

ON ALPINE HEIGHTS  
AND BRITISH CRAGS

GEORGE D. ABRAHAM



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ON ALPINE HEIGHTS AND  
BRITISH CRAGS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE COMPLETE MOUNTAINEER

MOTOR WAYS IN LAKELAND

MOUNTAIN ADVENTURES AT HOME AND ABROAD

ETC. ETC.





IN THE HEART OF THE DOLOMITES

SOME CLIMBERS ARE SEEN ASCENDING THE DELAGOTHURM. THE STABELER IS THE PEAK  
ON THE LEFT



# ON ALPINE HEIGHTS AND BRITISH CRAGS

BY

GEORGE D. ABRAHAM

AUTHOR OF "THE COMPLETE MOUNTAINEER"  
ETC. ETC.

WITH TWENTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS



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## PREFACE

“**W**HOEVER looked at them,” said an Arab writer in 1686, referring to certain mountains supposed to be identical with Ruwenzori, “became attracted, and stuck to them until he died, and this science is called human magnetism.” An allied species of “human magnetism” is noticeable on many mountains at the present time. But this nowadays takes the name of mountaineering, and so fascinating is the sport that few who have once been attracted by it fail to “stick” to the mountains to the end of life. Truly once a climber always a climber—in spirit if not in deed.

Previous to the outbreak of the great war mountaineering had been greatly on the increase. This was due in some considerable measure to the winter-sport fashion, and to the exploitation of rock-climbing in Britain. Men of all nationalities visited, and still visit, for instance, the Lake Country crags, and few of the thousands of ordinary tourists, who annually come to the district, fail to hear or see something of its fascinations for the climber.

Thus the adventures of the lover of the earth’s high places have attracted much popular atten-

tion, and to those so interested this book is intended largely to appeal. Yet no pains have been spared to make it, at the same time, of practical service to the active follower of ice and rock craft at home and abroad. The technical and topographical details are the result of over twenty years' keen personal contact with the mountains themselves, a continuous keeping in hand and foot touch with the crags.

This work having been prepared for publication just before the outbreak of the war, it may be mentioned that the topographical details of the Dolomite peaks have been practically left in their original form. There have been considerable alterations in the frontier-line, all of which will prove convenient for the climber as well as the ordinary traveller. I acknowledge willing assistance from several climbing friends, one of whom, S. W. Herford, whose name appears in the text, has unfortunately lost his life in the war. Mons. G. Tairraz has been good enough to allow me to use two of his pictures. I am also grateful to Messrs. Newnes, and to the Editors of *Cassell's Magazine* and the *Badminton Magazine*, who have kindly granted me permission to make extracts from articles which have appeared in their valuable publications.

G. D. A.

IDWAL, CHESTNUT HILL,  
KESWICK.

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**ON ALPINE HEIGHTS AND  
BRITISH CRAGS**



# ON ALPINE HEIGHTS AND BRITISH CRAGS

## CHAPTER I

### AMONGST THE CORTINA DOLOMITES

“Not vainly did the early Persian make  
His altar the high places and the peak  
Of earth-o’ergazing mountains, and thus take  
A fit and unwalled temple, there to seek  
The Spirit, in whose honour shrines are weak,  
Upreared of human hands.”

BYRON

**I**T was a hopeless world of whirling whiteness. Far, high up on the Piz Bernina we wandered, enwrapped by a blinding snowstorm, and full weary after a week of fruitless sallies on many a gale-swept summit. Then above the shrieking of the rising gale there rose a roar far overhead on the right. The crash of the avalanche was the last warning voice of the giant Bernina, and down towards us came the grim, invisible doom. The snow-laden mist grew thicker. Trust in Providence was the only hope, for trust in speedy legs might have carried us blindly into the very danger to be averted.

Immediately came the thunderous splash of the mass as it flung itself down to the quivering

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snow-slope whereon we waited. Very near us on the left, how close we shall never know, there were sounds as of a mighty rushing wind, a rattling roar like storm-breakers awash on a pebbly beach, and the whole mountain seemed to shudder. A few icy masses flew past in mid-air, and then, far below, the uproar sank to rest. We were unharmed.

There was now no counsel for advance. As one man we turned our backs on the enemy and raced valleywards, undoubting the wisdom of the Irishman's advice: "Better be a coward for ten minutes than a dead man all your life."

This was the final adventure of a stormy week, when shortly after Midsummer Day snow lay a foot deep in the main street of Pontresina. The dangers of the High Alps at such a time had been effectually demonstrated. That evening the voice of the tempter in the shape of a Dolomite enthusiast made itself heard. News had come that these less lofty peaks had escaped the severest storms. It was to be either Dolomites or Dover, homeward-bound. Thus a few days later we left the train at Toblach—the English climbers' gateway to the Dolomites—having, as is usual at Innsbruck, missed the connexion and the finest climbing-day of the holiday withal.

Then came the four hours' drive to Cortina, with the song of the breeze in the sunny pine trees and fresh views of mountain glory at every turn. Once past the blue Toblach See, with its typical Tyrolese dwellings, doll-house-like in

form and colour, our way lay steadily uphill. On the long straights where slowness tended to dulness, motors would flash past merrily, filling our mouths with dust and our hearts with envy. Near Landro the dense pine woods thinned, revealing ravishing peeps of towering pinnacles which played hide-and-seek with us 'midst shifting wisps of vapour.

Soon on the left there gleamed the ice-capped pinnacles of the Drei Zinnen away beyond the narrow defile of the Rienzthal. On the beautiful shores of the Dürren See the call of the camera was not to be denied. But perpetuation of the scene was postponed by the sudden appearance of some Austrian soldiers who scowled unpleasantly, and in excited, guttural gaspings stopped the proceedings. Feigned ignorance of their language was of no avail. Photography was not allowed because of some mountain fort near at hand. Put tersely, unless we desisted our camera and selves would be hurled into the Dürren See immediately. Ice-axes were evidently a poor match for muskets, so discretion proved the better part of valour, until subterfuge could take the place of both on a later occasion.

The reason of this ban was revealed during the coming war, for this was one of the most hotly contested areas where Italy pressed hard for mastery of the mountain region.

There was a strong temptation to break the journey at Schluderbach and spend a day on the Coolin-like ridge of the Croda Rossa, which lifted

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itself so grandly on the right-hand side of the roadway. The modern-looking village had a beautiful situation, and was far in advance of Cortina in this latter respect. We could well appreciate the wish of old Santo Siorpaes to live and die within sight of his native Schluderbach. This most famous of the early guides ever refused those patrons who tempted him to leave his own district by a recital of the wonders of the Greater Alps.

But to us Cortina had more important attractions. On our arrival therein the advantage of being early season visitors was quickly realized. There was plenty of room in the Croce Bianca Hotel, and the guides soon noticed our Alpine complexions, ruddier than the sunset on Sorapiss or the pinnacled peak of Pomagagnon. The "Inglesi" had arrived—harbingers of the rich spoils of the coming climbing-season—and we were besieged with offers of assistance. But soon the peculiarity of Dolomite guides was evident. Each amateur must take a single professional. It was fruitless to urge that any single Swiss guide would take us up the Grépon—the most difficult climb in the Alps—or that we had conquered the Matterhorn and many others without professional aid. For the actual climbing guides would not be necessary, but with our heavy cameras to carry, and the necessity of saving time for photography always present, professional aid was advisable. Rope-soled boots, or *scarpetti*, the climbers' foot-wear thereabouts,

leave no scratches on the rocks. The exact and best route up any difficult Dolomite may have taken many years to discover and perfect, thus for amateurs the finding of the proper way is a stiff problem, though a fascinating one withal, if the holiday time be not too restricted.

There is practically no snow or glacier work in the Dolomites, and some of us thought we knew something of rock-climbing. Besides, there is safety in numbers on a rope, and the sanguinary history of Dolomite climbing made at least one of us chary of trusting a more or less valuable life to an untried professional. But explanation was hopeless. One and all they refused to join our party single-handed. We expected many chimneys and corners on the peaks, but never a "corner" in guides. Fortunately, in this special case, the next two days were hopelessly wet, and we had plenty of time to make local inquiries which resulted in a certain guide consenting as an experiment to show us the way up the Cinque Torri. For this he was boycotted by his fellow-guides.

The break in the weather also allowed time for an appreciation of the surroundings. There seemed small wonder that Cortina had lost much of its former repute as a climbing centre. Imagination had pictured it close mountain-tended. As a matter of fact it lay in a broad, open valley running north and south, with the famous peaks bounding it, but sufficiently far away to lose much, if not most, of their grandeur.

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The Croda da Lago on the south-west, and Sorapiss, with Antelao in lofty attendance, on the south-east of the long valley, possessed the shapeliest outlines. On the north-west the three bulky masses of the Tofana di Razes, the Tofana di Mezzo, and the Tofana di Fuori lacked grace and character, though nearer acquaintance would have revealed plenty of good rock-climbing. Monte Cristallo on the east, one of the most visited of the Ampezzo Dolomites, showed none of its grandeur from the close vicinity of Cortina.

In the village itself—perhaps town is a more appropriate word nowadays—the School of Woodwork was an attraction. In the main street, just south of the church, was found an excellent place where scarpetti to fit Cumbrian and other sizable feet might be bought. Meanwhile the wonderful and lofty campanile of the church was ever conspicuous in scene and story. High up was pointed out to us the ledge where Emil Zsigmondy made the traverse that so astonished the natives. With youthful audacity he passed twice round the dizzy edge of the highest balcony before the police gave chase. Then he hid in a dark corner until they passed up the stairs, whence by a hurried descent his escape was made.

At last there came a cloudless morning, and with it the early morning sun which made fine play with our lack of training on the way up the westerly side of the valley to climb the Cinque



Torri. Several inches of new snow lay on the ground and hung amongst the pine trees. The warmth stirred the usual stillness of the woods to a watery life, which in the downpouring made its presence felt as well as heard. Then, as we drew up towards the remarkable five towers, gathering vapours made a welcome shade and added vastly to the grandeur of the surrounding heights. Two cameras were important members of the party, and a sturdy porter came as far as the Cinque Torri Hut to help with these and other heavy luggage. The plan was first to climb our peak and then cross to the Reichenberger Hut on the Croda da Lago the same evening, in order to ascend that splendid Dolomite the following day. Thus, as the porter was unnecessary on the actual ascent of the Torri, he was told to stay at the Cinque Torri Hut in charge of the luggage and await our return. He was left snoring peacefully between two empty wine bottles outside the building, utterly thoughtless of coming events. Alas! we never saw him again.

During the walk up to the foot of the gigantic highest peak of the Cinque Torri there was time to discuss the unique topography of the mass. There are more than five towers and all have now been climbed. The last to succumb was the tooth-like pinnacle of the Torre Inglese, and it is one of the very few special problems around Cortina that have been solved by Englishmen. A few of the ordinary peaks were first ascended by our countrymen, notably the Pelmo (10,395

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feet) by Ball, and the Civetta (10,560 feet) by F. F. Tuckett ; moreover the highest tower of the Cinque Torri (7760 feet) owes its first conquest to an Englishman. This was in the September of 1880 when Mr. T. E. Wall and his guide, G. Ghedina, reached the top by the short, easy northerly side.

How strangely opinions and methods have changed in a few years' time. Great difficulties were encountered, and the first man up said, " In not one of the mountains here is the most little bit as hard as the easiest in this." The ascent of the 580 feet of climbing on the short side took three hours and the descent two hours and twenty minutes. Nowadays an expert would climb up and down in an hour if the conditions were good.

The core of the peak is split from top to bottom by a huge crack quite 600 feet deep. The weathering turmoil of ages has jammed this cleft with masses of shattered limestone varying in size from a pea to an elephant. The former genus are apt to fall and crack the heads of an unwary climbing party, whilst the latter great boulders head the cracks by which the ascent is made. Their negotiation forms the difficulty of many of the main routes, which for the most part make use of the central cleft or some of its branches. These side clefts branch off from the central one to the east, west, north, and south, so the top of the Torri is split somewhat like a gigantic X.

Until comparatively recent times the west

side, which faces the Nuvolau, was considered inaccessible. Its reputation for interest and difficulty led us to choose it for the ascent. We trudged leisurely up the bare slopes, later to be bespangled with wild tulips, vanilla, and the grey growth of the edelweiss. The great wall of limestone now rose straight overhead for 800 feet, and it was necessary to walk away to the left to realize the weird wonder of those savage rocks. Perched, like huge monoliths, on the crest of a grassy mountain Alp, and thus often called the Torri di Averau, they scarce seemed like the work of nature. It was easy to imagine them to be the colossal ruins of a gigantic temple dedicated to some Alpine Isis, and raised by the Cyclopean Gigantes of unknown ages past. From some points of view they had weird resemblance to a crumbling mass of colossal cromlechs.

Impressive as was the scene the adventurous call of the great rift on the westerly face was irresistible. In the great boulder-crowned cave at the foot of the chimney we exchanged the ordinary nailed climbing boots for scarpetti. The steady drip, drip of falling water from the melting snow up above made much lingering unpleasant, thus "*Vorwärts*" was the continual cry. In sheltered crevices ice lurked insidiously. The dangers of scarpetti on icy or wet footholds were soon realized and, contrary to good mountaineering practice, the arms had to do most of the work.

Up and up we went in two parties, through

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chimneys narrow and broad, and over impending boulders of terrific aspect. My leadership of the second rope was at first under the careful scrutiny of the guide, but his misgivings as to our making a speed-record descent to the starting-point gradually disappeared like the mists on the opposite snow-crowned peak of the Nuvolau. The outward views of the now sun-bathed prospect, framed in the dark walls of the chimney on either hand, were grand in the extreme. A stone dropped from one point where a protruding mass broke the continuity of the chimney fell direct for several hundred feet to our now tiny footsteps in the snow at the foot of the tower.

The chimney rose ahead in an alluring way, and some one suggested the taking of a photograph of this from the crest of the protruding mass of rock. Two of us climbed to its narrow tip where there was barely room for the leader and his camera. The legs of both were steadied by the second climber, who secured the rope around a projecting knob of rock. Behind and on either hand was empty space ; the camera in front gave a feeling of false security, because its use as a support would spoil the exposure. As to the others mounted in the chimney, their progress was arrested with successful photographic result.

A minute or so later there came from above a terrifying sound of falling stones. Our guide in the chimney lost his head and his handholds simultaneously, but fortunately he slid and jammed in the narrow crack, whence he was

yelling promiscuously the most dreadful language. Our position on the pinnacle seemed hopeless. Balance was almost upset by the suddenness of it all, still we were of necessity firm under fire. Two or three large rocks flew past our heads with a roar. A "big, black, bounding beggar" made me duck my head almost to the verge of joining its flight into the abyss. But the succeeding "small fry" with their invisible but not inaudible whiz caused most dismay. Strange to say, not one actually struck us, though a small one took an inch of skin off the finger of my right hand which was nervously thrust out to save a valuable lens.

Meanwhile some excited language was in progress overhead. The guide explained, to our great astonishment, that it was the porter whom we had left asleep three hours ago outside the hut. It seemed that a German climber had appeared and persuaded the porter to take him up the Cinque Torri by the easiest way. He was engaged by us, but hoped to get up and down before we appeared. To prove so unfaithful and nearly kill his patrons in the act seemed an unforgivable offence. He probably heard our vows of terrible requital, and hence made downward tracks to Cortina, leaving our baggage and all hope of reward at the hut. Much as some of us longed to meet that porter once more, he was never seen again after the previous parting at the Cinque Torri Hut.

Ere long the narrow escape was forgotten in

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the joys of conquest of that hoary-headed old Dolomite. Near the top of the chimney a traverse was made out to the right, and an exhilarating finish on the tremendous south-westerly face of the lofty tower added to the zest of the expedition.

It was a remarkable place, truly Dolomitic in structure and sensation. We moved carefully along an indefinite ledge to the right until the foothold gradually thinned away to invisibility. Ere this was reached the guide was the only man moving on the face. It was nervous work watching him swing out over the great wall, and our companion who was tied on the same rope looked round longingly but vainly for a belay round which a coil might have been hitched. Such an experience was uncomfortable for a well-trained cragsman. He had yet to learn that blind trust in the professional, be he competent or otherwise, which so many of our countrymen are so willing to bestow.

Personally, my list of climbing friends has been thinned too tragically to encourage this hero-worship of the Alpine guide. On this occasion, for photographic purposes, we recalled the guide, and meanwhile the rope joining him to our friend was belayed round a jutting rock above our standing-place. Then the advance up the slippery vertical wall was permissible, and the photographers and their lens could take in the scene unmoved (see illustration opposite).

With the ice cleared off the handholds our



CLIMBING THE GREAT WEST FACE OF THE CINQUE TORRI





following ascent of the face proved less difficult than it appeared. But it was sensational in the extreme, and the downward plunge of the precipice a few feet below a slanting niche which held the toes of one's scarpetti was weirdly thrilling. Beyond this the eye saw nothing but the tiny roof of the Cinque Torri Hut a thousand feet below. Calm deliberation was required in the selection of the best holds, but soon the angle became more reassuring, and we crawled out on the surprisingly broad summit slabs.

When my brother appeared from below with the bulging rucksack, filled with a whole-plate camera and full equipment, on his back, our Dolomite mentor was much impressed. The way the climbing had been negotiated seemed to satisfy the critic, and he exclaimed, "Surely, Herren, I will go alone with you to the end of the world!" We nodded suggestively down to the world far underneath, and, after expressing a disinclination to take such a journey, we took advantage of his enthusiasm to extract a promise that he would accompany us up the Kleine Zinne instead. He kept his compact though, finally, only through much tribulation; but that is another story.

Sunny, midsummer conditions had reigned on the west side of the peak, but midwinter greeted us harshly on the summit. Dense snow-clouds enwrapped mountain and mortals alike. After a brief battle with the elements the farther peak was gained. There the guide pointed to a black

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hole at our feet, and it was evident that the storm-swept climber might very easily step unawares into that veritable Avernus. It would be his last worldly step. However, it was indicated as the top of the great central cleft and the way downwards, so one by one we descended into its moist, chilly interior where it was at last possible to give the difficulties our cool consideration.

The great cleft extended to the base of the Torri, a black, yawning abyss with perpendicular sides but bridged in places by a chaos of huge boulders and jagged splinters wedged from side to side.

A descent was effected on the north wall until the first mass of boulders could be gained. Thence through narrow holes and dark caves, and along surprising ledges, we wriggled and crawled until another steep descent brought still more emulation of the Troglodyte. Finally, without descending the great chasm to its foot, which would have brought us on to the open mountain-side just above the hut, a way was made outwards to daylight on the northerly side near the Torre Inglese.

At first a passing snow-shower hid this quaintest of all the Ampezzo pinnacles. However, whilst we sheltered amongst a vast mass of tumbled boulders, strangely reminiscent of the summit of the Glyder Fach in North Wales, the skurrying flakes grew thinner. A dim, grey spire appeared above us, curving upwards and

bending forward like a Titan's finger of scorn pointing mockingly down at puny mortals. The Torre certainly seemed likely to have the best of the argument that day. Then the snow-curtain drew aside to vanish beyond the glittering peaks of the Tofane, and the sun shone cheerily.

In half an hour's time we were tasting all the joys of airy isolation on the final front of the fragile tower where for over 80 feet hand- or foothold was scarcely more than an inch wide. A sudden snowstorm, whose sudden approach had escaped detection during the excitement of the ascent, enwrapped us on the summit. This added more than a spice of danger to the undertaking. There was every prospect of our being snowed-up literally. In fact had not a small but convenient spike of rock been discovered, there were chances of our being transformed into human icicles and handed down to posterity from the crest of the shapely Dolomite. However, aided by the friendly spike and the long length of doubled ropes we reached terra firma in peace, not in pieces.

After regaining our "foot luggage," for thus seemed the heavy, nailed climbing boots after the light, softly-treading scarpetti, we hurried down the slippery slopes to the hut. The porter had gone. We were wet to the skin, and in the end the feel of the heavy loads led us to the decision to spend the night at the Cinque Torri Hut.

It was a cloudy sunset, and early next morning

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anxious heads were thrust outward to scan the weather prospects. Patches of starlight were visible through the drifting clouds. Encouraged by these we took an early breakfast, and just as grey dawn began to creep into the gloom of the pine forests we trudged valleywards to cross to the hut below the Croda da Lago. The plan was to keep as high a level as possible across the lofty, tree-fringed slopes and contour round the extreme northerly end of the mountain. Others who wish to climb the two popular Cortina peaks on successive days would find this route much preferable to the long descent towards Cortina which is usually followed in approaching by the Fedara Alp.

The Croda da Lago might well be termed the Queen of the Dolomites. Seen from Cortina it rises in shapely grandeur on the west side of the valley. Its lower form is draped in flowing robes of olive-tinted pine trees, whilst the array of pinnacle and campanile crowns all in lofty grandeur. The peaks of Antelao (10,710 feet), Sorapiss (10,520 feet), and Cristallo (10,495 feet) on the opposite side of the valley possess more height, but their almost shapeless massiveness makes them seem but as vassal peaks to their gracefully majestic queen. Small wonder that more climbers pay homage to this peak than to any other of the Dolomites. The south peak (8910 feet) is the higher of the two summits, but it has little of interest for real climbers, and the northern tower (8887 feet) now monopolises practically

all the scarpetti traffic. It was first ascended in 1884 by Baron Eötvös with Michel Innerkofler by the east face, which is still the easiest and most popular route. The North Ridge, discovered as recently as 1893 by Dr. Sinigaglia and Pietro Dimai, has more fascination for the expert.

The Pompanin Chimney which is even more difficult for those who have not learnt how to "back and knee" up such places in England is on the west side of the peak. Zaccaria Pompanin was the first man up the route by the famous *Kamin*, and Dr. Sinigaglia with Angelo Zangiacomì were his companions in the August of 1895.

The North Ridge was to be our route the day after the night spent at the Cinque Torri Hut. A picturesque "cross-mountain" walk, down and up hills galore, brought us within sight of the beautiful Lago from which the Croda probably gets part of its name. The comforts of the delightfully situated Reichenberger Hut were soon available. Hereabouts the view of the graceful tower of the Becco di Mezzodi (8430 feet) peeping through the pine trees, and reproduced with wonderful clearness in the blue waters of the lake, was most alluring. There was a strong inclination to linger in this abode of mountain peace and spend a lazy day amongst the flowery depths of the Fedara Alp, or scramble amongst the rugged crags of the Becco. In the latter case an easy way would have been found on the farther or southerly side, very suitable for guideless wanderers. The beginning lies up a sandy gully

facing the Pelmo. Then on the northerly side facing the hut we might have tasted all those joys of almost holdless perpendicularity which charm the expert exceedingly.

However, the huge, pinnacle-crowned cliffs of the Croda overhanging the little lake rose like a perpetual challenge which had perforce to be accepted. The path up to the crags on the farther side of the lake was unmistakable, and this soon led up through a maze of juniper to a steep couloir. This was so abundant in holds that the rope was unnecessary, despite our heavy loads. Soon we gained the open mountain-side, and thence to the left an extended series of wonderful ledges on the face of the cliff brought us to the real work of the day.

This began practically below the beginning of the true north ridge of the north peak. This point had not been realized by several friends who had vainly attempted the Croda without guides. The secret of success would be to traverse practically as far as possible along the ledges across the east face. Then we came to the so-called Rast-Platz—a big hollow under the overhanging body rock of the peak. Climbing boots were replaced by scarpetti. Buttresses and towers now rose overhead in bewildering confusion, but the guide picked out the route unerringly.

At the outset a chimney full of handholds and dripping water was an absorbing detail. In due course we seemed to be clinging, as

Tartarin has it, "in circumambient ether," with the possibility, should a handhold fail, of a record dive into the gloomy lake over 2000 feet below. As is usual in Dolomite climbing, the ascent proved easier than it looked. Yet sensational situations abounded, and a chill north wind was at times troublesome. Vertical and even overhanging sections were passed with comparative ease, because of the wonderful holds for hands and feet. At one point a smooth slab caused delay, but there was one comforting grip for the trusty fingers that made the upward swing through space nothing more than exhilarating. This was perhaps the most difficult part of the climb.

Near the top, and at the foot of the final chimney an amusing incident occurred. Not a single English person had thus far crossed our paths in the Dolomites. Strange to say, the only exception happened that day on the top of the Croda da Lago, where an English lady was met; if this word can be applied to any one encountered wrong end first. Voices were heard above when we arrived at the base of the chimney, which overhung considerably in its lower portion. The cold here was intense, but a patient and shivering wait was necessary, for the others were descending.

Soon a lady was visible above; the guides were more or less lowering her down the chimney. Her attempts to use the somewhat icy holds were spoilt by the guides, in their haste, jerking

her off into the air. The experience seemed unpleasant, for some good old-fashioned English language was wafted down the chimney. Silence fell suddenly when the gallant of our party called up advice as to the situation of a foothold. When the lady had descended within reach, this impetuous youth stepped upward and invited the beskirted climber to use his shoulder as a resting-place. "Thank you!" came the hurried reply of acceptance. Then the guides, out of sight up above and feeling the strain off the rope, let it loose. Down came our countrywoman like an extinguisher on top of the human footstool. Smothered ejaculations of surprise were heard. There was immediate confusion and collapse on the part of both as they slid down to a capacious ledge where we fielded the struggling pair in safety. The adventure caused much merriment, and relieved the chilliness of waiting whilst the guides descended. Then, bidding farewell to our chance acquaintance, we struggled up to the steep chimney, revelling in the exercise which brought welcome warmth.

A few minutes later we clambered easily up into the glorious summit sunshine. Of the two quaintly carved crowning towers that to the south, attained across a narrow crumbling gap, afforded the warmer shelter from the northerly breeze. There was revealed to us one of the finest views of its kind we have ever seen in the Dolomites.





A TYPICAL DOLOMITE SUMMIT—THE LAST HUNDRED FEET ON THE  
TORRE INGLESE.



It was a clear afternoon of almost cloudless beauty. The jagged spires of the North Ridge, once so unpleasantly compared to a row of carious teeth, were hidden, but a northerly peep showed the Tofane, furrowed with sunlit gullies and looking now really Alpine in grandeur. The busy life of Cortina was represented by tiny dark dots down in the broad valley. Far extended from north to south on the easterly skyline rose Cristallo and its satellites with the spiky teeth of the Drei Zinnen beyond, and Sorapiss, round and bulky, neighbouring the graceful cone of Antelao. This latter beautiful mountain was Titian's favourite; it adorns the background in many of the famous masterpieces. Pieve di Cadore, his birthplace, down below in the beryl depths of the valley was hidden from our sight by an intervening buttress.

But to the south and in the track of the westering sun lay the grandest array of wild nature. Beyond a foreground of grotesque pinnacles the Pelmo and Civetta loomed in vast splendour of grey and purple, draped with the white tracery of lingering winter, and tipped with the ivory gleam of the older snows. Farther to the right and beyond ranges that from their greater distance seemed mere lowlands, there crouched the "Dolomite King" gleaming proudly in his glacier crown. Truly this towering Marmolata

" From out the plain  
Heaves like a long-swept wave about to break  
And on the curl hangs pausing."

After inspecting the way up the east face of our peak and enjoying a chill peep into the then impossible, ice-filled depths of the Pompanin Chimney on the west, the descent of the ridge was begun and ended without incident.

Instead of descending to the Reichenberger Hut the traverse along the ledges on the easterly face was continued to the Forcella di Cordes. This was the little col which cuts into the northerly end of the cock's-comb-like crest of the Croda and gives access to the westerly slopes of the mountain. In the steep snow-filled gully a certain member of the party took an involuntary glissade and swept us all down in record time to the soft flowery pastures of Cordes. With every footstep a seeming sacrilege amidst such a carpeting of bloom it was almost a relief to gain the path and race valleywards. Cortina was entered long after the last ruddy glow had faded from Cristallo, and the evening star hung like a jewel on the night-crowned crags of the Croda.

## CHAPTER II

### UP THE KLEINE ZINNE AND OTHER POPULAR CORTINA CLIMBS

“Huge as the tower which builders vain  
Presumptuous piled on Shinar’s plain,  
The rocky summits, split and rent,  
Form’d turret, dome, or battlement,  
Or seem’d fantastically set  
With cupola or minaret.”

SIR W. SCOTT

“**I**N my opinion the Kleine Zinne is a dangerous mountain in the incurable sense of the word.” Thus wrote Sanger Davies nearly twenty years ago. In our own language he was the first man to attempt an exhaustive, but far from exhausting, description of the favourite Dolomite climbs. His grotesque pictures and stories are familiar to most mountaineers. In such circles mention of these usually brings forth a smile; they are prone to be regarded far from seriously. Yet “Dolomite Strongholds” is full of enthusiastic interest and sound judgment. Probably not all the other English writers on the Dolomites combined have done so much to make these peaks known and popular in the climbing sense. Did ever any

Englishman scramble up the Kleine Zinne without a mention of the name of Sanger Davies? The feat would be as impossible as his wonderful picture of the upside-down Kamin.

Some years ago I well remember how seriously the late O. G. Jones treated the "strongholds." Our incredulous smiles were disapproved. "Ah!" said he, "but for Sanger Davies I should never have climbed the Kleine Zinne, and you will be the same."

The prophecy came true enough, and small wonder that with the famous warning of the "incurable dangers" of the peak in mind we approached the problem of the Kleine Zinne with some trepidation. Thus, after returning from the Croda da Lago the doubtful weather of the few succeeding days was not deemed suitable for the long and serious expedition to Misurina and the Zinnen group. Meanwhile we learnt that from the Tre Croci Inn (5930 feet) above Cortina, right and left barrel shots, so to speak, could be made at two sporting Dolomites.

Cristallo (10,495 feet) is the most important of these by reason of its picturesque and interesting route, though the actual climbing could scarcely be called anything more than easy. The first ascent was made in 1865 by Paul Grohmann with Angelo and Santo Siorpaes. It is a somewhat lengthy walk, quite three hours, from Tre Croci to the first rocks on the south side of the peak by way of the deep Val d'Oriei between Cristallo and Piz Popena. A well-

known traverse across the "Band" on the face partly overlooking Tre Croci offers no difficulty, and then a series of short chimneys and buttresses lead to the highest point.

Cristallo has now been ascended from almost every point of the compass. Some of these routes are of exceptional difficulty, notably that from the west-south-west, first climbed in 1893 by Dr. Sinigaglia with Pietro Dimai and Zaccaria Pompanin. Perhaps the mountain is most famous through the loss of Michel Innerkofler. This greatest of Dolomite guides was fatally injured by falling into a crevasse on the small glacier which is crossed on gaining the Cristallo Pass from Schluderbach.

Piz Popena (10,310 feet) looks most alluring from Tre Croci, but only the excessively dangerous south arête is conveniently available from this side. It is usually climbed from Schluderbach by way of the Val Popena bassa and the Val Popena alto. The actual rock work is mostly on the east face, but finally finishes on the southerly side.

The other important ascent to be made from Tre Croci is that of Sorapiss (10,250 feet). It was one of Paul Grohmann's early conquests in 1864 with the guides Francesco Lacedelli and Angelo Ghedina. This was from the north. Nowadays the popular way goes from Tre Croci by a well-marked path to the Pfalzgau Hut (6350 feet). The hut stands near the Sorapiss Lake, and if one stops the night at Tre Croci its shelter need not be utilized, for it is only distant about two hours'

easy walk. Thence the much favoured Müller Weg is followed almost in a direct line up the north-easterly face, the foot of which is gained by a moraine leading to the upper part of the little Sorapiss glacier. The only difficult bits, a steep, smooth rock face and two short chimneys, are now, unfortunately, simplified by a fixed rope. Under good conditions six hours from Tre Croci to the summit would be a good average time.

Antelao (10,710 feet), the loftiest of the Ampezzothal group, and second only to Marmolata in the whole of the Dolomites, is not easily attained from Tre Croci unless the traverse of Sorapiss is made, descending by the south-eastern face. However, it is best approached from Cortina by driving to Chiapuzza, near to San Vito di Cadore. Thence it is a simple walk of about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours up to the Rifugio San Marco (6036 feet). The shortest and only popular route up Antelao runs up the North Ridge which is reached by the Forcella Piccola. The peak was first climbed in 1863 by Paul Grohmann and Oscar Ossi with the guides Alessandro and Francesco Lacedelli. The course is tedious but not difficult.

Monte Pelmo (10,395 feet) was first surmounted in 1857 by John Ball, the first President of the Alpine Club. The expedition is more favoured nowadays for the beautiful views it affords than for the interest of the climbing. The way lies mostly on the east face, across which a remarkable ledge is followed amidst striking rock scenery for fully half an hour. At the only



awkward place the projecting rock has recently been blasted. The Rifugio di Venezia (6624 feet) on the Passo di Rutorto forms the best base of operations. It is three hours' walk from San Vito di Cadore. Like many of the lofty huts or small hotels in the Dolomites it is often overcrowded with passing tourists. Very frequently food and accommodation are at a discount.

During our stay at Tre Croci the "German Invasion," which goes on daily there at midday during the season, caused much amusement. The storming of the pass was a favourite feat amongst our Teuton cousins. The reward of victory was an enormous appetite, whilst the hurrying *frau* and her usually extensive offspring joined in the fray. On fine days at this high place supplies ran low. Dispatch was necessary.

The German custom of simultaneously eating and speaking at full speed made the scene a fascinating one for a young companion who had never previously travelled in the Dolomites. Happy in his own ignorance of the German language, and assuming a reciprocal ignorance on the part of the Germans, some strong personal criticisms were often made regarding the table manners. This seemed to him a fine joke, but it occurred once too often. A very stout tourist, sitting at the next table, attracted notice. With a huge serviette tucked under his chin to catch the overflow, he was drinking his soup out of the large tureen, evidently the spoon was too slow. "Oh," said our friend, "that fat old Deutscher !

What menagerie manners!" Then the supposed German turned round and delivered himself as follows—"Ah don't know where tha comes frae, young fellow; but ah come frae Yorkshire!" The merry twinkle in the speaker's eye expressed no resentment. We all laughed heartily, and a genial hour was spent with our countryman.

Next day we set forth for the Kleine Zinne. It was a delightful drive through the fir forests, whose scented shades were afire with the crimson glow of Alpine roses. Then suddenly the screen of foliage sank below, and the beautiful peaks of the Zinnen rose calm and clear above the still waters of the Misurina Lake.

The comforts of the splendid hotel on its shores are famous, but discomfort was our portion, for an expert climber and his guide were there on the same errand as ourselves. We were to be robbed of the first ascent of the year. The others had decided to leave at one o'clock next morning, so, after arranging to start two hours later, we retired to bed feeling displeased with things in general; even a brilliant, cloudless sunset with its promise of a perfect morrow met with scant appreciation.

Early morning starts in the Alps are never conducive to good temper, so I may pass over an encounter with the frontier custom officials, who, doubtless misled by our ragged climbing garments, made sure they had surrounded a gang of desperado smugglers. The explanations of the guide proved indispensable.

Once above the level of the storm-riven pines rapid progress was made, for dawn rode up apace, and to meet it from the west there arose "a cloud no bigger than a man's hand." This spread amazingly. In an hour "the heaven was black with clouds and wind and there was a great rain," though sleet might more fairly describe the downfall.

The three summits of the Drei Zinnen still towered clearly but gloomily overhead with the shapely 2000-foot pinnacle of the Kleine Zinne, seeming greatest of the group by reason of its proximity. But gradually all were blotted out; first the wind turned chilly, then perfect calm settled all round, and snow encompassed ourselves and the mountain in solemn silence. Beds of delicate blue gentians and the wonderful carpet of Alpine flowers were all soon ermine-coated.

Ere long we had struggled up the loose, rocky slopes to the base of our peak which rose vertically for a few yards until it disappeared in snow-laden vapour. The sounds of voices were heard far overhead in the clouds. Our guide called up for news of the upper world. There was nothing uplifting in the curt reply; it savoured rather of the lower regions. Sigismondo grinned grimly and said: "The Kleine Zinne wins to-day, they are coming down at once!"

His words seemed tragic in their directness. Suddenly a piercing shriek echoed through the solitudes. Then we heard an ominous series of bumps, as of a soft human body falling down

the cliff from ledge to ledge. Curiously enough to me the sound instantly recalled an occasion on Snowdon when a sheep had fallen over the cliff with similar sounds, to land in a dying condition at my feet. But now there were only human beings overhead. The horrible sound drew swiftly nearer. The whir of falling stones failed to stir us; we stood still in affright. A brown, huddled mass struck the snow a few yards higher and came sliding helplessly down towards us, leaving an ominous red trail on the virgin snow. But we received it from the mist with a relieved roar of merriment. The climbers had accidentally dropped a big rucksack, and two precious bottles of red wine were the only victims claimed by the Kleine Zinne that day.

We apprised the others of the whereabouts of their property and fled swiftly downwards for shelter in the little hut below the mountain. The place offered only a chilly reception; it was practically filled with ice. However, the clearing of the interior promoted bodily warmth, and as abundance of wood was available a smoky fire was soon in evidence, and in our lungs also, for the flue was choked as well as ourselves. A stone torn off the roof remedied this; we could smile again instead of weeping waterily, and several hours of the simple life were more or less enjoyed.

The other party, though led by one of the most famous of the young Cortina guides, had returned disconsolate to Misurina, but in the

afternoon there was vouchsafed to us the reward of the faithful. The mist thinned; one by one towering peaks of a hundred shapes peeped forth, and the afternoon sun began its work of preparing the great cliffs of the Kleine Zinne for our reception on the morrow. A northerly breeze was lifting the mist-wreaths, and our spirits rose with these.

Nevertheless, nobody seemed enthusiastic as regards spending a sleepless night in the comfortable hut, with damp hay and freshly plucked juniper branches for bedding. The Drei Zinnen Hut on the other side of the peak was scarcely two hours' walk away, so tracks were made for its comparatively sumptuous accommodation.

The afternoon was spent on the jagged, northerly ridge of the Patern Kofel. The quaint pinnacle, called the "Frankfurter," and standing like a sentinel only a few minutes' walk above the hut, kept one of its conquerors in suspense for some time. During the descent the doubled rope jammed, and to prevent a resort to artificial respiration he had to be cut down. It proved that there is a limit to one's powers of endurance when hanging in mid-air on an Alpine rope. Since then this fact has been proved in tragic fashion on at least two occasions.

At this point, ere we set forth for the ascent of the Kleine Zinne, it may be of interest to give some of the topography of the peak and its neighbours. Seen from the hut the three towers are revealed in their true proportion, but from

Misurina only two can be plainly discerned, and one of these, the Westliche Zinne (9755 feet) takes on most prominence. The top of the Kleine Zinne (9452 feet) peeps very modestly round the shoulder of its big brother the Grosse Zinne (9850 feet), which is the central of the three towers.

Yet to climbers the south or Misurina side is of most interest, because, with the exception of part of that up the north side of the Kleine Zinne, none of the routes are visible from the direction of the Drei Zinnen Hut. This excessively difficult course is only possible when the rocks are free from ice. It was first climbed by Dr. Hans Helversen with Sepp and Veit Innerkofler in 1890. The way lies from the hut along the scree slopes to the unmistakable couloir between the Grosse and Kleine Zinnen. Some hundred yards up this a series of chimneys on the left lead up to the Nord Sattel. This is the deep gap between the Punta di Frida and the highest peak.

Two remarkable parallel cracks are now seen to rise in front, springing vertically in an almost unbroken line to the summit, though strictly speaking that to the left does not continue the whole length down to the Sattel. The way lies almost wholly in this terrific-looking left-hand crack. The real *mauvais pas* occurs about two-thirds of the way up, and there a variation along a horizontal traverse to the right was found by the Ampezzo guides. From the end of this ledge the course leads upwards again and back into the

crack for a few feet. Soon another easier-looking rift is noticed on the left. This is entered and followed direct to the summit.

The ascent of the Kleine Zinne from the west side is that usually followed. It was first surmounted in 1881 by the guides Michel and Johann Innerkofler. No part of the climb can be seen from the Drei Zinnen Hut, but the key to success is to begin up the great couloir between the Grosse and Kleine Zinnen on the farther or south side of the group.

The Grosse Zinne is a comparatively easy expedition. Paul Grohmann with Peter Salcher and Franz Innerkofler first reached the summit in 1869. The approach is the same as that for its smaller but more worthy brother. A slanting chimney and slab lead up to the left from the south couloir. By these the face is reached and continued to the highest point, tending westwards, if desired, on the upper part.

There is an unfrequented way on the west face and one also on the east. The former starts from the col between the Westliche and Grosse Zinnen, and makes use of the Mosca Kamin, partly on the south face. The latter keeps to the central rocks. J. S. Phillimore and A. G. S. Raynor with Antonio Dimai and Giuseppe Colli were its discoverers in 1897.

The Westliche Zinne receives scant attention. It is neither the loftiest nor the most interesting of the group, hence its neglect. In the year 1879 Georg Ploner and Michel Innerkofler were the

successful pioneers. The way begins in the gully between the two bigger Zinnen. Thence, after following around the east, south, and west faces by a continuous series of broad ledges, the top is finally gained from the west side. In 1899 two English climbers, Mr. C. C. B. Moss and Dr. T. K. Rose, found a route up the East Face with Sepp and Michel Innerkofler.

Our climb up the Kleine Zinne from the west was characteristic of the kind of work encountered on this splendid group, perhaps really the grandest crags in the whole of the Dolomites.

The evening turned out cloudless, and a typical Dolomite sunset called forth much appreciation. The world of letters and paint has rhapsodized about these Dolomite sunsets; in fact, it has become the fashion to do so. But some of us who had spent evenings high up amongst our British crags, notably on the Coolin in Skye, knew that a sunset made in Germany or Austria falls short of the home product in true beauty of colour, magnificence and artistic impressiveness. However, it proved, in due course, that the weird ruddy glow on the curious yellow pinnacles of the Drei Zinnen augured perfect weather for the next day.

It was a calm dawn of cloudless promise. But not altogether without misgivings regarding the day's venture, we followed our footsteps of the previous afternoon back over the Patern Sattel, that magnificent view point between the Zinnen and the Patern Kofel. The morning was



well advanced, and from the pass we saw that our peak was frozen on one side and baked on the other. On the north, icicle festoons curtained its huge cliffs with fairy frostwork, beautiful to behold, but ugly to climb ; on the south, whither we were bound, everything seemed bare and almost black by comparison, for the sun was doing his work well.

Just under the base of the Kleine Zinne the æsthete of the party was in sore trouble ; he had left his tooth-brush behind at the hut. Remonstrance was useless, he persisted in his decision to return for it. A long wait was thus necessary ; yet this was good for our mountain, so we followed the example of our native guide and sat down on some adjacent boulders. It was a thoughtless proceeding on the part of everybody. No Swiss guide would linger below a 2000-foot precipice bathed in morning sunshine. We remembered too late. Suddenly a distant clatter was heard far overhead ; the guide sprang up in wild excitement and dashed away precipitately. The mountain artillery was upon us, but luckily there were no "big guns." One of us ran close up under the cliff—the wisest plan, by the way—and a fragment as big as a teacup struck the stone he had sat upon two seconds previously. Another of the party stuck his head ostrich-like in a hole under some boulders, and incidentally learned that an Englishman's nose is softer than Dolomite rock. This was the only damage, and our good fortune was almost miraculous, though

scarcely deserved; however, the lesson was accepted thankfully and in all meekness.

In due course the wanderer returned, and a long traverse was made up and across stony slopes until a snow couloir led up between the Grosse and the Kleine Zinne. Steps had to be made in the snow, and it was quickly proved that a pocket-knife is a poor substitute for an ice-axe. Yet soon a lodgment was effected on the dry rocks, and the heavy "hob-nailers" were left in a picturesque row on a narrow ledge, for scarpetti were to be our best friends for hours to come.

Sigismondo almost had a seizure when we announced our intention of taking our large camera to the top of the Zinne. Such a thing was undreamt of in his philosophy; it was surely impossible. Thus only after a long talk, much excited shoulder shrugging, and a solid promise of *trink-geld*, could he be persuaded that sudden death would not be the end of us all. Even then he said, "only as far as the Traverse!" We were thankful for small mercies, so out came the ropes and we started upwards in two separate parties. At first progress was speedy, but gradually the great impending cliff seemed to close down upon us.

Everything steepened rapidly, and a narrow, vertical chimney, wherein blue-black ice gleamed unpleasantly, rose above me. As leader of the second rope I was soon in its clutches, with the right knee jammed in the narrow rift—the only

support—while the other leg and most of the body overhung several hundred feet of nothingness. The hands wandered furtively over the smooth rocks above my head, but there seemed nothing for the uplifting of humanity. The real work of the day had begun. The flat hand was first thrust high up and far back into the thin slit between the ice and the solid rock ; now the fingers were doubled up hard and firm. Skin was rent, but the jammed hand held secure. With a mighty heave, every muscle working in unison, the body was swung out and dragged up higher until, with a gasp of satisfaction, a hold was gained as big as an eggcup. Soon the crack widened, and I could wriggle more comfortably up its interior as far as the exit, where a broad ledge made “the joy of life in steepness overcome” seem very real. Free from ice that chimney has few terrors, but my brother who carried the bulky and heavy rucksack had no objection to the lowering of an extra rope down the frozen rift to serve as handhold.

Another similar but much simpler chimney led up to the left, and seemed to bring us to the end of all things. But here a typical Dolomite development surprised us. At the top of the chimney there was a curious break in the perpendicular curtain of the cliff which dropped sheer, and clean cut, except for this gap, through a height of nearly a thousand feet. This opening led on to a remarkable, almost level ledge, scarcely ever more than a foot wide, which

continued around the face of the precipice for about eighty feet. This was the celebrated Kleine Zinne Traverse. Its passage has led to the penning of more blood-curdling descriptions than any other place in the district. Our friend Sanger Davies made great play here. He said the traverse "seemed to be 100 yards going and 50 yards returning ; let it go at the latter."

Above the ledge the rocks overhung awkwardly and threatened to push one backwards over into the abyss. The place was certainly sensational, and with ice on the ledge the difficulties required delicate treatment. The attitude and sinuosity of the serpent were first tried, but lack of handhold on the frozen ledge made the effort too creepy. Finally the upright method was adopted with the body facing the cliff. With the feet firmly placed on the outside edge of the ledge, so that at places the heels overhung the depths, the balance was well preserved and the crossing an easy enough matter.

Of course the rope would not be of much service in such a passage, but there could be no excuse for some of the guides who untie and carry the rope in their hand during the crossing. There are excellent belays near each end of the traverse, and no fatal accident has yet happened at this place. All of us crossed safely, despite the excitement of our guide, who, according to custom, lost his head when we persisted in bringing the camera over the *mauvais pas*. A photograph had to be taken of the notorious traverse during



THE KLEINE ZINNE TRAVERSE, FROM ABOVE



the descent, and Tyrolese profanity gradually subsided under our utter equanimity. As a matter of fact these were the sort of places upon which we had spent a goodly portion of our lives. Nobody seemed to mind, excepting himself, whether or not the guide went home. However, as those of us on the leading rope climbed steadily upwards, for my party was now in front, he grew resigned and soon resumed the ascent.

A series of vertical chimneys, all icily difficult by reason of their sunless aspect, now led up to the crux of the climb, the Zsigmondy Kamin. This and the question of its inaccessibility had formed the bulk of our conversation for the greater part of the day. Something out of the ordinary was expected, and in this we were not disappointed.

By making a divergence to the right we had a thrilling view of our two companions negotiating this fearsome-looking front of the highest point. The camera was erected and used from our *firma loca* on the south peak, and then came our turn for the ascent.

The final 150 feet of the Zinne rose in one absolutely vertical slab, and the notorious Kamin or chimney split it clean almost from base to summit. The rift at the point where we had to step into it from right to left overhung the abyss impressively; it really had no definite bottom, unless the foot of our mountain, 1000 feet below, could be thus defined. About twenty feet above the start an overhanging bulge of rock blocked

the direct way up the bed of the chimney, and this we knew by repute necessitated a sensational outward and upward swing on the left wall. It was here where the Sanger-Davies party had performed somewhat like the modern airmen in a sort of "loop the loop," upside-down act.

I have vivid recollections of this place. Its tragic history would obtrude persistently, and the one and only handhold was that from which the exhausted fingers of a recent ill-fated climber had slipped. The rope, an old one held by the guide up above, had broken, and he had fallen through mid-air in one fearful bound to the bottom of the cliff. In my own case this single grip for the extended left hand proved sufficient for the outward swing, but there was unpleasant longing for foothold. I hung over the depths with scarpettied feet feeling vainly for sufficient support on the smooth wall.

Instantly a friend's adaptation of the old puzzle recurred to mind: "Think of a foothold; double it; put your whole weight on it; take away the hold you thought of and you will find yourself wondering how you got there." But not if the subtraction lands you at the bottom of the Kleine Zinne. Anyhow, I was not anxious to try the experiment. Fortunately my right hand could now come to the rescue and reach a higher wrinkle on the bulge, and with this help the body was lifted into comparative comfort. This consisted of stomachic support on a sharp edge somewhat



like a domestic mantelshelf. Though there was a sense of peril in deep inspiration, I could at least retain the position until an ulterior notch as big as a thimble gave trusty hold for a single finger. This secured, the snow was cleared from a deep niche, though hands and body chilled uncomfortably during the clearing of the hold. However, with this help, sunnier, rough rocks on the left were ultimately reached, and the upper part of the Kamin ascended on its left wall.

Only one sharp ridge, actually the frontier-line, separated us from the summit. With one leg overhanging Italy and the other in Austria we crawled joyfully up to the crowning cairn.

It was a wonderful prospect. Yet, like almost all the summit views of the Dolomites, the distance lacked individuality. A rippling lake of peaks, rather than a rough sea of mountains, stretched all around ; few were big enough to recognize, and the eye was first attracted by the nearer crags. Jagged, spear-like tops peeped up from below, gleaming grey and white in the sunshine, whilst still lower, the little hut, seen through floating wisps of mist, marked the only sign of human effort in this savage mountain-land.

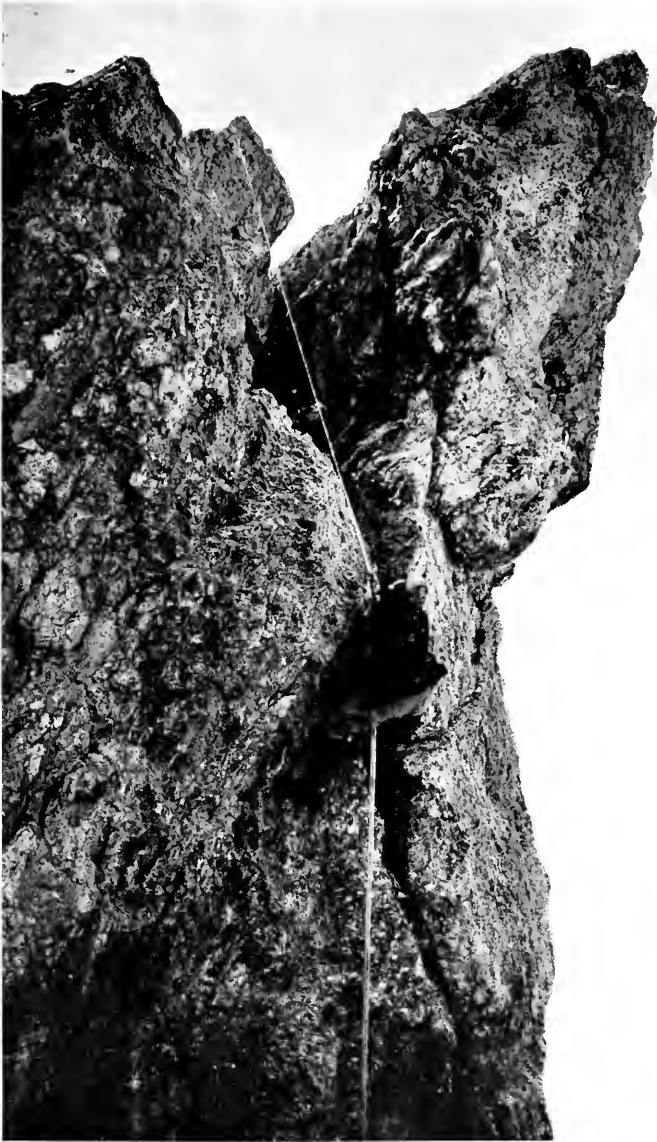
In the grey west, beyond the rugged shoulder of the Grosse Zinne, lay the most of distant interest. The blue lake of Misurina shone like a sapphire in an emerald mantle, with the crinkled crest of Cristallo beyond. Then, farther

south still, the gleaming tip of Antelao, like a silvery spire, pointed heavenwards from a coronal of circling clouds. A snow-shower flitted beyond the more distant pinnacles of the Croda da Lago; its onward march turned our thoughts valleywards.

The descent, as is usual on difficult rock peaks, proved easier than the upward climb. In the Kamin the full 200-foot length of our joined ropes was brought into play. Most of the party were more or less steadied over the *mauwais pas*, and the guide came down last on a doubled rope which had been hitched over a convenient outstanding rock high up in the Kamin. When he had joined us, a strong pull on one end of the rope brought it down to our ledge with ease. The same safeguard was used lower down in the icy chimneys.

The passage of the traverse was made leisurely. At last Sigismondo resigned himself to the peculiarities of the photographic climbers, and he actually posed without profanity near the end of the "berühmte Traversierstelle."

He enlivened, or otherwise, the moments of waiting by telling of the miraculous escape of a famous lady climber who once attempted the ascent. She was moving along the traverse with Michel Innerkofler following quite close after her. The guide was unroped. Suddenly she toppled backwards over the edge, but almost by a miracle Michel managed to clutch the length of rope near her waist. With one hand



DESCENDING IN THE DOLOMITES BY MEANS OF THE DOUBLED ROPE  
(SEE PP. 42, 35)



grasping the rock in desperation and the other supporting the weight of the victim, he was in perilous plight. Yet the brave guide preferred to lose his life rather than release his grip on the rock. He actually held until the second guide could crawl along the ledge and effect the rescue of their dangling and unconscious companion. It was a vivid illustration of a danger which might arise through the taking of a single guide. But for the presence of the third man it is most likely that Innerkofler would have refused to part from his patron and both would have perished. On the spot this seemed scarcely a pleasant story; the local colour might be rather too vivid for some travellers with the passage of the traverse in front of them.

However, no such adventure befell us, and soon we were scrambling merrily down the final rocks, which were now warm and quite free from ice. Ere long a way was being ploughed through the soft, avalanchy snow in the great couloir between the two Zinnen. A huge mass collecting enwrapped us in its damp embrace, and all went helter-skelter, head over heels, with a disconcerting downward rush to the more level slopes below. Misgivings, unnecessary as it proved later, regarding the smashing of precious photographic plates utterly spoiled the enjoyment of this the last adventure of the day.

In the gathering gloom of twilight we hurried across to the Zinnen Hut with the loftiest summits catching the last ochreous gleam of

sunset. Then with lightness of heart, somewhat tempered by the heaviness of the rucksacks, we set forth into the night on the backward way to Cortina. The Kleine Zinne now rose black and austere, solemnly silent, and stupendously aloof, as though a thing apart from mortals and the lives they live — or sometimes lose. Yet up there 'twixt earth and sky the spirit of the mountains spake in no uncertain manner. Health of mind and body abide on the heights, and the man who seeks them in storm or shine has sunny memories that last for ever.

## CHAPTER III

### IN THE HEART OF THE DOLOMITES

“ Huge mountains of immeasurable height  
Encompass'd all the level valley round,  
With mighty slabs of rock, that slop'd upright,  
An insurmountable enormous mound.”

J. H. FRERE

THE rattle and roar of the railway journey from England was over, and we found Sabbath peace at Bozen—the famous gateway into the wonderful, western Dolomite region. A great, extended wall of snow-capped peaks rose out of the plain, glowing blood-red and massively mysterious in the sunset gleam. The sight brought to mind Kipling's lines: they

“ Stood up like the thrones of kings,  
Ramparts of slaughter and peril,  
Blazing, amazing, aglow,  
'Twixt the sky-line's belting beryl,  
And the wine-dark flats below.”

The mountains called. Thus a long day's drive was undertaken, first over the foot-hills, then always up and up into the heart of the Dolomites. The fact that we were fortunate enough to find by far the grandest approach

to this wonderful Alpine land must be my principal excuse for some topographical details.

All the "world and his wife" go mountaineering nowadays. The overcrowded state of the Swiss Alps, where one has almost to fight for sitting room amongst fashionable society on many of the peaks, has led some of our countrymen towards the more primitive Dolomitic districts of the Austrian Tyrol. Accommodation is ample and inexpensive. The scenery is overpowering in its grandeur.

The unique military road, the Dolomiten Strasse, is now complete from Bozen on the west to Cortina on the east. The war has revealed its purpose and justified the expensive construction. Nowhere in the world does such a highway cut so deeply into the savage recesses of untamed nature. Peaks of fearsome aspect seem to have been undercut by man's puny but effective handiwork, and 1000-foot precipices rear themselves up from the very roadside.

Wonderful as is the new road throughout its length, its most impressive section is that from the Pordoi Joch down the Fassathal, and this may well be called the real heart of the Dolomites. For the climber who is "peak-bagger" and nothing more—happily a rapidly disappearing species at the present time—the through communication by an efficient motor service affords the chance of visiting all the most famous and loftiest Dolomites in a single month's holiday.

However, the real mountain lover could spend



at least three seasons and take a fresh district each time. For the easterly Dolomites, Cortina would, of course, be the centre, and San Martino is equally certainly the best place for the splendid south-westerly peaks that cluster so compactly round the tapering Cimone della Pala. But the central mass and the grandest of all has no really recognized base. Most probably this accounts for its being neglected by English "top mounters and country layers," as one of the hotels so quaintly named climbers and ordinary visitors in their English advertisement. Yet in this central district rises the most famous of all the Dolomites, the tragic Fünffingerspitze, whilst Marmolata fills in the opposite side of the valley. Then, besides those huge neighbouring peaks which actually overlook the Fünffingerspitze, there are the tremendous pinnacles of the Rosengarten group, and the spiry towers of the Vajolet ever challenging the wrestler with fate to come up and try a "fall." Plenty of climbs hereabouts have never been scaled by any Englishmen.

In practically all the villages along the main military road there are now comfortable wayside inns where English folk and their acknowledgments are pleasantly received. In the Fassathal for the approach to the central peaks, Campitello is altogether beautifully situated—of which more later, and Canazei, at the foot of the great zig-zags that rise to the Pordoi Joch, has developed greatly within the last few years. Lovers of palatial hotels and all the paraphernalia of

luxurious town life—things which many go to the Alps to forget—will prefer the caravanserai at the foot of the famous pass.

In mentioning these centres it must not be forgotten that to many the ideal way in the Dolomites is to travel light, and spend the nights at the various Alpine Club huts which are sprinkled amongst the different groups. These huts are practically all "*bewirtschaftet*," that is, they are usually capably staffed, have good bedrooms, and also excellent food-supplies considering their oft-times remote situations. They are mostly under the supervision of either the German, Austrian, or Italian Alpine Clubs, and members have special rates and conveniences. Continental tourists and climbers, principally the former, were quick to realize that one of the cheapest of travel holidays can be spent in these various Rifugios. Consequently, during the season, they are crowded with a cosmopolitan company, and "the sleep that is amongst the lonely hills" is an impossibility.

My personal opinion is that in the Dolomites to climb from a centre is the best plan, and under such arrangements many of the peaks can be climbed direct, and in other cases an odd night or so may be spent in the huts. Such was our plan when we left Bozen on a mid-June morning upward bound towards the heights through the narrow, little-known gorge of the Eggenthal. This would save the long detour involved in following the main Dolomiten Strasse; it brought us at once into close company with the rocks.

The approach to the gorge at Kardaun was striking enough, with the picturesque castle of Karneid perched on the rocks 1000 feet overhead. It stood guarding the entrance to the deep ravine, and near it an artificial chamois on the skyline played havoc with all sense of proportion. In Kardaun a prominent notice forbade the use of motors on the road—a rule for which we felt thankful ere long. Ever the rocky jaws of the mountain gateway closed in nearer and nearer, until nothing but the road and the rushing torrent could find fair-way through the depths. The straight walls of porphyry sprang upwards; often the line of the roadway was the only cleavage in the clean-cut cliffs. None but a narrow strip of daylight came through the o'er-bending heights, and numerous tunnels often robbed us even of this. Small wonder that in the dull gloom of a sunless winter day its Stygian depths are such that strange legends are told of fearsome shapes whom lonely travellers fear exceedingly.

However, there was nothing dull about our journey up the lengthy gorge. Riding in an ancient, springless carriage certainly became somewhat of a weariness of the flesh, and walking often proved a pleasant change. Moreover, this seemed safer, for there were thrilling moments when descending traffic was encountered, usually on some hidden corner with stirring suddenness. The roaring torrent, sometimes over 100 feet below, seemed a "near thing" on these occasions. We appeared to be doomed to the

verge of the abyss. How often we longed for the English rule of the road when our wobbling wheels overhung the crumbling edge, and the downward view was delightfully unobstructed! Then the wonderful gorge widened; the harshness of the torrent's voice softened to a sigh amongst the bending larches, and flowers of a thousand hues jewelled the wayside slopes. Ever up and up we mounted steadily and almost dreamily into the dense shades of the lofty pine forests, where evening, solemn and still, seemed to set in prematurely. Then at intervals were revealed alluring peeps of the towering peaks that were to be our friends for many a day. Curtains of mist rolled aside, and hoary old sentinels of the silences seemed to bow over us in formal introduction. Ere long came a glimpse of the glass-like surface of the Karer Lake, uncanny both in its stillness and translucent reflections of the bizarre towers of the impending Latemar group.

The palatial structure of the Karer See Hotel loomed through the gloom in passing, and night quarters were found at a presumably less imposing place near the top of the Karer Pass. There we found one of the drawbacks of the big Dolomite hotels unpleasantly developed; the prices of everything more than matched the high situation. Englishmen were looked on as fair game to be fleeced, and there was certainly a special low tariff for the abounding Germans, and another just the reverse for the scarcer Englishmen. We were tariff-reformers in the Dolomites.

Somehow or other the peaks immediately surrounding the Karer See made little appeal to us, though Mr. E. A. Broome, the greatest modern authority amongst English Dolomite climbers, has sung their praises so delightfully. The straight buttressed fronts of the Latemar group looked most attractive, but our guideless enthusiasm was somewhat checked by the warning of great falling masses. Some of the outlying pine trees below the crags and quite close to the ordinary path had been shorn off clean from their roots by flying fragments.

The life of the great hotels with their fashionable crowds seemed peculiarly antagonistic to any climbing enthusiasm. Various kinds of games and social pastimes were in progress, and many habitués wandered afar amongst the flowery pastures and the forests, but there was no real climbing being done. Candidly, we were disappointed with the Karer See district, and I think the majority of home-trained climbers would be the same.

Even the very best of the Dolomites fail to appeal to many of those who know the joys of the British rock-climbing. Not long ago two young friends of mine planned a holiday abroad. They visited the Rosengarten group, quite close to the Karer district, and other famous peaks, making guideless ascents of several of the most difficult courses, including the Winklerthurm and the Schmitt Kamin on the Fünffingerspitze. Yet, remarkable to relate, they tired of the

Dolomites in a few days, and actually returned to England to finish their holiday on Scawfell.

We were not such patriots, in fact some of us had already fallen victims to the fascination of the Dolomites. The bizarre scenic effects, the joys of the flowery pastures, the lightsome unjarring tread of scarpetti on the rocks, and, above all, the exercise in that lofty Alpine air where every breath is a healthful draught of Nature's nectar, all tend to the impression that our homeland crags are not altogether supreme.

However, in the choice between San Martino and Campitello we decided to journey to the latter place. From the crest of the Karer Pass there were alluring peeps of the San Martino towers with the Cimone della Pala pushing its peak skywards, exactly as does the distant Matterhorn when seen from above Aosta. At Vigo we entered the Fassathal and joined the main highway by which the motors travel round from Bozen.

The way now ran pleasantly through Perra and Mazzin with the fantastic pinnacles of the Rosengarten—the legendary King Laurin's rose garden—looming vastly mysterious in ever varying shapes amidst the slanting rays of the ruddy evening light. Ahead, the massive Sella group rose grandly in full aureate glow, with the darker rocks of the Pordoi Spitze in curious contrast alongside. On the right sprang the steep buttresses which Marmolata thrusts forth, far flung as it were to hide the ice-crowned "King" from the gaze of the valley-wanderer.

At Campitello came the sudden revelation of the tooth-like peaks of the Plattkofel and Zahnkofel, the Innerkoflerthurm and the Grohmannspitze, almost seeming in the gloom of twilight to overhang the little village.

This was planned like most of man's handiwork in these narrow Dolomite valleys. On the banks of practically every larger stream that came down to the roadway there was a small sawmill, and scattered alongside stood its output in the form of a few rude wooden dwellings. At Campitello, with its two almost pretentious hotels, the chalets were in part more finished, but still full delightful set alongside the chattering stream of the Duron with the weather-stained old church o'er tending all in this peaceful nook under the mountains.

Next day a chat with the natives soon revealed the fact that the Fünffingerspitze and the Marmolata were their proudest possessions in the way of mountains. The former was not quite visible from the village, but a few minutes' walk to the other side of the valley revealed its crest, gleaming icy and white with newly fallen snow. Marmolata was still invisible; but ever present was the story of a recent accident which proved again that magnificent as are many of the Dolomite guides as rock-climbers, they know little of snow and ice-craft.

A party of two amateurs and one guide were crossing a snow-bridge over one of the big crevasses, and, despite a melting wind, all marched,

roped in close order, over the fragile structure. It gave way with a mighty crash; they were precipitated into the icy vault. One of the travellers found himself in a sitting position at a depth of nearly thirty feet. After recovering from temporary unconsciousness, he saw the guide below him lying motionless and jammed between the narrowing icy walls of the crevasse with a severe wound in his head. Still farther below in the gloomy depths he perceived his companion, who said he could only support himself for a short time in this perilous situation. Fortunately another party ahead had heard the crash, and the guides hastened to the rescue. Two were lowered into the crevasse, and with the help of the rope hauled out the two amateurs, neither of them being seriously damaged. The guide, Dal Buos, was found beyond human aid; he had fallen head downwards on an icy projection. The escape of the others was miraculous.

But the recital of this did not dismay us; in fact, the man who goes climbing in the Dolomites must forget, as he most certainly will in the health and pleasure of the sport, that almost all the surrounding peaks tell some tragic story. Why is this? Undoubtedly because hundreds of young continental students, inexperienced in mountain craft, play what might aptly be described as a game of "follow my leader" on these terrific crags. The law of gravitation asserts itself, men are flung to their doom, and the Dolomites are called the "Shambles of the Alps."



Yet we found climbing of the safest, yet still most thrilling kind, on the wonderful peaks around Campitello, none of which proved easy of ascent in their then prevailing icy condition. It is unnecessary to mention all, but some ascents have left adventurous memories behind. The Rosengartenspitze and the soaring pinnacles that encircle its north-easterly base yielded splendid sport—in fact, there is nothing to equal them in the Dolomites—or, as some have said, even in the Greater Alps of Switzerland.

Bad weather greeted us at Campitello. Yet the chills of a midsummer snowstorm and the inroads of muscular laziness were negated by impromptu games in which some of the natives joined. An aerial traverse across the river outside the hotel was especially attractive. A 100-foot rope was stretched across the torrent, and daring spirits made the passage suspended on hands and legs. The spectators were astounded at the mad Englishmen, the more so as the first man dropped showers of coins out of his trousers pockets when halfway across. Straightway the stream was thronged by young and old wading for the spoil, and we had visual evidence that such a washing of feet had never previously been known in Campitello.

Early next morning the valley was bathed in sunshine, and our spirits and the barometer both rising accordingly. The Vajolet Hut at the base of the Rosengartenspitze was the *objectif*, and after the journey down the Fassathal to

Mazzin there was an inspiring three hours' walk up the beautiful Vajoletthal, undoubtedly the grandest upland valley in the Dolomites. As we passed through the groups of lower chalets, the lack of sanitation made itself unpleasantly felt and smelt, for the wealth of the Tyrolese peasant seems best judged by the size of the manure-heap outside his front door.

But these troubles were soon far below. Up on the right the red tip of Rizzi's Tower rose alluringly, whilst ere long a sudden peep through the gloomy pines revealed the Vajolet Pinnacles in all their grandeur. Low-lying mist accentuated their jagged contours, but this addition to their charm could have been dispensed with, for distant thunder rolled ominously. Finally a shower of sleet chased us up the last slopes to the hut. This place, as is usual in this district, was in charge of a reliable guide and his family, who kept all clean and tidy. The cooking was good, the inevitable "*Rost-bif*" was not, as spoken of by the prophet, either a burnt-offering or a bleeding sacrifice.

Quite close by the hut was a small outdoor gymnasium where parties of Austrian students trained assiduously for the crags. Their antics were amusing to some of us who hold that rock-climbing and gymnastics are things apart. Strangely enough the best gymnasts are disappointing as rock-climbers. Much muscle conduces to clumsiness, and in climbing it is more the mental application of skilful strength and

balance at the crucial moment than mere ability to perform fixed feats of muscularity. Thus we reasoned with the Austrians after one of our party had shown that he was no stranger to the horizontal bar.

Moreover, discussion arose regarding the practice of jumping for holds which is favoured by some Dolomite specialists. Of course jumping in nailed boots would be suicidal, but in scarpetti there is more safety. Yet even this we held was unjustifiable. One of the routes on the Rosengartenspitz was said to be impossible without jumping about a yard to a remote foothold. Failure to land correctly would end the proceeding at the bottom of the 1000-foot cliff. Yet English parties have made the ascent without recourse to such an unorthodox method.

Just above the hut there rose the Punta d'Emma, quite a small projecting buttress of the Rosengartenspitz, but one of the most desperately dangerous climbs that has ever been made. *In extremis* on the *mauvais pas* a youthful rock gymnast had jumped for a hold. His remains were recovered with difficulty from near the foot of the cliff. Thus our theories were illustrated with somewhat tragic practice, nevertheless the next day the warning was unheeded by one of the listeners.

The weather seemed hopeless in the evening, thunder sang us to sleep, but about 5 a.m. next morning there was such a terrific crash that the little hut seemed to be lifted bodily. Heads were

thrust hurriedly out of the windows, to find a group of workmen busy with a new addition to the building. They had just blasted a great mass away for new foundations. When soundly rated for thus disturbing our slumbers, the reply came with Teutonic directness: "Nobody sleeps in a place like this after 5 o'clock in the morning."

Thus, in improving weather, we arose, and in due course were bound for the Rosengartenspitze. At first loose slopes of sliding scree had to be negotiated, where, as the Irishman said, "One takes two steps up and comes back three." Yet snow-slopes eventually supervened, and up these we plodded to the Gartl.

The view from this crater-like hollow was most impressive, with the serried ranks of the most weird-shaped Dolomites rising sheer on every side except by the way we had come. The Vajolet Thürme, with their three pinnacles of the Winkler, the Stabeler, and the Delagothürme, the most difficult actual peaks in this Alpine region, outrivalled all in outline, but the tremendous precipice of the Rosengartenspitze above which we were to climb overpowered all in height. The clean, smooth, valleyward plunge of the precipice was remarkable. It was doubtless the sort of mountain that would have appealed to a sensation-loving American expert, who disliked the Matterhorn, and "guessed he only cared for cliffs where he could spit a mile." Such nasty tests for clinometry are much to be deprecated.



CLIMBING THE FACE OF THE ROSENGARTENSPITZE



Our route at first lay up a steep, narrow couloir in the shadow of the peak, and every step had to be carefully hewn out with the ice-axe. When ascent by the rocks became advisable we found their surface to be icy in many places. Thus the usual rope-soled boots, or scarpetti, were not used; nailed boots were necessary to grip the slippery ledges on the almost vertical cliff.

We climbed on two separate ropes; a young guide led the first, and the second was my charge. Our only professional proved it easier to find the way than stick to it, literally, a fact which was vividly accentuated later in the day. On specially icy and steep places he would give up the attempt, and suddenly jump down again on to the narrow ledge from which he had started the difficult bit. This was dangerous and disconcerting, but all went well up the steep face until the summit-ridge hove in sight. The plains, 8000 feet below, had been gradually blotted out by surging masses of vapour which now rose up and swirled furiously around the summit.

It was obviously to be a race with the on-coming storm, so all the warm clothing was donned, and hand over hand we clambered up the rough backbone of the Spitze. On the only awkward section we encountered two young Austrian climbers who had turned back. To make greater speed they had unroped. A voice in the mist startled me suddenly as I emerged on a sloping slab, and there, on the left, standing

on a narrow ledge, and separated from me by a deep cleft, was a climber. His remarks were incomprehensible in the storm, likewise his actions. Suddenly with a shrill whistle, as though to hearten him to the desperate venture, he sprang across the gulf to the lower edge of my slab. The distance proved to be more than he expected. His feet failed to grip on the icy slab and he slid half over into the abyss with his feet dangling in nothingness. A wild clutch at a projecting rock saved terrible disaster, for a 2000-foot precipice lay just below. I have never felt so helpless in my life, in fact the suddenness of it all was most unnerving.

In a few seconds speech came to the rescue and relief was possible. After this the young Austrians tied on the rope and moved more sedately. It was a vivid example of how accidents happen in the Dolomites. "Never jump when negotiating rocks" is a rule enforced by British climbers. Would that this were observed in the Austrian Alps.

Even such an adventure was soon forgotten in the upward fight with the storm, but eventually we found shelter for a few minutes in the lee of the frost-decorated cairn. A thunderstorm was raging on neighbouring peaks, and a curious sizzling on the summit rocks warned us that electricity was more than in the air. Further misgivings arose when the guide discovered the square zinc box that held the visiting cards of successful conquerors of the peak. Two ugly,



black holes were burnt right through it. The shape was twisted, and a sulphury smell pervaded the damaged contents. It was certainly the work of lightning, probably during the previous day's storm, and the guide's scared face as he murmured the words "*Blitzen! blitzen!*" suggested immediate retreat valleywards. This was achieved successfully; but as though to make an exciting day still more memorable, our local friend caused some stirring moments during the descent of the rock wall at the side of the great couloir.

My brother and myself stood above, and about thirty feet below, as the guide and a friend on the other rope were moving midst sleet-laden mist down the slippery, icy rocks, my attention was called to their movements by a startled shout from the guide and a sound of nailed boots jarring on the rocks. I saw the "Dolomiter" stumble, lose his foothold on the sloping slab, and go sliding down it. Apparently nothing could prevent him shooting over into the depths of the couloir several hundred feet below.

My thoughts were not for the falling climber, but rather for my friend on the same rope. He must instantly be pulled down, for the slip occurred so unexpectedly and on such an easy place that the rope was not secured around any projecting rock. But, strange to relate, just at the very instant that the guide's feet struck a narrow ledge on the brink of space, the strain came on the rope held with grim determination by my

friend, truly a trusty and powerful Englishman. The coincidence saved the situation. But I never want to see a narrower escape.

Two hours later we were racing down the slopes of loose rocks and snow towards the hut in a deluge of rain, and absolutely soaked to the skin. The previous day's garments were still undried, so each spent the evening in a blanket, much to the amusement of the Austrians, who dubbed us forthwith the "Arabi Pashas."

The difficult ascent of the highest point of the Vajolet Thürme was made under opposite conditions. It was a perfect morning as we scrambled at dawn up the easy, lower rocks, higher and higher towards the starry sky, until all below seemed destitute of form, and void. Behind us, over that savage land of storm-riven peaks, the oncoming of day was magnificent, for—

" Silent and slow from point to point  
 With stealthy feet he trod,  
 And one by one with ruthless hand put  
 Out the lamps of God ;  
 Then down the East triumphantly  
 He hurled his golden rod."

The warm sun soon enwrapt us, and ever and anon we wrestled with the joys of delightful rock-climbing when muscles and mountains are in perfect trim. Now wriggling up the interior of some narrow chimney, or crawling Caliban-like along some narrow groove ; now hanging by trusty fingers over impending buttresses, until at last the final peak rose vertically overhead promising yet more interesting sport. Some one

christened our resting-place the pulpit, because "it led to better things above." There was soothing happiness in this close contact with the great peak, the while wisps of tobacco smoke curled lazily amongst the crags.

An icy couloir, verging in places on the perpendicular, led up to the final problem. From the top of the couloir a vertical rock wall, or "nose," about fifty feet high confronted us, and, despite the remonstrances of the guide, my enthusiasm led me to attack it direct. About twelve feet above the start I found myself attempting unavailingly to make upward progress. The fingers could find but tiny excrescences overhead, and a sloping ledge held one foot; the other rested in thin air, acting as a sort of balance weight. There was an eerie gulf below. Yet, having chosen the route, I was loth to "climb down" literally. However, in such a place the man who stands on dignity alone is apt to lose his footing, and this I did with great suddenness. The handholds held firm, but strength almost failed before the upstretched arms of those below could render assistance.

Then, during moments of recovery, the guide with keen pleasure showed us a comparatively easy but longer and more circuitous way to the left whence we could traverse back above the place where I had failed. The only member of the party to climb the "nose" direct was the camera hauled up in the rucksack.

Then a splendid 80-foot chimney gave access

to the summit, and we revelled in a cloudless prospect near and far. Marmolata, with the vertical south cliff now seen in profile, gleamed white crested and seemingly close at hand. The Rosengartenspitze, with the strange spires of the Winkler group in front, still seemed stupendous, whilst, in the opposite direction, nearly fifty miles away, the Cortina peaks were dimly discernible.

Turning to the descent, it may be said that the lessons we had learnt on the Rosengartenspitze caused every precaution to be taken. At the 50-foot vertical wall, or "nose," the guide lowered us one by one into the depths of the couloir. Then with the full length of the rope doubled around a "belaying rock" up above he swung hand over hand down to our level.

The advantage of having a local guide in the party was appreciated during the descent of the steep ice-chimney leading from below the summit, or Hauptthurm, to the gap between this peak and its lower neighbour the Nordthurm. The great boulder which blocked the smooth-walled rift was encased in ice, and a safe descent would obviously entail much time. Yet the Dolomiter stoutly refused our suggestion to make steps for his descent as last man. When all were below he surprised us by scraping the ice off a ring-headed *piton* which was driven into a rock crevice above the obstacle. Again the doubled-rope method could be used. With the full length of it threaded through the ring he swung down to us

with a grin on his face almost as broad as the chimney wherein we lingered.

Soon came the long descent of the much weathered collection of chimneys and loose buttresses that led down to the path near the hut. One became almost weary of first standing and distributing one's weight on the loose spikes, then sitting or sliding on their sharp points, and finally using them as handholds during the downward swing to another similar series.

It was a performance to gladden the heart of one's tailor, but not that of the sempstress at Campitello, though she always did her best to make us presentable. We were certainly tattered and torn, but the bare facts of the case were not realized until we arrived at the Vajolet Hut. There a party of English ladies who had walked up the valley, of course never dreaming of us as fellow-countrymen, made remarks that kept us dumbly seated until their departure was made.

In the afternoon there was a full-uplifting of the clouds from that wonderful rock-basin in the heart of the Rosengarten. All round the tiny hut, so snugly ensconced in the depths of the wild valley, there sprung the most fantastic array of cliffs and "campanile" imaginable. The Kesselkogel (9846 feet), the loftiest and easiest peak in the group, encircled the northerly side with its jagged buttresses far flung to the east. In the southerly direction the Coronelle Towers were less striking by reason of their greater remoteness, but all the westerly side was

dominated by the overpowering masses of the Rosengartenspitze (9781 feet), and the spires of the Vajolet Thürme, now just catching the yellow gleam of the westering sun.

The terrific east face of the Rosengartenspitze looked impossible in the purple shadow, and far underneath it, like tiny insects, we watched the English party threading their way over towards the Tschagerjoch and so to the Karer See Hotel. Had we wished to reach the Rosengartenscharte, and thus ascend the Spitze by its magnificent though only moderately difficult south ridge, this section, at the outset, would also have been our route. Others who visit the Vajolet Hut would do well to remember that to traverse over the Rosengartenspitze from this side, descending by the north ridge to a point almost opposite the Winklerthurm, gives the best, long expedition of moderate difficulty in the neighbourhood.

In perfect weather we strolled leisurely down to the Fassathal and on to Campitello, heavy laden with luggage and pleasant memories of new mountain friends whom we hope to meet and climb again.

Finally, for those who go to Campitello for the climbing, a few notes on the best peaks may be given. All the shapely neighbouring heights which rise to the north-north-west of the village provide interesting climbs, where the cragsman must rely more on himself and his guide than on any published information.

Taken in order as they are reached from Campitello or the Duronthal end, the Plattkofel (9744 feet) stands first. It is the easiest of all the series, which is known collectively as the Langkofel group. The small amount of rock-work it affords is best approached from the Fassajoch at the south-westerly end of the mass.

The Zahnkofel (9825 feet) is the next in order. It is a short but difficult climb, and is usually attacked from the Plattkofelscharte between the two peaks. On the Campitello side there is a terrific, thin crack running straight up the red cliff. The renowned Campitello guide, Luigi Rizzi, tells a thrilling story of his first ascent. A night was spent in the chimney at about two-thirds of its height.

The Innerkoflerthurm (10,073 feet) is a more ordinary course. Michel Innerkofler climbed it first in 1880 from the Zahnkofelscharte by the west face, and this is still the usual route.

The Grohmannspitze (10,207 feet) can be surmounted in at least six different ways, few of which are followed with any degree of exactness during consecutive seasons. The huge, round obelisk abounds in loose structure, and this renders most of the expeditions both difficult and dangerous. Some of the soundest rock is found on the east-south-east faces, visible in profile from near Campitello. The west face from the Grohmannscharte was the first way followed by Michel Innerkofler, alone in 1890, also, if ascended from the Fünffingerscharte—the snowy gap on the

east side of the mountain, the Grohmannspitze offers less danger from insecure rocks.

The Fünffingerspitze (9833 feet) from its shape should be unmistakable, it stands between the Grohmannspitze and the Langkofel (10,427 feet). It is dealt with in the succeeding chapter.

The Langkofel dominates the mass and is separated from the Fünffingerspitze by the easy tourist pass of the Langkofeljoch (8800 feet). The peak was first ascended by Paul Grohmann in 1869 with Peter Salcher and Franz Innerkofler. The course is best approached from the Langkofel Hut, and follows mostly up the north-westerly front of the massive and complicated mountain by what is known as the Felsen Weg. The way is more difficult to find than to climb.

Marmolata (11,024 feet), though magnificent to look upon, is somewhat disappointing to climb. Comparatively few Englishmen appear to visit it. As a matter of fact the rock-climbing is the only justifiable feature of a climbing holiday in the Dolomites, for any snow or ice work encountered is of little interest. The ordinary way up the Marmolata rises at an easy angle from the Fedaja Pass, where there are two good sleeping-places—the Fedaja Haus and Valentini's Inn (6700 feet). The Pass can be reached from Campitello through Penia in three and a half hours. A still finer approach to the sleeping-quarters is to take one of the motors up the wonderful "Strasse" to the Pordoi Joch. Thence it is an easy three hours' walk to the Fedaja Pass by the "Bindelsteig,"



a new and cleverly constructed path made by the Bamberger section of the German-Austrian Alpine Club. With the exception of a few easy rocks, it is a simple snow walk to the summit in about five hours. During the summer season a broad groove in the snow, worn by the heavy traffic, marks the way unmistakably.

The descent may easily be made by the west arête, once difficult, but now so decorated, or desecrated, with ropes and iron stanchions that only the magnificent scenery is the climber's reward. This leads down to the Marmolata Scharte (9840 feet), whence, by the Ombretta Pass, the Contrin Haus (6890 feet) on the south side of the mountain may be gained. This hut may be reached from Campitello by way of Alva and the beautiful Contrinthal in three hours. It serves as a starting-point for the remarkable ascent of the precipitous south face of Marmolata from near the Ombretta Pass. This ranks as at once the longest and most difficult climb in the Tyrol. Like numerous others of the grandest courses, its merits have been brought before English cragsmen by Mr. E. A. Broome, whose papers in the *Alpine Journal* proved our best friend in our Dolomite wanderings.

## CHAPTER IV

### A NIGHT ADVENTURE ON THE FÜNFFINGERSPITZE

“ With hands and knees on the lone rock-faces, I climb and  
clamber to scale the peak,  
From yielding screes at the mountain bases to granite pillar  
bold and bleak,  
Where the raindrops freeze till verglas glazes the hail-beat  
ridges where storm-wraiths shriek.”

A. C. DOWNER

THE Tyrol teems with memories of the tempestuous early times of strife and slaughter. Nowadays only the lofty ruins remain of the early glory of the rugged Dukes of Hapsburg, of the cruel Galeazzo or the wily Welspergs whose shattered home, so proudly picturesque, is the especial delight of the modern traveller in the beautiful Val Primiero.

The turmoil of war has again invaded the mountains, but peaceful days are in store. Far above the vine-clad valleys and crag-uplifted castles, hoary with many a grim romance of heroism, there rises a region of embattled spires where the joys of victory can yet be tasted. The battle is not with dukes and their legions, but with those grim guardians of the heights, the towering peaks

of the Dolomites. These rocky giants with their defences of gloomy precipice, icy slope, and storm-swept ridge still challenge man to the fray. Health and strength are some of the rewards they offer if approached with due prudence and skilful assault ; otherwise they may take a relentless revenge.

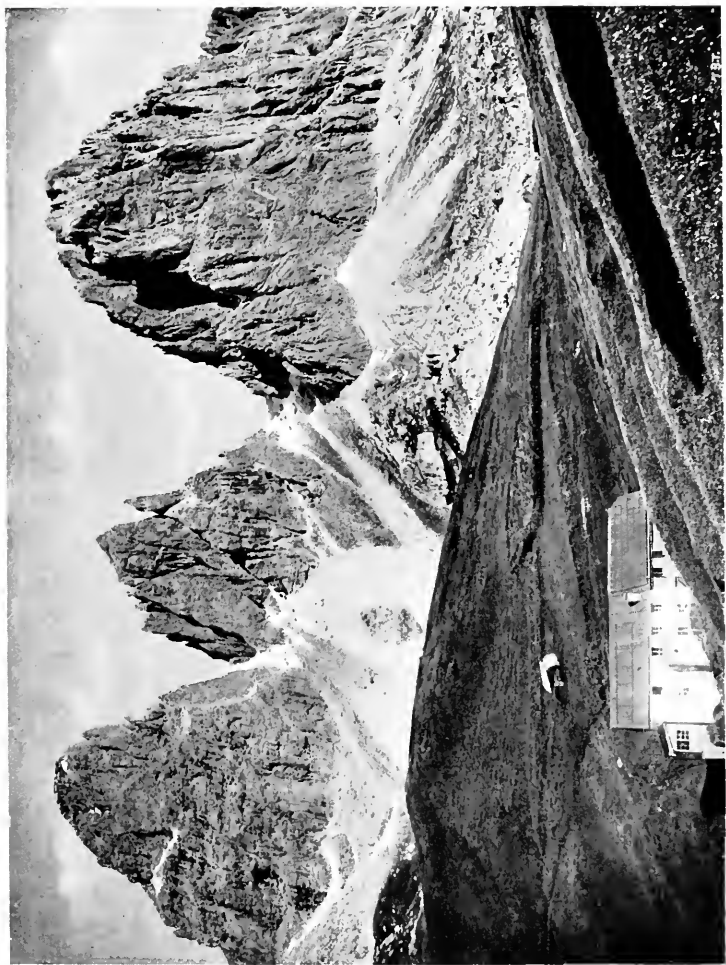
Of all these wonderful mountains, undoubtedly by far the most attractive for attack are the central towers that form a westerly screen to hide the lofty Marmolata from the unappreciative gaze of the hurrying travellers by the distant iron-way.

Of these the Grohmannspitze, the Fünffinger Spitze, and the Langkofel are the most impressive. Well may they be called "the three Graces," for truly they grace with savage beauty that most delightful of Dolomite valleys, the Fassathal. Moreover, the Grohmannspitze, as faith, upholds the simile well, for the man who climbs its shattered face trusts more to faith than to secure abiding-places for hand or foot. "Hope springs eternal" with the climber of the Fünffinger Spitze, to Englishmen the best known and most famous of the Dolomites, for, however steep and threatening its beetling cliffs, the rocks are mostly firm and trustworthy. As to the Langkofel, charity is mainly required ; only the guides know the most engrossing route of ascent from the Fassathal side, and the reward they ask is as high as the peak itself. And in this case the greatest of these is not "charity," but "hope" ; or, in other words, the Fünffingerspitze is the best

of the three to climb. There are few to equal it in all the Alps.

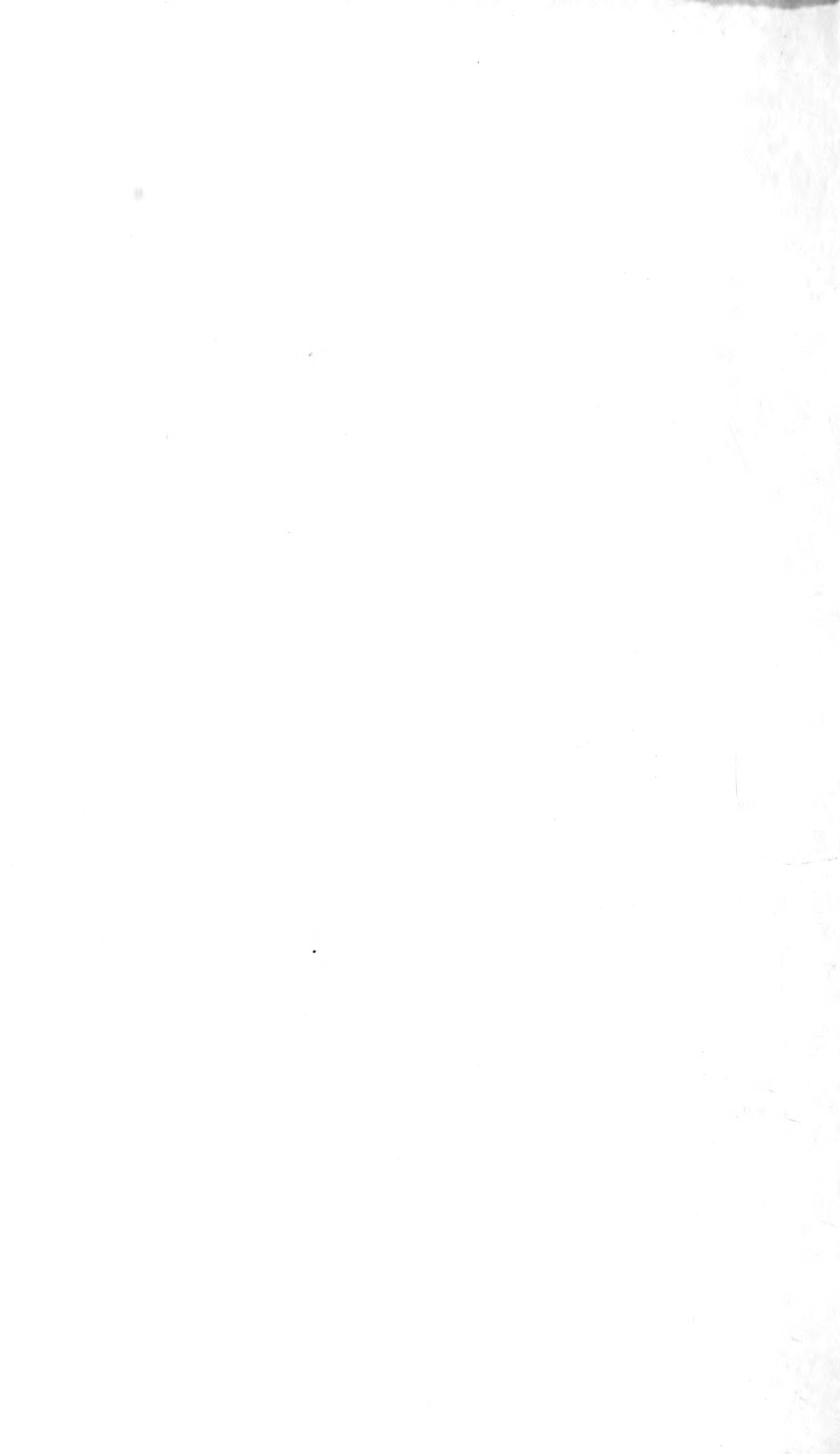
It was this promising reputation which made the latter peak the main object of our 1911 visit to the Dolomites. On the morning of Midsummer Day we set forth from Campitello bound for the little hut on the Sella Joch. It was a delightful walk up the slopes of the Duronthal, at one time in the scented shades of the straggling pines, at another out over some sunny glade where dew-spangled primulas and campanulas awaited the kiss of the morning breeze for their awakening. Then higher we wandered 'midst crimson seas of alpen rose, heedless of the vagrant elusiveness of the flowery track. Mighty monoliths ahead were unerring guides, and soon the ruddy, upstanding fingers of the Fünffingerspitze on the left blazoned our way unmistakably. The temptation to traverse to the right and climb the easterly crags of the Rodella was resisted, though the slight detour, for less laden climbers, would have made a pleasant variation.

Our way lay by the Col Rodella, and over the grassy pastures, still spongy and dripping with the lately vanished winter snow, but already wondrous bright with flowers. The Sella Joch side of the Rodella was draped with the golden glory of the yellow crocus, with here and there an ermine cloud where the white bloom of that flower outshone in brilliance the crowning snows of the Marmolata. But the joys of flower time in the Dolomites are indescribable.



THE GROHMANNSPITZE, THE FUNFFINGERSPITZE (IN THE CENTRE) AND THE LANGKOPPEL  
WITH THE SELLA JOCHI HAUS

THE DEEP GAP TO THE RIGHT OF THE TOP OF THE FUNFFINGERSPITZE IS THE DAUMENSCHAULE



After a call at the Sella Joch Haus we strolled over the Langkofeljoch and on to the Langkofel with pleasurable evidence meanwhile that the snow was quickly clearing the icy rocks on the more graceful neighbouring peak. With a steady north wind blowing, the cloudy sunset as seen from the verandah of the Sella Joch Haus caused no misgivings.

A pleasant evening was spent with some Austrian climbers, and, curious to relate, one of them had just received a postcard of the Napes Needle on great Gable, bearing the imprint of a well-known Keswick firm. He was shortly coming to "Schottland," as he called the Highlands, to "shoot the deer." His continental education had failed to include mountains as one of the good things which England possesses. Surely the photographers who made that picture must be frauds! It was a Chamonix aiguille! He had seen the same picture there, but called the Aiguille de la Nuque! This latter was true enough. Strange to say the photograph of the Needle had been copied by some continental firm, rechristened, and exploited at Chamonix, the very home of Aiguilles. It was a compliment to our English specimen. These things were duly explained to our Austrian friends, and since then one of them has found the Napes Needle and its neighbours more entertaining than "shooting in Schottland." Alas! war has claimed our jovial friends.

The Sella Joch Haus afforded comfortable

quarters, and "early to bed" was the motto, though little had been said of our plans for the morrow. This was necessary, for in the Dolomites the Fünffingerspitze occupies much the same standing as does the Matterhorn at Zermatt. Its first ascent marks the opening of the high-climbing season, and each year there is usually keen competition for the honours of premier conquest.

Thus, imagine our chagrin, when, waked by the morning sunshine, we learned that a party of three Germans had come up furtively the previous night and were now high up on our mountain. Unfortunately, the young native who had agreed to act as our guide had not yet arrived. He had some devotional service to attend at five o'clock in the morning at Campitello, and we did not expect to be able to start before the late hour of 9 a.m. Wherefore arose our many adventures.

The members of the expedition were four climbers and a camera. With us was Mr. Harry Harland, a famous English expert, and the other well-trying comrade, a practised, three-legged, one-eyed balancer on fearsome ledges, was also to be shown something of the wonders of the upper rocks of the Fünffingerspitze. It was half-past nine ere we set forth summitwards from the Sella Joch. Old Sol smiled warmly down upon us as we trudged across lofty pastures where every step seemed sacrilege. Now came flowers of a hundred hues, and anon, wide beds of delicately beautiful little gentians



gleamed like "the heavens upbreking through the earth." Then higher and higher we trudged up rough, rocky slopes, until gaunt precipices closed down upon us all around. The outlook behind, over peaks of a thousand forms, was glorious, but the nearer foreground somewhat marred the prospect. The sun-steeped snow-slopes showed tell-tale footsteps of those in front, who must surely rob us of the pleasures of first conquest.

We soon now learnt something of the topography of the Fünffingerspitze. From this side its five fingers seemed imperfectly developed; They rose almost as one solid tower, over two thousand feet high. To the right of this the sharp, lower peak of the thumb, or Daumen, was unmistakable, whilst between the two the deep gap of the Daumen Scharte was obviously the weak spot in the mountain's defences. A deep gully, mild-looking in contrast with the fearsome surrounding bastions, rose direct to the Scharte, and, despite its steep, snow-filled recesses, suggested easy upward travelling. The terrific icicle-hung rift of the Schmitt Kamin, springing straight to a gap in the summit ridge on the left, recalled the loss of Norman Neruda and the many other tragedies of this desperate Dolomite.

Even as we gazed a taste of its dangers was vouchsafed us. There was a clatter of falling stones in the great gully below the Scharte, and down flung the relentless mountain artillery

upon us. But the warning was ample. We dashed to the welcome shelter of an overhanging rock and heard the fragments crashing down the gully.

But more we heard of greater portent. Excited voices came from high up in the snowy recesses. Our guide laughed loudly, and jodelled his delight above the crash of the now subsiding avalanche. The Germans had mistaken the route, and were attempting the impossible feat of climbing direct up the gully to the Daumen Scharte. After all, they were more than likely to be beaten in the race to the summit. Yet we were in their power, for it was necessary to cross the stone-swept couloir to reach the high buttress on its right-hand side, up which we must climb to the Scharte.

Serious work now lay ahead, and the four of us tied together on one long rope. After warning calls to those overhead to desist from movement until we had passed the danger zone, I started across the steep, icy slope, hewing footsteps in its frozen surface with the ice-axe. It was an unnerving proceeding. Those above either failed or refused—let us hope the former—to understand our instructions, and every now and again small stones came whizzing past with ominous hum. At last a larger mass, visible by its size, necessitated a sudden “ducking” of the head, and my delicate balance was disturbed almost to the point of falling. Moreover, at the same moment a small pebble carried away a portion of the rim of my hat.

Then the gully became a veritable babel. Impolite English, French, and German personalities stirred the solitudes. The former prevailed when we understood that the others were coming down, and wished us to wait to allow them to go first. This would have meant more than an hour's delay. Further parley seemed impossible, but in calmer mood our guide explained matters, and whilst this progressed my feverish efforts to secure cover on the other side of the gully were successful. Then, one by one, steadied by the rope, the others fairly galloped across the icy gulf.

A 100-foot chimney, deeply cut into the body-rock of our peak, now rose vertically overhead. The real work of the day was about to begin, and the snowy shelf on which we stood assumed the appearance of a store for cast-off clothing and old boots. Spare garments were discarded and friendly old hob-nailers exchanged for scarpetti, which would give a wonderful grip on the smooth, metal-like rock of the Fünffingerspitze.

As all in the party might be considered somewhat experienced cragsmen, we climbed on two separate ropes, the guide leading one, and the other, of which my brother, laden with the heavy camera, formed the "tail-piece," was in my charge. Soon we were struggling up the recesses of the introductory chimney, now in its gloomy, frozen interior, anon spanning its outer edges Colossus-like, where large rocks blocked the direct route up the crack.

Nearly a hundred feet above the start, impending, icicle-hung boulders jutting outwards overhead, forbade direct assault. In consequence, a way was made to the right out on to the face of the cliff along narrow, sloping ledges, where the rope-soled boots proved grateful and comforting. It was a typical Dolomite traverse, with perpendicularity above and below. But the almost level, straight, and narrow way soon led around airy corners to a small rock gully where loose matter abounded, and loose tongues also when one of the party upset some fragments on the heads of those below.

However, the sunny crest of the buttress once attained, these excitements were forgotten. Now was the time to enjoy our mountain sport to the full. Great grey slabs rose ahead magnificently; above them the tip of the "thumb" peeped persuasively, as though beckoning us ever upwards to the joy of the heights. The Germans were now below, they had given up the attempt. With hearts full of hope and hands full of handholds, we mounted steadily, yet every now and again doubts assailed our professional friend.

Like a shower of diamonds, icy fragments fell continuously through mid-air from the huge precipice on our left. The upper reaches of the peak were evidently heavily iced. The sunless, 100-foot rock-wall above the Daumen Scharte was to be the crux of the climb. Could it be climbed under such conditions? Only the

previous day an old and famous guide had declared it impossible.

In due course the ever-steepening rocks forced us away to the left, and soon a bulging series of ledges suggested a traverse as it were across the ball of the thumb into the Daumen Scharte. Under summer conditions six minutes would suffice for the passage ; now it took us sixty.

Ice and snow-masked rocks caused many exciting moments ere we at last gained the well-known gap. We expected comfort here, but the reverse obtained. A cutting north wind swept through the opening, and I have unpleasant recollections of naught to sit upon but a sharp, narrow ridge of hard, icy snow. My left foot overhung the 1000-foot depths of the gully, my right dangled airily over still more profound abysses on the other side of our mountain ; behind rose the pinnacle of the Daumen ; in front, the terrific icy wall up which we must go summitwards.

For over an hour alternate hope and despair assailed us, whilst the guide clung and climbed up the *mauvais pas*. Certainly it was a fine entertainment, but one which we were scarcely in a position to enjoy, for a slight slip on his part would have precipitated matters too effectually. All would have felt happier had there been some projecting rock round which the rope could have been hitched.

However, imitating the remarkable example of a celebrated guide's performance, we arranged

plans for distributing our falling selves down each side of the Scharte should collapse on the part of the leader occur. Heated arguments as to whether the rope would stand the strain kept us warm, but fortunately the test was not necessitated. One at least of us was so frozen to the icy seat that nether garments and climber would have been difficult to separate suddenly. However, doubts instead of climbers were finally dissipated. The plucky young guide found a safe ledge 100 feet above us, and one by one my companions climbed carefully up to his side, whilst the heavy camera on the end of two joined ropes made light of the ascent.

But now a serious mistake was evident. I was left alone in the Scharte, and every effort to throw the loose end of the rope down to me proved futile. The northerly wind carried it far out of reach. At last some fragments of rock were discovered and tied to the end, but these invariably worked loose and fell over into space. The last of all, a big piece of angular Dolomite, very nearly caused me to join its mad flight. It loosed itself from the end of the rope, and by a hairbreadth missed the single human head left in the Daumen Scharte. This ended the rope-throwing performance.

An hour of precious time had gone. I had either to climb the icy wall unroped or all must return defeated. The former plan was adopted. It would scarcely be wise to expand on the sensations of that lonely journey up one of the most

desperate places in the Alps the while anxious friends peered nervously down upon every movement. The ascent was not made more comfortable by the excited disapproval of the guide. It seemed that we were repeating the escapade of a previous party. In that case the horror-stricken men above saw their comrade make a false step—alas! his last in this world, for he fell in one fearful bound for nearly a thousand feet. But our climb up the Fünffingerspitze ended more happily. After joining forces we renewed the order of ascent on two separate ropes, and again sunny rocks greeted us.

Then onward and upward we climbed, now impressed and compressed also by some narrow crack, whose bottom overhung the abyss, now pushed cruelly backward by some impending rock, where the smallest of handholds were just sufficient for their purpose and no more. If variety is charming, we bore charmed lives—one place especially thrust itself into my memory and anatomy. This was a painful stomach traverse along a sharp knife-edge of limestone, with the feet dangling helplessly on either side. The sensation of being cut in two was discomfoting.

This ridge led up to an extended overhanging lintel of rock which obviously stayed vertical progress. Below it we crept along a narrow groove and soon gained the wall of a deep chimney filled mostly with blue-black ice. This was the notorious ice chimney. For its negotiation my brother had carried up the guide's heavy nailed

boots in his already bulky rucksack. Scarpetti would have afforded an unsafe and unpleasant standing in the icy steps during the carving of the staircase in the frozen mass. For this purpose the ice-axe, which spends a lonely life hung upon a ring by the side of the chimney, was discovered and utilized.

At this point Luigi grew downhearted. In accordance with custom he remembered certain tragedies, and domestic details of which he was the sole support. With us it was an old, old story. We pointed out that for him now the support of the rope was ample, because we had passed it through the head of a strong *piton* or spike, which had been driven into a deep rock crevice. A slip might have meant a sudden whiz down the ice chimney for a few feet until its overhanging end was reached. There he would have hung in mid-air with the little Grohmann glacier 2000 feet below, and three strong Englishmen up above. There was no doubt which way he would have come.

Thus, having assured himself of his safety, whatever happened, Luigi traversed along the left-hand wall of the chimney and disappeared from our sight round a rocky buttress. He was evidently at work with his ice-axe, for large pieces flew whirring down into space beyond the bottom of the chimney, to be seen and heard no more. Then these signs of work accomplished almost ceased. For over an hour we had waited patiently. Somebody at last grew anxious



because Luigi's declamations about ice, and one ice chimney in particular, had subsided. Thus I unroped and traversed carefully and slowly along for about fifty feet until it was possible to peep round the buttress into the chimney. There was our hero enjoying the pipe of mountain peace, tucked comfortably meanwhile in a recess between the ice and the rock wall. When I spoke the sudden start almost toppled him out of his seat.

Practically no progress had been made. He had simply cut a few steps close to the rocks on the left wall and now said : " Herr ! It goes not ! The Fünffingerspitze is impossible to-day ! " It was a painful example of a splendid cragsman quite beaten by a short and simple ice-slope. He returned to my level, and, with the idea of my doing the step-cutting, an attempt was made to force my feet into his nailed boots. This was more impossible than the chimney.

However, our cheering spirits, of more than one variety, seemed to rouse the guide's native courage, " One more try ! " he said. Then coached from the end of the traverse, he was persuaded to launch boldly out and attack the middle part of the ice chimney vigorously. Previously he had not self-confidence enough to release his hold of the rock ; he persisted in clinging thereto with one hand. Naturally it was impossible to cut steps in the frozen mass with the ice-axe swung only in the single hand.

But now upward progress was steady and sure. Forty feet above my ledge the ice was covered with firm snow, and in this he soon kicked steps that brought him to the last deep gap below the summit. His jodels of success were tremendous. We joined in the uproar ; they heard it at the Sella Haus and saw that victory was assured.

We were soon all gathered in the gap, and half an hour later, after an interesting struggle up slippery rocks where every step was an adventure, the tip of the Fünffingerspitze was under foot.

After such a severe battle our elation was well in keeping with the lofty situation, but to hinder the height going to our heads as well as our feet the guide quickly lowered our high spirits. Amid much excitement we gathered that it was actually half-past six ; there was every probability of our having to sleep out somewhere on the great cliff. Thoughts of an "all-night sitting" on some exposed ledge suggested the "closure," when the wonders of that evening outlook from the grandest of the Dolomites bade fair to cause delay.

There was just time to notice the frozen heights of the Ortler, fifty miles away, flashing like a golden dome in the sunset, to glance around, adown, and afar on peaks, precipices, and pinnacles arranged in that wild confusion which only pertains in the most central of the Dolomites. Then, "*Hinunter ! Hinunter ! Kommen sie nur !*"<sup>1</sup> were the hoarse cries of our anxious guide,

<sup>1</sup> Downwards! Downwards! Come along!



NEAR THE TOP OF THE FÜNFFINGERSPITZE  
TYPICAL DOLOMITE ROCK SCENERY



and swiftly but surely we clambered down those huge, icy rocks.

To save precious time the long rope was flung over the precipice into the first gap, and one by one we slid and slithered down to the top of the ice chimney. It was a doubtful pleasure to consign oneself to the strength of an Alpine Club rope. How feeble seemed this small connexion between the world present and the world to come ! To struggle for holds on the adjacent rock was the only diversion. The narrow landing-place below lay frightfully out of the line of descent, and there was an unpleasant tendency to realize that a falling body would miss this and hurtle through space to the base of the mountain 2000 feet below. However, at last the fingers found hold on the less impending rocks, and a landing could be negotiated on the narrow apex of the ridge.

Then came the eerie descent of the last man. All the rope was brought into use and hitched around an outstanding little pinnacle above the trying section. On the rope thus doubled he swung and clambered downwards like a spider on a wall until his feet came within reach of our upstretched hands. All were safe again. We released one end of the rope and hauled with a will on the other end until it came down to us. Somewhat the same method was used in the ice chimney, and also during the descent into the Daumen Scharte, the latter being quite impossible under such frozen conditions without this safeguard.

It was now almost dark. There had been scant appreciation of the glories of a Dolomite sunset, and only the faintest rosy gleam lingered on the very loftiest snows of the Marmolata. The hard, cold, steely grey of night spread upwards with sullen suddenness when once the buttress below the Scharte was reached.

Despite the dangers of the undertaking, for every hand and foothold had now to be groped for deliberately, there was no sense of peril. A strange calm, of which we mortals seemed a part, pervaded the imperturbable solitudes, which, if solemn and subduing at midday are doubly so at midnight. The heavy silence seemed but deepened by the distant voice of streams plunging valleywards from mountain fastnesses full of darkness and awe. The great peaks bending around as if to listen induced that soothing sense of companionship with their mysterious vastness which only the true climber can know amidst the struggles and joys of his sport. 'Tis a knowledge which goes to the very root of a man's being ; it keeps "the heart from fainting, the soul from sleep."

Like ghosts we moved noiselessly downward one by one ; no jarring sound of nailed boots was heard on the rocks. The concentration of effort led to whispers only being exchanged. Some of us blessed that instinctive memory for hand and footholds retained from their use during the ascent. There was small chance of missing the way down the restricted front of the buttress,

but the discovery of the lower traverse into the chimney was a different matter. Several lonely excursions were made by the leaders along likely ledges, but in vain.

It seemed that the fair, unsullied record of our long climbing career was at last to be spoilt. We must spend the night out on the rocks! I have recollections of feeling my way delicately across the gloomy precipice. All would go well for a yard or two; then ledges vanished; hands and feet groped vainly through black, holdless nothingness, and a disheartening return to the others was necessary. But at last the instinct of the guide prevailed; he discovered some familiar stones that marked the start of the traverse. The top of the final chimney was gained in utter blackness—even darkness which might be felt, and heard also, for a very voluble Englishman's head came in painful contact with one of the impending boulders.

And now faint shouts were wafted up to us from the hut on the Sella Joch. Those far below were anxious for our safety. Some one remembered the press correspondent at Canazei, and suggested that the London morning papers might give the scaring news: "Three Englishmen lost on the Fünffingerspitze!" Instantly thoughts flew from the blackness of that grim precipice to the lonely watchers at home. The suggestion caused us to shout in unison with all the resonance of absolute emptiness. For six hours we had tasted nothing but a few raisins.

However, the worst was over. After the others had descended I fixed a doubled rope around a boulder that was firmly jammed in the walls of the chimney, and swung trustfully down into "the depths of Avernus." It was the last adventure. What mattered the sudden slip of tired fingers on the icy rope when I had reached a height of only a few feet above those below? The few bruises received from the sudden precipitancy of my descent were honourable scars. Victory was ours despite the fierce resistance held out by the grandest of the Dolomites.

Boots were donned, luggage hastily collected, and two hours later we were disturbing the slumbers of those in the hut on the Sella Joch. Their welcome was genuine and, for hungry men, painful in its profusion.

It had been a thrilling day, a day when alternating success and failure followed by final conquest had revealed many of the glorious uncertainties of mountaineering, truly "the king of sports." Such an adventurous experience aroused a spirit of restlessness, and in the warm night air we lingered long watching the silvery rays of the rising moon o'erspread our mountain. An outstanding line of light marked the edge of the Schmitt Kamin, the wonderful rift by which the Fünffingerspitze was first climbed. It sprang almost vertically from the screes to the last gap below the summit, where the notorious ice chimney rose to the sky-line from the farther side. Then thinking over the romantic history



of the grandest of the Dolomites we sought repose.

Finally, a short résumé of the history of the Fünffingerspitze up to the present time may have many points of interest, especially details of the modern route up the Schmitt Kamin.

Until 8th August 1890 the mountain was considered inaccessible. On that date the Great Kamin was climbed by Robert Hans Schmitt and Johann Santner. This same rift practically cuts clean through the mountain in the upper part. From its farther or northerly side Norman Neruda with Christian Klucker reached this Nord Kamin and climbed it to the summit. Their exit was a little to the right or west of the ice chimney. This was in 1891, and the same year H. J. T. Wood, with Luigi Bernard of Campitello, discovered the Daumenscharteweg, which is now the route usually followed.

The Westweg was climbed in 1895 by Oskar Schuster and Friedrich Meurer. During the ascent one of the few loose and dangerous sections of the mountain had to be negotiated. For this reason it will scarcely become popular. In 1897 Sir Edward Davidson, with Sepp Innerkofler and Christian Klucker, discovered two different ways of reaching the Daumenscharte from the north.

The Fünffingerspitze was Norman Neruda's favourite peak, and his enthusiastic familiarity with its ways tempted him on one occasion to climb all the four routes in a single day. Perchance

it may have been a familiarity which bred contempt. Else how could he so disregard his own advice? Neruda wrote just before his accident—"One of the dangers of mountaineering that is certainly avoidable, but is, unfortunately, too often unrecognized, is to be found in lack of sufficient training. Any extra exertion put upon the body when not in proper condition of health and training may produce a dangerous state of over-fatigue on a long snow expedition, or a momentary faintness, a temporary heart failure, which on a difficult place may involve a fatal slip. No difficult and tiring expedition should be undertaken unless *every* member of the party is in the best of health and in perfect training, and many a regrettable accident may be traced to the neglect of this rule."

Yet, in 1898, doubtless through a momentary neglect of this important rule, he attempted the ascent of the Schmitt Kamin when "not in the best of health." Whilst leading his wife and Herr Dietrich up the Schmitt Kamin he fell from what is now probably the most difficult portion of the climb. The results proved fatal.

The disaster added to the terrible reputation of the Schmitt Kamin, but its ill-repute is now recognized to be undeserved. When free from ice, and in good condition, it is a climb that would rank as very little, if any, more difficult than the direct ascent of the famous English course, Moss Ghyll on Scawfell.

In 1913 two of my friends, Messrs. G. S.

Sansom and S. W. Herford, showed that for Cumbrian-trained experts the Kamin has no terrors. Their guideless ascent followed a modern route which, given in detail, may be useful to others of similar training.

The way lay at first up about four hundred feet of moderately difficult and rather indefinite slab climbing on the right-hand wall of the gully. This was followed by the ascent of about twenty feet of very loose yellow rock which led on to a conspicuous projecting nose of rock at the base of the Schmitt Kamin proper.

Two fairly easy 20-foot chimney pitches led to the floor of the "Kirchl," which is a typical, narrow cave pitch about thirty-five feet high. It was best climbed by working up inside the cave with the feet on the right wall until close under the roof, and then horizontally outwards for about fifteen feet. There some fine footholds enabled the top of the outermost jammed boulder to be reached. Here, after the "pull up," there was a comfortable stance in a small cave. It was upon this platform that Norman Neruda fell when attempting the ascent of the succeeding obstacle.

This closely resembled the "Kirchl" pitch, but the chimney was much narrower and the final upward lift on the arms much harder. The best holds were on the left wall. A long, sloping scree platform was now attained from which it was possible to climb to a very large, sloping ledge on the left, which shows clearly in

the photographs of the south side of the mountain. This ledge leads nowhere at present, but probably a way might be forced up the wall ahead. To return to the Kamin, the chimney was now narrow and steep for 20 feet, where it was divided into two branches by a vertical rock rib. The left-hand branch had the form of a narrow crack, whilst the right-hand branch was very wide at the bottom, and would appear almost unclimbable for the first 15 feet. After ascending the crack on the left for about 20 feet, it was possible to traverse across the rock rib and effect a lodgment in the right-hand branch which could be followed for another 30 feet until it ended in a sloping scree terrace. This last chimney closely resembled Collier's Chimney in Scawfell. It possessed about the same degree of difficulty, and there were good, deep handholds on the right-hand wall, though these were rather far apart. Above this, by walking up the scree bed of the chimney for a considerable distance, a break in the right wall was reached. At this point there was not much difficulty in traversing out to the rock face on the right and thence up to the gap above the ice chimney on the Daumenscharte route.

Those familiar with the Schmitt Kamin may notice that the route used by the pioneers was varied considerably. This was certainly an advantage. It also kept more to the chimney proper than the guide's variation discovered by Antonio Dimai. There was scarcely more climbing in

the actual chimney than 300 feet, thus the course would bear fair comparison with many of the longest and more difficult of the well-known climbs in Cumberland and Scotland.

There can be no finer farewell to the Tyrol than to grip by the hand that gruff, old, five-fingered giant of the Fassathal. This we thought as from the slopes above St. Ulrich we watched the jagged teeth of the Langkofel gleam pallid and white against the blackness of an oncoming storm of thunder and rain. Gradually all were blotted out. But, last of all, the long and lean hand of the Fünffingerspitze stood up sharp and clear, clutching as it were at the ragged edges of the wind-hurled vapour. Then overwhelmed, it vanished 'midst lightning flash and the crash of a thunderous roar.

It was the last sight of the Dolomites and wonderful withal. Yet now linger more abundantly memories of evening peace 'midst the great crags, of the last glimpse of the golden west, of that night when the world's turmoil was afar off and mortals in true mountain comradeship heard the still, small voice. Such are the times to feel

“The chief things of the ancient mountain  
And the precious things of the lasting hills.”

## CHAPTER V

### THE WORK OF THE ALPINE GUIDE

“ There are perils of knightly zest  
Fit for the warrior's craft ;  
Pitiless giants with rock-bound crest,  
Mystical wells for the midnight rest,  
Ice-crowned castles and halls, to test  
Steel with the ashen shaft ;  
Realms to be won by the well-swung blow,  
Rest to be earned from the yielding foe.”

G. W. YOUNG

IF “work is man's highest service” the Alpine guide by reason of his lofty calling, if for no other, holds exalted place in the social scheme. And if the quickly increasing modern craze for mountaineering has added largely to his emoluments, it has vastly increased his responsibilities and made greater demands on his capabilities.

One of our own poets sang—

“ Hills draw like heaven  
And stronger sometimes, holding out their hands  
To pull men from the vile flats up to them.”

Yet in practice gravitation is more likely to exert an evil influence in an exactly opposite direction. To counteract this and enable men

to enjoy safely the pleasures of the high places of the earth is the real guide's work.

Any man who defies Nature's primary laws encounters danger, and on great mountains this is aggravated in numerous ways. The Swiss professional may be comparatively safe alone or with native companions, but it is the insidious temptation of gold that leads him into danger. A mere novice in mountaineering may come along with enthusiasm in his face and bank notes in his hand, and the guides will take him almost anywhere. For a sum of £12 two of them will tie themselves on the same rope as the veriest duffer and take him over the Matterhorn. This it is that largely makes the guide's work the most dangerous in the world.

With all their wonderful watchfulness and skilful management of their patron he may slip at a crucial moment. The unexpected happens with startling suddenness in mountaineering. A few years ago in the Dolomites a guide was taking an amateur up the face of the Fünffinger-spitze. Both were roped, and the leader began to climb upwards, leaving his companion on a narrow ledge below with instructions to pay out the rope freely as the guide mounted summitwards. Above all the amateur was not to stir from his secure niche. But human inquisitiveness prevailed; he wished to know how the leader was progressing overhead. A step outwards was taken. His foot slid off a sloping ledge, and with a cry of fearful import heard by another party

on the mountain, he fell over into the abyss. Caught helpless with naught to grasp or secure the rope around, the guide was torn ruthlessly down and flung with his ill-fated companion to the base of the precipice in one tremendous bound of over a thousand feet.

Though the "unknown quantity" with which the guide is willing to link himself at a price has been responsible for innumerable accidents, this state of things has much improved of recent years. Before going abroad many men have mastered the technicalities of mountaineering, specially those of rock-climbing, on our British mountains. However, this has its drawbacks. It soon leads wealthy climbers to be dissatisfied with anything but exceptionally difficult expeditions. Thus the guides are tempted to undertake the most desperate ascents; they pit their skill and strength against Nature's inaccessibility, and usually win, but sometimes victory, terrible in its tragedy, rests with the mountain.

There can be no doubt that the temptation of the shekels may often lead the best of guides into an error of judgment. In seasons of doubtful weather a considerable loss of remuneration is inevitable, and great responsibilities rest on those amateurs who often persuade the professionals against their better judgment. Thus only can the Bergli accident be explained.

The lure of the Jungfrau—the beautiful "White Maiden" of Grindelwald—has tempted



many rash woovers to their undoing. But who would have thought that old Alexander Burgener—the greatest guide of his generation—would have allowed himself and his party to be enmeshed in disaster! Yet so it was.

It was a large party, consisting of four guides with two German climbers, and all were bound for the Bergli Hut; the well-known “half-way” sleeping-place for those who visit the Jungfrau. From the Eismeer Station, on the Jungfrau Railway, they were traversing across the extended slopes of steep glacier, which, after the previous bad weather, were wreathed with much new snow. A warm wind was blowing aloft. Progress was slow through the soft, clinging mass, and about six o'clock the hut was close at hand; the smell of the evening meal was in their nostrils, for the old guide in charge had espied their approach and prepared accordingly. He even came towards them, making steps in the snow to lighten their labours; the smile of welcome was on his face. Alas! in an instant it was turned to one of terror. The snowy breast across which he and his friends moved split away from the icy slope with frightful suddenness. The break came close by their feet and extended far back along the face of the mountain. They had sliced off their own doom.

All were torn ruthlessly downwards as though by a giant's hand; the old hut-keeper was engulfed in the crashing mass, and with the others flung helplessly down over the cruel, jagged rocks

of the Bergli. About 750 feet lower the human avalanche came to rest in a small and snowy hollow close to a tremendous crevasse of great depth. Another guide in the hut heard the roar of the avalanche. He dashed outside, and far below saw shapeless, black fragments lying still on the snow. With all speed he climbed down and bravely did all that was possible under the circumstances. Not a single member of the party survived ; seven lives were lost.

In the very early morning, ere the sun has softened that snowy slope, the passage from the Eismeer Station to the Bergli Hut may have some claims to safety, but this disaster and numerous lesser ones make me mention it as one of the most dangerous places in the Alps from the popular point of view. It is practically certain that but for the convenience of the Jungfrau Railway the Bergli catastrophe could not have happened. The journey up to the hut from Grindelwald involves six or seven hours' steep walking ; the crossing from the Eismeer Station would scarcely take more than an hour and a half. Had the ill-fated party come up from Grindelwald by the Bäregg and the Fiescher Glacier they would have had ample time and opportunity to realize the dangerous state of the snow. Moreover, instead of cutting across the danger zone, they would have advanced up the slope, which is always the safest method. Regarding the almost instinctive skill in gauging the safety of new snow on steep ice slopes, the

guide is usually recognized as superior to the best amateur. The extensive practice of the professional makes perfect, and Alexander Burgener was in this respect one of the most remarkable guides I have ever known. He was celebrated throughout the Alps for his great strength, and, despite his sixty-six years of strenuous life, his powers were little impaired even to the last. On one single day during the autumn previous to his death four chamois fell to his rifle, and single-handed he carried two of these down to the valley, a four hours' journey.

It is interesting to note the way the guide receives his training and becomes skilled in earning his dangerous livelihood. Moreover, he is a fascinating character study. From youth upwards accustomed to danger, and conversant with Nature in her wildest and sternest moods, the first-class guide is a perfect gentleman in the truest sense of the word. Of course I do not refer to the so-called "loafer" who frequents such popular centres as Grindelwald and spends his time in viewing the scenery through empty "glasses," and occasionally, with noisy lingual accompaniment, conducting parties to inspect the lower glaciers. The man who tackles the great peaks is built in an entirely different mould, he is quiet and unassuming.

"So mountain-schooled, so silent, self-possessed  
Of calm drawn in from sky and snow-clad crest."

Referring to practical matters it might be mentioned that generations of development have

given the first-class guide peculiar physical advantages for the perfection of his craft. For instance, his feet are uniquely pliable; they can find steady support on peculiarly slanting angles, and for walking up steep places the foot, at each step, can be planted comfortably pointing directly up the slope. A "flat-lander" who attempts this method of walking quickly finds that he possesses muscles in the calves of his legs.

Moreover, the guide's hands and fingers are curiously strong, and his shoulder muscles are often developed so excessively as to look almost clumsy. On a flat road he certainly seems so, with his awkward step and ambling gait. But amongst the dangerous crags and treacherous glaciers he is supreme and at home when his town-bred companion often wishes he were safely there too.

Many of the leading professionals speak two or three languages fluently, and some of them spend a winter or two in our country learning English. It is a great advantage especially for the tyro to secure one who possesses the latter accomplishment. Occasions frequently arise on the mountains when a few seconds' delay may involve serious danger. If caught in a couloir with the sounds of falling stones overhead, suddenly detected by the quick ear of the guide, there is no time for explanation or the opening of a conversation book.

This danger is recognized in some districts,

and at the Guides' Bureau in Chamonix an effort has been made to pass a law forbidding the members tackling certain ascents except with climbers who understand each other's tongues thoroughly. In Switzerland the guide is under government control. His licence or book is only obtained after several years' experience as porter with properly guided parties, and finally by means of examination. This latter consists mainly of arithmetic, grammar, and other accomplishments equally useless on a high mountain. Strange to say, a knowledge of first aid to the injured has received no official attention. Its invaluable benefits are obvious, and within the next few years the fault may be remedied. But it is a still more curious fact that the average guide has no proper training in the use of compass and map; in fact he professes to scorn their assistance. This is the weakest point in the system. How many scores of lives would have been saved had the guides possessed but an elementary knowledge of orientation! On one occasion on Mont Blanc as many as eleven lives, both guides and amateurs, were lost in a single fatal day.

There is no more terrifying experience in the world than to be caught in a raging storm high up on one of the greatest Alps. None but the hardiest can withstand the fearful cold, or battle with the pitiless, snow-laden wind which seems, like some titanic fury, to seize the climber in its grasp. Familiar landmarks are blotted out by the

*tourmente*, all sense of direction is easily lost, and footsteps cannot be retraced, for they are quickly obliterated by the smooth, snowy mantle.

Fortunate the man who at such a time has a tried and trusty guide—such, for instance, as the genial old Oberlander, Melchior Anderegg. This famous hero of many pioneering conquests is one of the few guides to survive the dangers of his profession. It was a joy to many to call on the old man at Meiringen, and, despite his eighty odd summers, note the fierce spirit of life and energy proclaiming itself incessantly. The kindly countenance bespeaks unmistakably the story of a mountain life.

I have reason to remember his merits as a guide. A sudden storm had assailed us on the top of Mont Blanc. During the beginning of the descent we were in parlous plight, for huge white clouds of drifting snow enveloped the party ; to find and fight a downward way seemed almost impossible. The old Oberlander brought up the rear-guard, and now and again words of encouragement were wafted down to us. Though only a moderate wind blew, the cold was almost paralyzing in its intensity. To halt even for a few moments would have meant adding to Mont Blanc's list of victims, for we should have been frozen to death.

On the col below the Mur de la Côte our guide in front, a well-known Chamonix man, followed the slope and slanted off to the right and downwards. Under such confusing conditions the



ON THE CREST OF THE WEISSHORN

THE GUIDED PARTY FEELS SECURE IN PASSING ALONG THESE NARROW ICE RIDGES WITH  
AIRY DEPTHS ON EITHER HAND





error seemed natural, but I shall never forget old Melchior's fearful shout of warning. As we instantly turned away to the left the explanation of the tragedy of 1870 seemed revealed. On a similar day in that year a party of two guides and an American tourist disappeared at this spot. No traces of their bodies have ever been discovered. All sense of direction must have been lost on the wrong side of the mountain, until collapse occurred on some icy slope and the great white peak enwrapped them in an icy tomb.

Naturally, the best guides have remarkable powers of observation, and that peculiar instinct sometimes so aptly described as the bump of locality is strongly developed. He is alert to detect the slightest traces of a predecessor on a climb.

A party of us were once befogged and had lost all idea of our position on the complicated westerly face of the Riffelhorn. A young guide was with us, and he became so dangerously disconsolate and helpless that one of the amateurs had to take the lead. For some hours we fought with severe difficulties, to which a snowstorm added, discouraged meanwhile by our companion's prophecy of certain disaster. His poor old mother was doomed to lose her mainstay in life, the worthiest of all her many sons! Things were altogether miserable. Suddenly we came to a ledge on a desperate corner with a steep chimney to the right. The young guide signalled his arrival by my side with a great and startling

shout, a joyous jodel as of deliverance. His quick eye had espied a trouser-button in the cleft of the chimney, and we knew that we had struck the regular route. That tiny relic of humanity put new life into the faltering one, and he then led us hand over hand to the summit.

There are few guides that can rank as experts in snow- and ice-craft, and also stand first-class amongst rock-climbing specialists. The men of the Vispthal, notably of Zermatt and St. Nicholas, are probably the best in all-round knowledge ; but the Oberlanders from the Grindelwald district may fairly be said to be superior in snow- and ice-craft. Chamonix has produced the most wonderful rock-climbers on the special structures which prevail on the remarkable aiguilles that overshadow their homes.

This latter district would seem to offer most scope for those with pecuniary ambitions. The Aiguille de Grépon is the hardest of all, and for the crossing of its several summits the fee for each guide is £12. As two at least are required—I speak throughout, of course, for the average mountaineer—the ascent provides a costly day's amusement. The Dent du Requin and the Aiguille du Petit Dru stand almost equal to the Grépon in difficulty and value. Comparatively few guides tackle these and other special courses. The two families of Ravanel and Simond are world-famous as leaders up these terrific pinnacles, where for hours one false step must mean destruction. There are places on the

Dru, for instance, where one might step into space and touch nothing during a fearful descent of over a thousand feet.

It speaks well for the guides and their expert and wealthy companions, mostly Englishmen by the way, that so few disasters have occurred on the Aiguilles—in fact, no fatal accident has yet happened on any of the three already mentioned. But on the Aiguille du Plan, a neighbouring height with comparatively easy routes to its summit, there happened one of the most remarkable accidents that has ever occurred on these peaks, especially if its tragic results are considered. It illustrates well the dangers of mountain craft as a profession.

The Aiguille du Plan is familiar to all who visit Chamonix; its north face overlooks the town, and it was from this special side that a party of four essayed the ascent on 25th July 1911. The leading guide was Paul Bellin, his assistant was Léon Simond, and their patrons were MM. Joseph Caillet and Jacques de Lepinez. They left the sleeping-place at the Châlet du Plan at half-past one in the morning, and by ten o'clock they had overcome the greater part of the necessary height. At this time they appear to have missed the route, and attacked a difficult couloir. Whilst the leading guide was exploring this a stone fell which struck Simond so severely on the head that he only survived about a quarter of an hour. The others were in a desperate situation.

The warm rays of the sun were now melting the upper ice and more falling stones came flying down the great cliff. Thus they decided to leave their unfortunate companion on a narrow ledge and make an attempt to cross over the summit and descend by an easier and safer route. This seemed preferable to the return. A short distance higher, on a long difficult section, the leading guide required a longer length of rope, and M. de Lepinez untied. In his case this proved providential. No sooner was he unloosed than the snow-slope upon which M. Caillet, who was the last man, was standing, gave way. Luckily, the guide happened to look down and saw the danger. Instantly he hitched the rope around a projecting rock. But the man on the other end went crashing down with such irresistible force and for so great a distance that the rope broke and M. Caillet disappeared into the depths. Then, curious to relate, the survivors now decided to return by the line of ascent, and after a terrible night on the mountain they reached the *Châlet du Plan* about noon next day.

Some desperate deeds of daring were done in the rescue of the remains of the ill-fated climbers. Several searchers were severely hurt. The quest became almost a forlorn hope until the brave guide Auguste Blanc of *Bonneval sur Arc* came to the rescue. With his employer, Dr. Thomas, and their porter, *Jacomin*, he discovered the lost victim. By a supreme effort the recovery was eventually made; nevertheless, except for Blanc's

great skill and resource at a critical moment, the party and their grim charge would all have been flung over the cliff.

The rope used on this occasion was naturally much the worse for wear, having been used for lowering the body, yet later, on 8th August, it was the only one available during the ascent of Mont Dolent by Dr. Thomas' party. A new rope was said not to be procurable at Chamonix. The party had passed all the recognized serious difficulties and were passing along the lofty north arête of the Dolent, carefully negotiating the loose rocks encountered on the ridge. At one point within sight of the summit a great boulder barred the way along the crest of the peak.

It appeared quite easy to pass this by descending to the right and passing close below the obstacle. Auguste Blanc advanced accordingly. He scarcely touched the great mass above him, yet something disturbed its balance. The others saw it lurch forward sickeningly before the guide realized its movement. Warning, though instantly given, came too late. He was caught by the great boulder and carried down with it irresistibly. The rope was held securely by the second climber, but when the strain came it broke, "cut as clean as with a knife." Probably this damage may have been done by the huge rock. The famous guide, one of the finest experts of the younger generation, was now of course beyond human assistance. He fell over the cliff to the Pré de Bar Glacier. Two days later Pierre Blanc

was the first to discover and reach his brother's remains.

This work of discovery, rescue, and recovery of those "whom the mountains scourge" is the most desperate, dangerous, and awesome part of the guide's work. Yet the brave men never shirk the gruesome task. Deeds of wonderful heroism have been performed in the recovery from the cruel walls of some pitiless precipice, but greatest of all in the bringing up of their late companions from the depths of great crevasses. Moreover, they are ever ready for the call, even when the victims are those rash and youthful enthusiasts who have unjustifiably sought the heights without guides and found only a terrible death.

Mont Blanc is an easy mountain, technically speaking, and yet its frozen, storm-swept slopes abound in huge crevasses, many of them hundreds of feet deep, and avalanches occur fairly frequently. The yawning gulfs seem ever waiting to receive those who slip on some slope up above. Each year they swallow their victims. Some are recovered, others are found long years afterwards at the end of the glaciers, but a goodly number are never seen again. Thus the Chamonix guides are celebrated for their skill in the recovery branch of their profession, doubtless too constant practice has made perfect in the unpleasant toil.

There is no more nerve-testing experience than to balance along a steep, icy slope, in the steps cut by the leading guide, with a great crevasse

below seemingly waiting for all that gravitation may send it. Handhold is at a discount in such a position ; all depends on the feet. One false step by any one of the party means that all must go. Yet it is unknown for any modern guide to unrope himself from his unskilful patron for the crossing of such a risky passage. Not long ago, on Mont Blanc, a slip in such a situation resulted in two guides and their friend being hurled down into a big crevasse. Extrication seemed hopeless, yet after several days their remains were brought up from a depth of nearly two hundred and fifty feet. This would rank as a record, and authorities have urged that such a feat is scarcely worth the fearful dangers involved. However, the guides refuse to listen to this ; they have strange superstitions, and until their comrades are found they seem scarcely able to believe they are not alive.

Another remarkable record of recovery was made on the Petit Plateau on Mont Blanc during the August of 1891. The crossing of this snow-field always involves a certain amount of risk, because avalanches are prone to fall from the ice-cliffs of the Dôme du Goûter. However, these masses seldom extend across the plateau, and the guides take as wide a course as possible ; they are wise not to defy an avalanche. On the occasion mentioned two large parties were descending from Mont Blanc. Just as they reached the Petit Plateau a great avalanche crashed down the slopes above and behind them. Then began a tragic race with death. But the

last party, consisting of two travellers, two guides, and a porter, became engulfed in the snowy incubus. They were swept downwards, then hurled into a huge crevasse. Three of the unfortunate climbers struck a snowy ledge down in the depths and were eventually extricated, severely damaged but alive. The other two fell through into the lower recesses of the crevasse. They must have been killed instantly; in any case their remains were only rescued after two days of hazardous and horrible toil.

Two guides, with nerves and muscles of iron, were lowered, one at a time, into the bowels of the glacier. Their friends were ultimately found nearly two hundred feet below the surface.

In this tragic work a good number of the first-class professionals secure less practice than their more ordinary compeers, whose guiding is more of a local nature, for the best men often go far afield. They are usually engaged a year or even more in advance, and besides making expeditions in various Alpine districts they frequently join parties in the Himalayas and other distant ranges.

Certain places in the Alps are specially celebrated for their guides. The little village of St. Nicholas, through which the railway traveller passes on his way up the Vispthal to Zermatt, may well claim to be the nursery of the most worthily famous of modern mountain men. For more than a generation the Lochmatters, Knubels, and Pollingers have held a lofty place in Alpine





THE GREAT CREVASSE ON THE PETIT PLATEAU, MONT BLANC  
THE ROPE INDICATES THE POSITION OF TWO GUIDES, WHO ARE BELOW SEARCHING FOR  
THE LOST CLIMBERS



records. Members of the two former families have recently performed astounding feats amongst the Chamonix aiguilles in company with enthusiastic Englishmen. Fortunately, they were not concerned in the disaster which befell one of their patrons, an event which may be considered a foregone conclusion when such extreme risks become habitual.

It has always been the proud boast of the St. Nicholas men that they never return from the mountains without their "Herren." In the case of a catastrophe it is all or none. The accident of some years ago on the Dent Blanche offered them this only consolation. Joseph Marie Lochmatter and his eldest son had almost reached the top of this dangerous peak, with Mr. Gabbett of Durham as their charge. Misfortune befell them in an icy chimney; just how this happened will never be known. Three days later their bodies were found at the base of a 2500-foot precipice. It was reported at St. Nicholas that a single man had been seen alone high up on the mountain on the fatal day. The inference is that a slip occurred; two fell, the rope broke, and the survivor refused to return alone.

The worst tragedy on the Lyskamm, that notoriously treacherous Zermatt peak, will never be forgotten in St. Nicholas. Unusually huge cornices of overhanging snow decorated the summit-ridge. During that fatal season it was almost impossible to detect these veritable death-

traps from above, and great pieces were liable to break away. Somehow or other the St. Nicholas guides became confused; they wandered on to a thin section of the cornice. This broke away under their feet and all the party of four fell together down the icy cliffs for nearly three thousand feet.

Grindelwald, now so overrun by the world of fashion as to be named Brighton-by-the-Mountains, has produced many men who have earned great note in mountaineering circles. The earlier generations of Almer and Kaufmann have gone, but the young men worthily uphold all of good repute, whilst the Jossis, the Bernets, and the Burgeners are yet unspoilt, despite the winter-sport invasion.

There are few districts without great names. The Andereggs of Meiringen, and the Burgeners of Eisten in the Saasthal, have been mentioned. In the Bernina Alps the name of Christian Klucker will never be forgotten, and in the Dauphiné there is a wonderful family which flourishes like the green bay tree. Reference is here made to the Gaspards, of whom old Pierre, the father, has just died. He was active and healthy to the last, despite his age of over seventy years. Père Gaspard had two wives, fifteen children, and over thirty grandchildren. Five of his sons are famous guides. He had accounted for over 500 chamois, had acted as a guide for thirty-nine seasons, and, besides being the first conqueror of the long-defiant Meije, there are over two dozen

great pioneering climbs to his credit. Such is a typical mountain family and one which will carry on the great work of the Alpine guide for many generations to come.

Doubtless, as a means of earning a livelihood, mountaineering has many uncertainties, but with all its perils the same story of a plentiful supply of recruits comes from all the lofty valleys. The life is gloriously healthy and inspiring, though its gloomy side is ever persistently present. Yet, despite the latter drawback, the great guide is always the cheeriest of companions, a true gentleman by nature, come fair weather or foul. True, his work is the most dangerous in the world, but the rewards are many, and every cloud has a silver—or rather a golden—lining!

## CHAPTER VI

### HOW TO CLIMB SAFELY

“ See that ye walk circumspectly.”—EPHESIANS

“ **A**N impressive and expensive way of committing suicide ! ” Thus curtly spake an unsympathetic, non-climbing friend as we strode down through the pine woods above Zermatt. News of disaster on the cruel, cloud-swathed Matterhorn had reached the valley. Two of its bravest sons had perished, and strange gloom was everywhere. As with most Alpine catastrophes all prudence and common sense had been cast to the winds ; and their shrieking arch-priest the storm-fiend, with whom few mortals can consort on the life-chilling heights, had wreaked dire and deadly vengeance.

But, after all, the average number of mountaineering accidents is, comparatively speaking, not excessive. True it is that of recent years there has been an increase in this respect, yet it is simply a natural result of a greatly augmented popularity of Alpine climbing. For every climber in existence ten years ago there are now at least twenty. The craze for climbing during

the winter sport celebrations has added to this.

It must, however, be acknowledged that recent records of Alpine catastrophe give an average of over a hundred and fifty lives lost each year. Yet the point should be strongly accentuated, that very few of these fatalities have any connexion with the real sport of mountaineering. Nowadays all sorts and conditions of men and women visit the "Playground of Europe." The cosmopolitan host sweeps up the main valleys, and many, perforce, escape "far from the madding crowd" by clambering about dangerous mountain-sides, often in search of edelweiss or other rare plants, and exploring crevassed glaciers, yea, even above the snow-line. "Ignorance is bliss" until the old proverb is proved that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread." Suddenly a foot steps through a fragile snow-bridge, there is a quick flounder, and crash goes the snowy mass, victims and all, down into the frozen bowels of the glacier.

Or, again, perchance the luckless tourist is crossing some mountain-side; a slope of snow is encountered, and he steps merrily across it, but unexpectedly an icy section intervenes. Instantly his feet slip from under him and away he goes down with ever-increasing impetus, helpless and hopeless to arrest his mad career, until some precipice intervenes and all is over.

Such are typical Alpine catastrophes so-called,

but scarcely more than 15 per cent. of these accidents happen to genuine climbers. It may flatter our national pride to know that the number of Britons in the above averages can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

During one's travels abroad the question is frequently asked: How is it that so few Englishmen are killed? They are only satisfied with the most difficult climbs, yet accidents seldom happen! The answer is easily given—Because nowadays, most English climbers who attempt great Alpine ascents have spent years on their native crags learning the way to use hand and foot holds to the best advantage, the methods of dealing with loose rocks and, above all, the proper management and use of the rope.

Thus, at the outset, my plea for safe mountaineering in the High Alps would be—Begin on the British crags! All can be learnt thereon except glacier practice and ice craft above the snow-line, but these details are easily acquired by the man who has previously learnt all the technique of the sport at home. Nevertheless, the first point to note in this connexion is that English rock-climbing has dangers at least equal to those encountered in the Alps. The late Leslie Stephen said that “we should hardly estimate the majesty of either men or mountains by the length of their butchers' bill.” As regards the mountains this is very true to-day. Our comparatively insignificant Scawfell has seen more of human tragedy than many of the most majestic of the Alps.





ON THE FACE OF A GREAT SNOW-WREATHED PRECIPICE IN THE ALPS  
NEAR THE TOP OF THE AIGUILLE BLAITIÈRE



In fact, whether a man fall 300 or 3000 feet the result is likely to be the same.

Thus British rock-climbing must be approached with proper respect, the fact being recognized that it has become an established sport, and year after year experts have discovered routes shorter, of course, but still much more difficult than any ordinary Alpine ascent.

This fact being realized I would urge that the best district for the beginner is that around Wastdale Head amongst the crags of the English Lake District. As all rocks are much the same from a practical climbing point of view, it may be stated that nowhere in the world can the average man learn so thoroughly "how to climb safely."

The Cumbrian "school" is a well-graded one; routes are available of all degrees of difficulty. There are climbs where hand and foot holds are abundant, whilst others are just humanly possible. The main point is to start methodically on easy courses. Fortunately there are now standard works available with all the important routes mentioned and classified in order of difficulty. The best plan is to take this list, and, beginning with the easiest, work patiently through the series. As this runs to over a hundred, and many of the most advanced are only possible for one expert in about five hundred, a goodly number of courses will probably never be visited.

Some further advantages of the Wastdale district are, the routes are well marked by the

scratches of many nailed feet, there are fewer loose rocks by reason largely of the considerable climbing traffic, suitable companions can generally be encountered, and sound advice or even the services of an expert Alpine guide are available. This is the only real rock-climbing guide in Britain, if the Mackenzies at Sligachan in Skye are excepted, but the latter only tackle the less difficult expeditions.

Practically all the sport is undertaken by amateurs, especially the exceptionally severe courses. Some of these are more difficult than anything climbed in Switzerland, and I do not think that even the greatest of Swiss guides would attempt them with chance companions unless they were tired of life. Thus it should be urged unmistakably that to attempt the more difficult British climbs with untried companions is to court disaster. Fatalities have occurred through neglect of this advice.

The popular and general misconception of rock-climbing and what it means is altogether astonishing. At the inquest on one of the victims in an accident to which reference has been made above, the coroner expressed astonishment "that visitors should come and attempt to climb up places that no native would dream of trying." Moreover, he "understood that the party had no ice-axe, and how could anybody expect to get up such rocks without the axe to make holds with!"

Climbers are familiar with the many vagaries

of the press. The breaking of the rope is usually made a leading feature in the thrilling story of an accident—in fact it is a great popular error that such a breakage is usually the prime cause. Probably this arises from the known presence of the fixed ropes on Alpine peaks, the breakage of which and consequent disaster to those supported thereon is the general idea of what comprises an Alpine catastrophe. It is doubtful whether the breakage of a fixed rope has ever caused a fatal climbing mishap.

The parting of a rope to which a climbing party is tied is a different matter ; it is a frequent accompaniment of an accident. Yet this generally means that the leader has fallen, and but for the breakage of the rope the rest of the party must have been dragged down. This latter question concerns the whole safety or otherwise of rock-climbing. In this connexion a few explanations for the uninitiated as well as some useful hints for the beginner may be given.

The average man who gazes, for instance, on the great face of Scawfell from the slopes of Scawfell Pike sees apparently a well-nigh ledgeless cliff. It would seem impossible that mortals could scale that smooth, stupendous precipice. Yet there are numerous favourite and almost popular routes up it. Close inspection will reveal the fact that this, like practically all precipices, even the most formidable-looking, possesses innumerable ledges of varying sizes.

It is the number, size, and situation of these ledges that make a climb easy or difficult. A roped party led by an expert leader, though they may seem but tiny insects amidst such vast surroundings, will soon find the weak spots in the armour of this mountain Goliath. The best man must go first and ascend to some suitable ledge, perhaps about twenty or thirty feet above the start, where he can stand firmly and hold the rope during the ascent of the second climber. Then, before the third man follows, also steadied by the rope, the leader will probably climb to some higher resting-place, or anchorage, to use the technical term.

The second man carefully watches the leader's upward progress, and slowly pays out his rope, probably around some outstanding knob of rock (see illustration, p. 206). These jutting rocks, which may vary in size from an eggcup to a country church spire, are known as belays, or belaying pins. The lack of these safeguards usually makes a climb unsafe—in fact, an ascent of such a place may be unjustifiable.

The uses of the belay are vividly illustrated by one of the most recent accidents in the Wastdale district. This was in 1909, when young W. Rennison, a comparatively inexperienced climber attempted to lead a party up the direct ascent of the Eagle's Nest Ridge on Great Gable. It is one of the most difficult of British climbs, and in its lower section consists of a vertical frontage of rock nearly a hundred feet

high. There is an excessively trying section just above the beginning. This consists in effecting a lodgment on the crest of the ridge which is reached from the right-hand side up a steep wall of rock about twenty feet high. Below the point of arrival on the ridge the rock on the leader's left slants downwards and ends in an overhanging rose. There are only the smallest of finger-tip holds for the uplifting to the ridge, and the feet do nothing more than dangle uselessly in thin air.

It was in this short but trying passage that the leader slipped when scarcely more than twelve feet above his companion's head. Suddenly, without a cry, he fell over the impending rocks on the left. Fortunately the second climber had the rope coiled around a jutting rock, but it failed to withstand the strain, and broke.

In this case had the rope held, fatal results might not have ensued. Similar accidents have become so frequent of late, especially abroad, amongst continental cragsmen, that the plan of tying two ropes to the leader on such special short sections should undoubtedly be tried. Where such excellent anchorage is available as on the Eagle's Nest Ridge the plan deserves practical attention. In one's early novitiate days this safeguard was used, though never actually tested, but now the suggestion is new and would seem unknown to climbers in general.

The fatality on the Eagle's Nest Ridge shows how little service the rope can be to the leader

should he fall from any great height above the second climber. The new English Alpine Club rope—and no other should be used—is tested to hold a twelve-stone man falling ten feet through mid-air.

On a few occasions the leader has been providentially saved through his falling on some ledge almost simultaneously with the weight coming on the rope. But, after all, the leader must never slip. He should be incontestably the best climber of the party, and years of practice, probably augmented by special natural ability, should give him the responsibility and honour of leadership.

If a leader has ever been known to fall, the writer would emphatically advise all climbers not to accompany such an one unless he takes an inferior position on the rope.

During some expeditions a short stretch of impending rock may bar progress. To reach its crest the leader may mount on the shoulder, or even head, of the long-suffering second climber. Hob-nailed boots may thus leave a lasting impression behind them, but they are honourable scars. The writer once found foothold on a friend's nose, yet the success made possible by this mutual help was considered ample recompense.

The most important points to be kept in mind by the leader are, climb slowly, use the feet rather than the hands, never ascend a very difficult place so far that it is impossible to



descend, and always reserve strength for this purpose. A careful watch should be kept for any small projections round which the rope can be slipped, and on exceptionally difficult places the leader may often thus secure safety. *In extremis* a descent can frequently be managed safely by thus hitching the rope.

Moreover, in climbing difficult cracks small rocks are often so wedged in the cleft that the rope can be threaded behind them. Some of the famous pioneering climbs were only possible with this safeguard. Standing on the smallest ledges, it is often possible to untie the rope end from the waist, thrust it up behind the stone, *from below*, be it noted, and then retie on again. If the stone is secure it is a position of comparatively perfect peace for the leader; though few care for the luxury, he can dangle more or less comfortably in mid-air, if those below hold the rope. Then, as the leader climbs higher, he is probably secured against serious fall, but it is well to make certain that the rope works freely through the opening behind the wedged rock.

All these suggestions and aids tend to the perfection of the art of safe rock-climbing, and with the advance in knowledge and skill there has come the tendency to attempt many exceptionally severe variations in the Alps. This development has taken place mostly on those spiry *aiguilles* which thrust their tapering forms out of the glacier-swathed slopes of Mont Blanc.

In August 1911, under perfect conditions,

some remarkable feats were performed, and hitherto impossible places surmounted, notably on the Aiguille de Grépon and on the neighbouring peaks of the Pétéret. But in the following year the granite giants suffered defeat less patiently. Daring assaults have resulted in terrible disaster, and gravest of all was the loss of H. O. Jones, his wife, and Nicholas Truffer on the Mont Rouge de Pétéret. The accident, so it is alleged, was due to the fall of the leading guide.

In this accident Truffer was leading directly up to the front of the Mont Rouge ridge of the Aiguille de Pétéret; the lady climber came second on the rope, with the expert Englishman last. An Austrian mountaineer, Dr. Preuss, was climbing ahead of the party, but, strange to relate, not roped to the others. The reason for this is all the more incomprehensible when it is known that several traverses had to be made; added to this, unstable rock abounded.

Had the orthodox plan of all being tied on the rope been followed, it will be obvious that the accident could scarcely have happened. The guide slipped probably through handling a loose hold; he was unable to save himself, and fell, dragging down his two companions to their doom. They were flung on to the Fresnay Glacier 1000 feet below. It is a curious coincidence that two of our greatest experts, both of the same name, should perish, so it is thought, by the slip of the leading guide; it will be remembered that this was the cause of the Dent

Blanche disaster, when O. G. Jones and four guides were lost. Dr. Preuss, the other member of the unfortunate party on Mont Rouge de Pétéret was killed the following year. He fell when climbing alone on the hitherto unclimbed north face of the Mandlkogel, a difficult rock peak in the Salzkammergut.

The modern Alpine danger, the falling of the leading guide, must be recognized. The average Briton's confidence and trust in the professional is absolutely astounding. Skilled experts will go abroad and allow Swiss peasants with a fraction of their own skill and experience of difficult rocks to lead them anywhere. On the Mont Rouge ridge the simple coiling of the rope round a belay might have saved life, but the gravest error of all cannot be overlooked. I would strongly urge that no serious climbing should be undertaken with a lady tied second on the rope. This has led to several parties being lost. Rather should the strongest and steadiest man occupy the onerous position, and then with absolutely the most skilful climber leading, the risks of rock-climbing at home or abroad may be reduced to a minimum.

In dealing with the question of how to climb safely in the High Alps, that is, in the region where snow and ice-craft is more in demand than skill in rock-climbing, somewhat different points require accentuating. The vastness of the world of everlasting snow, and the size of the big Alpine peaks, where for hours the mountaineer is cut off

from human aid and liable to continuous error in the route, introduces an altogether different state of affairs. Time is of vast importance in the Alps, the making of the best use of this, and the knowledge of how to utilize the prevailing conditions of snow, ice, and weather to the safest advantage, form the salient features of lofty mountaineering.

At the outset, for safety in the High Alps, a first-class guide is the greatest necessity. The selection of such an one may be somewhat troublesome for the uninitiated, and especially so for the man of moderate means. Many of the guides are spoilt by travelling with wealthy patrons, some of whom have been known to dispense a sovereign even when only some pairs of shoe-laces are required. On one peak it once fell to my lot to pay over £5 for the liquid refreshments only for two guides. However, these tendencies are becoming known and reforms must follow.

Two classes of professionals should especially be avoided, those notorious for accidents, and those who "tout for a job." The hotels often have guides on their staffs who thus receive interested recommendation which should be disregarded. It is much better to make a decision after a personal interview, and some expert friend, old or new, is usually available to suggest a likely man.

There is a regrettable modern tendency to recommend young cragsmen who are expert on rocks below the snow-line to climb the smaller

and presumably easier Alps without guides. Let it not be forgotten that nearly 80 per cent. of the accidents occur on such peaks. Guideless climbing, or even mere walking on any of the Alps above 10,000 feet should not be undertaken until something has been learnt of big mountains and their treacherous moods and structure. Those who have learnt all about rock-climbing at home in summer and winter should manage safe guideless climbing in the High Alps after two seasons with first-class guides.

With skill, common sense, and prudence, all the dangers of high mountaineering may be met and overcome, excepting two. These, the unavoidable risks, are sudden weather changes for the worse, and falling stones.

It is a terrible experience to be caught by a storm on a high mountain many hours from refuge or human aid. These who have wooed the Jungfrau and found her in a repulsive mood know the Great White Maiden as one of the most dangerous in this respect. Perchance she may smile graciously in the early morning sunshine, but unnoticed, gloomy forebodings are aloft, and ere midday the storm may sweep in mad hunt across those vast snowfields or shriek mercilessly amongst the shattered ridges. These are the times when the Jungfrau and her lofty compeers enfold their victims in a last embrace.

Health and joy and life dwelt on the heights in the morning; now death stalks amid savage surroundings. Unwary, unknowing, and un-

prepared mortals fall easy victims to the *tourmente*.

The following incident, one of many, is a characteristic result of modern, imprudent methods. A party of two set out to climb the Jungfrau in doubtful weather ; they disappeared, and in the fruitless attempt to discover their bodies the search party found the remains of another climber. He had been attempting the ascent alone, also on a day of cloud and storm.

It is necessary to distinguish between an accident which occurs through unforeseeable sudden weather changes and one which happens to a party who wilfully attempt a big mountain in obviously bad or doubtful weather. The former may be unavoidable, the latter is a form of gambling with Providence. The terrible losses of late years show how seldom puny man wins against such overwhelming odds. This has always been the most fruitful cause of Alpine disasters. Personally I have always found it a safe maxim, though one which sometimes takes much strength of will to enforce, never attack a big peak after bad weather until three fine days have elapsed.

The other unavoidable danger, falling stones and ice, always takes its annual toll of victims, but it is a much smaller average. Avalanches are not here referred to, for their haunts are well known and easily avoided, but comparatively small pieces of rock and ice which become loosened from the mountain-side by the action of

sun and frost. Man also acts as a considerable geological agent in displacing loose stones whilst climbing. However, genuine weathering action is the real cause, and this goes on more quickly after midday; those places notoriously dangerous on this account can and should generally be avoided in the afternoons. Two typical danger-zones are the Great Stone Couloir on the Matterhorn and the Wetterhorn Couloir. Belated parties on these two peaks are numerous; each season cracked heads and broken limbs abound proportionately.

Concerning those avoidable dangers which lurk insidiously 'midst the everlasting snows, some details may be given which show how mountaineers may learn safety from the misfortunes of others. Climbing alone is on the increase, judging by the recent records, but it is absolutely unjustifiable. The man who thus habitually penetrates into the lofty sanctuary of the snows is only safe in one sense—safe to be killed. If he confine himself to rock peaks, he may survive a few years, but a slight slip or tumble, even whilst walking on ordinary rough ground, may be serious. For instance, a sprained ankle may prevent return valleywards from the solitudes where no living thing is seen except some wild bird of prey, and no sound heard but “the song of the mountain wind, solemn and loud.”

On a big snow peak the unsafeness of the solitary climber is still further increased. The higher glaciers are often broken and riven into

big crevasses, at times hundreds of feet deep, yet these are often covered with a deceptive, and at times level-looking, layer of snow. These hidden crevasses are difficult to detect, and in the afternoon, especially when the sun has softened the snow which bridges them, each is a veritable death-trap to the solitary climber.

Owing to the number of accidents that occur through falls into hidden crevasses, these dangers have become exaggerated. However, with proper management of the rope they can be safely negotiated. In the first place, the party should consist of not less than three members. All being roped together, the leading guide, who is familiar with the lay of the crevasses, would go first, and each of his companions should move exactly in his footsteps, carrying meanwhile the rope held in one hand, just feeling, as it were, the man in front. Should anyone inadvertently break through the snow-bridge, a slight pull on the rope will usually save the situation.

In this connexion it should be noted that if a climber falls overhead into a crevasse it is impossible for a single man to haul him out again. Thus it is evident that a party of two must run great risks on high mountains. Yet, year after year, intelligent mortals incur the danger, and lives are annually sacrificed.

Not very long ago two expert continental climbers were descending from the Weisseespitze. They were moving slowly, looking to right and left, as is the proper way, to see how the crevasses





A GUIDED PARTY MOVING SAFELY AMONGST GREAT CREVASSES  
THE USE OF THE ROPE IS SHOWN, AND THE LEADER IS "SOUNDING" WITH HIS ICE-AXE FOR  
HIDDEN CREVASSES



cut the snowfield. The snow usually dips slightly downwards when a crevasse is below, and to the expert its presence is thus perceptible. The leader was carefully passing over such a place, when, suddenly, crash went the snow on which he stood down into the gloomy depths of the glacier. The unfortunate leader fell with it. His companion on the brink was just able to plunge his ice-axe into the snow and belay the rope round this to check the fall.

But the strain was such that the ice-axe was dragged through the snow, and the upper climber thrown forward on his chest, holding the rope meanwhile with desperation. Thus he lay for nearly half an hour, only great strength and indomitable bravery preventing his being dragged down into the abyss. No answer came to his calls for help, and gradually he began to be drawn forward. Then, and not till then, did he hearken to the terrible instructions of the doomed and injured man in the crevasse—"Cut the rope!" When this was done, all that he could hear were faint moans. Ere long the survivor set off for help. The search party was delayed by bad weather, but eventually reached the fatal spot and recovered the remains.

The final ridges of many of the great peaks are often crowned by overhanging cornices of snow which sometimes break away. These are difficult to detect from above, and as their crest generally affords the easiest ascent, mountaineers are often tempted from the safe way,

which should be along the steep slope on the side of the ridge away from the cornice.

One of the most recent accidents accentuates the dangers of these formations, and is also a remarkable illustration of how the presence of mind of a climber may save many lives. It was on the narrow crest of the Monte Disgrazia, and the party consisted of four young students from Milan. Great cornices were in evidence and all moved warily. The summit was in sight ; success was almost won.

Suddenly the leader, Arrigo Truffi, heard a loud crash behind him. Almost instinctively he realized the peril. A great mass of the corniced ridge had broken away and with it his companions were disappearing into the abyss. Instantly he flung himself down the steeper opposite side of the ridge. His fall was arrested by the rope which hung suspended across the snowy crest of the peak.

On the other side the fall of his companions was arrested, helpless for a while on the icy front. But the rope was torn by the fearful strain ; it broke close to the ill-fated last man, Ettore Levis. Far underneath, his horror-stricken companions saw the tiny black speck of humanity disappear through space midst a whirling cloud of snowy debris. In two bounds he fell straight on to the Disgrazia Glacier quite 3000 feet below.

Fortunately one of the suspended survivors had retained his ice-axe, and, aided by this and the assistance of Arrigo Truffi, the top of the ridge

was finally gained. They descended at once, and three days later their lost comrade was brought down by an heroic search party, whose perilous adventures on the Disgrazia Glacier entailed serious mishap to one at least of the rescuers. This was the first life lost on Monte Disgrazia, and but for the marvellous presence of mind of the leader the toll of death would have been quadrupled at one fell swoop.

In the elation of the descent after a successful climb there is a great temptation to glissade down the harmless-looking snow-slopes. The climber stands almost upright on the incline and allows himself to slide downwards with the axe used behind as a brake, and also as a means of steering. But the dangers of this pleasant means of descent are many; the glissader may suddenly glide on to an icy section where, for instance, rocks may have sheltered the snow from the sun's softening rays. He will fly off like a shot from a gun, and if rocks or deep crevasses are below he is likely to spend the rest of his life in the descent thither. The yawning abyss of some great crevasse often cuts across the snow-slope and is generally invisible from above.

Most glissading accidents happen to climbers who are descending a peak by a different route from that used in the ascent. Sound advice in this connexion is, "Never glissade down a slope unless you have previously ascended it."

Finally, I would urge that slow climbing is safe climbing, and when in doubt as to personal

fitness or dangerous conditions, turn back resolutely.

Mountaineering has many rewards for its ardent devotees. The recreative exercise amidst scenes of almost overpowering magnificence appeals irresistibly to true manhood, but the physical fitness and perfect health which are garnered on the heights must not so overcome the climber that he forget the unsympathetic law of gravitation. It is only by constant care, prudence, and keen observation that the mountaineer may learn how to climb safely either on British crags or above the snow-line.

## CHAPTER VII

### WINTER SPORT MOUNTAINEERING

#### AN EARLY WINTER ASCENT OF THE SCHRECKHORN

“O'er windy hill, through clogged ravine,  
And woodland paths that wind between  
Low drooping pine boughs winter weighed.”

WHITTIER

THE Alps in winter have become a popular craze. This is undoubtedly a move in the right direction. Those who are healthy, wealthy, and wise do well to forsake our murky winter darkness and hie them up into the daylight on the great white roof of the world. The annual Christmas “rush” is now well known. Nowadays, like many another famous centre, Mürren becomes a veritable Mayfair-in-the-mountains, but the great popular flood never rises far from the level of the railways. For those not “in the swim,” there are still restful places to be found amongst those huge snow-swathed Alpine monarchs which tower far overhead, a world apart from society crowds and their functions.

All the popular resorts are so exploited as to be well known, but the winter mountaineer will prefer the quieter haunts. A typical spot for such an one is Le Planet, away up on the snowy slopes above Argentière in the Chamonix valley. It is unsurpassed for ski-ing opportunities, and all around are magnificent mountain expeditions of varying length and difficulty, with Mont Blanc the *ultima thule* of all.

Practically all the big Alpine peaks have been climbed in winter, but once the Great White Mountain is enshrouded in his wintry mantle he offers a deceptively dangerous welcome to all mortals. During the remarkable season of 1912 the loftiest snow in Europe was twice gained, but in normal winter seasons the top is inaccessible. The knowledge of this but adds to the majesty and mystery of the gleaming alabaster dome which towers far over that shattered world of frosted Aiguilles, upheld "on walls impregnable of gleaming ice."

Then Zermatt, with the stupendous Matterhorn glistening in the winter sun like a huge inverted icicle, has not yet attracted the crowds, and though as a ski-ing resort it is more for the expert than the tyro, in the way of mountaineering it has vast opportunities.

The Matterhorn has been scaled in winter long ago, but at such times Monte Rosa, the Breithorn, and the Dom provide more reputable expeditions. They are perhaps the best amongst a host of others. Certainly the railway up the





A MID-WINTER SCENE IN THE CHAMOIN VALLEY



Gorner Grat is closed. Yet it is well to revert, now and again, to the older and better method and walk to the top, which, thus attained on a snowy Christmas morning, will provide a prospect not to be forgotten in a lifetime. The Mettelhorn as a view-point is even superior, and it has the added advantage of offering a more sporting expedition.

Grindelwald is certainly a somewhat crowded centre, but in the upper part of the valley there are several quiet hotels. The wonderful Jungfrau Railway will there be much appreciated by a great number of winter Alpinists. With a little planning it is possible to climb the Mönch or the Jungfrau in a day if the earliest train is taken to the Little Scheidegg and thence to the Jungfrau-joch. By this means it is also possible to reach the Concordia Hut quite easily, whence the Finsteraarhorn may be attacked and Grindelwald regained the same day. All the big Grindelwald giants have now been ascended in winter. Even the Schreckhorn, the "Terror Peak," has lost much of its fearsomeness. Little did those enthusiasts of the early January days of 1897 think that so soon would their example of an out-of-season climb be so keenly emulated.

It cannot be said that the same respectful care and prudence is brought to bear upon many of the winter mountaineering exploits of more recent times. The completion of the railway to the top of the Jungfrau will bring many dangers in its train. The great glaciers in mid-winter,

apparently harmlessly hidden in a smooth, spotless covering, afford a natural highway into the lofty sanctuary of the snows.

Yet there is a simple, harmless look in the great, white snowfields which has led many to their doom. Expert summer Alpinists appreciate the dangers of those snow-covered glaciers where great crevasses are so deceptively hidden. In January innocent and inexperienced tourists, many of whom know nothing of the Alps in July or August, wander fancy free over the death-traps. Small wonder that in the early months of the year the Alps gather in the bulk of their victims.

The loss of Louis Theytaz on the Pigne d'Arolla in January 1912 showed that the most expert of guides may not be invulnerable against the deceptiveness of the glaciers in mid-winter. With two Englishmen and three other guides he was descending the peak about half-past three in the afternoon. They were roped in two parties. The others had crossed a crevasse carefully, but when Theytaz was following down as last man the snow-bridge collapsed. Unfortunately the rope broke and he met his death in the icy depths. Doubtless the fracture of the rope was a great cause of the disaster. The usual plaited continental pattern, the property of Louis Theytaz himself, was worn on this occasion.

Some of the ropes used by Alpine guides would be discarded in England even as cart-

ropes, and had the genuine English Alpine Club pattern been used this catastrophe could not have happened. Frozen ropes are, as in this case, especially brittle; but if the proper quality is taken out from England, this danger, which has been the cause of innumerable accidents, may be averted.

After the tremendous Alpine winter snowfalls, sometimes twenty or thirty feet in depth, the average ski-runner or mountaineer is prone to assume that the glacier crevasses are safely covered. Four or five days after a downfall this assumption may be correct in certain situations. For instance, wind-driven snow usually settles firmly, but during the exceptional low temperatures often prevailing in sheltered places the snow is so dry and powdery that its sustaining properties are very slight. Contrary to popular notion, the big crevasses are not filled up, but simply covered with a deceptively level surface, wind-carved and beautiful to look upon, but, alas, too often a whited sepulchre. The modern tendency to discard the rope in winter glacier expeditions should be rigorously avoided.

Under certain conditions the same safeguard might avoid adventures in the valley. This was proved two years ago when, after the great snowfall at Argentière, an English party lost one of their number in a group of the loftier chalets. Only signs of a few roofs were found at one spot. Suddenly there was a shriek. The leader had disappeared down the chimney opening of a

chalet and was receiving an unpleasant reception from the goats, who *in extremis* were using the living room below. The impromptu chimney-sweep was dug out by the others later in the day little the worse, excepting for what must be a lifelong aversion to goats' milk and Alpine cheese.

Midwinter weather is usually settled, that is, settled very bad or settled very good, and those treacherously sudden changes, the terror of the summer Alpinist who pushes further afield under doubtful conditions, are seldom troublesome. In the dry winter air a good aneroid is a useful and reliable companion; in July its warning may be neglected, but never in January.

Of course foul weather has caused many catastrophes. Puny man is but as a reed shaken in the wind, when the winter storm-fiend flings himself athwart the white, trackless wastes. The coolest calculation and presence of mind may be well in their way, but again absence of body is best of all; at the slightest sign of doubtful weather turn back resolutely even though the summit may be comparatively close at hand.

Doubtless the unfavourable weather in the early part of 1912 was a contributory cause of the worst catastrophe in winter-sport records. The weather had been in a treacherous mood, but despite all warnings a ski-ing party of eleven, one of them being a lady, set out to ascend the Hochschneeberg. Probably the fine morning tempted the leader of the expedition, Herr Hacker,

an expert Austrian mountaineer, to advise the ascent.

Soon after dawn the party were enveloped in mist, and a persistent snowstorm rendered progress very laborious. They, however, at last gained the Fischerhütte. There, as the weather failed to improve, it was agreed upon to make the descent. But, unfortunately, the dangerous cornice of snow below the hut offered a most tempting path along its crest. When all were on the overhanging part a huge lump broke away, carrying its human freight into the abyss. They were caught in the tremendous thundering mass, which ever increased in bulk and impetus until, when the slope eased off, all came to rest on a level plateau nearly five hundred feet below. Strange to say, the lady of the party was the only survivor, all the others were shattered and suffocated in the snowy incubus.

The lure of the cornice is perhaps the most insidious of the perils encountered by the winter sportsman who wanders upon the heights. The disaster on the Hochschneeberg accentuates this unmistakably.

Almost all exposed ridges hold these overhanging eaves of snow and, unlike the summer tendency, both sides of a ridge may be corniced at the same time or alternately, first on one side and then on the other. Unless the lay of the cornices be judged accurately no peak with lofty narrow ridges should be attempted. In sunny weather the shadows and mouldings of the snow

reveal the danger to an expert, but on dull days a cornice is most difficult to detect.

In any case no party on a corniced mountain should number more than three, and all should be roped. The leader, at least, should carry an ice-axe and know how to use it in order to sound through the snow for the solid crest of the peak. Those with only average experience on ski should never tackle such problems.

“The wooden wings” of the Alps are more appropriate where open mountain faces have to be negotiated. This suggests mention that some patterns of ski, notably the Norwegian styles, cannot be used with the ordinary hob-nailed boots. To complete the ascent of the upper portions of an Alpine peak in ordinary soft-soled ski-ing boots is tempting Providence, a temptation which has had fatal results. Either nailed boots should be carried or the proper pattern of Lilienfeld or Alpine ski used—these are the kind invented by Herr Zdarsky. They have a special binding to accommodate nailed boots; thus, when rocks, bad cornices, or other obstacles have to be encountered the ski may be discarded.

Yet, undoubtedly, the gravest perils of the winter sportsman are those from avalanches. I do not refer so much to those huge snow-slides which involve more or less the whole of a mountain-side, and for miles carry death and destruction in their train, but rather to those tiny, harmless-looking slides which begin with a few inches of



gliding snow. At first the movement may be, and probably is, treated as a joke.

Then, as the mass gathers speed and size, the victims, for such they really are, attempt to escape from the embryo avalanche. All is movement, to right and left there is no escape; they thrust their guiding poles into the now swiftly whirling mass, and finally, flung head over heels, they cling desperately to life alone. There is nought else to which they can cling. If the slope be of any length their plight is hopeless. They are borne downwards, perchance on the crest of a wave of snow, then plunged under the swirling, stifling weight of whiteness, to be seen no more.

Such is the simplest form of avalanche, and, as has often been tragically proved, this may be met with even on the slopes quite near to the popular centres. On the higher parts, precipices usually aggravate the death-dealing powers of the avalanche, whilst great crevasses frequently receive all that the "white doom" sends them.

Early in 1911 a typical accident happened to a ski-ing party which accentuates an important point. It does not always follow that those who are entombed in avalanche debris are beyond human aid. Several lives have been saved by a quick rescue, and in roped parties the life-line justifies its name, for it indicates the position of the buried victims.

The fatality referred to seems inexplicable. It happened on the easy slopes of the Bruder-

kogel, and Dr. Kernthaler, who was described as an expert ski-man, was leading the party. In stamping a step prior to turning, he detached a small avalanche, which carried himself and his two companions, Dr. Fritz Blaschke and Alexander Korany, off their feet and eventually buried them all when it came to rest. Strange to relate, the other members of the same expedition who saw the accident appear to have made no serious effort to assist their unfortunate comrades. In fact, when the bodies were subsequently recovered, it was found that Dr. Blaschke had only been lightly covered with snow and had worked a great hole in his endeavour to free himself. In this, but for being held tight by his ski, he would doubtless have succeeded.

There are different kinds of Alpine avalanches, but that variety which is composed of soft powdery snow is the arch enemy of the winter sportsman. The danger is at its greatest after a heavy downfall in the coldest weather, and it is aggravated if the fall rests on a hard, frozen snow substratum or on a smooth, grassy, mountain-side without rocky outcrops, or free from small bushes. Even after many fine days such slopes are dangerous if set at an angle of over  $23^{\circ}$  and exposed to gales of wind. The soft snow accumulates "in the shadow of the wind" as it were, and waits but the passage of the skier to set it in motion, and thus break up the partly solidified lower sections. Big cracks suddenly spread across the slope; with a dull

crash great shields peel off the mountain's front and plunge valleywards. Most experienced ski-runners are familiar with the weird cracking sound that precedes this form of avalanche. It is Nature's warning to make oneself scarce.

To judge of the safety or otherwise of the cutting of ski-tracks across a slope by a party of runners requires fine judgment and much experience. It may be quite safe to go straight up the face of many a slope, whilst the crossing on ski would be fatal. The rope is no protection against avalanches on a wide, open mountain-side, rather the reverse, and it should not be used. Travelling thus unroped, it is well for the members of the party to keep several yards apart when an unstable section is being negotiated.

Snow at an angle of less than  $23^{\circ}$  is free from danger; this is a safe rule to follow, but beyond that angle the risk increases proportionately. On steep, hard slopes above  $50^{\circ}$ , where in the ascent the ski have to be discarded, the rope should be worn and the ice-axe used to cut steps for the feet. To secure anchorage meanwhile the axe should be driven as far as possible into the snow. With the rope belayed round this it serves as a peg upon which all may be hung in case of a slip.

Finally, if caught in an avalanche it is imperative to keep on the surface, preferably lying on the back and adopting a swimming attitude. But the ski must first be cast off, and to do this, according to one of the authorities, the

binding should be cut with a knife to rid oneself of the awkward wooden blades.

Above all avoid all places notorious for this special danger. Few men who ride on a real avalanche are likely to take further interest in mountaineering.

One of the earliest winter ascents of a big Alpine peak, where serious rock-climbing normally provides a part of the expedition, was made at the beginning of the January of 1897. The climb in question was up the Great Schreckhorn (13,386 feet), and the party consisted of the late Owen Glynne Jones, with Hans Almer and Peter Jaggi as guides.

The first attempt was frustrated by bad weather, and an uncomfortable time was spent at the Schwarzegg Hut. Grindelwald was regained during the second day, but rather more than forty-eight hours later the enthusiasts returned to the attack. My late friend left an interesting description of the actual ascent. The story is so characteristic of a fascinating style, which has made his book on the Cumbrian crags one of the most famous climbing classics of modern times, that no apology for its insertion here in detail is needed. "Two days later I found myself, to my surprise, at the Schwarzegg Hut again, this time the only Herr of the party, with Hans and Peter as my guides. Our previous sojourn had made considerable differences to the comfort of our quarters. The roof only dripped occasionally, the blankets were damp, not wet ;

no wood was wasted in thawing ice from the stove chimney, and we had the luxury of warm feet all night.

“At twelve o'clock we arose, assured ourselves of settled weather, and had breakfast. We were not hungry, but there was no saying when we should get our next chance of a meal, and it was as well to prepare for a long fast. We left sundry provisions at the hut—bread and meat and some soup preparation. It was essential to travel as lightly as possible, and we could not tell how hungry we might be on our return. Slipping on boots and gaiters, we seized our ice-axes and rope and started for our peak in earnest.

“It was a glorious night and not yet one o'clock. The moon was at the full, and, but for a few clouds masking the great beauty of the Eiger Grat, the sky was clear. The sharp peak of the Finsteraarhorn, greatest of the Oberland giants, cut a thin wedge in the vault of heaven. A glittering star lay seemingly on its crest, and might have been a watch-fire of the goblins who haunt such rocks at these hours. To our right in beautiful contrast lay the Jungfrau, her head nestled sleepily in a fleecy shawl of mist, suggesting to our vagrant fancy a tired maiden flitting home by moonlight from a dance.

“The Schreckhorn rose up some 5000 feet above us. It was much whiter than usual, though its grim western face is too steep ever to show much record of snowy weather. By its side rose

the mighty broken ridge of the Lauteraarhorn, of nearly the same height and perhaps no less difficult of access. The track led along the glacier between these peaks and then up to the lowest point on the ridge joining them. Till this *Sattel* was reached we were to have only snow and ice, and thence to the summit a sharp ridge of difficult rock was to try our skill in another direction, handicapped as we should be by fresh snow, and in all probability by a keen wind blowing across our narrow path.

“We quitted the rocky promontory on which our resting-place was built, and bore obliquely upwards towards the Schreckhorn Glacier. It was light enough to see that our route had its dangers. High up above our heads a hanging glacier showed its gleaming face over the edge of the great couloir we were traversing, and the debris at our feet was evidence that now and again the ice was forced over the edge, and the couloir filled with the million hurtling fragments of an avalanche. We did not stay to admire the view or to talk philosophy, but sped rapidly across till the danger was past.

“Before us now was another couloir, flanked on one side by an immense buttress of rock that apparently lifted itself to the very summit of the mountain. On the other by a rock wall crowned by the upper ice of the Schreckhorn Glacier. The bed of the couloir was of hard snow, passing up at a steep angle for over a thousand feet. It was in excellent condition; we had no need to cut steps,

and, giving the hanging glacier a wide berth, we climbed steadily upwards, the leader kicking footsteps in the firm snow without halt and almost without effort.

“As we crept upwards alternately on the black shadow of rocks and in the pale moonlight, the sides of the gully approached one another and its steepness increased. At two o'clock a route lay open to the right up to the Schreckhorn Glacier by a snowy terrace easy of access. Leaving our gully we took to the glacier and again breasted the steep slopes, steering clear of several crevasses that the winter snows had not strongly bridged. However, to speak truly, we did not avoid them all. I crushed through one of the first and meditated on the necessity for caution as I hung suspended for a few moments on the rope we had only just before put on.

“Up glacier and snowfield we made our way, the guides pausing now and again to complain of the cold and to pass round the flask of cognac.

“At four o'clock the moon was lost behind a bank of clouds and the night became very dark. The *Sattel* on the main ridge was seen high up above our heads and was to be reached by a steep slope of icy snow, relieved at intervals by glazed rocks that projected slightly above the even white surface. I inquired of Hans how long it might be before we reached the *Sattel*, expecting that a couple of hours would leave us a fair margin. Three hours and a half he thought—possibly more. As a matter of fact we did

not leave this wall of ice till five hours had elapsed.

“With the exception of a short divergence on to a few rocks near the beginning, we were obliged to keep entirely to the ice, as the glaze on the rocks projecting from it would have been a source of constant danger. Each step had to be cut with the ice-axe. Hans, who was leading, would hew out a recess large enough for one foot, whilst he held the lantern by his teeth. I came second and scraped the step a little larger, and Peter, bringing up the rear, would perfect it. For we were to descend the same steep wall on our return and should then require all we could get in the way of foothold.

“There must doubtless have been an element of romance—nay, of pleasure even—in our situation as we clung to that icy face in the darkness of a midwinter night and listened to the fragments whizzing past us from the axe of the first man in our halts between each step, but I sacrifice my self-respect on the altar of veracity, in admitting that the only sensation I can now recall was that of extreme cold. It froze one’s faculty of enjoyment, and insidiously benumbed one’s hands and feet.

“That which gave the cold its worst grip on our shivering frames was an accident that promised at first to be nothing short of disastrous. Peter had assumed the leadership, and was forging his way steadily ahead, when Hans in a moment of carelessness let slip the axe from his doubly-



gloved hand. We heard it rapidly slithering down some distance and then stop. The words that were uttered the next few moments will not be recorded. If the axe were irrecoverable our peak was lost to us also, and we would have serious trouble to return in safety. However, I unroped, so as to give Hans as much range as possible, and giving him another axe we let him gently down. For some time he travelled in a zig-zag, searching from side to side with the lantern. Then, when we had let out some eighty or ninety feet, and were beginning to give up hope, a joyous shout of triumph from Hans told us he had found the axe. Most luckily for us it had been caught in the corner of some small rocks which we had skirted on our upward scramble.

“We rapidly hauled Hans up and put the rope on again. The halt had chilled us terribly, and we were thankful to be able to move on.

“We longed for the dawn and the bright sun, and fervently hoped there would be no ‘hitch’ that morning in the sunrise. At last towards eight o’clock the Finsteraarhorn was touched with pink. In a minute or two the brilliant colour reached the Agassizhorn and the stars began to pale. Rapidly the rosy glow spread downwards towards the Strahleck; the whole chain looked miraculously beautiful for a few fleeting moments; then the effect changed to broad daylight, and the Alpine sunrise was over. We soon felt a little warmth creeping into our half-frozen limbs, and worked eagerly to finish our step-cutting.

“At 9.15 we cut our last step and pulled up over sundry easy rocks to the level *Sattel*, where we halted ten minutes and partook of lunch.

“Our provisions were difficult to attack. The meat was frozen hard, and as troublesome to cut as a block of mahogany. Bread was flavourless and about as interesting as antique toast. Butter was ineffective as a lubricant, and could only be chipped out of the little glass that held it at great risk of the blade of one’s knife. In despair we opened a tin of sardines, and were delighted to find that they, at any rate, were protected from frost and moderately palatable. These and cheese and chocolate were our staple articles of diet for the day—a queer assortment, but the best at our disposal. I tried an orange at the finish, but it was as crisp and cold as a snowball and equally uncomfortable for the teeth. Having done our duty at this somewhat perfunctory meal, we were eager to bestir ourselves again, and looked anxiously in the direction of the final ridge.

“The summit looked very near; it was, in fact, only about three hundred feet higher. But these few feet had many times before turned back stronger parties than our own. The thin rock ridge running to the summit was to be reached by an upward traverse on exceedingly steep snow that sloped away to the distant *Lauteraar-Sattel* on the right. Often a couple of hours are here spent in step-cutting. To-day, luckily, the snow was firm, and all hard work with the axe had been ended down in the gully below. We

had left the provision bag at our resting-place and went on. A quarter of an hour found us astride the ridge, gripping good, solid rock, and ready for some gymnastics.

“ We slipped our axes into the loops of rope round our waists, so as to have both hands clear. Hans led off with a grin of delight, ever enthusiastic on such work. He had to sweep away some snow from the handholds, but the wind had already done much to clear our course, and we were seldom impeded. No ice seemed to be about ; it had probably evaporated long since ; we were all in fairly good form and went up hand over hand without a pause. On uncertain ground and with doubtful passengers it is safest to see each man across each difficult bit, only one moving at a time. Such precaution was scarcely necessary here, and we did not adopt it. By ten o'clock we had finished the rocks and stood rather breathlessly looking at a short snow ridge that yet remained.

“ A narrow snow wall had gradually grown up along the ridge to a height of five or six feet above the rocky foundation. The top of the wall was either exceedingly sharp or fringed with an overhanging cornice. To walk along the top without breaking the wall down, or encroaching on our cornice that was possibly lurking beneath us, was no easy matter. My dislike of such a prospect as confronted us was not absolutely unreasoning. A few years back, whilst traversing the Täschhorn and Dom, my guide had plunged through a

cornice on that well-known ridge between the two peaks, and the story of old Peter Baumann's grisly experience on this same Schreckhorn Ridge came vividly to my mind. It is an old story now. He was climbing with an Englishman. Another man was on the same ridge climbing without a rope. They saw him slip and fall headlong down some thousands of feet to the very base of this terrible wall.

"Small wonder, then, that we took every precaution that experience could suggest, and allowed ourselves ample time. While Hans was engineering his way along a bad place, Peter and I had our axes buried deep in the ridge, and we followed his every movement closely. If he fell over on one side of the wall, I was expected at all costs to throw my weight to the other side, so that the rope should tighten across the ridge and prevent those behind following their leader. But Hans arranged for our mutual benefit not to fall; on the most blood-curdling places he knew how to anchor himself firmly and land me safely by his side. Then I in turn drew up the rope for Peter.

"At last all possible risk was over, and a short, steep snow ridge led in a couple of minutes to the long-desired summit. The air was marvelously clear at our own level, but as far as the eye could see the valleys were blotted out, and only the great peaks rose out of the sea of dense cloud. From forty to fifty miles away we could readily distinguish Monte Rosa, the Weisshorn,

Dom, Matterhorn, and Dent Blanche. Farther still to the right the grand Combin seemed to stand alone, and eighty miles off to the south-west Mont Blanc rose like a leviathan from the deep. Towards the east little could be seen but cloud-land, though close beneath us we could make out every detail of the glacier system.

“We were at a height of 13,386 feet, something like 10,000 feet above Grindelwald, and the sense of isolation was half oppressive, half exhilarating. Far away beneath our feet we could just distinguish a party on the Unter-Grindelwald Glacier. We jodelled ourselves hoarse, but they could not hear us.

“After a rest of fifteen minutes we started downwards. The return journey to our provisions required nearly as much time as the ascent. But we were now no longer ignorant of the difficulties before us, and the ridge was divested of its terrors. Just below the *Sattel* we sat down on some loose debris and attacked the provisions again. They were now a trifle warmer and more palatable than before, but we had to do without wine. It had been frozen hard for hours. Peter hugged the gourd as though it were a baby, endeavouring to impart a little warmth into its frozen body, but scarcely a drop could he squeeze out of it. Therefore Hans and I agreed that we were not thirsty, that wine in winter was not necessary, even a luxury to be avoided. Peter echoed these praiseworthy sentiments with a chary ‘*Gewiss, gewiss.*’ Neverthe-

less, he still maintained his grip upon the bottle.

“At two o'clock in the afternoon we began the rather perilous descent of the ice wall that had given us so much trouble before dawn. The staircase we had cut was difficult to discern, as the steps were nearly all filled with the ice chips that had fallen down into them, and I often admired Peter's sharp sightedness in recognizing where to kick out a hold.

“We descended with our faces to the wall, swinging the axes well into the ice for additional security at each downward movement. The process was monotonous, but the situation too exciting to make us careless. Down, down we went, till the ridge above us dwindled to insignificance, and the slope below eased away on to the glacier. Once there we raced away through the soft snow, sometimes following the traces of the morning, at other times taking short cuts, now that the daylight showed them to be sufficiently free from danger.

“At the top of the great couloir we could see the hut once more, and a loud jodel brought out a couple of guides who returned our salute most heartily. On reaching the couloir we sat down on the snow and glissaded all the way to the avalanche debris, a glorious slope of nearly half a mile.

“In ten minutes we were at the hut and chatting with friends. We found a sumptuous tea awaiting us, and between our cups we described our climb

and talked over plans for the next day. The new arrivals were proposing to traverse the Pfaffenstockli and Grünhorn, a ridge facing us across the glacier. I am free to admit that the charms of another night at the hut were not sufficient to keep me there. Grindelwald, after all, appeared to be the best resting-place for the night. Visions of table d'hôte down at the 'Bear' gave a temporary vigour to my tired limbs, and I had little difficulty in persuading Peter Jaggi that his wife down in the valley would be anxious to see him again. So we wished our friends a *gute Reise* and ran down in the clear moonlight, reaching the hotel soon after seven o'clock. Then followed feasting and a long night's rest."

## CHAPTER VIII

### UP THE MÖNCH IN A STORM

“Ye living flowers that skirt the eternal frost!  
Ye wild goats sporting round the eagles’ nest!  
Ye eagles, playmates of the mountain storm!  
Ye lightnings, the dread arrows of the clouds!  
Ye signs and wonders of the element!  
Utter forth God, and fill the hills with praise!”

S. T. COLERIDGE

**S**ORE wounded but not subdued! How well the words apply to the Mönch, that white-crested central sentinel of the Oberland. Man has thrust his “iron way” into the very vitals of the great peak; it has shared in that disrespect which all railway-fettered mountains are prone to acquire. In a few months’ time man’s handiwork will end on the crest of the Jungfrau.

But let it not be forgotten that conquest has come from within, not from without. Far overhead the sky-soaring rocks and icy ridges lift themselves heavenwards as barely inaccessible as of yore. Lest we forget, now and again the frozen heights tire of man’s rash familiarity. The old Mönch stirs, as it were, from his winter sleep. His snowy mantle shakes loose in early summer





"HIGH UP ON THE RIDGE-POLE OF OUR PEAK THE GALE  
BLUNG ITSELF UPON US."



sunshine, and puny mortals who cling to his front are flung helpless to their doom. Quite recently five great guides and two of their companions in peril perished in this fashion.

My own experience of the three Oberland peaks that charm all beholders when seen from the popular view-point on the Little Scheidegg has always savoured of the adventurous. Not very long ago the Mönch gave us a cool reception, and the escapade must live in memory for a lifetime. Our party, the first of the year, by the way, to tread those summit snows, consisted of two famous guides and three amateurs. Railways were not in our programme, for we had pleasant memories of that wonderful walk by the Bäregg and up the flower-bedecked slopes of the Kalli.

It was a morning in early June, and the valley of Grindelwald lay already drowsy in summer sunshine when we set forth into the cool shadows of the pine woods. The little Lütschine was now long past its winter sleep, it poured a grey torrent through the tree-girt glen, and far overhead the old Eiger lifted his crest like a silver shield upheld on a canopy of beryl and purple. Then came the upward way, leaving the weather-browned chalets below, with the zig-zags winding in front up the dewy pastures to the sullen shades of the fir-draped Mettenberg.

Here was a strange stillness, unlike any British woodland. No song of birds filled the air, only intermittent rumblings, harsh and uncanny, rose from below. The warm air of summer stirred the

glacier monster in the depths. Now and again through many a welcome clearing the backward prospect was revealed of sunny valleys all peak begirt. Across the sky fleecy clouds freshly uncurled from mountain crests were drifting in cheerful flocks, shepherded by winds as yet unfelt below.

Then from under the strangely o'erbending rocks we trudged forth into the full blaze of June sunshine with the inn of the Bäregg soon tempting to a prolonged halt. Meanwhile a greyness gradually rose zenithwards from the north-west. Two hours later the scene was utterly changed. A sudden storm assailed us as we traversed the lofty glacier that was to give access to the Bergli Hut, where the night had to be spent before tackling the Mönch next day. All were heavy laden with provisions and firewood, most of the former, and all the latter gathered *en route*. Thus, when a terrific thunderstorm swept down upon us, there was but a tardy race for shelter under a large and conveniently placed boulder, verily "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

Yet from this cover it was a fine experience to watch the *tourmente* gradually increase and spend itself amidst the vast solitudes. Lightning flashed amongst the misty crags of the Eiger; the thunder reverberated incessantly from the peaks on either hand and then seemed to echo itself to exhaustion in the more distant snowy recesses of the Jungfrau. Gradually the mists

settled down, the turmoil ceased, and a great calm pervaded the heights. Such conditions made us think of the comforts of Grindelwald. However, we were cheered by the recollection of the mountain's reputation for sudden changes, and the optimist of the party carried a barometer, which to the faithful always seemed to be going up when there was talk of going down.

Thus we donned our heavy loads again and set off in the now invigorating air across the trackless ice of the Fiescher glacier. Slowly the vapours sank valleywards, and the sun shone out on such a beautiful world of glittering whiteness that the camera was voted a most welcome and important member of the party.

Nowadays it is often asserted that landscape photography is "played out"; the blasé amateur is tired of country lanes and woodland dells. Let him try the marvellous opportunities which the High Alps afford: he will not at least feel blasé when manipulating his camera on a slippery ice-slope, with downward views meanwhile of appalling suggestiveness.

It was five hours after leaving Grindelwald before a sight was obtained of the tiny hut of the Bergli, perched far overhead on an island of rock that thrust itself forth from one of the mightiest glacier systems in Europe. To reach its portals some difficult and dangerous work was evidently necessary. The steep ice now became uneven, and twisted into the weirdest of shapes. Intricate systems of crevasses were dominated by snow-

covered pinnacles glistening in the rays of the afternoon sun.

The work of disintegration was strikingly obvious; ominous cracks were heard. Whilst we gazed, away up to the left a huge splinter toppled forward, broke into a thousand fragments, and crashed down with a roar towards us. Fortunately ere it reached our level the whirling mass was caught by a tremendous crevasse and swallowed wholesale. Naught was heard but the hollow gurgle deep down in the bowels of the icy monster. It was only the presence of this natural refuse-pit, as it were, which made our passage along the dangerous slope at all justifiable. A savage rebuke came from Jossi, our guide, when the insatiable photographer suggested a halt to "take" an avalanche. A few minutes later it was evident that the avalanche would have done the "taking"; an irresistible snow breaker leapt the big crevasses and actually obliterated our recently made footsteps.

Then the actual climbing became exciting when the debris zone was passed. The newly fallen snow made negotiation of the crevasses somewhat slippery. The treacherous covering had to be cleared off the ice, and big steps cut on the edge of many a vertical frozen abyss. The clatter of icy fragments hundreds of feet down in the depths made one realize that life was worth living rather than the reverse.

Now we were down in the gloomy depths of some awesome crevasse, with its cold, purple,

gleaming, icy walls ; anon, high in air, we were crawling gingerly across some slender white snow-bridge suspended over black nothingness. Eventually a snow-slope was attained, and with startling suddenness the little hut was seen close at hand. So engrossing had been the work that an hour had passed as a minute.

It was but a cool reception we had that mid-summer's evening at the Bergli. First the frozen entrance had to be forced, and then the frozen exit of the chimney thawed. Meanwhile snow-clouds enwrapped us ; the world was blotted out, and we gladly sought the welcome refuge of our little wooden hut, the loftiest of its kind in all the Swiss Alps, and nearly eleven thousand feet above sea-level. We little guessed how gladly we should leave it three days later.

The discomforts of the melting moments must not be dwelt upon. Suffice it to say that we retired to rest amidst the damp blankets and moist straw with scarcely a dry thing amongst us, except a bottle of a special brand of ginger ale brought up from Grindelwald by one who detests the *vin du pays*.

The natural drying process filled the hut with clammy vapour. Yet such is Alpine health and hardihood that we awoke next morning fit for anything and ready to try "a fall" with any mountain giant available. But the only fall that morning was that of the snow outside and our spirits inside. Even the barometer rose persistently. A peep at dawn from the tiny window

of the hut revealed naught but a dense, whirling snowstorm. This lasted for two whole days.

The cold was, of course, intense, but at first the time did not drag wearily. Everybody possessed musical talent of some kind or other; both chorus and principals, as well as the band, whose instruments consisted of a mouth-organ and a frying-pan, displayed great staying powers and keenness. Various gymnastic feats furnished warmth, and numerous games were invented.

During the third day things grew more serious; the downfall was tremendous, and all around the air seemed filled with the roar of avalanches; the frail structure quivered with the unseen danger. Only once in twenty years had the Bergli Hut been swept away by an avalanche: a one-in-twenty chance seemed to us a fair risk when an attempt to reach Grindelwald would have meant certain extinction.

At last patience was rewarded. On the evening of the third day the storm subsided; we were able to venture outside the hut and grope our way along the snow-piled, yard-wide ledge which served as veranda. The stores of food and firewood were almost exhausted. Thus, after a night of hunger and cold, we were glad to leave our straw beds at three o'clock next morning.

A glance outside the hut disclosed a marvellous sight. The sky overhead was quite clear, but far below, in the dimness of dawn, lay the



lonesome glacier valleys, filled with seething clouds. Later, when the sun tipped their edges with a golden fringe, fleecy fragments seemed to detach themselves from the main mass and rise up like ghostly beings, to fade slowly in the deep grey of the firmament. The nearer world in which we dwelt awhile seemed transformed; the black, frowning crags had vanished. It was a softly beauteous world of great alabaster cones and wondrous domes of whiteness.

Though marvellous to behold, these conditions and the lack of provisions augured ill for the success of our venture. Yet two hours later we were in the thick of the fray, now up to our knees and anon to our waists in powdery drifts above the icy rocks of the Bergli. A cold northerly breeze seemed finally to carry us up with a run to the pass of the Mönch Joch. There shelter was found from the flying snow spiculæ. On the left the Fiescherhorn gleamed gloriously in the clear air; on the right, comparatively close at hand and far overhead, the old storm-shriven Mönch seemed to smile down upon us in utter, icy aloofness. A long streamer of wind-driven snow trailed far away to leeward from his frosty poll; he "smoked his pipe," as the guides say. With defences storm-shielded aloft and frost-embattled below, the chance of conquest seemed simply hopeless. In the midst of these monster Alps mere man feels almost as insignificant as he does at a meeting of suffragettes.

However, there was one weak spot in the icy armour of our peak : the fierce wind had cleared the new snow off the top of the ridge by which the attack must be made. This we saw on closer approach. In short, one of the party was so intent on the upward gaze that we forgot the well-known fact that the dangers of the eternal snows are less obvious than those of the rocks. Truly the man who at such times lifts his eyes to the hills instead of dropping them to his feet must soon find the rope a very present help in time of trouble. In other words, one of us disappeared suddenly into a snow-hidden crevasse. Only an opportune pull on the rope prevented a protracted interview with the interior of the "Everlasting Snowfield," as this great glacier between the Mönch and the Jungfrau is called.

At last the huge brown rocks were close at hand, as well as foot. What mattered the roar of the storm overhead! Up and up we went on the bare crest of the ridge, at times clinging almost lovingly to some engrossing section, where we hung apparently in mid-air on holds of full sufficiency, with prospect wide and wonderfully deep ; or again, struggling keenly with the hidden, inward intricacies of some snow-choked chimney or crack. Then came an exciting moment when the leader dislodged a loose rock to whiz inch-wide of the ear of some one below. Soon the "tail of the rope," in the form of a human tongue, wagged vociferously when under fire a second time. However, such little mishaps

only added enjoyment—especially to those up above and well out of the line of fire.

Ere long the rocks were passed, and high up on the ridge-pole of our peak the gale flung itself upon us. The position was exciting in the extreme. A delicate knife-edge-like ridge of hard, wind-driven snow stretched across about forty yards in length to the icy front of our mountain. We had to make our way along the sharp crest, with the body carefully finding the balance at every step. There was no need to counsel steadiness. The downward prospect of a cloud-filled abyss on either hand beyond either foot sufficiently revealed the results of momentary carelessness. Fortunately, the gale swept quite steadily across from the right, and as I stepped deliberately along the knife-edge in the steps of those ahead it was curious to notice how their bodies leant far over the abyss to windward. It appeared as though a sudden lull in the wind would result in a drop into the nether world for the whole party. Luckily the aerial balancing ended successfully, and a comfortable ledge allowed momentary rest. Here some dry bread and frozen chicken were disposed of, and some sour wine braced us for the work ahead.

Truly it was work indeed, and specially so for Jossi, the leading guide, who for two hours hacked and hewed with his ice-axe at that gale-swept slope. The angle of the ice must have been nearly sixty degrees, and it was a fine sight to see such a master of craft, with perfect balance

and steady swing, carefully cutting each step in the icy staircase. The rest of us shivered with cold. At last, one at a time, we followed upwards, the rope held firmly meanwhile by the man in front.

I well remember my own experience at this point. My ice-axe had lost part of its head in a rocky niche lower down; it was useless, and had to be left behind. Some snow plastered on the ice-buttress gave footing to those in front, but the frail support had almost gone. In the act of stepping across and upward the wind suddenly whirled me off my balance. There was a wild plunge for the foothold; it collapsed, and I toppled over the icy precipice, with uninterrupted views of a vaporous nether world.

Fortunately those above were prepared, and their hold of the trusty rope prevented a quick descent of the 4000-foot face of the Mönch. It was an eerie sensation, but, seizing the rope in both hands, it was possible to assist in my uplifting to the safe steps in the ice-wall. Then, reunited, we went on our way rejoicing. Steps were cut in many an icy bulge, until finally the great tapering tip of our mountain afforded an easy yet dangerous finish. Through the surging mist great eaves of corniced snow were just visible on the right, and overhanging the precipice above the Bergli Hut, now almost four thousand feet below.

A sudden realization of their presence was vouchsafed us. With an ominous grunt the old

Mönch seemed to settle down under our weight ; it was the work of a desperate instant to spring backward to the left to the solid part of our mountain. With a roar the storm hurried us onwards, its shrill shriek as we crawled finally on to the summit arousing sinister memories of great climbers flung to their doom by the collapse of those treacherous cornices.

On the side of the peak facing the Little Scheidegg there was comparative calm, and for a few moments we lingered, tasting the joys of conquest. Below us a fragile ridge of snow dipped over into the vaporous nothingness ; overhead flashed momentary glimpses of blue sky.

Memory involuntarily carried us back to a distant day of sunny summit calm, when peaks a hundred miles away had stood forth clear and bright, and even the far-away "tripperish" turmoil on the Little Scheidegg was fair to see. On that occasion we had drunk in the glorious prospect, and other things from a rucksack bulging with the good things of life. Now, there was neither prospect nor provender. The empty thought made us hurry back over the storm-swept summit. There were only half a dozen raisins and 10,000 feet of mountain between us and Grindelwald.

Down and ever down we went, every nerve alive and every muscle strained in battle with the *tourmente* and the tendency to tread unwarily. Luckily the wind had veered somewhat, and, thanks to much enlargement, the steps in the

dangerous ice-buttress had assumed the dimensions of "Wappin' Old Stairs" ere the last man's turn came to descend the *mauvais pas*.

An hour and a half later we stood on the Mönch Joch, gazing down on the roof of our erstwhile house. A thick pall of clouds filled the valley; lightning flickered weirdly 'midst the swaying masses, and discomfoting sounds of thunder echoed upwards into the heights. Yet now, above and around us venturous mortals was pleasant sunshine. Nevertheless even this had its drawback: the new snow was peeling off the snowy breast of the Mönch—the warmth had roused the avalanche fiend once more. In front of the Bergli Hut we packed up our luggage and discussed the question as to the safety of descending the debris-swept slopes that separated us from the main glacier valley and Grindelwald.

"Is it safe?" we anxiously asked Jossi.

At that very moment the answer came with terrible suddenness from the slopes of the Fiescherhorn. A broad stream of snow crashed in a seething mass down and across the actual route we should have to follow. To be caught by such a relentless foe meant certain destruction. The only reasonable plan was to wait until the cool air of the evening should congeal the upper snows and hold them firm. Thus we tightened our ropes and endured some hours of hungry, patient waiting.

Nothing of any moment had fallen for two

hours, so we decided to trust to Providence and swift legs to carry us through. A few minutes brought us to the edge of the steep slopes ; the maze of crevasses was passed, and downwards we dashed over the furrowed snow-slope.

“Faster! Faster!” shouted our leader as we hurried forwards, slipping, scrambling, stumbling, tumbling, and oft-times glancing nervously backwards and upwards at the overhanging snow-doom.

Nerve-racking, hissing, crashing sounds were heard now and again. But nothing fell in our direction, and after half an hour of extreme excitement we were out of range of the dreaded mountain “artillery.” A long glissade down the steep slopes brought us to level glacier. There we flung ourselves on the snow and moralized as to the safety or otherwise of mountaineering.

Three hours later we were literally wading through the rain-clouds that overhung Grindelwald, and on reaching civilization we found that a terrific thunderstorm and deluge had swept the valley. The mention of sunshine up aloft was received with incredulity, and not for days could the natives realize that the first great climb of the season had been made. Yet the Mönch was ours. His gruff welcome and the savage struggle for supremacy are a pleasant memory. May we meet again!

## CHAPTER IX

### TWO CLUB MEETS IN LAKELAND

“There is a power to bless  
In hillside loneliness,  
In tarns and dreary places.”

FABER

ONCE a year Coniston is crowded. Early November's heralding gleam of winter whiteness crowns the fell tops and greets the climbing clan who foregather in the little Lakeland village. It is the annual meet of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club, three hundred strong, and the most flourishing institution of its kind in Britain.

The resounding tramp of the cragsman's hobnailers and the click of his ice-axe disturb the silence of the little God's acre where Ruskin sleeps. 'Tis strange irony that the great critic's own mountains are overrun by the victims of his misplaced sarcasm—the so-called “greasy pole specialists.”

Few think of this as they gaze around. The lower fell seems almost afire with the golden glow of late autumn, whilst, grey and gloomy by contrast, the lower crags peep overhead per-



suasively. They beckon the cragsman irresistibly, up and up into the sanctuary of encompassing solitudes, to sense the healing silences and feel at one with the things that do not pass away.

Thus, when the strife of speeches and the formalities of feasting are over, there is at least one day for the joy of the mountains. The buttresses and gullies of Doe Crag, only an hour's walk away, absorb all interest. Groups of keen cragsmen trudge up over the windy heath, 'midst the scent of aged heather and the smell of dying bracken, grey crags in front, and the silvery glitter of Coniston Water, deep-mantled in russet and olive glory, far below. But the forward view attracts most attention from these rock enthusiasts with coils of rope round their muscular shoulders and faces set with that "do or die" expression so familiar a sight at the great Alpine centres. It is all an eloquent proof of the popularity of homeland climbing.

And Doe Crag, that magnificent westerly off-shoot of Coniston Old Man, yields opportunities second to none. There are routes to the crest of the crags of all shades of difficulty, more than a score in all; some where convenient ledges afford abundant grip, and others of appalling steepness and smoothness, where little avails for man's upward progress. Only in summer-time are the latter courses fit places for married climbers with responsibilities in life; in fact, in November they are often scarcely feasible.

Adverse changes of weather occur with treacherous suddenness even on our Cumbrian mountains. Sunshine may make life worth living in the highest, truest sense on the great crags in the early morning, but an hour may alter the prospect. A storm of wind and sleet may hurl itself wildly upon the climbers, the rocks turn icy, and every movement become a desperate fight with Fate. Yet an expert party of tried friends may win through, as has been proved over and over again.

A few Novembers ago on Doe Crag, old King Winter played dangerous pranks with several parties. Four of us essayed the conquest of the steepest of the central buttresses, and came off victors by the skin of our teeth—or rather, by the skin of one of the climbers' heads. Much ice and snow masked the rocks, but this was not easily appreciated from below.

It was sunny and warm at the outset, but progress grew slower the higher we climbed. With gloved fingers every ledge had to be cleared of its snowy covering. The interest of the ascent distracted attention from the increasing chilliness, but when we congregated on an exposed ledge below the most dangerous part of the climb, a sudden gust of snow-laden wind assailed us. Under the icy conditions our position seemed precarious. Below, the crags dipped over ominously into the abyss, with the little tarn of Goat's Water nearly five hundred feet lower. Above rose a perpendicular wall of frosted rock fully

a hundred feet high, with, for the most part, only inch-wide excrescences for hand and foot.

It seemed impossible to mount the *mauvais pas* with gloved hands. Thus with bare fingers I wrestled with the difficulties and reached an awkward position about twelve feet above those below. But alas! the fingers slowly began to lose all sensation. It was impossible to don my gloves, for both hands were required to prevent the wind from flinging me off the cliff and into space. Immediate descent was imperative. How this was achieved it is impossible to describe. It seemed like a desperate and hurried slide, until the trusty second climber caught my legs and dragged me down to his side.

During the painful melting moments whilst frozen fingers were thawed, we saw that another party on the next buttress across the deep gully on our left had given up their programme and begun the descent. But confidence, begotten of many experiences of similar conditions, made us feel that we still had the upper hand of our mountain and its wintry defences. One more attempt was permissible.

With fingers encased in gloves, the holds at the beginning proved just sufficient and no more. Upward progress could only be made during the lulls in the storm. A trusty friend below steadied my feet on the sloping, icy ledges, and at a crucial moment offered his head as foothold. The situation demanded instant acceptance. A cry of surprise arose from the human

footstool as my rough hob-nailers came into sudden contact with his tender cranium and found support for an instant only. Yet this was long enough to enable my fingers to grip an ulterior knob of rock as big as a thimble, and thus raise my weight up to a more comfortable ledge.

Then inch by inch I crept, lonely and storm-buffed, up the snowy buttress, the shouts of those nearly eighty feet below becoming gradually inaudible. At last a broad ledge gave standing-room. A jutting rock served as a belaying-pin for the rope, and steadied with this my friend of the damaged head was soon by my side. A slight loss of skin and some precious Irish blood was the only hurt.

Above this the difficulties became less, and we entered the snowy recesses of one of the great gullies that cleave the crag throughout its height.

Somewhat sheltered, we enjoyed some splendid ice and snow climbing equal to anything in the High Alps. With the ice-axe steps were hewn in the final frozen slope. Over four hours of glorious life had been spent on that icy buttress, and purple peaks loomed through the scurrying clouds, whilst a rosy gleam in the west betokened sunset. The rope was untied, and we dashed down the sheltered side of the mountain, the valley gloom rising quickly to meet us. Ere Coniston was reached we tasted the terrors of a black bog on a black night.

. . . . .

A land of still, white, winter solitude ; above, rose 700 feet of frosted precipice ; below, filmy, fleecy clouds hid all the nether world. The grip of the ice king was over all ; the hardy herdwick had sought the valley ; the wild bird of prey was silent, and even the mountain stream had ceased its echoing song.

Such were our New Year's Eve impressions as we stood in Hollow Stones under the northerly front of Scawfell. We were bound for the mid-winter "meet" at Wastdale Head, and the way thither by Deep Ghyll and the upper reaches of Scawfell appealed through its sporting indirectness. The way from Keswick had been followed along the shores of frozen Derwentwater, where venturesome spirits had "starred" successfully. In Borrowdale the valley depths were a fairyland of fragile, feathery frostwork, whilst overhead rose a phalanx of ice-draped cliffs and snowy domes of wondrous whiteness ; and Great End, the bulky northerly bastion of the Scawfell *massif*, stood up, rose flushed with dawn, and took the morning like a veritable Alpine giant.

From Seathwaite, still justifiably famous as the wettest village in Britain despite its Welsh competitors, we had passed over the Sty Head and crossed closely under the snow-filled foot of Skew Ghyll. There a slanting ascent of about three hundred feet had brought us to that wonderful yet practically unknown continuous series of terraces which lead across the north-westerly face of Scawfell Pike. Round innumer-

able snowy buttresses and across a score of ghylls, where huge icicles hung densely pendulous, the way led past the head of Piers Ghyll and thence across the shoulder of Lingmell into Hollow Stones.

As we worked our way carefully up the steep snow-slopes into the foot of Deep Ghyll, with the rope tied on securely, and every step hacked out with a swishing blow of the ice-axe, we compared the work with that in the Alps. Surely Bryon knew nothing of Scawfell when he wrote—

“England, thy beauties are tame and domestic  
To one who has roamed the mountains afar.”

There was nothing tame in the terrific, frost-fretted wall of Scawfell Pinnacle, which now rose vertically above us; the only domestic thing visible was the small cross cut in the rock which marked the place where four ill-fated friends were dashed to death from the face of Scawfell Pinnacle. It has been proved with fearful tragedy that the climbing on Scawfell is as difficult and dangerous as anything in the Great Alps.

This was not forgotten as we struggled to effect a lodgment on the icy boulder which formed the first obstacle in Deep Ghyll. The snow was banked up steeply over the great cave forty feet deep, and care was necessary to prevent a sudden collapse through the fragile bridge.

But now the difficulty was short. A long step up with the right leg, and the gloves gripped an icy ledge securely as the body was lifted up over the edge. A long, steep slope of hard snow,



A NEW YEAR'S EVE SCENE IN BORROWDALE





where every step had to be cut with the ice-axe, led up to the second pitch. The big boulders which block the Ghyll from side to side here were only partially snow-masked. The usual way up on the left was one sheet of blue-black ice. It looked uninviting.

Thus we pushed a way through the snow-screen into the upper cave, whence we knew a "through route" was available in the summer-time. It would afford an easy, tunnel-like way up through the maze of boulders, and into the higher recesses of the Ghyll.

But now the hole seemed undiscoverable. The leader struggled up into the roof of the cave, peppering those below with little avalanches as he cleared off the drifted snow. The monotony of being covered almost up to the neck in powdery snow was varied when lumps of ice were detached and scattered downwards. The patience of those below was at last exhausted; the leader was dragged out of the hole like a fighting terrier. The "through route" was voted abominable, so we turned our attention to the left-hand side of the obstacle quite close to the big boulder.

This consisted of a smooth, overhanging rock wall glazed with blue-black ice. The height of the real difficulty might be compared with that of an elephant; and its bulging front bore a curious resemblance to that animal's broad-side. To effect a lodgment on the "bulge" overhead seemed impossible; there are no ladders in Deep Ghyll. Yet it was found that

a human one could be improvised by the second climber standing high up on the snow-slope and leaning against the icy wall. Then the leader mounted on his shoulders. By means of the ice-axe the grooves in the confronting bulge were quickly enlarged to support the feet, and thus stay the flow of language which rose from the down-trodden "footstool."

Once launched on that icy wall, extreme care was required. Each step had to be hewn out carefully with the ice-axe swung in one hand, whilst the fingers of the other found precarious support on some icy excrescences. Fortunately, there was perfect calm. A slight breeze would have disturbed the fine balance. At last the angle became easier, and a firm resting-place was reached on the frozen, upper snow, whence the others could be steadied up on the rope. Counsel for careful movement was scarcely necessary. One glance into the depths over that frozen bulge was enough, we had no desire to test the hopeless terrors of that icy slope. Memories of young Alec. Goodall's fatal New Year slide of a former holiday recurred none too pleasantly.

Slowly and surely we mounted up the icy staircase which our leader now cut in the steep bed of the gully. The tremendous, frosted walls rose grim and austere on either hand. Daylight was waning. Night crept up gloomy and grey from the valley depths, but for one instant we touched the last crimson tinge of sunset as it

flashed across the loftiest snows. Crash went the final snow-cornice under the lusty blows of the leader's axe, and we crept out of the dark abyss into the summit glory.

A northerly breeze swept over the crest of the crags ; thus the chill air and the gathering darkness made us hurry away. There was just time to glance across the icicle-hung cliffs silhouetted weirdly against the gloomy valley depths ; to notice all the old mountain friends far and near clad in their winter garments, but now grey and gloomy. Great, snow-festooned rocks loomed through the twilight, some of them resembling monstrous animals or birds of prehistoric contour, but always uniquely beautiful. The descent was made by the long slopes above Burnmoor Tarn, and Wastdale Head reached in darkness after many adventures in woods as well as rivers.

Yet these wanderings were soon forgotten as we entered the straggling white-washed inn, famous the world over for its climbing associations. Boots, bulky, and weirdly nailed, littered the snowy floor ; seating space was mostly filled with rucksacks, ropes, and ice-axes, whilst ski filled the corners. But there was warm welcome from many a mountain friend, and surely it was a strange cosmopolitan crowd which greeted us. There were men who have conquered all the Alpine giants, subdued the frosty Caucasus, or broken records on the lofty Himalayas, all gathered together pleasantly with humbler lovers of the heights.

In midwinter the Cumbrian crags possess dangers and difficulties that may repulse the hardest and most-skilled experts. It has been proved that a man may hold the world's record for almost the highest ascent in the world and fail to climb the crack on the Gable Needle.

Thus, as the latest parties strolled into the inn, their faces reflecting, as it were, the ruddy glow lately departed from Great Gable's snowy cone, one realized that the famous routes where summer cragsmen scramble, had now become almost impossible. The Stomach Traverse on the Pillar's northerly face was said to be too full of frozen snow to accommodate its appointed portion of the human anatomy. The Broad Stand on Scawfell was a huge bulge of ice, too narrow a "stand" for a single climbing foot. Slingsby's Chimney remained unswept except by tiny avalanches which the north wind stirred merrily. Then the evening of healthful conviviality was over, and, though stories of lofty endeavour and adventure continued until the early morning hours, next day's dawn saw numerous parties ready for the fray.

With the New Year came a softness in the air. Grey, damp clouds hid the peaks, and at last the icy ridges of Great Gable might prove attainable. There were stories of a young expert who reached the tip of the Needle the previous day, but refused to allow the second climber to join him. When, as on this occasion, there is only a rounded bulge of ice to sit upon, the rope might

not prove a very present help in time of trouble. Should the second man slip the leader would assuredly be whisked off into space along with him.

However, with thoughts of an ascent of the Arrowhead Ridge in mind, we trudged up to the Sty Head and along the snowy front of Great Gable. Mist-wreaths gathered in the valley depths, and the many peaks of Scawfell peeped forth at intervals from amidst the cloudy vapour. The thaw had come. Now and again we plunged thigh deep in the softening snow. Up and up lay the way, steeper and steeper amongst the great grey crags all draped in the white, wintry mantle. Firm footing was found on the almost vertical snow-wreaths, but more frequently icy slopes called for the use of the ice-axes to carve out foot or even hand hold in frozen perpendicularity.

At last a great bulge of black rock rose into misty visibility far overhead. It was the foot of the Eagle's Nest Ridge, one of the most notorious climbs in Britain, and a place of tragic memory. It was upon our very standing-place that young Rennison fell in 1909 when attempting to climb the overhanging bulge of rock only about thirty feet above.

A wide snow gully soon brought us to the foot of the Arrowhead Ridge ; its curious tip towering icily through the mist made it unmistakable. The way lay up the narrow front of the ridge. Thoughtful companions took one's rucksack and ice-axe, for the leader must climb light up such places, especially when every ledge, large and

small, is masked with snow and ice. Fortunately the thaw made the clearance of hand and foot holds possible. Gloves were impossible on the small holds, and the damp cold was intense.

Frequently numbed fingers failed to grip, and one stood on the narrowest of ledges leaning precariously against the huge, vertical wall with half-frozen fingers plunged into one's pockets in search of that warmth which is life on such occasions. Then broader resting-places allowed anxious companions to join one on the knife-edge crest of the ridge, with vaporous nothingness on either hand, and black rocks dipping underfoot into space. A sudden clearance of mist showed our footsteps in the snow hundreds of feet below.

Now came the crux of the climb up to the snowy tip of the Arrowhead. It was almost vertical, and the main supports were holds scarce bigger than a thimble, but luckily too small to hold much snow. There was one exciting moment. Clinging desperately to every slight roughness, and thoughtless of everything else in the whole world, one was suddenly thrilled by evil news from twenty feet below. An anxious voice called up through the mist that the third man on the rope was attacked with faintness. For a moment there were thoughts of being dragged down into the abyss. But a trusty second was able to support and revive the lapsing one. "All right!" came the cheering cry, and thus relieved of the weight of grim possibility, one was able to climb quickly up the final difficulty.

There was still, however, an hour of fascinating climbing along the less vertical crest of the narrow ridge, where ice and snow made every movement an adventure. In waning daylight the summit was gained. Then the rope was untied, and with a boisterous rush we plunged down the snow-slopes into the darkening depths of Hell Gate.

In two hours' time the lights of Wastdale gave pleasant greeting, and later by the midnight fire the days' battles on many a towering height were fought o'er again with keen delight.

Truly these are glorious winter days on our English crags. Fortunate are those who realize there is winter sport mountaineering at home unsurpassed in the whole world.

Finally, in connexion with winter climbing in Lakeland a few practical remarks may not be misplaced.

Only ten years ago it was a rare event to encounter any mountain wanderer when the district lay under snow and ice. Scarcely ever were more than half a dozen enthusiasts to be met at Wastdale during the Christmas and New Year holidays. Now this is all changed, and with so many parties on the mountains there is sometimes a lack of suitable winter expeditions. The ascent of Skew Ghyll and Cust's Gully on Great End is still as favoured a course as it was in the earliest days. In the case of a large party the short hours of daylight may no more than suffice. If, instead of Cust's Gully the

Great Gully is climbed, the summit is seldom reached before dusk if the conditions are at all in their normally severe state.

The great pitch in the middle part of the gully usually requires considerable time for its ascent. It is generally best climbed by making for the right-hand main branch of the gully. In this section only a long snow-slope remains to be climbed above the pitch, but on the crest of this branch of the gully there are frequently the finest snow-cornices which the district can show.

A longer and more interesting way up the higher part of the gully avoids the big central pitch. This route keeps away to the left up a broad, icy wall, and then up a series of steep rifts which lead in three distinct rises to the broader summit outlet.

The neighbouring gully—the South-East—gives, under real winter conditions, an easier climb. The almost continuous narrowness of the rift calls for less knowledge of snow craft, for the rock walls assist largely in the ascent. Where the gully forks the right-hand branch should nowadays be followed.

With the exception of Deep Ghyll the gullies on Scawfell are not usually suitable for attack when they are choked with snow and ice. It took the earlier climbers some time to realize that, not only here but elsewhere in Cumberland, real rock-climbing is not advisable under such conditions.

The narrow escape of the late O. G. Jones in



Moss Ghyll made this plain, although the fact that he was attempting the ascent alone might seem a contributory danger. After overcoming serious difficulties the famous pioneer had reached the boulders on a level with the Collie Step. He was just stepping out across the icy wall when he slipped and fell about twenty feet on to the steep snow, which shot him downwards at frightful speed. Fortunately, with characteristic prudence, he had previously tied the length of rope round a rock under the great boulders. This held and saved his life. After his second fall, that in the C. Gully on the Screes, Jones used to say jokingly that he "had three lives." Alas! the third fall proved his last.

Another snow expedition which scarcely receives the attention it deserves is that up the Central Gully on Gable Crag. One has recollections of so many exciting days spent in its snowy recesses as to urge the opinion that under full winter conditions it is the best course of its kind in Lakeland. Both the lower pitches are surmountable direct, but each of them has a simpler alternative on the left.

With much ice in the gully, the Direct Finish would seem impossible, and on such occasions it makes a pleasant variation to traverse off to the right along a lofty ledge to a narrow gully just above the well-known Smuggler's Retreat. The finish thence to the summit is easy.

The Pillar offers few tempting opportunities in snowtime. In fact, when the famous Rock stands

up like a great white ghost, its appearance will scare off most thoughtful parties. It is then a really long expedition to make the snowy traverse along the High Level and thence across the broad Shamrock Ledge to the east side of the Rock. The Easy Route may prove almost impossible in the time available, but the ascent, if achieved, provides a splendid finish to a delightful winter's day on the mountains.

## CHAPTER X

### A NEW CLIMB UP THE PILLAR ROCK

“ He revels in the sheer ascent,  
And finds new world for wonderment  
In every grim recess ;  
Sure foot to grip the perilous ledge,  
Strong hand to grasp the rough glad edge  
Of each unconquered spire.”

G. W. YOUNG

THE sun was sinking into an ocean bed of saffron splendour as we emerged from the sombre greyness of the eastward combe into the sunset glory on High Stile's lofty crest. It was a perfect evening in June. The Pillar, always a magnificent mass of crinkled crags and frowning precipice when showing its northern frontage, now seemed overpoweringly grand. Above, all was purple and gold ; below, Ennerdale's greyness still held a misty crimsoned gleam.

That wondrous night stillness, so strangely soothing when men and mountains are close befriended, was fast o'erspreading the heights ; at longer intervals arose in soft cadences the music of the mountain streams, that chorus of many waters which Cumbria's wildest yet most

tuneful dale pours forth perpetually. It seemed almost sacrilege to stir the lofty peace with thought of crags and their conquest. Yet across the valley the last, long glint of the sun's slanting rays was revealing that curious structure of the Pillar's northerly face most alluringly.

The great Rock, usually from this side one huge, grey slice of crag, was now sun-carved into the semblance of a tremendous organ front. Two great pipes, as it were, bordered the dark rift of Walker's Gully, and between them a thin purple cleft sprang summitwards through the slabs where all before had seemed a smooth, holdless frontage. That lofty north-north-easterly wall to the right of Walker's Gully was practically the only portion of the Pillar Rock untrodden by human foot. Would that straight-cut cleft yield yet another route up the famous Rock?

The point was discussed on the valleyward way, but not for nearly a year was there an opportunity of putting the theory to a practical test. Meanwhile others had heard rumours of this curious break in the great slabs, and the failure of a famous party of experts to reach it from below probably led to the delay in our attempt. There did not seem much promise of success. However, realizing the paradox that the climber who gets to the bottom of things is likely to come out on top, we decided to inspect the problem at close quarters.

My brother and I had spent several strenuous

days at Wastdale with some old friends, and the off-day favoured by our companions seemed a suitable occasion for settling the question of the possibility of a new climb, at least so far as we were concerned.

The Easter of 1912 had been wet and stormy ; but ten days later the floods both of men and moisture had departed, and Wastdale was at rest with its lambs and larches proclaiming the arrival of warm spring sunshine. The heralding breath of summer had even pervaded the loftiest heights, and only the deepest gullies held memories of winter's stormy grasp.

On our way Pillar-wards there were many signs of the unusual drought in the dale. The kingfishers flashed over the shady and shallow pools below Mosedale, where a few weeks earlier the herons had haunted the full-throated torrent. Higher up, the brown heath and parched grasses crackled under the heavy tread, and the rich, good smell of mountain earth pervaded the peaty hollows under "the hills where the wind has a scent of sunbeams."

Then far below lay the valley with its spring-time sheen and chorus of feathered songsters, and we strode along into the craggy shades of the Pillar's northerly front with the harsh cries of the breeding buzzards echoing in the depths of Green Cove. Soon the great Rock greeted us, and the pleasures of springtime were at once forgotten in the discussion of practical matters.

Seen from below, the Shamrock, the huge

confronting slab, which rose far overhead and formed the north-north-east supporting wall of this side of the Rock, seemed almost ledgeless. It was easy to understand how climbers had missed this façade in their search for new routes. The place looked impossible. Yet to the knowing eye the presence of the curious cleft by which one must mount was revealed. A great black stain, left by ages of dripping water, ran vertically down the big slab, but at one point it was not continuous. Its course was broken sharply, and from below it was just possible to detect a rift slanting up and across the face of the precipice. This crack could, by the eye of faith, be traced down for over a hundred feet to a projecting grassy ledge. To reach this latter base was the problem. Its difficulties or impossibilities were not revealed until an attempt was made to climb to it from directly below.

Certainly at this point the old Rock held out no handhold of welcome, and after many precarious poisings on steeply slanting ledges we ascended a short distance in the bed of Savage Gully by the usual route up the first part of the well-known North Climb. The gully might well be considered the dividing line between the north and north-east faces of the Rock. Up the latter must lie our way for fully 500 feet to the summit, with the great cleft of Walker's Gully on the left dividing the Pillar Rock from the Shamrock.

About twenty feet above the curious boulder which bridges Savage Gully and affords a

“through route” to weedy enthusiasts, a curious series of ledges were noticed leading round a perpendicular buttress on the left. Now or not at all was to be found the place to attack the north-east wall. Forty feet above this starting place was the rough recess upon which two young climbers were dashed to death from far overhead.

But despite the ominous markings which were still visible upon the rocks, these tragic memories were soon forgotten in the exhilaration of rude mountain health, and in the arrangements of a plan of attack. As we tied on the opposite ends of a trusty 100-foot rope a certain precautionary resolve was made. This was that no section must be climbed that could not be descended again in safety should proved inaccessibility be the only outcome of the attempt. How this resolve was carried out will shortly be revealed.

There was a fascinating feeling of strange adventure as one balanced delicately around that ledge, entering upon a part of Britain hitherto unknown to human foot or ken. Then came a cautious step across into a tiny recess where one posed like a statue in a niche. No camera was available on this occasion to perpetuate the picture, and serious matters ahead demanded every effort. A short rock chimney, 20 feet in height, was overcome, and at its crest there was more room to breathe deeply.

My companion was now out of sight in the depths of Savage Gully, but before he could follow it was advisable to discover a jutting rock

or "belay" round which the rope could be manipulated during his ascent. A higher ledge suggested the presence of this safeguard. But on arrival naught but round, downward-sloping slabs greeted me. A few feet more of perpendicularity coaxed me upwards to a yet more favourable but still most deceptive stance. The climbing became more difficult, and eventually smooth, impending crags rendered farther upward movement utterly hopeless. Our only chance lay along a desperate ledge to the left. Sixty feet of rope separated us; there was a strange feeling of loneliness as I clung to the great cliff like a fly on a wall. Fortunately some security for the rope protruded close at hand.

"You may come carefully," was the reply to my brother's concerned question as to my welfare. In due course we proved, even on the edge of nothing, that "two's company"; a third would have been utterly and literally out of place on that tiny ledge.

The way to the left was discussed at length. Descent was mooted, but not approved; neither of us desired to test its practicability. It was an eerie situation, yet there lingers in vivid memory that wonderful view down 1000 feet of shattered, rocky wilderness to the lonely valley of Ennerdale. Mountain gloom was our environment, but far below, on slopes bathed in brilliant sunlight, the shadow of our peak was cast in shapely profile.

However, more practical matters now obtruded—or, at least, thus did an awkward piece



of the Pillar into the front of my anatomy. To pass across the projecting corner was distinctly unpleasant. Once round this a deeply recessed crack afforded splendid handhold, though the support was scarcely reassuring, because it was simply a great flake of rock resting against the vertical wall. It certainly served excellently for the occasion, but doubtless its disintegration is only a matter of time.

The foothold for the passage was dangerously sloping, and before the crossing was finally made the nailed boots had been discarded. With stockinged feet the tiniest roughnesses could be felt and, as it were, almost grasped. After the hands left the friendly crack, there was a short but thrilling lift into a small recess. The handhold was just scanty enough to make one remember, during an instant of fierce endeavour, the domestic responsibilities of the far-away world of ordinary life.

Then came an absolutely vertical projecting buttress of rock to be rounded. It was straight cut and curiously smooth, but a fairly continuous turfey ledge about four inches wide served for foothold as long as one could preserve the position of absolute perpendicularity in closest contact with the rock. There was practically no handhold, and to raise the arms above a low level meant a backward collapse. The position was strongly reminiscent of the ascent and reversing traverse on the mantelshelf in the Wastdale billiard-room. But here there were no delighted spectators to

mollify collapse, and misplaced balance would have meant misplaced trust in Providence, for there was naught but thin air between that Pillar mantelshelf and Savage Gully 200 feet below.

Inch by inch one balanced delicately and deliberately to the left round the giddy verge, feeling meanwhile that in one's birthday clothes there would have been greater safety. Even the projection of waistcoat buttons increased the backward-toppling tendency. It was a place where an abnormally large nose might prove a handicap.

However, once round the corner the left hand could be raised to grip a truly comforting ledge, and the worst was over. Only a milder projection remained to be rounded, and a broad grass terrace was gained. In due course, after slinging our boots across on the full rope-length, my brother arrived on my resting-place. Strange to say, we felt little elation. The passage had certainly been made successfully, but such had been the difficulties and dangers of the crossing that, unless a better way could be found, the new climb would never prove of practical popular utility. During the short halt some topographical notes were made in case the upper part proved more justifiable.

Then we mounted over easy ground for a yard or two. A sudden peep round the corner ahead revealed a surprising and wonderful sight. Where we had expected to fight for every inch of progress, a remarkable slanting groove promised a veritable highway to the height of our ambition.

There is no place on any British crag to surpass, and few to equal, that astonishing corner on the Pillar Rock. This we agreed as we climbed up "the narrows" of the groove. On the right the most impressive vertical slab in Lakeland rose stupendously smooth overhead, as though cleft by some titanic axe; on the left a peep over the edge revealed the recesses of Walker's Gully in all its savage grandeur.

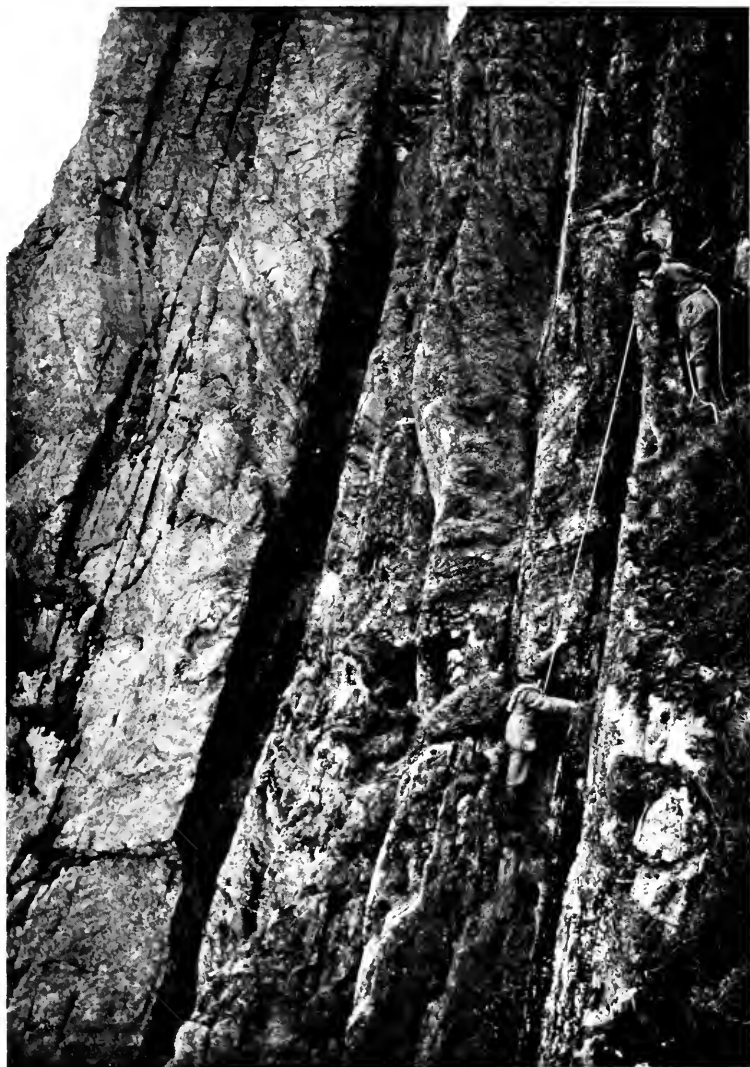
Only those who visit the North-East Climb can realize the magnificence of this gigantic gorge, so hidden is it 'midst unapproachable surroundings. It was strange to think that until now human eyes had never really seen Walker's Gully. Its first ascent had given one of us the most desperate pioneer climb of a lifetime. Its difficulties have not abated, for quite 200 feet of rope had been left on its overhanging bulwarks by those who have fruitlessly, if not injudiciously, attempted the climb.

The ascent of the groove in the great wall offered no extreme difficulty, though the place was smooth enough to remind one that only the smallest of footholds hindered a few yards' downward slide and then a fearful flight into space. To the climber in its recesses the groove seemed to end over Ennerdale 1000 feet below. However, record descents were not desired, and slowly but surely we wriggled up the crack to its very crest. A small ledge was available, just big enough for two if we held on by each other.

Now came one of the most temptingly trying parts of the day's work. Only 25 feet overhead, comparatively easy ground was recognized—so near and yet so far. The separating rock face was absolutely vertical, and covered with a curious smooth moss which hid every vestige of support for hand and foot. Behind and below lay the gloomy depths of Walker's Gully; a slip on the leader's part would be his last. Yet the place had to be surmounted or the night spent on a rocky bed.

After a couple of fruitless attempts, tiny ledges began to be disclosed, and at last a handhold as big as an egg-cup was discovered half-way up. We rose from the "Slough of Despond to the Happy Heights of Hope." The next attempt was successful. What mattered it that, in the heat of the moment, for one wild instant one's weight depended solely on a quivering turf ledge? Solid support for trusty fingers was soon grasped, and the upward pull to safety achieved. Other hidden ledges were unearthed by my brother during his ascent, whilst I held him with the rope. Those who follow in our footsteps will scarcely realize our pioneer troubles on that 25-foot wall, the final key to success.

A broad, grassy ledge was now available, and several ways might have been made straight ahead. However, a little chimney on the right, which is that used by the leader in circumventing the "nose" on the ordinary North Climb, gave us the quickest route because of its familiarity.



ON THE NORTH-EAST CLIMB UP THE PILLAR ROCK  
THE 25-FOOT WALL WITH WALKER'S GULY BEHIND



The way then lay up the much be-wrinkled face of the grand old Rock. Soon, hand over hand, we mounted, as it were, up the Pillar's nose, and then on to the backward-sloping brow, all tufted with a coarse, curly fringe of grass and scented juniper.

A straight-cut, vertical chimney cleaving the shapely summit tower straight ahead lured us upwards. Progress was now swift and sure, and luckily so, for the gloom of twilight stole up behind us from the savage depths of the dale. The conspicuous chimney proved interesting enough, but with a lusty brother jammed securely in its foot to act as fieldsman should skyward progress be reversed, there was little cause for delay.

Then suddenly, as we clung to the lofty summit ridge, the clouds broke in a glimmer of golden splendour to seaward, and the lake of Ennerdale flashed below. The pale, storm-bleached topmost crags were flooded with a wondrous crimson gleam, and the inspiring sight urged us on with renewed energy—"up out of dwindling light to light aglow."

It was the last throb of departing day, and night fell as at last we hurried over the familiar summit. Every hand and foot hold was now an old friend. This familiarity was much appreciated, for in darkness even the easiest ordinary way down the Pillar Rock may prove quicker than desired should a false step be made. However, the descent was completed without event,

and three hours later we were back in the valley again answering the inquiries of anxious friends.

There were disturbing dreams that night of that eerie crossing above Savage Gully, and unpleasant doubts arose. Had we discovered the easiest route? That point must be settled unmistakably. Thus the very next morning we set forth again for the north-east side of the Pillar Rock, and with us came two old friends, the well-known Alpine experts, Messrs. A. E. Field and H. C. Bowen.

At the outset from Savage Gully the route of the previous day was followed as far as the ledge at the top of the 20-foot chimney which rose above the niche. At this point, instead of climbing directly upwards as far as possible, and then making the desperate traverse almost horizontally across the face to the left, a gradual sloping ascent was made to the left and up to a prominent grass-crowned projection on the easterly edge of the cliff. The beginning of this latter movement was deceptively awkward. One had first of all to descend into a steeply sloping groove on the left, and the handholds for the lowering were not easily utilized. Some shaly turf ledges which served for foothold disappeared after or during the arrival of the last man.

Once in the groove, the upward slanting traverse was nothing more than exhilarating, though the position was decidedly sensational. Below the grass-crowned projection a prominent



cairn was built, and then a narrow chimney led directly up for about forty feet. There the end of the previous day's traverse could be joined just round the last vertical leaf of rock. From that point the original way was practically followed to the summit.

It cannot be said that the new North-East Climb has yet achieved the popularity it deserves. The presence of the easier route is not generally known, and its attractions scarcely realized. Yet, comparatively speaking, the difficulty is little greater than that of the ordinary North Climb. The two most trying sections are met with during the departure from Savage Gully and on the upper 20-foot wall which overhangs Walker's Gully. Now that much of the vegetation has been cleared away, the new climb yields a delightful course, the chief merits of which are the surprising situations and the wonderful views of a hitherto unknown portion of the most romantic and grandest rock in Britain.

## CHAPTER XI

### A MIST ADVENTURE IN SKYE

“From the lone sheiling and the misty island,  
Mountains divide us and a world of seas,  
But still our hearts are true, our hearts are Highland,  
And in our dreams we see the Hebrides.”

**M**IST, nothing but mist, white and impenetrable! The only solid bit of visible world to which one clung was a few vertical feet of Sgurr nan Gillean, the grandest of the Coolin, those wonderful mountains away up north athwart the Hebrides. A thousand feet of perpendicularity lay below. This much we knew after hours of fierce fight with the force of gravitation. Above, all was unknown, a mist-wreathed mystery; yet somewhere ahead the narrow rock-ridge to which we clung must end near the well-known, shapely, summit spire.

Upward again we mounted, no sound but that of human exertion breaking the stillness of the mist-hidden abysses. At last the sharp nose of the ridge, a granite highway, gave way to shattered rocks and consequently less certainty of the route.

Half an hour later we seemed hopelessly lost.

An impending bulge of unassailable precipice had unexpectedly overshadowed us, and reference to the compass only showed that the much-sought summit was somewhere behind and below, whence we had come. Fortunately we remembered the magnetic nature of the rocks on the upper part of Sgurr nan Gillean ; the compass was voted a faithless friend, and discarded.

Then a long passage to the left soon rose upwards into the steep intricacies of a huge crack in the façade of the peak. We were probably somewhere on the easterly face of the top of Sgurr nan Gillean. The fact that we were far off the usual route was obvious by the number of loose rocks which hung poised on almost every ledge. The chimney in which we dallied certainly needed sweeping very badly.

Treacherously loose holds were encountered, and as we climbed up the rift, with the back on one side and feet or knees on the other, extreme care was used at every moment. Despite this, one of the party was unfortunate or clumsy enough to detach a splinter as big as a basin, and this crashed down upon the unlucky last man on the rope with startling suddenness.

To us above escape seemed impossible. We clung on to the rope desperately. This instinctive clutching at the life-line saved the situation, and our lives also ; for just as the stone seemed to strike our friend's head, he grasped our safe situation and flung himself backwards in mid-air. It was a striking exhibition of pluck and presence

of mind. The attacking mass whizzed downwards between his legs; it did not even leave a torn garment as memento.

Instantly the mountain far below resounded with flying fragments, but the fog robbed us of a sight of the "junior" avalanche. Unpleasant personalities were rife for the moment, but there was sudden calm when some one pointed out that the mist was vanishing visibly. This proved to be so, and our troubles vanished with it. Five minutes later we scrambled up into bright sunshine only a few yards away from the summit cairn.

The day was yet young, so we basked lazily in the fitful sunshine. Behind us the northerly pinnacles peeped pertly out of the low-lying mist which rolled aside intermittently and showed the tiny white speck of the Sligachan Hotel set solitary amidst the sombre moors. In front circled the jagged main ridge of the Coolin, with peaks grotesque and grand in form gleaming silver-edged where the sun's rays caught the profiled edge of their huge, slabby glacis. Now and again ragged clouds surged upward from the western corries, their wild outpourings but accentuating the soft, peaceful beauty of the distant sea, where light cloud shadows chased each other amidst the far-off Hebrides.

The wondrous translucence of the air, which revealed the blue dome of Ben Nevis rising stately above the remoter peaks of Glencoe, and grey gathering vapours low down on the westerly

horizon, might have warned us of on-coming storm.

Yet the keen ardour of the enthusiast proved too infectious. We had with us a companion six feet and nearly as many inches in height, and he was specially anxious to show us how to climb the difficult Deep Chimney which rises to near the top of Sgurr nan Gillean on its north-westerly side. As an engineer he had many ideas for the improvement of climbing methods from a mechanical point of view. For instance, on this occasion he wore a pair of special mountain boots which were shod with a plate of soft steel, out of which certain projections had been punched and pressed to take the place of nails. The way in which he was able to walk up slabs where we had perforce to crawl cautiously proved surprising.

All of us were anxious to try the new substitute for nailed soles in special chimney work. The result proved remarkably satisfactory, and the idea undoubtedly would have become well known. Unfortunately within a few months' time our original and enthusiastic friend met with a fatal accident. The novel idea of indestructible boot-soles and the other advantages they offer is mentioned here in case others may follow up the improvement.

In order to gain the foot of the Deep Chimney we clambered downwards on the crest of the West Ridge. The weather seemed to be steadily improving, and our spirits rose in unison with the vaporous masses that kept rising from the gloomy

den of Coruisk to vanish in the ethereal blue overhead. The most wonderful part of the West Ridge, thin, fragile, and so airily poised as to vibrate ominously during the crossing, was still guarded by the famous Gendarme or "Policeman." Years ago we had prophesied his early disappearance into the depths of Lota Corrie. Despite the fearsome gales that so frequently sway the rickety structure, there seemed to be no alteration.

Thus I advanced cautiously along the sensational narrow edge, and after some careful balancing was able to grasp the "man-in-charge" affectionately round the neck. Then with a knee thrust abruptly into his lower regions it was a somewhat easy matter to swing around him on the right until an outstretched foot could eventually gain support on the farther continuation of the ridge. Close at hand, or rather foot, was now seen the easy chimney leading down to the screes above Bhas-tier Corrie and thence across to the foot of our proposed variation.

Yet, capacious as seemed the ledges for hand and foot in the vicinity of our downward way, the place had already achieved a tragic history. Not long ago two climbers were scrambling up to the crest of the West Ridge. They were unroped, probably because of their lack of knowledge of each other and of the difficulties of the upper part. They had reached a height of about sixty feet above the foot of the steeper rocks, and at this point Alexander Whincup went in advance of his companion. Then he disap-



HOW TO CLIMB ROCKS SAFELY  
THE SECOND CLIMBER HAS THE ROPE "BELAYED" ROUND A PROJECTING ROCK,  
IN CASE THE LEADER SHOULD FALL





peared towards the right round a steep buttress. Directly after his disappearance he called to his companion to come and assist him in finding support for one of his feet. The lower climber was just about to advance to the rescue when he was startled by a loud shriek. Suddenly his friend appeared in mid-air. He fell clear of the cliff and crashed with such violence on the scree ledge 60 feet below that he was hurled over the edge of the lower crags and on to the great slope nearly two hundred feet lower.

Alexander Whincup was obviously beyond human aid, but his companion made all speed down to Sligachan. With commendable promptitude a party of six climbers, including a doctor who happened to be staying at the hotel, set out that same evening. They did all that was possible under the circumstances. Appearances would seem to have indicated that the ill-fated scrambler had been seized by a fit, and that this led to the fatality.

It is only fair to state that this constitutional tendency was unknown to the other member of the party; doubtless, had this been known the rope would have been worn, and the more skilful member of the party would have undertaken the leader's part. The fatality was a vivid example of the danger of climbing with chance acquaintances, and of the unwisdom of visiting the crags during ill-health.

Ere that day of cloudy grandeur on Sgurr nan Gillean was over we had reason to be thankful

that all in our party were well-trying friends and sound of physique withal. The Deep Chimney justified its name, for so deeply was it cut in the face of the mountain that for over an hour we saw little of the outside world.

In that time the weather had changed for the worse, and during the last more stirring adventure in the upper part the scurrying clouds closed down upon us. I have reason to remember the place. Our lengthy companion was leading, and the broad width between the two parallel walls of the chimney at this point afforded him every chance of an easy ascent by wedging upwards with his back on one side and his steel-shod feet on the other.

I was emulating his example with more or less uncomfortable success, but when the rocks at the widest part of the chimney became slippery with moisture the downrush of the storm tempted me to hurry. The rope was held by the leader, but the truth of "more haste less speed" was soon evidenced. My head suddenly adopted a lower position than the rest of my body. The finish was made in an attitude which caused the jovial leader to remember the story of the fervent young curate who was delivering an address on the dignity of the Church. "My friends," he said, "let us think of old Mother Church standing with one foot planted on a rock and the other pointing to heaven!"

Then with equilibrium restored we worked our way up the dripping recesses of the final great

chimney, at one time through narrow holes amongst jammed boulders, great and small, at another out over the airily projecting edge of some crowning chockstone. The plan was, perforce, to follow the rope which indicated the route taken by the man in front, and the leader, with characteristic energy, always seemed to prefer the dampest and dirtiest inner recesses.

Yet, after all, this getting away from the spotless, irreproachable tidiness and cleanliness of everyday life is one of the joys of mountaineering. The average healthy-minded man of modern civilization finds keen pleasure in "getting dirty," and this was one of the insidious attractions of the early motoring days. To the mountain enthusiast a struggle up a wet, muddy gully is looked upon as a really festal occasion. For many the tendency is a difficult matter to understand or explain; perchance it appeals to some deeply innate connexion with those days of early origin when primitive man loved to roll in the mud.

However, about three hundred feet from the foot of the climb a way of escape from the depths of the chimney was revealed on the left. This would allow quicker progress, for now the gathering gloom proved rather disturbing to the enjoyment of the climb. Time had passed all too quickly. Thus we hurried up in dense, whirling vapour towards the summit, tending as we thought to the right to reach the West Ridge. We learnt later that the better plan would have

been to have continued upwards in the somewhat indefinite bed of the chimney, which would have brought us unmistakably to the crest of the ridge.

And now what a tremendous change had taken place on those summit rocks. Sunshine and warmth had vanished utterly. The wind swept in a circle round and round the mountain. As a guide its varying direction was useless. We now decided to make for the so-called easy way down the Sgurr by its East Ridge. The mist grew thicker and damper than ever. During the upward fight there was plenty of time to realize one of the advantages of the rock-climber; though he may obtain practically no view he finds full and sufficient interest in the actual conquest of the crags. Engrossing as was the finding of the way, and the keen outlook for the slightest landmark, or rather rockmark, that would indicate our whereabouts, the real strife of the day was yet to come.

The wind whistled louder than ever round what we at last judged, probably mistakenly, to be the top of the peak, and a driving ice-cold rain came in fitful gusts and chilled us to the bone.

It was impossible to linger long to settle arguments regarding our whereabouts. As a last resort we sought enlightenment from the compass. Its vagaries on certain parts of the peak were well known. They had already been illustrated earlier in the day, but two or three readings seemed to confirm the general opinion that we were heading for the direction of the East

Ridge. Alas! the magnetic nature of the rocks must have utterly deceived us, for the tiny needle would have led us up again summitwards. Downward not upwards must be the way, and the compass was now dismissed summarily.

The forcing of the valleyward way had become imperative at all costs. Somehow or other we must have turned south instead of north. It is well to draw the veil over our troubles on that great face above Lota Corrie.

Darkness fell when we were continuing the descent, literally feeling our way down the storm-swept precipice. At last we arrived at the edge of nothing; a small torrent gurgled below, and one of the party recognized the place where an undercut cliff dipped over to the open mountain-side. He proved to be right.

The 100-foot rope was brought into use, and one at a time the others were lowered through black space down to safety. For my part, as last man, the doubled rope was used around a convenient outstanding rock. There was an eerie sensation of loneliness as down I went into the darkness of Erebus, kicking and struggling wildly to find support on the adjacent rocks. Finally it was a case of dangling in mid-air until those below clutched my feet. Then the length of rope suddenly jammed; there was a spasmodic jerk, and hurriedly I took my seat in parliamentary fashion on those below. But the oaths came from the others.

The storm shrieked louder than ever in the

wild crags overhead, as though disappointed of its prey. We were now on the rough but easier slopes above Lota Corrie, and, temper-trying as was the rough-and-tumble descent, thoughts of the narrowness of escape from a terrible night out on the exposed cliff had a soothing effect. Ever downwards we went, until at last torrents and bogs engulfed us alternately. In the dense darkness close order was advisable. Suddenly a rock or boulder would stop the leader, and those behind would stumble one after the other on the top of him. In due course a miniature mountain confronted us. This proved to be that historic landmark, the famous "Bloody Stone." Surely Macleod or Macdonald never sought its shelter on a wilder night, or their feud would have been postponed and forgotten. During one of the great gusts which swept down the corrie, we crouched for a few moments under its lee and frightened ourselves and a herd of deer who had forestalled us. They galloped off with ghost-like swiftness, the sound of their plunging hoofs soon unheard. Eventually we arrived at Sligachan about midnight, wet through and through, and much the worse for wear.

There, John Campbell, surely the most genial and self-sacrificing of mountain-landlords, received us gladly, and in the early morning hours a sumptuous dinner was served. Finally, one might well say that it will be good news to many to know that the Sligachan Hotel is back again

in the hands of this real friend of all climbers, benighted or otherwise. Doubtless, thanks to his ministrations, our adventurous day on Sgurr nan Gillean left behind nothing more than pleasant memories, and a few days later we were homeward bound.

## CHAPTER XII

### MODERN WELSH CLIMBING

#### ON A "NEW MOUNTAIN"

"There is a thrill of strange delight  
That passes quivering o'er me,  
When blue hills rise upon the sight  
Like summer clouds before me."

RUSKIN

"**S**TAND not upon the order of your going but go at once," is sound advice to the increasing numbers of British cragsmen who have hitherto found more than a full sufficiency of climbing amongst the mountains of the Lake country. Yet it is a wonderful revelation of the many interests of our mountain sport, and an education in its various technicalities to turn from Cumbria to Cambria. Truly, "What do they know of Lakeland who only Lakeland know?"

The writer's recent "going" was by motor, and to one who has reached Snowdonia on foot, as well as by carriage and by rail, the new means of approach seemed best of all. Moreover, the advantages of the motor amongst the mountains



were undoubted, a point which had previously been scarcely appreciated. It had not been realized what vast, outlying attractions lie ranged round every side of Snowdonia, and in the widely scattered groups, especially those to seawards. Except for incidental visits by motor, as part of the day's outing, these latter crags might scarcely be worth the trouble involved in reaching them. Moreover, now that the Snowdon Ranger Inn on the shore of Llyn Quellyn is closed, there is a difficulty in finding accommodation.<sup>1</sup> However, this is somewhat premature; let us first arrive!

Chester was far behind. We had come by Llangollen, through woodlands rich in the full golden splendour of a wonderful autumn day, up and up to the grey moors above Pentre Voelas. Then came the sudden mountain revelation, one of those strange contrastful changes which form the greatest of the charms of motor wandering. Overhead was a grey sky, all round stretched the dark moors, olive and ochreous, and silent but for the plaintive call of the last lingering curlews. The long straights called for speed and not in vain.

A waning shower chased us feebly up to the heights, and on the crest the mountains stood forth ahead in wide array, an azure screen against the orange glow where distant sunshine flooded the western seaward littoral. The dimness of the nearer underlying lands added to the im-

<sup>1</sup> A new inn at the foot of the lake is reported.

pression of great height. There on the left was shapely old Snowdon, unmistakable amongst a host of giants rendered disproportionately big and bulky by their contiguity. Moel Siabod, cloud-shadowed and sombre, was greatest and nearest of these; and then the Glyders led the eye around to the wonderful central dome of Tryfaen, with the deep northerly notch where ran the seaward road by Ogwen and its lake. Away to the right stretched the long, curving crests of the Carneddys to swerve finally downward to the valley of the Conway.

Surely it was a stirring sight, and one over which there was some temptation to linger. It stirred my companion in another way, for he belongs to that adventurous type of Briton who is only happy in a fierce speed draught, or on a steep crag with open heaven above and little else below. The forward call was irresistible. Down from the 750-foot levels we flew, the speedometer readings being such that one was sorely tempted to break the old rule, "Never speak to the driver!" Then swiftly the pine trees came up to meet us, and we entered the mountain gateway where gaunt, grey rocks hung overhead, and far below us the Conway glistened amidst the tree-girt gorges.

It was a fascinating run up to Ogwen Cottage with welcoming mountain friends, crags of many a lofty endeavour of years ago greeting one on every hand. There was little change in the much-favoured climbing haunt. The incursion

of Englishmen was represented by a well-filled climbing book recording new routes and variations, mostly the latter; the American invasion took the form of a motor-car, with which Mr. Jones, the genial landlord, meets his rail-borne patrons at Bethesda as smilingly as ever.

There was yet time to pay an afternoon call on the Milestone Buttress, a place of pleasant memories, for it was one of the happiest discoveries made during the Easter of 1899, that last holiday before the Dent Blanche claimed the best of comrades and friends—O. G. Jones. It was strange, after fourteen years, to grip many well-known holds which, during the interval, have probably served for the support of more cragsmen and cragswomen than any other in Wales. In fact, few climbs in Britain have served for the weaning of so many enthusiasts from the milder delights of fell-walking to the more solid delights of real rock-work.

There were innumerable evidences of the great popularity of the Milestone Buttress. The heathery lower glacis, up which we had floundered knee-deep in vegetation in early days, had disappeared, and the more solid rock, though polished with the tread of many nailed feet, afforded safe abiding. It has been written that the old route had been varied and improved, yet one found that the original way was followed exactly.

There have been many variations made on the popular buttress and in its vicinity, some

quite new, some otherwise. Amongst the latter the so-called Rowan Tree Route was used by one of the pioneering parties for the descent. The Castle Rocks were also visited more than once as a continuation from the finish of the buttress, and the descent from them was made on the west. The enthusiastic search of Dr. Guy Barlow, a member of one of the pioneering parties on the "Milestone," was rewarded by the discovery of several new and useful variations. That up the true ridge line of the crag and to the right of the original route bore little signs of traffic. To expert parties this Direct Route would give about a hundred feet of excellent initial sport.

The principal object of our present visit to Ogwen Cottage was, however, the inspection of the climbs of Creigiau Gleision. Authorities have described these crags as "the most important addition to the climbers' domain since the annexation of Craig yr Ysfa in 1900."

The Creigiau proved a strangely intractable problem. First of all the attempts at the pronunciation were scarcely successful, which doubtless accounted for the inability of some passing shepherds to understand our inquiries. Mrs. Jones came to our rescue, but though she could assure the natives of our polite intentions, neither her local knowledge nor that of the shepherds could reveal the whereabouts of the new crags.

Fortunately, Mr. Jones had more information to offer, though this was characteristically vague,

but we learnt eventually that Creigiau Gleision—Cray-ge-i Glice-eon—as the local pronunciation ran—were situated above Cwm Goch. They were invisible from near Ogwen Cottage, but their position was fairly obvious from the fact that they faced the shoulder of Foel Goch which sloped down from that shapely peak towards the Nant Ffrancon Valley.

Thus we set forth along the old road towards Bethesda, little reckoning that the hardest problem of the “Grey Craggs” was yet to come. The rough front of Y Garn loomed grandly overhead on the left; a fine-looking buttress, which had been explored and climbed by Mr. F. H. G. Parker and his brother, looked especially alluring. A short descent of the grassy road brought us to the bridge over the stream which came down from Cwm Cywion.

Immediately beyond this we left the road and turned upwards towards the unshapely looking mass which, according to the 1-inch Ordnance map, separated Cwm Perfedd and Cwm Goch. It had become the modern practice to change the name of the former Cwm to that of Cwm Cywion. After crossing some wire railings a much-weathered wall was gained, and followed on its farther side up steep, grassy slopes, as far as a large sheepfold. This should be an unmistakable landmark, even in misty weather, for those who have so often failed to find Creigiau Gleision.

The view from near this place was remarkably fine, and probably all the more attractive by reason

of its unfamiliarity. Tryfaen lifted its purple pile grandly over the silver streak of Lake Ogwen. The sun flashed on the few foliated knolls where the smoke of civilization curled lazily above the little cottage, and lower, the white torrent of Benglog trailed ribbon-like from the jaws of the pass, to find peace seaward-borne in the richly vested bosom of the valley.

To the left, Carnedd Dafydd thrust forth a shadowy "black arm" whose side carried the straight high-way of communication between those mountain wilds and the great outside world. On the right, ridge beyond ridge, the Glyders upreared their wild recesses into the morning mist, their hidden beauties of crag-girt llyn as yet unrevealed.

Then the nearer scenes demanded attention. The crags we sought were at last partly in view. The grotesquely carved face was seen somewhat in profile, but nearer, and not far above us, were gathered the weirdest array of rocks that Wales possesses. Closer approach showed us the quaintest forms, stuck, as it seemed, on the scree-draped slope of the mountain. Here a colossal cat peeped pertly, and there a toppling toadstool overhung an upturned ogre-like face of felstone; a crouching lion guarded a grassy knoll, and doll-shaped figures massed like a showman's array above the recesses of a storm-weathered gully.

This quaint portion of the mountain was named the "Mushroom Garden" by the pioneers, and somewhere midst the collection of shattered



LLYN OGWEN, TRYFAEN, AND THE GLYDERS FROM THE SLOPES OF CARNEDD DAFYDD  
LLYN IDWAL IS THE SMALLER LAKE, AND SNOWDON RISES ABOVE IT MORE DISTANTLY





shapes stands "Grey Matilda." The name might aptly apply to dozens of these rocks, and we soon became tired of hunting her. Innumerable climbing problems could be found here, and irrespective of this the bizarre groupings were well worth a close visit from all mountain wanderers.

However, the real climbing had yet to be found. Thus we skirted along at the base of the main mass of the bigger cliffs, working across the slopes of Cwm Goch. We carried with us the volume of the "Climbers' Guides" which deals with the Ogwen District, but, unfortunately, two days were required to find that its information was practically useless. There was a North Arête, a South Arête, and a Vanishing Arête somewhere, but all had acquired the latter tendency. The pioneers seemed to have mistaken the orientation of the crags, which our compass showed, to face in their main line of bulk just slightly west of due north. Thus, instead of being, as stated, on the southern flank, the "Mushroom Garden" was on the easterly end of the crags.

We followed diligently along to the westerly end, hoping to find some cairn or sign of the climbs, but nothing was found. Surely this could not be Creigiau Gleision! We were repeating the experience of other parties. However, what was probably the most continuous-looking ridge was found at the western end of the crags, and this we decided to climb.

The beginning of the West Ridge, as we called

it, should be unmistakable. A cairn was built on a conspicuous, large mass of rock, which projected from the grass terrace or rake that ran along the foot of the cliff. The ridge was composed of three main steps. The first of these rose directly above the rocky projection ; it was steep, but firm, and full of footholds. The second was somewhat tower-like in structure, nearly eighty feet high, and split *en face* by a narrow chimney, which held many loose flakes of slaty rock delicately poised. My companion made a clean sweep of these, and we left the place in excellent repair.

The crux of the third obstacle consisted of a curious, slanting groove in the front of the tower. Its repellent-looking, slimy smoothness led me to attack the vertical right wall. Thereon I had a sufficiently prolonged perpendicular poising to make me realize that the direct way up the groove was advisable. My companion in due course quickly justified this view, and soon we were hurrying up the easier, quartz-marked crest of the ridge where a final cairn was built.

Unfortunately, it was now raining steadily, and there was just time to race over to the top of the main ridges on the Creigiau. The actual central point of the principal mass of the cliffs has not yet been climbed, but to the left of it as we looked downwards, the strangely shaped edge of the Tower Ridge was visible. Excepting our West Ridge, that was the only course on the westerly side of the summit.

In the easterly direction or on our right the finishes of two distinct ridges were noticed. Both had cairns. That to the right we proved later to be the Great Ridge proper, and the other was the easier variation of the same course. From its distinctive character a separate name would perhaps be advisable for the latter, because, though the start for both seemed to be the same, higher up the two ridges divided unmistakably.

Then, as the rainstorm chased us down along the mountain crest, numerous small ridges and gullies loomed through the mist. Some of the former might give short and indefinite problems, for most of them seem to divide bewilderingly, but the gullies on Creigiau Gleision are not of interest. They slope at easy angles, and contain mostly grass and the debris from the retaining ridges.

Some details of another day's visit to Creigiau Gleision may be of interest, because on that occasion we reached and ascended its most fascinating and prettiest problem. This was the Tower Ridge. During the approach a fruitless effort was made to discover other routes made by former parties. Thus from the sheepfold we walked up the screes and into the "Mushroom Garden." Thence a series of grassy ledges led across the face at some height until we soon gained a great, scree-filled recess about midway the full length of the crags.

Those bound for the Great Ridge or the Tower Ridge by the ordinary lower way would reach the foot of the scree-filled hollow by following along

the base of the cliff. At the corner of approach, where great masses of newly fallen debris poured out from the rocky hollow, there was a striking view of the serrated sky-line. On the extreme right there was the West Ridge. Then, with one's gaze following upwards to the left, the tooth-like spire of the Tower Ridge attracted immediate attention. Its right-hand vertical wall was cut sharp and clean, but on the opposite side lay the gentler angle up which we must climb. A black, undercut portion of the ridge, with a jutting nose of rock above it, was very obvious.

To the left of the Tower, which rose in curious, slanting form almost parallel to the lay of the face of the crags, there was a deep, vegetation-choked gully. Overlooking this the top of the Creigiau rose steeply, and farther to the left the two crests of the Great Ridge, by comparison, stood forth somewhat mildly. To the east again some off-shoots of the lesser ridges formed a skyline of "Coolinesque" contour. Their importance and size were apt to be overrated because of their nearness.

To reach the foot of the course up the Tower Ridge we climbed up the scree-filled hollow and into the stony gully under the Great Ridge where the initial cairn stood. An extended wall of overhanging rock cut us off from our goal, but after a slight descent a curiously weathered shelf underneath the dripping lintel led far across the face to the right. There a shattered cairn showed that we were following the route of the

first party. Soon a short but somewhat loose rock buttress gave access to a great green hollow in the cliff's frontage. This was probably the "Bilberry Bight" of our predecessors. After clambering up through the lush growth for fully eighty feet, a way could be made to the left to the true crest of the Tower Ridge.

The real climbing now began with a sharp struggle up a 20-foot nose, and there we found that the ledge above it might have been gained by a simple walk up the grass gully on the left. However, this characteristic feature of so much of the Welsh climbing was accepted philosophically, for we were determined to make the most of the ridge's opportunities and adhere to its true crest as much as possible.

A really stiff confronting bulge had now to be surmounted. It was about twenty-five feet in height, and proved in the end to be the most difficult part of the day's work. After a steep start a step to the right, followed by a delicate balancing movement back to the left, landed me in an airy situation with little for the fingers to grasp. My companion below was out of sight under the overhanging bulge. The difficulty of retaining the position of the left foot on a small hold until a loftier distant knob of rock could be partly grasped was somewhat of a strain, and even when this hold could be secured the final upward haul was trying on such sloping support.

This "agreeable" section would disagree with many thoughtful scramblers. Above it

some easy steps led to the foot of the noticeable overhanging "nose." Its black recesses provided safe sanctuary for a luxuriant wealth of beautiful ferns, whose delicate emerald fronds spread vernant in the dripping depths whilst all the outside world was tinged with the brown of autumn's progress.

The impending roof of this "hanging garden" was obviously impossible. The upward way to the left was the only alternative, and there an awkward, slimy face of rock about fifteen feet high brought me into a grassy corner with the crest of the ridge towering overhead. To reach this was the immediate intention, and a steep, narrow crack allowed the plan to mature. Above the point of arrival on the narrow tip we were told by the authority to "bight the rope round a stook of bollards." The absence of a dictionary placed one in an awkward predicament, for there was absolutely nothing but the bare, thin edge of the ridge springing skywards.

Fifty feet of rope dangled from my waist. No convenience was available to warrant the ascent of my companion, thus there came a bracing swarm up the front of the knife-edge, and I was thankful meanwhile for the grip of rough tweeds on the somewhat smooth structure. After twenty feet of sensational ascent a place was gained where a curious break occurred, and there it was possible to sit saddle-wise on the cloven crest enjoying comfort and safety and a magnificent view. I sat facing down the ridge, a great

slab behind and nothing in front but the far-off, breakered shoreline, white and lazule, beyond the golden sands of Lavan. On either hand, or foot, nailed boots overhung the depths. A sidewise vault would have ended 500 feet lower, and Cwm Goch would have had further justification of its name. The voice of my companion from far below disturbed these soliloquies. Soon he appeared astride the narrow edge, and though the rope was more ornamental than useful he showed how easily the sensational place could be surmounted.

Then a steep slab, 25 feet in height, proved to be the final problem, for it ended close to the actual tip of the tower. There we gathered together the remains of a small broken-down cairn, which was the first evidence of a former party noticed since the beginning of the climb. The big buttress of the central mass of Creigiau Gleision rose grandly on the left, but our ridge continued more to the right. Only two short pinnacles remained to be climbed ere the solid front of the mountain could be gained up a steep 15-foot buttress.

Such was a typical ascent on the new Welsh climbers' domain, a crag abounding in astonishing and romantic situations, and offering opportunities which seem almost wholly unappreciated by cragsmen in general. For obvious reasons I have said as little as possible about the errors of the only published description of the Creigiau, but this would undoubtedly account largely for its neglect. Almost all parties seem to have had

trouble regarding their whereabouts on the crags, and the place had received an undeserved ill-repute for instability. From Nant Ffrancon it looked uninviting.

Yet, once the gullies and the grassy lower reaches were passed, the true ridge-crests usually afforded sound and splendid sport. They were above the average for Wales, the formation being free from the slaty inferiority of the greater mass of Lliwedd. The man who obtains a good photograph of the face, and details upon it the various courses, will have a reward of thankfulness from all climbers. Unfortunately, bad weather and the lack of sun on the northerly-facing frontage prevented our achievement of this object.

After the climb over the Tower Ridge the downward way from the mountain's crest was made to Ogwen by Cwm Cywion, and so to Llyn Idwal. There, with the last gleam of sunset flashing a golden crown on the Glyder's lofty head, we lingered by the "silver strand," stirred by old memories of unforgettable days on the great encircling crags, and soothed by the simple music of the wavelets on the pebbly beach. To some the evening gloom of Idwal savours too much of the sombreness of solitude. But to others, who hear aright the whisper of the breezes on the heights and the full chorus of hurrying streams, the great Cwm is filled with heartsome echoes of the joy of life that is given to those who climb from valley darkness into the open light of summit splendour.



## CHAPTER XIII

### MODERN WELSH CLIMBING AND ITS ACCIDENTS

#### 'TWIXT SNOWDON AND THE SEA

"Of Cambrian mountains still I dream,  
And mouldering vestiges of war ;  
By time-worn cliff or classic stream  
Would rove,—but Prudence holds a bar."

BLOOMFIELD

OF the new climbs discovered in North Snowdonia during the last ten years, those on Creigiau Gleision are undoubtedly of most importance. The Great Gully on Craig yr Ysfa still ranks as the best climb of its kind in Wales, and the West Gully on Ysgolion Duon must take next place in point of interest.

The inappreciation of the merits of the latter magnificent cliffs, their grandest gully, and the opportunities they offer for many a new route, is what impresses one as the most remarkable feature of present day Welsh climbing in the Ogwen district.

It would almost appear that with the Milestone Buttress or the Gribin Ridge only twenty

minutes away from the well-known centre, and innumerable courses attainable under the hour, the modern mountaineer is losing the use of his legs. He is becoming more and more a pure rock-gymnast. For instance, that glorious two hours' walk from Ty Gwyn round Carnedd Dafydd to the Ysgolion seems too much, and there are many others. Nowadays we read records of so many minutes from the top of Lliwedd to Pen y Pass, from Pen y Pass to Lliwedd's Eastern Buttress, or from the Glyders to Ogwen.

In Scotland or Cumberland a two or three hours' walk is endured gladly. My late friend O. Glynne Jones held the opinion that the long, steady, uphill walk was the finest preparation for a stiff rock climb. It was the best disperser of the lack of muscular suppleness which is so evident at the beginning of a climbing holiday, the most sure promoter of that quick control of brain over body that tends to safety when the crucial moment for downward or upward movement arrives.

Undoubtedly the nearness of many of the most difficult Welsh climbs and the hurrying methods of approach have been responsible for several accidents. In fact the latter feature, as well as the dangerously loose and unsuitable structure of much of the rock, and the preponderance of vegetation, climbing must be considered the principal causes of the numerous accidents for which North Wales has become so terribly notorious. After a prolonged absence from the Welsh crags these facts attracted attention irresistibly.

Glyder Fach never appealed to one during the earlier visits, but the East Ridge has since been discovered. It provides two very fine routes on good rock. The rest of the mountain is unsatisfactory. The dangers of the East Gully have not been appreciated, and the escape of a climber who fell down the great pitch which rises in the lower section bordered on the miraculous.

Truly the belittling of the difficulties of any climb is the worst form of exaggeration. Failure to realize the severity of the East Gully on Glyder Fach, doubtless, largely contributed to the cause of the catastrophe of 1910. At the beginning of the Easter holiday, Donald Robertson attempted to lead a party up this exceptionally difficult course.

The party of five had come round from Pen y Pass to Ogwen Cottage by motor. Thence they set forth for the climb, and ascended the lower slope very rapidly to the foot of the gully, with Robertson always ahead, in high spirits and revelling in the familiar surroundings seen in all the beauty of a perfect Easter morning. The others rested at the foot of the climb, but the leader, with characteristic enthusiasm, spent the time in exploring the adjacent buttress.

Then the party roped together in two sections, and Robertson started upwards, with two expert comrades on the same rope watching his every movement from below in the bed of the gully. At the outset he committed a grave error of judgment. Instead of ascending in the cleft

by the comparatively easy route described in "Rock Climbing in North Wales," a way was forced up the left-hand wall. Those below quickly realized the exacting nature of the place ; they advised return and an attempt by the usual route. The suggestion was not followed. The leader's answer came in the form of an apology for keeping the others waiting, and for the poor condition of his fingers for such a first day's climb.

The others were now nearly thirty feet below. Inch by inch Robertson crept up the great wall, relying now, alas ! on his magnificent strength. It was a hopeless rally, for above him was no abiding place. There was a large safe-looking handhold just out of reach. This was gained after a special effort, but its deadly deception was instantly revealed, for it proved to be sloping, smooth, and useless for tired arms. Strength failed ; fingers, muscles, and nerves were soft after months of city life. There was a futile struggle to find support for the feet, and then human power was exhausted. Without a cry, and apparently unconscious of all things, he lost his grip and slid down the rock face. Ten feet lower he toppled backwards and fell head foremost on to the snow and rock bed of the gully fully forty feet below. His companions were prepared for the collapse, and the rope being held around an outstanding rock checked farther fall. The accident ended fatally.

The lessons of the sad loss of one of the

bravest and most true-hearted of mountaineers are obvious, but the leading point, and one which quite recently has had further accentuation, deserves re-mention. The East Gully of Glyder Fach especially is totally unsuitable for a first day's expedition. The upper obstacle is of exceptional severity, and the leader's fall from that final stretch, nearly fifty feet above the point he had reached so fatally, would almost certainly have involved others in calamity. Undoubtedly climbers should, so to say, "play themselves in" before attempting the difficult strokes. Easier expeditions at the outset of a climbing holiday are indicated.

For a selection of these, the graduated lists of courses which are a feature of some of the standard works on climbing are extremely useful. These lists offer a reliable comparison between the courses, from easy to exceptionally severe, and though natural weathering and other agencies affect some places, these changes are usually soon made known. Two typical examples in this connexion are the Hanging Garden Gully and the Devil's Staircase, two fine clefts which rise side by side on the crags just west of the Devil's Kitchen. The former has increased in difficulty considerably; the latter has become distinctly easier.

But the accident on the Devil's Staircase in 1910 showed that there is danger in accepting too freely those reported simplifications of climbs. Until recently, in one quite small section of the

Welsh climbing circle, it seemed a lowering of self-esteem to confess that a route discovered by other parties possessed any serious difficulties. This tendency is still not altogether a thing of the past, and those who make new climbs are obviously affected by it. Thus an exceptionally difficult section, for instance, is described as "extremely agreeable." Until cragsmen sink this false pride and realize that the dangers and difficulties of the sport must not be minimized, but rather the reverse, the grim list of accidents, fatal and otherwise, both in North Wales and elsewhere, cannot decrease.

The Devil's Staircase will probably always be a dangerous and difficult course. The nature of the rock and its turfy drapings must aggravate this tendency. The 1907 accident is not the only one of its kind, but it illustrates the characteristic unreliability of the place. During the August of that year two unconscious climbers were found at the foot of the cliffs. One of these, Mr. Arthur T. Reid, succumbed at once to his injuries; his companion eventually recovered. It appeared that some height had been gained under Reid's leadership, when with terrific suddenness he fell backwards through mid-air. There seemed a possibility that a rock round which the rope had been coiled gave way and dragged down the leader. His companion was dislodged, and both fell to the foot of the cleft.

Apart from the suggestion regarding the detachment of a belay, the exact cause of the

accident is somewhat of a mystery, and as inexplicable as that on the great slabs below Glyder Fawr. This was on the Easter Monday of 1911, and the party of four included two ladies. Mr. A. G. Woodhead, an expert who is well known for several pioneer ascents, was leading. A lady came second on the rope. When the leader had gained a height of about a hundred feet above the grassy terrace at the foot of the slabs, and the others were spaced out below in the usual order, a stone was dislodged.

Exactly how this happened has not been made clear, but it struck the second climber on the head and knocked her off her standing-place. All unconscious of what was happening, the leader was dragged down almost instantly. He fell for nearly a hundred feet ; but the descent of the lady was somewhat checked by the rope and the practical presence of mind of the third climber. By a strange but agreeable good fortune neither of the victims of the mishap was killed, though Mr. Woodhead was seriously injured. The lady was less severely hurt. In this accident and that on the Devil's Staircase just mentioned "it was suggested that probably a belay gave way." This may be somewhat vague, but both illustrate the need for constant watchfulness and persistent recognition of the friability of most of the Welsh rocks.

Glyder Fawr possesses very little reliable rock ; perhaps the slabs above Idwal, where the 1911 accident happened, are its soundest portion. It is peculiarly deceptive, and scarcely suitable

for any but experienced parties. The two great upper pitches, one in the Central Gully and the other in the Eastern Gully, both have a simple look when seen from below; but the former is almost impossible if attacked direct, whilst the latter offers no difficulties. Yet the Eastern Gully has a stiff initial obstacle whose feasibility would be endangered should an important loose handhold, a survivor of many years of storm and strugglings, come away. For a careful party the ascent of the Central Ridge, which is a recent discovery made by Dr. G. Barlow and Mr. H. B. Buckle, gives one of the most dependable courses on Glyder Fawr.

Tryfaen still stands supreme as the soundest mountain in North Wales. Excepting on one tragic occasion it has been kind to true cragsmen, though several fatal mishaps have befallen ordinary pedestrians. There were some narrow escapes reported during the treacherous Easter of 1911, one somewhat similar to that which happened on another well-known place. On a misty day a tourist seemed to think that the walk down the Parson's Nose offered the best valleyward way from Snowdon. He is no longer of that opinion. The same lesson has been learnt on the east face of Tryfaen, with more calamitous results.

Under winter conditions such as prevailed during the early Easter of 1913, Tryfaen is an ideal resort. The popularity of climbing has attracted the notice of the Press, and at the



time some amusing notices appeared. In one of them it was announced that "Mount Tryfaen and the neighbouring mountains are in delightful order for the mountaineer. All the hard places are easy, and the gullies are so filled with ice and snow that there is no need to use handhold or foothold."

This was not the experience of one party at least. They started up what they considered to be the North Buttress, about midday, but so difficult had their task proved that at 8 p.m. daylight failed them when a steep snow-patch was reached about a hundred and fifty feet below the North Summit. Before 11 p.m. a search party arrived at the foot of the peak, having motored round from Pen-y-gwryd. The benighted party were making signals with matches, and these were seen and answered by those below.

The "night-errants" were reached next morning, about 7 a.m., and assisted down to Ogwen Cottage. Despite the lack of food and the intense cold, none of them, not even the ladies, suffered any ill effects. Yet the adventure should be regarded seriously. The night was clear and windless, otherwise a very different tale would have been told.

During the same holiday another party found some "need to use hand and foot hold" even in the Nor'-Nor' Gully, which is normally almost the easiest course of its kind on Tryfaen. Yet all holds failed to suffice, and the two climbers, one of them a lady, "enjoyed" an experience

unique in British climbing records. They had reached a point near the curious projecting rock called the Tombstone. There they were suddenly startled by a booming sound overhead. The noise was described as "rather like that of artillery, but sharper and very loud." The lady, who was leading at the time, gave a warning shout, and both bent forwards in a sheltering attitude, plunging their ice axes firmly in the snow. Overhead and on the left a small avalanche came pouring into the gully like foam. The second climber has described the results :

" I remember thinking that the shock of it would be unpleasant, but I was not in the least prepared for what followed. I felt as though I was struck forcibly on the thighs and we were both hurled off our feet and swept down the gully. The leader was thrown clear over my head, and it is possible that I was knocked down by her and not by the snow. We were fortunately brought up on the Grass Terrace, where the snow spread out."

They had fallen quite a hundred feet, and came to rest within a yard of the edge of the lower cliff. An ice-axe which continued the downward flight was a sufficient warning of what might have been their fate. Fortunately, the falling snow-mass was free from stones, and neither of the "avalanche riders" was damaged during the descent.

Another instance of how the mountains held the upper hand during the eventful Easter of 1913 occurred on Snowdon. Under such conditions the gully-seamed face of Y Wyddfa provides real mountaineering unsurpassed by any peak in Great Britain. The great rifts, where in summer time bedsteads, perambulators, wheelbarrows, and other refuse from the summit hotel form unpleasant obstacles, are filled with snow and ice. Man's spoiling handiwork is obliterated. Yet, unfortunately, the ill-repute of insanitary Snowdon lingers, and few favour it even in snow-time.

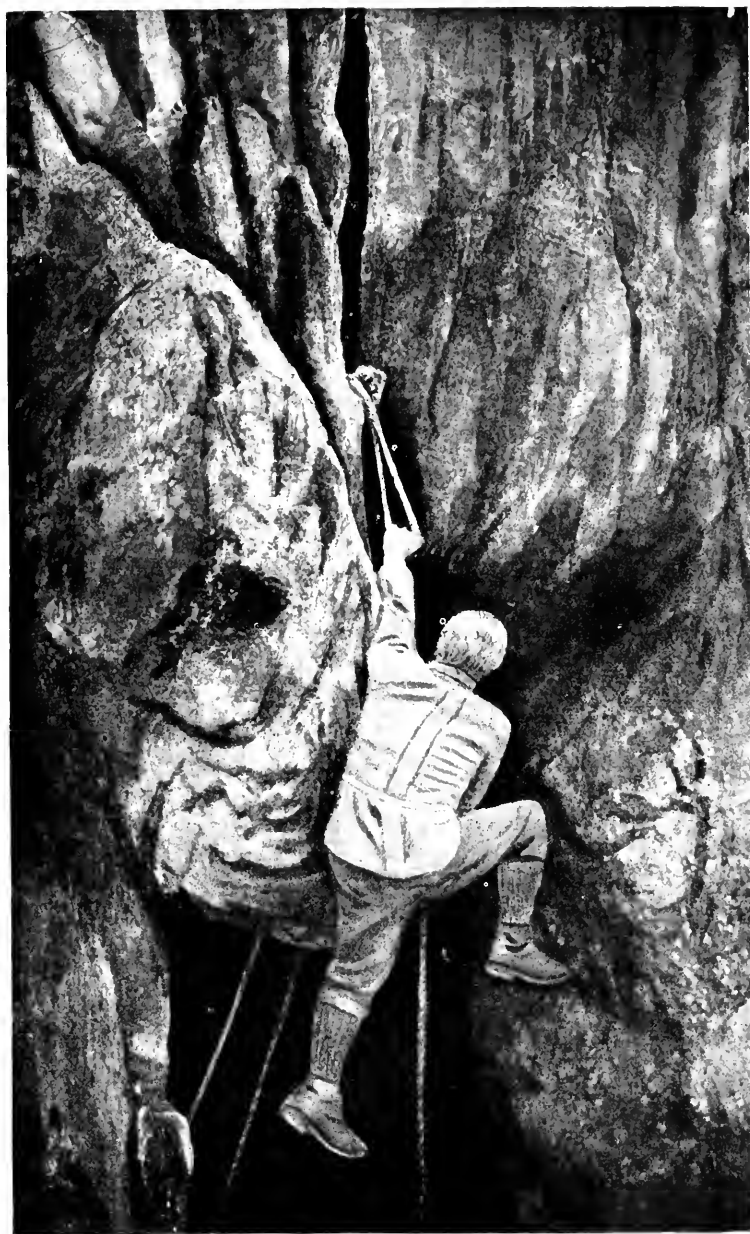
Luckily, two experts visited the face on Easter Saturday, and came to the help of a party in distress in the very nick of time. They discovered two men, the survivors of a party of three, storm-battered and helpless on the cliff. Their companion, so they said, had fallen over the edge, and from the description of the fall the rescuers deemed that he must be beyond human aid.

Thus their first duty was to the living, and the two distracted men were eventually brought down to a position of safety. Then began the lengthy search for the body of the fallen climber. This proved unsuccessful. Regretfully they set their faces valleywards, and reached Llanberis several hours later. There the object of their grim search was found snug in bed. It was a great relief to all concerned, for a rescue party was about to set forth to bring down the other two "victims."

These stories and many others were learned during the autumn visit, and in due course we forsook Ogwen Cottage as a centre to inspect the little-known district 'twixt Snowdon and the sea.

On the way a special call was paid to Pen y Pass. Lliwedd had been visited on a former occasion. Evidences of its being the special haunt of the expert were not wanting. Innumerable variations were still being added to its already devious and complicated routes. One found it was best to wander fancy free on the crags, untrammelled by descriptions of particular courses, and content to stick literally to the firmest rocks. Despite all improvements, Route II. on the East Peak would still rank as the soundest expedition for an average party of experts. The once fearsome venture up the chimneys of the Far Eastern Buttress had lost many of its terrors. This was proved recently by the ascent of a well-known member of the Government; the holds are now liberal.

In the Central Gully the notorious impasse above the big slabs had altered considerably. In earlier days several skilled parties, secured with ropes held from above, attempted the discovery of a feasible method of overcoming the hopeless overhanging section. Under the exceptionally skilled leadership of Mr. W. R. Reade, an ascent was made some years later, and considerable alterations had evidently taken place. The continuation of these improvements allowed several experts to ascend the gully direct in 1913.



USING AN EXTRA THREADED ROPE FOR HAND-HOLD  
THIS SAFEGUARD, IF ADOPTED, WOULD HAVE PREVENTED MANY ACCIDENTS.  
WALKER'S GULCH WAS THUS FIRST CLIMBED.



But the conquest of Lliwedd by the many pioneers had not been achieved without numerous thrilling adventures. With its bewildering sequences of loose, firm, friable, and vegetation-masked rocks it should still rank purely as the expert's mountain. Failing the realization of this fact, tragedies as terrible as that which occurred early in 1910 are bound to recur.

On that occasion Leonard Salt attempted the ascent of the Horned Crag Route on the East Peak. A lady climbed next to him on the rope. Her father came third, and he was followed by two entire strangers who were met at the base of the mountain. All went well until a considerable height was gained on the great cliff. Moving deliberately, and one at a time, they were making a slanting, upward passage to a jutting nose of rock nearly two hundred feet above the chasm of the East Gully. On this "nose" there is a safe standing-place.

Leonard Salt was just beyond this prospecting the route ahead. He was hidden from the sight of most of those behind and below by a projecting rock. Suddenly the stillness was broken by the agonized call of a lady's voice, "Look out, Daddy!" Then came the swish of the rope through the air, followed by a sickening thud, and some hundreds of feet below something was seen sliding down the snow. It was their unfortunate leader.

He had slipped, probably on the treacherous vegetation. His brave second was unable to do

anything to save him, and but for the marvellous intervention of Providence she must also, with some of the others, have been dragged down. The rope caught in a sharp-edged niche of rock and parted. None of the survivors felt the slightest jerk.

Regarding recent discoveries made in the central district, it was pleasing to learn that the exploratory work of the late J. M. A. Thomson was in such capable hands. The huge crags under the northerly crest of Crib y Ddysgl, and on the west side of Clogwyn y Person, possess good climbs on rocks which for Wales are above the average for soundness. Here, as on many of the new precipices on the western side of Snowdon, Messrs. G. H. L. Mallory and R. Todhunter had performed a great amount of valuable pioneering work.

Then came the delightful journey to the seaward side of Snowdonia on an autumn day of sunny splendour. After days of rough handling on the crags there was soothing restfulness in the motor's valleyward flight. Down we sped from the brown moors to the tawny shades of Gwynant's shore, and on through glowing avenues of birch to where Moel Wyn, yellow and purple vested, was mirrored in the depths of Llyn Dinas.

From Beddgelert we could have reached Rhyd-ddu, or Snowdon Ranger, most quickly by speeding along the Carnarvon highway, and thus have been able to engage in a fairly full



day's climbing. But the softness of the lowland air and the beauty of those Welsh valleys tempted to inaction. Thus the circuitous approach was made by Aberglaslyn and the broad highway between the foot-hills and the sea, until the Nantlle Valley gave a gateway back into the heart of the heights.

Once through Nantlle, "the village of slates," where the very mountain foundations seemed to be turned upside-down and inside-out for the world-wide sheltering of man, the way was full of new interest and untold, unknown impressiveness. Past many a farm-house, grey and white, each with its foliated umbrage of russet and gold, we sped. Crag-encircled cwms loomed on the right, and Mynydd Mawr—the elephant mountain—grey and bulky of contour, rose on the left. Later knowledge was vouchsafed us of the grand climbing to be found in those cwms on the southerly side of the valley.

First, in travelling eastwards from Nantlle, we passed the recesses of Cwm y Craig Dilyn; then Cwm Silin, with its encircling buttresses and gullies, was plain to see. The wide Cwm Talnaguedd had less individuality, but beyond it the next great hollow to the south would be Cwm Trwsgwl—the cwm of the clumsy—with its shapely peak, curiously like Lliwedd in form and outline, peeping proudly skywards at its head. This strange precipice of Mynydd Trwsgwl was altogether swathed in rank vegetation, despite its high angle of steepness. At present it would

be a desperately "clumsy" problem for the cragsman to tackle, but when all else is swept clean in the district some new climbing may be unearthed.

Then on the same side of the valley the beak-like peak of Y Garn stood forth, and with Craig y Bera, the rugged buttress of Mynydd Mawr on the left, there was full splendid framing for Snowdon's lofty revelation ahead. The graceful peak, with a sun-reflecting window in its ugly summit pile flashing more fiercely than any topaz, peered grandly over the head of Bwlch y Felin, or, as it was called locally, the Bwlch y Drws y Coed. This "pass of the gateway to the wood" brought us quickly over into the long, wide valley of Gwyrfai, which forms the west boundary of the Snowdon massif. The great Cymric mountain was now seen in full and unobstructed array, but it seemed to lose much of its former impressiveness, for, after all, it had shown us its finest frontage and outline on the opposite or Capel Curig side.

At Rhyd-ddu the Carnarvon road was joined, and this soon led to the Snowdon Ranger Inn on the shores of Quellyn Lake. There we found the well-known hotel closed, and were informed that it was shortly to become the home of some form of brotherhood. Thus the return to Rhyd-ddu was made. It may be of practical use to other climbers to know that we found a comfortable resting-place for many days with Mrs. Roberts at Bron y Gader. When the excellence

and superiority of the little village as a climbing centre is considered, this discovery must rank as of some importance.

A few notes on the topography of the district from a practical rock-climber's standpoint may here be inserted. The feature of the Rhyd-ddu or westerly front of Snowdon is the great hollow of Cwm y Clogwyn, whose inner recesses are not well seen from the neighbourhood of Rhyd-ddu. The two grass-topped arms of Llechog and Clogwyn d'ur Arddu enclose the cwm, and on the former of these will be found the only rock-climbing worth attention on this side of Snowdon. Excepting for its magnificent scenery, Clogwyn d'ur Arddu, whose crags are on the farther side when seen from Rhyd-ddu, is scarcely worth a visit. The crags are either too easy of access or impossible, and the only gully was a few years ago so dangerously loose as to make a visit to its precincts inadvisable. A recent ascent can scarcely have modified this.

It is well for those who come into this little known district to understand that the best and bulk of the climbing is on Mynydd Mawr. Its north front is composed mostly of the rocky ramparts of Craig yr Cwm Du and Craig Cwm Bychan. The former is of some importance, for it now has above a dozen good courses well marked by the scars of nailed feet.

The buttresses here give the best climbs, and this feature of all the precipices in the district to the west of Snowdon deserves recognition. The

gullies, practically without exception, are of more interest to the botanist and the "mud-larker" than to the cragsman. In other words, they are filled mostly with damp debris and vegetation. This is the natural result of being situated at a comparatively low level, exposed to the warm air of the sea, and amongst rock that is almost invariably of a very friable formation and prone to quick weathering.

Thus few parties visit the district without adventurous experiences. The distribution of weight theory is all very well in the hotel smoking-room, but up in the sea breeze on Craig y Bera, with two crumbling footholds and handholds that can be lifted bodily out of their place, the insupportable satisfaction of theory is evident. One would urge strongly that for any but experts the climbing in the region west of Snowdon is unjustifiably dangerous.

Even the best of cragsmen may be misled. Probably the present generation has produced no finer, safer, or more promising mountaineer than Anton Stoop, who was killed on Y Garn y Drws y Coed in 1910. This graceful peak, which rises so finely to the west just above Rhyd-ddu, has three distinct details of climbing interest—the East, the Central, and the West Ridges. The former and the latter of these are scarcely difficult courses, though the East Ridge, if all the obstacles are climbed, not obviated, as may so easily be done, might rank as severe. The Central Ridge had not been climbed in 1910.

On a mid-October morning two parties arrived at the base of the cliff from Beddgelert. They climbed on two separate ropes, and each group of three was led by an expert. One party reached the summit by the East Ridge; the other, under the leadership of Anton Stoop, wrestled bravely with the great difficulties of the Central Ridge. The smooth, well-nigh ledgeless, upper section bade defiance to their best efforts. A steep, mossy cleft in the front of the buttress proved too much for them, and they passed across to the left towards the great gully which cleaves the precipice from bottom to top.

There another futile attempt was made to climb directly upwards, and then the leader entered a deeper chimney still further to the left and worked his way slowly upwards. About twenty feet below him his companion forgathered on a sloping, grassy ledge beyond which the rocks plunge wildly down for nearly three hundred feet to the steep debris slopes at the base of the crags.

The movements of the leader were hidden by an outstanding wall of rock. Suddenly, however, there was a terrifying crash of falling masses, and the unfortunate leader came into sight, crashing downwards in mid-air. He fell feet foremost, as though he had jumped clear of the huge boulders which came crashing down with him through space. There was just time for the second climber to grasp the rope convulsively when the ill-fated climber struck the grassy ledge

close at hand and rebounded over into the abyss.

No human strength could withstand the strain. The rope slipped through the fingers of the man who held it, and for an instant it seemed that all must be dragged down. But now a miracle happened. The rope must have been almost cut through by one of the falling rocks, for suddenly it broke. The two climbers were left on the grassy ledge; their companion fell in two or three tremendous bounds to the foot of the rocks.

The others on the crest of Y Garn saw at once that an accident had happened, and Mr. T. C. Ormiston Chant, their leader, made a desperately speedy descent of the easterly rocks to the foot of the cliff, but he found Anton Stoop beyond human aid. All the members of the sad party have pleasing memories of the great kindness shown by the Welsh mountain folk, and of the sympathy and help so freely given.

The tendency of the upper reaches of the crags in Snowdonia to show more looseness than prevails lower down probably accounted for this accident. In Scotland and Cumberland the opposite usually obtains. The fateful Central Ridge of Y Garn has recently been ascended direct by two experts, who took the wise precaution to inspect the place previously. They climbed it first of all on a rope held from above the culminating difficulty. Unfortunately, Anton Stoop failed to follow this plan, incontestably a proper pro-

ceeding on this and similar dangerous places ; had he done so, loss of life would scarcely have occurred.

Facing Y Garn on the opposite side of the head of the Nantlle Valley, Craig y Bera forms the magnificent southerly frontage of Mynydd Mawr. The wide stretch of bristling ridge forms the most impressive sight that the "Elephant Mountain" can show, but unfortunately all are loose and in decay. One might count over two dozen distinct ridges, and innumerable gullies curl sinuously up amidst the crumbling masses. Disintegration becomes speediest towards the Nantlle end of the face, and the two best ridges are situated near the Rhyd-ddu or easterly end of the cliffs. The well-known course here is the Sentries' Ridge, and it is really the first narrow mass of up-piled rock which is encountered when skirting around the face from the east. A wide buttress is certainly previously passed, but this seems to offer no worthily definite climb.

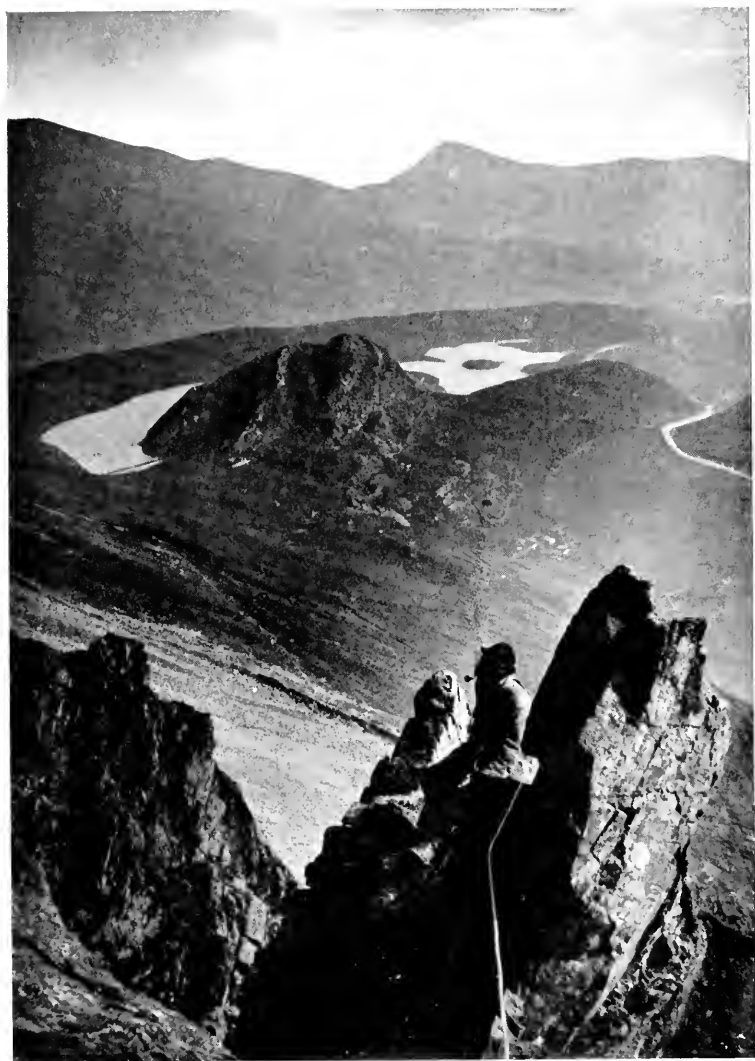
Then beyond the Sentries' Ridge, across a wide, tumble-down gully, there springs the Central Ridge, undoubtedly the outstanding characteristic of the mountain, and one which affords the soundest climbing. Little is known or worth knowing of the ridges west of this. Yet, seen in the afternoon light from the upper slopes of the Central Ridge, they provide one of the weirdest and wildest of mountain sights.

Rocks of a thousand forms push their crests out of the purple depths of gullies submerged in

shale. Lofty pinnacles, precariously poised, appear in strangest of colour blending. Red, yellow, and olive prevail, yet most are green tufted with turfy crowns, and some, mushroom-like, are corniced with beard-like trails of vegetation that sway in the thin air when the flashing flight of kite or buzzard stirs the underlying calm. And far away beyond this Doresque scene of Nature's turmoil and slow mountain death stretches the blue line of the sea. It is by contrast the emblem of the unchanging, for up there on Craig y Bera, with silence stirred only by tumbling debris, man's dreams of everlasting hills are meaningless.

From a short, practical experience one would recommend the Sentries' Ridge as the most justifiable course on this side of Craig y Bera. A repaired and enlarged cairn now marks the somewhat indefinite start of the climb, and soon the more earthy lower supports are forsaken for firmer grip on the first sentry or pinnacle. The rock here is not excessively loose, and a careful leader may feel his way directly up the front of the first guardian of the ridge—some forty feet in height. There are over a dozen of these fractious fellows to deal with in the summitward march, and some of the small fry hold such an insecure position on the narrow crest that too intimate embrace may cause the climber's departure along with them into the depths. The passage across the bridged top of the curious hole in the "highway," which would give access from one





A VIEW ON THE SENTRIES' RIDGE OF CRAIG Y BERA

YR ARAN IS THE DISTANT PEAK; THE BWLCH Y MAEN RIDGE OF SNOWDON RISES ON THE LEFT



flanking hollow to that on the other side of the ridge, marks the end of the real climbing. For a party of two the ascent may be safe; the old saying "the more the merrier" does not apply on Craig y Bera.

On Mynydd Mawr the only other crags worth a mention, besides those noticed already on the northerly side, are those of the well-known Castell Cidwm, which show so finely across Quellyn Lake. Numerous short problems can be found, notably on the northerly side of the central buttress.

Those who climb Craig y Bera or Y Garn will scarcely fail to notice the curious quartz-sprinkled peak which rises in the gap of Bwlch y Drws y Coed. This Clogwyn y Garreg has much sound rock, and innumerable slabs, chimneys, and caves make it worth the exploration on an off-day. The curious Dwarchen Lake, which washes the clean-cut crags of the Clogwyn on one side, is famous for its floating island. "The wandering isle" of Camden's time consisted of a large mass of turf with broad, spreading, fungous roots, evidently a part of the surrounding peaty shore-line which had become detached. The artificial raising of the lake has robbed it of its romance, but a certain water enthusiast recently improvised a floating island in order to gain a special "nose" on the Clogwyn which overhangs deep water. It is a fine bathing place; but the high dive, which the enthusiast took involuntarily, is better made without clothes and climbing boots.

Besides learning these many things during our

autumn visit, Rhyd-ddu was found an excellent centre from which to explore some little known outlying parts by motor. For instance, a ride over to Tanygrisiau and a day on Moel Wyn settled the mooted probability of good climbing being found on that fine mass. Like Honister Crag in Cumberland, the mountain was rendered uninhabitable for cragsmen by reason of the slate industry. Some curiously shaped pinnacles have been left in the workings, but the sight of a ragged climber with a rope seemed, in the native mind, to suggest suicide. Some small buttresses were found on the more remote upper parts of the mountain facing north, but the day's expedition was looked upon as a waste of time. The same might almost be said of Moel Hebog above Beddgelert.

Our last field of exploration was Llechog, whose undeserved praises have been sung so largely. This great mile-long stretch of cliff had attracted attention many years ago and was then adjudged to be of too loose and unsuitable a structure for serious climbing. The recent visit confirmed this opinion. The great attraction of the place was the wonderful scenery of the vast Cwm y Clogwyn, with its little lakes below and the huge crumbling cone of Snowdon overhead. Llechog—the sheltering place—swept round the opposite side of the Cwm facing the great peak, and on account of its north-easterly aspect shelters huge snowdrifts until late into the summer season.

The situation of Llechog when viewed from Rhyd-ddu was not easily appreciated, and the

approach proved somewhat long and indirect, though crowded with interest for the lover of mountain wandering. The wide, grass-crowned shoulder, which came down towards Rhyd-ddu from Bwlch y Maen, the southerly ridge of Snowdon, had to be rounded, for it was on the farther side that Llechog lay. Thus the ordinary Snowdon path was followed for fully a mile until a way could be made to the left, aiming for a wall that continued along under the end of the grassy shoulder. After half an hour's walk this latter developed a craggy frontage which gradually grew in size and grandeur. Several grassy gullies and chimneys were noticed, all evidently unclimbed, and the sound nature of much of the rock was apparent.

Then we rounded the end of Clogwyn Nadroedd and walked up into the hollow of Cwm y Clogwyn, on this occasion filled with autumn mist which, now and again, swayed lazily aside to reveal the magnificence of the surrounding mountain presence. The little Llyn Goch y Wyddfa was passed, and Llechog now loomed ahead.

In due course careful inspection from end to end disclosed numerous gullies with their intervening buttresses. The former were apparently choked with vegetation, and whenever rock showed in their depths it seemed unpleasantly slaty and to forebode loose, uncertain holding. Closer inspection inclined us to the buttresses; so on this occasion the most conspicuous of these was selected for an ascent. As this was probably

the most characteristic of the Llechog climbs, and may be much recommended for the fine views of the precipices which it affords, some details of the ascent are given.

The start was made just to the right of a deep gully which sprang summitwards near the centre of the bigger crags, and a large cairn was built at its foot. Three fine buttresses rose on our right, and to reach the front of the first of these a sort of subsidiary ridge with spiky towers peeping overhead was first attacked. The way kept close to the edge of the gully on our left, and across its depths a grim-looking buttress composed of strangely black rock loomed through the thinning mist. A cairn at its foot showed that the ascent had been made. It was probably the place climbed by the late H. O. Jones and J. M. A. Thomson, with Mr. and Mrs. K. J. P. Orton, in 1911.

On our ridge will-o'-the-wisp scratches showed evidences of a former party. About a hundred feet from the starting-point, and above a fine pitch in the great, grassy gully on the left, we forsook the subsidiary ridge and took to the main buttress on the right. An awkward balancing movement in a sensational situation above the great cliff gave access to its lofty front.

The peculiarity of Llechog rock was noticed during the passage. The face was grooved vertically, and the thin edges of these, flaky and soft in the weathering, gave none too pleasant holding. Yet so friable was the structure that by means of the nailed boot footholds could be kicked on

the sharp edges quite easily ; the trusting of one's weight on supports thus formed was not such a simple matter. However, a grassy recess was soon gained, and thence a steep, turfey chimney led up to another hollow, which was attained by a typical arm pull on a quivering mass of vegetation. An earthy scoop, steep and smooth, was now climbed for a few feet, and then a slanting upward way to the left could be made to another grass ledge.

The ascent had thus far been taken most leisurely, and the heavy air in the great, sheltering rock-basin was somewhat relaxing. During the making of these notes on the ledge just gained, my companion, some forty feet below and out of sight, had adopted a patiently restful frame of mind on the lower "nest." Few would have found physical rest therein, for he sat in the narrow seat with feet dangling over the cwm a few hundred feet below.

For my part the climbing ahead certainly seemed dull enough to conduce to drowsiness, but this tendency was rudely disturbed by a gurgling sound from below and then a startled cry. The rope was suddenly jerked from my fingers. But the stirring pull ended, and it was the work of an instant to regrasp the rope firmly. The sudden fright ended pleasantly enough, though it might easily have been otherwise. My companion, encouraged by the long and comfortable halt, had fallen asleep, and was awakened by the pipe dropping from between his teeth. He had clutched it just at the moment of its disappearance over the edge.

The disturbing interlude was treated as a joke, and soon we forgathered on a higher ledge that gave access to two steep "noses" of rock which partly overhung the big grass gully on the left. A sedgy rift now led up to another sleeping-place. There we rested awhile to watch the yellow fog curtain which filled the valley far underneath draw slowly aside, whilst the clouds, now breeze-borne, sped more swiftly overhead, their rifts flinging golden shafts of splendour over the tarn-flecked cwm. It was a wondrous change. Then, away aloft the sound and sight of the little locomotive threading its onerous path up to Snowdon's crest recalled the practical side of life. We, too, moved upwards from the gloom of Llechog's northerly front into light aglow on the sun-tipped summit.

We bade farewell to Llechog's crest with the thunderous roar of falling boulders echoing through the deserted cwm. The upper part of the cliff consisted mainly of great, weathered splinters largely supported by turf and vegetation, with here and there bigger masses up which indefinite ways might have been forced. There was no satisfaction in struggling up these crumbling or other firmer sections when a few feet away easy grass slopes led temptingly upwards. It was characteristic of so much of the Welsh climbing, and next day one sped northwards regretfully. The attempt to convert my friend to the merits of Welsh rock-climbing had proved unsuccessful.



## CHAPTER XIV

### LAKELAND CLIMBING OF TO-DAY

“Only a hill: yes, looked at from below:  
Facing the usual sea, the frequent west.  
Tighten the muscle, feel the strong blood flow,  
And set your foot upon the utmost crest!  
There, where the realms of thought and effort cease,  
Wakes on your heart a world of dreams, and peace.”  
G. W. YOUNG

“**P**ROMISE me you'll never climb the C  
Gully on the Screes: it's a deadly place!”  
Such were the words spoken one Easter  
evening at Wastdale Head by my late friend,  
O. G. Jones. We had come back from a strenuous  
day on the Pillar Rock, to find the famous en-  
thusiast looking paler than the snows on the  
Pillar's peak. He was bruised and battered, and  
had his arms in bandages; it was at last evident  
that the mountains had asserted their supremacy.

The huge gully on the Screes had already  
earned a sinister reputation. During the only  
previous ascent, led by Jones, a rocky ledge had  
peeled off the cliff, carrying with it the second  
climber. Only the leader's vigilance and great  
strength in the handling of the rope had pre-  
vented disaster. And now during the second

ascent, and on the very same spot, the leader himself had come away with a piece of the precipice, but fortunately his fall over into the depths had been checked on a narrow ledge 30 feet lower, and no vital damage resulted. Thus arose the evil reputation of the C Gully on the Screes, a notoriety which was further accentuated by a later accident.

But time heals all, and even storm-riven crags may not escape Nature's beneficence. Of late years there had arisen rumours that the most notoriously difficult and dangerous gully in Lakeland had been purged of its rottenness by a succession of cloud-bursts. Thus a few months ago we were led to essay the breaking of a promise by setting forth to attack the "deadly place." We should also see whether the gully had changed sufficiently to allow of its becoming a deservedly popular course.

At the foot of Westwater, the massive bulk of the Screes rose overhead, black and austere in the opposing glare of the morning light. Several rifts pierced the wall of the precipice, but one huge, narrow cleft, like the clean-cut gash of a Titan's axe, sprang in 500 feet of seeming perpendicularity from base to summit. This was the C Gully.

Near approach showed that the angle of steepness was not so severe as had appeared from the roadway, and that the interior of the rift was choked at infrequent intervals by bulky rocks which natural weathering agencies had

detached from the lofty cliffs to crash down into the narrow rock jaws. These jammed boulders, so typical of all the Lakeland gullies, formed a sort of monster staircase by which we must rise from the shadows into the summit sunshine.

Soon, with the trusty rope tied on, we were mounting the narrow rift. Enthusiasm might be cooled by the rushing stream of water which disputed the right of upward way icily, but sight was ravished by the adventurous prospects overhead. Four boulders or pitches, with their steep intervening rises, were quickly surmounted; but now there were signs of the great changes. A noticeable big rock which had spanned the gulf during the early ascents had disappeared, and smooth, shining slabs provided just sufficient hold and no more.

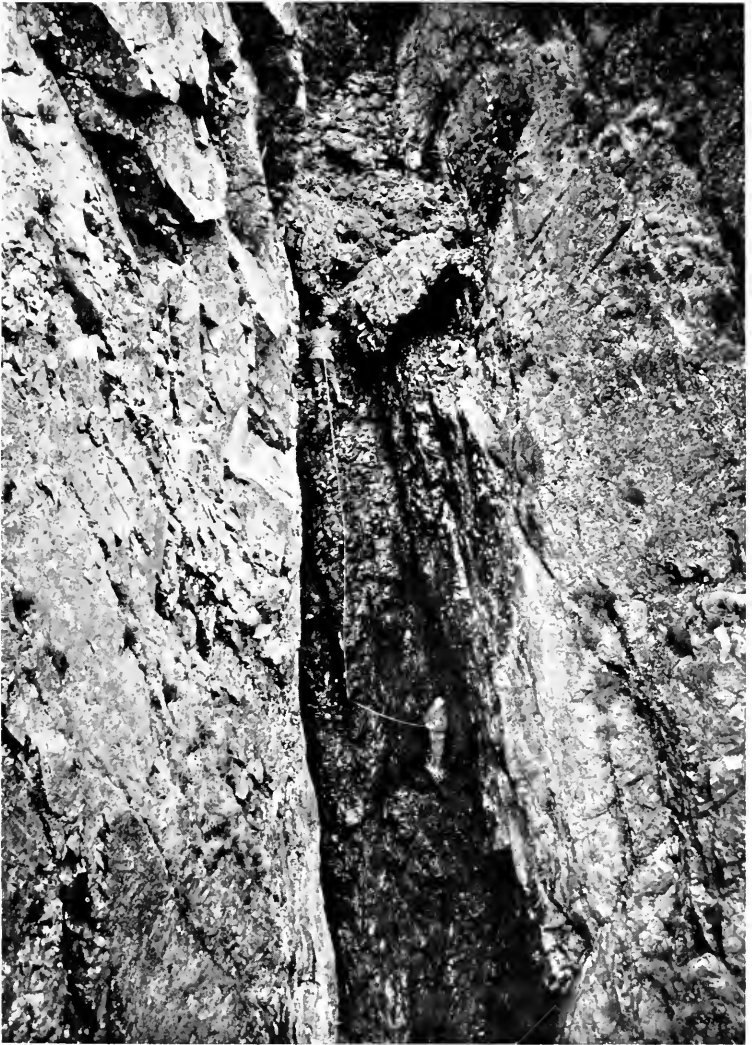
Two hundred feet higher the big crowning boulder of the famous seventh pitch overhung the chasm. Soon we gathered together in the cave, 80 feet under its dripping roof, with a glistening curtain of water masking filmily the outward and downward view, where Wastwater, 500 feet below, basked in full sunlight.

At this point the party of four divided. Two of us ascended the fragile left wall of the gully to secure a photograph of the others negotiating the obstacle. The detour led to some grim adventures. From a lofty ledge we watched the leader of the other party clinging his perilous way up the tiny crack on the left of the great boulder. He followed the proper method of

entering this crack by making a traverse to the left from the great cave, thus gaining the thin rift about twenty feet above its wet, smooth, and tiring beginning. Steadily and surely the expert mounted, a mere speck on the mighty wall, and verily a vivid example of the triumph of mind over matter, for be it remembered in difficult rock climbing that muscle is not always might.

Our attempt to descend again into the bed of the gully savoured more of suddenness than safety. By an error of judgment we were tempted to traverse across the almost vertical cliff in order to reach a ledge whence a descent to the others above the great pitch was possible. Soon we came to crumbling rocks. One thrilling moment will not be easily forgotten. With startling effects a ledge of loose granite collapsed under my feet, and for a few moments only the sudden grasp on a tuft of heather separated me from a hurried descent to the bed of the gully over a hundred feet below. Fortunately the fibrous roots held firm until safer footing could be found on more solid rock. We finally swung down into the gully depths from a lower ledge by means of a 100-foot rope doubled round a shattered ash tree, which obtained sparse and solitary sustenance in a niche on the cliff's frontage.

The eighth obstacle was mainly passed by performing balancing feats across some turfy ledges on the left; and soon the notorious ninth pitch was attracting attention. The gully, now



CLIMBING THE SEVENTH PITCH IN THE C. GULLY ON THE SCREES  
THE SECOND FIGURE IS SEEN IN THE CAVE.



almost at its narrowest, rose straight overhead, smooth and impossible-looking. It was here that the famous pioneer had taken to a ledge on the left wall, of whose terrors we had so recently tasted lower down. Now, curiously enough, there was no available ledge—all had been swept away by a rock-fall. Every trace of the loose structure had disappeared.

The only way lay up the crack-like bed of the gully, and to gain this from left to right an impending nose of smooth rock had to be negotiated. The "nose" was wet and cold. In fact, the tiny handholds above its tip were so slimy that the novel plan of wiping the nose with the handkerchief was adopted before upward progress was possible. Then there came a free swing in mid-air, with feet flung deliberately across to find support in the depths of the crack. This achieved, 80 feet of difficult climbing up the widening bed of the crack brought us within sight of the summit. The final big obstacle, a boulder with a feathery waterfall splashing from its crest, was avoided by struggling up a branch groove in the right wall.

Half an hour later the last 12-foot pitch was below and the summit attained. The view up there 'twixt the sunset and the sea was magnificent. The loftiest tip of Scawfell was afire with the last red glint of sunset, and purple gloom fast spread over the western waters.

There is no doubt that the notoriously risky C Gully on the Screes is the most altered of any

climb of its kind in Lakeland. The absence of dangerously loose rock in the bed of the great cleft was remarkable, and were the place climbed more frequently it would rank with Moss Ghyll on Scawfell in soundness. The ninth pitch was the most difficult, but the more impressive-looking seventh pitch would always require a steady leader. There was a long run out of fully fifty feet, and the final landing on the crest of the big boulder was not the easiest part of the ascent. Though still somewhat more difficult than the neighbouring Great Gully, it was safer on account of its greater stability, more definite route, and lack of vegetation. In the list of classified courses it would deserve readjustment. It might be fairly placed next to the Great Gully on the Screes.

The tendency of many of the exceptionally severe Lakeland climbs to become easier is a noteworthy feature of modern climbing at Wastdale. The dislodging of uncertain rock, the unearthing, often literally, of new hand- and footholds, and the unmistakable route blazoned by the tread of many feet, would largely account for this. On the other hand, several courses of varying technical severity have become more difficult.

As one walks down the Wastdale side of Sty Head Pass, the upper part of Kern Knotts seems more nail-marked than the path underfoot. The "perpendicular promenade" shows from afar like a light scar on the upper slabs.



The sloping footholds thereon, once rough though somewhat small, are now polished smooth and slippery. The same remark applies to an important small foothold on the left wall of the Chimney, which helped in the overcoming of the jammed rock.

The Napes Needle is another striking example of a popular climb which has increased in difficulty because of the greater climbing traffic. The western crack shines with the polish of innumerable tweeds, and the upper rock has footholds of such glass-like smoothness that stockinged feet are certainly safer than nailed boots.

The familiar early photograph which spread the fame of the graceful rock all over the world, suggested the old problem, "How many angels can balance on the point of a needle?" This may have a tragic answer if the looseness of the curiously perched topmost boulder is not appreciated. In earlier days there was not the slightest quivering, but now the tip lurches Wastdale-wards unmistakably. Three climbers on the overhanging side might easily precipitate matters.

Moreover, the top stone should be treated carefully, for in its proper place its value is inestimable. Without it, to climbers the needle would be pointless. When the much-to-be-deprecated road over Sty Head Pass is made, the famous rock will become one of the "sights," and utilitarians may suggest a long iron bar

being fixed from its tip to the adjacent ridge. But the new hand traverse thus provided will be barred.

In its short life as a recognized climb the adjacent Abbey Ridge on the Napes has undergone a vital change which has made the ascent slightly more difficult, yet safer. On the only really trying place—about a hundred feet almost vertically above the start of the true climbing—there was a small, loose spike of upstanding rock that served as a doubtful foothold. It afforded a momentary thrill whilst one stood on it and balanced upwards to secure a lofty handhold. This latter support has now to be attained by more skilful and more sound methods, because the loose spike has been removed.

A still more notable stone was that which was wedged in the narrow part above the recess in Kern Knotts Crack. Upon it innumerable leaders have hung shivering on the brink, but finally, trusting its stubborn shakiness, they have swung summitwards. A certain philanthropist took it away with him to Wastdale Head, and now the Crack may lay claim to be somewhat more difficult. Yet, compared with the earlier days, the ascent is altogether easier, for numerous holds have been disclosed by clawing fingers and struggling feet.

Discussion has arisen regarding the relative severity of the Engineer's Chimney on Gable Crag before and after the removal of the stone which was wedged in the awkward part of the

crack. As one familiar with the place under both conditions, an opinion may be offered that, if anything, the chimney is nowadays slightly easier, but for some reason or other usually wetter. This has damped the enthusiasm of many an expert.

Few practical changes of importance have taken place on the more popular Pillar and Scawfell climbs.

On the latter face Collier's Climb, though a few years ago rendered simpler by reason of a small rock-fall, has now assumed its former standard of difficulty.

The North-West Climb on the Pillar Rock deserves special mention. The somewhat complicated route has become so improved and altered, and so many new holds have been disclosed on the grandest of firm rock, that the ascent may no longer be described as unjustifiable. But the leader must be a master of craft: an unsteady fugleman on the upper lofty difficulty would be unspeakable. Moreover, dry conditions are a necessity.

Though perhaps of most interest to the expert, the growing favour of this unique climb prompts me to describe in detail the route as followed during the summer of 1914. The ascent may be divided into two sections: that to the crest of the lower buttress, and the other thence to the top of the Low Man. The greater difficulties were encountered in the upper part of the climb, though at one point in the 45-foot chimney on the way up the lower buttress there was a section

whose technical details demanded almost as much attention as anything in the upper part.

At the outset, from the well-known Green Ledge at the foot of the Pillar Rock the way lay for 15 feet up into a short 20-foot chimney, which gave early evidence of the splendid nature of the rocks. Then, to the left, came a balancing traverse—the three-step—on satisfactory footholds and the whole set at an easy angle. This led upwards into the foot of a chimney about forty-five feet in height, and in two sections. The holds were mostly on the right wall, and it proved best to climb thereon after a careful step across the rift. Then a short, sloping, crack led up to the roomy top of the buttress, where stands the large cairn, the only one now visible on the actual route.

At the beginning of the ascent of the upper section no strength or energy was wasted, as has been frequently done, in an attempt to climb direct to a projecting ledge right overhead.

The route lay to the right for 15 feet, and then up a sloping slab until, on the left, upward progress could be made to a ledge with an excellent pointed belay. The start from this was made by traversing round a nose on the left for about seven feet. A break in the great cliff overhead now suggested direct upward progress. A short but awkward bulge of rounded rock about ten feet in height prevented this, but standing at one's full height on some sloping footholds a single good handhold was found on the rounded

slab at full arm's length. This, aided by a well-scratched foothold on the left, proved sufficient.

After an easy 20-foot scramble up sloping slabs the large recess originally called Le Coin was reached. It seemed feasible to climb up the straight rift at the back of the recess; but parties have failed here through this deception, and in the failing found a return advisable. The proper way was followed up the more exposed rock wall on the right, where quite sufficient holds were revealed on close approach. By one of the earliest parties this steep 15-foot wall was considered the most technically difficult part of the whole climb. Certainly the finish was awkward, and might be troublesome if wet and slippery, but nowadays the way out of Le Coin has lost most of its terrors.

Above this characteristic pitch two grassy ledges were easily gained, and from the upper of these a short 10-foot wall or nose led to another recess which possessed two belays. One of these proved to be loose and unreliable; the other, to the left, was excellent. This was reassuring, for from this point there was a long lead for the first man of the party almost directly upwards for nearly seventy feet to the wide upper ledge below Oppenheimer's Chimney. This section must always be the crux of the climb.

It began with a short struggle up a 12-foot nose to a rocky hollow known as the "Block Ledge." The original way to the left ought to be carefully avoided, and that straight ahead, which

was found temptingly easy in its lower reaches, should be followed. There were three 10-foot "steps" up into the constrictions of a vertical, shallow groove in the clean-cut front of the great cliff.

The ensuing 20 feet of height provided the most trying part of the ascent. There was scant standing room in a small niche which at least gave safe resting in this part of the groove. How to make vertical progress was the trouble. There were slight footholds on the right wall, and a judicious use of these enabled an important left handhold to be secured. When this could be used confidently it solved the worst of the problem. Climbers have found themselves in a precarious position here on account of being forced out on to the left wall; it is preferable to keep more to the right, and then straight up the groove.

A good ledge to the left at the top of the groove was soon attained, and at this point a junction was made with the old original route, which lay farther away to the left, by a rift known as Taylor's Chimney. There now remained only a sensational and difficult balance step round a corner on sloping holds on the right, and the big ledge below Oppenheimer's Chimney was gained.

This well-known exit to the top of the Low Man had an easy introduction up some slabs on the right, and soon we were agrip with the inner intricacies of the cleft. The chimney proper was not more than twenty feet in height. It was

shaped like an inverted V, and at the narrowing apex two protruding jammed rocks had to be surmounted. The upper one was loose, and it was found advisable to thread a rope round and behind the lower rock. Slanting footholds on the right enabled the stiff arm-pull over this overhanging section to be negotiated, and once the dangling feet could find support the worst was over. There was now an easy walk up to the cairn on the Low Man.

Climbers have emerged in a state of arm exhaustion from the top of the North-West Climb. Some have found Oppenheimer's Chimney impossible in their tired state, and a less strenuous way has been found round a slabby corner on the right. Some friends happened to be on the Low Man when the much-impressed leader of one of the earliest parties emerged by the cairn. "Never again," he said; "not for a thousand pounds!"

These matters are difficult to understand. For the expert, and none other ought to attempt it, the climb should not prove tiring; for it is one in which the feet do, or should do, most of the work. The only real arm strain comes in the upper chimney; but that is short, and safe now for the leader if the threaded rope is used.

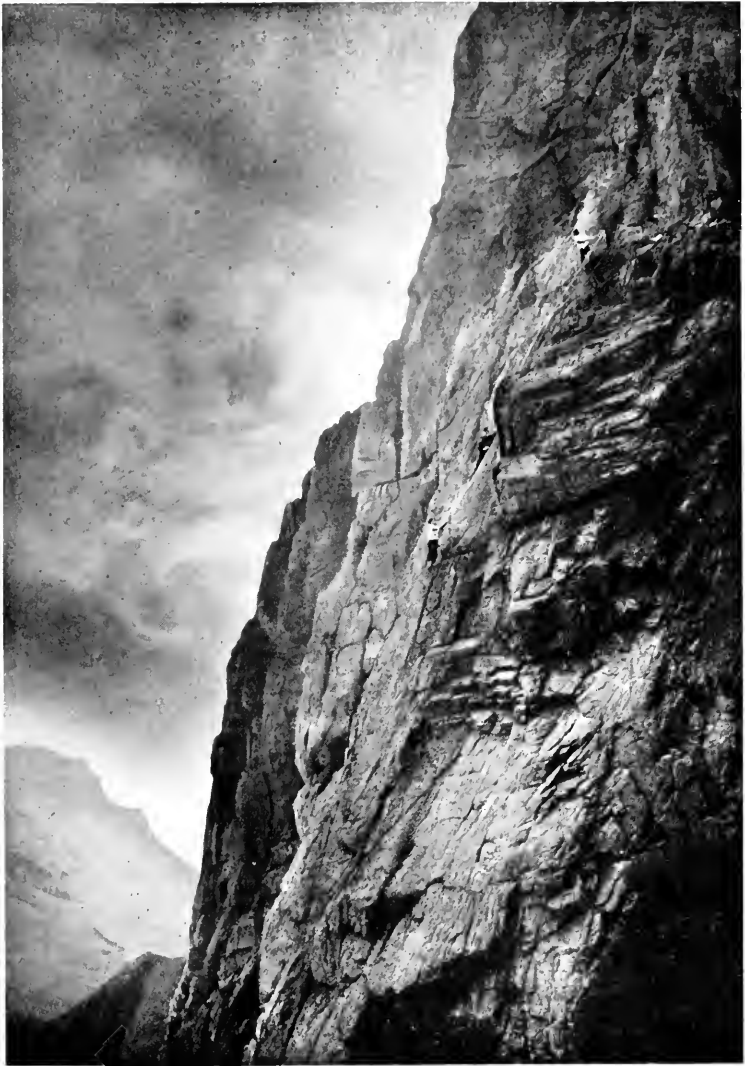
Passing mention ought be made of a recent climb made by Messrs. G. H. L. Mallory and A. Goodfellow on the Pillar Rock from the north-west by west side. From a point slightly north of the upper chockstone in the Waterfall Gully

an inviting crack was noticed 50 feet higher up, and cleaving a fine slab which faced almost due north. During the approach to the crack a 10-foot wall proved difficult, and above the interesting crack a 25-foot stretch seemed most trying of all. The leader took out 50 feet of rope before a safe stance could be found. Considering its nearness to such a famous course as the North-West Climb, the new discovery is scarcely likely to become popular.

To many of us Scawfell can never be the same after the grim tragedies of 1903. Yet for some the cloud of ill-repute is lifting from the sombre crags, and several parties have made the Girdle Traverse across the front of the great precipice. The very place where the ill-fated party of four fell over to their doom might now almost be described as a much-frequented spot.

The negotiation of this 20-foot slab, which has the Hopkinson Cairn just above it and the Moss Ledge at its foot, is said by some to be not more difficult than other parts of the new Traverse. Yet apparently the only change that has occurred is the disappearance of those ominous scratches which marked the place where the unfortunate leader slipped and fell. These were on the slab above the left-hand edge of the Moss Ledge, which is a mere wrinkle, a few feet long and a few inches wide, high up on the smooth front of the Pinnacle. The place, before the weather blotted out the traces of the accident, was marked from end to end with scars of nailed boots. The party





CLIMBING THE CAIRN SLAB ON THE FACE OF SCARFELL PINNACLE  
THE MIDDLE FIGURE INDICATES THE PLACE WHERE THE DELAYED LEADER FELL IN 1906  
THE LOWER CLIMBER IS ON THE MOSS LEDGE



had evidently spent a long time and made many vain endeavours to climb the short but vital section that separated them from safety at Hopkinson's Cairn. An attempt had been made to climb up from the right-hand edge of Moss Ledge. This place looks easier than the front of the slab, but it is a dangerous deception.

Thus far, in making the Girdle Traverse, the descent of the fatal slab has been made. On each occasion an expert who had made previous prolonged and careful study of the place descended as last man. A recent party found it a simpler plan to avoid the slab altogether, and thus traverse round the Pinnacle at a higher level into the well-known crack just below the "Crevasse" in the ordinary outside route up the Pinnacle.

Thus, after so many years of wise neglect, this dangerous section of Scawfell is perchance becoming too popular. The original sound advice that no roped party should tackle the face of the Pinnacle direct has been neglected. Nevertheless, it is still a place for a single climber only. The rope is useless. A falling leader would pull down the whole party; and so delicate is the balance on the smooth, almost holdless 200-foot wall, that the weight of a dangling length of rope may lead to collapse. A recent narrow escape in this connexion urges the warnings once more being given.

Shortly after the Easter holiday of 1914, another section of Scawfell's cliff yielded up its repute for inaccessibility. In Wastdale there

were strange reports of "ter'ble doings on t' crags." Old Joe, a famous character at the Inn, told of a well-known climber who sat on a rock for seven hours "an browt oot a new clim!"

Simply stated, this meant that a cragsman had waited patiently for hours on the front of the precipice holding the long length of rope whilst his two companions explored a possible new route on Scawfell's Central Buttress. This huge, bulging portion of the great cliff had been considered inaccessible, though many years ago the writer had found that the upper part was not quite impossible, and the lower part more or less feasible. But in the middle section there seemed nothing to serve for man's uplifting. For quite a hundred feet a granite bulge leaned forward repulsively, cutting out the upward view and offering to the cragsman who clung to its slight rugosities only a prospect of the world to come.

Yet there was one vulnerable spot. This was a fearsome crack about forty-five feet in height, and overhanging throughout. A large party, five in all, were concerned in the new ascent, which took three days for its full completion; but to the two leaders, Messrs. S. W. Herford and G. S. Sansom, the real credit of conquest must be given.

Their combined ascent of the crack must rank as one of the most remarkable and thrilling feats in the annals of mountaineering. A start was made up the 500-foot buttress at a point about sixty feet west of the cairn which marks the foot of the Keswick Brothers' Climb, the well-

known route up a neighbouring section of Scawfell. The way lay at first up a short chimney, but it soon bore to the right, and continued thus up to a slight ledge 80 feet above the "Rake's Progress." This small break in the cliff was formerly called the "Oval" by a party who found room, comparatively speaking, to "play about" upon it after long balancing on inch-wide ledges. From the "Oval" the ascent to the beginning of the crack was made. Its base overhung space; its top was out of sight overhead, hidden by a rock which was jammed in the impending rift about thirty feet above its foot. For 40 feet the leaders must climb more or less back downwards, clinging, almost like flies on a ceiling, to the slightest roughnesses of the face. The jammed rock would be the key to success or the cause of failure.

Slowly the two leaders struggled up the crack in close order, Sansom, as first man, conserving his strength by using Herford as foothold. The leading climber reached the boulder, but its ascent without some safeguard was wisely deemed impossible. Fortunately, on account of its protruding position wedged firmly in the crack, there was room to thread the rope behind it. Thus "hung up" above space there was comparative safety. Eventually two loops were coiled and tied round the projecting rock. Then two lengths of rope were threaded through the loops and tied round the leaders' waists, but the achievement of all this in such dangerous airiness

proved so exhausting that all attempts to climb further were unavailing. The descent had to be made, and Wastdale was eventually reached.

Next day the attack was resumed. The two leaders each tied on a separate length of rope. The two ends of these were held by the rest of the party, Messrs. H. B. Gibson, C. F. Holland, and D. G. Murray, who stood on the ledge below. Now the two experts reached the jammed rock more quickly. The ascent thence proved a grim and desperate undertaking. Herford, as first climber, struggled up, standing in stockinged feet, mostly on his companions' shoulders. When just on a level with the wedged rock there came one crucial moment. The strain proved too much for the second man. The hand which held him in place on the boulder was just slipping, through sheer exhaustion, when the leader stepped straight across upon it, and thus held firm the lapsing fingers. Fortunately it was a more restful position for both climbers, and in a few minutes Herford, after a wonderful exhibition of cool and skilful climbing, was able to gain hold of the projecting knob at the top of the crack.

From this place an almost level traverse was made along the sharp crest of the huge flake of rock which rested against the precipice. The separating cleft was only four or five inches wide, and with absolute perpendicularity above and below the passage was most sensational.

Then soon a succession of narrow ledges gave

access to the upper part of the Keswick Brothers' Climb, and all were glad to avail themselves of this easier finish instead of continuing to the top of the buttress direct. This was completed two days later. The route made some use of the curious vertical cleft which one christened the Bayonet-shaped Crack many years ago. The final exit was up a short chimney which overhung the abyss. The steepness of the whole climb was here vividly accentuated. A dislodged stone just missed one of the climbers, and fell through mid-air untouched by anything until it struck the Rake's Progress, 500 feet below, at the beginning of the climb.

The dangers and difficulties of this extraordinary *tour de force* can scarcely be over-estimated. It is undoubtedly the hardest climb in all Britain, and unless succeeding parties adopt the rope-safeguarding methods in the impending crack, disaster must assuredly follow.

Besides this uniquely severe new ascent on Scawfell, the Lake Country mountains can lay claim to the record descent also. Not long ago, on Doe Crag, the leader of a party in Easter Gully fell almost from top to bottom of the Hopkinson Crack. The terrific aspect of this almost vertical 100-foot pitch is well known, and no one will desire to beat this astounding performance. Previously the remarkable fall of a climber on Cyfrwy in Wales had held the record.

The Easter holidays of 1913 had just passed, and a large party of climbers, after making other

difficult ascents on Doe Crag, arrived in the big recess below the Hopkinson Crack in Easter Gully. Some visited the Black Chimney, and a set of three experienced cragsmen attacked the Crack. The lower difficulties had been overcome, and the leader advanced up the final 30-foot crack. There was rather more than fifty feet of rope between him and the second climber, who was well placed about forty feet lower down. The third man was near the broad ledge which gives a safe resting-place and affords a belay about half-way up the whole height of the difficulty.

The leader had climbed to a point quite fifteen feet up the final thin crack, the holds becoming smaller and the crack closing in. At last the only support he could see or reach was a vertical slit on the right and about a foot above his head. This proved only sufficient to hold the fingertips. An attempt was now made to adopt a backing-up attitude in the awkwardly splayed-out groove. This was unsatisfactory. A second attempt to find a finger grip in the slit followed. Then all was a blank, until the leader, in his own expressive words, "woke up at the bottom." He cannot explain how he fell or what happened.

However, this is what the others on the same rope saw and felt. The last man suddenly caught a glimpse of the leader falling down the vertical groove overhead and clutching wildly at the rocks. The stirring sight made him jump for the pointed belay on the central resting-place. There he held firm.



Before the second climber could stir, the feet of the falling leader struck him on the head and shoulders and knocked him off into space. Fortunately he caught a hold in passing and saved himself. With the force of the concussion the leader now fell backwards, and in a series of somersaults he finally crashed down into the narrow lower part of the crack about fifty feet below his companions. There his body jammed firmly. Luckily at this very moment, and not before, the strain came on the second climber. He was slowly pulled from his holds, but soon the downward drag ceased and willing rescuers quickly reached the damaged climber in the foot of the crack.

Of course all this had happened in a few seconds, but in due course the "record-maker" "woke up," and later on, aided by many willing helpers, he was escorted down to Coniston. Of course there was considerable physical damage, but by a strange good fortune no bones were broken, and no serious results, internal or otherwise, ensued. This adventure may well be described as a miracle of the mountains. Those who know the terrors of that great vertical crack will agree that this is the only word that can be applied to this altogether inexplicable intervention of Providence, so far as modern mountaineering is concerned.

## CHAPTER XV

### WITH THE BIRDS OF PREY ON THE CRAGS

“To climb the trackless mountain all unseen,  
With the wild flock that never needs a fold ;  
Alone o'er steep and foaming falls to lean—  
This is not solitude ; 'tis but to hold  
Converse with Nature's charms,  
And view her stores unrolled.”

BYRON

IT was a typical Lake Country valley. Behind and below us, cottages grey and white hid 'midst a misty gleam of blossom ; in front a silvery stream stretched sinuously up to a great hollow in the mountain's front. Solitude reigned supreme in a land all brown, ochreous, and purple, except where the stream vanished in a blaze of emerald splendour under the loftiest of the crags that encircled the valley-head. There was the falcon's eyrie.

As usual, the holiday of Easter time had held more of the rigour of winter than the promise of summer. But now, when the climbing crowds had departed, the sun had come, and even here in the heart of the wilds the discerning eye might catch, in the faint bilberry light that hung on the



THE FALCONS' EYRIE

THE TWO YOUNG PEREGRINES ARE READY FOR FLIGHT. FEATHERS AND OTHER REMAINS  
SPRINKLE THE LEDGE



confronting bastions, the signal of victory of light over darkness, the triumph of Nature's life in the re-making of the world beautiful.

Then, as we slanted upwards along the valley-side to gain the crest of the crag-girt hollow, there were more stirring signs of spring life. The ravens had spied us. A warning croak, almost like the bark of a collie with a cold, echoed across the great hollow. It was a welcome sound, for the season had been one of far too frequent triumph for the egg collectors. Sad to relate, many disappointing days had been spent on other crags in a fruitless search for a sight of the domestic bliss of the raven, that most weirdly fascinating of all the cragsman's winged companions. Under the kindly guidance of the Rev. P. W. Parminter, whose practical knowledge of the Lakeland mountain birds is altogether unrivalled, I had been shown six ravens' nests, and all of these had been robbed or destroyed—of which matter more will be said later.

Progress along the crest of the crags was now rapid, and soon there was sight as well as sound of the ravens. The female bird, discernible by her larger size, told us unmistakably of the nearness of her home. It reminded one of the youngsters' game of "hunt the thimble" when the word "warm" was used to indicate the approach to the sought object. "Wark! Wark!" cried the bird in deep, hoarse guttural as we balanced along the heathery edge of the precipice. A narrow ridge of grass led to the top of an outstanding

pillar whose valleyward front dipped steep exceedingly, and at each visit to this spot the croaking uproar increased unerringly.

“ Ah,” said my expert friend, “ the old site ! ” and out came the rope whose dangling victim I was shortly to become.

The wily old birds now seemed to realize the failure of their ill-tempered attentions. They retreated to a loftier distance, and treated us to some wonderful feats of flight. In captivity the raven may seem the clumsiest of creatures, yet up there in the mountain air, with sunny plains and the sea far beyond, and great rocks bulging over the underlying valley depths at our feet, the graceful swiftness of the bird's movement was astonishing. For a moment one of the pair would hang almost stationary, with great wings extended and almost every flight feather visible. Then suddenly, with a swishing sound similar to that of the wind rushing through a narrow crevice, it darted downwards like a pointed stone, wings close packed and head almost invisible.

Far below, in a flash, came the sudden upward swoop. The original height was regained apparently without effort, and now we were entertained to such exhibitions of topsy-turvy tumbling as would baffle all description. The heavy feet seemed to play a large part in this special performance, and at each plunge they seemed to be thrust upwards and backwards with tremendous force. Down from the cloudless blue into the purple shadows of the abyss the writhing, black,

feathered masses plunged giddily. The sight of these wonderful spirals and zigzags showed the difficulty which the gun-armed farmer has to overcome. The raven's instinct for danger is phenomenal, for which strange gift all lovers of mountain life are thankful.

My actual descent to the nest, which was ensconced in a recess about two-thirds of the way down a 100-foot buttress, seemed to cause few parental misgivings. Probably they recognized my companion and his ways, because each year the birds had doubtless haunted the same site. However, for a cragsman who has spent practically all his real climbing career at the front end of a rope, there was little peace of mind or body in gaining the vicinity of the nest. The rock was loose and slaty. Moreover, it overhung most persistently, and the rope made its presence felt somewhat too pressingly. Scarcely any rock-climber could feel at home on such a place, though it is said that local egg-hunters make little ado at the performance.

There was a strong dislike to any dangling, and every effort was used to reach the nest by fair climbing means. Instead of swinging directly over the edge, a way was made down a vertical chimney on the left for 50 feet, until a ledge led around the face only about twelve feet below the great mass of sticks which formed the nest. But here the uncanny wisdom of the bird was in evidence. It was a characteristic ravens' home—so near and yet so far. The attempt to

reach the recess from below ended in suspense, for the rock was smooth, loose, and overhanging. In fact, every approach to the nest was thus naturally guarded.

The rope also aided in my undoing, for above the coveted recess the rock bulged forward through a height of 20 feet. The main hope lay in making a traverse from the right, for there only did continuous ledges stretch across the impending fortress. In a few minutes I was in such a situation as only the veriest glutton for danger could desire. The passage across the more than vertical face had to be made on crumbling hand and foot holds, and if any single one was selected for special support it invariably proved a false friend in time of need.

Then at a moment when an unshaven chin gave more or less comfortable holding in a cup-like recess, there came disturbing news from overhead. "The rope is disturbing a flake of loose rock!" called the concerned voice. "Can you hold on whilst I move it?" The attempt to reply was calamitous. The chin-hold was lost. I toppled backwards, and on the instant something flashed past my ear with a sound like the whirr of the raven's wing. However, a startled glance showed the birds far overhead, but underneath a slaty flake was speeding down into the heather.

Nevertheless, the thrilling experience had the recompense of landing me on my knees around the corner, and almost in a prayerful attitude, on a sloping ledge which held the nest. This was



fully a yard across and half a yard high, and built entirely of sticks, most of which seemed to be old heather stumps. It was evidently an ancient abode, for the lower foundations were covered with a growth of bright green lichen. As to the lining, this was invisible, for five young ravens filled the nest's interior with bright pink-red fleshiness. Five big mouths were thrust open, of course ravenously, and a chorus of grating squeaks informed the patient friend above of my whereabouts. My information regarding the size of the family was received with much satisfaction.

However, it was not a place in which to linger. I was reminded of the advice that the nose is the best guide to the site of a nest of fledged ravens. Moreover, the uncertain and constricted position on the ledge was scarcely comfortable. There was little more than time to notice the remarkably differing sizes of the young ones, and to remember that the raven, like almost all other birds of prey, begins incubation after laying the first egg. As the youngsters grow remarkably in a single day, the disparity was not disproportionate. There was no store of food in or near the nest, as so frequently happens. Yet, besides the indications of the great number of rats consumed and the many other remains, some curious, white, paper-like pieces attracted attention. My companion informed me later that these were probably the skulls of lambs that had died at birth, a luxury which the ravens specially favour.

Nearly two hours had been occupied by more

or less aerial acrobatics on that crumbling buttress, and, after all, the position was too awkwardly constricted to permit a photograph being taken of the family group. In fact, an attempt to remove the camera from the rucksack on my back would only have meant more dangling. After many long years, I was in a position to appreciate the humour of a story told by the late O. G. Jones, of a famous classical scholar whom he once took for his first and last climb on Scawfell one wintry Easter time. He did not mind "the wind or the cold, the ice and the slippery rocks, or even being left until almost forgotten under a waterfall, but he did object to the infernal dangling!"

The strange recollection of this curious experience was dispelled by the calls of my trusty companion above, who at last suggested a move. "I'm coming! Look out!" was the reply—going might have been the better word, and true too had it not been for the rope, which stretched unpleasantly as my weight came upon it in mid-air. Yet this was but for an instant. Rested fingers clutched the slanting holds strongly, and in a few minutes I was up amongst the heather, resting in pleasant sunshine.

After as little delay as possible we made a way along the crest of the crags, with the old ravens noisier than ever. They were evidently anxious to see us well out of sight before any attempt was made to gain their home. Their impatient calls and near approach gave the

impression that they were chasing us off victoriously. Then from the shelter of the grassy hollow we saw the sly old birds swoop down into a distant part of the rocky cove. Just one glimpse was obtained of one of them dodging silently around an adjacent buttress on the nestward way.

During a hurried lunch, but perhaps just after it, there was an appropriate chance to discuss the feeding methods of the ravens. The "wildly raging raven" is a much misunderstood bird. Its lonesome life in the wilds, where few have given its habits the study they deserve, and its curious ways in captivity, where its true instincts are perverted, have largely accounted for this. Poets, romancers, and casual writers, scarcely any of whom have any real knowledge of the bird in its home, have imbued it with a cruel, fierce, and unwholesome character. The raven seldom kills: it prefers dead food—the "deader" the better.

The scavenger of the mountains it should properly be called, and in this respect all fell-wanderers, and cragsmen especially, who visit the more sheep-infested crags owe much of their joy of the higher, purer air to the sombre black sentinel who scents out the sheepish suicides. Scarcely a crag in Lakeland where such things happen frequently is without its pair of ravens, either resident all the year round on the spot, or in close proximity.

It is only in the early months of the year, and especially during March and the first half of April, that the supply of the staple food runs

short. Unfortunately the lambs come during the nesting season, and the old birds are sorely tempted to sort out the weaklings for attack. Yet they seldom yield to the temptation, or attack anything of real value to the farmers. The same may be said of game and small birds. Quite close to a raven's site which was visited recently, a ring ouzel's nest was being busily built, and on the heather slopes just below the crag a family of rabbits gambolled merrily.

A few years ago, on Force Crag, whose central gully is a notorious death-trap for the herdwick, and consequently holds a pair of "scavengers," I once witnessed a scene which the unknowing might have misunderstood. On one of the narrow grass ledges which are used to make the exit to the left from the top of the dangerous gully, a sheep had become crag-fast. It was noticed because of the noise created by a pair of ravens, the sound of whose swishing wings and hoarse croaks filled the heights.

Closer approach showed the sheep in the last stages of starvation, and almost too weak to move, despite the wildly fascinating rushes of the ravens. Their plan was evidently to cause the animal to cease its worldly troublings at the bottom of the crags as early as possible. As no rope was carried rescue on our part was impossible, but we decided to leave information with the shepherd on the valleyward way. However, this proved too late. In any case, the life of the animal could scarcely have been saved.

Whilst resting at the foot of the crags a series of unpleasant thuds echoed overhead. A grey mass soon appeared tumbling from ledge to ledge down the lower crags, and the almost lifeless body of the sheep came to rest close by our side. Nothing more could be done but leave the now silent ravens to perform their natural duties.

So far as the feeding of the young ravens is concerned, they generally receive one big meal at sunrise, another in the evening, and, comparatively speaking, very little is given them during the day. Breakfast may probably be obtained by their parents' visit at dawn to the refuse-heap of some farmstead, and it is usually enjoyed in the warm rays of the morning sun, for the raven prefers a site which catches the first glint of a March sunrise. The wisdom of this is evident: snow often encircles the nest.

After discussing these things and many more matters of interest to lovers of wild mountain life, we set forth along the crest of the crater-like hollow, into whose recesses heather-capped bastions dipped steeply. The peregrine falcons' eyrie was next to be our quest. Now and again, where the crags steepened, we rolled rocks over the edge, thus hoping to locate the whereabouts of the sitting bird. A curious pillar jutting forth from the main mass attracted attention. The rocky top, a magnificent look-out pinnacle, was besprinkled with evidence of its appreciative use by the preying falcons. The bleached bones

of pigeons and small birds and plenteous castings of indigestible details were hopeful evidences of some discovery being made.

An old ravens' nest, weather-flattened and firm on its top, had been used by the birds during a previous season. Suddenly the valley below echoed with the strident screams of the falcon. Unfortunately we missed its outset from the mountain front, and adjudged wrongly that its nest must be on the steep face underneath our feet. But it required an hour's more dangling on my part to realize that we had been deceived. Meanwhile the bird had ceased its noise, and evidently returned to its nest.

Another hour was wasted in a vain search for its whereabouts, and then we set forth valley-wards down the farther end of the crags. Our disappointment was keen, but as a forlorn hope another disused ravens' nest was to be visited on the way. Downward progress was slow on the crumbling heathery façade.

Now with startling swiftness came a perilous surprise. Forty feet of rope separated us, and my companion had gained a broad grass ledge below. I was carefully descending a steep face of quivering heather, gloomily unmindful of things in general, and especially thoughtless of the impressive view of the underworld. The latter failing was remedied instantly. A furious shout, in volume that no words can describe, rent the still air. "Ho! The Falcon!" roared my enthusiastic companion, and an unearthly scream was the

falcon's answer. For a moment there was grave danger. The sudden surprise almost made me join the flight of the great bird which shot forth into space like a steel grey flash.

My companion was overcome with excitement. With eyes flashing and hands waving overhead he turned from me and began apparently to walk over the edge of the precipice. The rope was almost taut between us. My hands were fully occupied in holding on, but on the instant my tongue was holding forth in no uncertain manner. Calm deliberation soon prevailed, and I was able to gain the broad ledge whereon stood my companion, all impatient for an immediate view of the eyrie. Soon he disappeared over the edge, and in a few minutes there arose the joyful news, "Three splendid eggs, the finest you have ever seen!"

Then came my turn to descend. It was an easy downward climb to a narrow ledge on the face of the cliff, grassy at one end, but at the other entirely devoid of vegetation. On the thin, bare, brown soil rested the three eggs with only the slightest of hollows to prevent them from rolling over the sharply cut edge of the precipice. A few feet above the ledge the rocks overhung suitably, and altogether it was an ideal falcon's eyrie, with a wonderful outlook down a narrow side valley to fertile plains beyond. The eggs were as large as those of the ordinary hen. Though one was splashed with a pale cream shade at the more obtuse end, the prevailing

colour was a wonderful red. It was almost the light red of the artist's palette, but there was still more resemblance to the russet splendour of the dead bracken when the March sun lights upon it.

Meanwhile, but for the wild screeching of the falcon, a strange and immediate silence seemed to pervade the valley. Even the piping of the pipits and the crying of the curlews had ceased. Only a few moments earlier four buzzards had been hovering playfully around a neighbouring summit, but they had now disappeared. The fiercely vengeful falcon was astir. Lakeland's king of the air had been roused. No live thing aloft dare neglect the warning of those fearful cries.

The great bird dashed in wide circles round and across the valley slopes, seldom rising into the open sky like the raven, but ever travelling with tremendous impetus. The flight resembled that of a great swift with those clean-cut flashing wings, and there was no misdoubting it to be the speediest of all our birds. It had none of the gambolling tendencies of the raven, and even in those long nest-ward swoops, which verily made the thin air sing, the powerful wings were never still. Truly the falcon should never be mistaken for the buzzard with its comparatively lazy, clumsy, hovering flight.

There was no slyness about this monarch of the mountain air. Its every movement was so straight and direct that the keepers find it an



easy prey for the gun. When the raven leaves its nest it dodges away round adjacent rocks, and if at all exposed describes most baffling zig-zags and spirals, but the falcon flew in a perfectly true line right outwards from its eyrie. This would have been the destroyer's chance.

However, the raven may be poisoned, but never the falcon, for it only feeds on the live things of its own killing. Alas! that a short while ago one of these beautiful birds should have been trapped by a cruel keeper on a neighbouring estate. A large jaw trap had been cunningly hidden under the soil whereon the eggs were laid, and when the sitting falcon returned it was caught and destroyed.

The sight of those splendid eggs with the evening sunlight adding to their ruddy brilliance, and withal so characteristic in their roundness of shape, reminded one of one of the bird's remarkable features. It is one of the rarest things to find a pyriform falcon's egg. Each specimen is worth a few pounds. A few years ago a nest was discovered at High Cup Nick with four of these remarkable eggs. Aided by the keeper, they were taken by an enthusiast and presented to a local museum. Next year he visited the place, and was astounded to find that the keeper had actually shot the bird that laid the "golden eggs." When the latter realized the loss that he had inflicted upon himself, for each year his income might easily have been greatly increased, he was utterly dumbfounded, and vowed never to shoot

another peregrine. Thus perhaps the loss of the pyriform egg-producer was worth while.

Then with the sun flashing in crimson splendour upon the distant sea we began the downward way, talking meanwhile of the many fascinations of the falcon and its compeers of the crags.

The raven is increasing in Lakeland to a considerable extent, but the same cannot be said of the peregrine falcon. An authority writing thirty years ago said there were about a dozen nesting ravens scattered over the district. Nowadays a couple of hundred pairs would be nearer the mark. Thus, though the egg hunters have done much damage during some recent seasons, the raven is not likely to suffer the distinction of extinction.

This is not surprising when its persistent attempts in family matters are realized. If the first nest be robbed, the raven usually takes to another site, and three or even four clutches of eggs may be laid. Each family has its own series of sites, and an outsider seldom if ever monopolises the ancient home of another pair of birds. The same place, if successful, is generally used year after year, and the annual addition of sticks and woollen lining often builds them up to a great size.

Probably the largest Lakeland nest, though it has been robbed many times, is in the Thirlmere district. During the present season it stood over seven feet high, and the breadth was fully two yards over all. A 60-foot traverse on

splendid rock brought me easily to a narrow ledge below the great mass of lichen-covered sticks. To obtain a sight of the interior of the nest was a different problem. Yet, strange to say, so firm was the structure that it was possible to climb up its front, and thus learn that the egg-stealers had paid a previous visit. The thick woollen lining wore that dishevelled look which is the result of the disappointed birds' search for the eggs.

These are generally five in number, though four and sometimes six are frequently laid. They are of a pale bluish-green tint, more or less blotched with brown, and somewhat smaller in size than the eggs of the falcon. Seldom more than four birds are reared, and the young ones from the later hatched eggs usually have a real struggle for existence. They are somewhat likely to be eaten by their bigger relations, in accordance with the ravenous custom which also appears to prevail amongst the buzzards and even the falcons.

The raven lives to a great age. There is an irrepressible old mother at Ennerdale whom the watchers know to be nearly seventy years of age, and my photograph over-leaf of the progeny of a similar elderly matron is evidence of her excellent catering. The blue-black lustre of her plumage has given place to a dull brown, but though two years ago a farmer's gun reduced her to widowhood, she at once attracted a young and handsome male to her eyrie.

The manipulation of the camera when one is suspended by a rope has much of exciting interest, but the securing of the illustration opposite was not achieved without many misgivings. The young ravens were nearly five weeks old and just ready for flight. The few days previous to this event are spent in wing-flapping practice on the edge of the nest. This is the signal for the foxes to make their appearance, and they seldom go empty away from the vicinity of a full-fledged eyrie. A hundred feet below me I saw an ominous movement in the dense heather followed by a momentary glimpse of a light-brown body gliding sinuously. The sight made my every movement one of extreme wariness. Fortunately on that occasion "old Brer Fox" was disappointed.

Perhaps the most remarkable and entertaining feature of the peregrine falcon is its method of obtaining its daily food, for the noblest of all our birds never kills merely for the sport of killing. Unlike most others of its kind it attacks its prey in mid-air, and many a cragsman whose eyes are not obsessed by the search for hand and foothold has memories of some wonderful exhibitions by these aerial hunters. Many of the most prominent crags which overlook the loftier Lakeland valleys afford an opportunity of watching the falcon at work. Buckbarrow, near the foot of Wastwater, and commanding the fertile seaward plains, is a characteristic place, whilst of the more favoured climbers' domains Pavey Ark and Doe Crag may be mentioned.



A WELL-FILLED RAVENS' NEST



Raven Crag, which juts forth so boldly in the narrow defile of Thirlmere, is an ideal vantage point. Let the mountain wanderer who has learnt that springtime is best of all seasons in the Lake country creep out amongst the brown heather on the very edge of the great crag's crest. There is natural hiding for his body in the dense growth, and lying face downwards he may gaze over the sudden edge straight down two hundred feet of grey rock to the screen of foliage, which dips lake-shoreward a thousand feet below.

If jackdaws play round the precipice it is useless to wait for the peregrine. That year the king of the air has forsaken Raven Crag. But let all be still except for the sighing of the breeze in the storm-wracked summit pines. Perchance a harsh, grating sound rises out of the depths. It is the young birds snugly ensconced under a 100-foot wall of overhanging rock and safe from the spoilers. Suddenly there is a grey flash across the precipice, an instant's glimpse of yellow legs, a sound as of a rushing wind, and the falcon shoots up into the firmament with a mighty rocket-like curve.

Two light specks are outlined against the pale grey of Helvellyn's topmost heights across the vale. The Thirlmere depression is used by the north- and south-bound homing pigeons. The falcon learnt this long ago. On glide the two speed-birds swiftly, but flight is hopeless before the destroyer. The falcon comes from behind. Probably before the pigeon realizes

its true danger it is smitten by the deadly talon, and falls past a mass of shattered feathers through mid-air. With a graceful return swoop the falcon catches the inert, tumbling mass in its claws, and, unheeding the other bird, glides down to a steeple-like rock at the end of the crag. There the prey is broken up for immediate family consumption.

Doubtless this somewhat public exhibition of the falcon's prowess accounts for the enmity of gamekeepers and others to all birds of prey. It cannot be denied that the falcon on very odd occasions varies its diet with grouse and other game birds, but the number is negligible. The buzzard and the raven are still less aggressive in this respect. But modern research and observation has shown that the destruction of the falcon and its compeers has been followed on the moors by the dreaded grouse disease. They first of all take the weakly and unhealthy birds. Thus in the Lake country the healthiest game areas are possessed by those who carefully preserve the birds of prey. The best known of these belongs to Lord Lonsdale, who goes to considerable trouble in this connexion.

A certain well-known collector who visits the Ullswater district every year has almost completed his hundred clutches of ravens' eggs. The feat of destruction is only one of which to be ashamed, but on account of the renewed energies of the keepers and watchers further



depredations will be attended with considerable risk of punishment for the illegality. Organized watch is being kept over nests in other parts of the district. It is becoming more and more difficult to destroy the added charm and fascination which our mountain birds afford to all who visit the heights with the seeing eye.

Cragmen who arrive in the vicinity of the falcon's eyrie would find it well worth a little trouble and delay to obtain a glimpse of its interior, especially if the young birds are hatched. They form one of the prettiest of sights. From the first they are clad in the softest of white down, and, when the beautiful brown feathers begin to show, a certain proud stateliness of carriage proclaims them to be no ordinary creatures of the air. They are somewhat prone to quarrel with each other. Already they begin to lift the reproving foot, and like the expert rock-climber they have realized that the use of the feet is their mainstay in life. The size and strength of the shin-bone is remarkable. Its proper development in later life enables the falcon to break the back of a great seagull during flight with a single blow.

The refuse scattered about the eyrie will show the kind of food approved by its owners. Pigeons, jackdaws, and pipits will be most noticed, and there is certain to be a considerable collection of rings from the legs of the former bird, for the falcon loves best of all the chase of the well-fed homer.

The buzzard is probably the most common of the bigger birds of prey. Certainly, both in North Wales and Lakeland, it is the species most frequently seen. Its hovering, unhurrying flight more nearly resembles that of the golden eagle than any other of its compeers. It nests later than the others, that is early in May and about the same time as the kestrel. The raven usually has its eggs approaching the hatching-stage about midway through March, and the falcon has made similar progress by the end of April.

The buzzard prefers a steep rock face of no great height on which to make its nest, which is built of sticks and small, withered, heather stalks. Like the falcon the number of its eggs seldom exceeds four, and three is the more usual number in Northern Lakeland. They are mostly of a brownish red colour with a white base showing at intervals. It is a common sight to find only one young bird survive. As the eggs are frequently laid at intervals of two or three days and brooding begins at once, the later-hatched youngsters are more likely to be nourishment than nourished.

The buzzard obtains most of its food from the ground, and the nest will probably contain young rabbits and a number of mice and moles. Masses of grey bristles may show that the hedgehog is sometimes approved, and live frogs have been known to be kept in the nest, probably in case other supplies run short. This bird, despite

its short, sturdy neck and cruel-looking beak, has not great powers of attack.

There is a Cumbrian saying, "as flayt<sup>1</sup> as a buzzard," and the schoolboy who runs away rather than fight is only a "gurt buzzard," or, in other words, a coward. It is rather difficult to understand how the word came to be used unless from long ago observations of the retiring ways of the buzzard when a fight is in the air. I have seen a pair of peewits harry a buzzard ridiculously.

A short time ago at Loweswater a friend was visiting a buzzard's nest on one side of the valley, and the mewings of the old birds filled the vale with unpleasing noise. The peregrine, who was sitting her eggs in the crags on the opposite side of the lake, disapproved of their doings and dashed forth apparently to castigate the offenders. She attacked the two larger birds furiously and in an instant the air was filled with loose feathers. The noisy pair retreated with all possible speed and actually forsook their nesting-place.

But though so afraid of their own kind, the buzzard is most aggressive of all the birds of prey where human beings are concerned. An inspection of the nestlings may lead to exciting adventures. The great, screaming bird, with head close-packed, descends like a big, brown stone straight for the unwelcome intruder's head, and only at the last moment prevents impact by sudden outspreading of the wings. There are many known cases of ordinary passing

<sup>1</sup> Frightened.

tourists having been attacked. Two years ago on Skiddaw, in Whitebeck Ghyll above Millbeck, a buzzard almost spread terror in the neighbourhood. Many people were chased, and one of these who used an umbrella in self-defence brought back only the stick and a few shreds of silk. An artist who innocently strayed upwards to sketch in the Ghyll told a thrilling tale of the sudden over-turning of himself and his easel. Part of his impedimenta was only recovered next day. Alas! this altogether delightful buzzard was trapped quite recently and is now stuffed in a way differing from that of the believers in the many fearful tales told of its doings.

The kestrel hawk has less of the romance of the crags connected with it than any of the former mountain birds that have been mentioned. It is now quite common in Lakeland, and the scantily built nest will be found on numerous crags, usually in the lower valley reaches. The interior of the nest is often simply the bare soil of the retaining ledge, but during the sitting of the eggs great numbers of indigestible pellets scattered about gradually accumulate and form a soft lining. The eggs, four or five in number, have the rounded shape of the falcon. In colour they are dull white, blotched and spotted with deep reddish brown of different shades.

The kestrel is unmistakable by its picturesque hovering habit which seems to occupy the greater part of its lifetime. It is seen high in air, a mere speck suspended as it were like Juno with a

cord from heaven. But let the bird's sharp eye detect a likely quarry, and the lithe, restless body is all alert. There is a sudden swoop to a nearer level, and then ere long a final, absolutely noiseless dart upon its victim—a tiny mouse. In fact the kestrel is the "mouser" of the mountains, and it is no exaggeration to say that in the summer-time it destroys quite thirty mice a day. Coleopterous insects are also largely taken. Thus this beautiful little hawk is as much a friend of the farmer as of the mountaineer, who so often finds his upward way cheered by glimpses of the graceful "wind hover's" fascinating evolutions.

Unfortunately the nesting days of the golden eagle in Lakeland are long past. Certainly the birds are seen occasionally, especially by those who reach the top of Helvellyn or Skiddaw, and, contrary to the usual custom, keep their eyes on things above. There is little doubt that these birds come down from Southern Argyllshire, which, after all, is only distant some two hours' flight. Now that the Thirlmere area is gradually becoming a sanctuary for the wild birds of prey, and some of them are undoubtedly realizing the excellent protection thus afforded, there is just a chance that the golden eagle may return.

For those who doubt the visits of the eagles, the story told of one of the best known of His Majesty's judges, who is also the keenest and best of authorities on birds of prey, may be of interest. Not long ago this enthusiast was driving down Lorton Vale in a landau. Suddenly

he leant forward and hit the driver a mighty smack on the back. "Stop!" he shouted excitedly, and then fell back on his seat with his eyes staring wildly skywards. The coachman was astonished. "His Honour" must be stricken suddenly ill, he thought, and the never-failing bottle came from an inner pocket. At last the judge realized the situation and muttered, "Eagles, man! Eagles! There they are!" The coachman saw nothing but "blackbirds" aloft, but the eye of the expert was not mistaken.

To all who love the heights the presence of our mountain birds is an added charm. There is a strange inner appeal in the echoing croak of the raven in the crags or the flash of the falcon across the dizzy cliff, the while one revels in the thrill of close contact with the great grey rocks.

It is not given to all to dare gladly the most desperate deeds of conquest. To such some of the remoter valleys, with less notable climbs hidden away in their precipitous recesses, must appeal. There it is that the wild birds of prey will be found. Years ago Scawfell and the Pillar rang with the calls of the buzzards; the ravens nested in Deep Ghyll and on the Pillar's north-eastern wall. The cragsman now has sole possession. Yet there is enough for all. Those who have heard the call of the hills, and felt their uplifting influence whether in the search for bird, or crag, or from other healthful quest, have tasted of living pleasures that do not pass away. The joys of the mountains are inexhaustible.

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