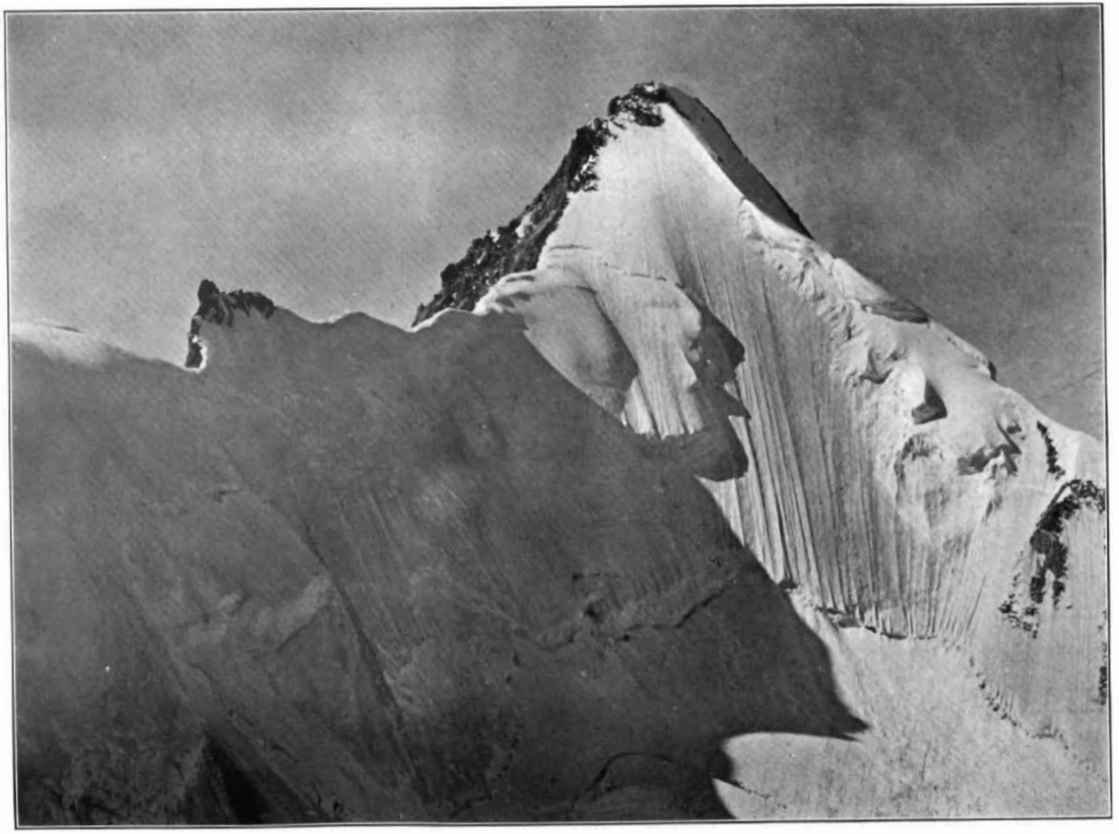

W. T. Lister, Photo. *Swan Electric Engraving Co., Ltd.*

THE SUMMIT OF THE OBER GABELHORN
(NORTH-WEST FACE).

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Five Years with Recruits.*

By R. L. G. IRVING.

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I FEEL like a new camera ordered down on approval by your Secretary, and the dreadful moment has come for producing the results after he has pressed the button. Why he pressed my particular button I don't know; I suppose since it couldn't have been the brilliancy it was the brass that attracted him. Anyhow he did press it, gently but firmly, and once the magic touch applied resistance was useless.

Forthwith my vanity was exposed, and I undertake to record some impressions of the Alps, without thinking of the developing, fixing, and printing of them. First I tried to make a presentable story out of two rather unknown climbs I had done this year in the Bernese Oberland; but I gave it up owing to the impossibility of getting slides to illustrate it. For me the only plan was to secure some slides, and then fit some sort of letterpress to them. Five years with recruits may sound an odd subject for a short paper, but I promise you we shall gallop through them. And as you find yourselves being taken along well-known paths, you must let your memories talk to you; for it is your share and not mine in treading out the way that can invest my pictures with a living interest to-night.

Naturally the five years have not been spent in making new conquests, but in fitting the recruits for service in the great and growing army of mountaineers, the army in which the Alpine Club is the Imperial Guard. I dare say I was not

* See 'Correspondence,' pp. 451-2, and 'Proceedings of the Alpine Club,' pp. 454 foll.

qualified for the post of trainer; to some of you it may seem sheer impudence to usurp the functions of the professional experts of Meiringen and Zermatt. It may even be that I shall be accused of corrupting the youth; but my present business is to describe, and not to apologise for my actions.

Let me explain quite shortly how I came to take upon myself the duties of a recruiting sergeant. The only friend with whom I had done any guideless climbing died five years ago, and in the summer of 1904 I found myself without a companion to share my Alpine holiday. I was in the position of a man who has sampled three kinds of mountaineering, and has to choose between them. I had climbed with guides, I had climbed alone, and I had climbed with a friend. The expense alone of the first was enough to deter me from returning to it; the second I had sampled far too freely already, but it had such an influence in persuading me to choose the third that I am going to call your attention to it for a few moments. The condemnation of solitary climbing has been very sweeping, too sweeping I think, because its generalities leave the novice unconvinced. The dangers have been greatly exaggerated, and the real drawbacks not sufficiently emphasised. There are routes up many peaks in the Alps, Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn being conspicuous examples, on which a solitary climber risks little more than a man who wanders alone on a wild Yorkshire moor. I am speaking of course of men who have learnt to move freely when unroped on snow or rock. But the rules of solitary climbing are terribly strict and hard to observe. Sooner or later they will be broken. First small patches of névé, and then quite considerable glaciers will be traversed by the luckless one to whom glissading and the delights of an easy descent over snow are forbidden fruit. The finest and quickest approaches to the big peaks are usually barred to him, and if he falls from grace and ventures on the snowfields, the constant anxiety robs the day of its restfulness and recreative power. If you climb for novelty and excitement solitary climbing is the kind to satisfy you; but if you climb for recreation of mind and body it is a failure. It is hard to estimate the strain a particular climb puts upon a man, but the kind of night that follows it is a good rough indication. The evidence in my own case has been astonishing. Time after time a solitary climb has caused me to lie awake for hours, or, worse still, to become just sufficiently unconscious of my surroundings to be pursued by persistent visions of the most sensational episodes of the day. Whereas the presence

of a companion, even on the longest and most arduous climbs, has been an unfailing soporific.

And then so many of the pleasures of mountaineering are incomplete if we haven't a sympathetic friend to share them. Left to ourselves we can best feel the solemnity of the hills, but if we remain too long alone in their presence the lights grow dim, and the shadows over-long. Our mountain pictures need correcting from other points of view; there is generally some fresh touch suggested by the presence of others, some little patch of 'mountain gloom' to be brightened into 'mountain glory.'

But the solitary climber is severely handicapped when he begins to seek companions; he has got so used to following his own sweet will in the manner of his climbing, that his society may be a doubtful blessing to climbers of his own age and experience. He has been his own leader everywhere, and murmurs, not always silently, at being tied fore and aft to men whose method of attaining the desired summit differs from his own. And even in moments of expansion he fears that the messages of the mountains, which he has treasured secretly for years, may sound mere platitudes in ears that have listened as long and as carefully as his own.

It was natural, then, that the idea of training my own companions should attract me. By imperceptible stages I should fall back from the position of first to that of second on the rope; and when there I should be hardly more jealous of my leader than a father of his son. My edition of 'Plain Tales from the Hills' would be good enough for those that had none, and the telling of the tales would be delightful. I think the need of having someone to talk to about mountains is quite as great as the need of having someone to climb with; starvation in either respect is terrible; and when I came back from a last solitary campaign in the Sierra Nevada at Easter 1904, I was determined somehow or other to secure a proper supply of both. It wasn't hard to do so; living in rooms almost adjoining mine were the very persons I wanted. The enlistment of my first recruit took place on the occasion of my finding him developing photographs during illicit hours. A tactful remark of his about a Swiss photograph led to an amicable discussion. He had seen the Alps, and had once stood on the summit of the Cima di Jazzi; so in his case the sacred fire needed no kindling, but only replenishing. A second recruit, a special friend of the first, was soon enlisted, and the planning of the campaign began.

Mountain nostalgia in the young is not a complicated disease; and the cure is simple, if somewhat expensive. We took it in the form of a ticket to Martigny. Arriving there tired, but too excited to be sleepy, we went straight on to Bourg St. Pierre, and were mad enough to try the Vélan the very next day. If you have played golf you will know what happens if you tear up to the club-house on your bicycle, and rush at once on to the first tee. It is not quite so bad in mountaineering, for as a rule if one man gives up the hole the others follow suit; and there is no unruffled partner, who has lunched comfortably at the club-house, to jeer at your failure. Both my recruits succumbed to acute 'mal de montagne,' and in spite of their most gallant efforts we had to stop within 600 ft. of the top of the Vélan. They were dreadfully cast down about it; if this peak of 12,000 ft. were too high for them, what was to become of the Combin or Monte Rosa, whose names had been starred on the programme. The descent was a trying one, but the moraine was reached at last, and the two sufferers sank down and fell asleep upon it, as if its angular blocks had been the downiest of cushions. They awoke new men, and we returned to Bourg St. Pierre fresh and full of hope. This 'atra dies' with which the season began is well remembered among us; and the name of Vélanitis has been given to the mysterious disease which robbed us of our peak.

But the day was not so black to me as to my recruits. As far as the actual climbing was concerned, they had more than fulfilled my expectations; they had found the rocks very easy, and though there was not much snow to test them they were perfectly steady during the passage of their first bergschrund, in spite of the fact that their heads were aching violently at the time.

We did not renew our attack on the Vélan, but feeling that a defeat by the Combin would be an honourable one, we started the next afternoon for the refuge built by the Balleys below the Col des Maisons Blanches. We did not find it, but found the new Valsorey hut instead, a very pleasant mistake to make. In the morning it was my turn to be indisposed, and we stayed at the hut all day. A party of twenty-four Frenchmen came up in the evening, but we slept long and soundly notwithstanding, and did not stir from our beds till the last of them had left. Our intention was to climb the Combin and descend the same way to the Col des Maisons Blanches, so as to avoid the ice-slope and the avalanche-swept part of the ordinary route. The rocks leading up to the W. ridge

of the Combin de Valsorey were very steep, but the recruits were quite at their ease. Symptoms of 'Vélanitis' appeared on the Combin de Valsorey, but a brew of hot cocoa kept off the attack, and we reached the top of the Grand Combin in another three-quarters of an hour. We could not resist the excellent tracks which led down towards the corridor. On the short ice-slope the steps were admirable, and my companions never gave me a moment's anxiety. Thanks to some delicious soup given us at the Panossière hut by the aforesaid party of Frenchmen, we reached Mauvoisin that night, and I am sure three happier men never went to bed in Switzerland. The Vélan was forgotten; its gloom had been swallowed up in the sunshine of the Combin. In dealing with rock, snow, and even ice, my recruits had performed wonders; they had won their spurs, and the great world above the snow-line was ours to conquer and enjoy.

Our next expedition was intended to provide some practice in glacier work. We walked up to Chanrion, and next day followed the high-level route to Zermatt over the Col de L'Evêque and the Col de Valpelline. I know of no expedition better worth repeating on a fine day than this one; we had perfect weather, good snow, and a succession of the small mishaps which are the spice of guideless climbing. First, I walked into a small lake near Chanrion, mistaking it in the dark for a snow-patch; then I fell into a crevasse near the Col de Collon far enough to make myself ridiculous and nobody anxious; and, finally, I quite failed to hit the N. Col du Mont Brûlé, and crossed the ridge at a depression much further to the N.—a mistake which delayed us more than 2 hrs. All through the day my two followers walked splendidly, and managed the rope well. Naturally we were all tired at the end; in fact when they told us at the Staffel Alp that an omnibus was all that Zermatt was likely to give us by way of bedroom we were only too glad to believe it, and stayed where we were.

When we did get down to Zermatt my recruits had plenty to see; there must be a twist in the mind of a climber who doesn't enjoy his first few days at Zermatt. A natural desire to be considered up to date calls forth loud lamentations over its departed simplicity; but his first thoughts are not of the crowd, the band or the bazaars, but of what has remained unchanged by these; he must learn to love what is still lovely at Zermatt before he can really feel the extent of the desecration committed there. We had only a few days at our disposal, but the weather was kind to us. We had a grand day on

Monte Rosa; up by the rock rib from the Grenz glacier, then along the ridge to the Zumsteinspitze, which had baffled me with guides two years before, and down over the Lysjoch. Slight 'Vélanitis' decreased our pace, and it was quite dark before we reached Gressoney.

The following day we toiled up to spend a few miserable hours at the Sella hut. Our imaginations, unfettered by accurate information, had supplied it with a caretaker, and all that was necessary for a nice hot supper. What we found was a wrecked stove and some boards to lie on, quite bare, save for a few damp blankets and some stone pillows. By good luck we had a boiler with us, and managed to make ourselves some thin porridge; but the night was sheer misery. Jacob must have had a wonderful faculty of sleep. Our consciences did not trouble us for having robbed the guides of their birthright, yet we saw no bright visions; as it was, a nightmare would have been welcome. We stood it as long as we could, and then crept out on to the glacier just before dawn, and crossed the Felikjoch in a famished condition. We breakfasted at the Riffelhaus earlier than a good many of its inmates, and then went down to Zermatt to pack our things.

The same evening we took train to Martigny, where our small company was split up. I went up to Champex with the remaining recruit, where we spent a day of complete idleness, and then set out for Chamonix. While enjoying a cosy supper at the Cabane D'Orny, the route by the Fenêtre de Saleinaz and the Col du Chardonnet seemed hardly good enough for us. But in the morning we found we had reckoned without the weather, and were very lucky to reach Chamonix that evening by the Col du Trient and the Col de Balme, our passage of the former being far from orthodox.

A traverse of the Col du Géant and a very belated return over Mont Blanc ended our climbing for that year. I have taken you over a lot of very familiar ground, but I wanted you to know what my recruits were capable of their first year. I don't wish to imply that our expeditions were justified merely by their successful issue, but the fact remains that the climbs were accomplished, and that without the slightest accident and without excessive fatigue; and I attribute this to some extent to my knowledge of what I could or could not safely do, but chiefly to the aptitude of my young companions. In January 1905 I spent a week at Pen-y-Gwryd with some new recruits, one of whom had done some small climbs in the Alps and in Norway. We did not get very far into Mr.

Abraham's list, but we enjoyed ourselves prodigiously, and learnt something about rock climbing.

Arolla was our headquarters for the following summer. Our party was a large one, and included some lady recruits. Our behaviour soon attracted the notice of the censors of mountaineering morals. It was hardly to be expected that a mother should allow her only son, and his sisters too, to pursue an apparently suicidal career, and escape criticism. One evening it leaked out that several of us were preparing to start for the Collon next morning. The alarmists were roused to action; they chose as their spokesman a well-known member of the Alpine Club, with a special knowledge of the district. It wasn't an easy job for him; but if ever a similar duty should fall to me, I should be well satisfied to perform it with as great courtesy and tact. The attack fell, not on me, but on the aforesaid mother of one of the party; she sustained it in a heroic manner, and allowed her son to go. But we agreed that under the circumstances it was better that two of the less experienced should not start. She spent the day with the late warnings ringing in her ears, but the worst was still to come. Owing to a disastrous short cut over a small col near the Col de Pièce we did not reach the N.W. arête of the Collon till midday. Through the telescope at the hotel we were seen on the top at eleven, but as a matter of fact we did not get there till two, when nobody was looking for us. Seven o'clock arrived, and still no sign of us. Down at the hotel the remnant of our party, concealing their anxiety, bravely sat down to an uncomfortable dinner. At half-past seven whispered consultations were held, and significant glances were cast at the empty places round our table; search parties were in the air, when our advanced guard arrived a little before eight. Half an hour later we were all in, and assisting at the joys of the réunion. There was a feeble repetition of the alarms when I started with my two best recruits for the Dent Blanche. The weather was perfect, but there was still a good deal of snow on the mountain, and we had it to ourselves. Not once were we in serious difficulties, and I felt as safe as if I had been with guides. From that day the alarmists let us alone. At the time I was foolish enough to show some resentment at their interference; but I have come to perceive their action was kindly and quite justified; and I wish I could let them know that I respect them for what they did, and regret my own attitude in the matter.

To those who are learning to climb, failure to attain the summit brings no shame and little disappointment, an advan-

tage which has once or twice enabled us to achieve success on days which older climbers might devote to writing letters. The most notable instance I remember was the day we climbed the Perroc. It was raining when we started, and continued to do so all day; but the wind was warm and the rocks were not glazed. A thick pall hung over all the mountains, and the most sanguine of our friends at the hotel expected us back for breakfast. It was tea-time when we did get back after climbing the Perroc, and traversing the ridge over the Grande Dent de Veisivi to the Col de Zarmine. Our party of three included my youngest recruit, and I think this shows how quickly rock-climbing of ordinary difficulty can be picked up. This youngest recruit was only seventeen, and the other nineteen.

At Easter, 1906, three of us mobilised at Fort William, where we accomplished one rash and several very good climbs on the N. face of Ben Nevis.

The following season in the Alps was the biggest we have had. The peaks round Zinal and Zermatt were in wonderful condition, and there were not many of them we did not visit during the six weeks that we spent among them. Towards the end of our time my recruits had become so proficient that the ladies of the party were included in some of our most important expeditions. One day the Nord-End and Dufourspitze, and another day the Lyskamm, were visited by a large company of both sexes. The Lyskamm was defended by a rather difficult bergschrund, and afforded a striking instance of the long apprenticeship necessary for snow and ice work. The ladies showed what a lot can be done by pluck and steadiness, but they naturally needed assistance in places, and I must confess that only one of my male recruits gave proof of sufficient steadiness and care on the descent. I do not mean that we narrowly escaped an accident, but that after two long seasons in Switzerland men may feel uncomfortable on the snow and ice met with on the ordinary routes.

We were surprised at seeing no one on the Lyskamm, for it can seldom be in better condition than it was then. And it may be worth while to mention a slight variation we made from the ordinary way of reaching the upper plateau of the Grenz glacier. We had dined at the Riffelhaus and started by moonlight at 10 P.M. By so doing we reached at 2 A.M. the upper ice-fall that cuts the Grenz glacier across at the height of about 12,000 ft. It is usually turned close to the great buttress of Monte Rosa, but at this early hour it was

possible to go straight up through the séracs. I should be sorry for anyone who followed our tracks in the day-time. It was like approaching the palace of a great magician, when all the lions and dragons that ought to have been guarding it were asleep. For half an hour we wound in and out among great ghostly towers and over crazy-looking bridges, and once we had to cut up a delicate flying buttress of blue ice. It was the most fascinating bit of glacier I have ever seen, and when we emerged from it I longed for more. It was as bad as being wakened up out of a dream of fairyland. Some of the great pendant icicles must have been astonished to see our tracks under their very noses when the sun woke them up, and I expect they were all demolished long before the evening. We tried the same plan of starting after dinner again on the Matterhorn, and so got a long start of the ten other parties that followed us up the peak, and through having no one to set us right, we descended the highest rocks on the S. face by a long-discarded route, instead of by the comfortable ropes and ladder now provided.

I don't want to become entangled in details, but I can't leave the season of 1906 without referring to one crime we committed, which might have resulted in a serious accident. In the course of a short tour between Zinal and Zermatt we found ourselves on the W. face of the Za. The previous day we had all gone up to the Berthol hut; there some of the party spent the night, while three of us returned to Arolla, intending to traverse the Za and pick up the others on our way over the Col d'Hérens. We were called three-quarters of an hour late, and lost another three-quarters of an hour in the stony wastes of the hillside below the Glacier de la Za. Just as we reached the rocks we came up with five other climbers, an Englishman with two guides in front, and a German with a single guide following close behind. We were most anxious to get to the Berthol hut early, and, thinking that we should go quicker than a party of five, we went ahead of them. The guides naturally resented this, and when I tried to explain the reasons for our haste they did not seem to appreciate them. We got up a chimney above them as quickly as we could, and then, wishing to clear out of their way as soon as possible, forsook the boot-scratches and tried to traverse the S. face higher up. We entered another chimney, whose walls were of loose rock. My companions closed up, and I was waiting at the top for the second man to join me, when he took hold of a huge loose block that came away with him. I was well placed and stopped him, but the boulder, after removing some

skin from his cheek, started off on a wild career down the slope. Our third man was quite close and a little to one side of the second, and the boulder did not touch him; but it was frightful to think of what it might do to the men below. We yelled with all our might, and prayed that they were under cover. The boulder burst above where they were, and we waited breathless for a few seconds. Then welcome voices came: they were far too loud and maledictory to come from men who had been badly hit. Whatever they said was fully justified, but one of the threats was truly awful: 'Nous vous aurions mangés, si vous nous aviez tués.' The strain relaxed, we prepared to grovel to any extent. We had put ourselves so hopelessly in the wrong that there was no spirit left in us. When all the other five had passed below us we descended into the ordinary route, and soon came up with them. The anger of the guides abated before our penitent attitude, and they gave us an almost friendly farewell when we left the summit. I believe the Englishman was the same that had had such a narrow escape on the Aiguilles Rouges some days before; at the end of his description of that thrilling episode is a mention of this climb on the face of the Za, and he refers to some feature of the climb near the top which was shirked. I don't know what this was, but I think he showed wonderful generosity in not referring to this nefarious attempt on his life by three irresponsible youths.

A happy inspiration took us to Ried in 1907. It was ideal for a family party like ours; simple, homely, and rich in climbs of all grades of difficulty. We did most of the ordinary climbs there, and one which was in part new on the Breitlauihorn. But our ascent of the Bietschhorn appeared to impress the hotel staff more than anything else. Both the mountain and ourselves were in excellent condition, and we had to race a thunderstorm at the end, with the result that we got back to the hotel in time for *déjeuner*. We took just 4¼ hrs.' actual climbing from the hut to the S. summit—a proof that our rock-climbing had progressed.

The last ten days of our holiday were spent at Chamonix. One of the recruits got a chill the first day, possibly from eating Mr. Couttet's ices; but I managed to ascend the Blaitière with the remaining one, though it took us nearly 20 hrs. to do so. We spent an awful half-hour fighting our way in the dark through some nut trees about a thousand feet above the valley, and we gave ourselves two hours superfluous step-cutting by ascending the W. side of the Nantillons glacier, instead of the E. side where the tracks were. It

G. P. Abraham, Photo. *Swan Electric Engraving Co., Ltd.*

A VIEW FROM MT. BLANC, SHOWING THE AIGUILLE DE BIONNASSAY.

was mid-day when we reached the Col des Nantillons. A stout wooden peg helped us over an awkward drop in the ridge leading up from the col. Another three-quarters of an hour was wasted cutting steps across an ice-slope to the col between the central and northern peaks. We meant to return to the latter, but as a matter of fact we inadvertently traversed beyond the central and climbed the southern peak first, and when we had come back and climbed the central peak it was far too late to think of the northern peak. It was six o'clock when we got back to the Col des Nantillons, and eleven when we reached Chamonix.

For some reason or other I have never been badly bitten by Aiguille climbing, and what working days were left to us were spent on Mont Blanc. I visited it first with a single recruit in whose progress I was specially interested, and the same week three of us traversed it from the Col de Miage over the Aiguille de Bionnassay. The sharp ridge descending to the Col de Bionnassay took us far less time than I had expected, for it was in perfect condition. Even so we were very pleased with ourselves, for it was the finest snow expedition we had ever made.

I have little to say about the present year; my recruits are fast becoming veterans. Last August two of them traversed the Strahlegg Pass, the Grünerhorn, and the passes leading from the Oberaar hut to the Lötschenthal, besides doing some climbing on their own account during our stay at the Fafler Alp.

Our two most difficult expeditions were the traverse of the Grosshorn by the S. and N.E. arêtes, and the traverse of the Mittaghorn from Obersteinberg to the Lötschenlücke, the upper portion of this last climb being of too hazardous a nature for my liking. Two days that I enjoyed quite as much were those devoted to the Nesthorn and the Aletschhorn. On the latter peak my youngest recruit led all the way up, thus proving he had learnt all he could learn from me.

Let me close my paper with a few general observations on the five years' climbing.

I am quite sure that with good recruits there is little risk while they are in the learning stage of mountaineering, and boys who are good at outdoor games learn wonderfully quickly. It does not follow that a man who is good at cricket or football will make a better mountaineer in the end than a man who has never played those games, but he starts with an advantage. He has a good eye, which means that his muscles readily act in concert with the eye and the brain. Kicking a football teaches a man to place his feet accurately and

quickly on a given spot; and being able to hit a half-volley in the middle of the bat will help him to strike the ice with his axe exactly where he wants. Curiously enough gymnastics, while they are extremely useful in special places, do not seem to produce the same general ease of movement as outdoor games; but in combination they are excellent. It is extraordinary how little idea of grip people sometimes have if they have never handled the bat or the parallel bars. I have watched men of three or four years' experience climbing who were far behind some of my recruits in their first year, both in skill and in steadiness. Of course when it comes to leading and making independent expeditions, experience is essential. As a rule the all-important question for a leader is: Can I safely climb this place? not Can I get up further than anyone else? On routes which are followed because of their special difficulty the case is different; but hitherto we have got on well without these. My recruits have never urged me to undertake an expedition which I regarded as too ambitious for us; but they are very young still, and I dread their becoming infected with the spirit of competition that pervades a good deal of the climbing literature of the present day.

I suppose the public would think our love of mountains was dead if we did not occasionally commit some follies over them; but I really think we have done our duty already in this respect. Bad weather, bad conditions, and aberrations from the right way, will provide a guideless party with as many exciting and trying situations as they ought to wish for. Some of my companions on the rope have lately developed a thirst for very difficult routes; but I regard it as a good sign that the two most skilful climbers among them are also the most careful. Occasionally they have broken loose, and crawled along gutter-pipes and window-ledges.

And if one of them has the mortification of seeing us go off to Switzerland while he has to stay behind, he may well be excused for displaying greed over exceptionally severe climbs in Cumberland or Wales. In Switzerland they have been wonderfully modest, and have quite appreciated the need of experience. They have shown unfailing steadiness in dangerous places; and no physical discomforts such as cold, wet, and fatigue can induce them to turn back when it is safe to go on.

I have said very little about our climbing in Wales. For my own part, I heartily wish that the climbs there were unnamed. But there are hundreds of men who have little

chance of going to the Alps, and for whom rock-climbing is a sport in itself; and if it helps them to have a graduated course that they can work through, and to have every ridge and gully labelled, we more fortunate ones must not grumble. Yet I do sometimes wish I could put the clock back, and return to the days when there was said to be good climbing on Lliwedd.

The young climber has now many inducements to try a large number of difficult climbs; and the accomplishment of these brings his standard of what is safe nearer to the limit of what is possible. The effect of a single week's climbing has been quite noticeable: increased pace and confidence on all sorts of rock; but with it a decrease of care in places that call for little muscular effort, but on which, nevertheless, a slip would be fatal. I cannot help thinking that the man who habitually and by preference does difficult climbs, is perpetually taking risks, which may be very small, but which will eventually catch him unawares. No doubt it is a fine thing to be able to delight in extremely difficult climbs, but the pleasure is dearly purchased with the loss of carefulness at other times. And if you tell me this loss of carefulness is not a necessary consequence, I will try to believe you, but the longer I climb, the harder I find it to do so.

Climbing, like other branches of art and education, is going through a phase in which it is demanded of them before all else that they be interesting. The beauty of a subject and the sort of thoughts it suggests are less considered than the evidence it affords of clever handling. The usual method of exciting interest in a climb is to introduce difficulties beyond those provided by nature, and in some cases the practice has been carried beyond reasonable limits. There are ridges and cliffs in the British Isles which resemble over-annotated editions of interesting classics, in which the conscientious reader is constantly having his attention distracted from the main thread of the story to some unnecessary and highly obscure note. I must admit that whenever I have had the temerity to attack the sort of rocks the modern expert calls interesting I have never failed to find them so. But with me the interest in finding an ingenious way up is often absorbed by the interest in what would happen to the party if I slipped. I do not deny this latter contingency has a high interest for all climbers, but I find a little of it goes a very long way, and repeated doses of such strong stimulants spoil the delicacy of the palate and render tasteless what was once a savoury dish.

Every man must seek the pleasures of mountaineering in his own way. There is no fixed rule for obtaining the joys that elude analysis. But each season as it passes leaves us some fresh indications of how to make a wise selection from our many sources of delight. And I have settled to my own satisfaction that mere novelty possesses but faded charms in the Alps. I cannot deceive myself into thinking I am an explorer when I succeed in scaling a few hundred feet of rock which have been known to climbers before I was born. There is a feeling of artificiality about such new climbs that robs them of the romantic mystery which surrounds the very name of the Himalaya and other unclimbed ranges. And so far is novelty from being necessary to me in my Swiss expeditions, that whenever I have been wise enough to make a second ascent of a peak, I have enjoyed it more than the first, and likewise with a third and even a fourth. Nevertheless, until we have followed one fairly difficult route upon a mountain we do not properly know it. A Swiss youth once remarked to John Addington Symonds, 'You only learn to love men whose bodies you have touched and handled,' and the same is strangely true of mountains. One aspect of them we may see when walking over their snowfields on a fine day, but before we have come to grips with them we are mere acquaintances. There is an overpowering sense of personality about a peak when we feel its broad snowy chest almost touching our own, when his great rocky shoulders rub against ours, and our hands clutch at his hard, rough skin to get a hold. Some sort of struggle, what the French call a *corps à corps*, is an excellent beginning to a lasting friendship.

We soon learn to value mountains by other standards than that of fighting power. And it often rests with us to decide whether they shall restore or exhaust our energies, whether they shall develop or test our powers of endurance, whether they shall deepen or disturb the current of our lives. Occasions constantly arise when we under-estimate the difficulties, or the weather plays us false. And then we can enjoy what is better than any self-imposed struggle; for the satisfaction of accomplishing a climb of catalogued severity is nothing to the joy of fighting a way out of difficulties and dangers that were unforeseen. The heroes of mountaineering are not those who have fallen in an attempt on some almost inaccessible pinnacle, but those who have perished like Carrel on the Grand Staircase. The long roll of Alpine fatalities shows that the most frequently trodden routes are not devoid of danger to the best of guides and amateurs. And the thought

Photo, Count Lurani. *Swan Electric Engraving Co., Ltd.*

MONTE DI ZOCCA AND THE ZOCCA PASS,
FROM THE NORTH.

must occur to us, that the respect due to even the simplest-looking of the great peaks is lessened to a dangerous extent by frequent indulgence in very difficult climbs. To some men, I suppose, climbing really does become insipid unless it is strongly spiced with danger; but I hope that neither I nor my recruits will ever be of the number. We desire no more 'Golden Age' of climbing than that which began five years ago, and I cannot believe that the discoverers of the old routes got a much keener pleasure out of them than ourselves. Many of these routes are no more vulgarised than the naves of our great cathedrals. Everyone dislikes to see them strewn with orange-peel and sandwich-papers, or to hear their solemn stillness broken by cat-calls. But they are not vulgarised because other men have worshipped there before us. And judging by our own experience, the probability of being crowded off one's seat on the summit is much less than is supposed. You would be surprised if I were to tell you the number of well-known peaks of which we have enjoyed undisturbed possession for a day. And with so many less frequented districts of the Alps still unvisited, we can look forward to the same privacy on many future days.

Perhaps my recruits will not be content with doing what becomes each year more easily within their powers. But I am hopeful; and when I read through the simple story of our climbs—it has reached its fourth volume—there is nothing that gives me more satisfaction than to find that we can still appreciate as of old the simple snow climb. Of course we do a few audacious things, we should not be young if we didn't; but we have tried to live up to our belief that there is an influence more purifying than danger in the beauty of the snows; and that among the countless ridges and recesses of the Alps, we shall find an outlet for the energies of youth without having constantly before our eyes immediate prospects of dissolution.

The Bregaglia Group.

By CLAUDE WILSON.

THE accompanying map will recall the situation and indicate the general outline of a singularly interesting group of mountains which afford granite climbing rivalling in interest and difficulty the well known aiguilles of the Mont Blanc range. The district is, according to Mr. Coolidge,*

* *The Alps*, 1908, pp. 884–5.