

Alan de Trafford, Philip Gosse, with Mattias Zurbriggen as guide. Also Joseph and Louis Pollinger, Lochmatter, Nicola Lanti and Fritz Weibel as porters, besides several native mule drivers.

Of our climbing and exploration, of which the foregoing, of course, is but the briefest summary, I hope to give an account in a volume to appear in the autumn.

‘PROGRESS’ IN THE ALPS.

BY THE REV. H. B. GEORGE.

(Read before the Alpine Club, December 13, 1897.)

I FEEL that apology is due when a veteran like myself ventures to address the Alpine Club—nay, more than a veteran, for I am no better than a Chelsea pensioner, laid entirely on the shelf so far as mountaineering goes, and perhaps not altogether impervious to the temptation which is understood to beset such respectable old cripples, to

Shoulder his crutch, and show how fields were won.

Still, we who belong to the past have one advantage, perhaps one only, over you who belong to the present. We remember a state of things in the Alps which men, say under thirty, can barely imagine, and can form an estimate of what has been gained and lost by the change. I will say nothing about the greatest difference of all; the necessary loss, so far as the Alps go, of the many-sided pleasure associated with new ascents, of which I personally had but enough thoroughly to realise its charm. I fancy I hear the younger men grinding their teeth with vexation at the thought of what they lost by being born a generation too late, and I will give them no further pretext for tearing me to pieces. No; the changes I am thinking of are those of organisation, so to speak, of the conditions under which life is lived while we are among the mountains. The white peaks and the broken icefalls, the rocky pinnacles and ledges, are what they were forty years ago, though it is certain that the latter at least are now attacked with a skill and audacity which had hardly then dawned on the imagination. The differences are down below, from where huts begin to be found down to the lowest level attainable in the mountain land. And I think they may all be summed up in one phrase—the Alps have become popular. The founders of the Alpine Club rendered a vast service to the youth, not of this country only, but of the whole civilised

world, by inventing the best of all forms of athletic amusement; but the very greatness of that service implied that ever-growing numbers would devote themselves to the pursuit, and the increase has been, in fact, enormous in the total of climbers. Since the foundation of the Swiss Club, the first-born of our posterity, which took place, I think, in 1863, the number of our club has grown by three or four hundred; and there is, for very obvious reasons, a considerably greater proportion than formerly of English climbers who are not in the club. Outside England the increase is not threefold, but twenty- or fifty-fold. If not a soul went to the Alps who did not mean business, the hotel accommodation of 1863 would simply not suffice—I will not say in the crowded centres only, but even if the climbers were distributed mathematically over the whole mountain area. The results are not pleasant, even with the vastly increased accommodation, in all respects. Poets, or mountaineers in a poetical mood, used to talk of icy solitudes, and the silence of the everlasting hills. Solitude on a peak is almost as difficult to realise nowadays as any other poet's dream, whereas in the sixties—I have consulted my old diaries, and found that in fifty-six expeditions of that decade my party three times joined another bent on the same thing, and three times casually encountered other people on the snow. I remember that in 1862, while Moore and I were failing to ascend the Mönch from the Wengern Alp, some other men were making the third ascent of the Eiger. As we re-entered the hotel, Christian Almer asked me what I thought of consoling ourselves for our failure by going up the Eiger next day. I gave no answer at the moment, but when we met again before bedtime we had separately come to the conclusion that it would be bad form to make use of other men's steps. What peak in the Alps could be now ascended, except just after a spell of real bad weather, if the same scruple were still alive? Of course, this is very disastrous from the point of view of sentiment; nowhere is the ordinary gregarious temper of humanity less in place than when one is breathing 'the difficult air of the iced mountain top.' But it must be confessed that there is some compensation, and that of the most important, though perhaps least agreeable description. When an accident happens, large or small, the vicinity of another party may easily make all the difference between life and death.

It is not, however, entirely, or even mainly, the growth of mountaineering which has transformed life in the Alps. There has been a still greater proportionate increase in the

mass of non-climbers resorting to the chosen haunts of the mountaineers. There was always a fair number of business-like walkers, whose aspirations were limited to the Jardin and the Théodule, or perhaps the Mettenberg, who rarely took a guide and mostly carried their own traps, men who occasionally furnished excellent recruits to the noble army of climbers. Doubtless there are more of these than formerly, but the growth is mainly of persons who are still less pedestrian.

We are always being told that we live in a democratic age. The word is made to mean many different things according to the taste and fancy of the speaker or writer, but in every sense it is more or less true. What concerns us in the Alps is the social sense; indefinitely large numbers of people nowadays do things of which formerly they never dreamed, for lack of opportunity or knowledge, perhaps of cash. The few suffer through the crowding, but they also gain in the facilities without which the many could not come to crowd them. I do not say that the compensation is adequate, but it exists; and, inasmuch as we cannot undo the democratising, to which we have ourselves contributed, I think we are fortunate to have so much compensation. Zermatt in the old days, when one would not see a white collar during a whole summer, when the club-room was that depicted in Mr. Whymper's frontispiece, was more to my liking than the Zermatt of monster hotels, station omnibuses, and elaborate toilets. I admit the nuisance of trudging up the long hot valley unless one went in over a glacier pass. No doubt one usually did take a glacier pass; in those days we did not despise passes, as seems to be now rather the fashion, unless they take the form of going up one side of a peak and down the other. But even in those golden days one was driven repeatedly to traverse the whole length of the Zermatt valley on 'shanks his mare,' and still worse the Rhone valley in the crawling *einspanner* or lumbering diligence. To be able to substitute the train for this weariness is, I should imagine, a boon to all climbers, especially those who centralise; for, after all, they can go over a mountain if they like. To us old fogies who can no longer climb, the boon is a very real one; it makes one's holiday practically a couple of days longer. And though I am not prepared seriously to maintain the utility of our continuing to exist, yet here as a matter of fact we are, no more to be kept aloof than the rest of the democratic flood. Seriously, we cannot prevent all the world rushing to our favourite haunts. So far as getting there is concerned, and

living in them, we are simply items of that world, not a caste apart; and we may, I think, be fairly contented to accept the comforts and facilities which we used not to enjoy. Like a landowner who has to give up a bit of ground for a railway, we do not like parting with our ancient exclusive ownership, but we receive a pretty fair price by way of consolation.

Take as an illustration the place which personally I love best in the Alps, the Wengern Alp, or, to be more accurate, the Little Scheideck. A generation ago there was a humble inn, well managed and satisfactory within its limits, but then those limits were narrow. The bedrooms were bare little slips, provided with the minimum of necessary furniture; the *salle-à-manger* was the only place to sit in; probably there was not an arm-chair in the house. The cooking was adequate, but rough; supplies were capable of running short. I remember being seriously delayed in starting for the first ascent of the Jungfrau from that side, because there was no bread left, and it was necessary to send to the Wengern Alp Inn to beg for more. It took pretty well a day to get there from Thun, the nearest point on a railway. Now one can leave London at 11 A.M., and be on the Little Scheideck in less than 24 hrs. Now there is a large hotel, with salon and smoking-room, besides the hall, with a fair supply of newspapers, and post twice a day. Now the bedrooms are furnished according to civilised principles, so that anyone who wants to read or write in quiet on a wet day, or after an expedition, can sit in his room with comfort. And the older one grows, the more one appreciates the pleasure of being able to live in comfort 7,000 ft. above the sea.

On the other hand, the railway brings crowds; the question is how far those crowds interfere with the mountaineer. But here we must discriminate, for there are many elements in the crowd. First of all there is one which we all welcome, for has not a member of the Alpine Club the right which St. Paul claimed for himself, though he did not exercise it, to lead about a wife or a sister, or even daughters? And then there are the ladies whose only home is in their portmanteaus, quiet old maids usually in couples, widows with a daughter or two no longer very young. These people used to content themselves with Interlaken, or Vevey, or Lucerne; they mostly limited their journeys to places accessible by railway or steamer, occasionally venturing on a diligence; it seldom entered into their heads to mount on mule back. But as railways have been constructed, their sphere has extended, and now they form an appreciable element of the

crowd. Of course they are all English, of course some are pleasanter than others, but they are all at least harmless; and I think it must be said that to them is mainly due the prevalence of the black coat at dinner time, and similar social observances.

Then there is the mob of trippers, who swarm all through the middle of every fine day, but do not signify much, for the mountaineers certainly, and other people if they like, are out of the way. The majority only stay long enough to eat, happily many of them at the station; others cluster on the Lauberhorn, or straggle up the track to the Eiger Glacier; but all are gone long before sunset. And there is a certain pleasure, cynical if you like, in studying the manners and customs of some of them. One day there came up a *gesangverein* from Pumpernickel (or was it Gerolstein?—I forget exactly), thirty or forty strong. They wore elaborate badges, and some of them started for the Eiger Glacier, but they all sat down to dinner at 12.30 and stayed there till 4.30, singing rather nicely at first, but less articulately as the afternoon wore away, which was perhaps accounted for by there being more empty bottles than men when at length they left the table to return to Pumpernickel. I confess that I thought it was a pity they ever quitted it; they could have boozed equally well at home. Another day I had walked down to Grindelwald to see a friend, and came back in the train with a personal conductor and one of his victims; the rest of the flock were in another compartment. The conductor was a very decent fellow, anxious to pick up all the information he could. He told me he had once been up the Wetterhorn, though he had no taste for climbing, so as to know what a mountain ascent was like. In fact, he showed so much zeal in his rather ignominious calling that he reminded me of the actor who blacked himself all over to play Othello. But his companion was perfectly abject. As we neared the Little Scheideck he asked anxiously if he need get out of the train. 'No, I don't know that you need, but the train stops there an hour, and people consider it one of the finest views in the Alps.' 'I don't care; I don't want to see anything more. I only want to get to Geneva,' where as I gathered he was to be released from his bondage and allowed to go home. A generation ago Cook, I think, existed, but he could not bring these reluctant sheep to places far beyond the railway. Yet do we not now most of us take advantage of Cook's machinery to get our through tickets? If Cook helps to bring the crowds to the Alps, he helps us also.

Cook's junior rival, Dr. Lunn, treats the Wengern Alp more mercifully, appearing once a week only. He comes up in his scores or his hundreds every Monday from Grindelwald, marches up to the Eiger Glacier, and there listens to a discourse from somebody. What these *causeries de Lunndi*, as some bad punster named them, really amount to, I cannot report. Every self-respecting dweller at the Wengern Alp goes somewhere else on Mondays. Once, forgetting the day of the week, I went to the glacier early, and was pottering about in the usual manner, when suddenly—a crowd, and an archdeacon. What was to be done? If I retired across the glacier, perhaps the crowd would follow, taking my axe for part of the show; besides, I had no lunch in my pocket. If I stayed to face them worse things still might happen. The only chance was to turn their flank. Exactly how and where I got off the glacier I do not clearly remember, but it was not by the path that I returned, and I did not hear the archdeacon.

There is one sub-species of the genus tripper which may be called *Americana*, because its ways are those of the conventional Yankee doing Europe in a hurry, though it comprises many more Germans and Swiss than real Americans. Its habits are such that naturalists have few opportunities of observing them. It arrives at the Wengern Alp late in the evening, occasionally, if the swarm happens to be large, crowding the house unpleasantly; and it invariably disappears by the first train next morning. Now at that hour the climber on duty is half way up his mountain, and the climbers off duty and other inhabitants are mostly still horizontal. I owe to the misfortune of being a bad sleeper, and therefore very ready for early breakfast, the opportunity of studying this species at leisure. Day after day I have enjoyed their conversation; I have heard them abuse the bread or the coffee, and inquire after the exact time of the train's arrival at Interlaken; I have heard them tick off the Wengern Alp as a thing done; I have had my knowledge of the extent and variety of mispronunciation possible in the German language very greatly extended; but never have I heard a word implying the slightest appreciation of the scenery which, *ex hypothesi*, they came to see. And now that the species has been described, nobody will wish to hear of it again, a fate which befalls many new species.

The Little Scheideck threatens to become a very centre of railway enterprise. I understand that a concession has already been obtained for a railway up the Lauberhorn, a

great mistake, for the slopes are gentle, and the top is too small. And there is a talk of one to the Männlichen, which would be simply a crime. Finally, all the world knows that there is to be a railway up the Jungfrau. As regards the last, I had been in hopes until last summer that as soon as it had been made up to the edge of the Eiger Glacier, the rest of the scheme would be abandoned. The work was being carried on in 1896 in a way that suggested 'Punch's' ancient cartoon of a wasted session of Parliament. Mrs. Britannia asks John, her head servant, 'What have you been doing all this time?' 'Nothing, mum.' 'And what have you been doing, Pam?' 'Helping John, mum.' Nor was the road-making very much more rapid in 1897. In two summers half, or, perhaps, two-thirds, of the distance to the Eiger Glacier has been dug. At this rate of progress completion may be confidently expected by the year 2000. On the other hand, stacks of iron sleepers have been provided; copper wires have been put up the whole way from Lauterbrunnen to convey the electricity which is to do the boring, and eventually to drive the trains; and the tube for diverting part of the stream of the White Lütschine to work the dynamos is nearly complete. Moreover the engineer is a wealthy man and an enthusiast, not a speculator; he has hitherto provided all the money required, and believes implicitly in the scheme. Whether he will find enough money that shares his enthusiasm remains to be seen; but I fear there is no doubt the work will be carried on in earnest. When I left the Wengern Alp, the engineer hoped to begin boring into the flank of the Eiger before the end of September, and to be able to arrange for working through the winter. What has actually happened I have not heard.

If the Little Scheideck is going to be thus turned into an Alpine Clapham Junction, will not all true lovers of the mountains shun the desecrated spot? Possibly; it is a question of degree, whether the desecration is sufficient to outweigh its inherent charms. Yet there is a place within easy distance of the Wengern Alp, one of the loveliest which I know, where one may spend the whole day without seeing a human being, or hearing a sound save the distant cowbells and the occasional thunder of an avalanche. But cart ropes shall not draw from me a hint as to where it is situated, lest the tribes of Cook and Lunn should descend on it, and destroy it utterly.

Chamonix is in most respects not so far advanced in democratisation, but except that the place has provided

itself with electric light, and has completely hidden the generating station among the trees on the Brévent slope, the changes tend to the bad. The railway, which will be opened to St. Gervais next June, will be years in reaching Chamonix, for the work will be heavy, notably a great bridge across the river near the top of the long defile below Les Houches, but when it does come it will be very disfiguring. The line is to come up the left bank of the river, to have its station placed so that the road to it will run between M. Loppé's gallery and the English church, and to be taken by a straight gash along the whole southern slope of the valley up to the Montanvert. Possibly when this is finished, and much occupation of carriage and mule driving is destroyed, the inhabitants may revert some of them to other employments. At present I am told that a Chamoniard workman is not to be found; all the men call themselves guides, &c., and all handicrafts are left to strangers. The experience of the thoroughly bad season of 1896, followed by another not much better, may teach them that a community cannot live on the *fremden-industrie* alone.

The worst thing I heard at Chamonix was that last spring some idiots collected a considerable sum for prizes for a race to the top of the Brévent and back. Whether the rage for record breaking is or is not an outcome of democracy, we need not inquire; we are all agreed that the Alps offer the most injurious of all fields for emulation in this direction. What it cost the competitors I naturally did not hear; but it is obvious that to go up the Brévent and back under two hours must strain dangerously the strongest heart and lungs. The Chamonix guides, as a body, are none too good already; if they repeat this folly often, they will soon become a *quantité négligeable* altogether.

The Grands Mulets hut has assumed the dimensions of a small hotel, and I believe the like has been done at the Concordia, and there are other moves in the same direction. Those who remember the days when the Grands Mulets possessed almost the only hut in the Alps, except Agassiz's deserted cabin on the Aar Glacier, which moreover was of no practical use, will probably most of them wish that there were none now. Certainly we managed tolerably well with the Eiger-höhle and the Faulberg cave, and occasional bivouacs. But the democratisation of the Alps rendered huts inevitable, and it must be confessed that they give some compensation. Fewer failures from bad weather, diminished risk of disaster from the same cause, the possibility of doing very long

expeditions in the shorter days, facilities for combining more ascents than without them would be possible in a given time—these are advantages which every mountaineer appreciates. I allow, nay, I insist on, the superior charms of the bivouac pure and simple; but one was shy of starting to camp out in dubious weather, whereas if you can go to a hut, the only risk is of having to return next day *re infectá*; and if the clerk of the weather does his duty, you get your expedition. And if you are to have huts, they may as well be comfortable. I remember the first time I went to the Grands Mulets, when one had to lie on the floor, spending the night in calculating whether it was least painful to lie lengthways of the planks, with cold air coming up all along each side of me, or crossways upon a sort of gridiron of draughts. The crowd, of course, occasionally is abominable. The Vallot refuge, packed so tightly with human beings that everyone had to stand, suggests the Black Hole of Calcutta. The Orteler Spitze between the Payerhütte and the summit is a sight to make angels lose their tempers. But then why did we render the Alps popular? If huts are to exist, I think it a pity that more in Switzerland are not organised on the Tyrolese model. Wherever the influence of the German-Austrian Club extends, the mountaineer knows exactly what supplies he can reckon on; and there is a fixed and very reasonable tariff for everything. If this is feasible in one part of the Alps, why not in another? Why should a night at the Grands Mulets cost more than at the most luxurious hotel in London or Paris?

Finally, let me make a suggestion. Mountain railways have come to stay; let us try to keep them harmless. Might not the Alpine Club formally request the Swiss Government not to allow any railway or hotel buildings to be erected actually on the summit of any mountain, large or small? The panoramic nature of the view from a mountain top is one of its greatest charms. There is a certain element of truth, perhaps, in Dr. Johnson's opinion, that a fine view is improved by having a good inn in the foreground; but let us be accurate—let it play the part of the cattle grazing or nymphs dancing in an eighteenth century landscape, not interfere with the view altogether. A proviso to the effect that the Jungfrau railway was not to impede free access to the peak was inserted in the concession by the Federal Council. And though the top of the Faulhorn, or even of the Gornergrat, is of less æsthetic value, yet its value is very real, and concerns a much greater number of people. If such a condition were insisted on a few times, it would establish a principle; and

then if we cannot keep the mountain slopes from invasion by the railway fiend, we shall at least have the summits clear.

A DOLOMITE HOLIDAY.

BY EDWARD A. BROOME.

MEN are boys writ large, and what overgrown schoolboys most of us are! How we look forward to our holidays from the end of the last to the beginning of the next; and if an Alpine holiday is contemplated, our keenness exceeds even that of our boys! This particular holiday had been long anticipated, though often deferred. One year the Dolomites were too far, another we were too few; but last year all seemed propitious, and a pleasant party (including my friend, Mr. Pryor, who knew the district) was arranged.

We had, perhaps, even less to complain of from the weather than any other party out. At any rate, whilst in Switzerland and Savoy little was being done, and the more difficult rock-peaks not climbed at all; while closer to us, in Austrian Tyrol, bridges were being washed away, and wretched railway passengers carrying their own baggage across yawning gulfs; we pursued the fairly even tenor of our ways, only got drenched five times, and in five weeks got up twenty peaks besides some passes.

It is right, however, at the outset to warn the long-suffering reader that if he expects new expeditions, or even new routes up old peaks, he is doomed to disappointment. No new peak, nor even (so far as I know) any important variation, was attempted. We were content to climb the best mountains by the known routes, and my excuse for this paper is that the Editor asked me to write it; partly, I suppose, because so few English climbers go to the Dolomites, and so little has lately been written about them in the 'Journal.'

The Dolomites! I longed to see them, their fantastic forms, their dark green forests, their gorgeous colours. I had devoured all the books (in English) about them I could find—Gilbert and Churchill to Sinigaglia, Leslie Stephen and Amelia B. Edwards to Sanger Davies. Pictures I had seen; Titian's, Elijah Walton's, and latterly my friend Howard's, whose 'Civetta' was to the fore in last year's Academy, and whose Dolomite paintings were the feature of our own private and particular little Academy in Savile Row. I had also cross-examined such of my friends as had been there; and now at last, on July 29, the Channel was crossed, our internal