

An apology is certainly due for my having entertained the Club with so dry a subject, but a little hygiene in Alpine sport is not misplaced. There is always a risk of becoming dogmatic when writing on the use and abuse of alcohol. My object is far from anything of the kind. I do not say that alcoholic beverages in their various forms are fatal to mountaineering; indeed, I have shown them to be useful in some cases. It is hoped that the present paper has made it clearly understood that strong drinks do not give strength, and, as a means of keeping the body warm, they go on the opposite tack, doing away with the natural power man possesses of resisting cold, and thus acting as a *delusion and a snare*.

NUGÆ ALPICULARES.

By H. B. GEORGE.

(Read at the Annual Meeting of the Oxford Alpine Club, November 1882.)

HAPPY is the nation whose annals are a blank; but happy is not the secretary of a society whose members have, for one reason or another, not been adventurous, when a paper is wanted for the annual meeting. I must confess myself to have achieved no more than my neighbours. The weather pushed us down into Italy after ten days of Dauphiné. The only novelty I can record is having seen the great chain of the Alps laden with an amount of snow probably unparalleled at the end of summer. For want of more thrilling topics I propose to ask you to listen to a brief account of mountaineering on a more modest scale and without guides. It is, perhaps, but a chronicle of small beer; but after all, when ale and wine are gone and spent, or when we lack opportunity to procure them, then small beer is most excellent.

The weather was still dubious when our party of four quitted the little inn in the Schuldig Thal, in which we had been imprisoned all the previous day by pouring rain, to attempt to make our own way up the Dachspitze. Two of the party, whom I will, with your permission, call Brown and Robinson, were more or less novices in mountaineering. Jones and Smith had, at any rate, so much experience as is implied in being members of the Alpine Club. Up to the highest houses in the valley our way was simple and uneventful enough, except that a heavy storm drove us to take shelter for some time, and nothing but the obstinate hopefulness of Smith prevented our giving in to the rain and returning to another day of protracted lunch and desultory whist. Thence a faint track led steeply up the mountain-side to the right, and presently became once more fairly well traced as we mounted to the upper level of the lateral valley leading to the Stallenkopf Pass. On the north side of the pass, which, from the gradual character of the final ascent and the abruptness of the descent on the other side, bore a

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marked likeness to the Maloya, we found one of the small lakes so common on the passes of Tyrol and the Engadin. Here, as we had no chance of water higher up, and had preferred trusting to the pure element—not, perhaps, unqualified—to the trouble of carrying bottles, we halted to make what Brown, who had had the last turn of the provision knapsack, described as a more equable and secure adjustment of its contents. Then turning sharply up to the right, we proceeded to tackle our peak. The weather at this period could scarcely be better described than in Oxfordshire vernacular as ‘extremely middling.’ It allowed us to see about to the middle of the lake at our feet; it showed us the middle, but not the sides, of the rough slope of rocks and snow up which, as the map seemed to indicate, our route lay; and when we rose above the level of the pass it allowed us to see the middle of a lake shining far away below, and also bits, which may or may not have been in the middle but certainly were not at the top, of the peaks which stood around. The slope, though easy enough, was undeniably steep, and Brown and Robinson, probably carried away by mathematical zeal to investigate practically the angle of least resistance to the course of a heavy body propelled upwards by the force of (cold) π , diverged very considerably from the straight line. As they were approaching uncomfortably near the precipices which cover the whole southern face of the peak, Smith went off to look after them, while Jones continued his upward course, in order to lose no opportunity, whenever the mists opened, of reconnoitring the unknown ground that lay between us and the summit. Alas for the laws of motion! Smith found that the initial velocity attributed to π had become exhausted through the pressure on the wind, and that Brown and Robinson had sought for repose on a convenient stone. Before long, however, they were again struggling upwards like mathematicians refreshed. Meanwhile Jones had made his way to the top of the first steep slope of rocks, and found the snow deeper and the mist thicker than ever. After waiting till the rest of the party came in sight, and assuring himself that they could not fail to cross his track, Jones again pushed forward, diverging somewhat to the right, as in that direction the slope, now of very moderate inclination, was rather steeper. When you are in doubt, lead trumps is an old maxim for whist, though the modern science of the game hardly considers it infallible. When you cannot see your way up a mountain, take the steepest course, is at least equally questionable, but it fairly often holds good, and this ascent was a case in point. The incline grew less, and we presently found ourselves seated on a cairn which commanded a horizon of about ten yards’ radius. The top of the mountain is spacious enough, but there was no doubt that the ground sloped away in all directions; and the evidence of the cairn seemed conclusive that we were on the highest point—not a secondary one—while our sensations were equally conclusive as to the desirability of quitting it promptly. Before starting we had planned to descend by the northern face, which would bring us eventually back to near our starting-point, but by another valley. The ascent had been so easy that we did not hesitate to adhere to this purpose, in spite of the weather. Brown and Smith

both produced compasses, which agreed indifferently well in the bearings they indicated, and Jones was told off to lead down into the still thicker fog which lay below the peak to the north. Obedient to the calls from the compass-bearers behind, he diverged to the right from the line originally selected, and having once begun to do the wrong thing, of course exaggerated the error, until presently we had described a considerable curve and come back into the line of ascent, fortunately only a little way below the summit. It seemed safest and easiest to return to the top and make a fresh start; and this time the leader, turning a deaf ear to remonstrances from behind him, landed safely at the bottom of a small secondary peak, close beside which the best route lay. It is needless to record the rest. We enjoyed for a few minutes, through the opening mists, a lovely view down two diverging valleys, in one of which the sun, otherwise to us invisible, was reflected from a dazzling sheet of water; and everyone got stuck in the mire, some less, some decidedly more, in descending the last steep bit of boggy ground into the road. It was not a great success, the day's work, so far as seeing views went; but we celebrated it with some hilarity, as being positively the first appearance of one of the party on any mountain stage.

Two days later we started under more promising conditions of weather for the more formidable ascent of the Schaufelspitze. But weather forecasts are made of even thinner pie-crust than other promises. Before we had fairly reached the base of our peak the clouds were everywhere thick; by the time we had surmounted the lower slopes we were fighting a furious wind. The mists were so dense that without the aid of occasional little cairns erected to guide travellers we could never have found the right way, while the wind rendered it a matter of continual doubt whether we should succeed in planting our feet where we intended, or be compelled to accept whatever footing the gust might select for us. As most of the way was over rocks thinly covered with snow progression was neither rapid nor easy; and when we reached a small depression which must be passed before scaling the final peak, Robinson, whose strength was scarcely fit to bear so rude a test, found it necessary to give in altogether. The gale was screaming so furiously that it was only by signs that he was able to inform the next man of his intention to stay where he was. The others in due course reached the summit; and the view had best be described in the graphic words of Brown, who next day recorded in the visitors' book at our inn that we had on Saturday ascended the Dachspitze and had a grand view of twenty yards' diameter, and that having on Monday ascended the Schaufelspitze, we were in a position to confirm the statement in the book that the former commanded considerably the finer view. Our descent was made not without some risk of being blown away altogether; but when we reached the spot where Robinson had last been seen sitting disconsolately and alone, and making no attempt to conceal his misery, he had vanished! There was no reason to think the mountain had opened and swallowed him, like the children who had followed the Pied Piper of Hamelin; but when we had pursued the trail for some distance and found no trace of him, we began

to think he must have taken effectual shelter somewhere. Accordingly Smith went back once more to the unmistakable spot where Robinson had halted, while the others continued the descent. Before long they found the desired footsteps pointing down; it must have required some skill on Robinson's part to go so far on the rocks without planting his foot in snow. He at any rate was below; but now Smith was astray and must be recovered. This time Jones went back up the old track, leaving Brown to pursue the errant Robinson. Meanwhile Smith had reached the halting-place of Robinson, had gone beyond it, prowled round it, looked under every big stone in the neighbourhood, but had got no nearer to solving the problem. He shouted with all the force of a stout pair of lungs. According to his own account he kept up a regular series of half-minute guns, but the wind alone knows whither it carried all that sound. What was he to do? He has always declared since that he realised fully Launcelot Gobbo's difficulty. The fiend at his elbow said, 'Use your legs; take the start; run away and overtake the provision knapsack.' Conscience said, 'Launcelot, budge not; two hours at least have to be spent in searching every corner before you can go back.' But whether conscience or the fiend would have won is among those speculations in the pluperfect subjunctive, which furnish the best subjects of debate, because no one can ever be proved wrong, whatever view he takes. Suddenly he heard a shout and hastened towards the sound, expecting to find the lost Robinson just rising into upper air after a snug nap underground. But it was only Jones, who had come back to fetch him, and had gone through an abridged edition of the same process. They had passed each other more than once within a distance of perhaps twenty-five yards; both had been shouting continually. Yet so dense was the mist that they could not see each other; so furious was the gale that only one shout, uttered at the very moment when Jones happened to be exactly to windward of Smith, had reached the ears of the other. It was certainly within the bounds of probability that they might have cruised about, like a pair of Flying Dutchmen, as long as the mist lasted. However the trouble was over at last, and two pair of long legs, with the wind now comfortably astern, made very rapid play downwards until the others were overtaken. Much might be said of the wetness of the corner which Jones selected as a charmingly sheltered spot for lunch, of the goodness of the chicken and ham pie, of the smallness of the tin that contained it, of the soaked state of our coats when at length we got back, and of the soundness of the dinner with which we refreshed ourselves; but cannot these things be filled in from every-one's memory?

Now, if you will be good enough to retranslate my German nomenclature into the vernacular, and discard the tacit assumption which one always makes in talking or reading about mountain expeditions, that they are made in summer, you will find that the locality of our little adventures discloses itself as being the English Lakes in winter, or, to be accurate, in a very snowy March. I might have gone on to record two or three other similar expeditions, one of which at least gave us as magnificent a panorama from Helvellyn as moun-

taineer could desire. I was able to obtain several photographs on that day, some from Helvellyn, and two looking back towards the mountain after we had descended Striding Edge; and if the forms do not rival those of the great peaks, no one would deny to the scenery a genuine Alpine flavour. And this we can have in two or three quarters—in North Wales, in the Lakes, in Western Yorkshire—within a few hours, if we select the right time of year. Such expeditions, being of moderate length and involving no serious number of feet of vertical elevation, are within the compass of a winter day, without the necessity for uncomfortably early starts. And the absence of anything like heat makes climbing, to me at least, incomparably less fatiguing—better suited, perhaps, than Matterhorns or Aiguilles du Géant to the physical capacity of some of us who began to climb the Alps twenty years ago or more. Further, there is a great pleasure in being one's own guide, which in the Alps is limited by one's readiness to carry weight and to cut steps in case of need. There are places on the English mountains in abundance where a fool may break his neck—I use the word as a compendious means of describing those who go on the mountains without experience of their own or of guides, or who possessing the knowledge are too careless to act on it—but there are none where people of moderate skill and judgment may not perfectly well trust to themselves. Nor is bad weather the worst danger, in my opinion, of Alpine climbing without guides, to be dreaded in England. Distances are not great nor slopes excessive. No one with a compass can lose himself; it is difficult to get into a place where one cannot retrace one's steps if further advance is cut off. Nothing short of weather in which no sane man would choose to be out of doors need interfere with those who like walking in bad weather rather than not at all, or cause one any serious doubt of appearing punctually at dinner. That this miniature mountaineering, these Alpicular expeditions (if I may suggest a much-needed word) are as good as the real thing I should be the last even to hint; but are they not a bad substitute. Marmalade is not so nutritious as butter at breakfast, but it makes a change, and is more palatable to some tastes, and after all you can eat both together if you like. Members of the Oxford Alpine Club, who are blessed with two short vacations, are specially able, without prejudice to the summer claims of the High Alps, to enjoy their smaller counterparts.

THE OBERLAND IN APRIL.

By F. T. WETHERED.

Vides, ut alta stet nive candidum
 Soracte, nec jam sustineant onus
 Silvæ laborantes, geluque
 Flumina constiterint acuto.

THE poet of Tibur, when he sat down to the above alcaic, was clearly not in love with his mountains in winter. Horace was evidently a chilly mortal, and from his oft-repeated allusions to frost and snow he seems to have dreaded them not a little. Mountain landscapes