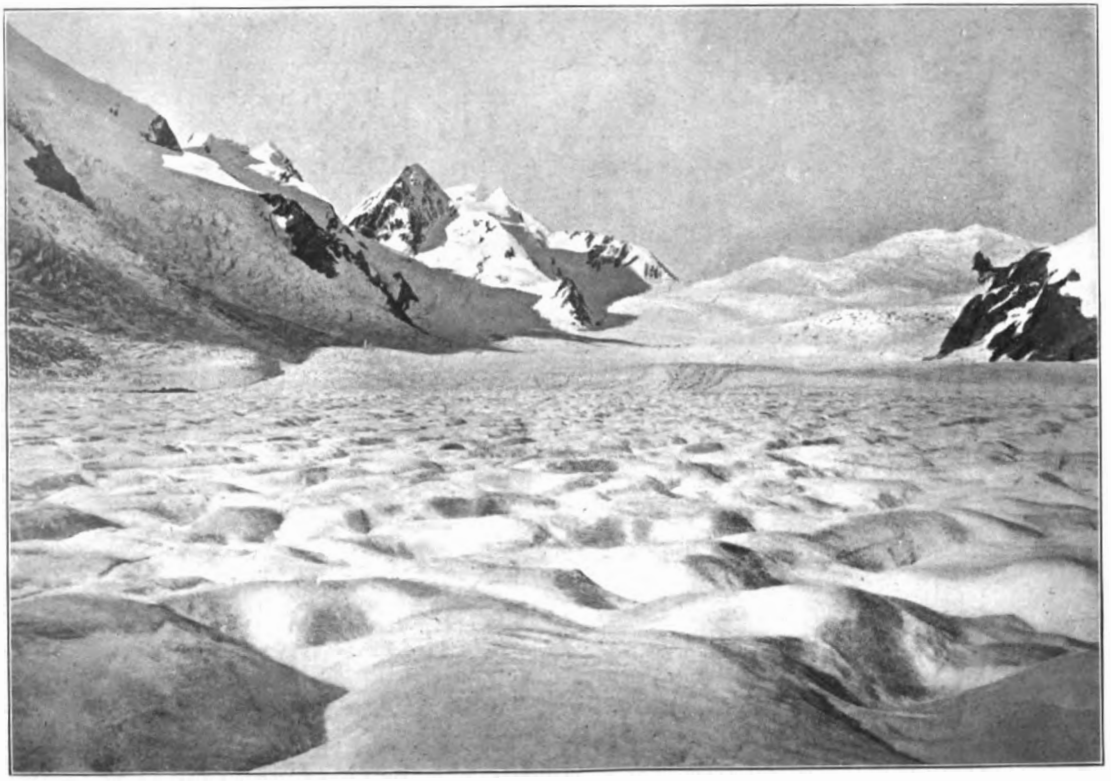

C. A. Macdonald, Photo *Swan Electric Engraving Co Ltd*

MT. GREEN AND CORONET PEAK,
FROM THE TASMAN GLACIER.

THE
ALPINE JOURNAL.

AUGUST 1909.

(No. 185.)

The Middle Age of a Mountaineer.

By CLAUD SCHUSTER.

(Read before the Alpine Club, May 5, 1908.)

MIDDLE age, or the middle age of which this paper treats has but little to do with the passing of time as mere mortals reckon it. Rather is it an affair of the emotions, an affection of the spirit. Some men are born middle-aged, as I suppose that gentleman must have been whom I saw ascending the Breithorn. Clad in an ulster, firmly secured by a rope to a bearded peasant, clinging to two loops of the same rope depending from the shoulders of his protector, and placidly smiling, the patient slowly overcame the force of gravity. *Sic itur ad astra.* Others never know it. One, full always of zeal for the mountains and of encouragement for the backward youth of many generations of climbers, whom I mention here because but for his kindly counsel one particularly unpromising recruit would never have dared to aspire to this Club or to inflict this paper upon you—Horace Walker—in one of his last seasons in the Alps, came down from the Dent Blanche to Zermatt, accomplishing what had been an ambition formed almost in boyhood, a little stiff, forced to remember a little too much perhaps of the golden age, but as fresh next morning, as ready for the open road and the bright eyes of danger, as if time were not and the springs of life were never rusted.

Many more, alas! allow middle age to be thrust upon them, and abstain from the pursuit altogether. As they find year by year that the touch of rheumatism comes more acutely after the first climb, or the breath comes shorter and the waist-band enlarges itself, and the standard of speed is pushed

ever higher, they conclude that, because the Matterhorn and Mont Blanc on one day is a feat beyond their powers, the sport is not for them. They fall to golf or motoring or other death-dealing pursuits. Their names are written for our learning in the pages of Conway and Coolidge; but the Monte Rosa and Couttets know them no more, and year by year their memory fades from all the circle of the hills.

But some, showing a more excellent way, achieve middle age, reluctantly perhaps at first, and find, in abandoning what was rather a dream than an ambition, that they have discovered the true beauty and delight of the Alps.

I say 'reluctantly,' for it is one thing not to be able to go to the Himalayas or the Caucasus and not to cross the Col du Lion, and quite another to admit to yourself that you can't, and, above all, that you don't want to! The trivial round, the common task are all very well, but it is a terrible admission that they furnish all you really want to ask, that you have become a saint through lack of capacity to sin! The adjuration of the satirist to the Roman Alpine Club has no longer a meaning for you:

> I, demens, curre per Alpes
> Ut pueris placeas et declamatio fias.

which may be translated with accuracy—

> Run, Mr. Young, uphill, with all your might,
> That you may be the Montanvert's delight,
> And find yourself, your language and your speed
> Food for an evening's jest by Mr. Reade.

But it is a bitter reflection that you will never find it necessary to justify your own Alpine irregularities by writing homilies in the 'Times,' because you are practising an enforced morality.

Great crises in a man's life pass sometimes unnoticed.

> Not till the hours of light return
> All we have built do we discern.

But I was surprised, in a charming paper read to this Club by Mr. Clapham a year ago, to hear that he had forgotten the manner of his conversion. My own remains singularly vivid to me, and it was accomplished, curiously enough, by a book which should have been in the mind of anyone whose imagination was caught, as Mr. Clapham's was, by the first sight of the peaks of Dauphiné, a book familiar to every member of the Club, the most vivid and the most bracing

of all books of travel—Mr. Whymper's 'Scrambles'—which had strayed by some chance into the house library at school. And my feet, thus set upon the right way, were confirmed by another book, excelling rather in charm and allurement, and differing from the first, as the Italian valleys to which it entices you differ in their warmth and strangeness from the austere majesty of Mr. Whymper's subjects—Mr. Freshfield's 'Italian Alps.' I can well remember how as a boy, going back year after year to the green meadows and the rounded hills of the Upper Engadine, I longed for the wildness of the Matterhorn, as yet seen only in the mind's eye and Mr. Whymper's illustrations, and for the clefts concealed beneath the precipices of the Cengalo and Badile, themselves clear to see in the evening sun, or for the dark recesses and silver lakes which you may look upon from Bernina or Palü.

My next spiritual crisis—the frank acceptance of middle age—was infinitely painful, and in no way softened by literature. I had just made the curious and unpleasant discovery, perhaps already noted by other travellers, but so far as I know unrecorded in writing—that the Valpelline slopes steadily uphill all the way from Prarayé to Aosta; and the phenomenon, perhaps only apparent to the feet and other understandings of middle age, had suggested to me that all was not as it had been, and that I was changed—

> From what I was when first
> I came among these hills.

The walk had had the more objective result of taking all the skin off my toes. Conveyed to Cogne in a carriage, while Wollaston bounded by my side like a roebuck, I had sorrowfully trudged half-way up the Herbetet, and been chased back by snow, and was nursing my wounded feet and spirit in some discontent when there appeared to us—Mayor. A Cambridge education has, we are to understand from our late President, certain advantages, but, being received, as I am credibly informed, in a stagnant plain in which the only climbable altitude is the roof of Trinity College, it superinduces among the mountains a spirit of restlessness which is agitating to the more placid Oxonian feelings of Wollaston and myself. It must have been owing to this fact that, after a day of rain and an evening of downpour, we retired to bed doomed to rise next morning for the ascent of the Punta Nera, Punta Rossa, and Punta Bianca. These eminences are pleasantly described in guide-books as magnificent view-points, because, I suppose, no one would ever trouble to ascend any one of

them if it were fine enough to hope for a view, or clear enough to see the unutterable drudgery before him. Wollaston was free to slumber, as he had once before wandered round the Trajo glacier in a fog, and he sent us to bed with delusive promises of joining in the evening for an attack on the Grivola.

I explained to Mayor and to Gabriel Lochmatter the simple rules by which my life is guided in the mountains, that racing is an abomination unto me, and that my constitution requires to be fortified every three hours by an opportunity to admire the view and to receive nourishment, and, being satisfied on these points, we took the road. There are few more attractive paths than that to the Pousset when all your companions are heavily loaded and you can march free. But when the loads are equal and Gabriel sets the pace and Mayor takes it up, you have no time to gasp out a protest. I believe that we left our knapsacks somewhere behind a rock, because we found them there in the afternoon; and I know that we breakfasted on the so-called Col du Pousset, because Mayor says so. But my only recollections are of wandering like a lost soul in wind and fog along a sometimes snowy, sometimes stony ridge, and of conducting interminable and breathless arguments, every time we kicked an unusually large stone, as to whether we were on the top of anything. At last we all three found ourselves widely separated on a slope descending to a berg-schrund which looked like moraine and was ice, and the two amateurs of the party wriggled and shivered until the professional and the friendly rope delivered us. By now we had had enough. We determined that the Punta Bianca was a cow-mountain—a peak beneath the notice of such distinguished persons, and we raced back for the wine bottle and the Pousset hut. I now found breath to accuse Mayor of his base treachery in the matter of the morning's speed, and could only get for excuse: 'Well, I always find it most convenient to walk the pace I'm set,' a truth which I had ample opportunity of testing before the end of the season.

At the hut we found no Wollaston, but Gerard, the local guide, laden with all the delicacies and delights which Wollaston always carries about in the mountains for other people to eat. They consoled us not at all for his absence—the only drawback to one of the great evenings of life.

The Pousset huts are sometimes ill spoken of, and, as there is only one sleeping place which holds two by a squeeze, as it is impossible to light a fire in the hut, as the interior has a very ancient and cheese-like smell, and the immediate surroundings of the exterior are—well, the immediate surroundings of a

very large cow-chalet, those who visit it when the men and beasts are still there may find too many forms of animal life present to assist them to ' the sleep which is '—or should be—' among the lonely hills.' But for us all was well. Beasts and men had sought the lower Alps. For a short half-hour the sun shone, and we bathed in a mountain basin where the local Pan disports himself on summer evenings in bright, clear water such as does not flow over any but Italian uplands. Then, amid the jeers of the guides, we raced over the grass, cropped close by multitudes of cows to make an ideal running ground for feet hot from London pavements, until we were dry and could dress. By now the sun had gone and, sometimes in wisps, sometimes in heavy masses, the clouds rolled round the cauldron in which the huts stand. Towards evening, with the gloomy slopes below Mount Emilius to look upon, the great wall of stones which shuts out the Trajo glacier, and only a hint below of the forests and glades to which the stream descends, there is no more fantastic place in the Alps—

> The fair humanities of old religion,
> The power, the beauty and the majesty
> That had their haunts in dale or piny mountain
> Or forest or slow stream or pebbly spring
> Or chasms or watery depths—all these have vanished :
> They live no longer in the faith of reason,
> But still the heart doth need a language, still
> Doth the old instinct bring back the old names.

It was impossible not to believe in and have fellowship with beings—I cannot say not of this world—but all merry and delightful, such as take pleasure in the lives of the shepherds or the free life of the mountain-lover, in foul weather as in fair. And we were merry. The fire lit with difficulty because it rained so hard. And it was very cold, but it was difficult to warm oneself or to keep the soup from burning, because the wind, having inveigled you into a warm corner, suddenly swept round and caught your breeches in the flame. And we sang—a feat which I do not think that either of us is in the habit of performing at a less elevation. Whether it was the character of our melodies—as the guides asserted—that attracted the geister, I cannot say, but, as the darkness grew thicker, so did the storm, until at last, tired out with laughter, we sought our couch and slept soundly until the rain began to come in in the morning—at least Mayor did. I was awakened in a quarter of an hour by a large rat which leapt from somewhere in the rafters in the direction of our breakfast, made a bad shot, and landed in my face.

This apparent digression, drawn out by the intense delight in recollection which it but faintly portrays, has a moral which I mournfully pondered next morning as, still in rain, we ran down to the valley. No true mountaineer, panting for his qualification to be inscribed in the great book which lies in the neighbouring room, could have felt anything but gloom at a wasted day. Any well-conducted person fresh with the fire of youth would have lain sulkily, after the rat had roused him, at the thought of the loss of the Grivola, and returned indignant. I regret to state that all my feelings of indignation were swallowed up in the thought of the hot bath and the *vermouth e selz*—only Italian vermouth at that—awaiting me in the valley; and all the afternoon, sitting in the sun—now again triumphant—watching the game of bowls which proceeds for ever in the street of Cogne to what would be the great danger of the limbs of the passers-by if there were any passers-by, soothing the youthful impatience of Wollaston and Mayor, I abandoned myself to the sensuous delights of middle age, and realised how much I had gained by the acceptance of the situation.

What, then, does the middle-aged mountaineer gain?—for everyone present can at once supply innumerable answers to the question 'What does he lose?'

First, he gains the joy of carelessness. No longer does he find it shameful to spend half a day in halts. His interest in records is gone. If his digestion will allow him, he can have four breakfasts in the morning on the ascent, and lie half an afternoon, if the little stones do not stick too uncomfortably into his back, watching the peak he has descended or looking down into the shimmering heat of the valley. He cares no more painfully to collate the annals of mountaineering until he has discovered a new route, and, having accomplished it, to argue with acrimony all the winter for its authentic novelty. If he were ever so foolish as to make a new route, he wouldn't record it, and so it wouldn't count.

Then he has learnt all sorts of tips and fads and rejected all sorts of others. He has an epicure's delight in the choice of victuals and a dandy's in the choice of dress. He likes to carry his own sack. He knows, in the words of the poet, that

> Clean shirts are more than cooking stoves,
> And sour wine than sweetened tea.

Above all he has gained the joy of reminiscence. Every mountaineer, and especially every mountaineer who has to read a paper to this Club, must feel a sense of rage against the

pioneers. Their ruthless waste of new ascents, which, properly husbanded, might have provided material for the energy of generations; their reckless exploitation of all the jokes which, properly preserved, might have kept this Club warm far off in winters which we shall not see, remind me of the desolating track of an invading army. I should not have asked them to leave us the Matterhorn still untrampled, or the flea unarrided, but they might have kept their feet from, say, the Mettelhorn, or have spared the porter from their mirth.

Still, there are compensations. No one who has passed twenty or more seasons in the Alps, even if he be not one of the guilty band himself, can be without the vivid memory of some great presence to inspire his mountaineering career. I can never again cross the Col du Géant without seeing Melchior Anderegg and C. E. Matthews marching over for the last time on one rope, or sit in front of the Monte Rosa without a vision of the heroic form of Mummery. And the mountains themselves, for the middle-aged man at least, have gained something from their own defeat. 'What song the syrens sang or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, though puzzling questions, are not beyond all conjecture.' But who will ever solve the riddle of where Meyer rested on his ascent of the Finsteraarhorn, or what is the precise position of the old Weissthor? And if we have these controversies to inflame us, still more can we see the hills whose history we know with certainty through the glamour of all that our friends have given to them and they give back to us.

As I toiled once up the tedious slopes which lead on the east to the Passo di Bondo, there appeared over the top of the pass first one and then another snow peak, infinitely distant, faintly flushed, and swimming in the vapour of the Lombard plain between. 'There is the Saas-grat,' I said to my companion, but he—only half consoled for a tour in what he called 'this pig-dog land of Italy' by the thought that he was to step over the frontier in five minutes—roughly denied it. Then, as we advanced and the well-remembered majesty of the peaks disclosed itself, his emotion overcame his obstinacy and he delivered his soul of this pregnant sentence in the German tongue: 'Ach! to look upon one's home mountains—that gives one something in the stomach!' Some such feeling comes over every one of us as the summer approaches, keeps us restless in the train, makes us unduly talkative or morosely silent as we puff up the Rhone valley, and bursts in a pæan—if a silent one—when we are at last among the hills once more.

II.

I do not deny that, so far as this pleasure of the association of memory is concerned with the coming and going of the feet of others, the middle-aged man has seen changes that are displeasing to him. There are undoubtedly a great many more people in the world than there used to be, and a very large proportion of them, more or less unsuitably attired, place themselves, for reasons difficult to understand, within the confines of the Alps during the late summer and autumn. It is, however, probable that, if we find their presence irksome and their general appearance unattractive, they cordially reciprocate the sentiment. One may desire to possess in loneliness the joy of all the earth, and yet hesitate as to whether the making of new roads and railways and the building of new and great hotels have not been an advantage to the lover of solitude. It certainly drives the folk together and keeps them together. You walk up the Riffelalp path now with much greater amenity than when I first made the adventure. You can get to the country more quickly ; you can get away from your fellow-men more quickly ; and yet I have never experienced any difficulty in finding quite uncomfortable places to sleep in and quite nasty things to eat, and, in the last few years, when circumstances have driven me to September climbing, in finding the mountains almost reserved for my own party.

What does seem, speaking quite seriously, a very grave evil is the condition of some rock mountains and of the surroundings of the more frequented huts. Descending the Swiss side of the Matterhorn in 1906, I found the resting place by the old upper hut in a condition of unutterable foulness. Three days later a furious wind caused us to shelter for a few minutes in the Vallot hut. In addition to the ordinary litter which makes huts on the line of popular ascents distasteful, the inner room was cumbered up with opened tins of preserved meat and the like which gave every evidence of long exposure to the air. The whole place was like a very insanitary dustbin. It was not my first visit to either spot, but the degradation of a few years was remarkable. There can be little doubt, I fear, that some classes of modern mountaineers do not themselves obey the rigorous etiquette which was more common some years ago, either in their own conduct on the mountain or in huts, or in the condition in which they leave huts, and do not, when they climb with guides, exact the same standard from the latter as of old.

But the reminiscences of the middle-aged are of a special and,

as a rule, of a more engaging type. Years ago, when all the great peaks had been ascended by all possible routes, and it had not yet occurred to anyone that an Alpine literature might be constructed out of the process of letting one's self down them by ropes, when delicacy forbade as yet the discussion in this room of guideless climbing, an ingenious Secretary induced an ingenuous member of the Club to write a paper on the subject of centrism and excentrism in climbing. At once a discussion raged comparable only to that burst of earnestness which fills the daily press every autumn on the subject of 'The will to believe' or 'Should women propose?' The excentrics pointed out with much invective the immorality of table d'hôte dinner and the discomfort of hot baths as compared with the chaste simplicity of Binn, Bignasco, and the Tosa Falls. The centrists did not indulge in so much argument, but continued with unabated zeal their ascent of the smoking room window at Montanvert. Time has somewhat dimmed the interest of the controversy. Every rood of earth maintains its Grand Hotel, and I hear that sacrilegious hands have destroyed the smoking room window. But there remains, concealed perhaps, an antagonism between the two groups corresponding to a real spiritual distinction. Deeply seated in every human heart is one of three yearnings—the desire to get to the top, the desire to look round the corner, the desire to get home to dinner. It is the characteristic of the truly middle-aged mountaineer that, while he pays due attention to the last of these three cravings of his inner nature, his mind is set tensely on the second.

For my own part, from childhood I have felt this passion strong upon me, and, when you think of it, it is a child's passion, and therefore suitable to middle age. Many are the fairy tales which have their motive in the glimpse at another world where King Laurin and the elves dwell in the clefts of the hills, or the enchanted princess sleeps beyond her rocky barrier, or some sundering flood or some frozen haunt of the evil one shuts you off from the land of ampler spaces or more mysterious recesses than your own,

> . . . and there
> The sunshine in the happy glens is fair.
> And by the sea and in the brakes
> The grass is cool, the seaside air
> Buoyant and fresh, the mountain flowers
> More virginal and sweet than ours.

It is the essential spirit of travel, the gadfly that drove the Icelanders to Vine-land, and the Goths to Rome, and Bonny

Kilmeny up the glen. That desire and no hard economic pressure, as the professors do vainly talk, has ever set men moving from the time when first, long ago, the fair-haired Northerner streamed down towards the shores of the midland sea, until the sailing of the last boat which took Mr. and Mrs. Bullock-Workman to the Himalaya.

And it is especially potent to the Northerner when the expected land is Italy, just as I suppose to those south-country folk, who first looked over into the Zermatt Valley, the longing to lie down by the green pastures of Winkelmatten must have been all but overpowering.

Thus my prototype will think most lovingly of passes rather than of peaks, and having learned that there are 'better prizes than attaining,' and experienced his most poignant emotions in times of stress and in the tumult of the winds, will turn with affection to his failures rather than his, or his guide's, successes. I remember one such adventure which I must apologise for describing, since it has already received as much attention as it deserves from the far abler pen of Mr. Mumm in a paper read before the Club in March 1907, and published in the May number of that year's 'Journal.' But I tell it partly because I disliked it so much at the time and partly because my own feelings differed from Mr. Mumm's as described in the 'Journal' so typically that they aptly illustrate my text.

If you look east from any suitable halting-place on or above the Clariden-firn, your eye, travelling across the deep gap whose floor is made by the Biferten glacier and the wide pastures of the Sand Alp, will rest upon a wall of rock which, turning first a little east of north from the Bifertenstock itself, runs northward until it breaks away in the terrific precipices of the Vorder Selbsanft. This rock is the western containing-wall of the basin in which the Gries and Limmern glaciers have their common origin, and in places, notably just south of the Hinter Selbsanft, the Gries glacier and the top of the wall are all but on a level, so that, the coping-stone once reached, you have but to step gently down on to the glacier. The wall may, for all I know, be vulnerable in more places than one, but one deep and obvious furrow catches your eye at once as the true pass, and this, the Scheibenrunselücke, the Tentiwang pass of Mr. Coolidge's guide-book, happens to be just the spot where the wall sinks down nearest to the level of the glacier. The mere attainment in itself, however, of the Gries glacier or the Limmern glacier is only half the day's work. If you could see over the wall from your imaginary view-point, your eye would follow the Gries glacier on its northward course until it ends in nothing

in particular, its torrent discharging over great glacier-worn rocks into a tiny lateral glen of the Limmern töbel. Returning to the head of the Gries glacier you would then look down the Limmern glacier, which, indistinguishable at first from its twin, soon takes an independent existence, strikes off eastward along the base of another great spur of the Bifertenstock, its southern containing-wall, as the Selbsanft ridge is the western wall of the Gries, until that wall also turns northwards, and the Limmern glacier, giving up its vain attempts to reach the Rhine, makes the best of a bad business and empties its waters also into the Töbel, to which it gives or from which it receives its name. Now whether it be possible to follow the Limmern glacier to its snout, neither Mumm nor I know. Had we done so, however, we should have been in the Limmern töbel, and we believed at the time that the only exit therefrom was by the gorge leading from the Töbel to the Uelialp, a route only to be followed at the driest of times by wading down a swift stream, and, in the autumn of 1904, wholly impossible. We both now think that this opinion of ours was mistaken, and if the state of the Limmernbach allows you to reach the track marked on the Siegfried map on the right bank of the stream, probably there is no difficulty in following it up from the Boden to the Nüschenalp.

Hence our impression was that on crossing the pass we should find ourselves in an enclosure, exit from which was impossible on the north, where no wall was, and that our natural, and indeed our only, retreat was by climbing the spur of the Bifertenstock mentioned above as the southern and eastern containing wall of the Limmern glacier. Up this, trusting to the Glärner Führer and to the assurances of our local guide, we hoped to climb by a kind of band, or sloping shelf, and we knew that, the wall once scaled, we could walk along its top northward to the Kisten pass path and then to the Müttsee hut, our evening's destination.

To avoid confusion I should say that the word 'left,' where it occurs on page 457 of last year's 'Journal,' is an obvious misprint for 'right.' The way up by the Limmern band to the Kistenstöckli (if it exists) starts from the right or south-eastern bank of the Limmern glacier.

The walk up the Linth-thal from Stachelberg by the left bank of the Linth to Thierfehd, and thence by the gorge of the Pantenbrucke and the forest to the Hinter Sand huts is one of the most charming in the Alps. It was a clear, fresh evening with every promise that the weather, which had already played many tricks upon us, was at last about to relent; and when we

reached the Alp hut, standing in a great stretch of pasture, a green island shut in by the Selb-sanft ridge and the huge precipices which apparently bar the way to Ober Sand, I shared fully Mumm's enthusiasm for the strange quietude of his favourite mountains. The herdsmen had driven down their kine long before, but they had lent us the key, and we had what was that season the unwonted luxury of an empty hut, with a roomy loft and plenty of nice wet hay to roll in. It is true that the night was one continuous effort to find a place on to which some one of the numerous holes in the roof did not discharge rain so as to tickle my nose. But, damp and disagreeable as the morning was, we knew that a porter with a great store of dainties waited for us at the Müttsee, and we had no idea of the penance to be undergone before we could reach that hut, and so we started gaily enough. If bound for the Scheibenrunselücke, our goal, you follow the well-trodden path towards the Fridolinshütte for three-quarters of an hour, if you walk our leisurely pace, and when you reach the first bridge over the Biferten torrent, turn round sharply to the left or east and toil up very steep and pathless grass slopes until you are high enough to have turned the Tentiwang precipice. Then incline south-east and proceed still up grass until you are nearly at the foot of the gully leading to the pass. Here one of those convenient shelves, which these accommodating mountains provide in the most unexpected places, leads you into the gully itself. We found ourselves at the foot of a slope, arranged at a very steep angle and always steepening to the pass. Direct progress seemed difficult if not impossible, and we traversed leftwards and northwards until in this direction also the rocks became sheer and destitute of holds. Then, turning right, we traversed back into the gully itself. All the way since we struck the shelf the scenery had been of the wildest character. We seemed to be climbing up the edge of the world. Indeed, except among the wildernesses to which the Zmutt arête gives access, I do not remember any spot in which you are so deeply committed to the mercy of the mountain, so savagely withdrawn from humanity. And on the Matterhorn your very height gives you glimpses of a kinder and more coloured world which are denied to you in the Scheibenrünse. It is only now, however, that the climb becomes interesting to those who value difficulty. Imagine yourself at the foot of a wall, not very high but practically vertical, the masonry of which has split from top to bottom. Imagine, then, that the defect has been repaired by the insertion of another block of masonry which in its turn has been split by

age and weather both from its original material and in itself. Up this intrusive mass lies the way, not a difficult way in any circumstances, since the rifts give large holds both for feet and hands. When, however, as sometimes must happen, the staircase is a plaster of ice or snow, or when, as we found it, the place is saturated with water so that every stone has been ungummed from its neighbour, it is trying to weak nerves. Inderbinnen, who was leading, is far too careful a climber to proclaim a security which he does not feel, and he soon began to express his opinion in indistinct mutterings. We huddled together to avoid the stones which he seemed certain to dislodge. Our local friend, who had already caused me some uneasiness, seized the opportunity to lose his head altogether. I directed, commanded, implored him to attend to the rope between Mumm and himself and between himself and me, and to belay the latter round the firmer parts of the mountain, if any such there were. But his usual sprightliness of demeanour now vanished into a gush of patois. He wouldn't attend to the rope; he wouldn't answer; he wouldn't move up; he wouldn't move down. At last, Inderbinnen groped his way over stones which were apparently secured to nothing, Mumm followed, and our friend had to move or be cut in two. He didn't climb badly. But the consequences of climbing up rotten rock with the rope gracefully festooned round the neighbourhood are apt to be painful to those below, and before I, in turn, somewhat constricted about the waist, arrived on the pass, several stones had asserted their obedience to the laws of Nature, and one had got me on the head, fortunately at very short range.

As we reached the top, we had full warning of the kind of afternoon we were likely to spend. The clouds were just rolling upwards and downwards over our future path. If we had been quite reasonable beings, we should have started off immediately, compass in hand. But both Mumm and I were hungry, and we have been too many seasons in the Alps to allow reason to direct our goings. For forty minutes we feasted and listened to the thunder of the rocks bounding and rebounding in the gully which we had just ascended, and effectually cutting off our retreat. Then, after the strictest cross-examination of our local guide and the most confident assurances that he could find the Limmern band (the shelf which, as we then thought, was the only egress from the glacier) in any weather, we set out. Our way ought to have lain almost on the level, a little south of east, so as to clear the stones which the Siegfried map marks as running up like a cape into the ice-streams of Gries and

Limmern, and then slightly downwards and nearly due east to the band. When therefore our leader started off uphill and southwards or south-westwards, I thought my sense of direction must be confused in the fog or else that some local condition of the ice at the division of the glaciers must make the détour necessary; and, as no one else objected (the usual excuse of the blunderer), I followed obediently. After an hour's steady ascent, however, my legs made the protest which my mind refused, and simultaneously for one blessed instant the wind disclosed a secondary summit of the Bifertenstock straight in front of us. Mumm may be trusted to be kind to any companion, even the most dour. I have never known him choose any but the worst bed, the leg of the chicken and the most uncomfortable position on the rope. But this evidence that we were walking steadily away from home was too much even for him. And in a few moments we swung right about face and were descending the Limmern glacier. The horror of the succeeding hours haunts me still. Sometimes for a moment or two the clouds melted to a veil through which the Kistenstöckli ridge showed dimly. More often they dissolved in little drizzles of clinging rain. Our man was still quite confident of finding the Limmern band. 'Where was it, then?' 'Down there where the end of the stone shoot could be seen against the cliff.' 'Why, then, was he trying to lead us to the left bank of the glacier?' 'Because that was the only way of getting off.' 'But wouldn't that lead to the Limmern töbel, and was it possible to get out, once there?' 'No, there is no path out of the Limmern töbel!' 'Then why go there?' Patois and pantomime. Further interrogated thereanent. If we would trust to him, he knew the way well to the Limmern band. Advance. Wanderings again to the left bank. More patois: more pantomime. Then the statement that there was a thick fog and no one could be expected to find the way in a fog, coupled with the remarkable suggestion that we should sit down on a stone and wait for morning! One of the greatest aids to success in life is, I understand from those who have succeeded, the faculty of losing your temper at the right moment. Mumm's natural fairmindedness prompted him, I think, to give this last suggestion his impartial consideration. But it was too much for the united party. The unhappy young man was deposed from his pride of place, and, still pouring forth a flow of unintelligible and plaintive patois, was tied up firmly in the middle where he could do no harm. By dint of what another would have called, and I still believe to be, the inherited guide's instinct of Inderbinnen, leading

down a glacier which he had never seen before, in rain and fog and discouragement, we then groped our way down and to the right until we struck the bottom of the wall which we were seeking.

Even now we could not find the bottom of the Limmern band. We unroped to look for it, and while Mumm, Inderbinnen and I searched, our local friend bringing up the rear still poured out his assurances, firstly that we were not on the right way, and secondly that, if only trusted, he could show us where that way lay. Still, when interrogated, he took refuge in patois and suggested recourse, so far as we could understand him, to the Limmern töbel. At last, as our search brought us higher and higher on the cliffs, we decided that, if there was any Limmern band in existence, it certainly was not there, and that the only course remaining was to force a way straight forward. We tied ourselves up again as well as we could with a rope which was now, with wet and ice, of a consistency of wire, and plunged on, all fearing, though none daring to express the fear, that at any moment the cliffs might steepen and we might find ourselves cut off from the top of the wall. Progress was most painful. The whole slope ran with water. The rope kinked and caught. The local gentleman stopped continually to tell his tale of woe, and, every time he did so, jerked me off my legs. At last the cliffs did steepen. We did not seem anywhere near the top, but Inderbinnen pressed forward in desperation. For a moment he disappeared from sight. Then from the jerkings of the rope it was clear that he was going more quickly. We crowded after him and found ourselves on the road where we would be. The rest of our adventures are of no interest. A wonderful race to reach the Müttsee hut before the snow actually began, and a weird riot in the hut dressed in a pair of gloves and a blanket (which were the only dry coverings available) concluded the evening. But, long before tobacco had made the inside of our resting-place as foggy as the night without, our local man had recovered his confidence, and was relating to the hut attendant with what unerring skill and with what cool courage he had delivered the three mad adventurers from the penalties which their incompetent rashness would otherwise surely have brought upon them. We felt too pleased with ourselves to protest.

Next morning the unfortunate goats which glean a precarious living in the neighbourhood of the Mütten See butted at the door of the hut for a refuge from the cold and storm, and on opening the door we found a foot of snow on the ground

and a tornado raging. I even found it in my heart to forgive myself the somewhat unceremonious manner in which I had rejected the proposal to camp on the glacier!

III.

One more typical reminiscence of middle age. If there be any district in the Alps where you need the thought of a round-the-corner country to make its civilisation tolerable, it is the Upper Engadine. And, for all its well-ranged peaks, there is no other district which has so many corners round which you may go, nor any other civilised land with such delightful savagery within the reach of a day's walk. He who will leave dress clothes and little dances and a nine-course dinner should do so by the Forno Glacier, the best worth visiting and the most secluded of all the ice streams accessible from the Engadine plateau. There is something almost vulgarly ostentatious in the way in which the Morteratsch and Roseg glaciers flaunt their rather undistinguished summits to the passer-by. They take great care to be known of men and to have their beauties ticked off by the occupants of the six-horse carriages which sweep in triumph up and down the Bernina road. But all the societies of all the capitals in Europe may travel up and down between Italy and Maloja without suspecting that an easy three and a half hours from the carriage road through forest and up steep glacier will lead you to a spot whence as much fine confused climbing can be got as from any minor hut in the Alps. Indeed, even with the aid of maps and travellers' tales, you hardly credit it yourself until you have breasted the lower Forno slopes and the full glory of the peaks surrounding the head of the glacier bursts upon you. On your left is the snow and ice wall which separates the glacier from the immemorial track to Italy of the Muretto pass. At the turning-point is Sissone: in front, the four needles of the three Torroni and the Punta Rassica leading to where, at the Cima di Castello, the ridge turns again to form the left-hand wall of the glacier. Over or between any of the Torroni peaks, passes of various degrees of difficulty lead to Val di Mello. But I recommend anyone in whom the first ardour for a broken head has been cooled by experience to select the pretty little pass—Passo Lurani—which lies immediately under and to the east of the Castello. The pass is without difficulty of any kind, but if you leave your knapsacks on the Col and climb Castello himself, straight up the great wall in which the window of the pass is cut, you can find an hour's

rock climbing, quite steep and smooth enough to give pleasure to the most determined followers of the wrong way. Then run down by the North Arête and the east face of the Cima back on to the Forno glacier, and you can be on the Lurani pass again in an hour from the top and resume your descent to Italy. And what a descent it is! First over the usual stones and couloir into the green basin of the Torrone Alp, with the spikes of rock which fringe the Italian side of the chain showing fantastically among the mist which is indigenous to this part of the world; then, squeezing through the gorge, through which the glen discharges its waters on to the hillside, and down, running, stumbling and laughing until you reach the valley floor and can bathe in the valley stream. Then along the valley to San Martino and up the lateral glen of the Val dei Bagni to where the bath-house of Masino stands, in deep forest at the edge of the mountain, bright and clean and undisturbed in its clearing and just as Mr. Freshfield first found it and described it many years ago. Nothing seems to have changed. You still find the same family party of Milanese chattering and playing bowls and decorating the neighbouring trees with the Italian ensign—just as kindly, just as eager at the sight of a stray Englishman and two stray Swiss, just as unconcerned at the existence of the curious menagerie of human beings living in the cold Engadine on the other side of the hill.

My first journey to Masino, however, was not over any mountain pass, but shamefully by the carriage road (so-called) which winds up interminably through chestnut trees from the Valtelline, and our first expedition there, naturally—as the first expedition of every traveller there must be—Badile and Cengalo. These accomplished, our thoughts turned to the real object of our journey—Disgrazia. And, with a little army collected at San Martino, we started for the Cecilia hut. There are two obvious ways of going from the Bagni to Cecilia. You can either go down the main Val Masino and then, turning to the left a little above Cattaeggio, go up the Vals Sasso Bisolo and Preda Rossa, at the head of which the hut is situated; or, without going into the Val Masino at all, you can go straight up Val di Mello as far as the Piode Alp, and then, crossing the south-west spur of the Disgrazia by the Remoluzza pass, descend on the Cecilia hut. There is nothing to be said in favour of this latter route except the beauty of the walk up Val di Mello and, as it furnishes far the best way down from Disgrazia, anyone of common sense will choose the walk up Sasso Bisolo on the ascent. Needless to say, our local talent took us up Val di Mello, principally, I think, because the commander of

the expedition had many friends in the farmsteads up the glen, and promised himself a pleasant walk, passing the time of day with them and exhibiting to their astonished eyes two strange adventurers. Val di Mello is certainly very beautiful, but it is also certainly very hot on a September morning. We had no temptation to hurry. The main valley stream makes music all the way, the great trees give you a pleasant shade and tempt you to idle where they offer it, and, when you are most repining at clothes made to resist the violence of an Alpine snowstorm, you drink from brooks which descend from Val Torrone and from Val Zocca and lift up your head. At last the valley comes to an end against the rocky theatre which is the last buttress of the ridge connecting the Disgrazia and Forno peaks. The grass grows more emerald green, the trees are more and more only the outliers of the forest, the undergrowth begins to disappear, and you begin to realise that you will soon have to leave your pleasant path to wander up slopes of stone and dwarf rhododendron to the pass. Just at this crisis we reached a large Alp hut tenanted by a *bella donna* (of whom old Giulio had been muttering and chuckling all the way up the valley), together with an innumerable number of bright-eyed children and all those apparently superfluous young men with no particular occupation whom you may find leading a pleasant but apparently a somewhat meagre existence round all these Valtelline huts. By now the warmth and closeness were declaring themselves as only the precursors of a fresh break in the weather. A few large drops fell

> And at length
> Thundered the heat among the hills.

If the advent of the rain had not so unfortunately coincided with our arrival at the Alp, I think we might have pressed on, as any ordinary party would have done in Switzerland, reached the hut in a few hours, and, having dried our clothes, been in a position for an attack on the morrow. But, as it was, what with the attractions of the *bella donna*, the curious cooking arrangements which appeared to be gone through as a ritual ceremony, and the interminable conversation carried on in patois with the hinds, nothing could drag Giulio from his shelter. What the conversation was all about I don't know. Suppressed gigglings every now and then, which were all the more irritating as one could not share in the wit which produced them, suggested to my mind that some of the talk was carried on in the language of gallantry. For the most part however, the key to the riddle was probably to be found in an

observation which Gentinetta made to me last year in Val Savaranche. A fiery gentleman with the air of a Socialist orator was addressing with extraordinary vehemence a little crowd of men in the High Street of Degioz. I asked our guides if they could discover from the porter what all the pother was about. And the answer came: 'What is he talking about? In the mountains they talk of cows.' In any case, whether it rained or the sun shone, for two and a half unlucky hours we remained watching the polenta boiling. Then, as a much longer halt would make it impossible to reach Cecilia at all, I compelled a start. Anxious to show his zeal, Giulio deserted the path and led us straight up what appeared to be a water-course. When our stockings and breeches were well soaked, the rain suddenly increased again and performed the same process to the upper parts of our persons, and without a word the guides and porters turned and ran furiously back to the Alp. Then another hour's wait, and more conversation. At last, a little after 4, flesh and blood could stand it no longer, and we made a fresh start. It was supposed to be about an hour and a half's walk to the pass, and say another hour to the hut. Of course therefore, all being heavily laden, we tried to walk much too fast; equally of course, the fog and rain descended again; and still more of course, when dealing with a San Martino peasant, the time was grossly undercalculated. An hour came and went. 'How far to the pass now?' 'About two hours.' I then suggested that the less heavily burdened members of the party should push on to wave a light from the hut door and make the soup ready for the remainder. But no, we must all keep together 'per far coraggio.' Accordingly we still ploughed on together. Another half-hour passed, and still no sign even of the approach to the pass, which by all accounts had now receded to a considerably greater distance than that which we had to accomplish when we left the hut. And still adjurations to keep together 'per far coraggio.' It appeared to me, however, that common sense rather than courage was the necessary ingredient to success. Basil Williams was quite willing to get wet in the good cause of restoring courage to Giulio, and I accordingly left him to do so; and, taking one porter with me, pressed on with all speed, hearing, as the distance between the two parties increased, the continuous pathetic bleat borne upward through the mirk, 'Tutti insieme, carissimo signore, tutti insieme per far coraggio.' The pass is reached, so far as it is possible to tell in a thick grey fog, over gentle grass slopes ending in a steepish little scramble over stones. On the other side, further

stones—horrible walking-ground in the wet dusk—led down very quickly to Cecilia. When we got there, of course I found that we could not wave a light to assist our companions, because we had left all the candles with them, and that my dry shirt was on the back of the other porter!

We were so wet and cross and tired with racing up the slopes to the Remoluzza that I doubt whether anything but the brightest morning would have nerved us to the Disgrazia, of whose difficulty I had at that time a very exaggerated idea. But in any case the following morning was as grey and discouraging as the night. We stopped at the hut long enough to have an excuse for saying that we had given the mountain every chance, then at last Apraktoi took the downward way by the Valley of the Red Meadow, turning away, in my case, defeated for the second time by the Mountain of Ill Omen. We were still quite cross when we paid off old Giulio at San Martino, though his childlike and bland manner and his apparent innocence of the reasons for our irritation sufficiently overcame our annoyance to make us abstain from chiding words. When we had paid him and written a eulogy of his masterly leading in his book, he begged us to wait a moment and disappeared into his dwelling, the only entrance to which lies through his hen roost. A hideous cackling, as of Rachel robbed of her children, came out of the darkness, and a very large hen, which as it brushed my face seemed as big as a turkey cock and gay with all the colours of the rainbow, flew into the road. Then out came Giulio bearing in his hands the spoils as a peace offering—one white egg each. An egg is a difficult object to handle with grace. I think more than ordinary mirth must have provoked the company of the Milanese at the Bagni when Williams and I arrived half an hour later, soaked to the skin and bearing each in one hand an ice-axe and in the other the offering of the hen of San Martino.

I have dwelt lovingly on these failures, but there are two other even more precious possessions obtainable certainly by the middle-aged wanderer.

First come friendship and fellowship, and, if anyone here has listened to this paper, he will realise by now that I must have considerable confidence in the infinite compassion of my friends.

So much for charity. Further, there is an amalgam of the other two great Christian virtues, faith and hope. Some years ago a very august member of this Club spent a summer in walking through a part of the Alps—as he described it, from end to end—and subsequently told the Club that the Alps were

exhausted. The Alps can never be exhausted: not by any individual member of this Club; not by the united efforts of all the members in all the years which have led to this year of jubilee; not by all the countless myriads who swell the ranks of this Club's god-children. It may be that men may more and more take that curious form of pleasure which consists in ascending the Jung Frau through a rabbit-hole, or the Wetterhorn by a rocket apparatus. Mr. Young may climb, if he has time, every perpendicular precipice in the Alps, and the Yorkshire Ramblers Club descend into every pot hole. We may find the old haunts desecrated, and we may have to abandon the Swiss side of the Matterhorn through the danger of falling sardine tins; but for all this, shall love and fellowship be dead or the full moon paler over Monte Rosa? Shut us off from the fashionable climbing centres, ticket every rib and every gully and catalogue every peak—the infinite vastness, the infinite variety of the Alps will remain unplumbed, unstaled, and for many years to come the middle-aged man and his children and his grand-children after him will seek among those heights, and will find, the peace, the freshness and the purer air of another world. Whether in the translucent mystery of the morning or 'the incomparable pomp of eve,' they stand for ever for us unchanged, unchanging, only transmuted in the alchemy of the affections through what our hearts distil of recollection and of love.

Mountaineering on Ski.

By E. RUSSELL CLARKE.

(Read before the Alpine Club, March 2nd, 1909.)

THE art of ski-ing, like the art of skating, has attained to something like finality. I am told that all the skating turns mathematically possible can now be done by a first-class skater. In Norway and Sweden a corresponding proficiency on ski is quite common, but the Englishmen who are first-class skiers in this sense can be numbered on the fingers of the hand.

Mountaineering on ski, however, is quite a new sport, and there has not been time for the technique to crystallise as it has done in the case of mountaineering on foot. I therefore propose to deal with the subject generally, without attempting to describe any particular expedition.

There is a very wide distinction between being able to ski and being competent to mountaineer on ski. The ability to