ALPINE ACCIDENTS.

THE past summer has been signalised by an unusual number of accidents amongst the higher Alps, and the Alpine Club in particular has to mourn the untimely death of two of its younger and more active members. In previous pages will be found obituary notices and some general observations on the lessons to be learnt from these sad events. Here we have merely to chronicle the facts, so far as they can be ascertained, for it is not the least melancholy feature of the three accidents which occurred above the snow-line, that no survivor remained to explain the immediate causes and circumstances of each mishap.

The first in date is that which happened on the Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret,* near Courmayeur, when Mr. F. M. Balfour, Professor of Animal Morphology and Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and his guide, Johann Petrus of Stalden, lost their lives. The following letter sent to the 'Times' contains all that can ever be known on the subject:—

'SIR,—By this time the news has, doubtless, reached England of the accident on the Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret, which resulted in the death of Professor F. M. Balfour, F.R.S., Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and his guide, Johann Petrus of Stalden.

'On the 14th inst. Mr. Balfour crossed the Col du Géant, and in descending the Italian side the idea first occurred to him of attempting the Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret, or, as it is also called, the Aiguille de la Belle Etoile. This peak, which had never been ascended, is a part of one of the buttresses of Mont Blanc, and is joined to the *massif* of the mountain by an extremely steep snow arête. My guide Emile Rey had previously attempted the peak, and was able to give Mr. Balfour so many details as to the probable line of ascent that he proposed that we should both accompany him. This Emile strongly advised me not to do, as he considered the snow to be in a dangerous condition. Mr. Balfour, however, did not agree with him as to the state of the snow, and next morning started with Petrus for the Aiguille, accompanied by a porter to carry blankets and wood as far as their sleeping place on the rocks.

'This was on Tuesday, the 18th, and as it was a new ascent and a difficult one, it was thought probable he might be absent two nights, and return to Courmayeur on Thursday afternoon. As he did not reappear, it was supposed that he must have crossed Mont Blanc to Chamonix, or, having found the ascent more difficult than he expected, gone down to the Châlets de Visaille for more provisions. On Friday Mr. Bertolini and Mr. W. M. Baker, an Englishman who was staying in the hotel, became seriously alarmed. Finding on Saturday he had not been heard of either at Chamonix or the Châlets de Visaille, they sent out a search-party, accompanied by the honorary chaplain, the Rev. H. S. Verschoyle, there being some hope of the poor men being

* A distant view of the peak will be found in the number of the *Alpine Journal* for May 1878.

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still alive. Early on Sunday morning, on reaching the rocks between the Glacier du Brouillard and the Glacier du Fresnay, they saw what appeared to be the bodies of Mr. Balfour and Petrus, both partially covered with snow. They were lying at the foot of the steep snow arête before referred to. It is clear that Mr. Balfour's death was instantaneous. As there was a comparatively small quantity of fresh snow about the place where they lay, we presume that it was not an avalanche which caused their death, but that one of them slipped, and the other had not sufficient strength to hold his companion. As the provisions which they had left at the sleeping place were untouched, the accident must have taken place on Wednesday, the 19th, just a week ago. But it is not certain whether they fell in the descent or ascent of the Aiguille.

'Yesterday sixteen guides and porters, headed by Emile Rey, started with the necessary means of bringing the remains back to the hotel.

'Mr. Balfour was a first-rate mountaineer, a fact sufficiently proved by his achievements in the Alps during the past two seasons. But it is much to be feared that he made an error in judgment, in taking one guide only instead of two, for such a long and difficult snow expedition.

'Mr. Balfour's brother is expected to arrive here to-day. Till then it is uncertain whether the remains will be buried here or conveyed to England. I am, Sir, your obedient servant, C. D. CUNNINGHAM.

'Hotel Royal, Courmayeur, July 26.'

'SIR,—The late Mr. F. M. Balfour's name was known and his loss has been keenly felt in so wide a circle that the following details of the accident by which he met his death will, doubtless, be interesting to a large number of your readers, on the Continent as well as in England. They were gathered by Mr. G. W. Balfour and myself at Courmayeur, partly from the guides who brought the bodies down and partly from an examination of the scene of the accident, in which we were assisted by Mr. W. M. Conway, who kindly made a sketch of the spot from a short distance. In several important points they will be found to supplement the letter from Mr. Cunningham, published in the "Times" of the 31st ult.

'In order to attain the lowest point of the arête between the Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret and Mont Blanc, Mr. Balfour and his guide had to reach the upper basin of the Glacier de Fresney. This basin is separated from the lower portion of the glacier by an excessively steep and impassable ice-fall, bounded on the left or north side by a wall of rocks, generally precipitous, but divided, not far from the ice, by a couloir. This couloir is wide and filled with ice near the top, but the lower half is a narrow gully, formed of rocks which at the time of the accident were to a great extent covered with thin ice. In the snow at the top of this couloir the traces of the party were seen by the guides; the bodies were found at the bottom, on the steep snow-slope of the lower glacier. Mr. Balfour must have climbed the rocks by the side of the gully; their difficulty may be inferred from the fact that the well-known guide, Emile Rey, once spent five hours in ascending them, though their vertical height must be less than 1,000 feet.

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'It is clear that the two travellers fell either from the top of the couloir or at some point in descending. The condition in which the bodies were found seems to exclude the former hypothesis. Mr. Balfour's neck was broken and his skull fractured in three places. Petrus's right arm was broken between the elbow and the shoulder, and so were his ribs on the right side; a fracture of the skull was, in his case, probably received during the very difficult and dangerous descent of the bodies to Courmayeur. Both showed some bruises and abrasions, but no other serious external wound; their hands were scratched only on the outside, so that they could have made no effort to save themselves by grasping anything. The clothes were torn, but not to any great extent; nor was the rope broken. These appearances seem to point to a fall over rocks, but through a comparatively small height. The guides were confident that they had not come down with an avalanche.

'Whether the summit had been reached will, perhaps, never be known. One or other must have slipped in the descent of the rock wall, not far above the glacier. It is most probable that Petrus fell first; partly on the general ground that Mr. Balfour, who was remarkably sure-footed, would, of course, in any difficult place have the assistance of the rope, while his companion, coming last, would have to do without it; partly because four or five adjacent nails were broken off the heel of Mr. Balfour's right boot in a manner which could not be accounted for by a mere slip on his part. His foot would appear rather to have been torn by a violent wrench from firm standing ground. It may be added that Petrus's body was found in advance, but it would be rash to draw any strong conclusion from this circumstance. It has been stated that the guide's boots were not properly nailed; this, however, is not the case. The nails were, it is true, slightly worn, but not sufficiently so to be a source of danger.

'It is not easy to say how far the absence of a third man contributed to the accident. In a place of extreme difficulty it would very probably have meant only the loss of another life. On the other hand, by carrying a spare rope and indirectly by lightening the labour of what must have been a very arduous day, a second guide might, perhaps, have spared us the disaster.

'The columns of the "Times" have borne witness to the magnitude of a loss which Mr. Balfour's friends alone can fully appreciate. Permit me to add one word of respect to the memory of a brave guide. A finer climber or more true-hearted man could scarcely have been found among the Alps. The fact that he was brother-in-law to Peter Knubel, who a few years ago lost three brothers at once by an accident on the Lyskamm, adds an additional pathos to his fate. I am, Sir, yours faithfully, WALTER LEAF.

'London, August 11.

'P.S. Since writing the above I have ascertained from the porter who accompanied the party to the sleeping-place, that they had with them a spare rope, much thinner than that with which they were tied. This was not found upon the bodies, and had doubtless been left behind in

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the descent of some difficult place. It is not impossible that it might have frayed upon the rocks, and thus actually caused the accident.

'It is perhaps right to add that Henri Séraphin held that the fall had taken place on the snow at the top of the couloir, and that a vertical height of 700 or 800 feet had thus been traversed. Emile Rey, who at first agreed with us that there must have been a slip close to the foot of the rocks, has, I understand, since come round to Henri's opinion. To me it is simply incredible that such a fall, over excessively steep ice and rocks, without the protection which would have been afforded by an avalanche, had they ridden upon the top of one, should have produced no further injury to the bodies. A vertical fall of 30 feet would be enough to account for the wounds received.

'Should the rocks be again climbed, a careful search ought to be made for the spare rope; there seems to be no other chance of any solution of the mystery. W. L.

'October 8.'

A foolish report, which gained a wide circulation, was contradicted on authority in a letter to the same paper, which it is well to place on record:—

'SIR,—A telegram from Geneva appeared in the newspapers on July 31, concerning the accident in which Mr. F. M. Balfour and his guide lost their lives in the attempt to climb the Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret, near Courmayeur. It was stated that before making the ascent Mr. Balfour executed his will and made provision for the family of his guide. This report is calculated to give a painfully false impression of recklessness, not only as to his own life, but also as to that of his guide. I have been informed, by a near relative of Mr. Balfour, that his will is dated several years ago. I happen also to know that before a previous tour in Switzerland, he made a similar provision for his guide's benefit in case of accident; that on the present occasion the arrangement was made before he went to Courmayeur; and that in a letter to his brother he referred to the smallness of the risk in climbing, and said the enclosed cheque was to be torn up on his return to England. It was, in short, a last example of the singular thoughtfulness for others which marked his whole character.

'It is now but too effectually proved that the attempt to climb the Aiguille was venturesome; but all who knew Mr. Balfour will disbelieve that he thought he was incurring abnormal risk, and will especially repudiate the implication of recklessness with his guide's life. I remain your obedient servant, G. H. DARWIN.

'Trinity College, Cambridge, August 8.'

There had scarcely been time to recover from the shock of this terrible event, a blow not merely to mountaineering, but to biological science, when two other accidents followed close on one another. On August 3, Mr. W. Penhall and Andreas Maurer of Meyringen, perished on the Wetterhorn, and on August 12, Mr. W. E. Gabbett, with J. M. Lochmatter and the latter's son, a youth of 19, shared the same fate on the Dent Blanche.

Of the former tragedy we give a detailed account (fuller than any yet

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published) written by Mr. Howard Barrett, who accompanied the search party, and whose professional opinion is of the greatest value in any attempt to seek out the causes of the accident.

'Readers of the "Alpine Journal" will be interested to have an account of the sad accident that befell Mr. Penhall and Andreas Maurer last August, of a fuller and more detailed character than that which I thought it necessary to communicate to the "Times."

'On August 1 Mr. Penhall joined Mr. Church at Grindelwald. They had for their guides Andreas Maurer and Rudolf Kaufmann. Mr. Penhall was anxious to ascend some Oberland peak before he accompanied his friend over the Agassiz Joch to the Eggischhorn, en route for Zermatt. He therefore proposed that he should start at midnight, and ascend the Wetterhorn direct from Grindelwald, taking with him Andreas Maurer; whilst Mr. Church should start in the morning with Rudolf Kaufmann for the Schwarzenegg Hütte, where he and Maurer would rejoin them in the evening, as he counted upon being back in Grindelwald by 2 P.M. They left the "Bär" hotel at 12.30 midnight, on Thursday, August 3, the night being warm and close. When evening fell, and still they did not return, considerable anxiety began to be felt concerning them.

'The day had been far from fine, and the mountain enshrouded during a great part of it in clouds suggestive of snow. It was thought that they might possibly have descended to Rosenlaui, and at about 8.30 P.M. a Meyringen man was despatched thither to inquire. He returned at 4.30 A.M. on Friday, with no news of them. Therefore, at 6 A.M. a party consisting of Johann Tännler, Ulrich Kaufmann, Rudolf Kaufmann, Kaspar Maurer, "little" Peter Baumann, and myself started and went up by way of the Milchbachloch. All the crevasses in the line of route were thoroughly examined, as was also the ground at the foot of the declivity of the smooth shelving rocks on the eastern side of the glacier. At the hut we found Maurer's sack, containing the provisions, &c. I had with me a very powerful double telescope, and, armed with this, Tännler and I lay down 30 yards in front of the hut to examine as much as was visible of the upward route. We easily found the tracks of those we sought on the first snow-slopes visible above the hut, and followed them with the eye upwards, and then to the right, along a sort of broad corridor of snow, backed by the wall of rocks named, I believe, the Wildgrat (though Tännler would call it nothing but "Der Fluh"), and bounded on the west, or the side nearest to us, by a steep (and in places apparently vertical) declivity of rugged rock falling to the snow-slopes beneath. The tracks were plainly visible along this corridor until a point was reached where a short distance farther would have taken them into the great couloir, up the side or on the ridge of which the ascent of the mountain is usually made. But here, to our dismay, we saw the line of their footsteps cut across by the track of an avalanche; there were none beyond it. It seemed distressingly clear that a fatal accident had occurred, and that all that remained to be done was to find and bring down the bodies. So I sent down Rudolf Kaufmann with a request to Mr. Boss to send up a strong party of guides and

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porters with carrying necessaries, and the rest of us proceeded with our search. It was both inexpedient and dangerous to follow the track of those who were lost. Inexpedient, because the bodies were probably not there, but carried down below; and dangerous, because the snow on the mountain was still in a most unsafe state, and inconsiderable avalanches were dropping freely about during the whole time we were upon it. So we skirted along below the line of rugged rocks of which I have spoken, over which all snow that fell from the space I have ventured to term a corridor must descend. When we came, though at some distance below it, to the spot where the avalanche had swept across the corridor, there, stretching from our feet in a vast and tapering mound, high up to the rocks over which it had fallen, lay its remains; and on its surface, at one third of the distance between ourselves and the rocks, was some dark object. As Tännler first fixed the glass upon it, his muttered exclamation and sudden pallor assured me that we had found what we sought. This was about 3 P.M. Before we moved we carefully examined the spot. Above the tail of the avalanche was the broken wall of rugged rocks. The rocks here were about 200 feet high and very precipitous, and cleft by an almost vertical gully down which this avalanche had swept, and which bore the appearance of being a regular channel for similar down-pours. Above the rocks, but concealed from sight by the serrated outline of their upper edge, was the snow-slope or "corridor" from which the unfortunate men were swept. Rising steeply behind that again, was the jagged wall of the Wildgrat, cleft also by a small or secondary couloir, down which undoubtedly had rushed the mass of soft snow that had overwhelmed them. This, I think, disposes of the question, "Did they start the avalanche themselves?" They did not. It came from the Wildgrat or Fluh, and not from the great couloir, or from the slope they were traversing. With all possible speed, for we were in a position not suitable for loitering on a hot afternoon, we waded up through the soft snow of the avalanche to the spot where lay the bodies. They were close together, almost touching one another; the rope unsevered, but strangely twisted up, still bound them together. They lay on the surface of the snow, and not in the least imbedded in it. A sadder sight I have not often seen. Their hats were picked up 20 or 30 yards above them. Death had evidently been very sudden, for the *rigor mortis* had surprised the limbs and fingers, and stiffened them in their very last act of desperate clutching. It is only when death is extremely sudden that the *rigor mortis* appears to set in in this instantaneous manner. Instances of a similar character are not at all uncommon on the battle-field in the case of those shot through the heart. I need not enumerate the injuries that each had received. Suffice it to say that they were sufficient to satisfy me, as a surgeon, that death had been almost instantaneous. But I was struck with the fact that the clothes were scarcely torn, or much disarranged; that the limbs in the case of both, and the head in the case of one of them, were without a fracture; and that they lay so completely on the surface of the snow. I have reason to believe that the chief injuries were inflicted and death occasioned during the descent of the rock

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gully, and that the vast mass of soft snow in which they were enveloped prevented those even greater injuries that might have been expected from so tremendous a fall. Penhall's watch stood at 4.10, and had not been wound up. Maurer's had stopped at 6.30 (A.M.?)

'The latter is the probable time of the accident, though it credits the unfortunate men with having gone very quickly, considering that three hours of their walk were in the dark. We carried the poor fellows down to the lowest verge of the snow, and in it we buried them for the night. The next morning the guides and porters sent up, together with my own guides, brought the bodies down—a task of no slight difficulty. At the Wirthschaft, near the foot of the glacier, they were transferred to biers, and were followed to the village, as in funeral procession, by a large body of guides and a few English mountaineers.

'On Tuesday, August 8, they were buried in the same grave, under the eastern end of Grindelwald church. The funeral service of Mr. Penhall was read by the Rev. H. W. Majendie, himself a member of the Club, assisted by the Rev. Arthur Waugh, resident chaplain.

'It is not less than a duty to mention here, with gratitude, the extreme kindness and delicate feeling displayed by Messrs. Emil and Fritz Boss in all pertaining to this sad business. Had the victims of the disaster been kin of their own, they could scarcely have done more, or in a more graceful manner.

'Though, in common with most mountaineers, I wholly condemn the practice of attempting peaks attended only by one guide, I am bound to say that in this instance I do not think the catastrophe would have been averted by two guides. It seemed to me that the avalanche was too large. Had there been three or four guides—which, for an ordinary ascent of the Wetterhorn, would seem absurd—it is possible they might have been saved. The mountain ought not to have been attempted on that day, or the next; the snow was known to be in an unsatisfactory condition. I spent the night of Tuesday, August 1, in the Gleckstein hut, listening to the storm that raged without; and in the morning, though the peak itself was too shrouded in falling snow, sleet, and mist to be seen, fresh snow was lying a very short distance above the hut. Had I been aware of Mr. Penhall's intention, I should have ventured to express an opinion. But we have no evidence that Maurer offered any remonstrance to Mr. Penhall, either on the score of weather or of going alone with him.

'In conclusion, it becomes necessary that I should explain the slight discrepancy that exists between what I have written above and one sentence in my letter to the "Times."

'The sentence alluded to is as follows:—

'"An avalanche of fresh snow—what Alpine peasants call a *Staublauine*—had either swept down upon them while they were in and not far from the bottom of what is called the great couloir, or they had themselves started one."

'Looking upwards from the place whence we first sighted the bodies, very slightly to the right of the spot where the accident happened, just the lower portion of a considerable snow couloir is visible, which, seen only in part, I mistook for the "great couloir;" but as a matter of fact

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that is still further to the right. I only discovered this slight error by the inspection of a photograph (one of Beck's Hochgebirges-Ansichten), taken from a very advantageous point of view, in which the whole of that portion of the mountain is very clearly depicted.

'Moreover, I wrote that letter on the Saturday afternoon in a hurry, and when I had had only a short conversation with Tännler about the manner of the accident. Now the German of that excellent man is of a peculiar and (to me) occasionally incomprehensible character; and, in the few words we exchanged, I understood him to give the version set out in my letter. That did not absolutely accord with what I thought I had seen; but, after many seasons' experience, my faith in his rapid and correct intuition and deduction in matters relating to the mountains, as well as in his truthfulness, is such that I believed it safer to record his opinion than my own. But, in the course of a subsequent and longer conversation with himself and Ulrich Kaufmann, when all complicated German and patois was fully unravelled, I found that I had misunderstood him; that what I believed myself to have seen, I had really seen, and that my original impression, as stated above, was correct.'

Maurer, who was only married last year, leaves a widow and one child. Subscriptions were opened at Grindelwald, in England, and elsewhere, and soon poured in; a list is printed in another part of this number, and further contributions will be gratefully received by Mr. F. J. Church (The Deanery, St. Paul's, E.C.), or Mr. Howard Barrett (3 Tavistock Square, W.C.). The following letter from Mr. F. J. Church explains the proposed application of the subscriptions received:—

'I shall be much obliged if you will allow me to state in the "Alpine Journal" the outline of the scheme on which it is proposed to administer the "Maurer Fund." The money subscribed will be paid to the Gemeinde-Präsident of Meiringen, to be deposited in the communal "Kasse," where it will carry interest at 4 per cent. Melchior Anderegg has consented to act as trustee for the widow and child of Maurer; and he will pay to the widow, so long as she remains unmarried, an annuity (in periodical payments) equal to, or slightly exceeding, the annual interest on the whole fund. He will also advance to the widow by way of loan, at his discretion, any sums that he may from time to time think fit. If the widow marries again, her interest in the fund will wholly cease. It is proposed to devote the *corpus* of the fund (subject to the provision for an annuity to the widow) to the maintenance and education of the son, and to giving him a start in life. It has been thought undesirable that he should succeed to a small fortune on coming of age. It may be added that Maurer's life was insured in the Zürich Insurance Company for 4,000 frs, which have been paid. This sum has been almost entirely used up in paying his debts. The above scheme is founded generally on that adopted in the case of the Knubel Fund, which has been found to work well.'

The accident on the Dent Blanche is described in the following letter to the 'Times':—

'I regret to have to record another fatal accident which occurred on

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Saturday last, August 12, in this district. On the previous night Mr. W. E. Gabbett, accompanied by J. M. Lochmatter of St. Niklaus, and his son, slept at the Stockje, meaning to ascend the Dent Blanche the next day. The weather was splendid, and the mountain in a favourable condition. They should have returned to Zermatt on the evening of the same day. As they had not been heard of by midday on Sunday, the 13th, two guides from St. Niklaus, with Mr. F. J. Church, started for the Stockje to see if they could obtain any tidings of the missing party. Mr. Church returned with the intelligence that at the Stockje they had only found Mr. Gabbett's knapsack. A search party, led by Joseph Imboden, of St. Niklaus, and consisting of an English gentleman and seven guides, started at 2 A.M. on the morning of the 14th. At the Stockje they met the two Messrs. Wilson, with their two guides and the two who were already there. They at once divided into two parties, four of them going over the Col d'Hérens and the rest straight up the rocks of the Wandfluh. They rejoined each other high up on the Glacier de Ferpècle, and went along the slopes of the Dent Blanche to a spot a short distance below the bergschrund, where they found the bodies about 2 P.M. The search party at once descended with some difficulty to Ferpècle, taking the bodies with them, and leaving them on the moraine of the Ferpècle glacier. A telegram was despatched from Zermatt to Evolena, requesting that assistance should be sent to the top of the Col d'Hérens as early as possible on the morning of Tuesday, August 15. The party from Zermatt met the original search party with the bodies close to the summit of the col, and Zermatt was reached about 7 P.M. on Tuesday evening. The spot where the bodies were found was about 2,500 feet below the summit of the Dent Blanche, and the slip must have occurred in traversing a difficult piece of smooth rock some twenty minutes below the summit. The bodies of all three were frightfully disfigured and scarcely recognisable. Mr. Gabbett is to be buried to-day in the English churchyard at Zermatt, the two Lochmatters at St. Niklaus to-morrow morning. It is impossible to speak too highly of the conduct of Joseph Imboden, of St. Niklaus, and the other guides who accompanied him on the search. The weather on Sunday night and during the whole of Monday was exceedingly bad, and much fresh snow fell, adding enormously to the difficulties they had to encounter. I wish to add that J. M. Lochmatter has left a widow and nine children very badly provided for, in whose favour subscriptions will be received by M. Seiler, at Zermatt, or they may be paid to the account of the undersigned, at Messrs. Hoare's, 37 Fleet Street, E.C.

'I remain, Sir, faithfully yours,

'H. SEYMOUR HOARE.

'Zermatt, August 16.'

Mr. J. Stafford Anderson, who had made the ascent of the same peak the previous day, writes:—

'It was certainly in the best possible condition for attack, and I think I am right in saying that *no* ice was on the rocks anywhere. We saw the poor fellows at the Stockje, and chatted with them about the mountain. In answer to a query on Mr. Gabbett's part, I said that the

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mountain was in a very favourable condition, and that he would not find the least difficulty in making the ascent. The place where the accident happened was no doubt on some bad rocks on the south-west face, about twenty minutes from the summit. These lie at an angle of, I should think, 45°, with *very little* hold, being smooth slabs a few feet wide, with small ledges between each, of a few inches in height, sloping the wrong way. The height of the bad place is about twelve feet. At the base of this, foothold bad, and to the right (facing the summit) for some little distance (fifteen to twenty feet) also bad going. Down the latter part we found a little water trickling on our descent (4 P.M.), which *may* have been ice before noon the next day.'

The bodies were found about 200 feet apart, forming a sort of inverted triangle, according to a letter in the 'Times' from Rev. W. Lefroy, the English chaplain:—

'The boy and Mr. G. were almost in a line, but 200 feet apart. L. was nearly equidistant from each, but fully 250 feet from them. Young L. had a coil of rope round him. He was found first. Mr. G.'s wrist and body were indented considerably by what must have been a tremendous strain on the rope. L.'s wrist was marked in the same way.' Most of the clothing was gone, and neither watches nor ice-axes could be found.

We are glad to hear that the appeal for Lochmatter's family has been liberally responded to, nearly 10,000 frs. having been collected. Mr. Gabbett, after a distinguished career at Oxford, had been appointed to a tutorship at the University of Durham, which he held at the time of his death. Though not a member of the Alpine Club, he had done much good work in the Alps, specially in the Dauphiné.

The following accidents took place below the snow-line. Herr v. Rütte, of Bern, had, with a friend, attempted to ascend the Wilde Frau, in the Blümlis Alp group, without guides. Overtaken by bad weather, they spent the night on the Dündengrat, and next morning gained the Club hut. They then started on their way down to the Œschinen Alp, but, losing the track, reached a spot at which it was necessary to descend 15 feet of sheer rock. Herr v. Rütte lowered his friend by the rope, and then sprang down himself; but unfortunately he overbalanced himself, and fell over a precipice below. Help was obtained from the huts, and he was transported to Kandersteg, where the unfortunate traveller shortly succumbed to his injuries. This sad event took place about the middle of August.

A boy of 14, who had been up the Niesen with a party of friends, slipped on the way down as he was running to pick some flowers, and fell over a precipice, being taken up dead.

Similarly, Herr Leo Arnstein, of Vienna, lost his life on the Gaisberg, near Ober Gurgl (Oetzthal), while looking for edelweiss.

Herr E. Schenkler, a German student, climbing with some friends near the Great S. Bernard, got separated from them in a fog, and was killed by a fall over a precipice.

The death-roll for the summer is thus a very long one, and many issues concerned with the very elements of mountaineering science are raised by these numerous accidents, particularly the first two thus

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described. One point common to the accidents which cost Professor Balfour and Mr. Penhall their lives, is that each was accompanied by a single guide. This similarity was the occasion of a letter in the 'Times,' weighty in itself and by reason of the signatures, and which is worth placing on record.

'SIR,—In consequence of the recent accidents in the Alps, we feel it our duty to protest against the practice of single travellers undertaking difficult expeditions with only one guide.

'In all cases where the rope is necessary the number of persons to be attached to it should not exceed five, and should never be less than three. Four men to a rope—two travellers and two guides—is the safe and proper number. Where two are roped together on rocks or a steep slope, and one falls, in nine cases out of ten he will carry his companion with him. If he falls on a crevassed glacier the one remaining on the firm ice will be unable both to hold up and to rescue the other. A trifling accident may disable the best mountaineer; in such a case a single companion is incapable of rendering any effective assistance.

'The dangers of mountaineering may be reduced within very narrow limits, if all the precautions are taken which reason and experience have shown to be necessary. If these are habitually disregarded, disasters will inevitably occur. We are, Sir, your obedient servants,

'T. G. BONNEY, F.R.S., President of the Alpine Club.
'WILLIAM MATHEWS, } former Presidents.
'C. E. MATHEWS. }

'August 10.'

The principle here laid down will be generally agreed to by mountaineers. But it must be added that its neglect will not account for all the accidents of this year. In Professor Balfour's and Herr von Rütte's cases the absence of a third was probably the cause of disaster. On the Wetterhorn another cause must be looked for. It may be found in the failure to take into account the state of the mountain. In mountain, as in other warfare, there are two factors in the problem—the strength of the position attacked, and that of the attacking party. Fair allowance is seldom made either by guides or travellers for the variations in the former factor caused by bad weather. A peak is reckoned 'difficult' or 'easy,' and men forget that the state of peaks is as variable as that of the sea itself, and what was easy last year may now be full of peril. Rocks coated in ice or fresh snow may be in the highest degree dangerous, while a month later the same rocks will be as safe for fair climbers as a mule-path. Avalanches, after fresh snow, fall frequently in spots where during settled fine weather they are practically unknown. We hope that this lesson, which has once more been so painfully impressed upon us, will be taken to heart by all mountaineers who have a true love for their noble pursuit.

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