A Near Thing on the Aiguilles Rouges.

By L. S. AMERY.

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MOST climbers who have been to Arolla are familiar with the traverse of the Aiguilles Rouges. It has been described in this 'Journal' fairly recently (August 1904), and all that I need say of it here is that it combines one of the finest views in the whole Alps with an abundance of interesting and diversified scrambling. But even the best of mountains have their imperfections, and the Aiguilles Rouges, I most regretfully acknowledge, are not wholly above suspicion in the matter of loose rocks and falling stones. The ingenious efforts of one of these rocks to annihilate our party, both singly and collectively, may be worth recording in the 'Journal' as an interesting tale in itself and as presenting several curious technical features.

On August 21 last we—that is to say, my brother, Captain Harold Amery, and myself, accompanied by Martin Pralong and Jean Bétrison, of Evolena, the former as guide and the latter as porter—traversed the ridge from north to south. We had practically completed the climb by noon, and were lunching on the ridge above a large patch of snow, very conspicuous on the accompanying illustration,* by which the descent of the east face of the mountain is usually made, when I suggested that we might as well continue along the ridge and do the last little piece of it which rose in front of us, and which climbers as a rule do not seem to have bothered about. Martin laughed at my anxiety to add another 'dix minutes de moraine,' as he scornfully called it, to the exertions of the day, but readily acquiesced. We went down the ridge to the col from which the last piece rises fairly steeply, and, instead of mounting all the way along the ridge traversed to our left on to the eastern face. We crossed the upper end of a shallow gully which ran straight down, as far as I remember, to the glacier some 1,500 to 2,000 ft. below, and started climbing up the steep but not otherwise particularly difficult face on the far side of the gully, in order to rejoin the ridge some 60 ft. above us. We were now all on the face, more or less in a vertical line, Martin some 10 to 15 ft. below the summit, Harold, who was

* Mr. C. D. McCormick's drawing is from a photograph by Mr. A. W. Andrews.

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second on the rope, about the same distance below him, myself 8 to 10 ft. below Harold, and Bétrison just out of the gully. Martin was wriggling up the only difficult bit when, suddenly, a large rock, which had been poised on the very crest, started sliding straight down on him.

There was neither time nor opportunity for dodging, but Martin, as the rock reached him, most gallantly tried to push it to one side, in order to save us. But the rock, an ugly lump, 2 ft. or more in length, and perhaps half as wide and thick, simply crushed and doubled back his right hand and passed on, bent on mischief. Harold was not over well placed, but, hearing Martin cry out, at once gripped hard on to his holds and tucked in his head as well as he could. The rock struck him right on the head, but apparently with only part of its weight, and, thanks to the many thicknesses of knitted wool in his *passe-montaigne* cap and to his snow goggles, whose wire frames it completely flattened out, it failed to kill or even to stun him. At the same moment it fell upon the rope between him and Martin above, and jerked Martin, already maimed in one hand and no doubt shaken, backwards right off the face of the rock.

So far I have given the story as pieced together by Martin and my brother afterwards. Now for my own share in the proceedings. I was standing on an excellent level ledge, 5 or 6 ft. long and varying from a foot to nearly two feet in width. When I became aware of the rock it had passed Harold and was falling clear, apparently straight for my head. I shifted a step to the left, barely enough for the purpose, for it just touched the fingers of my right hand and, missing my foot by a few inches, struck the ledge with a tremendous crash and bounded on. Almost at the same moment I saw Martin flying past me, well clear of the face, head down and feet clawing about in the air. I glanced up, saw the rope come taut on Harold's waist with a jerk which no one in that position could have held up against, and knew that my turn had come. There was nothing over which I could have slung the rope; the only thing was to turn round, so as to face outwards, haul in the slack, and lean well back to take the strain. There was hardly time for much reflection, but I distinctly remember feeling a thrill of satisfaction at the excellence of my foothold, and recollecting, as in a flash, some story I had once heard of a guide holding up two men who had fallen from above him, mixed with a vague doubt as to whether that had happened on rock or on ice—a curious instance of the inconsequent

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things that may pass through one's mind at a critical moment.

Then came the jerk; exactly how or when I cannot for the life of me remember, for the next thing I was clearly conscious of was that Harold was lying on his face across my right foot right along the edge of the ledge, with both hands clutching tight in a crack at the inner angle of the ledge, and that we had escaped. Though he had not managed to save himself from being torn out of his hold he had held on tight enough to prevent his being jerked right away from the face, and had fallen vertically, striking the ledge below feet first. The joint action of Martin's drag downwards and of my haul inwards had then pulled him over on his face in such a way that not only was his weight transferred as a factor on my side of the equation of forces, but that, by lying on the rope, he caused the final jerk to be largely taken by the angle of the ledge. A luckier combination of circumstances it would be difficult to imagine.

A second later we heard a most unearthly yelling and wailing below us. I noticed that the strain was off the rope and thought for a moment that it must have parted and that Martin was gone. I looked over, and saw Bétrison holding Martin in a safe position in the gully, and concluded that the sound came from both of them and that Martin was, at any rate, alive and conscious. We made our way down cautiously, and in doing so discovered that, as a culmination of its performances, the rock had, after missing me, fallen on the rope between me and Bétrison and cut it clean in two! So instead of joining us in a sudden descent to the glacier, if things had not turned out so fortunately above him, Bétrison would have been left alone on the top of the mountain with a few feet of rope round his waist, and, perhaps, have incurred the suspicion of having cut the rope himself. Martin presented a terrible spectacle. At first I thought his face had been clean torn off, but on coming closer I found that what had happened was that a large piece of the flesh on the top of his head and most of the forehead had been scalped to the bone, and that the flap of scalp hanging down concealed the rest of the features, which were badly cut about, but nothing like destroyed. Harold, with a coolness I envied, poked about the exposed skull with his fingers, declared that it was intact, and proceeded to put the scalp back into its place and tie it up with a large silk handkerchief. I got some snow and applied it to stanch the flow of blood both from the scalp and from the other cuts, which was very heavy.

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We then felt his ribs and limbs generally, and found that, except for his right hand, which was evidently very painful, nothing was damaged. A lot of blood came from his mouth, but from the colour I concluded it was only from the inside of his lips and cheeks, and though he moaned a good deal about internal pains I was inclined to think it was only the result of the jerk on the rope, which must have been tremendous, considering that he fell some forty feet clear. I imagine the fall must have been taken almost entirely by the rope, otherwise he could never have got off so lightly. In that case his head must have grazed the face of the rock near the end of his fall, which would account for the extraordinary clean cut which lifted off his scalp.

In about twenty minutes or so the flow of blood had decreased considerably. Martin was evidently able to move about, and we decided to try and get down. Fortunately the climb down to the glacier was easy. Martin led the way, climbing for a few minutes at a time and then lying down to rest and recover. More than once he showed great reluctance to start again, but I was determined, if possible, to get him down to the glacier, where it would be easier to get help and where he could be carried. This was the worst part of the whole business, but at last, after about three hours of it, we got down. I sent Bétrison ahead to Arolla to fetch bandages and spirits and to telephone to Evolena for a doctor. We followed by slow stages and got in towards half-past seven. The doctor arrived at nine o'clock and stitched away till midnight. He found no internal injuries, and with good luck, he assured us, Martin would be well in a month.

The next day he was pretty bad, but the day after, coming in from a long scramble on the Bouquetins, I found him in the best of spirits and very anxious to do some more climbing before the season was over. A day or two later he was sitting about outside the hotel, watching my progress up the Za with a telescope, and seriously distressed that his *locum tenens* shirked the last steep pitch to the summit by traversing to the right. On the twelfth day after the accident we took the field together again and went up to Bricolla to try the west arête of the Dent Blanche next morning. But Martin's hand was still too bad, and after an hour on the rocks we decided, somewhat to his regret, to get down on to the glacier again and work round the side of the mountain up to the top of the Wandfluh and thus down to Zermatt. Even so we had a good eighteen-hours day before we got in, no small performance for a convalescent. Martin's ambition

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From a Drawing by A. D. McCormick *Swan Electric Engraving Co.,*

THE AIGUILLES ROUGES FROM THE ROUSETTES.

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to add the Zmutt arête to his book was gratified a few days later, though I think his pride was a little mortified by his having to play the passenger rather than the guide, and though his hand gave him many a painful twinge. For the traverse of the Rothhorn, however, he insisted on taking the lead again. We parted at Sion soon after. A most cheery companion, an excellent climber, and a man of remarkable pluck, I hope I may yet have a chance of accomplishing with Martin Pralong some of the many climbs we had fixed up before our programme was cut short by that shameless rock on the Aiguilles Rouges—not so short, though, as it well might have been. I only hope that before this account is in print his summer's earnings will not have been wholly swallowed up in a pending action for grievous assault and battery committed upon another guide with whom, at the time of the last cantonal elections, he had a serious difference of opinion on the subject of denominational teaching in the schools.

The Traverse of the Gross Lohner.

By W. R. CAESAR.

THE highest point of the Gross Lohner (10,020 ft.) is ascended from the S. almost daily during the Oberland season, but for several years past whispers have come from Kandersteg of an untrodden ridge, which investigation proved to be the range running from the highest summit to the Bonderkrinden.

Last year (1906) I was coming from the Valais with Abraham Müller, jun., and his brother Gottfried, and, while crossing the Gemmi, we had a good view of the ridge, with the result that on the next day—August 21—we marched off at 3.15 A.M. up the Kanderstrasse and the Ueschinenthal. Some people object to roads on principle, but at that hour a sharp walk on an even surface sets the machinery of muscles running smoothly, and seems to me to have advantages over spasmodic movements on moraine or scree. After 3 hrs. we reached the foot of the rocks on the E. flank of the ridge and near the most northerly patch of snow seen in the photograph taken from above the Oeschinen See. The snow patches showed traces of falling stones, and one or two sniping shots were fired down the couloirs on either side of our breakfast place. After our meal we set off again at 6.55 A.M. There is a seeming choice of several broad couloirs,

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