

ACCIDENTS IN 1893.

OWING, no doubt, in great measure, to the splendid weather which prevailed during most part of the climbing season, the past summer has produced fewer accidents than we have unfortunately learnt of late years to expect. Without going into the question of what constitutes an 'Alpine accident' (a question, however, in the answer to which more is involved than perhaps appears at first sight), we may record here such of them as would incontestably fall under that head.

On July 28 Herr Menzel, an Evangelical clergyman from Erfurt, left Gries, in the Salztal (the valley entering the Oetzthal at Lengenfeld), to ascend by himself the Winnebachkogel, a peak about 9,500 ft. in height. He reached the top, where his card was afterwards found, inscribed, 'Five hours from Gries, in favourable weather. Hope to find a shorter way down.' Curiously enough, observers below seem to have thought the weather unfavourable. On the descent, doubtless in looking for his shorter way, he fell on a slope composed of grass and steep slabs of rock and was killed. He is said to have been an experienced climber, and to have made many guideless expeditions.

On August 7 Messrs. Andreas Seiler, of Zermatt (a young man of 19, a member of the well-known family), and Oscar Gysi, of Manchester, with the guides J. J. Biner, Joseph Taugwalder, and Leo Moser, were ascending the Matterhorn from the Italian side. About half-way between the Col du Lion and the hut young Seiler, growing impatient at the slow pace of his companions, separated from them, and with only Biner on the rope proceeded rapidly upwards. Half an hour later the hindmost party heard a clatter of stones above them, and the next instant the bodies of Seiler and Biner were seen falling towards the Glacier du Lion. The whole account is curiously parallel to that of the accident of three years ago in which Herr Goehos and his guides lost their lives.*

On the same day an accident happened which fortunately resulted in no loss of life, but which seems worthy of record. Herr Schlesinger, of Berlin, with the Laurent Proments, father and son, had successfully ascended the Grandes Jorasses. On the descent they found the snow in the couloir above the Roches du Reposoir, as might be expected after a hot day, exceedingly untrustworthy. Young Proment anchored himself, while his father and Herr Schlesinger advanced cautiously, tied to 100 ft. of rope. They had nearly reached the head of the rock, when the whole mass of superjacent snow gave way, sweeping them down in an avalanche and jerking young Proment from his hold. Fortunately they were able to stop before reaching the bergschrund at the foot of the couloir, and succeeded in extricating themselves, two of the party considerably the worse for wear. The elder Proment, who by good luck had escaped without much damage, had stuck to his axe, and was able to cut steps in the direction of the hut,

* See *Alpine Journal*, vol. xv. p. 274.

along which the others crawled. Herr Schlesinger's nephew, a young medical student, had come to meet his uncle, accompanied by a porter, César Ollier. They arrived at the hut at the right moment. Ollier helped the injured men to reach it, and returned to Courmayeur for auxiliaries, while the nephew rendered surgical assistance. On the following day a party of fifteen went up to the hut and brought Herr Schlesinger and his guide down. In this case all due caution seems to have been observed, unless, indeed, of which no evidence appears, the original start was made too late.

Of the next mishap on our list we regret to say that the same remark cannot be made; indeed, if ever a life was lost in the Alps through flagrant disregard of well-established rules it was that of Mr. Lucas. We quote the account as given in Reuter's telegram of August 18, based on the reports of the guides:—

'On Tuesday, August 15, the party, consisting of two Englishmen, Mr. Williamson and Mr. H. N. Lucas, with two guides, Adolf Andermatten and Franz Zurbriggen, both of whom belonged to Saus, left that place to cross the Täschhorn. They passed that night on the rock to the east of the Täschhorn, and at 11 o'clock on Wednesday, the 16th, reached the summit. They intended to make the descent in time to reach Randa at 5 in the evening, and to climb the Weiss-horn on the following day. The way over the Kien Glacier was difficult, however, and they were also detained through the indisposition of Mr. Williamson. The consequence was that they were benighted, and had to proceed by the light of lanterns. At 10 o'clock in the evening they came to a dangerous path, which led over the rocks from Kienacker to Randa, the beginning of the forest region, at a height of 2,000 metres, the distance being less than two hours' journey.

'The guides considered that it would be unwise to attempt to descend further, as their lanterns were burnt out, and they accordingly selected a smooth piece of grass on which to pass the night, only eight paces distant from two abysses. They lit a large camp fire, and being overcome with fatigue all were asleep by about 11 o'clock. Two hours later Zurbriggen awoke, and discovered that Mr. Lucas had disappeared. He and the others called him by name, but in vain, and they were obliged to wait for daybreak before they could commence a search. At 4 o'clock they found the body close to their resting-place at the foot of a rock 60 metres in height. His watch had stopped at 20 minutes past twelve. It is supposed that he shifted his position while half asleep towards the edge of the precipice and rolled over. Immediately on being informed of what had occurred, the authorities sent ten guides to recover the body, which was brought to the Wildi Chapel, near Randa, at 5 o'clock in the evening.

'Mr. Lucas was 23 years of age and an undergraduate of New College, Oxford. Both the guides are trustworthy and experienced men.'

How it can have come about that 'trustworthy and experienced men,' as Andermatten and Zurbriggen are, doubtless with justice, called, should have allowed their party to go to sleep in a spot 'only eight paces distant from two abysses,' without the security of the rope, passes our

comprehension. The point is one on which almost every book containing advice to climbers lays stress; * but one would have thought that without this the necessity of the precaution would have been obvious.

On August 21 a Herr Chaumontet ascended the Schwarzenstein, in the Zillertal, accompanied only by a porter, aged 65, who had never been on a glacier and carried no axe. Their rope was a chance one, procured at the Berliner Hütte, about 15 ft. long and $\frac{1}{4}$ in. thick. On the descent they had to cross a crevasse, wide below, but showing on the surface only as a crack some 10 ins. wide. Herr Chaumontet, a heavy man, stepped on the edge of this; the ice broke with him, and he fell more than 70 ft., being buried under a mass of snow. His companion's life was saved by the not unlikely accident of the rope parting. Next day Herr Chaumontet's body was recovered. With the 'Oesterreichische Alpen-Zeitung,' from which we take it, we think that 'we may refrain from any commentary on this narrative.'

On August 27 an accident occurred on the Aiguille Noire du Pétéret, near Courmayeur, by which Signor Poggi, a well-known member of the C.A.I., lost his life. Mr. J. P. Farrar writes as follows on this subject:—

'This mountain was first ascended some years ago† by Lord Wentworth, with Emile Rey and J. B. Bich, but up to the present year had remained almost unknown, only some four or five ascents having been recorded, nearly all under Rey's leadership. This summer, however, it was repeatedly ascended—viz. by Miss Foley, by Messrs. Wicks, Morse, and Wilson, by Mr. Broome, by Dr. Güssfeldt, and by myself, three of the ascents being again under Rey's leadership. The route is a complicated one, and the mountain has a general reputation of being dangerous from falling stones. Still, none of the parties above mentioned appears to have suffered from stones, although one of them descended in the severe thunderstorm of August 24. Signor Poggi, who was accompanied by David Proment, of Courmayeur, as guide, as well as by a porter named Fenouillet, made the ascent from the usual bivouac in the Fauteuil des Allemands, the day being fine and windless. The party reached the summit at 8.45, and were already about 2 hrs. on the way down when a stone, described as the size of a man's fist,‡ came whizzing down and struck some loose stones, which fell right on the climbers. The guide's arm was badly hurt, his axe broken, whilst Signor Poggi was struck by a stone just behind the ear and killed on the spot. He also received other unimportant injuries, whilst the porter who was leading down escaped unhurt.

'On the news reaching Courmayeur Signor Gonella, president of the Turin Section of the C.A.I., who had made the ascent in 1890 with Signor Poggi's guide, at once started with a body of men for the scene of the accident and brought down the body. Signor Gonella made a careful investigation on the spot, and is fully convinced that no blame

* See, for example, Dr. Wilson's *Mountaineering*, p. 50.

† See *Alpine Journal*, vol. ix. p. 1.

‡ In the *Rivista* 'as big as a horse's head.'

attaches to anybody. The funeral service was held at Courmayeur and the body then conveyed to Turin.'

The 'Rivista' for August adds some further particulars. The part of the route most exposed to stones had been safely passed, and the accident happened as they were crossing a small gully. The statement, however, that the leading guide sprang forward, the hinder one backward, to the nearest points of shelter, drawing the rope tight and making it impossible for Signor Poggi to move in either direction, is contradicted in the September number; and, indeed, the conditions seem to have been such as to make this impossible.

ALPINE NOTES AND NEW ROUTES.

PIC BOURCET, CENTRAL AND WEST SUMMITS (12,115 ft. [?], 12,100 ft. [?]), AND ROUTES BY THE W. FACE. August 16.—Mr. Ernest Aves, with Christophe Turc as guide and J. Rochette as porter, left the hotel at La Bérarde at 2.55. The rope was put on at 7.5, and the top of the Col de la Casse Déserte reached at 9.10. Descending the col on the E. side for about a quarter of an hour, they turned S., and in about 20 min. reached the S.E. foot of the mountain. So far the route from the col had probably been that taken by Mr. Swan.* Crossing a triangular piece of snow, Turc attempted the rocks on its left, but no advance being possible there the snow was descended S. to the end of a long rib of rock. This was turned (10.55) and found to give good going on the other side. Here the actual climb may be said to have begun. Bearing N.W., the party mounted the S. face of the mountain until very near the Pointe Swan. Skirting this on the left side, they made, first by a chimney, then by open rock, and again by a second chimney followed by open rock, for the central summit of the main ridge (1.5). Hold had been somewhat uncertain at points on the way up, but only for the last 80 ft. or so were the rocks very bad. Here they were distinctly rotten and dangerous. The central summit seemed to be about 15 ft. lower than the Pointe Swan. The party followed the main ridge for about a quarter of an hour, then descended by a medial arête (S.) for a short distance, traversed rather steep rocks (W.), and finally climbed by easy rocks to the W. summit (2.25). This is the point seen from the Tête de la Maye, and is, perhaps, 30 ft. lower than the Pointe Swan. A second cairn having been built by Turc (the first having been put up at the central summit), the party began the descent, at first S.E. and then S., following a couloir of easy rock and loose stone until opposite a well-marked gap in the side of the mountain facing the Vallon des Etançons. Cutting across an ice-slope, they climbed a low wall of rock and reached the gap (3.50). Here the descent of the W. face and the most uncertain part of the route began, although Turc, who so far had led, had shouted down, after a brief reconnaissance from the gap,

* See *Alpine Journal*, vol. xiii. p. 404.