

ACCIDENTS.

BALLOON ACCIDENT IN THE ALPS.

MANY books and articles have been written during the last few years on the subject of Alpine dangers and accidents, and it might have been reasonably supposed that no single form of peril remained against which due warning had not been given, or a variety of precautions recommended. Yet we will venture to say that no one of the 'active and intelligent' authors ever contemplated the possibility of such a disaster as that which happened in the Levanna district last autumn.

It is a good many years since some imaginative person wrote to this journal to suggest the use of balloons as an aid to climbing. The suggestion was not taken up with any enthusiasm, and the matter passed into oblivion. Perhaps it was just as well, for—as the incident to which we are referring seems to show—a balloon in the mountains is by no means a trustworthy ally.

In October last, Captain Charbonnet, of Lyons, who was in business at Turin, married a young lady of that city. Being a distinguished aeronaut, and thinking, it may be supposed, that he could not too early initiate his bride into the pastime which he loved, he started on the evening of his wedding from Turin in his balloon 'Stella,' apparently with the view of reaching Lyons. That day only some ten miles were accomplished. The next morning, October 9, they started again at 10 A.M., accompanied by two young men, Giuseppe Botto and Costantino Durando, the latter an habitual assistant of Captain Charbonnet in his ascents. Stormy weather seemed to be brewing, and after rising to a height of 3,000 m. they were caught in a current which carried them at first towards Pinerolo, then a little west of north. At Saluggia they nearly touched ground, then leapt up again to 4,000 and presently to 6,000 m. About 2.30 P.M. the balloon began to descend rapidly, and they had some difficulty in stopping it at 3,000 m. Here they were in dense clouds, and bitterly cold; quite ignorant, moreover, of their position. Captain Charbonnet made his crew lie down in the car, himself leaning out in order to try if he could catch a glimpse of any point from which he could learn his bearings. The balloon was drifting at a great rate, and nothing could be done to check it. Presently there was a shock, and Captain Charbonnet was thrown to the bottom of the car by a heavy blow over his left eye. The balloon rebounded, and dashing across a gully struck the other side of it. Two or three more strokes and returns of this kind completed its collapse, and it finally settled down on a steep rocky spur on the east side of the Bessanese (3,632 m. = 11,917 ft.), just above the small glacier of Salau. It had struck the wall of the mountain which faces the Rifugio Gastaldi, at a height of about 3,000 m. (9,843 ft.).

The aeronauts reached the ground a good deal shaken and bruised, but none of them, except the leader, suffering from any serious injuries. The clouds presently broke sufficiently to show that they were among high mountains, but whether in France or Italy they had no notion;

nor did the clearing continue long enough to enable them to find a way of descent before nightfall. Their sole provision was one bottle of wine; but they were fairly well off for covering, and they cut up the balloon to supply deficiencies. In the night a violent storm came on, to add to their misery. In spite of his injuries, Captain Charbonnet kept the spirits of his companions up as well as might be; but towards morning his powers failed, and when day dawned, his young wife, a girl of only eighteen, had some difficulty in bringing him round.

They started to descend the snow slope, Durando going first, and making steps to the best of his power with his feet 'and with a long key which he happened to have in his pocket' (says the 'Rivista'). Of course they had neither nails nor poles; and, by a fatal imprudence, it would appear, on the part of their leader, they did not tie themselves together, though ropes must have been in plenty in the wreck of the balloon. Presently Charbonnet slipped. He was held up by his wife and Botto; but a few minutes later he disappeared into a hidden and, by the inexperienced travellers, unsuspected crevasse. The others could see him far below, but as he neither moved nor answered their call, they rightly assumed that he was beyond the reach of any help they could afford, and proceeded downwards. After infinite difficulty, owing to their utter ignorance of the country, and after another night spent in the open air, they found a path which brought them to the hut under the Rocca Venoni. Thence a shepherd guided them to the Cantina della Mussa, where they were at first taken for deserters or spies; the lady, it should be said, had been obliged to put on a suit of her husband's clothes, her own having been torn to pieces in landing from the balloon. The sight of her hair and bracelets convinced the inhabitants of the true state of the case; a telegram was sent to Turin, and a message to Balme, and a search party came up from the latter place in the afternoon. Captain Charbonnet's body was recovered the next day. It was found at the bottom of a crevasse more than 60 feet deep, and completely doubled up; but medical examination showed that his death was primarily due to the injury received when the balloon first struck. The remains of the balloon were also recovered, but the car lies where it fell—a monument of as rash an expedition as was ever undertaken.

The above account is summarised from that given in the 'Rivista Mensile Italiana,' October 1893, pp. 348–350.

THE TÄSCHHORN ACCIDENT.

THE late Editor of this Journal writes with regard to the accident on the Täschhorn as follows:—'I am sorry to find that, owing to insufficient information, undeserved strictures were passed in the last number * upon Mr. Lucas's guides. The spot where the party slept was far below the level at which the rope would naturally be in use; indeed, it was actually among the trees. Whether as a matter of extreme caution it might not, as the event seems to prove, have been better to attach the party together even in this situation is possibly

* Vol. xvi. p. 503.

a point open to discussion ; what is quite certain is that the omission to do so in no way involved any culpable neglect of the usual precautions on the part of Adolf Andenmatten and Franz Zurbriggen. A letter on this subject will be found on p. 39, and from the now known fact that the party had been for a considerable time on a path, which was occasionally lost and found again by the aid of the lantern, it is quite evident that the guides were wise not to continue the descent when their candle was burnt out. It is a well-known fact that on a path the rope is never used, nor is it customary to rope a party together when sleeping on such a place as is described in the letter. The guides showed good judgment in allotting positions to Mr. Lucas and Mr. Williamson, and most certainly are to be held blameless. As, however, such an accident has occurred, it would seem to be advisable in future for a party to rope when sleeping near a precipice ; and, to be absolutely secure, the rope should be attached to a tree or rock, if possible at both ends or else in the centre, as it is conceivable that the weight of a falling man coming on one sleeping might drag him also over the precipice.

A LARGE number of fatalities and a larger number of escapes are recorded as having occurred during the past six months ; and Christmas week was especially prolific of disasters. Most of these accidents happened to tourists, more or less experienced, climbing without guides ; and in many instances the victim was climbing alone. Most of them occurred upon minor peaks ; and, while some are on the borderland, the majority cannot be looked upon as Alpine accidents proper. Excepting in the case of our own countrymen, we here record those only which come strictly under this designation.

In the middle of September an Italian artist named Cumanì attempted the ascent of Mont Blanc by the Brenva Glacier alone. He has not been heard of since.

In October M. Eugène Sessely, a member of the Geneva section of the S.A.C., was killed on the Sixt side of the Pointe des Avoudruz while trying to make a short cut in the descent.

On Christmas Day three Viennese tourists—Dr. Ludwig Kohn, Dr. Sigmund Patzau, and Herr Robert Pick—lost their lives in a snowstorm on the Gross Glockner. The party had intended to make a guideless ascent of the peak, and with this object in view they left Kals, accompanied by a single porter, at 5 P.M. on Christmas Eve, reaching the Stüdl hut (about 9,000 ft.) at 2 A.M. on Christmas Day. Here the porter left them, and, as they were never again seen alive, the exact nature of the accident can only be guessed at. It seems probable, though, that one or other of the party must have slipped and dragged the others after him, or else that they were either blown over by the force of the gale, or carried down by a small avalanche. Two of the bodies were found about 600 feet, and one about 1,200 feet, below the probable site of the disaster. In one case, at least, death was not instantaneous, for a pair of gloves were found lying together beside the body. The sudden storm which broke upon the Glockner shortly before noon on Christmas Day seems to have made the inhabitants of

Kals apprehensive, and a search party was despatched on the evening of the 25th. Next day a larger party started, but it was not until the fifth day after the accident that the bodies were found and brought down. The guides engaged in the search seem to have behaved in the most praiseworthy manner, and were themselves exposed to very grave risks.

Comment on this disaster seems hardly called for; doubtless it ought not to have happened. All three members of the party were strong and active men between twenty-five and thirty years of age, and all are spoken of as experienced mountaineers. They were not, however, a strong enough party to undertake a guideless ascent of the Gross Glockner in mid-winter. Winter ascents involve risks of which most amateurs know but little, and certainly no such undertaking should be contemplated except under perfect conditions of snow and weather.

On the same day (December 25) another Viennese tourist, Herr Deinzer, lost his life from exposure to cold in an attempt to ascend the Rax Alp. His companion, Herr Lischke, was recovered from the Archduke Otto Shelter some days later: he was severely frost-bitten.

On December 30 two out of three Italian workmen, who were attempting to cross the Theodule, were killed by an avalanche.

The last day of 1893 (Sunday, December 31) witnessed the only fatal accident which occurred during the year to a member of the English Alpine Club. On this day Dr. A. Milnes Marshall, professor of Zoology at the Owens College, Manchester, was killed by a fall on Scafell. The facts were as follows. Professor Marshall, with three companions, ascended Scafell by Steep Ghyll and the Lowman; they descended by Lord's Rake. Near the foot Dr. Marshall separated from his comrades, and, being anxious to obtain a photograph of Deep Ghyll, he proceeded to search for a suitable spot on the ridge which forms the N.W. wall of Lord's Rake. He selected a site, and called to his friends to follow him with the camera. As they were doing so they heard a noise of falling stones, and Dr. Collier, turning quickly, saw a boulder rolling down the slope, followed by the body of Professor Marshall. That the unfortunate gentleman was dead seemed almost certain from the fact that, though the ground was broken, and not excessively steep, he made no attempt to save himself. His friends ran down to the point where the body came to rest, and found that life was quite extinct. No one saw the first part of the fall, so that the exact circumstance which led to this lamentable fatality must always remain matter for conjecture. It seems certain, though, from the injuries received coupled with the direction of the fall, (1) that he fell backwards, probably some eight or ten feet, (2) that the back of the head was the first part of his body to reach the ground, and (3) that death must have been instantaneous. It is probable that he was standing on the boulder when it suddenly gave way; possibly he was pulling himself up by it when it started and threw him backwards. The total distance, from the point where the fall took place to that where the body came to rest, was about 130 feet.

Professor Marshall is spoken of by all who climbed with him as an accomplished mountaineer and a singularly careful climber. He

was in good health and spirits at the time of the disaster, and had been climbing with his usual skill and care throughout the day. The accident occurred, not on the difficult rocks of Scafell, but on what all members of the party regarded as easy and safe ground; a rope would seldom be employed in any similar situation; and, in short, it may be said that the catastrophe was a pure misfortune, and did not result from any neglect of reasonable precautions. The mishap is one which should be classified more with sub-Alpine than with mountaineering accidents proper.

On December 31 last a party of five experienced Italian climbers, four officers of the 'Alpine Companies,' two guides, and three porters started from the Col d'Olen Inn to pass the last night of the year in the newly erected Club hut (Capanna Margherita) on the summit of the Signalkuppe, or Punta Gnifetti. This hut had been occupied since the 30th by two of the Signori Sella, with two porters. One of the nine, Lieutenant Giani, had been ill on the way, but had been able to keep up with his comrades, despite an icy wind, till by evening the whole party were but a short distance from the summit. One of his brother officers, as well as three of the five experienced climbers, finally remained to keep him company when he was too ill and fatigued to proceed further, the rest of his party (including all the guides and porters) going on to the Club hut. Night, however, came on, while the wind so increased in fury that the five below were unable to continue their journey up to the Club hut, while all those in the hut were quite unable to descend to their aid, though well aware that their friends were not far off. A terrible night was spent on the glacier by the five. About 4 A.M. on January 1, by moonlight, the wind having gone down a little, the five began to mount towards the hut, while those in the hut came down to their aid. Four succeeded in gaining the hut, but Lieutenant Giani succumbed while being dragged up by a guide. Two of the four were badly frost-bitten. The Signori Sella and other tourists went down to Alagna and Gressoney, to send up men to help them down, the hut being amply provisioned for several days. On January 2 the four survivors (with whom the guides had been left) were brought down to Gressoney, but the body of Lieutenant Giani had to be left, for the present, in the hut.

The above details are taken from the 'Rivista Mensile Italiana,' 1893, p. 436.

NEW EXPEDITIONS AND UNRECORDED ROUTES IN 1893.

Lepontine Alps.

S. PEAK OF THE PIZZO FIZZO (2,742 m. = 8,997 ft., I. map).
June 17.—Mr. W. Larden, with Christian Almer, jun., went from Binn to the Geisspfad Pass by the usual route. Thence they struck S.E. over stones to the W. base of the N. ridge of the peak, the deep notch (just right of a sharp rock tooth, and just left of the great rock