The Dom from the Domjoch.

By W. M. CONWAY.

(Read before the Alpine Club, Tuesday, March 4, 1890.)

Infandum jubes renovare dolorem.

A PEREMPTORY command from our esteemed Secretary is my only, and sufficient, excuse for directing the attention of the Club, away from the fervid glories and excitements of Caucasian exploration, to the lukewarm story of achievements a dozen years old. It seems like the other day, but it was in the summer of 1878, that Penhall and Ferdinand Imseng (may they rest in peace!), with the St. Niklaus guide Truffer and me, were loitering around at Zermatt, full of projects for climbing all the unclimbed ridges in the district. The Rothhorn, straight up the face from Zinal, the Matterhorn from the Stockje ridge, and the Dom from the Domjoch were the three expeditions we had determined on in our plan of campaign. Of these, the bad weather only allowed us to accomplish two that year; the third was duly carried out by Penhall in 1879. It appears that there was at least one other party at Zermatt intent upon the same goal as ourselves, though we knew it not. Imseng, I believe, found it out from the guides, and this accounted for his peremptory command to us to start one very unpromising day. Much fresh snow had recently fallen and more threatened to fall, but Imseng would hear of no delay, and so on August 18, after lunch, we started, driving off to Randa, amidst the jeers of our friends and the sneers of rival guides. From Zermatt to Randa we easily beat the record, for we went at a good canter all the way behind the best horse in the valley. About 2 hrs. after leaving Zermatt we had hired a porter, packed up provisions and all things necessary for sleeping out, left Randa behind, and were steadily plodding along towards the spot known as the Täschhorn sleeping-place. We walked up zigzags, past the Tschuggen Alp, and in 1¼ hr. from Randa turned into the Wildi Thal. Then we went along, high above the right bank of the torrent, for 2 hrs. more to an overhanging rock, close to the moraine of the Kien glacier and near the point marked 2,613 mètres on the Federal map.

I forgot all about the night, except that it was hot, and that the stars twinkled finely. By 2 A.M. on the 19th we had breakfasted and started off, along the moraine, which

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we followed by lantern-light for an hour, till close under the cliffs of the Grabenhorn. Then we took to the north half of the Kien glacier and made our way for half an hour along its right edge ; we crossed below the séracs (20 mins. pause for roping) towards a tower of rock that stands in a gap in the ridge that divides the glacier longitudinally. We doubled back again towards the right bank till we came to a point directly under the Domjoch, and so made straight for the huge *bergschrund*, reaching it in 2 hrs. from the foot of the séracs. Thus far we had been walking in the night or in pallid dawn, with our enthusiasm chilled down to freezing point. The sky gave every promise of a bad day, and a nasty wind already visited every chink in our apparel. The great *schrund* gaped diagonally into the mountain, and we crawled miserably enough into it and ate a frozen apology for breakfast. When this formality had been accomplished we emerged from our shelter and found clouds whirling about in all directions close at hand. We forced a way with some difficulty over the great chasm, and then attacked the steep rocky slope that leads to the Domjoch. It was thickly encrusted with new snow and the covered rocks were rotten—a nasty rock slope of the usual kind, diversified with ill-marked gullies and indistinct ribs, up which we scrambled with silent doggedness. We bore always rather to the left, came level with the Domjoch in about 2 hrs. from the *bergschrund*, and got on to the south arête of the Dom in some ½ hr. more. There, for the first time, the full blast of the storm caught us. It had been already snowing for an hour or more, and the wind came in blasts which were sometimes terrific. Once a stone, of no trifling weight, was literally blown off the arête before our eyes. Of course there was no possibility of stopping for food or rest. The west side of the ridge was too steep and the east side too rotten, even if the wind had not put a veto on any such indulgence. We could not even pass round the brandy flask. What the arête might look like under other circumstances I cannot guess. As things were, it afforded scrambling which we were just able to accomplish and no more. The rocks were all thick set in snow, and often glazed with ice. Our heads were in similar condition. Once or twice we were forced on to the actual crest of the arête and then we had to go on our bellies clutching hold with all our might. Two or three very nasty places remain photographed in my memory—one where there was a kind of elbow in the ridge, and we had to jump from an oval-topped ice-covered block across a gap

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of no particular width, landing on a knife-edge of rock, from which we had instantly to step again on to firm footing. The thing would have been easy enough without the glazing and the gale, but the memory of the moment before that flying step comes back to me sometimes like a cold horror. Truffer took the opportunity of a brief lull in the gale to shout in my ear that he had a wife and children at home, whom he never hoped now to see again. We should certainly have turned round and gone back if we had dared, but a great deal of snow had fallen and yesterday's snow had become soft, so that avalanches were continually tumbling over the rocks up which we had climbed. In fact, our best chance of getting down at all seemed to be to reach the top and descend by the ordinary route.* Things went a little better for a time, and then we seemed to be stopped. There came a vertical step in the arête, some 20 feet high. On the west there was a steep smooth slab with a bed of loose snow kept up by a crack or two at its foot. We tried the east face, but could not stand on it, the rocks were so broken and unstable. There was nothing for it but to surmount the smooth slab, which was iced into the bargain, or to turn tail. We crossed a treacherous snow gully and then made a ladder of three of us, leaning on the slope of the smooth rock. Imseng climbed us and got his axe over the top edge of the rock, and so crawled on to the arête again and hauled us up after him. Two yards further along the arête we came to easier conditions; the clouds parted for a moment and showed us a peak (which we took to be another *gendarme*) evidently easy of access. We went forward with lighter hearts and presently stood on the top of it, and found to our joy that it was crowned by a stone man. It was the highest point. The ascent of the arête had taken us 3 hrs. 35 mins.

It was far too cold and too windy to stop even for a moment. The cloud was so thick about us that we could not see from one end of the rope to the other. The rope, moreover, was frozen so stiff that there was no possibility of untying the knots or altering our relative positions, so I had to come down last—a position I hate. The descent lay at first over featureless snow, enveloped in milky cloud, but we

* My notes are: 'At first the arête was dangerous. We had to climb over a tooth, which was rotten, and down on to a rotten snow cornice, the whole thing crumbling; hence about 1½ hr. of difficult arête work over two or three more teeth, till at last we seemed stopped.'

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were somewhat less exposed to the wind than we had been in the ascent. The snow down the first slope was in an unstable condition, and suggestive of avalanches, so we bore away to the left towards the N.W. arête. As we neared it a very curious thing happened. Imseng, who was leading, suddenly disappeared into the snow, and it closed up like water over his head, leaving the surface level above him. He had not gone into a crevasse, for the rope remained slack between him and Penhall, who jerked it about like a fishing line in an altogether unconcerned manner. We had been so battered and flustered for hours that none of us were surprised or curious as to what had come to Imseng. We just stood around and waited (I suppose for seconds, though it seemed like hours). Presently Imseng emerged a little to the left of where he went in; the snow closed up again as before, and we went on, giving the mysterious place as wide a berth as we could. At the time talking was quite impossible, for our ears were bunged up with mufflers and ice, and the howling of the wind swallowed all lesser sounds; but later in the day we asked Imseng what had happened to him, and he said that he could scarcely remember—the whole business had been such a dazing tumult that one detail had not impressed itself upon him more than another. He dimly recalled having found himself suddenly enveloped in snow (which he took to be a small avalanche), and having crawled on all fours for a moment or two, and found himself out of it again. I suppose it was really some kind of hole or dent in the slope which the *tourmente* had filled with light new-fallen snow, little more consistent than water. We reached the N.W. arête in about ten minutes from the top, and then we went down it, taking to the slopes beside it whenever we could. The arête consisted of blue ice in many places, swept clean by the wind, and a great deal of step-cutting was involved, so that our progress was slow. At last the mist became less dense, and all of a sudden we stepped out of it into clear, transparent air, through which we could see down to the glacier and valley below, and across to the opposite hills. It was a glad moment for all of us, and we relieved our pent-up feelings with shouts. Our headgear soon thawed and could be unwound, and our hands warmed and could be ungloved. In a few minutes we reached the col in the ridge between the Hohberg and Festi glaciers, 3½ hrs. from the top of the Dom. A blissful half-hour of feeding and repose was snatched—the first halt we had been able to make since

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breakfast in the *bergschrund*. The remainder of our route presented no novel feature.*

A few days later (September 2) Mr. Fitzgerald ascended the Täschhorn from the Domjoch† in faultless weather. That expedition was afterwards repeated by Mr. G. F. Cobb, and both parties combine in praising the interest of the climb and the splendour of the views from the arête. Our route up the Dom has not been visited by any other party, and so I am unable to express an opinion about its normal difficulty. I should think that, under ordinary circumstances, it would not be called difficult by the mountain-gymnasts of the present generation. I don't think it is properly a gymnast's expedition.

The gymnast likes 'pretty bits' of rocks, with a cracklet here for a finger and a cracklet there for a toe. He does not mind whether he reaches a summit or not. He is not careful to enlarge his knowledge of the Alpine chain as a whole. The climbing of details is his pleasure. He is fond of Alpine centres and likes to be near his work. He has been known to pass whole days scrambling about stiff little bits of rock in the immediate vicinity of an hôtel. He returns frequently to the same resort. He loves it in detail. He usually lacks the geographical instinct. He does not care for wandering. He hates long valleys. He has small affection for trees and mountain forests. He dislikes snow-fields and slopes. Easy climbs are a bore to him. He has, of course, great virtues of his own. He detests swagger, and does not willingly talk about his expeditions. He slips off by stealth and returns as from a stroll in the meadows. He will do all he can to avoid following in the steps of a predecessor, and then will be unable to say exactly where he has been. He is not fond of following a guide, preferring to set and solve scrambling problems for himself.

The mountain-climber, on the other hand, is an altogether different kind of person, but at present he is not so easy to

* My notes are: 'Crossed a few rocks on to the Festi glacier. Kept close along the snow by the r. bank for ¾ hr. to the moraine. Unroped. Followed moraine for 20 mins.; thence 15 mins. down rock *débris* slope to sleeping-place on the Festung. Stopped for some time. Hence by rocky gullies and faces (one or two steep bits), and then by the r. bank of the Randaierbach in 1½ hr. to Randa, which we reached at 7.45. Dinner there. Drove to Zermatt in the evening.' The whole expedition, under most unfavourable circumstances, took 18 hrs. of actual walking from Randa and back.

† *Alpine Journal*, vol. ix. p. 109.

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find. What he loves, first and foremost, is to wander far and wide among mountains. He does not willingly sleep two consecutive nights in the same inn. He detests black-coated tables d'hôte. He hates centres. He gets tired of a district and likes his holiday to be a tour. He loves a good and companionable guide. He always wants to see what is on the other side of any range of hills. He prefers passes to peaks, and hates not getting to the top of anything he starts for. He chooses the easiest and most normal route. He likes to know the names of all the peaks in a view. He cannot bear to see a group of peaks none of which he has climbed. He covers maps with red lines, marking his routes. He willingly explores side valleys. He has ascended the Basodine and other splendid points of view of easy access. If he visits the Tyrol he is not content with merely climbing the more famous Dolomites; he is certain to make for the Gross Glockner too. If he has the time and the money he will probably be now contemplating a visit to the Caucasus.

Such are the two types of mountain lovers, which have become clearly differentiated from one another during the last ten years. Both are valuable and excellent in their way. The future of Alpine literature depends upon the climber, but the prosperity of climbing as a sport depends upon the gymnast. Most men, especially married men, have to go to a mountain centre for their holiday. They cannot wander from place to place—mere questions of expense often enough forbid that. They do not care to pay a guide every day, but they want a daily scramble. Scrambling for its own sake soon becomes an absorbing pleasure to them, and they find great delight in making themselves acquainted with every gully and rib of rock in a neighbourhood. They naturally prefer a place which lies in the midst of short expeditions of moderate difficulty, with a selection of tougher scrambles for special occasions. Thus they become gymnasts. The opening up of the Caucasus will leave Switzerland more and more to them. The unluggaged climber with his knapsack-wardrobe will become more and more of a stranger in the homes of the gymnasts. He will not be welcomed by the well-dressed crowds at Zermatt or Grindelwald. Fortunately there remain plenty of districts which he can still explore, but the cream of the Alps is taken from him. He is by nature a pioneer. Like a backwoodsman, he is driven out by advancing civilisation. The civilised mountaineer is the gymnast. The typical climber hates civilisation. His

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chief aim is to get away from it. He is generally a dolicocephalous black man,* one of that small dark stock that always has to go under before the ruddy brachycephalous Saxon Philistine. 'Shy trafficker of the wild Iberians,' lover of discomfort, of ill-ventilated huts and open-air campings out, of ragged and unkempt attire, lost wanderer from a prehistoric age, condemned to live unwillingly amidst a clean and shaven race, even the Alps are no longer for him. His days are numbered there also. Delilah and the Philistines lie in wait for him, and he shall not escape.

The following letter from Mr. G. W. Prothero was read by Mr. Conway, and may fitly be appended here :—

63 Trumpington Street, Cambridge:
March 3.

My dear Conway,—I see you are going to read a paper about the Dom at the Club to-morrow, and that Carteighe is to give an account of his first ascent. Perhaps as so few ascents have yet been made from Saas (I was told in 1888, when I went up that way, that only three had been made previously), a few notes of my journey may be of use, as the routes did not, I fancy, exactly coincide. Of course, don't make any use of this letter if you don't think it adds anything worth mentioning.

Our party, consisting of Clemenz Zurbriggen, Peter Ruppen, and myself, slept on a patch of rocks—the lowest patch on the face—to the right of the flat ridge that reaches down from near the Domjoch to the glacier. The spot where we slept had been occupied a few nights before by a German (Herr Wetzckin) and his guides, on their way to the Dom. In the interval between the two ascents a considerable snow-avalanche had fallen from high up the face, and we crossed the débris in going slantwise from the upper glacier to these rocks. In the night there was a violent thunderstorm, and snow fell for some hours, so that we did not get off till a quarter past five. We reached the top of the rocks in a few minutes, and then struck off in a slanting direction, bearing upwards and to the right, towards a ridge that leads down nearly from the top and eventually loses itself in the face to the right of the rocks where we slept (or pretended to sleep). By 6.30 we reached this ridge, crossing a good many snow-couloirs on the way. It was down these couloirs that the snow-avalanche I spoke of above had fallen, and it would probably not be safe to cross them in the afternoon, but they were all right at the early hour in the morning. Once on the ridge we stuck to this all the way to the top, never deviating from it, except, I think, on two occasions, to turn a couple of rock towers. Our progress was rendered rather slow and the climbing more difficult by the quantity of fresh snow which had fallen in the

* [These somewhat crude anthropological generalisations must not be taken as committing the Alpine Club to any theory on the subject.—Ed.]

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night, and which lay deep in places on the ridge. The climbing was nowhere really difficult, but required pretty continuous attention. The rocks were generally, but not always, firm, and the angle continuously steep. We made only short halts on the way, and reached the top at 12.10, having struck the main ridge about 200 yards, I should think, to the right, or N.E. of the actual top. Under favourable circumstances the expedition would, no doubt, take less time. The German, I was told, had not kept to the ridge, but had for the greater part of the way followed the snow and rocks to the left of the ridge. We were prevented from doing this by the fresh snow. Our route was, I should think, the safer of the two. In fact, except for the snow-couloirs at starting, it was quite safe all the way. The expedition is a fine one, and deserves more attention than it has had hitherto. I send a rough sketch which may explain our route. It is drawn from a photograph taken by W. Leaf from a point near the Unter Allalin Horn to the S.E. of the Dom.

Yours ever,
G. W. PROTHERO.

EXPLORATION IN SIKKIM HIMALAYA.

BY COLONEL MICHELL, COMMANDING 13TH BENGAL INFANTRY.

[By the courtesy of the Indian Government we are enabled to print the following most interesting account of work done in its service by a member of the Club. One or two passages bearing more directly on military science have been retained, as furnishing an answer, if any be needed, to those who question the practical value of mountain training.]

I LEFT Pakyong, June 18, 1889, with two sepoys and twelve coolies, carrying ten days' provisions, and marched 12 miles to Guntok, altitude 5820′.

June 19, 1889.—Mr. J. C. White, Political Officer, who wished to obtain a more accurate knowledge of the high ground dividing Chumbi from Sikkim, agreed to accompany me, and we journeyed together from Guntok. We marched 13 miles to Lagyapla, altitude 10,700′. Leeches were exceedingly numerous and troublesome from Kangshu, 6250′, to Mirreh, 10,000′; they literally swarmed on the coolies' legs, while ponies and dogs had their bodies, nostrils, and eyes clustered with them. As it would have been impossible to camp on any ground where these pests abounded, we determined to push on to Lagyapla, 10,700′, which was above their range; rain fell in torrents, and the march was most laborious to the coolies, the road being very bad and steep (an ascent of 6000 ft. in seven miles).

Arrived at Lagyapla at dusk, still raining heavily. We

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