

THE DEATH¹ ROLL OF THE ALPS.

A cablegram last week announced that there had been nearly forty Alpine fatalities in Europe this season, which appears to have been a singularly disastrous one. Yet, notwithstanding the danger attached to mountaineering, there is no sport in this world so enchanting as mountain climbing in the high Alps. It is like being in love, and one is always falling into difficulties and getting out of them, but all the time thoroughly enjoying oneself. When once the fever for climbing seizes a man he is a lost soul to anything but the mountains.

I remember last year coming across an Irishman in the Cafe du Nord at Geneva, who, with Alpine stock in hand, walked across to the table where I was sitting, and in a blithesome sort of way accosted me with the remark:

"I say, can you tell me where the nearest pawnshop is to be found?"

"Certainly," I said, having had at times a passing knowledge of such places. "Come along and I will show you."

Away we went, and he confided to me he was temporarily hard up, as "I spent all my ready cash in getting up the Wetterhorn, and I want another £20 to get me up the Mont Blanc."

Five days later I saw in the Swiss papers that my genial Irish acquaintance had made a successful ascent of the white giant of the Savoy Alps.

Before making the ascent of a mountain it is wise to run through one's kit, and see that everything is in good order. Warm but not too heavy clothing should be worn, a Norfolk suit, with a flannel cricket shirt and a heavy woollen sweater, being the ideal garments for the Alpinist. His boots, which are an all-important factor for success, must be heavy, strong, and well-nailed with a special kind of hob-nail, procurable at any bootmaker's in Switzerland. The thickness of the soles must be at least $\frac{1}{2}$ in., and the boots ought to be new, but well tried companions of many a trudge up the mountain side. A slouch hat, a pair of blue spectacles, gloves, rope and an ice axe complete the outfit. A mackintosh is a useless encumbrance. So much for the mere man, now for the ladies.

The Alps have no Mrs Grundy to criticise the lady climbers, hence conventional dress can be discarded without fear, for to essay a climb in ordinary feminine attire is not only a species of madness, but also renders the wearer a nuisance to the male members of the party, who, in nine cases out of ten, have to give up the ascent and help to carry a half-fainting, semi-hysterical woman down the mountain slope.

The proper costume for a woman is a short skirt of knee-length, covering knicker-bockers of a heavy material. Gaiters well up to the knee, and boots with a sole at least half an inch in thickness, a warm blouse, covered with a fairly heavy coat, gloves, ice axe, rope, and a tam o'shanter hat complete the costume. Before attempting a big climb, a local doctor ought to be visited, and if he vetoes the excursion, then under no circumstances ought it to be attempted.

On well trodden paths like those of the Rigi, Pilatus, Fauthorn, or the Gemmi, the services of guides are unnecessary in good weather, but for expeditions in the higher mountains, where glaciers are encountered, guides are an absolute necessity. There is no more honest class of men in

this world than the certificated Swiss guide. Each man is a climber of well tried experience, who has made a speciality of a particular mountain, and knows its peculiarities of weather, its many wandering, winding paths, its hidden crevasses, and other danger spots, like a London street Arab knows the Strand.

When engaging guides, it is well to put the matter entirely in the hands of your hotel proprietor, who, for his own sake, does not wish his mountain to get the reputation of being a dear one, and consequently will ar-

range fair and just terms with the necessary guides and porters. The charges, however, for guides and porters, are nominally fixed by the guides' tariff, issued by the Central Committee of the Swiss Alpine Club. In an engagement lasting for several days, the terms are fixed by mutual consent, but for ordinary climbs they range from 8fr to 12fr per day for the guide and 6fr to 8fr for the porter. The guide is bound to carry 15lb of luggage in addition to the necessary rope; the porter carries 33lb. In tours of special difficulty the guide

is entitled to refuse to carry any baggage, but he must give his employer due notice beforehand to this effect.

When ascending a mountain for the first hour or so it is all leg work and no danger, but when the snow line is reached the fun begins, and the climbers are roped together, the tourist being invariably placed in the middle. Frequently, when coming across a bad piece of mountain side, steps have to be cut in the ice-bound slopes, and slowly the ascent goes on. Sometimes the path is scarce 2ft in breadth, and at one's feet yawns a hungry precipice, awaiting an unwary climber. Then perhaps the road stops dead, and a chasm has to be crossed. This is first accomplished by the foremost guide, who literally jumps it; then the tourist either jumps or is swung across the danger spot, the guide at the end of the rope jumping the chasm afterwards. And so the dangerous climb goes on over glaciers, which are always dangerous, as crevasses covered by the snow are often encountered, up nearly perpendicular sides of the mountain, and so on, battling against dangers until the summit is reached, where in most cases an Alpine cabin awaits the weary traveller. Here the night is spent, as the Alpine Club fits up each cabin with rough beds and mattresses. On the morrow the descent is made, and the hotel regained.

Guides occasionally have to be firm with their tourists, and sometimes, from some inconceivable reason, an amateur climber gets mountain funk, and refuses to go on any further. Then the chief guide asserts his authority, and as I once saw in the Bernese Oberland, literally bullied his tourist into doing what he was told. German-Swiss guides, when they get unpleasant, are uncanny creatures, as their language, which is a cross between German, bad language and a cough, is hard enough at the best of times to understand, but when the speaker is excited, and waves an ice-axe in his hand, then the best thing to do is to bow to the inevitable, and express sorrow for having aroused the ire of this stalwart of the Alps.

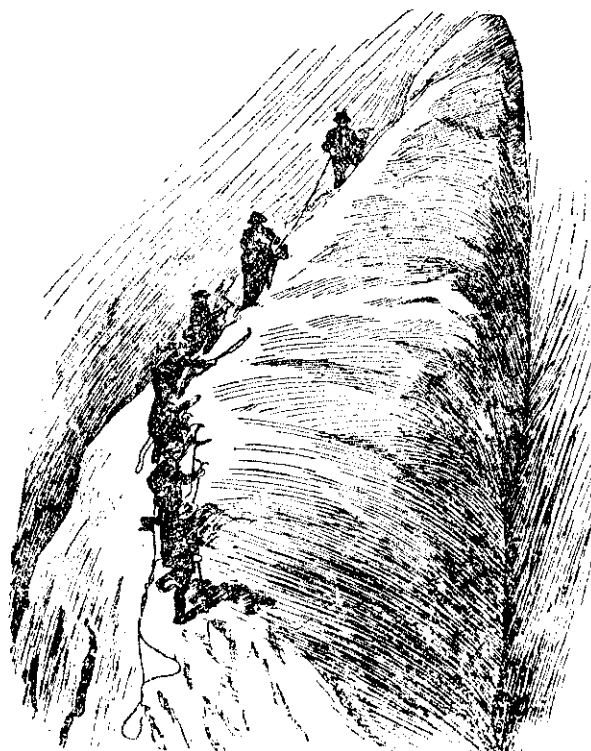
I have often been asked what is the charm of mountaineering, and what recompense does it give for all the danger encountered and all the fatigue endured. My opinion, after years of climbing, is that "doing" a small mountain is the maximum of labour for the minimum of pleasure; but the ascent of a snow peak is a thing to be remembered for a lifetime. The glorious scenery, the quietude of the snow-capped mounts, the endless seas of glaciers, the pitiless yawning chasms, the exhilarating devil-may-care feeling of fighting dangers and conquering them, the knowledge that you are doing something out of the common, and the fact that a false step or a careless action may mean a fall of a thousand feet, all combine to make Alpine climbing a passion once indulged in never afterwards forsaken.

Of course, accidents will happen, even when accompanied by guides; a rope may snap, or a rock give way from the parent body, or, perchance, an avalanche may fall. All these are legitimate accidents, which may overtake any party; but the ordinary run of casualties is the result of carelessness on the part of ordinary climbers, who, unaccompanied by guides, and without proper outfits, try to accomplish feats which, even with guides, would be dangerous. Then, again, there is the curious crank, who always wants to look down this crevasse "to see how deep it is," or desires "just to go down the slopes to get a bit of eidelweiss as a souvenir." He usually meets with an accident as a recompense for his curiosity.

One day I was up the Seelve, a perfectly easy mountain, and quite safe, with a party of Germans, one of whom was very inquisitive. We were without guides, and, as I knew the mountain, I was in chief command.



NEGOTIATING A DIFFICULT ICE-GULCH.



ANOTHER DANGER SPOT IN THE ALPS, WHICH CLAIMS SEVERAL VICTIMS EVERY YEAR. SUCH "SERACS" ARE ONLY CLIMBED BY THE ENTHUSIASTIC AND FOOLHARDY.