PERILS OF THE ALPS.

How Avalanches Sweep Away the Mountain Climbers.

PROFESSOR TYNDALL'S ESCAPE.

His Slide Took Him to the Verge of a Precipice—The Fate of a Noted Guide.

This is the season when the mountaineer once more takes down his Norfolk jacket, his nailed boots and his ice-ax and prepares to face the perils that may lurk for him above the snow line.

Strictly speaking—from the point of view of the expert who knows and does everything that an expert ought to know and do—mountaineering has two dangers only. There is the danger of bad weather and there is the danger of the falling stone. But every climber is not an expert, and even of experts it may be said that nemo omnibus horis sapit. So that there are all sorts of dangers to be reckoned with, and foremost among them is the avalanche.

Everybody knows—vaguely, if not precisely—what an avalanche is. Masses of snow accumulate in winter on the mountain slopes. In spring the warmth loosens their coherence, and they fall into the valleys, sweeping away or burying everything in their track. It is bad for the mountaineer, if he happens to be in the way of one.

Says the editor of the volume devoted to mountaineering in the Badminton library: "The simple rule with regard to all forms of avalanche is to avoid their track, and all that is necessary in the majority of instances is to recognize the marks on the snow surfaces that denote their cause, and to steer clear of them."

Undoubtedly an admirable rule, if only it could be always carried out. But mistakes, unhappily, may be made even by experts, as witness this story of a thrilling adventure which befell F. F. Tuckett twenty-four years ago.

The season had been exceptionally cold and wet. Snow lay thickly everywhere, even on the Faulhorn, the Scheinige Platte and the Wengern Alp. But in the early days of July an improvement began to show itself, and Mr. Tuckett, who for a whole month had been able to make no big expedition, resolved to make an attempt upon the Eiger.

The members of the party were Mr. Tuckett, Mr. Whitwell, J. H. Fox and the guides, Christian and Ulrich Lauener. They got off between 3 and 4 a. m. and presently started to ascend the Eiger glacier. The surface of it was entirely concealed with snow, but, for some reason, they neglected to put on the rope. High up in front of them were the disordered pillars and buttresses of the icefall, and above the icefall rested an enormous weight of freshly fallen snow.

Instead of ascending the center of the glacier the party, fortunately for themselves, were keeping to the left, towards the rocks of the Rothstock. Of a sudden a sort of crack was heard high up above their heads, and every eye was turned upon the hanging ice cliff from which it came. A large mass of serac was seen to break away, mingled with a still larger contingent of snow from the slopes above, and the whole mass slid down like a cataract, filling the coulier to its brim and dashing in clouds of frozen spray over the rocky ridges in its path, towards the travelers.

For a moment they did not realize that they were in its track. But then the knowledge flashed upon them all, and they shouted to each other: "Run for your lives," and struggled desperately through the deep, soft snow to reach the rocks of the Rothstock, yet with their faces turned to watch the swift oncoming of the foe.

Let Mr. Tuckett himself describe that thrilling race for life:

"I remember," he writes, "being struck with the idea that it seemed as though, sure of its prey, it wished to play with us for a while, at one moment letting us imagine that we had gained upon it and were getting beyond the line of its fire, and the next, with mere wantonness of vindictive power, suddenly rolling out on its right a vast volume of grinding blocks and whirling snow, as though to show that it would outflank us at any moment if it chose.

"Nearer and nearer it came, its front like a mighty wave about to break, yet that still 'on the curl hands pausing;' now it has traversed the whole width of the glacier above us, taking a somewhat diagonal direction; and now, run, oh, run, if ever you did, for here it comes straight at us, swift, deadly and implacable! The next instant we saw no more; a wild confusion of whirling snow and fragments of ice—a frozen cloud—swept over us, entirely concealing us from one another, and still were we untouched—at least I knew that I was—and still we ran. Another half-second and the mist had passed, and there lay the body of the monster, whose head was still careering away at lightning speed far below us, motionless, rigid and harmless."

The danger was over, and the party examined the avalanche at their leisure. It had a length of 3,200 feet, an average breadth of 1,000 feet and an average depth of five feet. This is to say, its bulk was 611,000 cubic yards, and its weight, on a moderate computation, about 420,000 tons.

Accidents of this sort, happily, are very rare, and the climber who is carried away by the avalanche has as a rule deliberately faced the risk out of bravado, and the desire to go home and boast that he had done hard things. But there is another sort of avalanche, which is a much more frequent source of danger. It consists of a stratum of snow loosely adherent to a slope of neve or ice. The snow breaks away under the weight of the party and carries them down with it, sometimes to a place of safety, sometimes to a crevasse.

Experience, of course, has laid down many rules for determining whether snow of this sort is safe, but the best men—guides as well as amateurs—may sometimes be misled. Prof. Tyndall, for instance, was always a cautious as well as a brilliant mountaineer; yet there was a day when the professor's snowcraft failed him, and he came very near to paying for his blunder with his life.

The place was the Piz Morteratsch, in the Engadine, and the time the month of July, 1864. Prof. Tyndall's companions were Mr. Hutchinson and Lee Warner, and the guides Jenni and Walter. Jenni was at that time the dictator of Pontresina, and he seems to have set out with the deliberate intention of showing his Herren how great and brave a man he was.

The ascent was accomplished without any incident of note. On the way down the party reached a broad couloir, or gully, filled with snow, which had been melted and refrozen, so as to expose a steeply sloping wall of ice. The question arose whether it would be better to descend this wall of ice or to keep to the steep rocks by the side of it. Prof. Tyndall preferred the rocks; Jenni inclined toward the slope and started to lead the way upon it.

There was a remonstrance from the professor.

"Jenni," he said, "do you know where you are going? The slope is pure ice."

"I know it," the guide replied, "but the ice is quite bare for a few rods only. Across this exposed portion I will cut steps, and then the snow which covers the ice will give us a footing."

So they started, roped together, Jenni in front, Mr. Tyndall next, followed by Mr. Hutchinson, Mr. Lee Warner, the one inexperienced member of the party, and last of all the guide, Walter, ready to check on the instant any false step that Mr. Lee Warner might make.

After a few steps Jenni began to see that the slope was less safe than he had supposed. He stopped and turned round to speak a word of warning to the three men above him.

"Keep carefully in the steps, gentlemen," he said; "a false step here might start an avalanche."

And, even as he spoke, the false step was made. There was a sound of a fall and a rush, and Prof. Tyndall saw his friends and their guide, all apparently entangled, whirled past him. He planted himself to resist the shock, but it was irresistible; he, too, was torn from his foothold, and Jenni followed him, and all five found themselves riding downward with uncontrollable speed on the back of an avalanche which a single slip had started.

"Turn on your face and grind the point of your axe or baton through the moving snow into the ice"—that is the golden rule for cases of the kind, the only way in which the faller can do anything to arrest his speed. But it seldom avails much, and in this instance it availed nothing.

"No time," writes Prof. Tyndall, "was allowed for the brake's action; for I had held it firmly thus for a few seconds only when I came into collision with some obstacle and was rudely tossed through the air, Jenni at the same time being shot down upon me. Both of us here lost our batons. We had been carried over a crevasse, had hit its lower edge, and instead of dropping into it were pitched by our great velocity beyond it. I was quite bewildered for a moment, but immediately righted myself, and could see the men in front of me, half buried in the snow and jolted from side to side by the ruts among which we were passing."

Presently a second crevasse was reached. Jenni knew that it was there, and did a brave thing. He deliberately threw himself into the chasm, thinking that the strain thus put upon the rope would stop the motion. But, though he was over thirteen stone in weight, he was violently jerked out of the fissure, and almost squeezed to death by the pressure of the rope.

And so they continued to slide on. Below them was a long slope, leading directly downward to a brow where the glacier fell precipitiously; and at the base of the declivity the ice was cut by a series of profound chasms, where they must fall, and where the tail of the avalanche would cover them up forever.

The three foremost men rode upon the forehead of the avalanche, and were at times almost wholly hidden by the snow, but behind the sliding layer was not so thick, and Jenni strove with desperate energy to arrest his progress.

"Halt! Herr Jesus, halt!" he shouted, as again and again he drove his heels into the firmer surface underneath.

And now let Prof. Tyndall tell the rest:

"Looking in advance I noticed that the slope, for a short distance, became less steep, and then falls as before. Now or never we must be brought to rest. The speed visibly slackened, and I thought we were saved. But the momentum had been too great; the avalanche crossed the brow and in part regained its motion. Here Hutchinson threw his arm around his friend, all hope being extinguished, while I grasped my belt and struggled to free myself. Finding this difficult, from the tossing, I sullenly resumed the strain upon the rope. Destiny had so related the downward impetus to Jenni's pull as to give the latter a slight advantage, and the whole question was whether the opposing force would have sufficient time to act. This was also arranged in our favor, for we came to rest so near the brow that two or three seconds of our average motion of descent must have carried us over. Had this occurred, we should have fallen into the chasms and been covered up by the tail of the avalanche. Hutchinson emerged from the snow with his forehead bleeding, but the wound was superficial; Jenni had lost a bit of flesh, removed from his hand by collision against a stone; the pressure of the rope had left black welts on my arms, and we all experienced a tingling sensation over the hands, like that produced by incipient frostbite, which continued for several days. This was all. I found a portion of my watchchain hanging round my neck, another portion in my pocket; the watch was gone."

Very similar in many respects was the famous accident of the Haut de Cry, in which J. J. Bennen perished in February, 1864. So sure of foot was Bennen that it used to be said of him, as it was said of Johann Lauener, who died upon the Jungfrau, that nothing could bring him to grief but an avalanche. And the hour came when the snowfield which he was crossing with his Herren split suddenly and the ground on which they stood began to move, and Bennen solemnly called out the words, "Wir sind alle verloren," and never spoke again.

The avalanche was deeper than the one which swept Prof. Tyndall down the glacier of the Piz Morteratsch. "Before long," writes Mr. Gossett, one of the survivors of the accident, "I was covered up with snow and in utter darkness. I was suffocating, when, with a jerk, I suddenly came to the surface again. To prevent myself sinking again I made use of my arms, much in the same way as when swimming in a standing position. At last I noticed that I was moving slower; then I saw the pieces of snowin front of me stop at some yards distance; then the snow straight before me stopped, and I heard on a large scale the same creaking sound that is produced when a heavy cart passes over hard frozen snow in winter."

But the snow behind pressed on and buried Mr. Gossett. So intense was the pressure that he could not move, and began to fear that it would be impossible to extricate himself. Then, while trying vainly to move his arms, he suddenly became aware that his hands, as far as the wrist, had the faculty of motion. The cheering conclusion was that they must be above the snow. So Mr. Gossett struggled on. At last he saw a faint glimmer of light. The crust above his head was getting thinner, and let a little air pass, but he could no longer reach it with his hands. The idea struck him that he might pierce it with his breath. He tried, and after several efforts succeeded. Then he shouted for help, and one of his guides, who had escaped uninjured, came and extricated him. The snow had to be cut with the ax down to his feet before he could be pulled out. Then he found that his traveling companion, M. Boissonnet, was dead, and that no trace of Bennen could be seen. His body, however, was afterward recovered. The story is told in a letter from Mr. Gossett to Prof. Tyndall.

"Bennen's body," he writes, "was found with great difficulty the day after Boissonnet was found. The cord end had been covered up with snow. The Cure d'Ardon informed me that poor Bennen was found eight feet under the snow, in a horizontal position, the head facing the valley of the Luzerne. His watch had been wrenched from the chain, probably when the cord broke; the chain, however, remained attached to his waistcoat. This reminds me of your fall on the Morteratsch glacier."

FRANCIS GRIBBLE.

AN AVALANCHE NEAR A VIADUCT OF THE ST. GOTHARD RAILWAY, IN THE ALPS.

A Needless Burden.

If all the troubles of life were divided into two bundles—one bundle containing the necessary evils which there is no help for, and the other bundle made up of the unnecessary miseries which we might easily get rid of—the second bundle would be much the larger. It would contain many headaches, backaches and other distressing symptoms, beside a constant sense of weariness, worry and despondency, as if life was hardly worth the effort of living. All this is not due to any mental malady or organic disease, but nine times in ten, though the truth seems hard to believe, the whole trouble comes from some form of that subtle, peace-destroying malady known as indigestion, and if you had faith to believe in the mild, unfailing power of Ripans Tabules as a certain cure for these unnecessary evils, the whole unbearable load of suffering and discouragement might be thrown off in a day and sent tumbling back among forgotten troubles.

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Mr. Labouchere and the Ladies.

London Truth.

A little while ago a number of the shrieking sisterhood subscribed a fund to prevent my ever again being returned to parliament, and sundry sisters are now having an outing in order to spend this fund. At one of my meetings two of the sisters, one aged and the other middle-aged, tackled me and asked me to explain my views on female suffrage. I declined to answer any question unless put to me by a resident in the borough. "Have you a mother?" asked the middle-aged sister. I replied that, in common with a good many persons, I had had a mother. What this interesting fact had to do with female suffrage I do not know, but apparently it is the key of the question, for the next morning a goodish-looking young lady, with esthetic eyes and robed in esthetic garb, penetrated into my room at my hotel. "I will not believe it," she said. "You cannot be against us. Have you a mother?" Again I pleaded guilty to the soft impeachment. Then she harangued me. The conversation drifted into one upon love. Ought a woman to marry without loving? she asked, and she explained to me that a baronet had once proposed to her, and that she had refused him because she had not loved him. This personal incident, strange as it may appear, did not convince me that I ought to vote for propertied women having votes. My visitor then confided to me that some doctors held that she ought to have an operation for some internal complaint, while others doubted it. This potent argument for female suffrage still, however, left me impenitent, on which she went away.

The next day the sisters had a meeting, at which the Conservative candidates appeared. The chief sister—the Lady Superior I suppose she ought to be called—announced that she would take me to her arms if only I would be converted. "But he's a married man, ma'am," shouted the audience amid roars of laughter. Another sister was adjured to go on, with cries of "Keep it up, dear." On the whole, therefore, I am afraid that the sisters left the place thoroughly convinced that I and my late constituents are a very tribald lot. I trust, however, that they enjoyed their outing, and went back to London—not better, for I do not question their domestic virtues—but wiser sisters. My experience of them confirmed my previous opinion, that women would do well to rest satisfied with the influence that they already exercise over men, and not weaken it by joining in the rough-and-tumble of elections.

Lady Gunning's Forgeries.

Harold Frederic.

Lady Gunning, whose arrest on the serious charge of forgery, receives a good deal of space in the papers today, is the stepmother of the present baronet of that name, and belongs by birth to the Spencers, being a cousin of Lord Churchill and remotely related to Earl Spencer and the Duke of Marlborough. Her marriage in 1879 to a widower of 82 years attracted comment at the time, and when he died, six years after, his family would have nothing to do with her. She has been very poor ever since, trying to support herself by secretarial work and the like. I know friends of hers who were always trying to find jobs for her, but somehow she never kept them. The specific forgeries alleged are of her father's name, he being a country clergyman in his 86th year, and these might be explained or hushed up. But it is said that there are other charges as well. The story of her struggle to live like a noblewoman on the income of a charwoman, filled as it is with humiliations, bitter snubs, and often with actual privation, could probably be matched by scores of other elderly women whose names are recorded in the peerage. The only wonder is that more of them do not come to a climax in a police court.

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