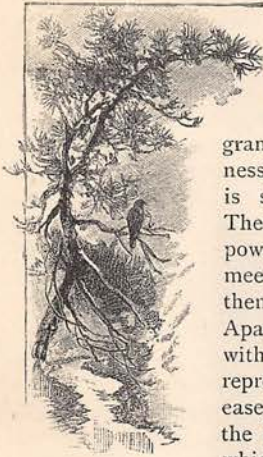


THE PLEASURES OF MOUNTAINEERING.



IT is easy to understand the fascination of mountaineering. Not a little is there to attract in being brought face to face with nature in all her grandeur, in all her picturesqueness, in all her power. But there is something far beyond this. There is the desire, innate in a powerful and dominant race, to meet difficulties, to grapple with them fairly and to overcome them. Apart from the foolhardiness—with which, however much we may reprobate it in our moments of ease, most of us, when it comes to the point, have some sympathy—which prompts men to attempt at

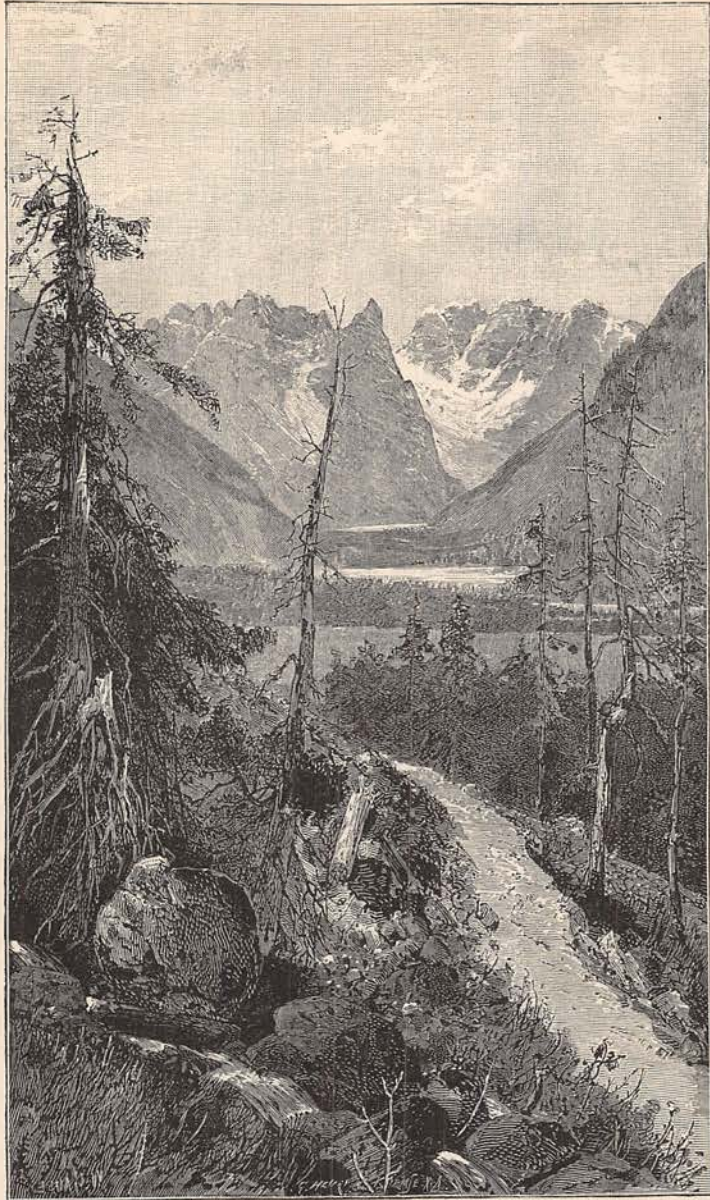
all risks what no one has ever yet successfully accomplished, there is the indomitable disinclination to being beaten, no matter what obstacles may stand in the way. The fact that difficulties exist is only a spur to the energetic mind and body: that dangers must threaten is only an additional incentive. This is the true spirit of mountaineering—the idea of doing work for its own sake, and for the sake of the reward which it brings with it in the consciousness of conquest. Unfortunately, fashion has injuriously affected climbing as well as other pursuits. It is the fashion to have traversed certain passes, to have stood on the summit of certain peaks; and the result is that men who, whether constitutionally or by habit, are utterly unfitted for the satisfactory performance of the smallest mountaineering feat, insist upon doing what fashion prescribes, and, after a small part of the journey has been accomplished, become nothing better than burdens—a source of danger alike to themselves and to their companions.

The greater familiarity which recent years have brought with them has very naturally diminished to some extent the danger, to a qualified mountaineer, of the ascents of mountains which are now comparatively well known. Avalanches, for example, scarcely now constitute a practical risk to experienced climbers who place their reliance upon competent guides. Terrible they are even to witness; overwhelming if they are met in their course. An earthquake or a tornado on shore, a cyclone at sea, all tend to impress a man with a keen sense of his utter helplessness when opposed to the active forces of nature; but there are few things more gruesome and awe-inspiring than the sight of a snow avalanche as, with horrid hiss and roar, it tears onward at the rate perhaps of a mile a minute, sweeping everything before it and leaving desolation in its trail. Still, the routes where these appalling dangers are to be met with are now pretty well known. No guide worthy of the name would conduct his *Herr* into the "avalanche path" of the Jungfrau; the *ancien passage* on Mont Blanc has

been forbidden for years; and there is now but little risk of such a disaster as opened the sad calendar of Alpine accidents when Dr. Hamel and his party were overwhelmed on Mont Blanc in 1820, or such an one as in February, 1864, cost the life of Bennen, one of the most renowned guides of the Valais.

A much more real danger to Alpine climbers is that arising from the showers of falling stones. The peril springing from this source is much greater on some mountains than on others, and depends to some extent on atmospheric conditions; but there are times when, on the Matterhorn, the falling stones make a continuous roar, and the Schreckhorn, the Weisshorn, and the Wetterhorn have also an evil reputation in this respect. Let it not be thought that the danger arising from these boulders bounding down from point to point is in any way an imaginary one. It is very real, very serious, and quite unavoidable. Only to mention one instance: a guide of the name of Gertz was killed on the Wetterhorn by a blow from a falling stone; and most Alpine men have had an unpleasant experience, amounting perhaps to a rope cut through or to a stunning blow on the head. These falling fragments of rock descend with marvellous velocity and force; but when they bombard, as it were, the only path by which it is possible to ascend, there is nothing for it but to accept the risk with equanimity.

The name of Mont Blanc has occurred more than once in the preceding paragraphs. It is indeed impossible to write anything regarding Alpine climbing without frequent reference to the mountain which the average tourist seems to regard as *par excellence* the Alp to be ascended. Now the ordinary ascent of Mont Blanc from the French side is, in fine weather, a feat of no great difficulty. Under favourable circumstances there is a tolerably well-marked path to the summit, which even the grasping Chamounix guides—incompetent as they are, for the most part—can scarcely miss. But the extent of its snow-fields constitutes a danger which cannot be overlooked at any time, and which, in bad weather, becomes far more serious than those who have only seen the mountain in fine weather can readily imagine. A crevasse is an awkward thing at best. Sometimes, when an ice or snow bridge some distance down offers the only means of reaching the other side, it is necessary to cut steps with the ice-axe down the wall of the crevasse in order to reach the bridge, and then to cut corresponding steps in order to ascend on the other side. Below, the dark abyss yawns menacingly, and it needs a stout heart as well as a steady head to look down it unmoved, with the knowledge that a single slip or false step may precipitate the whole party to a hideous death within its depths. It is the number of these crevasses that lie hidden under the snow-fields of Mont Blanc that constitutes the danger of that mountain. And this brings us to one of the elementary principles of mountaineering which is unfortunately too frequently disregarded—that, when traversing crevassed snow-fields, there



A MOUNTAIN PATH.

should never be less than three men on a rope. Not a few accidents have been traceable to neglect of this simple precaution; and men who do much mountaineering, and yet work in pairs only, have their good-fortune and neither their pluck nor their skill to thank if they escape serious disaster. If there are only two men on a rope, and one falls through, it is almost impossible for the other man to hold him, whilst many crevasses are so wide that it is quite probable that two, and by no means impossible that even three, men may be upon one at the same time. About seven or eight years ago, a Mr. Marshall and a guide, Fischer, were

on a crevasse at the same time, and the other guide, Christian Almer of Grindelwald—perhaps the only guide who ever came near Melchior Anderegg in ability—was on the verge of it. The two former fell through and were killed, and Almer was dragged after them, but escaped with his life. A real danger in mountaineering, too, is a slip upon an ice-slope or a snow *arête*, and if a man slipped under such circumstances, a single companion could scarcely hold him.

It may be as well to say a few words regarding guides. Much has been written, much more has been said, on the subject, and the following must be taken

merely as hints for novices. Avoid the self-styled guide who meets you in remote places with a book of glowing testimonials, and who is always perfectly ready to undertake to conduct you anywhere and everywhere. He is almost certainly incompetent. Remember that a guide should be trusty and trusted; he must necessarily be your companion, and he should be chosen with discrimination. It is possible that the time may come when your life will be in his hands; all the more reason, then, why you should not imperil his life and your own by recklessness or by foolish disregard of ordinary precautions. The result to be attained should be in proportion to the risk required to achieve it, and there is no cowardice in seeking to avoid preventable accidents. If you meditate anything more ambitious than the simplest excursions, it is not sufficient that your guide should be a good climber. He must be this, and more. He must tackle untried ground with a sort of intuitive perception of the best route to be followed; he must not be at fault as to the best point at which to attempt a crevasse. He must be quick, brave, loyal, fertile in resource. There are many amongst the best class of Alpine guides who fulfil these conditions, and they are, as a rule, engaged year after year, months beforehand. Possibly the worst set

of guides in the Alps, taking them as a body, are those at Chamounix. With some few exceptions, it may be said of them that their rapacity is enormous, their ignorance sublime.

Last year seems to have been, on the whole, one of the best Alpine seasons ever known, and, in the record of the year, three feats stand out beyond their fellows. German climbers accomplished the ascent of the Meije from La Grave, and the descent of the Eiger by the dreaded *Mitteleggi arête*; whilst Mr. King, a member of the English Alpine Club, succeeded, after a toilsome climb from Courmayeur which necessitated sleeping out two nights, in accomplishing the first ascent of the Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret. Unhappily, the year did not pass without bringing its usual tale of disaster—a better, or at any rate a more accurate word, perhaps, in many cases than “accident”; and foremost among the casualties of the season must be placed the death of a French abbé and two guides on the Col des Courtes. It is an unpleasant episode to dwell upon, and it need only be said that there must surely be something near akin to madness in attempting, in bad weather, to cut one’s way up an ice-slope which has never been crossed, even in fine weather, and which, moreover, possesses an evil reputation for falling stones.

W. T. MAINPRISE.



HOW I BECAME A SERGEANT OF VOLUNTEERS.

OW did you become a sergeant?” is a question that has over and over again been put to me by enthusiastic recruits, many of whom seemed to think that there was some royal road to obtaining the chevrons. The shortest and most simple answer is that I had to work hard for it; but as this may seem hardly sufficient for any future inquirers, I will endeavour to give, as briefly

as possible, the circumstances attending my volunteer life until I took my place in the “supernumerary” rank.

Coming of a family which erstwhile has contributed considerably more than its quota towards the defenders of our island home, I was early impressed with the idea that it was my duty, at least, to join the volunteers. Not having been in London for any considerable length of time, and knowing no one actively connected with the movement, I was unaware that a recommendation from one or two existing members was required before a recruit was allowed to join any Metropolitan regiment. A subsequent knowledge of this fact, however, explained what at the moment seemed the rather curious behaviour of the two gentle-

men whom I met in the orderly-room of one of the largest London corps, and to whom I mildly stated my desire to be enrolled. I was at once asked if I knew anybody in the regiment, to which I, innocently enough, replied in the negative. It then dawned upon me that I had—if I may be allowed the expression—“put my foot in it.” The shorter and younger of the two, fixing a glass to his eye, gazed at me for what seemed minutes, but could only have been seconds, with a look of mournful reproach, whilst the stern look on the weather-beaten face of the other seemed to meditate some more active measures on my unwarranted intrusion. But just as I thought it time to retreat, a whispered consultation was held, the result being that I was asked as to who I was, what I was, where I lived, and lastly—but by no means least—why I had selected that particular corps.

Another consultation followed, but I firmly believe it was to my answer on the last-named point that I was indebted for having in the books as my two sponsors the names of those two fly-wheels of a volunteer regiment, the adjutant and the sergeant-major. Having thus been duly sworn in to “defend Her Majesty against all enemies whatsoever,” &c. &c., I was then given a book of rules, which pointed out when I was to attend drills, and the number I should have to do to qualify myself: first, for admission into the ranks, and afterwards for my yearly efficiency.

I found that I could do five drills a week if I wished, so decided to get through my recruit stage