New Experiences in the Old Playground.

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(Read before the Alpine Club, December 14, 1891.)

ABOUT nine years ago, and after a season in which fatal accidents to English mountaineers were unusually numerous, I ventured to write, in the 'Alpine Journal,' an article which is known as the 'Alpine Obituary.' In that article I showed that eighty-seven lives had been lost or thrown away in the twenty-seven years commencing with 1856 and ending with 1882. I endeavoured to show not only that every one of these accidents was owing to preventible causes, but that scarcely one of them need have happened if ordinary prudence had been observed. I asserted that mountaineering was not dangerous, provided that the climber knew his business, and took all those precautions which the 'common sense of most' had decided to be essential. And I begged all mountaineers who loved the mountains for their own sake—for the lessons they could teach and the happiness they could bring—to do nothing that could discredit their manly pursuit, or bring down the ridicule of the undiscerning upon the noblest pastime in the world.

That article was honoured by translation into many European languages. Its conclusions were in the main generally approved, although some eminent climbers did not altogether share my views as to the needlessness of Alpine accidents. Mr. Grove frankly told the Club that perfect freedom from misfortune could not be hoped for. Mr. Dent agreed with those 'who think that mountaineering can never become wholly free from peril,' and a very competent critic in the *Saturday Review* expressed his opinion that, 'good as my arguments seemed on paper, the disagreeable fact remained that accidents continued to occur in the Alps.'

It is painful to have to record that accidents not only continue, but are increasing in number. The object I have now in view is to write the Alpine Obituary up to date, to point out to what extent my former views have been strengthened or modified by the occurrences of recent years, and to offer such comments upon this important subject as further experience has proved to be necessary.

But how was I to describe the subject which I desired to treat? If I used the title of Alpine Obituary in its naked simplicity, the more nervous members of the Club might be frightened away from this meeting. So by a kind of pious

fraud, for which I trust I may be forgiven, I have called my subject 'New Experiences in the Old Playground.'

Of course every accident is a new experience, but I am quite prepared to allow you to reproach me, as a certain rector once reproached his new curate, when he said, 'Sir, if your text had got the smallpox your sermon would never have caught it.'

Numerous as have been the fatal accidents already recorded, they were not of annual occurrence. Of the twenty-seven years to which I have referred, six were unmarked by any serious calamity. But not a single year from 1883 to 1891 has been free from disaster, and some of these years have been the gravest in our annals.

In 1883 the Count de la Baume-Pluvinel was killed on the Piz Bernina, owing to the fact of his guides and himself being all on a snow-bridge at the same time.

In 1884 M. Guttinger was killed on the Grandes Jorasses, because he disregarded the warning of his guides, and persisted in unnecessarily exposing himself to falling stones.

In 1885 seven lives were lost, four in consequence of men climbing without guides; and although I admit that Herr Emil Zsigmondy, who lost his life on the Meije in that year, was an experienced and excellent mountaineer, yet I think that his best friends must have admitted that he deliberately ran a risk from which a man of reasonable prudence would have recoiled.

In 1886 eight lives were lost, the whole of them, as I venture to think, from preventible causes.

In 1887 eight more lives were lost, six of them in that frightful accident on the Jungfrau which we all remember.

In 1888 seven travellers and three guides were killed, including those valued members of our own Club whose loss we still mourn, and whose deaths I have thought it right to include in my sad list, though not occurring in the Alps, for the climbers were really Alpine climbers and were accompanied by Swiss guides.

Only four deaths occurred in 1889, but in 1890 we have to record the most terrible list of misadventures in the whole history of mountaineering. Five travellers and nine guides were lost in that fatal year, and amongst the latter such well-known masters of their craft as Antonio Castagneri, Jean Joseph Maquignaz, and Jean Antoine Carrel.

During the present year the list of fatalities dwindled to seven, but for the nine years ending with the past season the names of forty travellers and twenty guides have been added to the death-roll.

I have no reason to believe that more men climb now than ten or fifteen years ago, and if I am correct in this assumption, then we have to face this significant fact, that whereas we had to record the deaths of forty-nine travellers and thirty-eight guides (eighty-seven in all)—in the twenty-seven years ending with 1882—an average of just over three per annum—we have now to record the deaths of sixty persons in nine years, an average of nearly seven per annum. In other words, the death-rate has more than doubled in recent years. You will not blame me if I bring you face to face with such facts as these. 'There is no tone deep enough for regret—there is no voice loud enough for warning.'

Of course, differences of opinion may arise as to what is really an Alpine accident. It has often been pointed out that accidents in the Alps are not necessarily Alpine accidents. Nor does the fact of an accident occurring above or below the snow-line afford any reasonable test. The loss of Mr. Devas in climbing steep slopes above the Gorner Glacier in 1885 was not owing to an Alpine accident; nor was the death of Herr Weber-Imhof in his descent from the Piz Bernina in 1891. The only rational test is whether the mishap did or did not occur to a mountaineer at work; and if this test is admitted, the height of the mountain on which the accident happens is of no importance. The fatalities at comparatively low elevations have been very numerous in recent years; but such misadventures—of which that which resulted in the death of Mr. Macnamara in 1890 is a notable example—are, of course, not included in the table which accompanies this paper.

How many of the sixty deaths to which I have called your attention were due to the culpable neglect of all usual precautions? Some of them resulted from that most silly of all vagaries, climbing alone; others from the fact of a party consisting of only two persons; others from the absence of a rope or the use of an insufficient one. We cannot believe that those six Swiss gentlemen who were lost on the Jungfrau would all have been destroyed if they had not chosen to tie themselves together with pieces of twine. Others have occurred in consequence of men persisting in climbing in bad weather—of all offences one which appears to me the most stupid and the most impossible to pardon.

In the first place it is extremely unpleasant, and can give no sane person the smallest amount of satisfaction. Again, it is extremely dangerous; for, under such circumstances, expeditions otherwise easy become perilous in the extreme,

and present difficulties with which the climber is often physically unable to grapple. Cannot we create good form in this respect? and hold that the man who wilfully violates this unwritten law of mountaineering shall forfeit the confidence and the respect of his colleagues?

If laws are to be observed there must be some punishment for their infraction, and I commend to the earnest consideration of the managers of this Society what the nature of this punishment should be.*

Other accidents in my list have obviously resulted from bad guiding. It is difficult to believe that any guide who had learned even the rudiments of his art could allow an entire party to be on a snow-bridge or an overhanging cornice at one time. Five of the deaths I have to record resulted from this gross carelessness on the part of guides. In my profession if a man commits a gross breach of professional duty he is struck off the rolls; and guides so offending should receive a similar punishment, and be no longer eligible to serve on the roll of guides.

One-fourth of the accidents in my present record have happened to more or less inexperienced climbers travelling without guides. We all admit this practice to be justifiable in the case of competent and well-trained mountaineers; but it is wholly unjustifiable in the cases of those who have not even served an apprenticeship to their business.

There are two instances of death from exposure about which I wish to say a few words. The first was that of Jean Antoine Carrel, who struggled to bring his party in safety from the hut on the Breuil side of the Matterhorn through that terrible storm that raged in the Alps on August 25, 1890. It is impossible in this instance to attribute the slightest blame to anyone. One traveller, accompanied by two very competent guides, set out for the Matterhorn on a cloudless day. There was not a hint of bad weather till after they had reached the comparative safety of the hut; indeed, guides who descended the Matterhorn that evening prophesied for them a splendid day on the morrow. But a violent hurricane raged not only all through the night but during the whole of the next day, and on the day following retreat was inevitable. It may be that Carrel was not in his usual health, but on him fell the lion's share of the work;

* I record with regret that many members of the Club—not excepting the writer of this paper—have in their younger and less experienced days, and carried away by a momentary enthusiasm, been guilty of this offence; but in their case repentance has preceded absolution.

and, after many hours of extraordinary toil, he had just succeeded in bringing his party from peril to safety when he sat down and expired. There has never occurred in our annals a more conspicuous example of genuine fidelity and faithful devotion.

This instance obliges me in fairness to admit that there are cases—rare cases—when sudden storms constitute a danger which the most prudent and the most careful climbers cannot wholly avoid.

The second death from exposure occurred to Mr. Borckhardt, on the other side of the same mountain, in 1886. Two travellers and two guides had attained the summit of the Matterhorn in fine weather; it then began to hail and snow, and the party occupied ten hours in getting about half-way down the mountain, when they were benighted under distressing circumstances. They were too cold to eat, and their wine was frozen solid. The next day, one traveller and two guides with great difficulty descended, a search party having gone out to meet them. The descending party appeared to think that they had sufficiently discharged their duty by informing those engaged in the search of the exact spot where Mr. Borckhardt could be found. At any rate, this poor man was left, after a night of cold and suffering, feeble, exhausted, and alone. I do not know any greater mountaineering crime than to leave a sick man on a mountain in absolute solitude. It is a course which should be regarded with abhorrence by every honourable mountaineer; and it can only arise from the grossest ignorance, or from a heartless indifference to the consequences of wilful neglect.

There is another cause of accident which is getting common, and that is climbing very steep rocks from mere wantonness. Signor Andreis, treasurer of the Italian Club, pays a visit with a friend to the well-known sanctuary of San Michele. Instead of taking the path, they must needs clamber up the precipice below the monastery. After an hour's climb they reached the path—which one of the party proposed to take—but Signor Andreis begged for 'a little more gymnastics.' Well, he had his gymnastics and paid the penalty with his life. To climb rocks steep and difficult which there is no need to climb—which lead nowhere—and, of course, without a rope, is deliberately to court disaster. A steeplejack is not an object of my admiration.

I am inclined to think that, in addition to sudden and unexpected storms, the possibility of being struck by a falling stone is the only real risk from which no prudence

can altogether protect the mountaineer. A few years ago I was on the Dent d'Herens—one of a party of five. We had made a happy ascent, and, in returning, about half an hour below the summit, the guide who was leading (Ulrich Almer) was struck by a falling rock, which we had probably loosened in our ascent. It was a very serious blow: his hands and head were much injured, and some of his ribs were broken. We were out with our wounded guide all the day of the accident, and all night and part of the next day. On looking back at that accident I confess that I am unable to see how any possible care or prudence could have avoided it.

During the last season two men—a traveller and a guide—were killed on Mont Blanc. I visited the spot after the accident, which, in my judgment, ought not to have happened. The party were overtaken by bad weather in the hut at the foot of the Bosses. The next morning they descended in mist and storm. They were joined by some workmen, and, in order to facilitate the accident which ultimately happened, eleven persons were on one rope. Everyone knows the détour to the right the climber has to make in descending the little plateau to avoid danger from the séracs which fall from the Dom. But this sapient party made a détour to the left to save a few minutes of time, and actually walked between the Dom and a well-known crevasse which is the object of all travellers to avoid. They encountered the usual afternoon avalanches, with the usual result. The only wonder is that the party, having apparently done everything in their power to insure the success of the accident, should only have lost two of their number.

Many foolish persons now climb, or are hauled up, Mont Blanc. It is generally their first mountain—often their only one. They have seldom any joy in it. But familiarity breeds contempt on the part of their guides, and ordinary precautions are not observed. In my opinion there is no mountain in the whole Alps so dangerous as Mont Blanc in certain conditions of weather and of snow, and yet scores of persons attempt it, imperfectly trained, unsuitably equipped, insufficiently clothed, improperly led. Over thirty lives have been lost already on this mountain, which seems destined to become a gigantic mausoleum.

This last year more lives have been endangered owing to some enterprising persons endeavouring to construct an observatory upon the summit of Mont Blanc. I encountered

a dozen porters toiling up the snow with tons of woodwork intended for the building. No doubt in the interests of science it is highly desirable to have observatories where the familiars of the various Astronomers Royal can be nightly employed to outwatch the winking stars, but why on the summit of Mont Blanc? I am informed that observations on the movements of the heavenly bodies to be of any scientific value must be regular and constant. What devotees of astronomy are likely to be able to make regular observations at such an elevation?

On August 14 last at seven in the morning my thermometer registered 4° below zero of Fahr. at the foot of the Bosses—36° of frost two hours below the summit! Was it desired to add death by freezing to the long catalogue of Alpine misadventure? As a matter of fact some of the workmen employed suffered very seriously from frost-bite, and the whole scheme has been altogether abandoned.

To sum up, climbing without guides or alone, or in parties of two on snow-covered glaciers, or without a rope, or gymnastics out of place, or the ignorance or incompetence of guides, have caused the deaths of fifty-two out of the sixty persons whose names I have recorded. Carrel, as I have said, died from pure and unexpected misadventure. How the Count de Villanova with Maquignaz and Castagneri met their deaths we shall never know. They started for Mont Blanc, probably to reach the new hut on the Italian side of the Dom, on August 18, 1890—a superb day as I well remember, for I spent part of it on the summit of the Grandes Jorasses. I have a note in my diary, 'Clear everywhere except the Calotte of Mont Blanc, which has a capote over it—a sure sign of change of weather.'

The weather did change that night. But in the absence of all trustworthy information it would not be fair in this instance to attribute blame to the parties. Nor will I ever assume that the terrible accident in the Caucasus could have primarily resulted from carelessness or imprudence on the part of travellers so experienced and guides so trustworthy.

We English have, however, some slight cause for congratulation. Of the forty-nine deaths of climbers (exclusive of guides) recorded in my previous list, twenty-nine were either English or American. Of the forty deaths recorded in my present list, six only were those of Englishmen, and it would seem as if the lessons of prudence and caution which this Club has so consistently preached had also been practised by our countrymen.

I confess that I look forward to the future with some misgiving. The means of reaching the great Playground are getting easier year by year. In my time high-roads have been laid out to the very feet of the great Alps. From Meiringen almost to the Handeck Falls, from Hospenthal over the Furca into the valley of the Rhone, from Sallenches to Chamonix, from Chamonix to Martigny, from Pré St. Didier to Courmayeur, and in numerous other places once exclusively devoted to the pedestrian or to the mule, we meet the carriage or the diligence at every turn. But this is not all. The iron road is now found in our most sacred spots. Hundreds of tourists are turned out of railway carriages every summer day into the very precincts of the Bär at Grindelwald, and the steam-engine drags the now luxurious tourist to our old familiar home of Zermatt—home no more!

Well, life is full of new points of departure, and it is idle for us to wage war with the impossible. We of the old school shall have to make new centres, or, like the chamois, to go farther and farther afield. But, rely upon it, that if the modern order of tourist takes to climbing, a fresh era of dangerous accidents will set in.

Meantime, in season and out of season, we must insist upon the observance of those canons of prudence and good sense without which our pursuit will inevitably be discredited in all impartial eyes.

Men may come and men may go, but 'the great mountains which we love like friends abide untroubled by the coming and going of the world.' Let us remember what we owe to them. They are the great restorers of the waste of life. We are indebted to them and to all their charming associations for the greatest of all gifts—friendship and health. The great poet of old days was not poet only, but prophet when he wrote those words—impressed upon our minds by one of the divinest melodies of a mighty musician—

> Lift thine eyes unto the mountains, whence cometh help.

Let no act of ours—or so far as our precept or our example may avail—let no act of others, bring a tittle of disgrace upon the snowy friends who have so well served us, or upon the manly craft of which we are the accredited representatives.

Date	Travellers	Guides	Where Accident occurred	Remarks
1883. August 25 .	Count de la Baume-Pluvinel	—	Piz Bernina . . .	Traveller and guides on a snow bridge at one time.
1884. July 11 .	M. Guttinger . . .	—	Grandes Jorasses . .	Struck by falling rocks; gross carelessness of traveller.
1885. June 29 .	Herr J. Herzmann . . Herr B. Kupfer	—	Todtenkopfel (Styria) .	Climbing without guides; two only in party—fall on rocks, rope not used.
1885. July 4 . .	M. l'Abbé Chifflet . .	Joseph Devouassond . Clément Devouassond	Col des Courtes . .	Probably slip on rocks.
1885. August 1 .	Signor Mario Rey . .	—	Col du Géant . . .	Climbing without guides; two only in party, and Signor Rey only 17 years of age; probably carelessness.
1885. August 6 .	Herr Emil Zsigmondy .	—	La Meije . . .	Climbing without guides; slip of traveller on hard rocks, and subsequent breaking of rope.
1886. May 22 .	Mr. Charles K. Puckle .	—	Cornettes de Bise . .	Climbing without guides; slip on grassy ledge; two only in party.

Fatal Accidents in the High Alps—continued.

Date	Travellers	Guides	Where Accident occurred	Remarks
1886. June 25 .	Marquis Alfred de Pallavicini M. H. A. Crommelin	C. Ranggetiner . . E. Robesoier	Gross Glockner . .	Bad guiding; whole party at one time on snow cornice.
1886. August 17 .	Mr. F. C. Borckhardt .	—	Matterhorn . . .	Cold and exposure; inexperience.
1886. August 28 .	Herr Max Munz . .	Gottlieb Meyer . .	Schreckhorn . . .	Struck by falling ice while in couloir.
1887. July 16 .	Herr J. H. Wettstein . Herr A. Wettstein Herr K. Ziegler Herr G. Kuhn Herr G. Bider Herr W. Bär	—	Jungfrau . . .	Climbing without guides; climbing in bad weather; insufficient rope; only two ice-axes among the party.
1887. July 19 .	Rev. David Wheeler .	—	Diavolezza Pass . .	Fall in crevasse; climbing alone.
1887. August 2 .	M. J. H. Gény . .	—	Pic des Opillous (Dauphiné). . .	Fall from rocks; two only in party.
1888. July 25 .	Herr Tannheiser . . Dr. Zeidler	—	Dachstein . . .	Slip on snow slope; no rope; one guide and one ice-axe for a party of four.
1888. August ? .	Mr. W. F. Donkin . . Mr. Harry Fox	Kaspar Streich . . Johann Fischer	Dych Tau (Caucasus) .	Probably fall on ice-slope.

1888. August 11 .	Mr. L. Ball . . .	—	Dent du Midi . . .	Slip on snow; no guides, two only in party.
1888. August 14 .	Herr G. Winkler . .	—	Weisshorn . .	Probably swept off rocks by snow avalanche; climbing alone.
1888. August 20 .	—	Michael Innerkofler .	Cristallo Pass . .	Breaking of snow bridge over Bergschrund; one guide only to two travellers; both travellers on snow bridge together.
1888. August 20 .	A. Pietri . . .	—	Dent du Midi . .	Slip on snow slope; party of five had no rope or ice-axes.
1889. March 25 .	Herr R. Kanitz . .	—	Raxalpe	Slip in gully; unroped.
1889. July 14 .	Herr A. Klein . .	— Pichler . . .	Hohenarr Glacier (Heiligenblut)	Bad guiding; slip of guide on ice; no steps cut.
1889. August 13 .	—	Maurice Gaudin . .	Oldenhorn . . .	Fall in crevasse; two only in party.
1890. June 24 .	Herr Poppe . . .	Peter Paul Gstrein .	Similaun (Oetzthal) .	Fall from cornice; two only in party.
1890. July 31 .	Dr. Mayer . . . Herr Mayer	J. Schernthaler . .	Kitzsteinhorn (Kapruner Thal)	Probably slip on rocks; one guide to two inexperienced travellers.

Fatal Accidents in the High Alps—continued.

Date	Travellers	Guides	Where Accident occurred	Remarks
1890. July 31 .	—	Andreas Untersteiner .	Obersulzbach thal (Gross Venediger range)	Lost in crevasse; alone.
1890. August 12 .	—	Gratien Brunod . .	Col du Géant . . .	Slip on rocks; unroped.
1890. August 18 .	Count U. di Villanova .	Jean Joseph Maquignaz . Antonio Castagneri	Mont Blanc . . .	Furious storm.
1890. August 25 .	—	Jean Antoine Carrel .	Matterhorn . . .	Cold and exhaustion.
1890. September 13	Herr Goehrs . . .	Alois Graven . . . Joseph Brantschen	Matterhorn . . .	Gale; slip on rocks; traveller and guides all comparatively inexperienced.
1891. June 28 .	Signor L. Lanza . .	—	Roche Melon . . .	Slip on ice; two only in party; no rope.
1891. July 19 .	Signor Mario Andreis .	—	Salto della Bell' Alda .	Climbing on difficult rocks without guides and without rope.
1891. August 13 .	Herr W. Behr . .	—	Becco di Mezzodi . .	Fall from rocks; alone.
1891. August 20 .	Herr Rothe . . .	Michel Simond . .	Mont Blanc . . .	Bad weather; bad guiding; bad rope.
1891. August 20 (?)	French Officer . .	—	Mont Chambeyron . .	Fall from rocks; no very definite information, but supposed to have been alone.
1891. August ? .	Colonel Filippo Zucchi .	—	Roche Melon . . .	Lost alone.