warmth would have been appropriate and useful in the Devil's Kitchen that day, for the chill, damp spray was everywhere : the rocks were in bad condition.

After tying on at the end of a 100-foot rope, the leader scrambled up to the foot of the crack, while I mounted to the top of the "Look Out Pinnacle." It was my duty to belay the rope from the top of this, thus probably safeguarding against a serious fall should a slip occur during the ascent of the lower crack. In such an event an unpleasant bump would certainly ensue : the gorge is over five yards wide at this point.

From my vantage-point there was a splendid view of the proceedings. Away down on the Kitchen floor, amidst the roar and tumult of waters, my companions shivered and waited, now and again glancing enviously up to my palatial perch, whereon warm rays of sunlight now slanted soothingly. Then the dim figure in the crack gradually mounted upwards out of the haze; soon I could see the movement of the supple muscles through the thin sweater that Jones wore that day. It was a fine sight thus to see a master of craft at work, every energy alive to the task in hand, every movement of that steady, slow, deliberate character which marks the expert of experts. The greater the difficulties, the keener is the attack. Verily the truth of Burke's words was evident ;

"He that wrestles with us strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill. Our antagonist is our helper."

There was a temporary delay below the first ledge, the position looked critical, and everybody was alive to the occasion. I could see Jones's long, lithe fingers wandering, almost claw-like, over the surface of the smooth wet ledge like a "greedy hand outstretched to seize whatever it can find." After a slight upward glance of warning in my direction, the crucial move was made. The legs swung out through space, the left boot touched unerringly on a tiny ledge, and, aided by this, the body was raised and then dragged forward by means of higher hand-holds up above the *mauvais pas*.

The next section of the crack was evidently easier. In a few minutes the second ledge was reached and my turn was at hand. But now came considerable delay, for our leader managed to make me understand that it would be unwise for any one to follow him unless some anchorage could be found for the rope. His standing-place was so confined and insufficient, that it would be impossible to support the following man should he make a false move. This would have meant disaster to both. After considerable "gardening operations," wherein those below on the Kitchen floor took a very active interest, a suitable anchorage was unearthed, as mentioned previously.

Eventually I was able to make the ascent, the only serious trouble occurring at the exit from the first crack. There the strain really came in raising that part of the anatomy which should have contained my lunch over and on to the ledge, but this once achieved it was comparatively easy to gain some capital higher holds and struggle up to a place of safety.

Some anxiety as to the strength of the rope was the only result of my attempt to reach the end of the traverse without disturbing the comfort of the leader on the upper ledge. Ultimately it proved possible to use this ledge as a left foot-hold in passing, and soon I was swinging round the dangerous-looking corner which starts the traverse in such familiar style, that my companion urged caution. Some men have better memories for mountains than aught else in life; as a matter of fact, every hold on that sensational traverse was like an old friend. In a few moments I was across on the top of the great chock-stone. The others followed in due course.

The whole climb passed off without special incident; danger from loose rocks or excessive difficulty was remarkable for its absence. It remained for later parties to prove how unjustifiably dangerous the Devil's Kitchen may become. Hairbreadth escapes and fatalities are now so associated with the place that many lovers of the mountains experience nought but sadness as they gaze on those sombre and majestic cliffs. Now and again worthy and capable men brave the perils of the ascent; be their reward failure or success, they are the richer for the experience. To such, warnings

are unnecessary. Nevertheless, catastrophes must happen so long as inexperienced climbers attempt the ascent in that competitive spirit which of late years has become so painfully prominent in Welshclimbing circles. I say emphatically that no man should attempt the ascent of the Devil's Kitchen without having had at least five years' experience in leading up not less than a dozen of the exceptionally severe British courses. This reference is to courses thus classified in the standard works on the subject.

CHAPTER V

THROUGH THE HEART OF THE ALPS

"Land of the shadow and haunted spire, Land of the silvery glacier fire, Land of the cloud and the starry choir Magical land of hills." GEOFFREY WINTHROP YOUNG

LIKE the mountains themselves, mountaineers are of many moods. However, they may be divided conveniently into two main classes: those who frequent the well-known centres and throng the Alpine highways, and those who shun the more crowded haunts of their fellow-men, and wander, fancy free, in Alpine byways. The former class favours the greatest peaks, its representative seems unhappy unless, aided by guides, he has done more or less "hanging on by his eyelashes," or has "bagged" the bulk of his pre-arranged programme. The climber of the other class has no programme; like wind he goeth, or rather bloweth, where he listeth. He usually travels without guides, thus truly breathing the higher, purer air; the joys of the valleys as well as the heights are his. There are no friends at the end of a telescope criticizing his "style" or lack of it : should he fail, he will not be aggravated by misplaced sympathy, or be told that "a lady is going up his peak to-morrow."

This is a day of extremes, and serious arguments sometimes arise as to the various merits of these two groups; personally, I should prefer to let extremes meet. The following recollections of a wandering holiday will suggest similar routes to those who look on the playground of Europe as something more than a gymnasium, where muscle is might and the athletic pleasure of peak and pass is simply weakness.

Avalanches are usually considered the mountaineer's grimmest enemy. Yet it is not always so. I owe the discovery of my feelings on the above questions to one of those calamities. It was early summer, and our party of three was bound for Zermatt, that little village, or, more properly speaking, small town, which reposes so snugly at the foot of the glorious Matterhorn. As our train crawled up the Rhone Valley, the official on board came along to inform us that the Zermatt railway had been carried away for some considerable distance by a newly fallen avalanche. This apparently meant a day's delay. Thus a companion's suggestion to leave the train at Sion, in order to visit the recesses of the Evolena Valley and then cross over the intervening peaks and passes to Zermatt, met with universal approval.

We acted accordingly, relieving the railway of further responsibility on our account. An attempt to relieve them also of the balance of railway fare paid to Zermatt was fruitless. Sion, "the beautiful for situation," delayed us little, for most of our luggage was sent on to Zermatt by post, and we decided to walk up to Evolena, carrying our sole worldly belongings in rücksacks on our backs. We knew by a previous visit of the difficulties and dangers, not to mention the expense, of driving up this narrow, upland valley. As the Irishman says, "If you drives, you walks," or ought to do so, rather than expect struggling horse-flesh to haul you up the steep, long, and rough slopes which are encountered.

It was a glorious day as we crossed the bridge over the rushing Rhone, and mounted the long 2000-foot hill to the upper valley where the small collection of sun-tanned châlets, known as Vex, suggested a halt. The snow-tipped peaks far ahead riveted our attention; but the goitrous natives close at hand had more attraction for a friend who was medically inclined. Goitre is very prevalent hereabouts, but scarcely more so than in some of the Cumberland valleys, where glacier water, at all events, cannot be blamed for its strange and unexplained occurrence.

Leaving Vex by the main street, which also, it is only fair to say, serves the purpose of main sewer, and where some one suggested that iceaxes were useful to cut a way through the heavy air, we emerged on the more gently rising road which skirts the rocky wall of the narrow valley. Maple, walnut, and pine trees provided a welcome shade. High up above us vegetation clung sparsely to bold, rocky buttresses; 1000 feet below us the torrent roared and thundered, now hidden beneath a screen of greenery, anon flashing out into the sunlight amidst the ruin of its shattered and decayed retaining walls. To the uninitiated it is an unpleasant experience to be driven along this crumbling escarpment in one of the brokendown, rope-harnessed vehicles, whose wobbling wheels ply this hair-raising route. It is small comfort to be told that nobody has fallen as far as the seething torrent; nor is it soothing to have a certain tree far below pointed out as the place where a falling carriage and its occupants once hung suspended over the gulf.

Gradually the valley opened out, and in the early evening we reached Evolena, to gaze with pleasure on the great peaks looming grandly in the twilight above pine-encircled châlets and the welcome hotel. The huge spire of the Dent Blanche was bathed in the last gleams of the Alpine afterglow as it towered proudly over the lower slopes, its forbidding outline seeming to recall that terrible calamity of 1899, whereby my friend Owen Glynne Jones, one of the greatest of English rock-climbers, lost his life along with three well-known guides. In the little churchyard close at hand a simple stone marks his last resting-place; but that June night, with the moonrays tipping the silvery crest of the "White Tooth," and the sombre, black surrounding peaks arrayed subserviently at its foot, we preferred to think of the nobler monument which memory weaves around those tremendous ridges and heaven-soaring peaks

where our friend learned the lessons of healthful life, and, alas! of death.

Early next morning we walked up the higher branch valley to Arolla, and on the way scrambled up to the right of the track to climb the Dent de Satarma. The ascent of this curious pinnacle proved somewhat of a gymnastic problem, and on the upper part the situation was distinctly thrilling, because of the scarcity of hand- and foot-holds. The great cliff on the right slanted straight down to the pine-clad pastures in an impressively sensational manner, and this being the first climb of the holiday, we clung almost too carefully to the small ledges, which were just large enough to make one realize one had a life to lose. The descent safely completed, we scrambled down and across the slopes until the hotels at Arolla were within hail, and, after the usual commissariat details, present and future, had been dealt with, we retired to rest.

Arolla is situated about 6500 feet above sea-level, with splendid peaks on every hand. It is a favourite resort with those of our countrymen who prefer guideless climbing; in fact, it might well be called the Englishman's playground, continental climbers being conspicuous only by their absence. The Pigne d'Arolla (12,471 feet) and Mont Collon, only a few feet lower, are the popular snow-climbs, whilst the Aiguille de la Za, the Dents de Veisivi, and the Aiguilles Rouges are the favourite haunts of rock-climbers. The latter series of peaks form a jagged outline on the west side of the valley, and yield the most

interesting and difficult expedition in the locality. There are three summits, the North, the Central and South Peaks. The last-named is adorned with a number of splendid gendarmes, most of which it is usual to traverse over as part of the day's work. At the southerly end of the South Peak there occurred in 1906 one of the most remarkable hairbreadth escapes it is possible to imagine.

Two English climbers and a porter, with Martin Pralong as guide, had traversed all the summits from north to south, and, as a finish to the day, decided to include the ascent of the small, indefinite peak at the southerly edge of the ridge. They were ascending by the east face, and Martin was leading, with the others almost in a direct line below. All were in a somewhat exposed situation, though it should be noted that the porter at the end of the rope was only a few feet out of the bed of the gully that flanks the face.

Strange to say, when Martin was about twelve feet from the summit and on the most difficult section, a large rock which had been apparently balanced on the very edge started sliding straight down upon him. There was no chance of dodging the large, ugly mass which was over two feet in length, but the brave guide attempted to divert its course in order to save his comrades below. Yet its weight was too much; it simply thrust back his right arm and crashed past him. The second man was awkwardly placed, but, hearing the cry of warning, he hung desperately on to the holds and hugged the rocks as close as possible for shelter. The falling mass struck him right on the head, but obviously not with its full weight, or he must have been killed instantly. A thickly knitted woollen cap also helped to break the force of the blow, and there was no entire lapse of consciousness. Almost simultaneously the boulder must have caught the rope between him and the leader, who, with his damaged hand, was thus jerked suddenly backwards off the face of the cliff. The stone fell clear of those below, and almost at the same moment they saw Martin flying downwards head first in mid-air.

The second man was of course immediately pulled away, and seems to have fallen on to a good broad ledge, whereon the third man was well placed; he, with remarkable presence of mind, quickly hauled in the slack rope. By a providential combination of circumstances, and a remarkable exhibition of presence of mind, the rope became belayed across the angle of this ledge when the second climber was lying on it, and his weight probably helped to keep it in place. Almost at the same moment Martin struck the bed of the gully near the porter, and, though terribly injured about the head, remained alive and conscious.

Strange to say, the ill-mannered rock, the cause of all the evil, had cut the rope between the porter and the third man. Had the fall not been checked, he would have been left alone near the summit in a terrible situation and, had he descended alive, might have incurred the suspicion of having cut the rope. One of the party was able to render skilful first aid to the unfortunate guide, and after a painful experience he was at at last escorted down to the glacier, and later in the evening to Arolla. The recovery was complete. Martin Pralong still climbs the Aiguilles Rouges, and is one of the best guides in Evolena.

Such an event must be regarded as an accident pure and simple. I know of no other case where, for no apparent reason, rock has fallen on a party and attacked them thus. The attack was met with that true grit and cool judgment which wins the admiration of all true sportsmen the world over.

It was our intention to attack the Aiguille de la Za on our way over to Zermatt by the Col d'Hérens, and we engaged a porter to assist in the transit of our camera and other heavy luggage to the Bertol Hut, where we proposed to spend the night.

We were a merry party that June morning, but old Sol gradually scorched our enthusiasm, and lack of training made us perspire copiously. Above the snowline the conditions were distinctly sloppy, and later in the day the surface of the glacier below the hut was in a dangerous condition. There were several snow-covered crevasses to negotiate, but our heavy porter, with a great load of luggage on his back, proved, or disproved, their several stabilities, much to the comfort of those who followed.

After continuous floundering through the soft snow, we reached the hut in a soaked condition of body, so we hung out our wet garments to dry on the hot rocks, and took a prolonged sun-bath in our "birthday clothes." The rest of the afternoon was spent in photography and enjoyment of the magnificent views around the hut. Thus early in the year we had the place entirely to ourselves, but in the height of the season it is usually very crowded. Some friends once told of such an occasion in August, when room was so scarce that the guides had to endeavour to sleep in unusual places. It fell to the lot of a famous local guide, old Jean Maître of genial memory, to sleep on the table. In the middle of the night, dreams of the crossing of a fragile snow-bridge supervened, and he fell off the table on to the wooden floor of the hut with a loud thud. Everybody was awakened, and further sleep was impossible after hearing the old man's story. That was a morning of early starts.

This hut, the Bertol Cabane, to give it its full title, is the highest in Switzerland. It is perched on a small island of rock which peeps out of one of the biggest glacier systems in the Alps. On the evening of our arrival, thick, heavy clouds shut out the sunset, but a rosy gleam pervaded the vaporous veil, and the weather prophet promised a fine day for the morrow. We were astir at 2 a.m. next morning, and gazed somewhat disconsolately on the black, mist-enshrouded solitudes; but the barometer continued to rise, and our spirits followed its example. Half an hour later we had disposed of breakfast by lantern-light, and clambered down the rope which has been placed to facilitate the descent from the hut to the glacier. The compass bearings had been carefully taken the previous evening; after roping together, we set off confidently across the wide snowfield, which was now frozen hard and firm.

In a short time we reached the base of an intervening ridge of rock, and in the dense gloom scrambled up a long, snow-filled gully, where the dislodgment of some loose rocks kept the tailend of the party very much alive, to judge from the vigorous wagging of their tongues. Ere long we emerged on the higher snowfield, and an uncertain greyish light augured the approach of dawn. Onwards and upwards we trudged, skirting the edges of black, fearsome crevasses, and at times taking flying leaps across the narrower rifts, a somewhat eerie proceeding in the deceptive light. Just when a heated discussion was in progress as to our whereabouts, rays of pale pink sunlight filtered through the mist; with astounding suddenness the great cloud curtain sank downwards and our wondrous surroundings were revealed in all their glory.

Straight ahead, and apparently close at hand, our *objectif*, the Aiguille de la Za, rose like a huge church spire, its weathered, slabby sides slanting upwards to a slender mist-wreathed summit in a way that appealed irresistibly to our rock-climbing instincts. Away to the right and behind us the scene was so magnificent that adequate description is impossible. The Dent Blanche upreared itself like a great black monster in the track of the rising sun, and fleecy wisps of mist hovered gracefully over the fields of everlasting snow, with the unmistakable peak of the Matterhorn now and again pushing its tapering crest through the vanishing clouds. Far away beyond stretched a veritable sea of mountains; for several seconds we gazed speechless on the sight.

After a second breakfast we scrambled up to the great ridge of the Douves Blanches, which rose like a cock's comb above us, and evidently led to the actual base of the Aiguille. On arrival we found the crest of the ridge narrow enough to require considerable care and attention. There was a fine sense of lofty exhilaration as we slowly climbed and crawled along the rocky ridgepole of the mountain, with the sunny precipice on the one hand and on the other the deep, dark abyss of the Arolla Valley, where night still lingered. Fleecy clouds floated lazily upwards. But these wonderful effects were soon forgotten in the excitement of the ascent. After surmounting an awkward gendarme, which obstructed the direct passage along the ridge, the last four hundred feet of the Aiguille were found to be almost vertical, and the small hand- and foot-holds often masked in ice. Up and up we went, now gripping the narrow ridge with its knife-like edge, now wrestling with some overhanging buttress, or clinging affectionately to the great exposed precipice, with

thousands of feet of airy space between us and the tiny châlets of Arolla far below.

The ascent of the final section was enlivened by an exciting incident. I had reached the shattered rocks close to the summit cairn, and was carefully taking in the rope while the second climber picked his way slowly up the steep precipice. Suddenly there was a surprised cry of warning, and at the same moment I felt a violent pull on the rope. Fortunately this was minimized by the friction on the rocks over which the rope passed, and I was able to peer over the edge at the cause of the trouble. There my friend hung, practically in space, with a large piece of rock tilted forward from the cliff and resting on his shoulder and arms. He clung to the mass with the strength of desperation, for our two friends directly below were in dire peril. They quickly realized that absence of body is even as useful as presence of mind in such a dilemma. Without stopping to argue the point, they moved along a narrow ledge to the left, out of the line of fire. Then our long-suffering companion let loose the piece of the Aiguille, and it went crashing down upon the very ledges they had recently vacated, to disappear finally over the great precipice, whence arose the tumultuous roar of the augmenting avalanche.

When we had recovered our equilibrium after such a narrow escape, we scrambled steadily upwards and foregathered on the summit. The view was somewhat spoiled by the clouds, which increased rapidly with the warmth of the morning sun. Now and again the peak of the Matterhorn thrust its spear-like tip through the vapour, and even more impressive seemed the snowy peaks of Mont Collon and the Pigne d'Arolla when disclosed to our appreciative gaze.

During the descent, which was varied and shortened on the lower rocks by climbing down direct to the glacier, we were able to "lay out" a course for the Col d'Hérens. A fine view of this well-marked depression between the Dent Blanche and the Dent d'Hérens was obtained, and it seemed impossible to miss the way despite the gathering clouds. When we had fairly embarked on the vast, trackless snowfield, the mist gradually settled down. The atmosphere was perfectly still and the dense white mantle at last enwrapped us in its insidious embrace. As we trudged noiselessly amidst this mysterious region of alabaster whiteness, our world curtailed to the limit of four or five yards, where only the beautifully moulded curves of wind-swept snow soothed the vision, a strange contentment absorbed us.

The easy angle of descent made muscular effort almost imperceptible; every step was delightful; truly we seemed to be

> "Afoot with the silent gods: Upheld lightly on the wings of the morning."

But the awakening came soon and rudely. A startled cry of "Look out!" broke the spell, and we found ourselves suddenly amongst crevasses



THE DENT D'HÉREAS IS SEEN ABOVE THE MIST ON THE LEFT, THE HIGHEST FOINT OF THE DENTS DES BOUQUETINS APPEARS ON THE RIGHT MORNING MIST NEAR THE COL D'HÊRENS

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which were dangerously masked with drooping eaves of snow. These were not in the programme arranged on the Aiguille; moreover, the lay of the ice was very puzzling. There was an immediate call for the compass, but all in vain. Pockets were emptied, but it could not be found, and for the very good reason that, as we learnt later, it had been left behind at the Bertol Hut.

It was finally decided to turn back in our steps, and, after clearing the crevasses, climb upwards. At length something in the aspect of the outlook through the slightly thinner fog on the right suggested the proximity of steep slopes. Our leader shouted, and we all joined in the effort to raise an echo. Strange to say, this came from the right hand instead of the left, as should have been the case. But, strangest of all, a human call was heard close behind us, and the sound of excited voices came out of the dense mist. In a few minutes a party of Germans with two Tyrolese guides put in an appearance. It seemed that they were bound for Arolla from Zermatt, and had become hopelessly lost after leaving the Col d'Hérens. A short while previously they had been relieved to strike our footsteps and follow them up, as they thought, to the Col de Bertol. Truly it was a case of the blind leading the blind. Anyhow, it seemed pretty certain that we had described almost a complete circle in the bewildering fog, and were, as far as we could tell, now close under the Aiguille de la Za once more. The porter seemed absolutely certain of finding the Col de Bertol; so, as he

appeared unhappy as to the future, we parted with him and let him return home with the other party. Our course was now quite simple.

Bidding an enthusiastic auf wiedersehen to our newly found friends, we followed their footsteps: they led circuitously but unerringly to the Col d'Hérens and Zermattwards. On the way down the upper Stock Glacier we suddenly emerged from the clouds. There we stood, almost dazed for an instant, in the grandest gateway of the greatest of all the Alps. The tooth-like arête of the Dent Blanche reared itself wildly upwards on the left, whilst on the right the ice-draped cliffs of the Dent d'Hérens glittering in the slanting rays of the afternoon sun almost but not quite eclipsed the gigantic magnificence of the western precipice of the Matterhorn. Below lay the rugged wastes of the Zmutt Glacier with the pleasing tints of the lower valley beyond, whilst behind and up above us, in sombre contrast, the dark, gloomy tentacles of the fog-fiend thrust themselves eerily through the snowy portals of the Col, as though loath to part with their victims.

Then we rattled helter-skelter down the slopes past the Stockje and on to the temper-trying moraines of the Zmutt Glacier. Two hours later the dark pine woods below the Staffel Alp harbingered the coming night; and as we approached Zermatt, evening seemed slowly to rise up and meet us. Through the plaintive pink and golden glow of sunset a pervasive silver veil of moonlight gradually swept over the valley. Beauteous as

was the scene, the sight, at last, of the Monte Rosa Hotel, and erstwhile the sound of the gong, appealed more forcibly to tired and hungry humanity.

The following morning, the view from the bedroom windows embraced only a mist-swathed valley. We appreciated and, in this case, approved the fickleness of Alpine weather; after the tiring work of the previous day, we were ready for a day of rest. At sunset the prospects brightened; our old friend of a previous holiday, the Matterhorn, stood out sharp and clear in an almost cloudless evening sky. Accordingly, we made arrangements to tackle next day one of the most difficult rockclimbs in the district, the Riffelhorn by the famous Matterhorn Couloir. Much snow had fallen on the upper rocks, and the guides smiled negatively when we suggested that one of them should join us. They looked on our task as hopeless. Their discouragement made us all the keener for the fray, and a somewhat wide experience of difficult rock-peaks under bad conditions made us hopeful.

Early next morning Zermatt was far below; we were busy threading the intricacies of the great ice-fall of the Gorner Glacier, which afforded the most interesting approach to the foot of the couloir. The shattered ice was twisted and riven into a maze-like system of crevasses, where the glacier pushed itself through a gorge between the peaks and over a small precipice. Now we were down in the depths of some yawning crevasse, and anon clinging to its slippery slope, or crawling carefully across a frozen snow-bridge that spanned the blue-black depths of some icy gulf. The Riffelhorn towered over our heads four times the height of St. Paul's, and a vertical rift in the huge precipice split the peak practically from base to summit. This was unmistakably our route, and we soon fell, or rather rose, to work in real earnest.

The climbing was more difficult than that usually encountered in the Alps; hand- and footholds were hard to find, and in some places the rocks overhung. One section about two-thirds of the way up is indelibly fixed in my memory. The bed of the couloir had become so steep that we could scarcely find holding room in its recesses, and a great bulge of overhanging rock just above us made it necessary either to leave the friendly crack and climb the giddy, exposed precipice on the left, or beat a retreat. I well remember pushing carefully out on to that almost holdless steep, and crawling like a fly on a window-pane-if a companion's homely simile may be pardoned-up the huge, firm rocks. These favourable conditions altered 50 feet higher, and I found myself confronted by a smooth, impossible stretch about 12 feet high. Defeat seemed certain, but my second boldly offered to come up to me and hoist me to where hand-holds could be gained.

Then followed some exciting moments. Fortunately my human footstool was not weak in the head; but hobnailed climbing-boots are stubborn facts on the hardest of heads, and it may truthfully be said they leave a good impression behind them. To add to the sport, a sudden snow-squall enveloped

us, but it had at least the merit of blotting out the thousand-foot drop to the surface of the Gorner Glacier away below. At last I was able to grasp the firm holds and swing up to good ledges which led back to the couloir above all serious difficulty. Aided by a slight assistance from the rope, the others scrambled up brilliantly. The ascent was completed in quick time, for near the summit the storm cleared and we had a splendid climb up the interesting rocks which formed the final section. After a halt to enjoy the glorious prospect, with Monte Rosa and the Matterhorn dominating all in magnificence, we scampered down the comparatively easy side of the mountain, and reached Zermatt in time to conform to the laws of dinner-table respectability.

Settled weather then ensued for many days. Our best climbs were up the Gabelhorn and the Rothhorn. The latter peak was our final expedition from Zermatt, and it nearly proved to be the finale in another sense. We had with us, to carry our camera, a youthful porter, who seemed to entertain an utter disregard for the value of human life. At the outset he surprised us by refusing to be roped to the rest of the party. It was impossible to take his refusal seriously, for to look upon his healthy, perpetually grinning face was a continual feast of humour. Even when he disappeared bodily in a snow-hidden crevasse, he was able to call jocularly for café au lait, which was the name we had given to our brandy flask; and after lowering our rope, we hauled him out of his dangerous dilemma

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still smiling. However, after this he was more amenable to discipline, and came on the rope. All went well until we were descending the fairly steep snow-slope leading to the lower rocks above the Trift Glacier.

Here, before we realized the danger, our porter took a mad jump on to the slope, and set off glissading downwards. Being roped, we had perforce to follow. All travelled gloriously for some distance, but suddenly an icy section intervened, and the slope steepened. Then the porter, who was leading the wild rush, lost his balance, and went flying downwards in a confused heap. Necessarily we all followed suit most ignominiously, and would doubtless have accompanied the good-natured one down a thousand-foot precipice to the glacier, had not some softer snow fortunately intervened, where the amateurs braked the party by means of their ice-axes. There we stopped and gazed gaspingly below. Another fifty feet and nothing could have saved us. We should have shared the same fate as a German climber and his two guides who perished there a few years previously. When they attempted to arrest their descent at the point where the slope steepened so surprisingly, they found the snow lying loosely on the ice. The whole mass slid away along with its human freight, flew wildly out over the edge of the abyss, and finally crashed down to the Trift Glacier. Several lives have been lost on that slope, which looks so harmless from above; and quite recently, despite the notoriety of the place, a party of Englishmen repeated our

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narrow escape. However, save for a few bruises we were no worse, but only the wiser for the adventure; and even our Zermatt friend behaved himself reasonably during the rest of the descent.

On several occasions we had been rewarded with wonderful summit views. The shapely array of Oberland peaks seen so invitingly across the Rhone valley had induced us to finish the holiday by taking more or less of a bee-line across the range to Grindelwald. Thus in the early morning of the day after the Rothhorn escapade our *au revoirs* were said at Zermatt. Again was seen that wonderful farewell glimpse of the Matterhorn as the fussy little locomotive whirled us around that rocky corner down into the leafy recesses of the Vispthal.

Later on, the valley opened out, and we realized that mountain majesty as seen from the comparative comfort of a railway train has at least some advantages; especially so when we bore in mind, and in body also, sore recollections of yesterday's battering on the icy breast of the Rothhorn.

The journey to Visp and thence onwards by Brieg and Viesch to the Eggischhorn requires scant mention. The somewhat toilsome grind up the steep path from Viesch to the hotel was enlivened by an encounter with a large "caravanserai" of English tourists, evidently some conducted touring party, whose antics and appearance savoured vividly of Hampstead Heath on Bank Holiday. Just above the corner where we turned from the track to take the short cut upward by the telegraph poles, they were desecrating the glorious surroundings by

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bawling blatantly the latest music-hall horrors. We did not smile or speak as we passed up the side path, and with our rock-riven clothes and sunscarred faces they had no idea of our species or nationality. But we understood their scathing remarks! Many continental climbers would have done so as well. Our appearance and bodily structure were harshly criticised. They mistook us for Frenchmen, and a companion of thin, tall proportions attracted their attention. His nether garments were decidedly scanty in parts, and we kept in close order for the sake of respectability; but it was of no avail. Thus, besides other enormities, our friend was greeted as "Bony-part"; and as we mounted higher, the jingle they sang of "Bony, Bony-part crossing the Alps," floated upwards through the sweet-scented pine woods. It is scarcely surprising that some of our countrymen are not "liked abroad."

At the Eggischhorn the weather turned decidedly doubtful, but after spending a day in the vicinity of the hotel, the prospects improved, and the following afternoon saw us well on the way up the Great Aletsch Glacier *en route* for the Concordia Hut. There our slumbers and peace of mind were disturbed by the arrival of a large party of guides. They were searching for a young Frenchman, who had set off alone from Grindelwald some days previously with the intention of crossing the Mönchjoch to the Concordia. He had persisted in the mad project despite the advice of guides and everybody concerned; he

jokingly refused any help, and said he would follow the footsteps of a party who had crossed the passes the day previously. Nothing was heard of him, and his friends becoming anxious, the search party of guides was sent out. They skilfully followed his footsteps, and at last reached a place where he had attempted to shorten the route. The footprints were tracked to the edge of a crevasse which was partially covered with a bridge of snow. Here the traces ceased. Next day they would recover his body. This was the sad story we heard that night in the Concordia Hut from the chief of the guides, a bearded, browned old Oberlander with kindly features, that, like his native mountains, were furrowed and seamed with the turmoil of the years and stormy strife thereof. A glance around the circle revealed the faces of many famous veterans. As they crouched over the glowing embers of the dying fire, with the red light flickering in the dark recesses of the hut, the effect was strangely Rembrandtesque. Few words were spoken. These silent men of the mountains cared little for their present work; yet never a reproach was uttered. Years of rescue and recovery, the fight with sudden dangers and contact with death, had made these retainers of the beautiful but terribly treacherous Jungfrau recognize the futility of that advice which comes too late.

Though, eventually, a comparatively merry chorus of sonorous snorings filled the hut, the amateurs wooed the gentle Morpheus ineffectually; and as the porter seemed anxious to get away early,

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we made a start shortly after midnight. It was a perfect night—

"The countless happy stars stood silent, watching In the deepening blue."

Such things as search parties and their causes were soon out of mind-left far below amidst those gloomy rocks and nocturnal music of "Discordia." We mounted steadily up the Jungfraufirn; in front, the guiding northern star; behind, the crescent moon slowly sinking to the distant horizon across the region of glacier and peak. Gradually the huge, dark mass of the Jungfrau seemed to draw downwards, and enwrap us in its mysterious shadow; but the knowledge of past friendship remained, and we feared not for our reception, or the finding of the way into the "sanctuary of the snows." The pearly greyness of dawn made our lanterns disappear when the wide circle to the right was made across the flowing white skirts of the "Maiden," whose frosted head glistened proudly in the blush of coming day. A glimpse of the final slope above the Roththal Sattel recalled the alarming experience of some friends thereon.

Sometimes the ascent is simplified by layers of firm snow, but at others the crest is simply a wall of hard ice, and an icy staircase has to be cut in the "intractable steep." On such an occasion a friend was making the ascent with a party of amateurs, and a porter to whom they had innocently given the charge of the eatables and drinkables. My friend was last man on the rope, and when they

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were all dangerously placed, he noticed the porter swaying in his steps and attempting to draw something from his pocket. The sight of the cognac bottle was a tremendous surprise, and he remonstrated vociferously with the porter. Instantly the tipsy professional turned round in his steps, stared leeringly down at his mentor, and, with a mighty heave on the rope, dragged my friend from his holds and dangled him painfully over the icy abyss, shouting meanwhile, in raucous tones, "Courage, monsieur; prenez courage." Those above immediately realized the terrible state of affairs, and the porter was quickly secured by the rope and his victim placed in a safe position. I will draw a curtain over the scene that followed after the descent to the Roththal Sattel.

Ere we had crossed by the Jungfrau to the Ober Mönchjoch, the slanting rays of the rising sun flung long purple shadows athwart the vast undefiled snowfields. Thus early in the year evidences of human handiwork, or rather footwork, were indiscernible; the crowds of worshippers still hugged the feet of the Jungfrau; her haughty crest was yet untainted by the embrace of men.

The uncompromising aloofness of her northeastern shoulder attracted attention; the repulsive, buttressed bulwarks, with their cruel rocky tips fringed with ice, seemed the embodiment of inaccessibility. This side of the Jungfrau has only once been conquered; a daring Englishman was responsible for the desperate undertaking.

The towering form of the Mönch soon diverted our notice; so loftily and almost insolently superior did he seem, that we accepted the challenge unanimously. The ascent began on the easy rocks above the Ober Mönchjoch. These soon led up to his frozen breast, where, after an hour's hard work, the ice-axe at last beat him to submission, and we strode "gingerly" along the corniced ridge to the tapering summit above the northerly ice-draped precipice. Far down, 10,000 feet below, the valley of Grindelwald appeared at intervals through the meandering morning mist which hid the Scheidegg and its ugly evidences of civilization. All round the prospect was enthralling, and we spent an hour of glorious ease poring over the infinite void, the whiles a more finite void was filled from the rücksack. Then down and down we went, very slowly and deliberately at first, for the sight of some tiny black specks far away below on the Jungfraufirn acted as a warning. It was the search party advancing to their work of recovery.

Once on the Mönchjoch, the perfect condition of the snow, hardened by the northerly wind which now sung loud amongst the rocks overhead, made quick progress unavoidable. Soon the Bergli Hut was within hail, but its lonely, snowed-up aspect scarcely favoured a halt. Four hours later the varied peeps at Grindelwald through the shadowy pines below the Bäregg seemed delightfully soothing after the sterner glories of the heights. Even the music of the swift-flowing Lütschine compared

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favourably with the "song of the mountain wind solemn and loud," and the uphill tramp to the hotel was a real joy after hours of knee-racking descent. That evening, with holidays over, we found comfort in Burke's judicious words : "Good company, lively conversations, and the endearments of friendship fill the mind with great pleasure; a temporary solitude, on the other hand, is itself agreeable."

CHAPTER VI

"THE MOUNTAINS SPEAK"

"I have often experienced this sensation among mountains. . . In their company the human hive is forgotten, and under the sky, which is their tent, one imagines oneself listening to the speechless communion of the old monsters, the world's immutable possessors and eternal rulers." HENRI TAINE

SUMMER was coming in the high Alpine valleys. The tiny buds on the pine trees were peeping forth and flooding the wooded slopes with a soft velvety sheen of emerald hue.

Grindelwald was deserted. The tinkle of sleighbells, the ring of the skate, and the dull roar of the curling-stone were heard no more in that mountainland. The season of moonlight flirtation, tobogganrun $t \hat{e} t e - \hat{a} - t \hat{e} t e$, and social extravagance had passed, for the match-making matrons had carried off their *jungfraus*, leaving the genuine attraction, the great, white, snow-wreathed "Maiden," in haughty and undisputed possession.

Day by day the warm air of summer floated further and further upwards, penetrating the very vitals of those hoary-headed monarchs who hold sway in the heights of the Oberland. Already the old "Ogre" felt the warmth about his feet. At last he roused him from his winter's sleep, and the very





A STORMY SUNSET ON THE EIGER-FROM THE SCHWARZEGG HUT

suddenness of it all sent a tremendous avalanche thundering valleyward off his sunny breast, where soft Italian zephyrs reached him from afar, and made thick winter garments unnecessary. The terrific noise of his awakening was heard by all his neighbours, who crouch like mighty monsters around the vast region of the Ewig Schnee Feld the Field of Everlasting Snow. Even the lofty Finsteraarhorn — the Black Eagle Peak — heard the call; small dark rocks began to push their jagged crests through the snowy mantle, and as he thrust his cruel, black beak into the ethereal blue, an answering avalanche crashed downwards with such a mighty roar that the peasants beyond the Grimsel feared for their lives.

Next day the graceful form of the Jungfrau was dotted here and there with fleecy white clouds; the snow was sliding smoothly off her milder slopes, and her gentle voice sounded soft yet petulant, like a summer gale through the pine trees.

"Ah!" said the Ogre—or the Eiger, as some call him—to himself, "she's always first to speak. These ladies nowadays will have both first and last word."

"You ill-named old monster, what made you rouse me so early this year? Don't you know that the young Englishmen, who are always first to woo me, never come until June? I am not in fit condition for any life-respecting climber to come near me until then."

"Hush — sh! sweet-tempered 'Maiden,' or you'll wake the disagreeable old Mönch, despite his thick head of snow," said the Ogre sarcastically. "You need not make fun of my poor name, for though the geologists say I have many faults, I'm not at all a bad fellow. Though they do stick their ugly iron rails into my internals and smear my feet with hotels and other mundane abominations, I have scarcely killed anybody. It's different with you. You've broken more hearts and necks than I care to think about—in fact, English people say you are a bad, deceptive, and dangerous mountain."

This severe retort wakened the Jungfrau completely, and her ill-temper vanished like the morning mists; for she knew it was no good squabbling with the Ogre, who had swallowed up the railway, and was doing his very best to absorb all its capital before it could even touch herself.

"Ah, well!" she said sweetly, "we know each other's weaknesses too well to quarrel about such things. Isn't this sunshine on the rocks glorious? But these early summer days always make me think of my coming visitors and stir up old memories. In fact, I have scarcely recovered from that sad affair of the three Germans who perished last autumn on my Roththal Ridge. They were all experienced mountaineers, and able to climb without guides. I knew them well by sight, for a few days previously they had jodelled to me victoriously from the Finsteraarhorn, and discussed my superior beauties even when sitting on the old Ogre himself.

"It was a beautiful morning when they left the Roththal Hut, but at daybreak, from my loftier

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position I was able to perceive a storm brewing amongst the Pennines. The cruel peak of the Matterhorn was flinging great masses of vapour across at the Weisshorn, and ere long a fierce gale swept dense clouds over my southern shoulder.

"The three climbers were so engaged with the difficulties of the rocks, which were somewhat iceglazed, that the storm caught them with mighty suddenness. Unfortunate was their refusal to be beaten back, though all my hand-holds were hidden with the quickly-falling snow. At the last difficult rocks below the easy slope which leads up to my shoulder, they became hopelessly lost, and I noticed that one of the party was showing unmistakable signs of collapse.

"They had reached a ledge leading into the narrow couloir where a fixed rope gives the only means of exit to the easier slope above. But alas! they knew nothing of this rope, and the position became desperate. To return through such a storm with an exhausted comrade was practically impossible. This they all realized ; and though the rapidlyfailing climber begged the others to leave him behind and save themselves, which they might have done, like true men they refused. 'All or none!' they cried, with Teutonic curtness. Then I turned away, for every moment I expected them to be swept off the rocks by the merciless gale and flung down the terrible precipice. But no ! for two long hours they fought death in its most dreadful form. At last even the strong men could go no further. A ledge only a few inches wide was seen on the

leeward side of the ridge, and the temptation to rest proved too strong. The leader of the party tied the rope around a knob of rock and then coiled it around himself and his friends. Then I knew they were doomed, for the awful cold wrapped them insidiously in the embrace of death, and snow and ice covered them with a white shroud.

"Next morning the sun shone, but they answered not to the call of life.

"Three days later the guides came, and at last found the bodies of the brave men. A few words were found scrawled on a piece of paper, which the guides carried reverently to the lone watchers far These were indeed memorable men." below.

Then the Ogre saw a cloud settle on the head of the Jungfrau as though to hide her sorrow; but when he looked across at her later, she was bathed in smiles of sunshine. In fact, she laughed so much that a great curtain of snow swept off her back on to the Guggi Glacier and disturbed the slumbers of the Mönch, who always smiles whatever happens. Still, he did his best to look serious and reprove the "Maiden" for her frivolity.

She answered: "I am amusing myself with thoughts of the stout old English gentleman who paid me a visit not so very long ago. He had four guides, and they earned every penny of their tariff on the last 1500 feet. Two of them pulled the old man in front, and the others pushed him from behind at every step. How are the mighty fallen! On the top I overheard the remark that the pseudomountaineer was making his first attempt on a big

peak, and this had only been done because a youthful widow in Grindelwald, with whom he wished to seem younger than he was in reality, had shown signs of neglecting his advances in favour of those of a well-known young climber who visited me the same day.

"Would that the lady in Grindelwald could have seen her old admirer's agony on the descent! The altitude had caused a severe internal disturbance; the hot sun, reflected off the snow, played havoc with his complexion; and the strain of the rope around his liberal waist seemed most painful.

"The guides cut steps in me as big as young crevasses at certain intervals; and though he persisted in sitting in these, uttering groans of dismay and fright meanwhile, they urged their long-suffering charge quickly downwards. Lower down he grew so weary, that at each of these resting-places he begged piteously to be left there to die in lonely grief. But the guides only smiled to themselves; those behind pushed him out of his icy seat, whilst those in front and below pulled with the rope to steady him into the next step. At first he shrieked when suspended over the icy abyss, but soon apathy supervened. The guides persevered like Spartans, and at last they lowered him over the bergschrund, and suggested refreshment on the comparatively harmless-looking slope below it.

"Whilst this was in progress, their charge, who was suffering severe pains, unloosed the rope from his tender waist, and before they realized what had happened, the hero of the occasion went sliding off

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down the slope which leads to the Jungfraufirn. With a shout the guides dashed after him; but he had too long a start. The speed grew astounding, and at last the aged one realized his danger, for there were crevasses below. Then in a frenzy he stuck his great horny finger-nails into my tender snow-wreathed bosom, and his nailed boots made horrible scratches yards and yards in length. But the pain was soon past. Providence smiled upon him, and he went crashing into some banks of soft powdery snow several yards from a crevasse. Then he lay still for some seconds, and I feared for the worst. Ere long he began to speak in that straightforward and rude manner adopted by Englishmen when they are not having things all their own way, and then I knew that all was well.

"There was a great reception in Grindelwald that evening. Next Christmas—so some stormdriven birds of passage told me—he lectured in England on 'How I conquered the Jungfrau.' Did he mean the other *frau*—the widow?"

Now this story amused the three Oberland giants greatly, and their hilarity annoyed that solemn sentinel of Grindelwald, the Storm Peak, or, as the maps call him, the Wetterhorn; he flew one of his skurrying clouds across as a hint that he still kept charge of their morals, at least as far as the weather was concerned.

This made them more serious, for they were afraid of the Storm Peak; and by and by he said to them: "Mountains who see so much of the frailty of human life should never joke about those

who brave their perils. The recollections of my many tragedies make me treat life more seriously. It has been said that I am the worst peak in the Alps, and of late years this has been too true, though I am not altogether to blame. They have called me the Ladies' Peak, and this familiarity has bred that contempt which conduces to arrant carelessness, rashness, and disregard of all my warnings.

"The August of 1902 was the most terrifying month I remember. It was only two days after an Englishman and a guide had been swept to their doom by an avalanche in my Great Couloir that the most terrifying calamity that has ever happened in the Oberland occurred. Two of our own guides, Bohren and Bravand, with two Englishmen, the brothers Fearon, set out to scale my peak after a wild night spent at the hut amidst thunderstorm and bad weather. Despite this, they started upwards in the early morning during a temporary lull in the storm. They struggled bravely with the adverse conditions, and actually reached the summit. The atmosphere was laden with electricity, and just as they were enjoying the pleasures of success, a blinding flash of lightning struck me and the ill-fated climbers at the same moment. It is best not to describe what followed. My beautiful corniced crest was a ghastly scene of death and destruction.

"Next day a search-party reached my summit, and found a single ice-axe stuck in the snow, torn and rent with the lightning. For forty hours this was all the discovered remains of the stricken climbers, but then the bodies of Robert Fearon and Bravand were found roped together and caught by a big rock, which held them over the great precipice above Grindelwald. For over a month their comrades lay hidden under deep snow on my farther side. They were found by some of Bohren's relations, whose search almost day and night for these many weary weeks in all weathers was wonderful and almost unnerving to watch. Everybody gave a sigh of relief when their awful task was completed, for on several occasions another catastrophe was only averted by the intervention of Providence.

"Who shall blame me for such calamities? Surely even 'the Ladies' Peak' should be left alone under such conditions; yet season after season similar deeds are done.

"In fact, early in the next year I was the victim of one of the maddest escapades possible. A young English lady made one of the first ascents, and innocently left a silken handkerchief fluttering in the breeze which helps to cool my fevered head in these exciting times. It was fixed to a short stick, and attracted the attention of some Swiss workmen in Grindelwald, who were gazing at me through an hotel telescope. A wager was made forthwith by one of them that he would bring down the trophy single-handed. He won the wager, but lost his life in the winning. Common sense prevailed to the extent of his taking a companion as inexperienced as himself, and Fortune smiled on them until they almost reached the foot of the Great Couloir on their return. There the successful gambler took off the rope, and said he would glissade down to the glacier, though his friend urged him to refrain. Alas! it was useless. At express speed he sped downwards until suddenly he saw the end of the Couloir overhanging nothingness, and the glacier some hundreds of feet below. It was too late. With a shriek of warning to his friend, he dashed outwards into space and eternity. His friend descended safely by the ordinary way down the rocks, and next day helped to recover the remains. In his right hand the unfortunate victim of his own folly still clutched the handkerchief : he bore it down to Grindelwald."

Then the Storm Peak seemed to be thinking of old times, and ere long continued: "I have many somewhat similar tragedies to my discredit; my death-roll includes many famous names. There is Penhall, who, though he had made a new route up the Matterhorn, fell a victim to my avalanches and—_"

"Peace! peace! vain boaster," cried the Schreckhorn, the Terror Peak, from the other side of the glacier valley. "Everybody knows my character, yet I never boast about it. But your days are numbered. Don't you know that the new cable railway climbs apace, and ere long you are to be decorated with the inevitable summit hotel? Thus your degradation, harmlessness, and captivity will be advertised throughout the world; the situation will be described as dry and bracing, the sanitation perfect, and the cuisine naturally of the highest order. There will be penny-in-the-slot machines on your hotel verandah for the production of real, live avalanches; air-ships will make it a regular stopping-place; and the daily programme will conclude with a grand illumination of the surrounding mountains."

This was enough to make even the Storm Peak silent, and he shuddered until great rocks rolled off his shoulder and crashed down thousands of feet, even to the pastures of the Great Scheidegg.

Then the Terror Peak said : "I am too ashamed of my own tragedies to speak of them, but, by reason of my height and commanding position, I have seen many strange and dreadful sights. I also have little amusements sometimes. Most mountaineers are afraid of me simply because I have been called the Terror Peak. Somebody once said, 'Give a dog a bad name and hang him.' The same thing applies to mountains, though there are difficulties in the way of hanging us; anyhow, rest assured that if the attempt were made, the Terror Peak would do his share of execution.

"I have an evil reputation for throwing stones and snowballs, especially down my lower couloir, and it is enough to make me split my glaciers with laughter when I see parties running helter-skelter down the slopes to get out of range, casting, meanwhile, horrible glances of terror and fright back over their shoulders. Then the rope entangles their legs, and down they all go in a heap, rolling and kicking, to the bottom of the slope. But I take no notice of them; not even a pebble falls;

and when all is over they crawl out of the soft snow, to look ashamed of themselves and ridiculous withal.

"All the same, on a warm afternoon my lower couloir is dangerous. Last summer an American climber, who was making the descent, fairly took my breath away, and frightened his guides, when he took off the rope and proceeded to photograph me from the middle of the slope. He refused to listen to the advice of the guides, and as a protest they scrambled out on to the rocks at the side. Then, by way of a joke, I sent down a small snow avalanche on the rash photographer, and it carried him spluttering and writhing to the level plateau below. Presently he gathered up the fragments of himself and his camera, of both of which he was enormously proud. A few days later I heard he was boasting of his performance down in Grindelwald, and even claiming that the camera was the most wonderful one in the world, for of its own accord it had photographed him during the mad rush downwards in the clutches of the avalanche.

"But travellers are not always so fortunate. The loss of two brothers who ventured on the crevassed glacier below the Bergli Hut without guides seems but as yesterday. It was early in the season, and the biggest crevasses were masked with newly-fallen snow. I shuddered to see their party marching gaily upwards over the hidden death-traps, until eventually Providence was tempted too far, and one of the brothers disappeared suddenly through an unsuspected snow-bridge. His

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comrade was almost pulled into the icy chasm at the same time. Indeed, perchance it had been better if he had. Despite his great strength, he was unable to haul his brother back to safety. The situation was terrible. Groans came from below, and his powerful muscles began to yield to the strain as he felt himself being slowly dragged down the icy slope. I expected every moment to see him cut the rope, but with brave determination he held firmly once more, and called over and over again for help.

"He gazed wildly around, but whence could help come in those vast solitudes? Then I almost shrieked with excitement, for on the slopes above the hut I saw a party of climbers returning from the Jungfrau. Alas, too late! When I looked again, the brave, unselfish brother had vanished. A few hours later the party from the Jungfrau saw the traces in the trampled snow, and attempted the rescue. Lifeless bodies were their only reward. Thus, once more, was demonstrated the folly of those mountaineers who persist in going alone or in parties only of two where snow-covered crevasses are liable to occur.

"It is not so many years since that amiablelooking old Mönch sliced off a great mass of his upper cornice whilst an unwary party was passing over it. I see he even now grows pale at the thought of the dreadful results, or—is it a snowstorm covering his hoary old head?"

Then the Schreckhorn looked round on the surrounding peaks, and saw that the north wind had

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returned with a sudden blast, whirling dense snowclouds everywhither. Ere long he himself looked more than pale; his beautiful black rocks, of which he is so proud, became ermine-coated, hidden in fog-crystals and snow-wreaths of wondrous design.

Then the giants of the Alps fell asleep once more, for in reality it was only All Fools' Day. Many weeks of storm and stress must pass ere the click of the ice-axe on the rocks and the crunch of the nailed boot on the glacier ice were heard again in that lonely mountain land.

CHAPTER VII

PIONEER CLIMBS ON THE PILLAR ROCK

"Where Nature seems to sit alone Majestic on a craggy throne."

JOSEPH WARTON

THE familiar saying, "Everything comes to him who waits," has little of practical promise or adaptation for the mountaineer. The man who lingers under a sun-illumined hanging glacier, or stays to rhapsodize on the natural beauties of some stupendous couloir. where falling stones do congregate, will be prone to prove the truth of the saying in an unpleasant manner. One of the best or worst known places in Cumberland, or even in Britain, for stone falls is that remarkable rift between the Pillar Rock and the Shamrock known as Walker's Gully. Yet I think the notoriety is scarcely deserved. It seems to have arisen from the natural structure of the place and the fact that many years ago a party of climbers were disturbed when strolling leisurely across the screes below the gully. Suddenly a crash was heard, and a big flat rock flung into view overhead. It ricochetted against the huge, clean-

cut, right wall of the gully, and, shattered into small fragments, came whizzing down upon the astonished party. The wily leader hid his head, ostrich-like, in a hole under a rock; a companion vainly attempted to follow his example, and almost scalped himself in the attempt; another, in the excitement of the moment, made a wild rush down the big screes, with painful results from the ensuing tumble; the last member of the party, a lady, stood still, and came off best of all, though a sharp fragment rent her climbing - skirt. The only one to suffer serious harm was the climber who ran down the screes; an injured knee bids fair to remain a perpetual reminder of Walker's Gully.

The funnel-like structure of the Pillar Mountain above the well-known gully certainly tends to conduct any detritus down its interior. Undoubtedly the place should be carefully avoided when other parties are on the mountain above. The upper reaches of the great cleft, where huge boulders seem to form a sort of impending, titanic staircase, are almost free from danger, because the impetus of falling stones usually projects them far out into mid-air, to fall clear on the lower section of the gully. One of the spectators who watched the tourist from whom the gully gets its name, said that the ill-fated victim swept with such a fearful velocity down the hard, upper snow that he was projected quite 50 feet into mid-air from the overhanging chock-stone. As is now probably well known, this was not a climbing accident. It has served as an effective and perpetual warning that at Easter-time the Pillar Mountain is a veritable death-trap to ordinary tourists, who come clad in light un-nailed boots, and otherwise unequipped for mountain craft. A slip on the upper icy snowslope will almost certainly end like the catastrophe of 1883.

To revert to the waiting question, the longsuffering climber sometimes receives his reward. The Christmas and New Year holidays of 1898 were wetter than is usual at this season of the year in Wastdale, which is saying much. For three whole weeks we had waited for a day of less wind, snow, sleet, or rain to permit us to prove the impregnability or otherwise of Walker's Gully. The Christmas "waits" had brought little reward except more concentrated moisture, and a pair of well-aimed mountain boots from the open bedroom window of a well-known climber, who resented our midnight, musical efforts. Yet the many days of waiting were well spent. Early in January we visited the Pillar Rock, and found that the slope of soft snow above Walker's Gully stayed all tumbling fragments and effectively destroyed the falling-stone bogie. Held on a rope from above, my companion peeped over the famous upper obstacle which had defeated so many experts. Little could evidently be seen except a near foreground of icy overhanging rock, and mist-filled abyss far below. The opinion was that descent would have no educative value under such conditions. However, my companion saw enough to raise hopes of a successful ascent, but a third member of the party would be

required. After deciding to wait a few more days for somebody, as well as the clouds, to "turn up," we climbed into the recesses of the Great Chimney, hoping thus to gain the top of the Pillar Rock. On the first pitch, bulges of intractable, blue-black ice shattered our hopes and the head of an ice-axe made in England.

Whilst descending from the impasse, our attention was diverted to the fine southerly wall of the Great Chimney, which we knew rose straight and steep to the top of the Rock. This wall has been named the Curtain. We knew of no record of a previous ascent, and though ice and snow masked the rocks insidiously, there seemed a chance of success if the jagged crest of the ridge could be attained. Some frozen slabs up which we climbed in a slanting direction to the left soon called for attention, and the sight of "simply mist and nothing more" below made the thoughts of a slip unpleasant. One small slab, just before we emerged on the crest of the Curtain, is indelibly fixed in my memory. It sloped downwards over the depths of the Great Chimney, and the only vestige of hand-hold available on its snow- and iceglazed surface was a small rock which jutted out near the centre of the slab. It looked suspiciously like a loose stone held in situ by the frost, and this it proved to be. Advance seemed impossible. Belay there was none. I stood on a steeply sloping face, clinging with one half-frozen hand to a small crack, and with the other holding the rope, whilst the leader vainly attempted to persuade himself that the frozen-in rock was safe. Even using this, the place was excessively difficult, and ere long the warmth of my companion's embrace suddenly made his main support move ominously.

Retreat was imperative, so we traversed to a sheltered corner, and shivered whilst Jack Frost helped the attack by re-solidifying the loose rock. He also paid chilling attention to our extremities, so, to prevent frost-bite, as well as to promote the safety of the ensuing passage, we forced a way up a narrow crack to a recess about 20 feet higher, and more or less above the obdurate slab. There, jammed like a human chock-stone, I held the rope whilst Jones eventually tackled the dangerous step. This time he swung quickly and deliberately up, with both hands clutching the frozen rock and feet beating the thin air as though searching for support on the unresponding surface of cloud-filled space. For a moment success and my plucky comrade hung in the balance. Every nerve was alive to the next move. By a skilful turn and heave of the body he managed to land sprawling on the slab, and, with a sigh of relief, I saw his powerful fingers grasp a snowy but satisfactory crevice beyond. He was soon in comparative safety on a ledge as big as a family Bible, and calling out cheerily to me, "Come along, your turn to swarm up for a warm up!" I shall not attempt a description of how these instructions were followed; suffice it to say that the Alpine Club rope proved strong enough to support my twelve stone and that other which

came away in my hands with startling precipitancy. The finish was ignominious.

Despite the unfavourable conditions, the steep crest of the Curtain offered little serious resistance, yet every movement required extreme care. Only one place gave us pause. A perpendicular nose about 12 feet high defied the unaided efforts of the leader; but after clearing the snow from the slanting ledge on the left-hand side, firm footing was secured for the "long-suffering second," who supported the whole weight of the leader whilst he hacked the ice from the ulterior hand-holds. What mattered the scar of the hobnails on tender shoulder-blades when an hour later we scrambled out on to the familiar top of the Rock, flushed with the joy of conquest over a worthy foe, who under the prevailing conditions had fought grimly and gallantly from start to finish? We had also learnt that under the circumstances Walker's Gully was impossible. So, by way of variety, a walk was taken to Keswick and back on ensuing days.

Meanwhile the northerly wind veered to the south-west once more, and on our return to Wastdale by way of the Gable Crag Central Gully the thaw wind whistled over the heights. The waterfalls entered at our necks and bubbled merrily out of our boots; verily 'twas a case of "water, water everywhere." That afternoon we were looked at askance by a spick-and-span party of tourists new to Wastdale and its ways. As we entered the hotel, though no words were

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uttered, their expressive faces recalled Macbeth's lines-

"What are these So wither'd, an l so wild in their attire, That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth, And yet are on't?"

As the water ran out of our draughty garments —for a glissade which finished on Gable screes had left little behind us—a well-known voice was heard in the dining-room. An old and tried friend, Mr. A. E. Field, was soon exchanging greetings with us, and without more ado a compact was made for a mutual assault on Walker's Gully.

The morning of January the 7th was as moist as ever, yet a start was made Pillarwards. As we trudged up Mosedale our eyes dwelt hopelessly on those familiar dripping clouds—

> "Who weep as weep the maidens of the mist, Clinging the necks of the unheeding hills."

But at last our persistent and patient waiting was rewarded. On Looking Stead the rain stopped; the vaporous veil, rent by a northerly breeze, rolled up out of Ennerdale, disclosing many an aged mountain monarch; whilst in the far north, "hoaryheaded old Skiddaw" still wore his "white nightcap," which augured colder conditions up above. Soon the great cliff of the Pillar Rock rose in front, and we wasted no time in the approach. As to the story of the ascent, this may well be left to our leader, who wrote a typically interesting description of the climb, which was unfortunately not available for his well-known book :—

"The precipice was a grand study in black and white, its immense slabs shining black with a thin veneer of ice, and decorated artistically with snow festoons and long, slender icicle tassels. Verily the giant had donned his coat of mail, and meant to do his best to repel our attack; but his preparations were incomplete. A little more ice on the middle obstacle, a little further loosening of a splinter of rock at the top pitch, and we should have been driven back unsuccessful. Maybe he thought us too wise to attempt the climb under such adverse conditions; but we were not, and the mistake spelt his defeat.

"We roped at the foot of the crags, and I started up by the left of the gully. The direct route could have been taken with greater ease, but a solid jet of ice-cold water was shooting straight down the middle, and we preferred to keep dry a while longer. I mounted the wall from ledge to ledge, turning periodically at distances of four or five yards to manipulate the rope for the second man, who in his turn steadied the last man up. It is easier, not to say far more pleasurable, to climb than to describe the process.

"Keeping up the wall for 60 feet, we were then able to traverse along a narrow terrace into the gully, and the hard work began in earnest. Vertically upwards sprang the great cleft, with massive boulders many tons in weight dividing it into separate stories like the rungs of a gigantic ladder. On our heads dripped the water thawing from the upper rocks, uncomfortable at first, but preferable to the vagrant falling stones that haunt the locality in summer-time. There was no drift of snow that might help us up the first few feet of each pitch. The side walls were clothed in wet ice, We wriggled up yard by yard, working closer together now for mutual aid. So long as the gully remained narrow, we were safe, for it was easy to hold in by leaning across from side to side.

"Then came the first overhanging bit at the middle pitch, and while Field braced firmly in the innermost recesses, steadying my rope, the second man balanced himself astride the gully, outstanding on the slenderest of ledges. Then I clambered on to his shoulders to reach the outer edge of the roofing-stone that overhung our course. Its upper surface was steeply sloping, and a jet of water plumping on to its centre radiated out a spray of the icy liquid from which there was no escape. Sharp was the word, for strength and courage languish rapidly under such penetrating influences. But I could find nothing to hang on to, so smoothly lubricated did every hold seem, until an aperture was discovered in the roof through which a loop of rope could be passed from below. This served excellently, and I hastily drew myself up with its aid. The others followed with greater speed, though they could not dodge the waterfall, and we stayed a moment to wring out our coats before continuing the assault.

"If variety is charming, we had charmed lives. Up the great ladder we went, through one obstacle, over the next, and 'chimneying' up between the

third and the great wall, the leader using the shoulders and heads of his companions, their upstretched hands steadying his precarious foot-holds, and their expert advice supporting him all through. And with it all the most sublime views outwards and upwards and downwards of Nature's simple and severe architecture, designed and executed in her grandest style.

"At last we came to the final obstacle, the limit of previous exploration. We had arrived at a little platform deep in the mountain, and three enormous boulders, one on top of the other, overhanging more and more near the top, had to be circumvented. There was no back way behind them; the only possibility was to work up one side wall and climb past them. I flung off my boots and Norfolk jacket, expecting to give the second man a bad time standing on his shoulders at the take-off, and attempted to climb up a narrow fissure in the left wall. Unhappily, it proved to be useless, and we were all supremely uncomfortable when it was discovered that I should have to descend again.

"Next the right wall was tried, and I blessed the previous three months' monotonous training with heavy dumb-bells. The strain on the arms was excessive. Fortunately, there was no running water there, or the cold would have been unendurable. At the worst corner, by hanging on with the right hand, and with the left looping part of my rope through the recess at the side of the boulder, a good grip was improvised. Of natural holds there were none on that smooth icy wall, and the loop was a perfect boon. Even a perfect boon is hard to utilize when hands and toes are benumbed and all one's muscles are racked with prolonged tension. But the loop served its purpose, and after a few more struggles in the crack a ledge was reached from which it was evidently an easy scramble to the head of the gully.

"'Réussi—parfaitement—messieurs—send up my coat and boots.' The gasping message was finished in English to save delay, but I shiveringly waited many minutes in soft snow before the rope could be untied and the articles in question slung up on it. A cherished pair of socks fell out of the coat-pocket as it was hauled over the edge of the top boulder, and took a preliminary clear drop of two or three hundred feet. It gave us quite a shock at the time, for we thought it was a packet of sandwiches.

"Then my companions came up, with an enviable surplus of warmth and energy. We raced up the steep snow and rock that remained above us, and did not halt till we had crossed the fell and descended to our starting-point near the foot of the Pillar Rock. There we sat in a protected corner, and I put my frozen feet into the others' pockets, my dignity into my own, while we ate the crushed remnants of our lunch and discussed the day's excitements. When the grateful diffusion of animal heat had brought sensation to my extremities, and the spare energy of the whole party had spent itself in dragging on my boots, we started off again, and

made our way over the snow-covered fells down to Wastdale."

This was the last important climb made by Owen Glynne Jones, and it will always rank as his most meritorious performance on British rocks. Few leaders would care to claim that there are any others to equal it. Numerous experts had pronounced the great upper pitch impossible, yet, despite the most unfavourable conditions, he discovered and forced a route, and that safely, be it remembered, over the most fearsome-looking pitch in Cumberland. It was the greatest triumph of skilful leadership that I have ever seen.

The West Face of the Pillar Rock presents probably the most imposing precipice in this "climbers' paradise" when seen from the scree slopes on the Ennerdale side. In the year 1900 there seemed scant hope of finding a route up the great cliff direct to the High Man, and the late J. W. Robinson's thrilling story of a fruitless attempt by some noted climbers was distinctly discouraging. Those were the days when we began to realize that practically all the bigger climbs had been discovered and annexed by untiring explorers. It seemed impossible that a chance of a new climb could be left by which young aspirants might rise to the select circle of pioneering Pillarites. The hopeless appearance of the West Face led my brother and myself to turn our attention to the north-west side of the rock. Again we were disappointed, but in another manner. A letter of inquiry sent to Mr.

W. P. Haskett-Smith, the well-known authority on the Pillar Rock, brought in reply a post card showing a route he had already made from this direction. Hope was shattered. It seemed that nothing would be left for local climbers. We felt something like the London urchin who was watching a "pal" devouring an apple. "Leave us a suck at the core!" said the hungry looker-on anxiously. "There ain't going to be no core!" came the crushing retort.

Thus our only chance of a "core" was the West Face of the Rock. Early in the October of 1900 a party of four of us stood on the westerly screes inspecting the impressive precipice in front, and disrespecting a fierce storm which was brewing behind and to seawards. The grandeur and steepness of the crags was remarkable. For 400 feet or so, huge perpendicular slabs of porphyritic rock, which have stood the stress of weather for ages, rose to the summit, with narrow cracks and chimneys splitting the smooth-looking face and rising temptingly. But woe betide the unlucky climber who would attempt the conquest without some plan of attack, for most of these chimneys finished abruptly in their upper portions with impossible, overhanging cornices of rock. Luckily, these large cracks and chimneys did not all end on the same level; the eye of faith saw that subtle traverses along almost invisible ledges connected the various sections, and where the chimneys ended some steep slabs on the right seemed to lead direct to the summit cairn.

These were our deductions, and half an hour later they were put to the practical test. We started up the rocks almost in a vertical line below the sharp-tipped summit, and just below a large boulder which is partially submerged in the screes that sweep around the base of the cliff. The difficulties were surprisingly small at the outset, but the oncoming westerly gale caused misgivings, and a cold rain bespattered us and the rocks mercilessly. The way lay up a shallow scoop for some distance, and we failed to take advantage of the way out of this on the right, which, on a later occasion, proved the easier and proper route. Soon the smooth, slabby rocks ahead verged on the perpendicular, and with some trepidation an upward movement was made on the right to a turf ledge, where all forgathered. Serious difficulty loomed ahead menacingly. A steep exposed buttress demanded every care. After reaching a small ledge above it, I have a very cloudy recollection of ensuing events. This is not surprising, for a mist-borne storm of hail and sleet threw itself upon us. The outlook was confined to the immediate rocks to which I clung, and my companions on the rope, though only about 50 feet below, were invisible, but not inaudible. "Come down! come down!" they shouted in chorus excitedly. The advice was indisputably sound, and in more ways than one it carried weight as well, for a "sixteenstoner" came second. Anyhow, the outlook ahead was not inviting. The wind was relentless. Immediately above me the rocks overhung; progress seemed only possible on the left along a narrow, sloping, snow-covered ledge. Its extremity faded away into cloudy nothingness. Failure was inevitable. After climbing down to my companions, they expressed their opinion in no uncertain manner. They "went plump" for the descent instead of the descent going plump for us all with unexpected precipitancy. We finally reached the screes in orthodox manner.

Towards the end of the following May, three well-tried friends and the writer stood again on the westerly screes. The conditions were changed; the glorious Rock seemed less formidable with the welcome spring sunshine slanting athwart the untrodden fastnesses. The route of the previous autumn was discernible, and after formulating theories for further advance, we roped ourselves together with about 50 feet of "slack" between each climber. The writer's brother came second. with Dr. Wigner third, and Mr. Claude Barton fulfilling the important part of last man. A start was made at the well-known boulder, and for about 80 feet the ascent proved fairly easy, though the friable rock, which had been previously held in place by the frost, was now much en evidence. One of our party nearly upset our equilibrium hereabouts by trusting his weight to a big loose slab, which came away unexpectedly and crashed noisily down to the screes below. The man in front of him is well known for his strength of jaw, both verbal and physical; this was an advantage, for when the slip

occurred, he was holding the rope in his teeth and feeling around for secure hand-holds. As usual, jaw prevailed; it held firm, and the mishap only caused some impolite language, which need not be recorded. A convenient ledge on the right next attracted attention, and we followed this for a few feet until a grassy buttress was available.

We then bore slightly to the right, where the difficulty increased. Twenty feet higher we came to a full stop against a wide overhanging buttress, which almost baffled us. After several attempts to overcome the obstacle direct, our leader struggled up a smooth-sided crack, and thus a footing was gained on some small ledges leading 10 feet higher, whence a good view could be seen of the crags on our left. Above, the rocks loomed threateningly, and our only hope lay in following an uninviting but continuous ledge by means of which we traversed carefully across the face of the crags for about 12 feet. Here the turf ledges of the former visit were encountered. The buttress in front was divided from the main mass by a narrow crack. This proved easier to manipulate than appeared at first sight, but in its upper part one realized that the foot- and hand-holds had almost reached their vanishing point, so we had to leave the friendly crack and struggle up a steep buttress, the roughness of which made sad havoc with our clothes.

But what caused most trouble was the apparent end of upward progress. A huge cornice of rock, several yards wide, part of which is seen at the top

MOUNTAIN ADVENTURES.

of the illustration, overhung the small ledge which the leader had reached. To climb farther ahead was impossible, and the view downwards forbade any trifling with the law of gravitation.

The wag of the party suggested "suckers," or a pulley from above; while some one else spoke of his approaching marriage, and, counselling descent, expounded the merits of the luxurious lunch awaiting us where we had started the climb.

The discovery of a narrow, more or less horizontal, ledge about one foot wide round the corner on our left silenced all arguments, and the rope was hitched over a rock belaying-pin, while the leader carefully explored the ledge.

Though grassy, it was fairly continuous for several feet; but just before it reached the bottom of a long, steep chimney, which during the preliminary survey from the screes we had noted as an important landmark, there was a gap about a yard wide. Foot-holds and hand-holds were at the time "conspicuously absent," the latter being masked by vegetation, so one had to move along the ledge in a sitting position, with both feet dangling like useless ornaments over an absolutely sheer drop of scarcely less than two hundred feet. However, the position was at least safe for those of a steady head until the break in the ledge was reached, and here the leader spent a long time in meditation before crossing this really awkward passage. There were two small hand-holds where the rock had broken away, but no foot-holds were available until the farther side of the gap could

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THE UPPER PART OF THE WEST FACE OF THE PILLAR ROCK

THE DOTTED LINE INDICATES THE NEW WEST CLIMB. THE PARTY OF THREE CLIMBERS ARE DISCERNIBLE MAKING THE SECOND TRAVENSE, THE LEADER HAS JUST CROSSED. THE WHITE CROSS MARKS THE PLACE WHERE, ON ANOTHER OCCASION, THE LEADER FELL (SEE PAGE 293)

be touched by the left foot. To launch boldly out from the ledge, with such slender support for the hands only, needed both care and coolness, and everybody felt reliéved when the leader swung himself safely across into the foot of the chimney.

In crossing a traverse of this kind the rope could be of very little help to the rest of the party. The last climber here, as in several portions of the ascent, had a very responsible position to fill, for a slip on his part would have meant his swinging pendulumlike across the precipice, and the whole party would have been in imminent danger of being dragged down.

A large fallen rock had become jammed in the foot of the vertical chimney which now confronted us, and this proved a good starting-point for what is probably the most interesting part of the climb. Before proceeding, the rope was belayed around this jammed stone; it would evidently prove an ideal safeguard in case of a slip.¹ The leader found the second climber's shoulder of much assistance, and even his head was used as a step to bring hand-holds within reach. We wriggled slowly one by one up this narrow chimney for some 40 feet before a resting-place could be found, and our direct passage was stopped by some enormous overhanging slabs, where even a friendly shoulder was of no avail. Moreover, the rocks were loose; and as those below were directly in the line of fire, the leader received little encouragement.

¹ Under icy conditions this safeguard should be adopted (see p. 293).

A peep round the left wall of the chimney showed a well-nigh ledgeless cliff, terminating far above us, and our only hope lay in crossing the face of the crags on our right, keeping as close as possible below the impending rock-cornice, which is such a prominent feature of the West Face. The first step from our chimney on to its right wall was most sensational, the only thing to prevent one's body from slipping off into mid-air being a small foothold of two or three inches ; this was about two feet above the take-off. The rocks were too smooth to give much hand-hold, and the raising of one's weight to gain a footing on this small ledge was extremely awkward. The dangers of a place of this kind are considerably lessened by careful attention to the use of the rope, but after rounding the corner great caution was necessary in the use of small foot-holds until some broken rocks were reached to the extreme right of the overhanging cornice. In the photograph (p. 293) showing the upper portion of the climb, the last figure is seen standing on these broken rocks, and the route leading to the summit is plainly shown. Under wet or icy conditions these slabs might prove the hardest part of the climb. Though dry on the occasion of the first ascent, we found their smoothness somewhat trying, especially at a point about 15 feet from the start. At this place, with practically no hand-hold, it was necessary to take a balance-step across to the right on to a tiny excrescence, beyond which the downward-glancing eye wandered fancy-free to the screes several hundred

PIONEER CLIMBS ON THE PILLAR ROCK 143

feet below. This passage was soon over, and the final chimney could be entered at once.

Our greatest difficulty in this last 30 feet of ascent was to preserve the precious contents of the flask, which had been cracked in a narrow chimney, and an argument arose on the rival advantages of internal and external transport of its contents. Though the one who carried the flask had talked unceasingly, when we foregathered around the cairn on the highest point, not a drop of liquid could be found. Very little satisfaction was gained by wringing out the lining of our friend's pocket, and, thirsty as well as hungry, we slowly descended the south side of the rock by what is called the West Jordan Climb. Climbers have a weakness for Biblical names, and here, as in other places, the tendency is well developed. In the general view of the Rock, when seen from the west screes, the point on the right is called Pisgah. This is easy of access, but not so the High Man of the Pillar Rock, which is known as the Promised Land, whilst Jordan Gap "rolls between"!

The descent was made into Jordan, but not a drop of water could be found, so we climbed around Pisgah and raced down the rough screes, until we arrived at the spot where the lunch had been left four hours before. Our climb was over, and we lay on the rocks tasting all the joys of glorious conquest. Gazing up at those gigantic crags, which had not yielded without many exciting and anxious moments, we felt we had gained a new friend whom to know was to love. The weird twilight shadows crept up the valleys and the last evening glow flushed the highest peaks as we trudged back to civilization once more.

The New West Climb on the Pillar Rock is nowadays a favourite course amongst experts. A well-known authority has described it as "the most fascinating and interesting climb in Lakeland." Would that there were more like it.

CHAPTER VIII

UP THE MATTERHORN WITHOUT GUIDES

"Winds and storms his lofty forehead beat, The common fate of all that's high or great." DENHAM

I T was early autumn in the Zermatt valley. The peaks stood up bare and black above the drooping pine trees; yellows and browns were the predominating tints, for it had been a sunny summer. The guides had reaped a rich harvest. They harmonized well with the general colour scheme; their faces were turned to a deep shade of mahogany brown, while their pockets were lined with "yellow."

I had just arrived from England after a hurried, sleepless journey, and the rattle and roar of a stormy Channel passage was still in my ears. The crossing had resolved itself into a "stomach traverse" along one of the deck seats, where I had realized the truth of the words of the old sea-song, "You don't go far wrong with a nautical song if you sing yo ho! heave ho!" This was scarcely a good preparation for high climbing, but the meeting with my enthusiastic brother, who had spent the whole of the summer in the vicinity of Zermatt, altered the aspect of things in general. He urged the unwisdom of a day off. The weather was perfect, but always likely to prove its fickleness so late in the season, especially after such a record of perfection. Besides, he had arranged with a couple of porters to come up from Randa that same evening. I innocently suggested that we might try the Shoehorn, or the "Bugle-horn," as we jocularly called the small peak of the Gugel, on the morrow. Just then, on our way up from the railway station, we emerged from the narrow, chalet-overhung street below the Monte Rosa Hotel, and the dark obelisk of the Matterhorn rose in front. "No!" he said. pointing determinedly upwards, "that is our 'horn' for to-morrow. We'll go without guides. I know all about it ; you'll feel better after dinner."

Thus later in the evening I fell an easy victim to the fascination of the suggestion. In the twilight we strolled out into the village, and met many old friends amongst the guides. We heard much amusing gossip, and a certain famous professional was anxious that we should see his newly-finished châlet. "There," he said, proudly pointing to a really handsome structure, "what do you think of that out of cutting steps for my gentlemen?" The unfinished state of the approach to the doorway suggested the remark that he should make some steps for his own family. The retort rather troubled us. "Ah!" he said, with a knowing wink, "I will cut you steps in the Matterhorn to-morrow, and then be able to finish my house." Somehow or other our plans had become known in the village, hence this

revelation of the business acumen of the Zermatt guide. A promise was given to make use of his services on a later occasion, and we strolled up the valley by the side of the turbulent torrent of the Visp.

A pine-crowned hillock tempted us up to enjoy the prospect. Behind us lay the quiet village, at peace after the season's tourist turmoil; in front rose the majestic Matterhorn, calm and clear in the glimmer of moonlight. As we gazed up at the great "peak above the pastures," memories of the past came irresistibly. On the skyline to the left of the wonderful and almost perfect pyramid sprang up the smooth profile of the Furggen Ridge. It needed but the slightest imagination to picture its first explorers. There, away up 'midst the most nervedestroying crags in all the Alps, crouched the long, lithe figure of Mummery, with Venetz close behind; whilst the burly form of Burgener was seen battling with the impregnable crowning bastion. Disappointment was their lot. Ascent was impossible, descent seemed scarcely less so; an escape to the Zermatt Ridge near the Shoulder was their last hope of attaining the summit. The wind-storm raged fiercely overhead; rocks and shattered icicles were falling at far too frequent intervals down the terrific Eastern Face, which must be crossed. Now the undaunted trio were springing wildly across the frightful slabs, now climbing more slowly on insecure ledges with great stones hurtling past their heads, and icy fragments making closer contact. Above the noise of the whizzing, shrieking fragments the deep, sonorous voice of Burgener was heard calmly urging them forwards: "Schnell, nur Schnell!" ever "Schnell, nur Schnell!" At last they gained the Shoulder, and in spirit we joined in their sigh of relief at danger past. Ah, how we cragsmen revere the memory of Mummery! Would that those Himalayan snows had not robbed us of him for ever!

On the opposite outline of the peak rose the Zmutt Ridge. Though deep in shadow, the graceful pedestal of snow which upholds it was seen above the riven glacier, whilst its pinnacles and bulging buttresses spoke vividly of the same climber's glorious conquest.

Between the two ridges, and running almost directly towards us, another sharp arête stood out boldly defiant; in fact, it seemed impossible that human beings could scale its perpendicularity. But we knew of its milder aspect at closer quarters, and this was our route for the morrow. But despite the kindlier reception which this, the Zermatt, or northerly ridge, gives to the mountaineer, it has a sinister history. Edward Whymper's sanguinary struggles with the Matterhorn provide probably the most fascinating story in all the annals of Alpine exploration. There, apparently two-thirds of the way up the peak, the snowy Shoulder gleamed white in the cold moonrays, with the awful gloom of the 4,000foot precipice of Zmutt below it on the right. There it was that four out of the seven brave pioneers perished. During the descent a youthful

comrade slipped, dragging the others down one by one; and had not the rope broken, the three survivors must have shared the same fate. No climbing-rope could have stayed the weight of the falling climbers.

Thoughts of those early days recalled the brave deeds of the Italian patriots led by Jean Antoine Carrel, who fought so determinedly for the honour of conquering the peak by the rocks of their own country. The Italian or south-westerly ridge was hidden from our view on the opposite side, but in spirit we were with Carrel and his comrades when they clung desperately to those pitiless cliffs on the very day that our countrymen snatched the victory from their grasp. We pictured their dismay when rocks came crashing down the cliffs. No wonder their superstitious natures deemed the peak goblinhaunted, and precipitately fled. Yet Carrel was ultimately successful, and we remembered that in life and death the Matterhorn was his "own mountain." That last expedition seemed terribly real to those of us who had battled with the peak when the storm-fiend swept the heights. Thought travelled quickly to that tiny hut perched high amongst the rocks below the Great Tower, and we saw the old guide, despite his sixty-two summers, cheering up his patron and the young guide Gorret. Two days and two nights they were storm-bound in the rude shelter; food and firewood were practically exhausted. Descent seemed well-nigh impossible with the crags and fixed ropes covered with the new snow and ice. But this was their

last resort. After a terrible experience in the heart of the hurricane, at last they gained the final, steep, downward passage, whilst the green pastures were visible through the driving clouds. Those in front were almost down when Carrel's bodily exhaustion gained the mastery over his brave spirit. He sank down in the snow, with his last strength calling to those below, "Come up and fetch me; I have no power left." The old man's work was done. When they reached his side he made a last effort to speak, then fell back dead on the snow. We knew, as Carrel himself must have known, that to save himself would have been a comparatively simple matter. He took a nobler course, and, thinking only of the welfare of his comrades, brought them safely through almost insuperable difficulties. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

This was the sad end to our soliloquies that evening below the Matterhorn. These things were quickly forgotten when we returned to the village. The porters' greeting was effusive: we were old acquaintances, for they had been with us up many a peak. The sight of Fillisch's face would dispel the gloomiest thoughts, and it has been one of the regrets of my life that no photograph was taken of his perpetual smile. Verily his was "the smile that wouldn't come off"; in sunshine and in storm it was always the same. From ear to ear it curved and rippled. Like so many of the guides, he understood very little English, excepting the

"swear-words," and answered "Yes, sir" to every-Thus the arrangement of tariffs was a thing. simple matter, but the payment of them later on the reverse. The trouble that evening was that the loads were very heavy to take single-handed up the Cervin, and he had brought his "plus grand brudder" to assist in the hard work. This we approved, but presently a "très plus grand brudder" was mentioned, and we objected to the expense. However, it seemed that the latter "giant" wanted to come simply for the experience, as he had never been up the Matterhorn. Now Fillisch, though prodigiously strong, was a short, squat man; but when the "big brother" and "much bigger one" appeared, we roared with laughter. They were even 'shorter and broader than their chief. One of them was mightily proud to be introduced to us as the "toad," which remarkably appropriate name had been bestowed upon him by an English climber. Finally, all arrangements, commissariat and otherwise, were complete, and we parted for the night.

Late next morning, in perfect weather, we were off up the valley *en route* for the "half-way" hut. All were heavily laden, for we carried a good supply of provisions, some extra clothing, our own sleeping bags,—because, like Mark Twain, we did not wish to spend the night "chamois"-hunting in the hut, —and a heavy camera, which was probably the most important member of the party. Thus, in the upper part of the valley the scorching sun made at least one of us glad to reach the refreshing shade of the pine woods. The higher we mounted the lighter became my load, for kind-hearted little Fillisch took compassion on my want of condition and transferred various things to his sturdy shoulders. At the Schwarz See Hotel, some 3,000 odd feet above Zermatt, we caught our first sniff of a cooling breeze from the glaciers, and this, with more solid comforts, revived us wonderfully. Here we sent our porters off to find some firewood, and they took advantage of the respite, as we learned on their return, to repair for spiritual devotions to the little chapel which lies on the shores of the Schwarz See. Most of the Valais guides and porters are extremely superstitious, the more so regarding the Matterhorn. Its terrible list of fatalities is a reasonable justification for this. When our porters returned from their devotions, they showed themselves prepared to brave any dangers gladly. Their cheerfulness was quite astonishing, and we commented on the practical benefits of their religion. But alas! later that evening we discovered the reason of their elation. They had found a private store of firewood, and purloined the lot. However, ignorance is bliss; we loaded ourselves with the stolen property, and in two hours' time arrived at the little Alpine Club hut which stands on the Hörnli Ridge facing Zermatt and at the base of the huge, rock pyramid which forms the actual peak. Thence onwards and upwards our progress was to be hand-overhand climbing for nearly 5,000 feet. The sun was just sinking in a sea of evening mist as we

gained the hut; and whilst I admired the view, savoury smells were wafted out through the open door. My brother filled the rôle of *chef*, and everybody except myself ate ravenously of his curious concoction, which I will call soup by way of compliment. It certainly needed an Alpine training to appreciate the table d'hôte that evening at the Matterhorn Hut; for my part, being fresh from England, I went hungry to bed.

My slumbers were soon rudely disturbed by the porters, who had been smoking outside in the moonlight, and had seen some curious lights flickering about the cliffs far above the hut. They were in a serious state of fright, and seemed to think the lights were a sure sign of our utter destruction should we attempt to climb on the morrow. We blamed their superstitious imagination, and attempted to still their mutterings of "Geister! Geister!" without rising from our comfortable straw beds, but it was of no avail. They talked of descending to Zermatt at once, and this waked us up completely.

The Matterhorn stood out dark and mysterious with the moon setting behind the jagged ridges. A glance up at the black crags towering far above our heads certainly revealed some curious lights, which peeped out suddenly and then disappeared as they had come. At first we were rather puzzled, but in the still night air we caught the sound of falling rocks, and even Fillisch acknowledged that he never knew of ghosts rolling down rocks. There was only one solution, and that must be that a party was benighted high up on our mountain. Our united shouts brought a feeble response, which was almost drowned amidst the resounding echoes of the stupendous cliffs.

We were absolutely unable to render any help, but after rigging up two lanterns outside and at the end of the hut facing the crags, we sang a jodelling chorus to cheer them during their cold night's vigil. Such assistance may seem trivial, but personal experience leads one to understand what a comfort it was to know that a party were at the hut, and that they were within reach of human signals. After a parting chorus we went to bed, but our attempts to secure sleep were scarcely successful. The thoughts of the benighted ones, and the sonorous snoring of Fillisch and his brothers from the far corner of the hut, kept us awake. In fact, my brother spent most of the night throwing shoes, tins, and other handy missiles at the Fillisch brothers in a vain attempt to stop their nocturnal trio.

It was quite a relief at 4 a.m. to roll out of our blankets, and, after a hasty mountain breakfast, to tie on the rope in the hut and step out into the chill morning air. Stars twinkled brightly from a cloudless sky, auguring good weather. Aided by the dim, uncertain light from our two lanterns, which after all only seemed to render darkness visible, we stumbled along over loose rocks to the base of the great cliffs. My brother led the van here in brilliant fashion, for he knew the ground well; and roped in one party we worked our way

upwards and across the East Face of the mountain. It was a weird feeling to be clinging to that great precipice with only darkness above and below, but the more prolonged clatter of tiny dislodged stones as they rolled down into black space showed that we were gaining height rapidly. I have vivid recollection of one spot where I found myself clinging to the rocks like a starfish in difficulties, and had to call out for a lantern to be turned on before I could discover the holds for which I had been vainly groping.

In that denser gloom which precedes the dawn we arrived suddenly on the rocky buttress which forms the side of the Great Stone Couloir, where we had to turn to the right and make a way straight up the Eastern Face. There an argument arose. Fillisch criticized our tendency to prefer mounting by the rocks instead of making use of the snow. It was purely a question of upbringing; nevertheless, it led to a division of the party; the amateurs were to go in front on one rope, whilst the porters followed on another. Just as the calm which succeeded this storm of dissension had settled on the mountain, the silent solitudes were suddenly disturbed. A terrific crash sounded apparently overhead. Instinctively we jumped back into the shelter of the retaining buttress, and not a moment too soon. Through the darkness great rocks came ricochetting thunderously down the Couloir, our proposed route. The air seemed alive with the whirr and uproar of flying fragments, and blue sulphurous sparks flickered amidst the chaos as the bigger masses were rent on the firm body rock of the peak. In some cases the pieces in breaking spread out like a fiery fan and a stray splinter unluckily attacked us in our shelter. Instantly there was darkness, for, strange to say, the rock struck our only really good lantern, tearing it from my left hand. We listened disconsolately to the metallic fragments rattling down the dark, awesome precipice. But for the few minutes' argument with the porters, we should have been caught shelterless in the bed of the Couloir, and Old Age Pensions would have ceased to interest us.

It was a most providential escape, for except a few minor cuts and bruises we were practically scatheless. When the din at last subsided, we rigged up the remaining, old lantern, and by its aid climbed slowly and very carefully upwards, keeping close together for mutual support. It seemed scarcely likely that the benighted party could have sent down the small avalanche, for they were too high up and more across the face of the peak. Rocks often fall unaccountably in the Great Stone Couloir and at all times of day and night. Numerous accidents, fatal and otherwise, have resulted. It is one of the most dangerous places in the Alps. However, these things were soon forgotten in the excitement of the ascent. We climbed mostly on the steep, right wall of the Couloir, and higher up, aided by the dim light of approaching dawn, an hour and a half's easy scramble brought us to the Old Cabane. This we found quite untenantable, for the interior was filled with drifted snow, and

of late years it has fallen into disuse. We now ate a second breakfast and watched the roseate tints of dawn creep along the upper snows of Monte Rosa.

It caused us some astonishment to hear voices above our heads, for the interest of our climb had made us practically forget the benighted ones. They soon put in an appearance on the rocks to our left, and we saw that the party included one amateur and two guides. The guides were treating their charge as so much luggage-in fact, they were almost carrying him down. He proved to be an exceedingly stout and incapable Italian tourist, who had intended crossing the mountain from Breuil to Zermatt, assisted by his two guides, who were fellow-countrymen. I am afraid the incompetency of the whole party had led to their adventure, for they had obviously lost their way amongst the crags below the Shoulder. Want of knowledge of our respective languages made intercourse difficult; but the way that stout Italian devoured our provisions and drank our wine made us resolve that, come what might, we must get down that night, or starvation would be our fate. Fillisch at last made a charge at the remains of the lunch; then, wishing them bon voyage, we continued straight up the slabby rocks of the great Eastern Face. Here I took over the responsibilities of leadership.

Far above us the pink tints of dawn gradually tinged the snow-capped summit and crept down towards us. Somewhere hereabouts we mistook the usual route, and found ourselves upon the very crest of the great rock-ridge which rises from the hut on the Hörnli right to the summit of the Matterhorn. We had some difficult rock-climbing to negotiate, and I well remember one point in particular where the ridge narrowed down to almost razor-like sharpness. We crept carefully along its thin crest, with the glories of dawn on our left and the blackness of night still pervading the misty depths below on our right. Clinging with hands and knees to this sharp ridge, the discomfort of the situation was more real than the difficulty of it. The rock was peculiarly pointed, and spurred us on by a dig in the ribs, or some softer part of the anatomy, whenever a position of rest was attempted. We expected some real fun when the Fillisch contingent reached this place, but on looking back they were nowhere to be seen. We sat down under a gendarme and waited. A few minutes later a shower of tiny pebbles dropped on our hats, and looking up we saw the grinning face of the "imp in charge" peering exultingly down over the edge. When asked if they had come up by the ridge, he said "Yes, sir!" as usual; but in reality they had found an easy alternative route by passing up a snow couloir and thus outdistancing us. This seemed to afford them much pleasure and satisfaction, so we took advantage of it to pose them on some difficult rocks whilst a photograph was taken. Now, as a rule the sight of the camera was to them a signal for sleep, and they usually settled down soundly in some sheltered

corner. It was a splendid institution, because they waked up refreshed and quite ready to tackle the heavy loads they carried so cleverly. Thus on this occasion there was much grumbling, even the elder of the "sleeping beauties" looked glum; but the familiar smile became as extensive as ever when the magic word *pourboire* was mentioned.

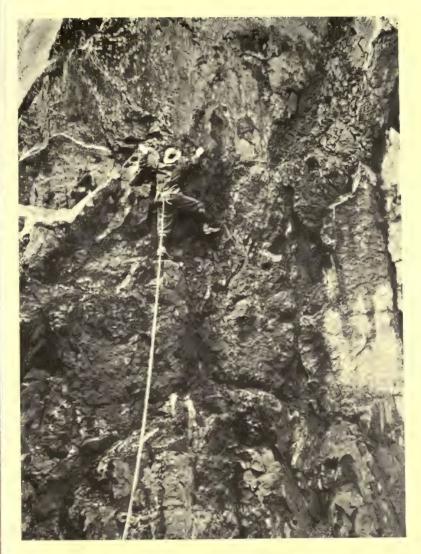
After the photograph was taken we climbed up the rocks to the Moseley Platte, revelling meanwhile in the warm conditions. This section is one of the landmarks on the Zermatt Ridge, and derives its name from the late W. O. Moseley of Boston, who was killed here in the August of 1879. The two guides in charge of the party actually allowed their unfortunate companion to untie the rope from around his waist and descend unroped. Moreover, the boots he wore scarcely held any nails. From the description of the accident given by the guides, it would appear that he was jumping or vaulting across a rocky spur when he slipped and fell for over 2,000 feet. This is fairly characteristic of several accidents which have happened on the Matterhorn; the famous mountain is a lasting monument to the memory of incompetent guides.

Beyond the Platte we soon ascended the steep snow leading to the Shoulder, and the steps of the former party facilitated the passage up the icy staircase. As we walked along the crest of the snowridge in brilliant sunshine, our shadows were cast far out to our right on to the thin wreaths of early morning mist which glided up from the dark valley. We had a marvellous exhibition of natural shadowgraphs. But Fillisch quickly turned the sublime to the ridiculous; he dropped on all-fours, and by waggling the rope behind him, made it appear that our shadows were leading a long-tailed monkey on a string.

The snowy Shoulder abutted against the almost vertical crags of the final peak, and to our left we' saw the series of fixed ropes and chains which for the true sportsman spoil the pleasures of this part of the ascent. It was near here that the terrible accident occurred during the first conquest of the Matterhorn in 1865. It almost made us shudder to glance down some 5,000 feet into that terrible abyss where four members of that ill-fated party were hurled to their doom. But we soon forgot such dismal thoughts in the fascination of the ascent, and that last 500 feet was the most enjoyable part of the climb. Fillisch, who was a true sportsman at heart, now joined his party on to our rope.

Great slabs rose tier on tier above us, and in several places I mounted on my brother's shoulders to gain hand-holds which were otherwise out of reach. The porters professed to scorn such artificial aid, but they eventually found this better than dangling on the rope in such a sensational situation. An exciting scramble up a steep buttress revealed a short slope of soft snow leading to the summit, and with a boisterous shout of delight we fairly galloped up the last portion, and were soon gazing far away across to the Italian Alps.

How changed from my previous visit! On that



CLIMBING THE MATTERHORN ON THE SLABS ABOVE THE SHOULDER ON THE ZERMATT SIDE

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occasion a howling gale swept up the tremendous northern precipice, whirling great pieces of flaky ice and snow away over the summit, and threatening every moment to treat us to a like fate. We could scarcely see a yard ahead of us through the snow-laden mist : in fact, our faces and bodies were caked in ice, and an idea of the temperature will be gained when I say that the wine in our gourd was frozen into a solid mass. All I recollect of the summit then was a thin, feathery ridge of ice overhanging a snowy abyss; but now the actual top was a ridge of warm, sun-baked rock. In a perfect calm we amateurs sat astride this ridge and decorated the summit with thin grey clouds of tobaccosmoke, while Fillisch and his brothers retreated to a shady rock and fell fast asleep. We were here 14,781 feet above sea-level, and the view was magnificent in every direction. Almost 10,000 feet below us lay the smiling, chalet-clad pastures of Zermatt, just catching the slanting rays of the early morning sun; and even at this great height the shrill whistle of the locomotive floated up faintly through the stillness. Away in the track of the rising sun lay Monte Rosa and her satellites, crouching like white, mammoth monsters above their glistening fields of ice and snow. The eve was led along the steep arête of the Breithorn and down again to the glacier of the Furggjoch, where some tiny black specks moved slowly across the white world, these being the only visible signs of human life. To the south and west a veritable sea of mountains rolled onwards to the horizon, where,

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at a distance of over 80 miles, Mont Blanc and its pointed aiguilles pierced the greyness. Almost as far away in the north, rising above the serrated ridges of the Gabelhorn, the Weisshorn, and the Mischabelhörner, rose the snowy peaks of the Oberland, with the Jungfrau and the Finsteraarhorn dominating the group.

We had just finished taking the summit photographs when a sudden weather change occurred; for which contrariness the Matterhorn is famous. A damp, chill breeze blew up from the south, and dense white clouds rolled up like a huge curtain. We shivered as the sun disappeared, and hastened to wake our porters. They rubbed their eyes and looked surprised at the change. As a matter of mountain habit, we all turned to the rücksack containing the last of our lunch, and after fortifying the "inner man," we carefully took our bearings and followed the downward footsteps of the Italian party of the previous day. These led us quickly down to the rocks, which were festooned with fixed ropes, and we slid down these in such a style as a well-trained monkey might easily envy. Below the Shoulder the mist grew thicker and thicker, but by good fortune we were able to strike the proper route down the rocks of the Moseley Platte. Only one place gave us much trouble, and here my brother, who was leading and carefully picking out the way, got stranded on an ice-slope treacherously covered with soft snow. The startling swish of this as it slid off its icy bed warned us of the danger to the whole party; but a timely pull from the

rope rescued my brother from his dilemma. The dislodged mass of snow in ever-augmenting quantities went crashing over the crags, and the avalanche thus formed almost made the whole face of our mountain shake as it thundered down to the glacier. We had to cut steps with an iceaxe across this dangerous place, and eventually gained an easy rock-ridge leading to our previous route near the Old Cabane.

In two hours we arrived safely at the new hut, and joined some friends who had come up from Zermatt to meet us. A warm southerly gale arose as we strolled down to Zermatt in the evening, and for two days the great peaks were hidden in whirling storm-clouds.

In this simple story little has been said of the actual difficulty of the climb. Truth to tell, under such conditions the Matterhorn possesses scarcely any difficulties as far as the actual surmounting of any section is concerned. Wherever a hand- or foot-hold is needed it is sure to be available. This remark would apply equally to the Italian side, for the steeper precipices which abound there are chained and roped from bottom to top, a species of ornamental desecration which increases year by year. In fact, some authorities urge that this, and the presence of the club hut high up on that ridge, makes the second day's work less trying and laborious than that involved in an ascent from the Zermatt side.

The remarkable fact should be noted, that by far the greater number of fatalities have occurred

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on the so-called "easier way." It is the length and height of the expedition, and the proneness of the peak to fearfully sudden weather changes, that must debar any but strong, experienced, and responsible mountaineers from attempting it without professional assistance. The story of a recent catastrophe, which also embodies the main features of several others, will accentuate these remarks.

On 14th August, 1907, three young climbers, Dr. R. Helbling and Herren K. Imfeld and Spörri, set out from the Schwarz See Hotel above Zermatt with the intention of traversing the Matterhorn from the opposite or Italian side. It may be mentioned that in making this expedition it is usual to start fairly early in the morning and spend the night at the hut below the Great Tower, which is reached by way of the Furggjoch and the rocks above the Col du Lion. Much time was lost, and, unable to reach the hut, they spent the first night on the Col. Next day, the 15th, the weather was doubtful, but they climbed up past the hut as far as the Pic Tyndall, the almost level snow-ridge below the base of the actual final peak. At this place a raging storm broke upon them, and, despite its increasing fury, they decided to stay there for the second night instead of descending to the hut. During the hours of darkness Spörri was overcome by the severity of the cold, and though his companions did all that was humanly possible, he perished in their arms. On the morning of the 16th, after placing their friend's body in the shelter of some rocks, another error of judgment was

made. Rather than descend at once, they thought it would be easier to cross the peak and make a way down to the Schwarz See. The consequence was that in their exhausted condition they reached the top at 3 p.m., and were thus compelled to spend another night out on the Shoulder on the Zermatt side. Soon after dawn on the 17th they continued the descent slowly and painfully, both being more or less in a state of collapse. Helbling was first to fail, and, utterly exhausted, with hands and feet hopelessly frost-bitten, he stopped, incapable of further movement. Imfeld was still able to go on, and fortunately he eventually met a party of guides, to whom he told the awful news. They immediately climbed up to Helbling and brought him down to his friend at the Schwarz See. The four days and three nights which they spent on the mountain, in the worst of weather, cut off from all help, and with the loss of their comrade ever in their thoughts, must almost be a record as far as human endurance is concerned. A party of guides went in search of the ill-fated Spörri; the recovery of his remains was one of great danger and difficulty.

CHAPTER IX

MOTORS AND MOUNTAINS

"He wandered down the mountain grade Beyond the speed assigned."

R. KIPLING

THE modern heresy, "Never walk if you can ride," has even tainted the mountaineer; but, like Balmat, the hero of the first conquest of Mont Blanc, he is prone to be proud of "his famous calves and his grand legs," and some may fear that the new locomotion, if used as an aid to climbing, will tend to promote that muscular decrepitude which is the outcome of disuse. However, the powers of the best of motors are limited. Roads are necessary, and the climber still must use his legs to reach the topmost heights of his ambition.

The discovery of an aeroplane for the man of moderate balance both in body and bank might alter all this. Yet the law of gravitation has been unsympathetic to aviators from Icarus to Cody, and at present the list of Alpine perils seems unlikely to be augmented by falling aeroplanes.

Motoring with its luxurious inaction, and mountaineering with its arduous physical exertion would to the outsider at first sight appear to have little in common excepting the danger. Everything has its risks, as said a friend of mine who broke his collar-bone with lying in bed; but from a fairly long experience of motoring and mountaineering I think that in each case the danger is more apparent than real. The motorist who looks at some of my illustrations may imagine himself classed in very bad company, but let him not think that he has the best of the argument in this respect. During more than fifteen years of strenuous climbing in many lands, I have suffered no accident resulting in bodily damage, but in five years of motoring it has been otherwise.

On one occasion, by reason of a sudden swerve to avoid some traffic which appeared unexpectedly from a cross road, the car turned turtle, but, unlike de Rougemont's notorious turtle, it was not a steerable one, and I accompanied the unwieldy mass as it went rolling over and over down a steep incline. Yet, strange to say, though the car was a "Sunbeam," I saw nothing but "stars." Fortunately the really serious harm was merely a dislocated elbow.

Many energetic mortals tire of the luxurious inaction of motoring, and the climber often finds the long journey to his mountains a weariness of the flesh. It is here where extremes meet, and, along with many friends who have tried the combination, I can testify to the marvellous convenience and pleasure of the motor as an aid to mountaineering.

Most of our British groups are difficult of approach by ordinary means of travel. It used to be far from enjoyable a few years ago to spend many hours behind panting horseflesh, making the weary journeys across the Scotch moors and foot-True enough that variety was afforded by hills. having to push up the steeper hills and pull back on the down grades. Under such circumstances it was easy to appreciate the remark of the Yankee who took one of the famous coach tours, and said afterwards, "Wal! I guess I never paid seven shillings and sixpence for so much walking in all my life." However, a moderate-powered motorcar of suitable construction obviates all this, and the pleasures of a mountain holiday begin the moment of leaving home, and finish only on alighting from the car on the return.

Those who have never experienced it cannot understand the unalloyed delight of the spin back to headquarters after a glorious but tiring day amongst the crags. Dr. Johnson has said that "the most beautiful mountain view is improved by having a good inn in the foreground." I would suggest that a trusty car awaiting the mountaineer at the base of his mountain is a worthier prospect, for it brings the best of hotels in a wide district within close proximity. In fact, in North Wales the mountaineering motorist could spend a holiday en famille at Llandudno and make excursions into the wildest recesses of Snowdonia. It is scarcely a two hours' easy drive from Llandudno, with its "pierrots" and bands, to the foot of the grandest crags in the Principality by way of Bettws y Coed and Capel Curig. From this latter place the famous Telford Road turns to the right, where Snowdon looms straight ahead, and leads along by a beautiful run below the grand crags of Tryfaen and the Glyders.

Garages are conspicuous by their absence in these mountain solitudes, but sometimes a farmyard is available as substitute. Though usually reliable, this may have its drawbacks, for on one occasion we returned from an expedition late in the evening, to find a recently washed and polished car appropriated as a roosting-place by the feathered population of the farm. The surprise of those fowls when we started the engine with the exhaust open was something to remember.

Many days could be spent climbing in the neighbourhood of Tryfaen and on the Carnedds, whilst from Capel Curig somewhat steeper gradients and a road of rougher surface leads to the head of Llanberis Pass, whence Snowdon and its neighbours are easily attacked.

The Cader Idris group is a region separate as far as Snowdonia is concerned, and the journey by carriage and railway from one to the other is such a lengthy and tiresome undertaking that few men include both districts in a single Welsh climbing holiday. With a motor as a member of the party the matter is different; the scene is easily changed. There are few rides in Britain to equal that from Cader Idris to Snowdon by way of Barmouth, Harlech, and Aberglaslyn. But, like many of the

Welsh roads, especially those of the mountain variety, this road is apt to be in execrable condition in the fall of the year. I speak feelingly on this point. A short time ago it fell to my lot to accompany a friend-in his car, be it noted-from Dolgelly to Pen y gwryd to keep an appointment with some climbing friends on the Glyders. Though off in the morning before daylight tinged the top of Cader, the dense darkness of a moonless night had enwrapped the shapely peak of Snowdon ere we swept, or rather crept, around its lower slopes. The weather had been bad at the outset, and the newlymetalled road resembled the bed of a mountain stream. The puncture fiend attacked us before Barmouth was reached, and we had too ample opportunity of realizing how truly Ruskin has said that the view across the estuary is one of the three finest in the world. To cut a long story short, we had thirteen punctures that day, and the search-party sent out from Pen y gwryd helped us up the long incline from Gwynant with one of the back tyres stuffed with hay.

For mountaineering in Scotland a motor-car is almost indispensable when one has once experienced its advantages. The mountain groups are widely separated, and otherwise so hard of access as scarcely to deserve a visit.

The peaks of Glencoe and the Ben Nevis district should first attract the enthusiast, and, once smoky Glasgow is left behind, the approach by road is most entertaining. Beautiful as are the "bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond," the

climbing motorist will almost give a sigh of relief when he leaves them behind and enters the wilder recesses of Glen Falloch. Certainly the road-surface becomes steadily worse as Tyndrum, Bridge of Orchy, and Inveroran Hotel are passed. The steep, "shifty" hills of the Baa Pass may make the best of cars look "sheepish," but the view of Buchaille Etive from the crest of the Blackmount Road is a worthy recompense for the ascent, as also for the bumpy descent to Kingshouse with its primitive inn.

I have found it almost useless to send postal advice of a visit to this place which reposes at the foot of Buchaille Etive, one of the grandest mountains in all Scotland. On one occasion the letter advising mine host of our visit, though posted a fortnight previously, did not materialize until the day following our arrival, and we were told that there was nothing to eat in the house but "whusky." We knew there was luxury and food enough at the comfortable hotel at Clachaig, near the other end of the pass; but a day on Buchaille Etive was worth a day and night of fasting. Certainly the residents did what they could to allay our hunger: a weedilybuilt gillie went, on slaughter intent, chasing a miserable specimen of a mountain sheep. The repast a few hours later was not a success. However, thanks to the chocolate and biscuits which we carried, the next day's climb up the now famous Crowberry Ridge on Buchaille Etive was most entertaining. Through breaks in the gathering mist we had peeps of our trusty car far below ready

to carry us to the comforts of Clachaig, a fact which added vastly to the enjoyment.

The Crowberry Ridge is a huge almost vertical buttress of rock rising over 1,000 feet high to the top of the mountain on the side facing the head Some of the situations en route are of Glencoe. sensational enough to satisfy the most hardened glutton for danger; in fact, it has been said that it is no place for married climbers.

Our ascent that autumn afternoon was rendered the more difficult by heavy clouds and driving rain. Indeed, the storm finally chased us off the mountain, and, what with the dense mist and quickly gathering gloom of evening, we had the greatest difficulty in discovering the whereabouts of our car. However, after wading through the river, which was in high "spate," we eventually forgathered on the lee side of our car, and discussed the situation. Soaked to the skin and miserably hungry, we were in no condition for enjoying the ride down the Pass of Glencoe to the inn at Clachaig. But, once on the move, these things were forgotten in the battle with the elements and adverse circumstances.

I shall never forget that night in Glencoe. A fearful wind was driving the rain in our faces, and it became more and more difficult to keep the car on the river-like, rock-strewn surface of the road. Head-lights would have been useless in the fog, and the side-lights were wrapped in handkerchiefs to shelter them from the gale. Slowly we crawled, literally feeling our way into the jaws of the pass, until suddenly we turned a corner above "The

Study," the famous and popular view-point. Here progress was suddenly arrested : the tremendous gale caught us in full force; sheets of watery vapour laden with the salty savour of the sea swept up from the black, Stygian depths below; and small pebbles and stones came whizzing amongst us, torn from the loose surface of the road. Our engine roared weirdly in the face of the blast, whilst changing down to the lowest gear we moved warily down the fearful-looking gradient. The shriek of the storm and the noise of the torrent on our left rendered conversation impossible, but a sudden upheaval in the balance of the car showed us that we were partially off the road. It seemed impossible to discern the proper course to follow, and ere long it became necessary for a route-finder to march in front indicating the way with a muffled side-lamp. The power of the gale will be realized when I say that it was unnecessary to use the brakes at all during the long descent, which in several places has a gradient of one in five or even steeper.

Despite the trying conditions, the car behaved magnificently until near the point where the comparatively level bed of the pass began. Here, just when the downpour seemed the heaviest, the engine gave a few disconcerting kicks and jumps and stopped dead. I at once diagnosed a shortage of current to the sparking plugs, because the moisture seemed to penetrate everywhere. Whilst I turned the engine round, an innocent friend kindly felt the sparking plugs to see if this was the cause of the trouble. His sudden ejaculation and disappearance into the darkness amongst the rocks at the side of the road showed that the electrical department was very much alive. A few seconds later it was found that the petrol tap had been gradually closed by the incessant jolting, but this was quickly remedied. and ere long we were off down the pass comparatively happy. We averaged certainly not more than four miles an hour, but at last the lights of our welcome inn shone in front. That night we had a great and foolish feast, and it would be kinder not to attempt a description of the result.

Clachaig is one of the very best centres for rock-climbing in Great Britain. The little inn stands in the seaward entrance to the Pass of Glencoe, with magnificent mountains rising steeply on either hand. On the left, looking up the pass, the long ridge of Aonach Eagach cuts the skyline with its jagged outline, whilst on the opposite side the majestic rocky bastions of the well-known "Three Sisters "-I refrain from giving their fearsome-looking Gaelic names-invite the mountaineer to try conclusions with their serene dignity and apparent aloofness. The remarkable rift in the breast of the nearest "Sister" to Clachaig is known as Ossian's Cave. All sorts of curious legends were told of it, until climbers gained its almost inaccessible recesses. A shepherd was said to have reached the place once upon a time, and through a narrow slit in the mountain he had seen a great army of ancient warriors asleep inside with their shields and spears close at hand ready for the fray.

Anyhow, we saw nothing of this when we climbed into the cave, and the difficulty of the ascent made us think that no Highland shepherd had been there before us.

But although the "Three Sisters" offer such grand opportunities to the climber, the *pièce de résistance* of the neighbourhood is Bidean nam Bian, of which the former crags are really only outlying buttresses. This is the highest mountain in Argyleshire, and on the Glencoe side its symmetrical peak is upheld by two magnificent walls of rock which are cleft by a great gully. The Church Door Buttress is the name given to the right-hand or western "wall," and its ascent yields one of the most difficult and interesting climbs in Scotland. There is no record of the Eastern Buttress having been climbed from the foot.

Two days after our stormy passage of Glencoe, a fine Sunday appropriately induced us to attempt the unlocking of the famous "Church Door." Our success was not achieved without some adventure. and a short description of the mauvais pas of the buttress may prove interesting. The "keyhole" of the buttress, which, seen in front, resembled a huge church door of Gothic design, consisted of a straight crack that pierced deeply into the rocky bastion of the peak. Suitable ledges for hands and feet robbed the ascent of serious difficulty, but shortly after the open face of the buttress was gained we were stopped by a great, perpendicular precipice, overhanging in places, which towered far over our heads.

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The direct route seemed scarcely inviting, so, remembering a former visit, we climbed across some big slabs and away to the left, until all at once we came to the edge of nothing, and peeped over into the abyss of the great gully which separated our buttress from the neighbouring peak. A strong wind was tearing up the narrow, savage-looking gorge, and a weird, booming, organ-like note of deepest bourdon pitch sounded from the upper reaches of the rift. At this point we saw the only way of reaching the summit, and with the rocks wet the general effect was not reassuring. The tremendous left wall of the gully to which we clung consisted of one huge vertical slice of rock several hundreds of feet in height. It looked as though some Cyclopean monster had cleft it clean and straight with one stroke of a mighty axe. We saw, some 50 feet across the face, that a narrow chimney had formed in a small bulge in the great The chimney had practically no bottom, for cliff. it overhung the abyss, and at first sight seemed unapproachable. However, there was some hope; for one of the most wonderful formations I have ever seen on a mountain gave access to the steeply slanting slab below the chimney. Almost a dozen large rocks and boulders had become suspended over the deep gorge by jamming one against the other, thus forming a unique natural bridge about six or seven yards long. Obviously, if one of these should give way, the whole flimsy-looking structure would crash down into the depths, and a discussion arose as to the wisdom of trusting ourselves to this

weather-worn bridge. Fortunately, we had with us more than a hundred feet of Alpine rope, and the presence of some jutting rocks around which this could be looped made the passage permissible. The sensation of crossing was exciting enough even for a seasoned climber, and the bottom of the chimney seemed a haven of refuge compared with the rickety structure below.

The mauvais pas is scarcely more than 25 feet high; it may be described as a little chimney with a big reputation. Names of great climbers are linked with the early failures. It fell to the fortune of Mr. Harold Raeburn, one of the most expert Scottish mountaineers, to be first to solve the problem and "unlock the Church Door for the faithful."

There was a feeling of loneliness in advancing to the attack, for it was scarcely permissible to have the second climber on the unsafe bridge meanwhile, and my companions held the rope around a rocky spillikin on terra firma at the farther end. The slabs, though damp and slippery, were scarcely difficult, but the start of the chimney above them was the reverse; it made one look around. The prospect was not promising. The splayed-out walls on either hand were slimy, smooth, and almost holdless, and where they met in the innermost recesses, thus forming a slippery crack, the two or three chock-stones had an ominous, impending appearance.

Upward progress was made by jamming the hand and arm in the crack, and using some leverage

for the feet on the left wall. I remember arriving at the first chock-stone and feeling uncommonly helpless. Suitable foot-hold for further effort was at a discount. The muscles flagged with the exertion of "hanging on" in such an overhanging attitude, but a quick glance downwards showed a tiny wrinkle on the left wall; it showed nothing beyond but thin air and the thrilling plunge of the precipice down into the chasm of the great gully. Slowly and deliberately the nailed boot was tried on the ledge: it gripped-but confidence was lacking. At that moment the hoarse croak of a raven echoed from the opposite buttress, seeming to say with gloomy, guttural foreboding, "Don't! don't!" and I regained the former altitude with thoughts of retreat. Those below talked cheering nonsense about the holding powers of an Alpine rope, and one more try was permissible. This was successful; but I remember at the crucial moment muttering to the invisible foot-hold the words-

> "Oh, the little more, and how much it is ! And the little less, and what worlds away !"

The succeeding move was made by the usual chimney method of back and foot, and, spanning the gulf, I was at last able to work upwards to the large wedged stone which dominated the pitch. In a somewhat exhausted but exalted condition I found it best for safety's sake to force a way under and behind this, thus reaching the summit to the accompanying jubilation of those below.



ON THE ROOF OF SCOTLAND-ABOVE GLENCOE

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Then one by one they followed across the veritable bridge of sighs, for each gave a deep sigh of relief when the solid rock was within reach of hand and foot. All went well safeguarded by the rope, but the chimney itself was not without its special excitement for the fourth member of the party. On account of his shorter stature, the cleft proved rather too wide above the crucial point for him to ascend in orthodox fashion with feet on one side and back against the other. Somehow or other he found himself spanning the gulf with his feet too high up and his head too low. The balance was so delicate, and the strain so severe when upward progress was attempted, that suddenly his feet slid outward and upward. For a few seconds he dangled head downwards in mid-air, but the rope saved the situation, and with our assistance he was able to complete his ascent feet first.

The difficulty of the buttress diminished higher up, and after a few minutes' enjoyment of the magnificent view from the wind-swept summit, we fled down the easy route to Glencoe. Other days were spent on the narrow Coolin-like ridge of Aonach Eagach, and a fruitless attempt was made on the great unclimbed couloir of Sgurr Fiannaidh near the hotel door.

Then we sped down the valley to Ballachulish, and, after enduring some mild excitement during the ferrying of our car across Loch Leven on a craft of fearful and wonderful construction, with fee for the crossing to match, we met civilization

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once more at Fort William within the shadow of the mighty mass of Ben Nevis. The great crags of its northern face were wreathed in winter's garb, and we enjoyed real mountaineering, as one of the party said, equal to anything in the Alps.

Avalanches are not supposed to be indigenous to British mountains; however, one of the homeland variety showed us that it possessed much in common with its Alpine confrères. A fairly bulky cornice of overhanging snow encircled the head of the gully. From below this looked formidable, but closer acquaintance showed that near the centre a large mass of the cornice had sunk or collapsed a few feet down the slope, and this opening evidently afforded the easiest and quickest means of exit. From its vast size, we judged that the mass was firm enough; but in orthodox style we kept to the left and out of the line of fire whilst our leader, with a longer stretch of rope, cut footsteps with his ice-axe in the almost vertical slope. When he reached the level of the broken cornice, and was proceeding to struggle up the fissure behind it, we heard a cry of surprise and a shout of warning. He just had time to plunge his axe up to the head in the main bed of the snow in the gully and cling to it, when the great snowy pyramid seemed to bow its icy head gracefully and topple gently down the slope. But the harmless-looking start was of short duration. The mass gathered in momentum and size almost instantly, and, had we been only a few feet lower, we must have been engulfed in the embryo

avalanche. As some one pointedly said, where we should have gone would depend on the life we had been leading. For a few seconds the situation was exciting enough, for the crash of falling matter seemed to shake the bed of the gully, and we almost feared that the din would bring other masses of the cornice about our ears. Fortunately, we held firmly to the quivering slope, and were able to enjoy the spectacle below. Crash! Bang! Great rocks were caught in the surging, thundering tourmente and sent whizzing into mid-air, to disappear finally with a wondrous splash on the less steeply inclined snow-slopes more than a thousand feet below. The sight was grand in the extreme, but we were all glad to escape from the clutches of that icy gully on Ben Nevis

On succeeding days, by means of the motor-car, we were able to visit other splendid mountains in the vicinity. However, enough has been said of the climbs on the Scotch mainland.

The Coolin peaks in the Isle of Skye away in the far north should not be visited without a motorcar. The hotel at Sligachan is the only centre, and it is so far away from the best climbing on the group that it is usual to resort to camping. Satisfactory mountain roads are available, and though many people may rhapsodize about the life amongst the

> "Peaks to the clouds that soar, Corrie and fell where eagles dwell And cataracts dash evermore,"

personally I have found the joys of camping in the Isle of Mist somewhat damp and relaxing. Cataracts are well enough in poetry, but they often go astray in typical Skye weather. It is not unalloyed bliss to be washed out of bed and camp in the "sma' hours," therefore give me the "puffing beastie," as the Highlanders call the motorcar, when next I go to Skye. In any case, it may be useful to know that the main roads on the island are distinctly good, and even a non-climbing motorist would find pleasure in a visit to the land of miniature Alps, unique coast scenery, and interesting inhabitants. It might be mentioned that the best crossing from the mainland is by the safe ferry from Kyle of Lochalsh to Kyle Akin. Thence, if the "water jumps" be taken steadily, the road to Sligachan via Broadford and Loch Ainort may be considered good.

The mountains of the English Lake Country are most accessible of all. Roads of good surface abound; but those of narrow width predominate, and awkward corners occur very frequently and unexpectedly. Even disregarding the question of its beauties, there is no justification for exceeding the speed limit in such a district, and the descent of some of the long, steep gradients may be considered hazardous. Judging by its sanguinary history, Kirkstone Pass is more dangerous to the motorist than is Scawfell to the mountaineer.

Wastdale Head is the most important centre, and its only approach on pneumatic tyres is from the seaward direction, preferably by way of Seascale

and Gosforth. Great Gable, with its famous Needle and arêtes, Scawfell, the Pillar Rock, and many other favourite peaks cluster around the narrow valley. Lovers of civilization may prefer Keswick as head-quarters, but the head of Borrowdale, Seathwaite of record-rainfall renown, marks the end of the road and the nearest approach to the highest crags. It might be mentioned that many of the maps show the Sty Head Pass, the rough mountain track between Seathwaite and Wastdale, as a carriage road. To those motorists who attempt the crossing, the error is at once obvious; but cyclists, deluded by the map, are constantly tempted onwards in hopes of better things to come. These belated travellers are often encountered, usually carrying instead of riding their machines. I once met a cycling party consisting of two young ladies and a gentleman toiling with the terrible path on the steep, rough Wastdale side of the Pass. The ladies had once worn light cycling shoes; of these little was now left except the uppers. The descent was too painful to think of, so they kept on stumbling and crawling up the less stony sides of the path. The gentleman was the hero of the occasion, for first of all he carried the ladies' machines up one at a time in stages of fifty yards or so, and then returned for his own. Very often he had also to return for his companions. Verily it was a Herculean task, and, for a brother, nobly done, but all in vain. We counselled retreat to Wastdale, and our proffered help, which resolved itself into porterage, was gladly accepted.

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Another road which possesses more insidious temptation for the mountain-motorist is that which runs between Eskdale and Langdale by way of Hardknott and Wrynose Pass. It is simply a grass- and rock-covered cart-track with gradients that are relics of the days when the Romans roamed the mountains hereabouts. Until the West and East of Lakeland are linked by the much-discussed new road through the Sty Head Pass, it is advisable to make the wide 60-mile circuit by Broughton and the fringe of the Furness littoral in order to reach Langdale. The neighbouring peaks, with Pavey Ark as best of all, yield magnificent climbing.

An amusing adventure befell two of my motoring friends in this narrow valley of Langdale. The weather was stormy; in a steady downpour they pushed onwards through the rapidly-falling darkness until a point was reached where the floods had overflowed the road. The passenger called "Rush it!" for the water extended only about 20 yards ahead. With a mighty splash they dashed into and through the pool, the flying moisture almost blinding them. A few yards farther another sheet of water appeared, and in the exhilaration of the former success the same tactics were adopted. A still mightier splash resulted, but it seemed to have no end, until suddenly the engine stopped, and they found themselves benighted in the middle of a flood which was gradually rising. The water was almost in the bottom of the car, and the starting of the engine seemed a serious

problem. The passenger crept along the bonnet to the front, and, balanced on the framework, attempted to manipulate the starting mechanism. After careful preparation, he gave a huge downward push on the handle, but somehow it slipped, and he fell headlong into the water. It was now unnecessary to "keep dry," and he could at least use the starting handle more effectively. But it was of no avail. Instead of starting, the engine only grunted resignedly. Wetter and wiser men, the two adventurers eventually waded waist-deep through the flood, and, after a night's repose in an adjacent farm-house, rescued the car next morning, aided by a climbing-rope and other assistance. It took many days to clear the water-logged vitals of that ill-used engine. In flood-time it is advisable to avoid some of the valleys of the Lake District, notably Langdale and Borrowdale.

In conclusion, a few words from my own personal standpoint and experience regarding the mountaineering motor may be acceptable. A car of medium power, moderate wheel base, and light weight with strong internals and of simplest construction yields best results. Like its owner, it must be a really good climber, keep cool on continuously steep places, and prove trustworthy under all conditions. An English car is absolutely essential, and it should be so arranged in construction that the amateur can soon master its technique, and keep it in perfect order without trouble or professional assistance; a chauffeur should never be required. Few light cars hit the happy medium as regards gearing; a too

high gear is the usual fault, and a car built with a low gear only for hill-climbing, like some of the French freaks, which for advertisement achieve wonderful mountain climbs in the Alps, is a weariness of the flesh for cross-country running. Two important points should be : firstly, have the largest tyres obtainable to fit the standard wheels; and, secondly, ascertain that the carburetter is gravityfed and able to work properly on a gradient of one in four. Force-feeding is as unsatisfactory for the mountain-motor as it is for the suffragette. Personally I have used two 10 h.p. cars during the last five years with unvarying success. Not a single breakage has occurred; any necessary adjustments have been trivial; and the expense of locomotion in the wilds has been vastly lowered. The usual advice given to those about to procure a motor-" don't "-is in my opinion as unreliable as Punch's memorable advice to those about to procure a wife. Everything depends on the choice.

CHAPTER X

UP THE SCHRECKHORN IN A STORM

"After this the gathering clouds amain Pour'd down a storm of rattling hail and rain, And lightning flash'd betwixt."

DRYDEN

THE climber's memory is like a picture gallery of his past days. The fairest and most pleasing days are those which immortalize, not the cloudless days of uneventful ease, but rather those of intense effort, and battles with almost unconquerable difficulties of the mountains or their moods. The glorious uncertainties of "British hill weather" are almost proverbial, but I have detected little difference between our muchmaligned Cumbrian climate and that of the high Alps. In fact, the fickleness of mountain weather from sunny Cathay to stern Caledon is indelibly fixed on the memories of mountaineers. Certain Alpine districts are notorious in this respect. In the southern Alps the jagged spires of Mont Blanc's southerly sentinels seem to attract any wandering wisps of storm which float over the Italian plains, in the central Pennines the spiry Matterhorn first heralds the storm wraiths, whilst for the Oberland the commanding cone of the Schreckhorn first flings out the cloud flag of warning. As this last, the "Terror Peak," forms the burthen of my present story, some topographical details may first be advisable.

Those three Graces of Grindelwald, the snowwreathed Jungfrau, the glacier-clad Mönch, and the rock-battlemented Eiger, are wonderful mountains. Truly they grace the most beautiful of Alpine valleys with their vast magnificence. All the world comes to see them ; yet even railways, German bands, kursaals, and almost all kinds of civilized society nuisances have not spoiled the glories of Grindelwald. The centralized haunt of polytechnic parties and polyglots galore is but a small speck of dust on a great picture. After all, the peaks are the Oberland, the town is the "Unterland." The mountaineer is essentially a lover of solitude, and thus Grindelwald has nowadays become simply a stepping-stone to higher things, a convenient house of call where the necessaries of life, which for most men include good guides, can be obtained.

The Schreckhorn is not a popular peak. It has a retiring disposition, and, standing farther back than its more self-assertive compeers, fails to figure prominently in the prospect from many of the favourite view-points. Nevertheless, there are few fatalities to its credit, or discredit, as the case may be; and on the whole the "Terror Peak" may be looked on as a milder mountain than its name and reputation would indicate.

The summit was first visited in 1861 by the

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late Leslie Stephen, whose charming description of the ascent reaches such heights of literary excellence that nobody since has been able to identify the route taken. A good hut now supplies the place of "a small hole under a big rock near the northern foot of the Strahleck," which formed the sleepingplace of the pioneers. Michel, one of the most remarkable of the old Oberland guides, was the leader on that famous occasion. He was described as "the very model of a short, thick, broad mountaineer, with the constitution of a piece of seasoned oak, a placid, not to say stolid, temper, and an illimitable appetite." On one occasion he was benighted on the Eiger. He calmly sat out the hours of darkness half-way up the mountain in a constricted situation, with a stream of freezing water trickling over him. His companion was an unlucky German, whose feet received frost-bites on that occasion from which he never thoroughly recovered, whilst old Michel scarcely had a chilblain.

It was one of the descendants of this noted guide who stirred the calm of one of my autumn visits to Grindelwald. We were descending from the Wengern Alp—by the railway, be it whispered —after a visit to the ice-world of the Upper Eiger Glacier, an expedition planned to make use of the doubtful weather which prevailed. At one point we had an alluring peep of the Schreckhorn. The huge wedge, black and truculent to look upon, towered far up into the Alpine sky. It seemed a real "Terror Peak," but my companion, with professional tact, pointed out the almost entire absence of snow and ice on its crest, and slyly hinted that, under such conditions, the practically unknown and difficult south-western ridge might be assailed successfully. Perchance with a high wind and other signs of a change in the weather it was a mad idea, but a man without ambition is like a monkey without a tail, unnatural and incomplete; 'twere better to aim high than not at all, or, in other words, laze in Grindelwald. This line of argument proved irresistible; thus the early hours of the following morning saw us trudging away up through the pine woods.

Even in the valley there was a wintry feeling in the air, but as we mounted higher, where the storm-shattered pines clung sparsely to the rocky slopes of the Mettenberg, the scene became a fairyland of beauty. The damp night-mists were shifting lazily upwards, leaving behind a wondrous mantle of hoar-frost; every blade of grass and every twig was ermine-coated, and the branches of the trees drooped gracefully with the weight of their covering. Beyond the châlet of the Bäregg we emerged from the shadows of the deep gorge into glorious sunshine; midwinter suddenly changed to midsummer, and we perspired accordingly.

Our idea was to climb the slopes of the Fiescherhorn, on the opposite side of the valley, to secure some photographs and prospect the route for the morrow. The illustration on the opposite page gives some idea of the appearance of our peak. By means of a powerful glass—I do not



THE SCHRECKHORN FROM THE SLOPES OF THE FIESCHERHORN THE WHITE CROSS MARKS THE POINT OF DIVERGENCE TO THE RIGHT FROM THE DANGEROUS COULOIR, WHICH STRETCHES DOWN ALMOST TO THE SCHWARZEGG HUT

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refer to anything of a liquid nature—we were able to see, perchance with the eye of faith, a possible route up the rocks direct to the summit. Everything promised well; with the exception of some dense clouds which hid the Grindelwald valley, now many thousands of feet below, the weather seemed perfect.

Shortly after midday we were slowly wending our way down the great ice-slopes, and after threading a passage through an intricate ice-fall we arrived at the Schwarzegg Hut as the rosy glint of sunset fell athwart the gaunt crags and icy couloirs of our peak, which stretched above the sleeping-place.

Rudolf, the guide, was an expert cook, and the porter who had charge of my ubiquitous camera saw to the sleeping arrangements, consequently I was able to stroll out and enjoy the glorious view. The weather now seemed perfect. The sky was cloudless; a great stillness reigned. After the evening meal came bed amongst the straw, and oblivion until the persistent striking of matches caused a partial awakening. Then I heard a scuffling sound, and the door of the hut was opened to let in a whiff of chill night air. Rudolf was inspecting the weather, and the words, "Three o'clock, and a cloudy morning, sir," dispelled all tendency to slumber. A peep outside disclosed nothing but a drifting mist; however, it felt dry and harmless enough, so we decided to start as soon as the usual formalities of eating, etc., had been given all due attention.

After roping together in the hut, we lit the two lanterns and sallied forth into the darkness, wondering what the "Terror Peak" had in store for us. Anyhow, we quickly realized its powers as an Alpine "quick-change artiste" as far as weather was concerned, for, as we trudged across the loose rocks and snow, a "thin" wind swept across the slope suggestively laden with tiny snow-flakes. Soon we entered the foot of the long snow couloir which rises a few hundred yards from the back of the hut, and there we found comparative shelter.

Up and up we went in the darkness, our lanterns casting a lurid light over the steep, frozen snow. The view was restricted to this area, and I remember that the front and foreground of my outlook was a varicoloured patch in the trousers of the guide in front. Words were as unnecessary as inadvisable, for we all knew the dangers of the lower couloir. Undue noise might bring down the overhanging glacier which in daylight grins grimly down on those who come within reach of its jaws; now and again the icy monster detaches huge masses and hurls them down on those presumptuous mortals who dare the dangers of his sanctuary.

The risky section was passed in safety, and we mounted gaily in the unmistakable bed of the couloir until it narrowed somewhat, and the presence of ice made me suggest our taking to the rocks on the right to avoid step-cutting. Whilst the discussion was in progress, Rudolf gave a sudden shout of warning, and at the same moment we heard the sound of falling stones high above

us, but evidently coming down the natural funnel wherein we still lingered. It was an unnerving experience thus to be trapped; every fraction of a second was valuable. Rudolf had good holding on the rocks to the right of the couloir, and a terrific jerk on the rope put an end to my momentary inaction by dragging me clean out of my icy footsteps. Then I seemed to crash with a rush-andtumble swing into the rocks below Rudolf, and almost instantly the porter came rolling down on top of me.

Fortunately for us all, there was a deep hollow between the icy bed of the couloir and the rocks, and in this we all got shelter, thanks to Rudolf's rough but effective action. He had jumped impetuously down into the dark hole, and the tightening rope had pulled us all down into the same rift at a lower point. But not an instant too soon, for, crouching down as far as possible, we heard the forerunners of the small avalanche whizzing down the couloir with a hum like a mauser bullet. Then the big guns opened fire, and great rocks came crashing down, first on one side of the couloir and then on the other, covering us with loose snow and small splinters.

Eventually the din subsided; but it was some minutes before we could inspect our bruises, which proved to be only of a minor order, and we deferred the application of bandages and sticking-plaster until a more convenient resting-place was available. Sad to tell, one of our lanterns had disappeared, probably dashed to pieces in the first wild rush, and

this made progress up the rocks, which we attacked at once, somewhat slower than might have been. The point of divergence is visible in the illustration taken from the Fiescherhorn, and the dangers of the couloir are also evident; this rift obviously acts as a receptacle for loose matter that falls from the face of the mountain above.

The difficulties of the rocks were increased by the darkness, but in about half an hour's time we arrived on a snowy platform, and passing away to the right below the "nose" of the South-west Ridge, the scene was grand in the extreme. The mist was scurrying across the great black crags above us, where the gale echoed fiercely, but down below, and far away amongst the peaks dominating the vast Ewig Schnee Feld-the Everlasting Snowfield-on the opposite side of the valley, comparative peace seemed to reign. The clouds had suddenly drawn aside like a huge curtain. There, flooded with the weak rays of a misty full moon, we saw the wondrous white peaks of the "Monk" and "Ogre" crouching in front of the graceful form of the Jungfrau, whose head was swathed in a light, gauzy veil of mist. To the left, and almost in front of the moon, the fearsome shape of the Finsteraarhorn -the Peak of the Black Eagle-cleft the clearing sky like the sharp beak of some cruel and monstrous bird of prey. But the lull soon ended, clouds enveloped us, and the storm shrieked louder than ever amongst the crags up which we had hoped to climb to the summit.

In the Alps, man proposes, weather disposes.

Our intended route was obviously impossible at present, but we decided to wait in the shelter of the rocks for an hour, to give the weather a chance of improving. This allowed us time to partake of second breakfast, and patch up the damages sustained lower down. After shivering out the appointed hour, and noting that the weather showed no signs of improvement, we decided to forsake the South-west Ridge and force a way to the summit by the ordinary course, with which I was already familiar under different conditions. The Schreckhorn was evidently in a playful mood that day, and we knew that even the usual route, which at best is difficult, would give us exercise and excitement enough and to spare. Then we launched boldly forth upon the cloud-swept surface of the glacier to the right. The way proved fairly easy to find, because the rocks on the left served as a landmark for some time, until several big crevasses forced us away to the right in a south-easterly direction. Just when progress began to get monotonous, and the mist grew lighter with the coming dawn, we were stopped by an awesome crevasse, which, as is usual so late in the season, stretched across the glacier from side to side. This was the well-known Bergschrund; we knew it had defeated a guideless party a few days previously. At the point of approach the passage was impossible, for the upper lip of the schrund, besides being several feet above the level of our heads, was some yards away on the other side of the icy chasm, which in the uncertain gloom seemed hundreds of feet deep. Fortunately, we

turned to the right, and moving carefully along the lower lip of the schrund for two or three hundred yards, a vulnerable-looking place attracted attention.

Peering over the edge of the abyss, we saw that some large splinters had quite recently fallen away from the farther side of the gulf, and become wedged in its interior. One of these, with a thin, sharp, icy crest, formed a natural bridge, and offered the only way to the top that day. The ice was so shattered and broken on the farther side that the exit would cause little trouble, but with the descent to the bridge it was otherwise. There was quite 25 feet of smooth, slippery, vertical ice to negotiate, and I found such difficulty in following down the ice-staircase, which Rudolf had skilfully cut with his axe, that we deemed it unsafe for the porter as last man to descend without a rope from above. This meant leaving our spare length of rope tied to an ice-axe which the porter drove firmly into the hard snow. Then he slid carefully down the rope to our level, and it was comforting to know that we had certain means of return, for the climb up that icy wall unaided would have been practically impossible. Certainly we were short of an ice-axe, but the rocks were close at hand, and its absence was scarcely felt at all.

'Twas a weird experience to sit astride that fragile bridge in the gloomy, yet sheltered, depths of the Bergschrund with huge icicles dependent on every hand. One at a time we edged warily across this veritable *pons asinorum*, and each

uttered a cry of satisfaction when the firm ice on the farther side was attainable.

Ere long we were out of the clutches of the chilly chasm, and battling with the rising wind which rushed down upon us during the approach to the rocks. Once these were gained, we mounted gaily and at a great speed for the sake of promoting bodily warmth. Daylight came on apace as we wrestled with the great snow-wreathed rockwall, which is one of the principal details of the ascent of the Schreckhorn.

One of the outstanding features of the "Terror Peak" is its unenviable reputation for throwing stones at those who come within range. We had verified this lower down, but the high cliff above the Bergschrund is really responsible for this evil name. The place certainly possessed plenty of available loose matter—in fact, we were often compelled to climb up it. I know of no more surprising sensation, and none more thrilling in the world, than on an exposed precipice to catch hold of a promising-looking hand-hold, and feel it suddenly come away with a jerk. The unnerving experience is heightened if the cliff is almost vertical and there is naught below for thousands of feet but "cloud-filled nothingness."

One of us—fortunately not the leader—tasted of the discomforts of such a performance that autumn morning on the Schreckhorn; but, after all, the adventure served a useful purpose—it acted as a warning, and made everybody move carefully.

After we had crossed and recrossed the upper

couloir the gale suddenly swept the clouds aside. Night lingered below, but far above our heads we saw the roseate tinge of dawn flashing across the summit snows. The sight was gloriously inspiring, and with renewed energy we struggled onwards—

> "Up the high steep, across the golden sill, Up out of shadow into very light, Up out of dwindling light to light aglow."

But this enthusiasm received a sudden shock. for one of the party-I am afraid it was the amateur -carelessly dislodged a loose rock, which started quite a junior avalanche lower down. All at once it dawned upon us that should any of the falling matter smash the ice-axe which supported the belayed rope in the Bergschrund a thousand feet below, our return might easily be indefinitely postponed. However, we were soon too busy to think of such disagreeable matters, for on the crest of the rock-wall the storm caught us in full force. It was impossible to stand upright in the blast, and we crept under the leeward side of the ridge for partial shelter. By this means we made quick progress, until, about five hundred feet higher, it became necessary to climb on the narrow, exposed crest of the ridge which leads direct to the summit. Before emerging, we crouched in the "shadow of a great rock in a weary land," and made external and internal preparations for the final dash.

Every article of spare clothing was now brought into use. I even utilized a spare pair of puttees by wrapping them, mummy-like, around my body. Goggles were dispensed with because ice formed so quickly upon them, thus crippling the eyesight. Then, leaving all the luggage behind, Rudolf led us boldly up on to the galeswept ridge. Our reception was terrific. A tremendous wind came tearing up from the cloud-filled depths on the other side of the mountain, and nearly carried us all along with it into space. Movement was impossible for quite half a minute, but in the succeeding lull we scrambled hurriedly upwards, and for some time progress could only be made during these quieter intervals.

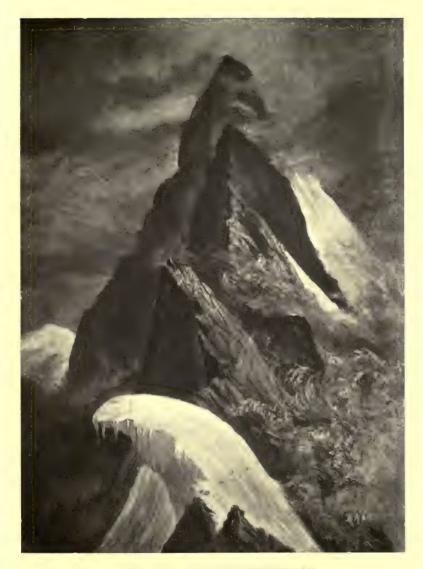
At such times it was possible to realize our situation. The conditions were so overpowering that the most hardened lover of nature's wildest moods would have been satisfied. One section was especially impressive. We were perched astride a fairly steep rock-ridge which gradually narrowed as we advanced. A few yards farther along it almost assumed the proportion of a knifeblade, and the crest curved gracefully over the abyss to the left. It was a soul-stirring feeling to be clinging desperately with arms and knees all alert to this fragile, frozen arête, absolutely cut off from all the nether world by banks of impenetrable mist. The only connecting link was the frozen rope, which, usually stretched ahead, was now flung far out to the left by the fury of the storm. I remember watching, with eyes half closed by the driving spindrift, this veritable life-line gradually straighten and tighten as the invisible man in front moved upwards. It was a relief to

feel the slight pull and know that the long minutes of frozen inaction were over.

To advance safely required great deliberation; in several places progress could only be made when the wind temporarily abated its fiercest efforts to tear us off our holds. It was impossible to spy out the foot-holds, and forward movement was mostly made by steady arm-pulls on the narrow tip of the ridge. It was quite a relief to reach the leeward side of what seemed at first to be a white pillar of snow, and suddenly realize that it was the snow- and ice-encased figure of Rudolf. He bent questioningly downwards, but ever "Vorwärts!" was my cry; and, thus encouraged, he moved away and upwards out of sight over easier rocks whilst I steadied the rope during the passage of the man behind.

A few feet higher up, the clouds thinned perceptibly, and for only a moment, just before reaching the final obstacle of the ridge, we caught a glimpse of the summit. Fortunately the difficulties now moderated, otherwise failure must have been our only reward, for at this point the full force of the storm was felt.

Great, dense clouds of loose snow were being torn off the north-eastern face, hurled up the tremendous cliff, and carried far out to leeward. The din was overpowering; not a word could be heard between us; in fact, at times my companions at each end of the rope were invisible. Infinite care and judgment were necessary. The slightest slip would, at least, have been inconvenient; nay, we



ON THE RIDGE OF THE SCHRECKHORN A GATHERING STORM

should have spent the rest of our short lives proving that man, equipped only with heavy mountain boots and climbing gear, has not yet solved the problem of aërial navigation.

Erè long a narrow ridge of snow separated us from the summit; this reminded us of the terrible accident which happened here to a young Englishman, who perished whilst tackling the most dangerous part of the peak unroped. Another party with a well-known guide were watching him returning from the summit, when they were horrified to see the snow suddenly break away under his feet. His body crashed through it and fell headlong to the glacier 2,000 feet below. These recollections were scarcely cheerful companions on such a day, so they were quickly forgotten in the joys of victory.

Just one touch of the tapering summit stones, 13,386 feet above the sea, and we began the descent immediately, for any chance of a view in such a *tourmente* was utterly hopeless. The work had been excessively exhausting, and, acting on Rudolf's thoughtful suggestion, we were glad to make a short detour by descending to a partially sheltered recess a short distance below the top of the mountain. This was a curious room-like hollow in the great cliff; the fact that one side of the room was entirely missing and the floor of hard snow sloped outwards militated against extreme comfort. The wind roared and boomed over the ridge just above us; at times the very mountain quivered; and though the cold was intense, I

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could at least open my eyes properly and look around.

In conformity with custom, the view outwards should now be described. It is an easy matter on this occasion. Nothing was visible! everything was blotted out by a dense mass of skurrying mist. But the mischief is that I was more deeply impressed with what I did not see. This was an ice-glazed boulder stuck loosely in the floor of the recess, and a sudden slip of the foot made me sit down precipitately and painfully on its projecting point. Fortunately the shriek of the storm prevented my friends from hearing the hurried remarks that were addressed to the point, yet it is put on record that my seat was taken in accord with parliamentary usage.

A great authority on such things has said that a blistered toe will spoil the most majestic scenery, thus my discomfort is a sufficient excuse for sparing the reader further descriptions of the wonderful and inspiring sights that ought to have been appreciated during the descent.

Slowly but surely we moved downwards out of the storm and danger-zone until the shelter of the snow-wreathed crags above the glacier was reached and a meal could be attempted. This was a failure; everything was frozen hard; some oranges were as solid as cricket balls, and inaccessible unless dissected with an ice-axe. The chicken was as hard as a board, and my wine gourd was frozen into a solid mass; so we tried to persuade ourselves that alcoholic stimulants are

unnecessary in mountaineering — in fact, they are positively dangerous. However, raisins and biscuits were available, and necessarily proved sufficient for the rest of the descent. Down and down we went, now quickly as well as surely, over slippery rocks and treacherous ice-slopes, for the weather was evidently growing worse; down into the welcome warmth, our frozen limbs gradually thawing with the violent exercise. Intermittent snow-showers fell, and when we gained the glacier vivid flashes of lightning flickered eerily amidst the snow-laden vapour.

Fortunately the ice-axe and rope were intact, and, after escaping from the Bergschrund we rattled quickly down the glacier to near the top of the dangerous couloir. Then came a sudden stop; the porter absolutely refused to go down to the hut by this route. It seemed that a few years previously he was descending the place late in the afternoon at the same time as a famous Grindelwald guide, a porter, and an amateur, when the latter climbers were overtaken by an avalanche. The escape was so remarkable that he refused to risk its repetition. Tactful persuasion was of no avail, but as a matter of fact we were glad at heart to follow the porter's advice and descend by the Strahlegg, despite the long and somewhat wearisome detour.

At the Schwarzegg Hut we picked up our belongings and raced down to Grindelwald, well pleased with the world in general.

Next morning the valley and its peaks were swathed in damp rain-clouds borne on a south-

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westerly gale; the climbing season was over. Then *au revoir* to the land of soaring mountains and everlasting snows; next day, greeting to old England with its rush and roar of city life. The Alps and all their truly delectable places were far away, abandoned to

"Bleak wintry storms with tenfold fierceness armed, And snows and icy blasts."

CHAPTER XI

THE HIGHEST CLIMBS IN THE WORLD

"Give me the sport which calls a man To some far-off and lonely land, Where cold, unconquerable peaks And crevassed glaciers sternly guard Impenetrable forest land."

W^E live in an age of strenuous travel and exploration, and nowadays it is almost possible to be personally conducted to the uttermost ends of all the earth. But the silent snows of the loftiest mountains and the ice-bound wastes of the farthest Antarctic still remain untrodden by human foot.

Polar heroes have drawn the populace in more ways than one. The things they have done, or more often left undone, have stirred the world; but the less commercial efforts of those men who have struggled to solve the great unknown of the highest heights have, popularly speaking, received scant attention. The farthest north has been rudely robbed of its romance, and the rumour that a certain famous American will shortly proceed to the South Pole may soon militate against serious interest being taken in Antarctic expeditions. In

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any case, the Antarctic conquest cannot long be delayed, and those in search of new worlds to conquer might well lift up their eyes to the hills. The vast recesses and stupendous solitudes of the highest Himalayas, though for the most part our own national property, are almost a *terra incognita*.

Nevertheless, of recent years several more or less organized expeditions have laid siege to the great peaks, and much meritorious work has been accomplished. The question as to who holds the record for the highest climb has been raised with characteristic personality by a famous American climber. In mountaineering circles a wordy warfare has been waged on this point, but of far greater interest and importance is the discussion regarding the feasibility of an ascent of Mount Everest.

It has been practically proved that, given proper organization, the journey to the poles is not a physical impossibility. On the highest mountains it is an altogether different matter, and scientists disagree as to whether modern mortals could withstand, for instance, the diminished air-pressure of the greatest altitudes. I say modern mortals, because it is a curious fact that the human race is improving in this respect. Two centuries ago, those rash travellers who attempted the ascent of our English mountain Skiddaw were afflicted with "bleeding at the nose and ears, due to the thinness of the air."

The same trouble was experienced by early Alpine explorers, and de Saussure and Balmat



MIDST THE EVERTSHALL STOWS

have given thrilling descriptions of their sufferings on Mont Blanc. Modern mountaineers scoff at these gory adventures; but they are still a stern reality on the very "Roof of the World," that region where Mount Everest and Kangchenjunga "touch the sky."

The terrible dragons and goblins that haunted the once mysterious Alpine glaciers have also retreated to the same region. They are a very present source of trouble to those climbers who perforce have to make use of the superstitious Indian coolies to assist in the porterage of their goods and chattels amongst the Himalayas. After weeks or probably months of organized work and forethought, it has happened, several times, that an expedition has been able to push its camp within reach of the highest points. Then the coolies suddenly remember that they are amongst the demon-haunted rocks and snows-they are actually intruding into "the sanctuary of the formidable devil which is figured on the walls of the Buddhist temples as the god of Kangchenjunga." The result is either a wholesale stampede with their loads of food, or an absolute dead stupid halt, and determined refusal to go one step further.

No doubt, as years go by, a trained band of coolies will be available for heights above 20,000 feet. Then, and not till then, will it be proved whether or not man can conquer the world's greatest peaks.

It is the vastness of the Himalayas, and the

inaccessibility of even the bases of the highest peaks that makes their conquest verge on the impossible. There are hundreds of peaks higher than Mont Blanc, many of them absolutely inaccessible until the perfection of the flying machine. The greater number of these are situated in "The Forbidden Land," and are consequently at present unapproachable for ordinary Britons. Mount Everest, supposed to be the loftiest peak on our globe, is 110 miles from Katmandu, the capital of Nepal; and this is the nearest civilized place to its base. The highest point has been actually seen by very few white men, and the nearest station from which its height has been measured is a hundred miles distant.

The figures given on the Indian Survey for 1901 are 29,002 feet. The insertion of the odd feet must surely be a tinge of official sarcasm, for it is no uncommon thing to find the heights in the Himalayas erring to an extent of hundreds of feet.

When climbers are permitted to enter the astnesses of Nepal, which at present is a prohibited province, it may be possible to take barometrical and boiling-point measurements of Mount Everest.

Its native name is Jomo Kang Kar—"the Lady of the Snows"—and it may be of interest to know that our English naming is from Colonel Everest, its discoverer. Thank the fates he was not called Tomkins!

The part of the Himalayas at present most accessible for mountaineering is that containing the

peaks of Sikkim. Darjeeling — where the tea comes from—is the best starting-place, and Kangchenjunga, the third highest mountain (28,150 feet), is distant about 45 miles as the crow flies, or would fly if it existed in Sikkim. The next-door neighbour to this snow-crowned monarch is Kabru (24,015 feet), and this is one of the few of the greater peaks which have been successfully attacked. Even then its final 40 or 50 feet resisted the onslaught of the strongest party of modern mountaineers. Until the end of 1909 this was the highest climb on record. It was accomplished in 1883 by an Englishman, Mr. W. W. Graham, with two Swiss guides, Emile Boss and Ulrich Kaufmann.

This expedition had practically no scientific aims. It was undertaken privately for the pure love of the sport of mountaineering, and relied more on the powers of its members than on the powers of gold, and consequent assistance from local officials and others. Taking these and other matters into consideration, I think that the ascent of Kabru so long ago as 1883 deserves premier place in any story of the greatest altitudes yet attained by man.

Mr. Graham appeared before the Royal Geographical Society and delivered a discourse on this and many other of his great ascents in Sikkim. I am fortunate enough to be able to give an account based on Mr. Graham's most interesting description of their climb.

Starting from Darjeeling with a party of only twenty powerful but heavily loaded coolies, and 14 their sirdar, the party travelled across the swampy valleys and intervening ridges to the foot of the great peaks. They spent several days in less ambitious climbing, during which time they successfully scaled a difficult peak called Jabonu (21,400 feet high).

Then followed some careful examination of Kabru from every side, and a final decision to attack it from the south-east. Starting from the village of Ahluthang, they passed the huge moraines below Pandim and crossed the Praig River, a strong, ice-cold glacier stream that rose to their waists, and proved a hard passage for the heavily burdened coolies.

When they reached the actual base of Kabru, snow fell heavily, and they pitched their small tents and slept peacefully at a height of 16,000 feet. At early dawn they continued upwards, intending to strike the crest of the south-east ridge. The newly-fallen snow made progress slow, but they eventually reached the end of a great rock buttress that rose up to the ridge.

There some discussion arose as to the best route. The Swiss guides advised the ascent of the buttress from the south, but the Englishman preferred to go straight up the ridge to the north. However, he yielded to the opinion of the professionals, and a few hours later they reached the top of the great rock bastion (about 19,000 feet high), only to find themselves cut off from the main peak of Kabru by an impassable gulf some hundreds of feet deep. It was a veritable Pisgah, for the Promised Land was visible, but Jordan "rolled between."

Whilst the others endured the disappointment in inaction, Kaufmann climbed over the edge of the abyss, seeking for a way down into the gap. The others were aroused to a fearful state of excitement by the sound of great rocks crashing down to the glacier about 6,000 feet below. It transpired that a large rock on which he had been standing had given way, and though he had had a miraculous escape, it was necessary to treat the matter jocularly to preserve the courage of the coolies.

The party eventually retraced their steps, and after the descent turned up the north side of the buttress. At a height of about 18,500 feet on the northern face, they found a narrow ledge overhanging the precipice, just large enough to accommodate some of the small tents. This was their highest sleeping quarters, and fortunately the weather proved fine. The coolies were so tired that they preferred to stay up at this height rather than follow their custom of returning to the lower level to sleep.

At 4.30 a.m. next morning the three mountaineers roped together and started upwards into the mysterious upper world of Kabru.

They crossed a large ice couloir in a slanting direction. Its surface was coated with a treacherous covering of loose snow, and it had no bottom, for, after sloping down steeper, and steeper, "it suddenly plunged over a nice thing in the way of precipices some 6,000 feet high." Great care had to be taken to prevent starting an avalanche, for, though the loose snow might have started gently and softly, it

would have carried the party down as it gathered in bulk, and flung them mercilessly over into the fearful abyss below.

However, by cutting deep steps through into the ice they passed this dangerous section and gained the long, steep incline of hard snow. After two hours of step-cutting up this, they arrived at the foot of the true peak, and were rejoiced to find a long ridge of rocks cropping through the snow.

After clambering up these for nearly 1,000 feet, they gained the top of the ridge at 10 a.m., and the great eastern summit rose scarcely 1,500 feet above. Now came the crux of the climb, for this last slope was pure ice that assumed an angle of steepness from 45 to 60 degrees. Under ordinary conditions, step-cutting up such a place would have occupied so long a time and induced such fatigue as to render success impossible; however, on account of the recent snowfall and subsequent cold, it was covered with a mantle of frozen snow several inches deep. Kaufmann led up this part by quickly hacking notches for the feet; and rather more than two hours later the party strode out on to the lower summit of Kabru, fully 23,700 feet above sea-level.

The view from such a point, surrounded by the giants of the Himalayas, must have been indescribably magnificent. The more distant prospect seems to have interested Mr. Graham most, and his remarkable statements before the Royal Geographical Society regarding the supposed highest peaks are worth noting.

North-west less than 70 miles away lay Mount Everest, and he pointed it out to Emile Boss as the highest mountain in the world.

"That cannot be," Boss replied; "those are higher," and he pointed to two peaks which rose far above the second and more distant range.

These showed beyond the slope of Mount Everest, at a rough guess, about 90 miles away in a northerly direction. The whole party agreed that the unknown peaks were the loftier. Their opinion is certainly worth attention, for from such a vantage-point mountain levels can be very accurately gauged; and they were able to detect the difference in heights between several peaks with which they had had practical acquaintance. Moreover, the famous botanist, Sir Joseph Hooker, has observed these unmeasured peaks during his higher journeys in Sikkim, and the natives who have journeyed into Tibet have described their wonders. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that in that inscrutable and veritable No-man's-land of snow and ice there are great peaks rising higher than the Lady of the Snows.

However, to return to the ascent, the actual summit was still ahead, and connected with the lower peak by a narrow roof-like ridge of steep ice. But the slope of the icy roof on either side was set at an appallingly steep angle : on the left there was a terrific slide to the glacier 10,000 feet below; whilst on the right, a few yards below the crest of the ridge, the ice-slope broke away and overhung a tremendous rock cliff some thousands of feet high. The abyss was filled with a light mist. A slight wind would have made the passage of this icy ridge-pole impossible; but fortune favoured the climbers, and after nearly two hours of exciting work they arrived at the last of the icy notches which form the summit of Kabru. Unfortunately the actual highest tip was quite inaccessible. It was a vertical pinnacle of hard blue ice, less than 50 feet high on the side facing them, and they were unable to gain any standing or hold on it at any point. However, they had been virtually successful, and their ascent of nearly 24,000 feet was a remarkable feat.

After leaving a bottle containing their names and planting a native flag on the nearest rocks, they descended safely to the highest camp. This was reached by moonlight about 10 p.m., after having been afoot about nineteen hours and a half.

A very remarkable feature of this wonderful performance was the absence of any serious discomfort due to the rarity of the air. This curious fact has been recently used as an argument against the truth of Mr. Graham's record of his climb. Most climbers when they reach a height of 18,000 feet, or even lower, according to their powers, suffer from a peculiar illness, which has been called "mountain sickness." Its main causes are diminished atmospheric pressure, the consequent lack of oxygen in the air, want of training, and some physical weakness on the part of the climber.

One cannot help thinking that physical inability and simple fatigue are the most potent causes of

mountain sickness even at great heights. Amongst the Swiss Alps, in these days when mountaineering has become the fashion for "all sorts and conditions of men," sufferers from *mal de montagne* are much in evidence.

A few years ago, during an ascent of the Matterhorn, the beauties of the upper rocks were completely spoilt by the troubles of a couple of incapable young Britons, who were being escorted, or rather pulled and pushed, up the peak by four Swiss guides. On the top they were in much the same condition as the "half-a-crown-a-sail" seaside excursionist, who gets to the stage of asking his best friend to end his misery by throwing him overboard. The two mountaineers were frightfully sick. They simply lay side by side and gazed down the grand precipice that ends several thousand feet lower on the green pastures of Italy. Their groans and grimaces reminded me of the truth of the saying that we Englishmen take our pleasures sadly. Of course the pleasure came some days afterwards, when they were able to tell a select few of their "conquest of the Matterhorn." Want of training and physical unsuitability were the causes of their illness. The same thing applies on a larger scale in the Himalayas, and careful acclimatization and physical perfection are generally considered the absolute essentials that make for success.

If a party in skill and physique equal to Mr. Graham's could nowadays attack the Himalayas, there would be no doubt of their success at the

greatest altitudes. It is a mistake to judge the strong by the weak. Other mountaineers besides Mr. Graham have climbed to great heights without suffering from mountain sickness.

The late Mr. Mummery's climb on Nanga Parbat is a notable instance of this. A famous mountain explorer has inferred that difficult rocks cannot be climbed above a height of 18,000 feet. Yet Mr. Mummery was able to conquer the great rocks of Nanga Parbat (26,629 feet) and reach a height of over 21,000 feet without suffering unusual discomfort.

English climbers who have seen and inspected Mr. Graham's route up Kabru see absolutely no reason to doubt his statements, and both Mr. Douglas W. Freshfield and Dr. T. G. Longstaff, the two greatest authorities on Himalayan mountaineering, are of this number. Messrs. C. W. Rubenson and Monrad-Aas, who reached the summit ridge of Kabru in the autumn of 1907, were also of the same opinion.

The expedition of these two Norwegians possesses many remarkable features. Neither of them could be considered expert in mountain craft —in fact, Monrad-Aas had never previously climbed a mountain of any description. They travelled guideless, and left Darjeeling with a hundred coolies to carry supplies and keep up the line of communication. They quickly appreciated the usefulness of the natives, and those who accompanied them on the heights were treated with every kindness and consideration. They realized that



LIST OF THE HIGHEST AUTHENTI-CATED ASCENTS IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE WORLD

MOUNT EVEREST, 29,002 FT., UNCLIMBED

- THE DUKE OF THE ABRUZZI, 1909. Bride Peak, Karakoram Himalaya, 24,400 ft. approx. The height is based on Sir W. M. Conway's
- The height is based on Sir W. M. Conway's survey MR. W. W. GRAHAM, 1883. 23,975 ft. G.T.S.* On Kabru, Sikkim Himalaya MESSIS, RUIENSON and MONRAD-AAS; 1007. 23,000 ft. approx. on Kabru, Sikkim Himalaya DR. T. G. LONGSTAFF, 1007. 23,406 ft., G.T.S. The summit of Trisul, Garbwal Himalaya DR. HUNTER WORKMAN, 1003. 23,994 ft. Pyramid Peak, Karakorum Himalaya MR. STUART VINES and ZURBEIGGEN, 1897. 23,080 ft. Summit of Aconcagua, S. America SIR W. M. CONWAY, 1802. 23,000 ft. approx. Summit of Pioneer Peak, Karakorams THE BROTHERS SCHLACHTWEIT, 1856. 22,230 ft. approx. Ibi Gamin, Garbwal Himalaya MR. DOUGLAS FRESHFIELD, 1809. 22,000 ft. approx. Jonsong La, Sikkim Himalaya

- MR. DOUGLAS FRESHFIELD, 1869. 22,000 t. approx. Jonsong La, Sikkim Himalaya MR. E. A. FITZGERALD, 1897. 21,550. Summit of Tupungato, S. America The late A. F. MUMMERY, 1895. 21,000 ft. approx. Nanga Parbat, Himalayas MR. E. WHYMPER, 1880. 20,476 ft. Summit of Chimborazo, S. American Andes HERP. PURPECUT. In . 1890. To app 6. Summit

- HERR PURTSCHELLER, 1889. 19,700 ft. Summit of Kibo, S. Africa Ir. Douglas Freshfield, 1868. 18,520 ft.
- MR. Elbruz, Caucasus

MONT BLANC, 15,792 FT.

* G.T.S. refers to the Great Trigonometrical Society

NOTE.--No account has been given here of the ascents of the late W. H. Johnson in the Kuen-Luen Himalaya, Despite conflicting evidence it may be assumed that during his estimable survey work under Government heights above 22,000 ft. were reached

SNOWDON, 3,571 FT.

SEA LEVEL

it is no good fitting oneself out like a Polar bear if one does not look after the men in the same way.

They approached Kabru from the Rothong glen on the south-west side, and established a base camp at Jongri. After excessive difficulties with the tremendous ice-fall, where five laborious days were occupied in step-cutting alone, amongst a chaos of ice-needles and crevasses, they gained the ridge between the "Dome" and the North-East Peak of Kabru. A camp was eventually brought up to this place, and they passed the night out at about 22,000 feet. Only two coolies remained at this height; the others had been sent down to the camp 500 feet lower. The cold was intense, the thermometer registering 29° below zero centigrade. Next morning, October 20th, 1907, an icy-cold wind was blowing, and a start was made at the late hour of 8.30 a.m. The plan was to go up to the saddle between the two peaks; but an embryo gale made this impossible. They then bore off to the right under the shelter of the North-East Peak, the top of which they almost reached after encountering many obstacles. At about 6 p.m. a low snow-ridge was seen about 50 feet higher. This seemed to be the summit, but the day was too far gone and the cold too severe for further ascent to be advisable, the more so considering the difficulties of descent. The altitude finally reached was about 23,900 feet. From the turning-point, the South-West Peak, the higher of the two summits, seemed easy of access. It appears that the descent proved exciting. I

quote from Mr. Rubenson's description in the Calcutta Englishman :---

"On the return journey we had a very narrow escape. Going down a very steep slope, I, who was in the rear and was roped to my companion, slipped from the icy step (we had to give up nailed boots after reaching the second highest camp, on account of the great cold the nails gather and communicate to the feet), fell on my back, and flashed past my friend like a shot. He was, luckily for both of us, able to retain me by lying against the slope. The rope, a Swiss tourist rope of five strands, very nearly broke, four of these strands parting, so that I was held by a single strand. As I did not lose hold of my ice-axe, I was able to firmly reinstate myself and continue the journey down. It is marvellous that Mr. Monrad-Aas was able to check my fall seeing the position he was in. Had we both fallen, we could not possibly have survived having a slide of some 500 feet and then a drop on to a lower glacier.

"The moon had now risen; the wind was blowing hard as we quickly made our way to the camp. When this was reached, we found our two boys shivering. We were really too tired to eat anything; the cold ox-tongue which had been our food for the two last days did not tempt either. Mr. Monrad-Aas complained of pain in his feet, and on examination we found that six of his toes were badly frost-bitten. I applied the only remedy available, viz. rubbing with snow. When re-

turning towards Jongri on the 21st, we had spent more than a fortnight on the ice. Neither of us suffered seriously from mountain sickness; some of the coolies who had it badly we left behind at the lower camps; most of the others did not seem to mind the altitude at all. I do not doubt for a moment that it is possible to climb even a good deal higher than Kabru.

"The chief thing is to have as good and as willing coolies as we had; properly fitted out and with kind treatment, they will surmount what would seem impossible. Take it slowly and carefully; let the coolies go over the road first without loads to get confidence, and they will then go with them. We could not make them use the rope when loaded; their reason for it, that they would not be able to help each other then, is worth considering. But by making as good steps as possible, bettering the road, fastening iron nails and stationary ropes on the most difficult places, we helped them as much as we could. Our experience is that the coolies, especially the Nepalese Sherpa, are excellent men when treated properly, and our success is only due to the willingness and brave qualities of these people."

Thus, these two remarkable men were defeated after a brave fight against adverse conditions. A point of interest worth noting is that, unlike Dr. Longstaff's party, they suffered no cumulative effects of a prolonged stay at great heights. Twelve or thirteen days were spent in camps at a height

of 19,500 feet and over. Thus it is not surprising to hear that Mr. Rubenson shares the opinion of Dr. Longstaff, that Mount Everest can be climbed.

In 1903 a famous American mountaineer, Dr. Hunter Workman, reached an altitude of 23,394 feet on Pyramid Peak in the Baltistan Himalayas, and Mrs. Fanny Bullock Workman accompanied him to a point only about 700 feet lower. This was a magnificent performance in every way, and Mrs. Workman holds the highest record amongst lady climbers. Unfortunately, on his return Dr. Workman cast doubts on Mr. Graham's credentials regarding the ascent of Kabru, and claimed the highest record for his own expedition. He met with scant encouragement from English mountaineers, and the merits of his work in Baltistan were scarcely recognized.

It is refreshing to turn to the climbs made in 1905 and 1907 by Dr. T. G. Longstaff along with the two Italian guides Alexis and Henri Brocherel. In the July of the former year the party reached a height of nearly 24,000 feet on Gurla Mandhata (25,350 feet), which stands in Tibetan territory near the Kumaon frontier. The guides claimed that the record for altitude had been broken, but the Englishman jokingly said that this referred to the barometer, which had been previously damaged. However, their attempt was one of the most wonderful exhibitions of pluck and endurance in the annals of mountaineering. After gaining a height of about 23,000 feet, the outlook ahead necessitated a different route of approach to the

summit. Thus it was decided to descend to some rocks in search of sleeping quarters. The outcome was that the first day's serious work was finished by a ride on an avalanche down a terrible icy slope for quite a thousand feet. But for a miraculous avoidance of the rocks, something more than "the record for altitude" might have been broken.

After this disconcerting adventure they spent the night on some rocks nearly 20,000 feet above sea-level, and next day, despite their severe shaking, climbed up the vast snow-slopes of Gurla Mandhata to an approximate height of 23,000 feet. The indisposition of one of the guides made them rest there for the night in a hole dug in the snow. At 2.30 a.m. the next morning they started by lantern light, but after nearly two hours of ascent their physical powers began to yield to the trying experiences of the previous days, and the descent was commenced. Judged by the height of surrounding peaks, they reckoned that they stopped nearly 24,000 feet above the sea, but Dr. Longstaff did not consider that he had equalled Mr. Graham's record.

Late in June of the following year the same party with a Gurkha reached the summit of Trisul (23,406 feet), one of the peaks of the Nanda Devi group in the Garhwal Himalayas. It may be noted that on this occasion the actual summit was gained, whereas the attempts on Kabru, Gurla Mandhata, and other great peaks fell short of this crowning conquest. The remarkable feature of Dr. Longstaff's success on Trisul was the comparatively low level of the final camp. This was at a height of 17,450 feet, yet they actually scaled the remaining 6,000 feet in ten hours, without undue suffering from severe exercise at this great altitude. Hitherto some authorities had considered such speed impossible.

Shortly after the midsummer of 1909, an impetuous daily paper announced that "the Duke of the Abruzzi has reached Mount Godwen-Austen, the second highest mountain in the world, and is now on his way to Mount Everest." Gloomy thoughts supervened. Alas! How are the mighty fallen! That indefinable charm and mystery of the great unknown had been shattered simply and suddenly, and for ever. These were my thoughts until a doubting friend came along with the advice, "Wait and see!" No definite news arrived for some time, but eventually truth proved itself mighty and prevailed. It seems that the expedition had about that time reached the vicinity of Mount Godwen-Austen in the Karakoram Himalayas. The important members of the party were the Duke, his adjutant, Marchese Negrotti, Dr. Filippi, Cav. Sella, and eight Italian guides from the Courmayeur district. Several unsuccessful attempts were made on some of the lower surrounding peaks, but Mount Godwen-Austen was not even attempted. Finally, after some bad weather, on July 18th the Duke succeeded in climbing to within about 700 feet of the top of Bride Peak, the approximate height attained being less than 24,500 feet above sea-level. Bad weather was the cause of failure to reach the actual summit. However,

at present this is the highest ascent on record. Considering the untold wealth lavished on the expedition, the official encouragement it received, the experience of its leaders, and the complete organization of all details, the results are disappointing and almost discouraging.

Outside the region of the Himalayas there are few peaks that have been associated with altitude records. Aconcagua is the most notable exception, and for many years it was considered as inaccessible as Mount Everest. In 1896–97 the famous guide Zurbriggen and Mr. Stuart Vines, who were members of Mr. E. A. Fitzgerald's expedition, finally trod its virgin summit, which rises to a height of 23,000 feet above the sea. Success was only achieved after much physical suffering on the part of the climbers.

The varying experiences, and confusing as well as contradictory opinions of the highest mountain explorers scarcely assist in the forming of an answer to the question, Can Mount Everest be ascended? Man's loftiest achievements fall over 4,500 feet short of his ambition. The favourable opinions of practical men have been quoted, but theorists have pronounced against the chances of success. For instance, they state the fact that MM. Croie, Spinelli, and Sivel ascended rapidly almost to the same height in a balloon, and were found dead on its return to earth, stifled for want of oxygen. Professor Bert has reduced a chamber in his laboratory to approximately the same atmospheric pressure as would obtain at these great heights,

and proved the difficulty of sustaining human life therein.

But these experiments are of little practical use, because on the mountains other factors modify the results. There is, for instance, gradual increase of height in contradistinction to the sudden rush upwards in a balloon or the unnatural experiments in a "pneumatic chamber."

Mountaineers who have seen the three highest mountains in the world agree that if due discretion is used as to choice of routes, the peaks themselves afford no physical difficulties; easy snow-slopes lead to their summits. In some cases it is hard to gain the actual base of the peaks, and hazardous rock-climbing is necessary before the valleys are left behind.

Though as yet without actual experience of the greatest heights, my own personal opinion, as a mountaineer of some experience, is that Mount Everest is humanly possible. This opinion has been arrived at by consulting several leading authorities and by plans and experiments arranged with a view to a visit to the Himalayas which was to have been made in 1900.

Important tests as to one's physical suitability can be carried out on Mont Blanc. I feel sure that if a climber can run at a fair speed up the last three hundred feet at its summit, he is capable of greater height records than have yet been made in the Himalayas. My intended companion on this expedition could do this with ease, and it would be interesting to have the same test applied

to the members of future expeditions to the loftiest peaks. In fact, such experiments would save a tremendous amount of time, expense, disappointment, and possibly bodily collapse; for the strain on a weak heart or lungs at the highest levels must be dangerous to human life.

I know that two Swiss guides can be found to pass the above test, and these, with two experienced amateurs, who are accustomed to carrying heavy loads, would make an ideal party.

Other important points of organization which would require attention would be, in the first place, the food question : each day's rations for every member of the party should be packed separately and labelled; and above the higher camps each portion should be carried by the consumer himself. An extremely lightly - made camp, that could be easily transported and used for the highest bivouac previous to the final dash for the summit, would be a necessary detail of equipment. Several months of training would be required by the porters or coolies, and this time would be profitably spent in climbing lower elevations and prospecting with a view to conquering only one great peak. Under present political conditions this should be Kangchenjunga, which is the most easily accessible of the three highest mountains. The ascent has only once been seriously attempted; on this occasion two lives were lost, and the whole undertaking reflected little credit on those concerned.

There have been brilliant exceptions, but up to 15

the present it can scarcely be said that the most physically suitable men have attempted the conquest of the greatest heights. Few can spare the time required, and a still more limited number have command of the necessary wealth. I venture the suggestion that the undertaking is well worthy of a Government grant; the money would be well spent in acquiring a knowledge of our own territory and its border environment ; moreover, the scientific and geographical results would at least equal those of Polar expeditions. Yet perchance 'twere unwise to moot the suggestion from a utilitarian standpoint. Rather let us consider the æsthetic side, and at the same time, for the sake of argument, assume the truth of the popular idea that such an expedition has no practical usefulness. Nevertheless, practical utility is not everything. A poem is an obviously useless and insufficient thing compared with a pair of trousers. Yet popular opinion would probably decide that it is none the less indispensable in life's economy. An expedition to the untrodden snows of the Roof of the World without prospect of material reward, in which nothing is gained but knowledge and perchance intense suffering, and nothing lost but the life of the adventurer, is a poem in action, a new Odyssey enacted. Such a deed has, in the world of to-day, an influence and purpose just as had the Odyssey in the Greek world of long ago. It is well that on occasion our thoughts should leave the miasma of the valleys and soar to that purer world of romance -the land of the everlasting snows, where life and

action are purified in the fierce struggle with the furies of storm and in sanguinary conflict with the wildest and most relentless forces of nature. It is well for the world that brave men, those modern Gigantes, should keep the light of heroism burning on the mountain tops; that the pure ideal, which inspires simply because it is, should not be forgotten in the quest of gold-mines or dividends. All honour and success to the makers of the highest climbs in the world !

CHAPTER XII

AUTUMN ADVENTURES ON THE AIGUILLES OF MONT BLANC

"Far, far above, piercing the infinite sky, Mont Blanc appears,—still, snowy, and serene— Its subject mountains their unearthly forms Pile round it; ice and rock; broad vales between Of frozen floods, unfathomable deeps, Blue as the overhanging heaven, that spread And wind among the accumulated steeps." SHELLEY

THERE are certain spots in the world whose memories haunt the climber like his shadow-more, in fact, than his shadow is in the habit of haunting him in this foggy, moisture-laden clime. And of all places which have the most sovereign power to cast sunshine on the memories of their sunny selves, I can think of none more potent than that wondrous region of splintered pinnacles overlooking the sunny slopes of France, and almost beneath the deep blue, cloudless, Italian skies. The climber who has once come under the indescribable but bewitching spell of those soaring aiguilles which uphold the pedestal whereon Mont Blanc uprears his lofty diadem of everlasting snow, 228



THE TOP OF THE AIGUILLE DE GRÉPON THIS IS USUALLY CONSIDERED THE MOST DIFFICULT PEAK IN THE ALPS

will never forget their charms. He will more than

"Annually sigh For the vision of the aiguilles with the coming of July, Where the airs of heaven blow, 'Twixt the pine woods and the snow, And the shades of evening deepen in the valley far below."¹

But, alas! not all can hearken to the call thus early, and at that time of the year when these peaks reveal their charms most easily to the climber.

It was the late autumn a few years ago when a party of three of us arrived in the village of Chamonix at the foot of the "Great White Mountain," and literally within shadow of its aiguilles. It seemed almost a forlorn hope to come thus late, for news had arrived that winter had set in earlier than usual. But now there had come a welcome return of summer, and as we gazed up at the steep cliffs of the Aiguille du Plan, the crash of avalanches bespoke the active influence of a warm sun, which, during the day, had been dislodging the newly-fallen snow.

At the outset a few topographical details of our surroundings may be acceptable. The average, uninitiated Briton possesses a rooted conviction that the Matterhorn is the hardest climb in the Alps. Doubtless its wonderful shape, and the long and annually augmenting list of tragedies, are both largely responsible for this popular mistake. The Chamonix aiguilles, those spiry-shaped peaks which cluster around the snowy flanks of Mont Blanc, provide the most difficult and dangerous

¹With apologies to Mr. A. D. Gooley.

ascents not only in the Alps, but it might almost be said in the whole world. Of these the Aiguille du Dru and the Grépon are the hardest nuts to crack, and, by comparison, the Matterhorn under normal conditions may almost be considered an easy stroll.

There are two distinct groups of aiguilles. These are divided by the great mass of the Mer de Glace, the sight of which from the Montanvert figures so largely in the ordinary tourist routine. The peaks nearest to and overlooking Chamonix embrace the Aiguilles Plan and Blaitière, the Grépon, Charmoz, and the Aiguille de l'M. The latter three peaks look most tempting from the valley, and, thanks to former experience of their intricacies, we hoped to surmount them without guides. For the other group, of which the Aiguilles Verte and the two Drus form the outstanding features, we had to resign ourselves to the care of a famous guide, one of the Simond family.

The first morning after our arrival we awoke to a land of fog. A fine rain was falling, but the barometer was rising, so we followed the latter's worthy example, and rose up through the pine slopes to see if Mont Blanc was still there. What with railways and rumours thereof, new huts with their ugly pathways, and several years of tourist and mountaineering traffic, we feared to find the Great White Mountain the worse for wear. But some hours later, on emerging above the moisture-laden atmosphere, all the clouds of damp and doubt disappeared. Whilst disporting ourselves amongst the huge

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crevasses below the Grands Mulets (see illustration, p. 237), sunshine suddenly saluted us. Then, far overhead and beyond a world of shattered ice, towered the Monarch of Mountains, pure and undefiled. Not a sign or sound of civilization was visible; years and man's puny handiwork seemed unable to alter the glorious semper eadem. After hours of exercise with ice-axe and rope, the lengthening shadows on the Dôme du Goûter counselled retreat to the less ethereal but more practical comforts of Chamonix. Even thus late in the season the ubiquitous American was there in goodly number, full of interest in "Byron's Mountain," and more so in its tragedies. After dinner, one of these insatiables, in the shape of a middle-aged lady, attacked us in the following typical manner :---

"They tell me you have been on Mount Blank!"

" Yes."

"My! Did you walk on a glazier?"

"Yes."

"My! No! Did you cross a cree-vasse?"

"Yes; one or two!"

"Oh my ! Weren't you mighty skeert?" And so on.

Finally bed proved the only refuge, for the next morning's start was to be early.

The *objectif* of our first serious day's work was the Aiguille de l'M, and the direct ascent of the last 200 feet of the final tower afforded us a fine opportunity of getting our mountain legs, as a nautical friend aptly put it. The crack by which we chose to make a new direct route grew extremely narrow near the top, and there was very little support for one's weight, except by jamming the left knee into the innermost recesses of the crack. where ice made every movement trying. It was a decidedly sensational place; for, with this slight and slippery support, we had to wriggle up the crack. The difficulty was engrossing, so much so that we had no time to contemplate the thousand-foot drop to the rocks below-a prospect usually so fascinating during the first day's climb.

The last man on the rope had a somewhat sorry time near the top where the thin crack slanted to the right. He described himself as "a longsuffering beast of burden," a justifiable name, for he was certainly long, and he suffered considerably from the force of gravitation, because he carried up our heavy, camera-filled rücksack on his back. Cumbered with his load, he slipped out of the crack where it overhung, and swung out to the right on to the great slab which helps to form the right wall. The strength and uses of an Alpine rope were then vividly demonstrated, for, from an excellent standing-place, we hoisted him safely up to our ledge. Personal remarks ensued, and the photographer of the party had to carry his own load for the rest of the day.

During the descent to the glacier our attention was rivetted on the great mass of the Aiguille Charmoz, which towered over our heads with an irresistible challenge. As evening crept on apace, the wonderful red ochreous gleam of the Alpine

afterglow suffused the pointed summit, and we were loath to leave the glorious mountain solitudes, the more so as next morning it would be necessary to return on our way up the Charmoz. However, a climber's hunger is not easily allayed on thin glacier air; Nature, despite her charms, abhors a vacuum, and food was necessary for the next day. So we decided that the hotel at Montanvert was preferable to the shelter of some overhanging boulder.

Early next morning, by lantern light, we left the hotel, and in due course were threading our way upwards once more through the wilderness of loose stones below the Charmoz. Fine-weather lightning flickered faintly around us, and its light made the passage of the glacier easier, whilst 4,000 feet below, the lights of Chamonix shone through the gloom in the form of a rude cross.

It was an eerie sensation to be struggling with the intricate crevasses of the Nantillons Glacier in that deeper darkness which precedes the dawn. To gain the island of rocks which affords the best way of passing the difficulty, it was necessary to make a way along a narrow ridge of ice with black nothingness on either hand. Moving carefully along its slippery crest, our leader, with the tiny lantern held in his teeth, cut footsteps, and in some places hand-holds, with his ice-axe. The clatter of the fragments into the depths on either hand accentuated the isolation, and we sighed for the coming dawn to show us the best way on to the rocks. Gradually our "bridge of sighs" widened

and at length broke away below some large slabs which loomed black in the now gathering greyness of dawn. Our worst trials, from the ice-and-snow point of view, were now over. We rattled almost furiously up the comparatively easy rocks, and strolled across the upper glacier to the base of the final peak, whose lofty summit was tipped with the roseate tinge of the rising sun.

A huge crevasse cut us off from the actual start of the climb, and we remembered to treat its treacherous sides with caution, for it was here that an expert, and famous, English climber, Aston Binns, perished with a single guide a few years ago. A glance into the icy gulf from the side showed the treacherous eaves of overhanging snow, and we made a long detour to the right to find a way around the obstacle, where some masses of ice had fallen into the crevasse and afforded a safe passage.

Then the great snow couloir which divides the Charmoz and the Grépon was entered. The way up to the latter peak on the right was obvious, and we were almost tempted to assail its impregnable-looking buttresses. But common sense prevailed; our muscles were still tainted with the flavour of civilization, and we decided to rest content with an ascent of the Charmoz.

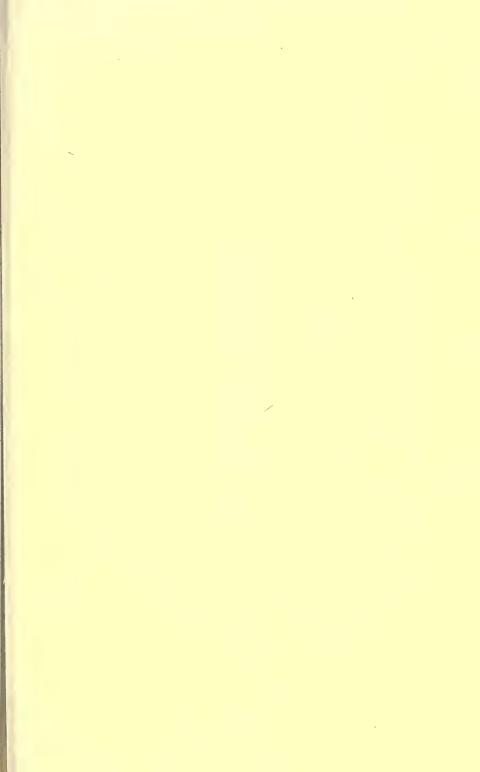
Away to the left a series of steep chimneys cleft the great cliff almost from base to summit, and this was our way to the crest of the be-pinnacled Charmoz. Soon we were busy with the real work of the day. Up and up we climbed in orthodox chimney fashion, with feet or knees on one side of the narrow cleft and the back on the other. At places large rocks blocked the bed of the vertical chimney, and some of these sections were very sensational, for, as we worked carefully upwards, it was necessary to climb on the exposed outside edges of the crack until the tops of these blocked rocks could be grasped.

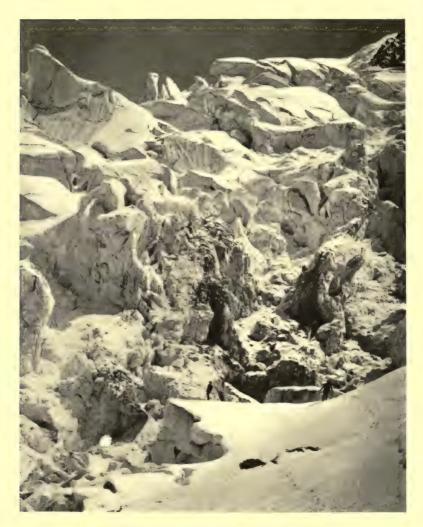
I remember, in the final chimney, reaching at a venture for a hand-hold on one of these rocks, and just when I was about to lift my weight from the foot-hold, the rock gave a sickening lurch forwards. For a fraction of a second the balance needed calm and delicate adjustment. However, a firm knob of rock was available, and I was able to smile reassuringly on those below who had noticed the wavering movements. At the same time, the danger of a slip on the part of the leader in such a place was accentuated by the view downwards. Twenty feet lower, my companions' heads were visible in the chimney, and beyond that nothing was seen but some fleecy mist floating above the Nantillons Glacier, nearly 2,000 feet below. Such situations are common enough on all the Chamonix aiguilles, and at any rate the advice given by the second climber to keep cool was unnecessary, for we were on the frozen, sunless side of the peak.

However, the difficulty was soon safely negotiated, and we emerged joyfully into the warm sunshine on the crest of the summit ridge. Now was the time to enjoy our mountain sport to the full. The rocky ridge-pole of our peak stretched in

front, and the highest point was at the farthest end. The ridge was extremely narrow, varying from a few inches to several feet in width, and shattered towers of granite rose menacingly at intervals. Up and over many of these we scrambled, now wriggling slowly along some sharp knife-edge of rock, and anon clinging desperately to the great cliff, whilst passing some specially difficult pinnacle by a flanking movement.

One of these lingers in my memory. I think it was at the gendarme which many parties overcome by lassoing methods. Balanced in a precarious position, the leader casts a looped rope over the top, and, using this as a safeguard, he is able to swarm up the awkward obstacle. Such unorthodox methods were not for us. We worked back a short distance along the ridge, until it was possible to take to some ledges on the Mer de Glace side of the mountain. The face was appallingly steep. With only inchsized hand- and foot-holds between us and the glacier over 2,000 feet below, there seemed small need for a friend's scriptural advice, " Look, therefore, carefully how ye walk," which hint he punctuated by nodding his head suggestively downwards. However, before we passed the base of the gendarme and were able to reascend to the ridge, some rotten rocks made the remark seem severely appropriate. Indeed, the whole movement was exciting, and its satisfactory issue caused no little elation. One of my companions still loves to recall jokingly how "like criminals we circumvented the gendarme and negotiated rotten securities successfully."





AMONGST THE CREVASSES ON MONT BLANC

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All the while the prospect was indescribably glorious. Vast snowfields lay below, out of which the huge, black aiguilles thrust their weird forms. All around rose mountains of almost endless shapes, with the "Great White Mountain" itself towering proudly and serenely over all into the blue, cloudless, Alpine sky. After passing the bizarre-shaped lower peak, we soon reached the summit. It was unwise to linger, for the hot sun was already rousing the slumbering avalanche danger. Once off the final rocks, we made a way into the great snow couloir between the Charmoz and Grépon.

Soon the Nantillons Glacier was reached. When we arrived near the place where the route runs beneath the impending ice-curtain which descends from the Blaitière, a small mass came hurtling down only a couple of hundred yards ahead. We all halted instinctively. It was then noticed that in several places our tracks of the morning were obliterated by avalanches. The danger zone extended for fully two hundred yards, and after a short rest we set off at full speed across it. But ere long the practised sprinters of the party proved too fast for the others, and the rope handicapped us tantalizingly. When rather more than half-way across the slope there was an unnerving crack and crash seemingly above our heads. This upset us in more ways than one. The sprinters sprang forwards; in a few moments the rope became entangled in our legs, and helter-skelter we went rolling, spluttering, and kicking down the gently-inclined snow-slope. Fortunately the human avalanche stopped short of

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the crevasses. Then we arose from the soft snow and looked "sheepish," for the avalanche was some distance away, and we had missed a marvellous chance of securing an invaluable snapshot. This was our last excitement. Soon the easy rocks were passed, the final glacier negotiated, and we sloped, without slang, off to Montanvert.

In front of the hotel we found our guide Simond, anxious to make use of the glorious weather for an attack on the Aiguille Grand Dru next day. Our ascent was marred by a slight misadventure near the top. Of late years the Dru has been considered an unsafe climb on account of falling stones; the tapering peak seems to have been loosened to its foundations by a local earthquake a few years ago.

It was a clear, starlit night when we left Montanvert, and as we climbed the vertical cracks and buttresses which yielded a most interesting route up the nose of the aiguille, there was scarcely time to realize the wonderful scenery. The sunrise was unique, and the shadow of our peak was cast weirdly down on a slight haze which overhung the lower reaches of the Mer de Glace.

Friable rocks had not seriously troubled us until the upper chimney was reached. But here a loose stone fell, apparently of its own accord, whilst the guide and I were on an easy place and paying no immediate attention to the rope. At the moment I just happened to look down, and saw a stone as big as an egg-cup drop clean out of the bed of the chimney, and, almost simultaneously with my cry

of warning, it alighted with an ugly thud on the top of the head of the following climber. Strange to say, without uttering a word, he instantly became unconscious, and before I could reach the rope, lurched backwards over the depths of the precipice. The last man grasped the situation instantaneously, and seized the rope wildly, within a couple of feet or so of the injured climber's waist. He was able to support the weight until I could descend, and, aided by some brandy and a good physique, the victim soon recovered consciousness and safety. The hurt turned out to be ridiculously small; yet, had it not been for my warning call, and the last climber's prompt action, the morning papers of a few days later might have told a different tale. We should have been dragged from our holds and flung down that awesome precipice, and, as in some other mountain catastrophes, no one would have divined the cause of our undoing. Though the damage was not serious, some of us had to return; the others joined forces with a party who were coming up behind us, and went on to the summit. There they rested and revelled in a perfect view, of which Mont Blanc and its clustering aiguilles, bathed in bright sunlight, were the crowning glory. The descent was made without further incident.

The Aiguille Verte (13,540 feet), on account of its superior height and shape, may be justly called the "Queen of the Aiguilles." By reason also of her commanding position and aloofness from the ways of men, the "Queen" holds place of honour,

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for the erstwhile "King of the Aiguilles," the Géant, has fallen an easy prey to the wiles of man. Bound in ropes and chains, he owns submission to the meanest and clumsiest mountaineer. His once inviolate crown of lichen is besmirched by the march of multitudes and their luncheon refuse. The rattle of soup and sardine tins forms a harsh accompaniment to the song of the mountain wind as the *tourmente* rushes ruthlessly over the great tower. As the gale sweeps swishingly amidst the lengths of cordage, sounds of weirdly mournful music are wafted around, sometimes even down to the slopes above the Col du Géant. The "King" bewails his fate.

The Aiguille Verte suffers no such desecration. The ascent means more than mere gymnastics; the peak is seldom visited except by respectful mountaineers. The knowledge of these facts induced us to make the ascent. As a view-point it was unique, but the ascent proved relatively easy. It resolved itself into a long snow-grind up a series of steep snow gullies with short sections of inferior rock-climbing. The only enlivening incident occurred before daybreak, and at the point where the great bergschrund or crevasse stretched from side to side, thus denying us access to the long snow couloir, which splits the westerly face of the aiguille almost from base to summit. The icv chasm that cut us off was quite 30 feet wide, and at the nearest point its upper lip was more than 15 feet above our heads. In the early morning light the crevasse seemed bottomless. Away to

the left was the only chance of success, because there the high snowfield was banked up towards the precipitous rock-wall of the couloir. But thus late in the year an almost impassible gulf separated us from the rocks, which, moreover, seemed smooth and rounded. They were worn by the action of the shifting ice.

A plan of campaign was soon evolved. At the narrowest and most vulnerable point two of the party were steadied, for a few feet, down into the interior of the icy gulf. There, despite the gloom of twilight, a convenient splinter of outstanding ice was discovered, and a capacious footstep cut upon its crest. The second man now mounted upon this and declared it firm. Then, with a cry of warning to those who held the rope above, he flung his long arms forwards, somewhat like a man in the act of diving, and let his body, of weedy and long structure, span the gulf. Quick was now the word, for the position was one of discomfort. The guide, also steadied from the lip of the crevasse above, crept gingerly across the human bridge until the rocks could be fairly attacked. Now came moments of suspense, for he described the rocks in very "bad" English. As he only knew two words, neither of them good, I need not particularize. It seemed that all the holds were unsatisfactory; evidently they sloped downwards. Several seconds elapsed before the bridge was relieved of its traffic and its feelings withal, for downtrodden humanity is bound to speak out. Soon, good hand- and foot-hold was available, and 16

the trusty guide was able to move upwards with his usual cat-like agility. Thirty feet higher he found an excellent resting-place, where the rope could be manipulated safely. Then, amidst many hurried injunctions "tirez la corde! très fort!" we swung one at a time across the gulf. In each case the landing was ungraceful and uncertain. As mentioned previously, the climb onwards was uneventful.

The actual summit ridge was formed of a cornice of overhanging snow. As we followed along this to its northerly end in order to obtain a glimpse of the neighbouring aiguilles, the Dru and the Aiguille Sans Nom, great deliberation was required in passing over the unstable surface. These cornices form one of the most insidious dangers of the Alps. Huge slices sometimes break away if trodden upon unwarily, and whole parties have been lost on this account. Slow and careful testing made the passage justifiable, though at one point I thrust my ice-axe through the crust, and peeped involuntarily through the narrow blue hole down a thousand feet of slabby precipice. It was not a pleasing prospect, but rather a serious hint that we were too near a thin section of the cornice. which had to be avoided by bearing away to the right.

When much new snow lies on the mountain, the ordinary way up the Aiguille Verte is prone to avalanche dangers. Numerous attempts to discover better routes have been tried by many experts, but, substantially, the original course, first made by Mr. Whymper's party, remains the favourite, though many prefer to adhere more to the lowest part of the great central couloir.

The Aiguille Sans Nom, the next-door neighbour, so to speak, rises at the northerly end of the lofty summit ridge of the Aiguille Verte; it was the last of the Chamonix aiguilles to yield to the attack of the climber. The summit was first trodden by the Duke of the Abruzzi's party in 1898. The undertaking proved excessively difficult and dangerous, for during the descent they were beset by avalanches and compelled to spend a second night out in a precarious position. It fell to the lot of my friend Mr. A. E. Field to make the third ascent with the late R. W. Broadrick and two guides. From the summit of the Aiguille Sans Nom they effected the first passage of the lofty ridge which runs to the top of the Aiguille Verte.

The passage of one of the cornices proved exciting. On either hand stupendous precipices dipped to the glaciers several thousand feet below. With considerable misgivings they trusted themselves to the frail structure. When all were safely launched on the *mauvais pas*, an awesome crack was heard, and even felt, by the whole party. The snowy mass to which they clung, balanced airily, seemed to quiver and settle down suddenly under their weight. The sensation was terrifying, but nobody spoke until terra firma was reached. Next day this adventure was being discussed in Chamonix, and some friends asked the second

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guide what he felt like. "Oh," said he, "I felt I would pay ten francs to be safely across!"

This whole expedition over the Aiguille Sans Nom and Aiguille Verte would rank as one of the finest and soundest performances in the annals of Alpine climbing. In all, the climbers were afoot twenty-four hours, and for slightly over twenty of these the rope was in use.

Reverting to our more ordinary day on the Aiguille Verte, the descent was made without difficulty. The bergschrund was taken with a jump. On arrival at Montanvert late in the evening, we found our hotel closed for the winter season, so we concluded our engagement with the guide and went down to Chamonix. Thence, some easier excursions were undertaken, and our final expedition was a guideless attack on the Grépon. Though more difficult, this aiguille possesses much in common with its sister peak, the Charmoz. Both have the same firm rock, and the be-pinnacled summit ridge of each is difficult of access.

Our attempt was really a forlorn hope, for the weather became unsettled. All went well as far as the upper part of the North Peak. There the icy rocks on the sheltered side of the mountain forced us out on to the great cliff above the Mer de Glace. A mighty rushing wind swept across the crags, but a narrow crack gave some shelter and coaxed us upwards. This crack ended suddenly on an exposed buttress, and when I put my head around the corner, it was instantly obvious that



THE MUMMERY CRACK ON THE MGUILLE DE GRÉPON

THE ARCALERATE CRACK ON THE MOST DIFFICULT ROCK PEAK IN THE WORLD," IS FAMOLS AMONDSI VIL "CRACK CIMBERS." THE REAL DIFFICULTIES HE IN THE YOFFOOT SECTION WHERE THE FIRST CLIMBER IS SEEN, AND ON THE TRAVERSE TO THE FOOT OF THE CRACK AT A RATHER LOWER LEVEL THAN THAT OF THE SECOND FIGURE. IT IS INTERESTING TO COMPARE THIS UNIQUE BLUERRATION WITH THAT OF THE SECOND FIGURE. TO SUMPARE THIS UNIQUE BLUERRATION WITH THAT OF THE SECOND FIGURE. TO SUMPARE THIS UNIQUE BLUERRATION WITH THAT OF THE SECOND FIGURE. THE SUMPARE KNOTS CRACK, P. 30

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human beings could not live that day on the Grépon. My hat, the old friend of many a mountain conquest, though secured with a seasoned boot-lace, was torn away and whirled down into the cloud-filled chasm. I very nearly joined its impromptu flight. The huge black tower of the summit was now and again visible through the scurrying vapour, and long icicles gave it a repulsive, impregnable appearance.

My proposal to go home to England was met with applause from those below, for we all feared frost-bite and other dangers from the intense cold.

Three hours later we were plunging down the glacier through a thick snow-storm. The Alps were out of season, so next day we bade them farewell, and returned, with that added zest which only mountaineering holidays can give, to the duties of the workaday world.

CHAPTER XIII

SOME AUTUMN DAYS IN SKYE

"Near the outer lands of the silent mist The waves moan wearilie; Yet hidden there lie the Isles of the Blest, The lovely Isles of the Sea."

CHERIFF NICHOLSON, the poet, philosopher and friend of all sojourners in Skye, has spoken in no uncertain manner about the weather in the Misty Isle. He obviously favoured "the prime of the summer-time," but at this season most climbers hear the Alps "a-callin'," and "won't never 'eed naught else." Not even the witching call of those cloud-soaring peaks of the Black Coolin, that "land of corrie and fell, where eagles dwell, and cataracts dash evermore," can persuade the habitual Alpinist that home products in the way of mountain climbs are equal in merit to those "made in Switzerland." As to the comparative attractions of the two regions from a purely climbing point of view, these must be tried to be appreciated. There are plenty of experts who prefer the Coolin and other British mountains; they have no wish to go abroad. Regarding British hill weather, I think that the popular idea as to its badness has been overdone; my luck 246

in this respect has been better in the Coolin than in the Alps.

Thus, when a visit to the far north at the latter end of October was mooted, there was no hesitation in acceptance, despite the freely-expressed opinion of invited but rejecting friends that "'tis a far cry to Skye to watch it rain."

We were a party of four when, from various parts of the country, we rallied at Glasgow one misty, moisty October day. Stirring events began at once. We rushed across the city intent on catching the afternoon train, and on reaching the platform a wandering son of Erin, who figured as a porter, gave a pretty exhibition of "breaking it gently." We asked hurriedly, "Can we catch the train to Fort William?" "Well," came the solemn reply, "your honours might, and then again your honours mightn't, because she's been gone just ten minutes."

This meant a wait for the early morning train next day, but it was worth the delay to travel through that "land of heath and shaggy wood" by daylight and even sunlight. The moors seemed almost afire with the ruddy glow of October as across "the flank of many a hoary Ben" we sped ever northward, leaving the monarch of them all far behind, his diadem of snow long glistening like a pearl on the distant horizon. Mallaig was passed as the day wore on. From the heaving deck of the little steamboat, "beyond wandering herds of barren" yet productive "foam," we caught glimpses of familiar outlines as the Coolin hove in sight

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intermittently. A disturbing swell was running, and at one point we felt quite relieved to see the painful grimaces of the good sailor of the party. However, 'twas a false hope; he did not share the troubles of our sickness, he was only practising the Gaelic pronunciation.

Once under the leeward side of Skye the troubling of waters ceased; the wonderful beauties of mountain and loch were appreciated. The crescent moon was peeping over the familiar peaks when we reached Sligachan; the comforts of the inn were acceptable after a chill drive from Portree.

One of the most interesting peaks in Skye is Sgurr nan Gillean, and as some of the party were new to the district, our first day was spent in negotiating the well-known Pinnacle Ridge. The route follows almost a bee-line from Sligachan, and there are four fine rock towers to be crossed before the Sgurr, the highest point, is reached. An authority has said that there "is as much rockclimbing here as in an ascent of the Matterhorn." Under the icy conditions which we encountered, the Skye peak would certainly have even the best of the argument for quality, as well as quantity.

Behind, and below in the way we had come, the storm-riven pinnacles peeped forth one behind the other, playing hide-and-seek through fleecy wisps of mist. Weird dissolving views of the spectre of the Brocken added a glamour of mystery to Nature's mountain pageant. Farther away, seen fitfully, the little white inn marked the only sign of

civilization amidst the vast heathery wastes, and beyond the lonely glen of Sligachan the round masses of the Red Coolin clothed and unclothed themselves in wraith-like, vaporous garments. In front and all around, except for the seaward opening to the east, towered for miles the shattered backbone of the Coolin Ridge with the den of Coruisk at our feet, 3,000 feet below. Great grey, gaunt slabs half hidden in billowy clouds supported the familiar, tapering peaks, carved grotesquely by the powers of frost and the fierce onslaught of wild Atlantic storm. And above all arched the pale blue northerly sky, cloudless but for advancing cumuli on the encircling horizon of sea-line. Few summer prospects could compare with this.

As we sat on the top of the shapely summit, a friend told of how a companion experienced the biggest surprise of his life on our mountain. Thev had gained the summit in safety, and by way of amusement were prospecting another way downwards. Our friend was slowly steadying the first man down a narrow chimney on the edge of the face. The left-hand wall was composed of a long flake of rock. Suddenly, without the slightest warning, it fell backwards over the cliff, and the climber was left dangling, minus his retaining wall. Fortunately, he was held firmly by the rope; he suffered no more than a severe fright. Magnificent as is the Coolin rock-it is a kind of granite called gabbro-precaution is required to prove its stability.

When we began the descent, clouds had gathered, blotting out everything, and on con-

sulting our compass, we had a striking example of the magnetic nature of the rocks. A few yards below the top, on the western ridge, the needle pointed due south-west instead of north. This erratic behaviour nearly led us into difficulties, but fortunately one of the party recognized some rocks of unusual shape on the ridge; this saved us possibly from a night out on the precipitous face of the peak. As it was, darkness fell ere we got off the mountain. We learnt once more that the Coolin rocks are hard, the ridges are long, and autumn days in Skye are short.

Next day we made a new route up the face of Knight's Peak. This is the name which was given, in honour of a well-known professor who first climbed it, to the adjacent summit to Sgurr nan Gillean on its northerly side. The lower part proved the most interesting, and the struggle up some splendid chimneys hindered us from forgetting the bruises we had received the previous evening. Near the top, a narrow knife-edge arête of rock made a splendid finish; the views downwards into the huge chasms on either hand were wonderful. They made us move circumspectly and take special care to avoid using loose holds for hands or feet.

The following morning we were out of bed in the sma' hours, and as the rosy gleam of sunrise was tipping the tops of the White Coolin with a golden glow, we were trudging away down the wild recesses of Glen Sligachan, where night still lingered. The party was augmented by two ponies carrying our camping outfit, and a gillie,



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who had charge of us all, judging by the Gaelic expletives he let loose when we persisted in making short-cuts across some boggy sections. We were bound for a few days' exploration and climbing on Clach Glas and Blaven, which form a detached and less-known portion of the Black Coolin. The gillie left our goods and chattels at the foot of the valley between the two peaks, and returned to Sligachan, whilst we struck upwards into the wild recesses of Lonely Corrie *en route* for Clach Glas, which towered above us.

The red sunrise had not belied its warning of storm. A strong gale was already blowing up aloft, and wind-riven clouds careered across the sky from the north-east. At first we were sheltered, but once on the main ridge we had a foretaste of what old Boreas had in store for us higher up. Nevertheless, the conditions were dry, and by skirting the various gendarmes on the west side we secured fair shelter. The Great Tower soon loomed straight ahead, looking almost inaccessible with its vertical straight-cut walls and remarkable outline. On this account it has been appropriately called the "Matterhorn of Skye." The resemblance was accentuated that winter morning by the snow and ice festooning the gaunt cliffs. Forsaking the ordinary route, we made the direct ascent of the impossible-looking pinnacles below the Great Tower, and then forced a way straight up the face of this from the well-marked col at its foot.

Our reception on the summit was a "coolin"" one, and the descent on the exposed farther side of

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the peak seemed scarcely feasible. However, we finally consigned ourselves to the care of a fragilelooking ridge, which dipped over into a cloudfilled abyss, whence the storm arose, now with a shriek and anon with a roar as it caught us in full force. At such times movement was impossible. Like Brer Rabbit, we lay low and clung to the sharp ridge of rock until a lull came between the blasts. Through breaks in the spindrift on the left we caught glimpses of the sea, some 2,000 odd feet below, lashed to fury. Our clothes and faces grew moist with the salt-laden vapour, and in places we saw and felt the sea spray flung wildly up into the heights.

An hour of this chilled us to the bone, and we were glad at last to find a way off the exposed crest of the ridge, and take to the leeward side of the mountain. This entailed some difficult chimney work, but the col between Blaven and Clach Glas was eventually gained, whence we scampered down through the gathering gloom to the camp. Space forbids a description of the discomforts of camp under such moist conditions. Next morning's dawn was truly welcome. The discovery and ascent of a new pinnacle on the west face of Blaven restored the circulation to our chilled bodies. We also spent a long day exploring the various ridges which rise to the summit on the westerly side, and the same evening reached Sligachan, fortunately in time for dinner. Late autumn camping in Skye is not to be recommended.

A few days later we were fortunate enough to be able to test the merits of plain living in the keeper's cottage in Glen Brittle on the other side of the range. It was agreed that

> "Not undelightful are the simple charms Found at the grassy doors of mountain farms,"

the more so as this sojourn permitted of an attack on the more impressive southerly peaks. These are scarcely attainable in a day's journey from Sligachan, if serious climbing is intended. Amongst other things, we ascended from Corrie Banachdich direct to the southerly tip of Sgurr Banachdich, which, being translated from the Gaelic, means the Smallpox Peak. There is no infection about the place; the sanitary arrangements are irreproachable. The poor ill-named mountain probably gets its name from the spotted nature of the rocks. These are remarkably rough in structure, even for the Coolin. This would also apply, but more forcibly, to the adjacent peak of Sron Dearg, and its ascent by what has been called the Window Buttress can be recommended as typical of the district. The name was given by reason of a curious obelisk which leans against the main mass of the cliff about 200 feet above its base; through the opening behind the detached mass is a fine outlook into the savage upper recesses of Corrie Banachdich. The day of our visit was too draughty to allow the view from the Window to be enjoyed; it needed glazing badly, for an easterly wind roared through the orifice. The main feature of the climb was encountered on the final section. This was a splendid vertical wall of granite, nearly 60 feet high. At first sight the

ascent looked impossible under the prevailing conditions, but on closer acquaintance it proved almost too easy. Deep pocket-holds predominated, and the fingers thrust deftly into these robbed the place of its terrors.

The so-called "Inaccessible Pinnacle" of Sgurr Dearg was taken on the same day, and this also vielded some amusement; but the best climb of the whole holiday was directly up the face of Sgurr Mhic Choinnich, or M'Kenzie's Peak. It was a morning of almost cloudless beauty, but as the day wore on we had all clouds and little beauty. Now and again heavy hail-storms seemed to descend, like a bolt from the blue, on the shelterless cliff to which we clung. Two situations on this climb are indelibly fixed in my memory. The first was quite low down. I had succeeded in forcing a way up some smooth, difficult slabs for about 50 feet until a safe standing-place was available. Meanwhile a sudden storm of hail and sleet broke overhead. The second climber was moving slowly upwards, and, just as he reached the worst section, a veritable avalanche of hailstones came sliding and dancing down upon us, threatening to make us also "join the dance." Fortunately, I had good holding ground, for the tourmente so chilled and paralysed the climber below that progress was impossible. For several minutes he was helpless, but the rope made all safe. The two other members of the party were on a broad ledge below, and, failing to appreciate the situation, were able to cheer us with chaff; they even suggested that we should keep

the position whilst one of them ran down to the valley for a camera. However, the storm soon became less boisterous, and matters so improved that the second man could advance. The rest of the party found those wet slabs entertaining. Handand foot-holds grew plentiful higher up, and until quite close to the top we met no very serious difficulty.

At that point a steep, slightly overhanging face of rock with sparse holds at its summit delayed upward progress. A gusty wind whirled round the corner exasperatingly. Even though mounted on my brother's shoulders, I was able to appreciate man's inability to add one cubit to his stature. I sighed for the extensibility of a mere worm, for scarcely three inches above my hand was a deeplyrecessed notch, which would evidently solve the problem. The situation was saved by my footstool, who bravely suggested that a head foot-hold was available. No sooner said than done; standing on my brother's cranium, I was able to grasp the hold firmly and move steadily up to the top of the difficulty. Thence onwards to the top, and for the rest of the day we saw practically nothing but clouds. Darkness fell ere the night quarters were reached. Next day the conditions were totally changed, and we climbed the peak again from the col which separates Sgurr Mhic Choinnich and Sgurr Tearlach. A long, slightly overhanging chimney was the feature of the climb. On the summit we had a glorious view, with the giants of the Coolin thrusting their gabbro pinnacles into the

sky on every hand. The loftiest of all, Sgurr Alasdair, 3,309 feet, seemed, in the clear air, but a stone's throw away. The only sign of the vanished storm was the newly-washed appearance of the peaks; sheets of water ran glisteningly off their flanks. Light cloud-shadows chased each other gaily across sea and land. But most enthralling of all was the distant view seawards, with the Hebrides and other far-away isles.

A peep over the edge of the precipice whence we had come the previous day revealed the rippling waters of Loch Lagan over 1,500 feet below our lofty tower. As we sat musing over the entrancing prospect, sympathies were expressed for a party of tourists whom we had left at Sligachan after a hopeless attempt to persuade them that nobody can really see the Coolin by keeping only to the main roads across the island. After a talk about gullies, one of them was overheard to remark regarding our enthusiasm, "Poor chaps! they're only happy in a gutter!" Would that they could have been with the "gutter men" that afternoon on Sgurr Mhic Choinnich! Then, as we moved valleywards, picking our way carefully along the shattered crest of the wedge-like peak, we recalled an old friend's appropriate lines-

"This be your thought as you turn from the summit, Gripping the rock as you gingerly go, There, where the cliff with the drop of a plummet Dips to the scree and the valley below, Men with a mind on a rational basis Walk on a road (as I'm sure that they should); Yours are the truly delectable places, Yours is the spice of the Ultimate Good !"

The descent was finally completed by the long and less characteristic section of the main ridge, which led to the col below An Stac and Sgurr Dearg. After a pause we rattled thence down the screes to Corrie Lagan and the bottom of the valley. Two days later came the farewell, let us hope *au revoir*, to the beautiful island of Skye, whilst the aurora borealis gleamed brilliantly in the twilight of dawn.

CHAPTER XIV

LIFE IN THE DAUPHINY ALPS

"Far from gay cities and the ways of men." Odyssey

THE average Englishman associates the sunny south of France with "blue skies and gentle breezes." Thus its principal mountain group has caught some of the reflected climatic glory; the Dauphiny Alps possess a reputation for fine weather, and optimistic climbers are prone to flee thence when the central Swiss Alps are swept by persistent storms.

Thus, as we sped across the green plains of France early in the June of 1909, there was no thought of bad-weather failures. And this despite thrilling stories of landslips, earthquakes, and suchlike unpleasant enormities, which, according to an ultra-excitable Frenchman whom we met in the train, would swallow mountaineers, boots and all, just as easily as a "little tender Frenchman."

Grenoble had scarcely recovered from the terrors of le tremblement de terre as we passed through, en route for the mountains. Peace reigned at Bourg d'Oisans, where the night was spent. There the English-speaking host told us many wonderful

things, specially of how extra efforts are to be made to attract Englishmen to the central Dauphiny mountains, which have been, comparatively speaking, neglected by our countrymen. The light railway will probably be continued from Bourg d'Oisans to Bourg d'Arud, and a new road is to be made in the very heart of the district from St. Christophe to La Bérarde, the best climbing centre hereabouts, at an untold cost of so many hundreds of thousands of francs. In reply to the question of "who pays" came the answer: "Ah yes! we shall print another tariff for the wealthy Englishman; the old one we shall keep as it is for other people."

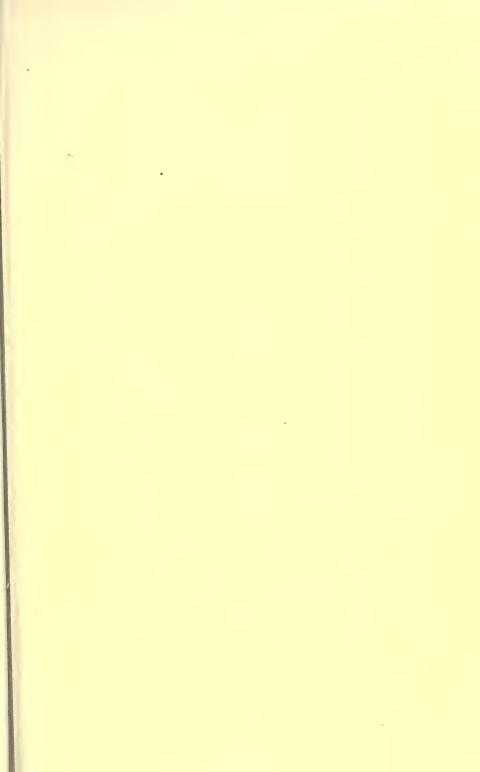
Such simple confession, though perchance it may have been intended as a joke, is not often made. The long-suffering Englishman seldom realizes that in the Alps there is le tariff Anglais and le tariff Allemande. This tariff should be reformed.

As we strolled through the quaint streets of Bourg d'Oisans, with those wonderful striated precipices towering obtrusively thousands of feet overhead, there were numerous signs of the efforts to cater for our countrymen. At one point a sombre-looking hotel half hidden in trees advertised "shadowy walkings." Another more palatial resort belauded "our wines, which leave the traveller nothing to hope for."

Next morning came the diligence journey to St. Christophe. On we went, through the sunny, unsavoury, main street of Bourg d'Oisans, where the healthy smell of the motor-car bound for the Col du Lauteret made the unhealthy abominations of animal traffic all the more apparent. On across the wide, more airy valley we jogged bumpily, until gradually its narrowing jaws enclosed us, and the sweet-smelling lavender lingered long in the drowsy air of the deep defile. Grim, clean-cut cliffs towered overhead on the left, but these gradually sank back to softer slopes, and the lower reaches of the Vénéon stretched ahead. Flowery slopes, alive with the hum of busy bees and "the cattle on a thousand hills," heralded a land flowing with milk and honey when the châlets of Venosc and Bourg d'Arud peeped through their thin framework of foliage. And far above all, and best of all, soared snow-capped mountains.

Now came a typical Dauphiny surprise. Practical matters dominated everything. Our Jehu calmly pocketed the fares and told us that the diligence went no farther than Bourg d'Arud, about five miles short of St. Christophe. Moreover, the road was blocked by a landslip. "Would we return?" All this could have been said before we started that morning, so an impolite reply was pardonable. Ultimately our luggage travelled up to St. Christophe in a coal-cart; we walked. In accord with our mood, the character of the country changed to one of gloomy savageness; gaunt, ugly rocks overhung the road.

Two miles of uphill walking brought us to a scene of great activity; tremendous boulders covered the road, and further progress seemed at first sight impossible, though a gang of workmen struggled





THE UPPER CRAGS OF THE MEIJE, DAUPHINY ALPS

bravely with the task of removal. At first our negotiations for a passage were treated with scant courtesy, but again it was proved that undeniable faith—aided by *beaucoup de pourboire*—moveth mountains. After three hours' delay St. Christophe became a possibility, but not before tremendous blasting feats were accomplished, and the baggage as well as the vehicle had been practically carried over the impasse. After lingering over the sight of the well-known gorge, which, as is usual with Nature's most wonderful handiwork, rejoices in a satanic name, we entered St. Christophe.

The little group of châlets is built up the slopes of the hill-side and on the right bank of the River Vénéon, the roar of whose passage through the rocky channel, now a thousand feet below, echoed through the still air. As a matter of course, we called on old Pierre Gaspard, one of the very few remaining heroes of the early pioneering days, first man to conquer the Meije and a hundred other Alpine giants. 'Twas a joy to talk of the good old times with the aged guide, and to note, even yet, the fierce spirit of life and energy proclaiming itself incessantly. The kindly countenance bespoke unmistakably the story of a mountain life,

> "As if the man had fixed his face In many a solitary place Against the wind and open sky."

But enthusiasm and mirth were near the surface. With justifiable pride came the recital of how, only the year previously, a party had traversed the Meije under his guidance. "Yes!" he concluded, somewhat sadly, "I shall never go again; but " and this with eyes twinkling merrily—"I climbed nearly as well as the lady of the party, and better than the men!" After further conversation about his age and the traverse of the Meije, he said, "It is now over seventy years since I learnt the cradle traverse," and added grimly: "I was once guide to the Meije; now I am the bone-setter." The latter presumably referred to his fame in St. Christophe and neighbouring valleys as a mender of broken bones.

One of the party had meanwhile strayed off with a younger guide to admire his family and see the wonderful cheeses, which are famous for their flavour. These—the latter—were kept under the bed. When the coarse bed-hangings were lifted, the strong young climber was so overcome by the strength of the "flavour" that he fled precipitately. He no longer eats cheese.

It was a sultry afternoon when we began the last stage of our journey—the three hours' walk up to La Bérarde. The luggage was to follow on mule-back. Some of us knew it as one of the most delightful walks in the Alps; regrets were felt that the new road will mean the desertion of this pleasant pathway. Steadily we mounted the narrow track, the foliage gradually thinning away as height was gained. Now and again there were entrancing downward glimpses on the right, almost sheer at some places for over a thousand feet, into the gorge of the Vénéon. Before the valley turned sharply to the left the cloud-wreathed snows of the

Pic d'Olan and its neighbours glittered brilliantly at the head of the branch valley of La Lavey.

All along we seemed to move amidst the life of the hardy mountain people, who wrest a bare sustenence from the thin soil which covers but meagrely the bare rocks. Here, at a height of nearly 6,000 feet above sea-level, every available corner where soil could be gathered seemed to be carefully tended and cultivated. Work went on easily and pleasantly. At one point, and this is typical of most, two men were ploughing a small patch about twenty yards square; a young woman sat knitting on the bank crooning weird music until our presence was known. Their plough was a rough, home-made affair, constructed almost throughout of wood; for metal would cut as sorry a figure as any Englishman who tried to work on such material and in such a position. The ground slanted steeply downwards, until suddenly it dipped over an abyss a thousand feet deep. Only cunningly-placed boulders and jutting, natural rock-stays seemed to prevent the whole mass, soil and mortals, from sliding off into space. We began to understand the wherewithal of Pierre Gaspard's practice. As is the fashion in these parts, the men took things very easily though appearing to make much ado, for they moved clumsily and awkwardly, specially those in charge of the horses. Soon they tired, and the girl smiled at their poor efforts. Then the modern Ceres, a woman of perfect feature and form, and, as we learnt later, one of the aristocrats of the neighbourhood, took charge of the

ploughing single-handed. The men assumed a position of slumber on the ground. Our excitement almost became out of bounds as, with marvellous skill and strength, she "drove a lonely furrow" on the very edge of the cliff. An ill-timed exclamation broke the spell; the dusky-faced maiden sat down, and we departed.

Now and again small family parties were noticed, some busily at work, others asleep. "Back to the land," somebody said curtly as we passed a family of three fast asleep on their backs amongst the soil and snoring lustily. Gradually these evidences of civilization were left behind; we passed into the recesses of the upper Vénéon and skirted close by the turgid waters of the glacier-fed torrent. The huge bulk of the Ecrins now rose in front, but the crest of the shapely peak was hidden by rolling masses of vapour. Late in the evening La Bérarde proclaimed its proximity by scents, "not of Araby," borne on the southerly breeze. The collection of rough, weather-beaten châlets and one hotel were to be our home for many days; it was fated that we were to see more of them than of the mountains.

Despite a sunset of gloomy portent, the following morning was brilliantly fine, and a start was made for the Tête de la Maye before the sun's rays had dipped into the deep valley. This small peak is to La Bérarde what the Gorner Grat is to Zermatt, a capital spot from which to spy out the land, and especially suitable for a first day. As we mounted the steep slopes, clouds gathered with the on-coming of the sun; the Meije hid her

magnificent face sulkily, and for nearly a fortnight we saw little of her beauties.

On the last broad ledge below the top there was a splendid view of the more westerly peaks, and the suitability of La Bérarde as a centre was unmistakable. It seemed almost possible to cast a stone down upon the roofs of the little hamlet which nestled below at the junction of the two upper valleys of Pilatte and Etançons, the streams from which intermingled near the village and formed the Vénéon. All around rose mountains of every shape, affording almost endless opportunities for the climber. The great mass of the Ailefroide had previously attracted attention, and its graceful, snowy neighbours, of which Les Bans was queen, towered grandly at the head of the Pilatte Glacier. A magnificent array of rocky summits dominated by the Grande Ruine formed the opposite wall of the Etancons valley. There can be little doubt that, with an easier approach, La Bérarde will in years to come take its place as one of the most famous mountaineering resorts. It is especially suitable for expert parties of guideless climbers who have learnt the art of rock-climbing on British mountains.

The Ecrins, that huge central "screen" which, as the name would indicate, screens the high valleys of the Dauphiny from each other, was more favourably seen than the Meije. The vast chaos of crags surmounted by the tapering snowy summit shows almost its grandest side to the Tête de la Maye, but scarcely any of the usual route used in the traverse from La Bérarde can be seen from the favourite view-point. The actual top is hard to locate from most of the neighbouring vantagepoints, and arguments as to its whereabouts are prone to recall Dr. Johnson's definition of a garret as the highest room in a house, and a cockloft as the room above the garret. When people see the summit of the Ecrins, there is usually a cockloft a little farther beyond. Practically the only part of the traverse which is actually discernible from the Maye is the Col des Ecrins, away down to the left of the peak, and the route from the Col down to the Glacier de la Bonne Pierre can be easily followed.

About two months after our visit a regrettable accident happened here. A party of three continental climbers, one of them a lady, had traversed the Ecrins and reached the Col safely. Instead of keeping entirely to the steep, but fairly easy, rocks which form its wall, they took to the dangerous snow-slope, probably thinking that quicker progress could thus be made. At a moment of unpreparedness, a slip occurred on the icy surface; the last man was dragged off, and all went flying at a dreadful speed down the slope. The leader struck some rocks, and was killed instantly. The lady of the party was fatally injured, but her brother, though severely damaged, attempted to carry her on his shoulders down to La Bérarde, which is nearly three hours away. Of course the hopeless task proved impossible ; he had to leave his burden. When the willing rescuers arrived, his sister was beyond human aid. Again it was proved that the

Ecrins is not a mountain for inexpert guideless parties; the ascent is a long and very serious undertaking at all times.

After enjoying the glorious prospect, and slumbering for awhile on the juniper-clad slopes in the vain hope that the clouds would clear away, we descended to La Bérarde. For nearly a week it rained almost incessantly. Snow and thunder storms came now and again to break the monotony. At the end of this the peaks were hopelessly out of condition for climbing.

Meanwhile there were ample opportunities for studying the simple life of these mountain folk, who for the greater part of the year are cut off from the outside world. The few months of summer were evidently spent with hard toil in preparation for the coming winter. Great piles of firewood, principally juniper, were procured almost daily from the surrounding mountain slopes. We often joined in the work and helped to tie up the great bundles, which were then sent rolling valleywards, and in due course added to the store behind the châlets. Then, every evening the goats and cows were gathered in from the heights, and the châlet-enclosed alley which we called the main street became a scene of activity. The sorting of the various properties by the womenfolk always led to excitement, for some or other of the animals dashed into any convenient doorway in wild hunt for the salt which was their usual reward at milking-time. It was a stimulating sight to see an Oxford undergraduate, clad in little else but shirt and trousers, chasing and catching

a goat by the hind leg, and finally milking it before a delighted audience of villagers. A month later it was equally stimulating, though in a different manner, to see that same enthusiast beset by a scratching mania. A tiny burrowing pest for long defied medical detection. It has been said that the inventor of insecticide came from Dauphiny. Truly a prophet hath honour save in his own country.

However, despite fierce storms, the likes of which were never previously remembered in Dauphiny, the natives kept cheerful, though their precious corn lay flat on the ground, covered with snow. Our diversions seemed to turn their thoughts a little from the sad havoc. We gathered that the people live and clothe themselves practically on what they grow. Their existence is such a forcible example of successful "small holdings" as would make the average Briton stare. High up on the bare mountain-sides small patches of corn were dotted here and there amongst the rocks. It seemed that when a new La Bérardian appears on the scene, its first birthday gift is a small plot of land cleared of stones and then planted with corn, and the next present is a cow. With these a livelihood is practically assured.

Though families and animals—the cleanliness of the latter would put to shame many human beings in England—lived in rooms that opened into each other, robust health generally prevailed. The question of medical help puzzled us, and the answer to the question reminded me of the same thing nearer home. In one of the remoter

Cumbrian valleys, I once asked, "How do you manage when illness comes along? You cannot get a doctor?" "Nae, nae, my lad," came the reply, "we've just to dee a nat'ral death." But even these hardy folk of the Alps must take "the long journey" at last. No burials can take place at La Bérarde, because there is no depth of soil; this means a wearying transit to St. Christophe. In wintertime this results in terrible hardship and gruesome adventures, which would eclipse a certain English novelist's wildest imagination.

Thus this weather-bound experience at La Bérarde was not uninteresting, but at last the sun peeped forth again, and we "lifted our eyes to the hills." Great white ghosts loomed through the dispersing mist; rock peaks were clad in their wintry coverings, and authorities averred that there was more snow present on the heights than in midwinter. After a day's sunshine this thinned considerably, and we found active amusement in ascending Les Cornes de Pié Bérarde, Le Plaret, and other small peaks near at hand. The first really suitable day was spent on the Tête de Chéret, and the snow-covered upper rocks proved quite difficult.

During the descent in the early afternoon an unusual experience was vouchsafed us. The snow was extremely soft and the sky cloudless. As we ploughed our downward furrow waist-deep—and at times even neck-deep—there was a general outcry against the merciless heat of the sun. But suddenly there came a curious shade; a dense haze obscured the south-western sky. Scarcely ten

minutes later it was raining hard, and a buffeting wind assailed us. One astounding flash of lightning and simultaneous thunder-clap marked the crisis of the storm. Then it passed away as quickly as it had come, and we saw the cloud whirling down upon La Bérarde, finally to pass over the serrated summit-ridge of the Meije. But the sight in the opposite direction was sublime to a degree. Water seemed to be streaming everywhere down the snows of the Pilatte Glacier, above which Les Bans, flooded with translucently clear sunlight rays, towered like a great spire of burnished silver. But the effect on the wide shimmering surface of the Pilatte Glacier was most wonderful of all. There. 2,000 feet below, lay the vast snowfields, stretching up and away like an illimitable sea of light, too bright in the glare of the sun for the eye to rest upon, and

> "Glittering like a field of diamonds With the multitudinous sparkle And the countless laughing ripple Sung of old by bard of Hellas."

Slowly the scene faded as more clouds gathered. We hurried off downwards. It was raining when La Bérarde came in sight.

However, the weather was not now hopelessly bad. A couple of days later an early start was made in order to leave a few boot-nail scratches on the breast of the Meije, for it now seemed evident that loftier embrace would be impossible for many weeks to come. The rocks above the Promontoire Hut afforded plenty of interest, and we saw enough of



THE SNOW-DRAPED CLIFFS OF LES BANS FROM THE TOP OF THE TÊTE DE CHÉRET

the icy conditions to dispel all hopes of conquest. The Meije was not climbed in 1909 until nearly the middle of August; the previous year the ascent was possible in June.

On the return we learnt that another party had departed that day for the sleeping-place on the Ecrins; the ascent, somewhat of a forlorn hope, was intended to be made next day. As a matter of fact, the weather of the early morning forbade a start, and when we arrived at the gite, expecting to repeat their climb, we found them still there. On reaching the great boulder under which it is usual to pass the night, over 9,000 feet above sea-level, there was a cordial and savoury welcome awaiting us. Tea and soup were passed round, and the other party seemed glad thus to relieve their dullness. The outlook was disheartening, for, though the early part of the day had been fine, clouds now obscured everything and showers flitted around. Musical repertoires were soon exhausted amidst the depressing surroundings; it was only the optimism of a youthful enthusiast that prevented a wholesale flight back to La Bérarde. At twilight we crept into the hollow below the boulder, where blankets had been arranged on young juniper bushes. It was a masterpiece of packing to ensconce so many in such a small space, but once packed, movement was almost impossible. Wandering streams of rain-water kept dripping down the sloping rock-roof, so that sleep was long in coming.

About midnight, my neighbour, disturbed by

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dreams of drowning, struggled wildly; our heads came into collision, and we were thoroughly awakened. Raising ourselves slightly, we looked forth. The black roof of the gite and the boulders which formed the foot of our bed cut off most of the scene : we looked out, as it were, from the dark jaws of some monster. A cloudless, starry sky was visible, and grey, mysterious mountain forms rose out of a sea of mist, all illumined with the rays of the full moon. The source of light was hidden for the nonce behind the nearer shoulder of the Ailefroide, which cut a vertical black slice down the side of the picture. Slowly the halo of light crept around this austere outline, and, as we silently gazed, the moon floated slowly forth into the firmament, flooding the surroundings with her radiance. Sleep was now impossible. Every one was soon wide awake. In half an hour breakfast was disposed of, and we were under way for the dim recesses of the Ecrins, which loomed ahead

Two hours later we were crossing below the Col des Avalanches, and approaching the great precipice which upholds the icy crest of the peak. How changed the scene! The calm of early morning had departed. It had been a fiery sunrise, and now great clouds of roseate hue came floating upwards from the gloomy depths of the col. Below the rocks a gale of icy wind swept across the slope, but we rose to the attack in fierce earnest. Hand- and foot-holds were glazed with ice, and the gathering *tourmente* threatened at

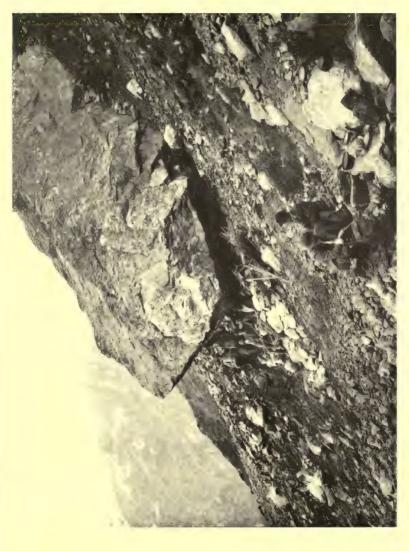
times to tear us off the slippery cliff and fling us into the gaping gulf of the Col des Avalanches, now far below.

At the point where it becomes necessary to go to the right to reach a fixed rope, a curtain of blue-black ice—evidently the previous night's rain newly frozen—defied the guide's best efforts. For over half an hour we clung and shivered. Then a well-known Zermatt guide who was leading called down, during a lull in the storm, to see if a certain half-frozen amateur would like to "have a try." A retreat was ordered at once. This judgment proved sound, for the day grew gradually worse; in the afternoon it snowed again, even down at La Bérarde.

Had we persisted in the attack, which was from the south side, the result would certainly have been as bad or possibly worse than that which overtook a party of three French climbers and their two guides on the Ecrins in 1900. They reached the summit from the easier north side about one o'clock, and whilst descending the same way were enveloped in a blinding snowstorm about three o'clock in the afternoon. They failed to find the snow-bridge by which the bergschrund had been crossed in the early morning. Many steps had to be cut whilst moving across the slope in search of the passage, and at last one of the party, M. Mestrallet, was overcome with the severe conditions, and slipped. He dragged the others down, and all fell with such speed that they practically cleared the bergschrund and crashed 18

down the ice-slopes. When they stopped on an easier incline, one of the guides was found to have broken several ribs, but the others sustained no injury beyond severe bruises. Darkness fell, and the storm grew more and more violent. There was no other alternative but to stay the night in the present position. Wet through, utterly fatigued, and practically devoid of sustenance, it was not surprising that one of the climbers expired early next morning. The others attempted the descent, but the damaged guide, Pierre Estienne, and M. Mestrallet could not proceed, and the other two, Eugene Estienne and M. Lambert, started downwards to procure help. At the Col des Ecrins they recovered a rücksack containing some food which they had left during the ascent, and the guide immediately turned back again to take this up to his companions. When he reached them all were frozen to death. After a terrible experience, Eugene Estienne eventually reached the Refuge Tuckett, near the Col des Ecrins, where he joined M. Lambert. Two days later, the work of recovery was undertaken by a large party of guides. Undoubtedly, the Ecrins, on account of the length of the expedition, is a desperately dangerous mountain in bad weather. At such times the ascent should not be made, especially by inexpert parties.

After this rebuff on the Ecrins, and the continuous unsettled weather, there was small temptation to linger longer in Dauphiny. On a day of sullen mist we struggled up the Pic Coolidge, and



THE SLEEPING-PLACE ON THE ECRINS, ABOVE LA BÉRARDE

also learnt later that the Pointe des Etages by the north ridge gives one of the most interesting rock-climbs in the district. Then patience was exhausted; we longed for sunshine, and found it two days later in England.

CHAPTER XV

NARROW ESCAPES

"Oh, the little more, and how much it is ! And the little less, and what worlds away !" BROWNING

F^{EW} men who have sought and found the greatest happiness in life on towering crags or eternal snows, are without memories of momentous intervention by the fickle goddess Fortuna.

Freed for awhile from the workaday world, the strenuous climber knows nought of dullness. By his own fireside, with drowsy senses soothed by clouds of tobacco smoke, he soars in fancy once more to that lofty fairyland of mist and mountain. Perchance, at such times, the mind naturally and imperceptibly reverts to some thrilling moment. The roseate glories of the sunrise pageant are past; muscles grow tense, teeth grip grimly that pipe of many a peak as in imagination he clings desperately to a shelving buttress, one arm athwart the frost-riven rock, the other convulsively straining at the rope. Below are two kindred spirits, but, horror of horrors ! a great slab is seen crashing in full flight upon them. The leader's foot has

stirred its balance and caused the fall. A hoarse cry of warning breaks the solitude, but it is useless. With mad fury of descent, the rock rends the coat sleeve and tears the boot sole of the second climber, who instinctively but futilely attempts to stay the would-be missile of death, and it crashes downwards straight for the head of the last man. Momentarily those above close their eyes on the fearful prospect. Secure hold there is none: the force of the blow must tear them all away. But it never comes. The falling terror strikes a tiny, unseen projection six inches above the last man's head, is diverted to the side of a great slab, where, dashed to a thousand fragments, it whirls through space to the depths below. The imaginary sound of the crash awakes the dreamer. Far-off memories give place to stern realities : the chapter on "Narrow Escapes" awaits him.

At the outset of such an undertaking a word of apology may be permitted, for many of these adventures are open to criticism by reason of their personal nature. In the course of everyday life one is so often asked such questions as: "Have you ever been in a place where it would be dangerous to slip?" or, from the less innocent, "Have you had many escapes?" or, still again, "Whatever made you first climb?" In the following reminiscences an attempt is made to answer these questions.

In conformity with custom, it may be well to revert to "first causes." To one who has lived all his life amongst mountains, it is difficult to define when first their fascination assumed tangible shapes. Perchance the voice of the mountains spake first in those days of boyhood, when the joys of bird-nesting were only at the fullest during an attack on the perilous, craggy stronghold of some wild bird of prey. My first recollection of rockclimbing dates back to such an occasion, and the exciting memories of the escapade are ineffaceable.

For some weeks three young hopefuls had concentrated their interest upon a kestrel hawk's nesting-place on the lower cliff of Falcon Crag, near Keswick. It was only about 30 feet above the grassy terrace, but those birds are connoisseurs in steep rocks, and recollection associates the ascent with desperate danger, for it fell to my lot to climb up for the booty. On arrival at the nesting-ledge, the position aloft was so exacting that I called outto those below, "I cannot let go to box the eggs: four of them !" "Put them in your mouth, and come down sharp," rose the reply. There was only room for two, so these were tucked safely one in each cheek, and the descent began. When about 15 feet from the ground, there was a sudden uproar below; a quick downward glance showed my companions skurrying away, and a well-known but vengeful keeper awaiting me with a terrible stick. Stricken with sudden terror, I lost my foot-hold and tumbled head over heels almost on the top of the avenger. Then a fearful thing happened. The eggs burst in my mouth; they each contained young birds of such putrid flavour that I collapsed in a state of horrible sickness. The keeper roared with laughter, which was better than with rage: he seemed to think that the punishment already fitted the crime; and sicker, but not much sorer, I made tracks homewards, thankful for the escape.

In these days it is recognized that men who climb difficult rocks without using a rope are courting disaster. It is not usual for every novice to accentuate this by practical experience, though, sad to say, some of my friends, by losing their lives, have proved it for the benefit and warning of others. Ropeless and solitary climbing are much to be deprecated; the records of Cumbrian climbing alone demonstrate this with tragic certainty. Though common sense should have been enough, this sound advice was not appreciated in the earlier days. In 1894, with my brother, I was cycling over Dunmail Raise; on the summit a sudden inspiration moved us to wander up to Grisedale Tarn, and, furthermore, have a look at a reputedly fine gully on the south-easterly end of Dolly Waggon Pike. The rough, uphill walk, in light, nail-less cycling shoes, was painful enough, but on arrival at the foot of the gully, though of course no rope was carried, the deceptive aspect of the place tempted us to tackle the ascent forthwith. The lower pitch must be quite 80 feet in height; it was smooth and slabby, but we finally arrived on a narrow ledge, which stretched for several feet across the bed of the gully and over a hundred feet sheer above the commencement.

A somewhat holdless, steep, slimy slab rose in front. The place was obviously both difficult and dangerous, but a rope would have made it safe. Aided by my assistance from the ledge, my brother reached the top without serious trouble. But in the attempt to follow him, my nail-less boot slipped off a sloping hold about half-way up the slab. The finger grips proved inadequate. In an instant I was sliding swiftly down the steep rocks. I only remember a sickening feeling of utter helplessness and the sight of my brother's horror-stricken face up above. He called out my name in sudden fright. Then, somehow or other, my feet caught the curious narrow ledge whence the start had been made. There was a sickening backward lurch. But, just before toppling over and down the 100foot drop, I clutched convulsively but effectively at an opportune hand-hold, and clung to it successfully. Then for a moment slight faintness supervened, but the robust health of irresponsible youth soon prevailed. Descent seemed uninviting. Consequently, the idea of improvising a short rope by knotting together the two belts of our Norfolk jackets was suggested, and adopted after mine had been flung to the upper man. Steadied by this as extra hand-hold, the ascent of the mauvais pas was completed. The lesson of that foolish performance has never been forgotten; never since have I climbed without properly nailed boots, and an English Alpine Club rope. Nothing but discredit attaches to this, my first and only slip on rocks in a position of real danger. The story is told mainly because of its moral application to others.

It has fallen to my lot to be indirectly concerned in a few hairbreadth escapes. Probably the most astounding and remarkable of these was that which happened on the Pillar Rock during the Easter holidays of 1903. A party of four arrived at the north side of the rock on Good Friday morning. Two of them were novices; the others had some knowledge of climbing, though they knew nothing of the intricacies of this course. It was decided that the three strongest climbers should start the ascent, and their erstwhile companion should carry two of the rücksacks and other luggage around the mountain to the south side of the rock to meet the others later in the day. The climbers had a 100-foot length of rope, and O. G. Jones's book on rock-climbing; and the last view their comrade obtained of them was at some point high up on the rock, where they were consulting the well-known work. Then he walked around to the appointed meeting-place, waited vainly till darkness fell, and finally reached Wastdale much concerned for the safety of his friends.

We did our utmost to soothe his misgivings, yet not very successfully. Such questions as these were constantly recurring: "Do you think there is any danger?" "Can an accident have happened?" "Could they have hurt themselves on that climb?" Before answering, I jokingly told him of a previous journey from Keswick to rescue a party who had spent a New Year's night and day high up on the same climb; on my arrival at Wastdale, they were safe and sound asleep in bed. Nevertheless, I had to admit that a slip might have awkward results on the North Climb. "Yes," came the answer, "but surely they couldn't slip. They had Jones's book and a rope!" This reply was a good excuse for merriment; if a man could cling to Jones's book and a rope, all would be well. Some of the listeners seemed to think that the best of books would be a poor substitute for an air-ship should impromptu flight down that hopeless precipice be necessary. However, though everybody grew gradually anxious, we kept all going merrily till midnight, when we retired to bed for a short rest, after promising that a searchparty should start about 4 a.m.

Meanwhile, fearful events were happening on the Pillar Rock. Before telling the story, a few topographical details might well be noted. The north face of the Pillar Rock is, roughly speaking, split vertically by a deep rift which extends from base to summit of the Low Man. This is known as Savage Gully; it forms the key to the ascent by the North Climb. The route begins in the foot of the gully, but about 150 feet higher, a fearsome, vertical rise of nearly 200 feet necessitates a way being made out of the gully on the right. The rocks here on its right side are much broken up, and the ascent is made thereon until gradually a wall of overhanging rock rises overhead, and a way has to be made back to the left into the upper easy part of Savage Gully above the 200-foot drop. But an almost impracticable buttress of rock bars the return. This

is the Nose, and to force a way up and beyond it requires circuitous and complicated methods. As the leader cannot usually climb or lead over the Nose, he has to be lowered on the rope—without this support the descent is unjustifiable—down a 25-foot crack into the depths of Savage Gully. The steep finish of the well-named rift rises over his head, but he must not climb this; rather should he cross Savage Gully by a broad grassy ledge, after pulling down the whole of the rope. Then he can scramble up the easy left wall until it is possible to walk without trouble back to the top of the Nose. After lowering the rope, he can now safeguard and assist his companions' ascent.

Now let us return to the adventurers. Thev reached the Nose in safety; the way ahead seemed blocked, so they consulted Jones's book, and as a result the leader and second man were lowered carefully into Savage Gully. Now, instead of going round to the left, the leader started straight up Savage Gully. Above the difficult part he found his length of rope exhausted. After calling down instructions to the second man to stand still, he unroped and was going forward to prospect, with the rope held loosely in his hand to allow more length. But the second man-by the way, the novice of the party-did not hear or understand. He started to climb up the gully, slipped off at the crucial point, and fell crashing down the terrific chasm for about 40 feet. The rope was jerked instantly out of the leader's fingers; its end flew loose. But the other end was held by the last

man, who was standing up on the right wall of Savage Gully and below the Nose. He could not see round the corner, but heard the uproar, and suddenly the rope began to rush through his fingers till the blood ran, and he felt a dreadful wrench as it tightened around his waist.

He was dragged off his feet and almost over the edge, but just managed to seize the outstanding spike of rock below the Nose with his right hand, and with the other a convenient niche in the rock.

Then followed a desperate struggle for life: the fall was arrested, but the victim hung stunned over the sheer depths of Savage Gully. The strain was horrible. Just as the human anchor felt that he must give way, and be dragged down into the cruel, gaping gulf, the dangling climber recovered his full senses, and eased the strain by stepping upon a ledge, which luckily happened to be within reach. The position was still terrifying. Eventually the last man was able to secure his rope around the small belaying-pin below the Nose and collect his shattered nerves. Meanwhile, the leader, by a remarkable tour de force, had descended the gully to the bottom of the crack below the Nose, where he could reach the rope that led to the fallen man, who was still invisible over the edge. After noting a suitable rock spillikin, he cut the rope which held the cause of the trouble and tied it securely around the belay. The upper part of the cut rope was still fixed up above, and by this means the last man, though torn, cut, and damaged by his struggle up above, was able to



THE NARROW ESCAPE ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE PILLAR ROCK

join the leader in Savage Gully. The work ahead of the two men seemed impossible. There they were, crawling about like two spiders, but without the spider's natural advantages, on a sloping edge of the precipice with a 13-stone damaged companion below them. He was out of sight, and standing on a narrow ledge with a vertical drop of some hundreds of feet below him. It seemed at first impossible to try to move him without a horrible tragedy, so they shouted as loudly as possible, hoping some party might be near. All in vain : there was no response save the echo of their plaintive voices among the desolate crags.

For some time they were at their wits' end. Suddenly they remembered the loose end of the rope hanging down below the lowest man. They managed to communicate with the victim, and ultimately a remarkable plan of rescue was evolved. The leader unravelled a woollen garter he had worn, and, with a small stone tied to the end of this frail but veritable life-line, it was lowered until the suspended man could reach it. Then, after some exciting moments, he was able to pull up the end of the rope, tie it to the wool, and the others gradually and gingerly hauled it up to their level. Now, with the second rope to haul on, and the other end fixed on the belay, they slowly hoisted up their companion.

Though suffering from shock, mental and physical, and badly cut and bruised, no serious damage was discovered, and, steadied patiently and persistently by the rope, he was able to continue slowly upwards with his companions.

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Dense darkness soon settled on the rock, but some hours later they reached the summit, and, descending by the easy east side, reached Wastdale about 2 a.m., much to the relief of everybody concerned.

Next day a party of us set out to rescue their belongings. On the ledge below the Nose there was an amusing and curious sight. Amongst a litter of garments lay our friends' rücksack with the book open at page 278, the Nose on the Pillar Rock. The battered, lonesome-looking rope dangling over the great cliff reminded us vividly how hardly we had escaped connexion with a terrible tragedy. Had the leader not happened to have untied the rope when the unexpected pull came, he must have been torn off backwards, in which case all would have perished, because the last man could not possibly have withstood the tremendous strain. Also had the fallen climber been so damaged (his escape was truly miraculous) as to be unable to secure some support for his weight, the man up by the Nose must ere long have been dragged down, and both killed. The awful question of cutting the rope would then have required decision.

In the autumn of 1908 some of the details of this narrow escape were repeated with sadder and more painful results. The two Messrs. Sprules were ascending the North Climb. The leader had been lowered into Savage Gully, and, probably in ignorance of the more circuitous but safer way, he tried to climb to the top of the Nose by the upper part of Savage Gully as in the former case. He slipped, how or why will never be known, for his companion had failed to secure the rope around the belay, and two valuable lives were sacrificed. This was the first fatal accident to happen on the Pillar Rock. The lessons are obvious : neither of these would have happened had the "Nose" been circumvented in the proper manner.

It will be understood from these details that the Nose on the north side of the Pillar is an impressively dangerous and sensational place. In the October of 1891, Messrs. Ellis Carr and G. A. Solly discovered a way of reaching the top of the mauvais pas without the complicated negotiation of Savage Gully. Instead of descending from the ledge below the Nose, the climber forces a way up the vertical wall on the right for about 25 feet. Thereabouts, a curious, narrow slit in the rock face will be seen on the left; this continues across to the top of the Nose: it is the famous Hand Traverse.1 The leader grips the sharp edge of the slit, and with feet more or less pawing the air-for foot-hold is practically absenthe moves across the face for over 20 feet, until, most probably thoroughly exhausted with the strain, he is able to step with a sigh of relief and his trusty hob-nailers straight to the top of the Nose. The most trying part is about a third of the way across, where the lower slit ends and the weight has to be raised to the continuation, which runs along at a higher level-roughly speaking, about 20 inches. It is a weirdly sensational

¹ This is indicated by the crack running across the top right-hand side of the illustration facing p. 284.

feeling to be performing a kind of aerial flight along that great cliff; the grip of the fingers seems strangely inadequate, and there is always the unnerving thought that it may give out before the exhausting final part of the traverse is reached.

Moreover, the place has a fearsome history. I have vivid recollections of my first passage. At that time only four leaders had attempted it; two of these had succeeded, and two had fallen off. Incredible as it may seem, in both cases, Providence, and the rope, saved their lives. The late J. W. Robinson was one of these, and I well remember his thrilling story of the sensation when he felt his strength failing. Slowly his fingers lost feeling, then they began to straighten out limply, and he fell backwards into mid-air, though not before warning had been given to those below. Strange to say, he fell on the shoulders of another climber, who stood on the ledge below, then flew head over heels down the precipice. The rope was belayed and held securely by a strong party in the Split Blocks, and, most remarkable coincidence of all, his body struck a sloping ledge at the very moment the rope tightened. Otherwise it must certainly have broken. Then he lay still, halfstunned, with nerves shattered by the experience. At last he regained his full senses. A peep over the edge brought back the frightful reality of his wonderful escape. In due course sympathetic companions effected the rescue. No ill after-effects resulted.

The other would-be "hand-traverser" also came off luckily, though not scatheless. These

unworthy examples should not be emulated; Providence can be tempted too far. It stands to the credit of modern climbers that the Hand Traverse is now scarcely ever visited; the risks are too obvious. They have been dramatically accentuated on other occasions besides those mentioned above, though not by any leader of a party.

Falling stones provide almost the gravest danger that assails the mountaineer either at home or abroad. Many exciting moments have fallen to my lot by reason of the discharge of this so-called mountain artillery, both in volleys and single fire. Many of these have been mentioned elsewhere; the affair of the Great Stone Couloir on the Matterhorn (p. 155) is perhaps the most striking of all.

British rock-climbs also possess their peculiar dangers, and few of the Alps equal some of them for downright difficulty. The Crowberry Ridge of Buchaille Etive in Scotland would rank as one of the three most difficult homeland climbs, and during our first ascent we had an eerie experience.

This famous ridge might aptly be likened to a huge knife of rock stood on end, and, where the handle joins the blade, a broad ledge cuts around the cliff. This ledge marked the limit of previous attempts to climb the ridge direct. A party of four of us foregathered a few years ago on this ledge, and gazed up at the terrific rocks above. The most tempting way seemed to lie up a crack which led to the crest of the knife-edge, about 80 feet above our heads. The left-hand retaining wall of this

vertical crack was formed by a long obelisk of granite shaped somewhat like a church spire. I climbed slowly but surely up this difficult crack, with my back against the left wall and feet on the other.

Twenty feet above the start I had had an impression that the great obelisk at my back moved slightly, but those directly below smiled at my so-called imagination. How could such a huge mass be loose? However, higher up, and doubtless on account of the extra leverage afforded, I felt the side of my crack lurch distinctly backwards with a sickening sensation of instability. Moving most circumspectly, I was able to beat a downward retreat, whilst my call of warning to those below made them move as fast as possible out of the line of fire to dodge a few falling fragments. The idea of the large mass being loose was still treated as a joke, but nobody offered to lead up the route. Then we turned our attention to the sharp crest of the ridge, and, after a long struggle with extreme difficulties, arrived on a narrow ledge about 20 feet above the upper exit from the crack which I had previously attempted.

Whilst resting, a friend who has a weakness for such amusement rolled a loose boulder over the edge of the tremendous precipice. Strange to say, the falling rock just struck the top of the great obelisk on the side of the crack. We were astounded at the result. The large mass, which must have weighed nearly 200 tons, swayed gently in its socket, lurched forward like a drunken man,

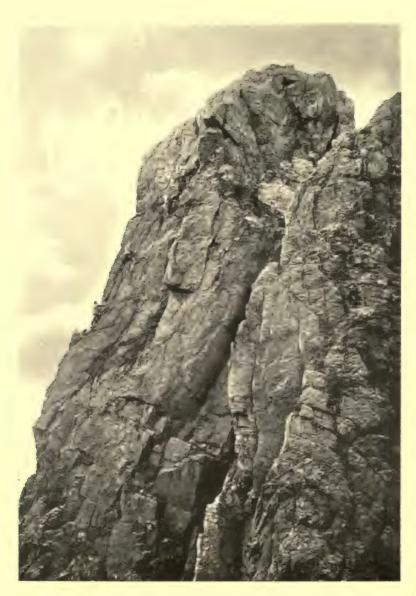
and toppled over the cliff with a tremendous crash. The air below was filled with sulphurous dust and flying splinters as the great pyramid thundered down the broken crags. It was quickly shattered into thousands of fragments, great and small, which crashed with mighty splashes into the snow-filled gullies a thousand feet below. The narrow ridge, to which we clung desperately, vibrated as though with a gigantic earthquake, and we crouched nervously under the vertical rocks, fearing that the commotion might bring down some loose boulders about our ears. The view downwards after the avalanche made us realize the miraculous nature of our escape. The broad ledge below the crack. where we had forgathered an hour or so previously, was practically carried away, and left like a huge scar on the face of the cliff. We all felt heartily thankful that the leader had not persisted in the attempt to climb that crack on the Crowberry Ridge.

The old saying, "A miss is as good as a mile," is strikingly applicable to "near" things on the mountains. A few years ago it again befell the Pillar Rock to prove the truth of this. During the New Year holidays of 1903, I happened to stray over to Wastdale Head after climbing with some friends on Great End. My arrival was late, and the usually placid peacefulness of the inn was disturbed by the non-return of a party of four climbers, who were "somewhere on the Pillar Rock." Recent climbing accidents had made the kindly host and his helpers nervous, and as midnight approached everybody became infected with their concern. In the early morning hours we arranged to set out with a search-party, though until daylight appeared it seemed impossible to do anything, because the exact whereabouts of the wanderers was unknown. The Pillar Rock is a big place to search, with ice and darkness everywhere. During the preparations I strolled out alone up the track to Black Sail Pass. It was a perfect winter's night.

> "No cloud, nor speck, nor stain Breaks the serene of heaven."

Only the pale face of the moon looked gruesomely down on the lonely mountain land. In deepest shade the bulk of Lingmell loomed black and funereal, and I almost shuddered at the thought of what might await us on the gloomy front of the Pillar. The recent disasters to several friends made morbid feelings almost excusable. But hark ! above the now faint, frost-bound song of the mountain streams there was a distant sound as of running feet. Soon a human being came bounding down the path. I quickly recognized my friend Lionel Meryon. It seemed that he was simply hurrying down to assure us that all was well. Between gasping breaths he said "they had had an awful time on the Pillar"; one of the party was "knocked about a bit," and they were coming down slowly.

As we walked back to the hotel he told the story of the adventure. I well remember his keen young eyes flashing in the moonlight, and his athletic



THE NEW WEST CLIMB ON THE PILLAR ROCK-THE UPPER SLABS

frame quivering with excitement, as he recalled the stirring events.

The following are the main details. They started up the New West Climb on the Pillar Rock about midday, but found the conditions very icy. In fact, at the second traverse (see p. 141) they almost turned back ; but the leader ¹ decided to trust to the "toss of the coin," and this favoured advance. I cannot help expressing an opinion here that such tempting of Providence is quite unjustifiable. This want of judgment was quickly evidenced, for in the steep chimney beyond the traverse the leader slipped and slid back on the second man, who had fortunately secured the rope around the large stone which is jammed in the lower part of the cleft.

Progress was extremely slow higher up, and darkness fell ere they reached the slabs on the upper portion. The rocks were ice-covered. However, by this time the light from the rising moon was coming to their aid. Except for this, they must perforce have spent the night on the exposed precipice, probably with serious results; but now, after prolonged consultation, they decided to push on to the summit. The slabs, which can be seen in the illustration opposite, were in a very dangerous, slippery state, and the leader had almost gained the point where the first figure is seen. Suddenly the second man, who was 20 feet below, and where the lowest figure is visible, saw the leader slip and come flying down the rock towards him at a terrific speed. He whizzed past,

¹ The late Rev. W. F. Wright.

and disappeared in the darkness over the edge of the precipice. Luckily the rope between the two caught on a slight excrescence; and though the leader fell practically clear for ten feet, the trusty English rope stood the strain, and the prodigious strength of the second climber also served him in good stead. But for the unexpected hitching of the rope round that slight excrescence, the whole party must have been torn away, and, with one tremendous bound of nearly 300 feet, have been dashed to death on the screes below.

The third member of the party was a few feet away to the left, and the last man still farther along, clambering across a narrow ledge of considerable difficulty. Strange to say, the sight of the falling leader gave the "tail-piece" of the party such a fright that he tumbled off the ledge, and went banging pendulum-like across the cliff, with the rope secured by the man in front of and above him. Fortunately, he fell with such a force that his body jammed in a crack away below in a slightly outstanding buttress. Here he was left for a time, practically unconscious but quite safe.

What a terrible position for the two uninjured climbers! At one end of the rope was the leader dangling over several hundreds of feet of nothingness; the rocks above his head overhung, and he swung listless in mid-air, half dazed and suffering much bodily pain. The other end of the rope supported a groaning, helpless mass of humanity. And the cold moon smiled indifferently down on it all.

Ere long natural pluck asserted itself, and after

many failures the leader was eventually hoisted up to the safe ledge below the slabs. Meanwhile, the last climber recovered, and his rescue was facilitated by the less steep angle of the cliff. For nearly two hours they waited, disconsolate and damaged, in an apparently hopeless plight on that pitiless precipice. Their calls for help were only answered by hollow echoes from the grim recesses of the shadowy crags.

Then the second climber,¹ with commendable courage, undertook to lead them up the disastrous slabs; and after many attempts he was at last successful. In due course the others followed, and on the top the injured ones received careful attention. The descent was made by another and easier route, and the party eventually reached the little hotel at Wastdale in the early hours of the morning. No bones were actually broken, and after a rest the injured ones made a quick recovery.

Not very long afterwards a telegram was handed to me, saying that four of my friends, climbing guideless, had perished on the Grand Paradis in the Italian Alps. Three of these were members of that party on the Pillar Rock.

The average person looks on the Swiss guide as practically impervious to the dangers that assail ordinary mountaineers. Expert amateurs do not share this view. The following accident to my guide—who, by the way, was considered one of the finest rock-climbers in the world—shows strikingly how the unexpected happens.

I was taking a photograph of the ridge of one

¹ The late L. K. Meryon.

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of the Chamonix aiguilles, and after unroping from the rest of the party, the guide had traversed out with me to the steep but comparatively easy ledge on the left side of the arête. He assisted me with the camera, and, after testing a large mass of rock below my ledge, he stood on it, and steadied my foot with one hand, whilst with the other he held a leg of the camera stand. I was just about to make the exposure when an ominous grating sound came directly from below. At the same moment there was a startled exclamation, and I felt a sharp tug at my boot. A quick glance downwards showed my companion starting to slide down the terrible, steeply-inclined face of the precipice on the mass of rock upon which he stood. It had given way beneath him, and I had a paralysed feeling of utter helplessness to render any aid.

But, trained by long experience of peril and sudden calamity, the guide seemed instantly to realize his position, and, just before the rock-slab slid over the abyss and dashed down a thousand feet into space, he grabbed with all his great strength a firm hand-hold, which luckily came within reach. The rock went thundering down 2,000 feet to the glacier, and my companion was left dangling by his hands over the tremendous gulf. Then ensued some painfully anxious moments, until I saw him, with admirable calmness, gain a secure hold for his feet.

He soon scrambled up to my level little the worse for the impromptu ride, but looking considerably scared and very pale.

The Schreckhorn, or the "Terror Peak," is one of the most dangerous mountains in Switzerland. It has an unenviable reputation for throwing stones and even avalanches at those who penetrate into its savage recesses. The feature of its ascent is a huge wall of rock over 2,000 feet high, and this is best scaled by a series of rocky ribs, which rise in almost parallel lines from base to summit. Snow- and ice-filled furrows separate these ribs, and, as the rocks become perpendicular in many places, a zigzag route across and up the Great Wall is constantly indicated. When new snow masks the furrows, the "Terror Peak" is worthy of its name.

Under such conditions, in the early summertime, we were once descending the Schreckhorn. On arriving at the side of the upper snow couloir, it was suggested that, though sun-wreathed and beautiful to look upon, the place might be in a dangerous condition. Our porter, in a mixture of German and English, called it "Der beautiful Teufel." So we made use of the full length of our ropes, in order to avoid all moving on the treacherous snowy mass at the same time. The leader had, with ease and apparent safety, reached the other side and secured the end of the rope around an outstanding rock whilst the rest of the party crossed. Somebody was joking about unnecessary precautions, when suddenly we realized that the whole bed of the couloir was sliding gently away with us. My position at the farther end of the rope was distressing, to say the least of it.

Insidiously, and almost pleasantly at first, the embryo avalanche carried us downwards; but in a few seconds the rapidly augmenting mass lurched forward over a bulge of ice, and I flew downwards head over heels amongst the soft, suffocating snow. For a moment the thought came that the rope could not possibly stand the strain of my fall amidst such an incubus; but the fear was shortlived, for somehow my ice-axe arose and knocked me unconscious with a blow on the forehead. Then there was peace, and oblivion. The next thing I saw was the bloodstained snow, and one of my companions bending anxiously over me.

The damage was more apparent than real, only a slight cut, and those above soon hauled me up to their safe ledge. For many days my tender waist bore painful evidence of the strength of an Alpine rope.

Far away, thousands of feet below, the Great Wall was still alive with avalanches, and their roar and turmoil made us all shudder involuntarily. But for the firmness of the leading guide, we should have spent the rest of our lives careering down that pitiless precipice.

These varied adventures may incline the reader to the opinion that mountaineering is unduly dangerous, yet the collection of this stirring and exceptional mass of incident inclines to an unfair opinion on this point. The man who, besides innumerable odd visits, has spent all his holidays on the mountains, from his teens onwards, is

bound to encounter strange happenings; the more so if most of his expeditions are made without guides and on British climbs, where bad weather and conditions that would be fatal in the Alps can be utilized, and often defied. The man who only visits the Playground of Europe for a few weeks each year, and tackles the great peaks under watchful, professional care, though truly delightful be his lot, may have a somewhat uneventful career. To such, narrow escapes may be practically unknown.

Wherefore, though their existence is undeniable, let us not get an undue idea of the dangers of mountaineering. After all, "mountains are the holiest ground that man has consecrated, and their educating influence is even more potent than that of books; they are the true authors, the standard works, printed in the most enduring type; that cheer and brace, as no other words can do, the minds of those who study them." The methods of study are diverse, yet all in their different ways reap their rewards. Some find it in distant prospect; others only in that closer clinging embrace, that contact with the very soul of the mountains, where all that is bravest and best in man comes to the surface. Days of uneventful calm must predominate, but now and again the strenuous lover of the huge brown rocks and the eternal snows is beset by apparently overwhelming danger, by sudden storm and stress, by impending calamity. He is tried in the balance, and let us hope not found wanting. And, as time passes, and even

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steep, grass slopes do not cease from troubling, but rather the reverse, these days of fierce testing are those that the faithful worshipper loves to ponder over and recall. Verily the memories of a mountaineer are the joy of a lifetime.

SHORT GLOSSARY OF MOUNTAINEER-ING TERMS USED IN THIS BOOK —FOR NON-CLIMBING READERS

Aiguille (French).—A sharp peak of rock, and sometimes snow, so called from its needle-like outline

Anchorage.—A safe position where one climber can, if necessary, support the weight of the next man by holding the rope

- Arête (French).—A steep, sharply defined ridge of rock or snow; often used in expressing an ascent up the exposed outside edge of a buttress or pinnacle
- Avalanche (French).—A mass of débris—snow, ice, or rocks—which sometimes falls from the higher parts of a mountain
- Backing-up.—The method of ascending chimneys by placing the back on one side, and the knees or feet on the other, according to the width of the cleft; also used to define the help given to a leader by the second climber following close up behind him as a support
- Belaying-pin—Belay.—An outstanding knob of rock round which the rope can be passed for greater safety
- Bergschrund (German).—The special variety of large crevasse often met with on the higher part of a mountain. It usually occurs where the steep upper ice or snow slope joins the lower névé or glacier
- *Chimney—Cheminée* (French).—A steep and narrow rift in the rocks, roughly resembling a household chimney with one side removed
- Chock-stone.—A mass of rock of varying size that has fallen and become wedged between the walls of a chimney or gully
- Coire—Corrie (Scotch).—A hollow usually situated at a high level, and more or less surrounded by high mountains
- Col (French).-- A pass
- Cornice.—An overhanging mass of snow or rock, generally on a ridge or at the top of a gully or couloir
- Couloir (French).—A steep, wide gully, it may be in rock, ice, or snow

Crevasse (French).- A fissure in a glacier or snowfield

Dent (French).---A rocky peak

Gendarme (French).—Alpine parlance for a tower or pinnacle of rock on a ridge

Gîte (French) .-- A shelter or resting-place

Gully.—A wide or narrow ravine cleaving the face of a precipice or steep mountain-side

Hand traverse.-Traversing by means of hand-holds only

Hitch .- See Belaying-pin

Ice-fall.—A much crevassed part of a glacier, usually caused by the ice descending steeply over the rocky bed on which it rests

- Moraine (French).—Stones and débris brought down and left by a glacier
- *Pitch.*—A comparatively short, steep rise in the rock bed of a gully, often crowned by a chock-stone. Used rather widely to define any serious difficulty met with on a climb
- Piton (French).—An iron stanchion, which can be driven into a crevice in the rocks, usually with a circular head through which a rope can be passed
- *Refuge* (French).—Mountain huts, usually erected by some section of a continental Alpine club to serve as sleeping-quarters for mountaineers

Rücksack (German).—A loosely-made bag supported on the back by leather bands over the shoulders. Much simpler than, and preferable to, the old-fashioned knapsack

Schrund (German).-See Crevasse

- Séracs (French).—Towers of ice on a glacier, formed by the intersection of complicated crevasses
- Threading the rope.—Placing it through a convenient hole between the chock-stone and the rocky bed of a gully. If the rope works freely, it can be used to lower the last climber down an overhanging pitch
- Traverse.—A passage, more or less horizontal, across rocks, ice, or snow on a mountain-side; also used to define a climb up one side of a peak and down the other

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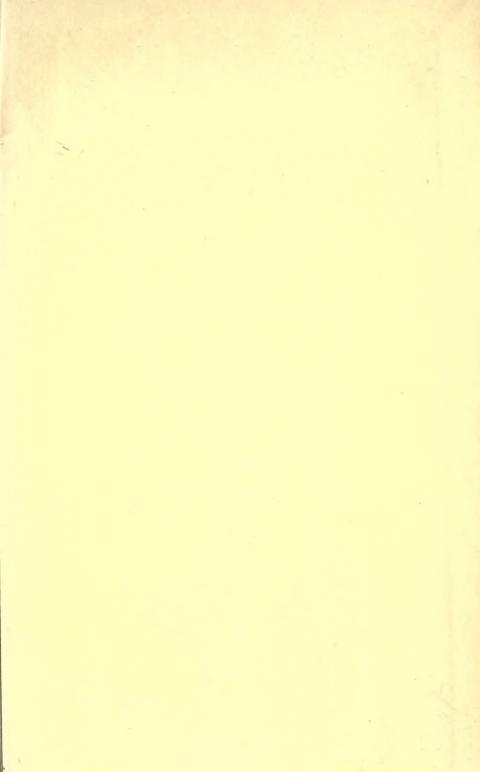
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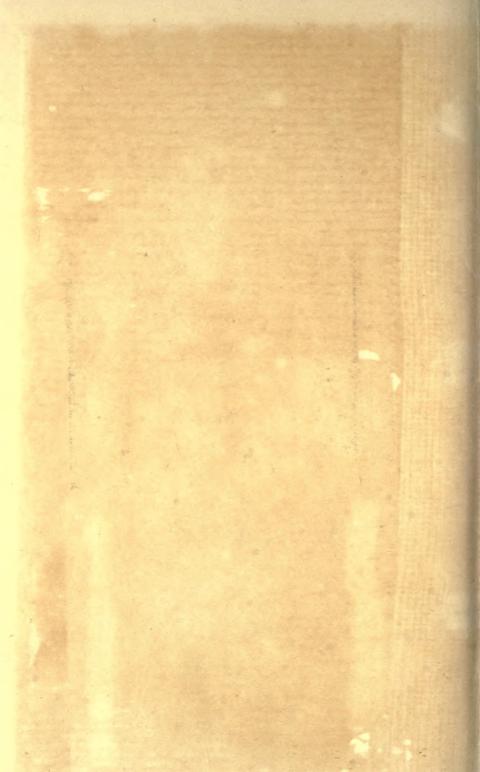
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