

ALPINE ACCIDENTS IN 1911.

THE ACCIDENT ON THE MONT DOLENT.*

Dr. Thomas's Account of the Death of Auguste Blanc.

' On August 8 we started at 3 o'clock in the morning from the Refuge d'Argentière with the intention of traversing the Dolent. After ascending the terminal portion of the Argentière Glacier we reached at 5 o'clock the bergschrund at the foot of the rocky couloir climbed for the first time in 1906 by Messrs. Kugy and Bolaffio. This couloir brings one on to the N. arête of the Dolent above the Brèche de l'Amone. The ridge has only to be followed in order to reach the summit.

The bergschrund being very wide was difficult to cross and required half an hour's delicate work ; we could only reach the upper lip by hewing out a small tunnel between the ice and the rock.

The ascent of the couloir was very steep, but as there were good holds there was no difficulty, save for a smooth slab the climbing of which required rather more care. At 7.15 we halted for breakfast at the foot of the great final slab about 25 metres in height which leads to the N. arête.

After the magnificent climbing on this almost vertical slab, with holds that were secure though often much extended, we came out on to the arête itself in order to descend for 10 metres or so on the Neuvaz side ; it was then 8.45 (altitude about 3440 metres).

We now had only to follow the N. arête, at first on the Neuvaz side over a series of terraces and ledges separated by piles of boulders. The whole of this arête was easy, but rotten ; the rocks are loose and the greatest care is needed to avoid detaching them involuntarily with feet or hands.

At 11 o'clock we were near the summit, 60 metres below it in height, and had just passed the small gendarme which marks the meeting point of the N. arête with the W. arête coming from the Col Dolent. In consequence of this junction of the two ridges it followed that we no longer had the Argentière Glacier on our right as we had done hitherto, but the Pré de Bar Glacier.

Unfortunately this particular structure of the ridge was unknown to me, and I was unable to discover it at the time, as all the latter part of the ascent was accomplished in fog.

Several metres beyond the junction, Auguste who was leading found the arête partly obstructed by an enormous boulder. Since

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it appeared easy to turn the obstacle on the right, he advanced to do so, but he had scarcely given it the lightest touch with his hand when the immense mass, balanced evidently only by a miracle and with an instability impossible to have foreseen, turned over on him and dragged him down. At the same moment the rope, which I was holding securely to check the fall, was crushed between the boulder and the rocks, and was cut as clean as if with a knife so that Jacomin and I were powerless to prevent the terrible fall; needless to describe our grief and our despair.

As soon as we could rouse ourselves from the natural state of collapse in which this unexpected and overwhelming catastrophe had plunged us, we finished the ascent to the summit, *always in fog*, and then slowly and painfully descended on the Italian side by the easy Pré de Bar Glacier.

If I could have suspected then that it was on to this glacier that my poor Auguste had fallen, Jacomin and I would have gone to inspect the place in spite of our state of profound despair, but the Barbey map (Imfeld-Kurz 1910), the only document I had with me, caused me to make a serious mistake. For it shows the N. arête as if continuing direct to the summit; consequently according to the map anyone falling to the right of this arête would necessarily be found on the Argentière Glacier.

I had concluded accordingly that since Auguste had fallen to the right, his body must be sought on the Argentière Glacier. Jacomin indeed had twice assured me that from the summit through a clearing in the fog he had seen the glacier on to which the body had fallen, and that it was assuredly not the Argentière Glacier; but since he could adduce no argument in support of his statement, I adhered to my first conviction based on my examination of the map, so that instead of descending to Courmayeur we made our way over the Petit Col Ferret to Ferret and slept there. It was only on the following day, when we had already gone too far on the way to Chamonix to turn back, that I was able to consult a copy of the 'Echo des Alpes,' containing a monograph on the Dolent by M. Marcel Kurz with a sketch map rectifying the error of the Barbey map. I understood that Jacomin was right, and at once on arriving at Chamonix telegraphed to the Guide chef of Courmayeur, to send a party immediately to search for the body on the Pré de Bar Glacier at the foot of the great couloir which descends directly from the summit.

There the body was found. The search party left Courmayeur at 8 A.M. Pierre Blanc arrived the same day at Courmayeur and left at midnight with the guide Mussillon. They overtook the search party and were the first to reach the body.

C. F. MEADE.

THE ACCIDENT ON THE EASTERN PIZZO TORRONE.

DEATH OF DR. R. BALABIO.

On August 19, 1911, Doctor Romano Balabio, of Milan, accompanied by his younger brother, Antonio, set out from the Allievi Club hut with the intention of making the ascent of the E. Pizzo Torrone. This peak is attained from the S. by taking one of two routes to the summit of the Colle Torrone; one of these routes is extremely difficult and the other is much exposed to falling stones. Once the pass is reached the W. arête of the peak is followed without very much trouble to the top. It was in endeavouring to discover a better and safer way to the pass that the accident occurred. The party had reached the uppermost slopes of the Small Torrone Glacier at a height of about 2900 m., and Dr. Balabio, who was leading, was trying by a short traverse to get a foothold on the rock wall above the ice, his brother being left securely anchored against the lowest rocks, when an enormous fall of rocks from the Pizzo Torrone occurred. Dr. Balabio was at once swept away, the rope between himself and his brother being severed by the falling débris—the latter, however, easily maintaining his foothold in spite of the shock. Dr. Balabio, terribly injured, was carried down only a comparatively short distance, and his brother was able to go to his assistance immediately. Having dragged him to a place of safety, Signor Antonio, who throughout showed much pluck and presence of mind, at once set out to obtain help and eventually, assistance having been procured from San Martino, Dr. Balabio was brought down with much difficulty through Val Masino to the hospital at Morbegno and later to Como. He lingered on in much pain till September 26.

Dr. Romano Balabio's death, at the early age of twenty-eight, has cast a gloom over all Italian mountaineers. During the last three years of his life he had been busily engaged in writing the 'Albigna-Disgrazia' (or 'Bregaglia') section of the 'Rhaetian Alps Guide-book,' and it is a sad coincidence that his death occurred almost simultaneously with the publication of that excellent work. He was a very fine rock climber and, in company with his brother and other friends of the C.A.I., had accomplished many important new routes in the district, several of which are reported in the 'Alpine Journal.' Only a few days before the accident he had forced new ways up the Cima Sant' Anna from the E. and the Cima di Rosso from the Sissone glacier. His great courtesy and charm towards English mountaineers will long be remembered by those who have had the privilege of his acquaintance.

E. L. S.