

The Venasque valley looked very beautiful, with its shining lake below and the snows of the Pic des Posets in the background, and repaid the hot trudge up the stony slopes leading to the Port de Venasque. At the Port, which we reached at 3.27, there was again a change of temperature, and we had no cause to dally on the descent, which sundry glissades down avalanche snow helped to shorten and brought us once more to the Hospice de Luchon at 4.40 p.m.

As those who have read the account of these expeditions will gather, and I think they are fairly typical of Pyrenean ascents, serious climbing forms a small proportion of the whole day's work: at the time of year they were made, when there is vastly more snow than later in the season, I think that on the higher peaks the conditions are more nearly those of winter than of summer: the starting-points are often low, and the distances to be traversed long, but that is because roads and railways and high-placed hotels have not multiplied as in the Alps: this lack of conveniences the mountaineer will not regret, for so he sees the upper world as Nature made it, still unspoilt.

AN ADVENTURE ON THE WINTER-LÜCKE.

By C. W. COBB.

BEFORE I tell the following story of a marvellous escape from death I should like to say a few words in explanation of the circumstances which led to such an adventure. I have wandered about the Alps every summer for the best part of thirty years. I have taken part in many expeditions, great and small. For years we have been used to find our way for ourselves on easy excursions below the snow on lesser heights, taking our provisions with us for the day, and until August 14, 1905, without a mishap worth mentioning. I was, I confess, under an entire misapprehension with regard to the nature of the expedition, which should not have been undertaken by our party. I failed in judgment, as will be seen, and finally was guilty of one of those momentary acts of carelessness for which the mountains are wont to exact terrible penalties.

On August 14, 1905, my wife, my second son, and I started from the Hotel Damma Gletscher, Göschenen Alp, at 7.15 a.m., to ascend the Alpligen-Lücke, which lies to the south of the valley, and from it the Lochberg, for the view. The



V. H. Gaulty, Photo.

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THE MALADETTA AND THE NETHOU GLACIER
FROM THE PIC DE NETHOU.

Alpligen-Lücke is described by Baedeker as 'toilsome but interesting,' the Lochberg as 'easily ascended from the pass in three-quarters of an hour.' The Winter-Lücke is marked 'with guide' from Realp, but all that is said about it is that the descent is steep to the Winter glacier. Between the Alpligen-Lücke and the Winter-Lücke the Lochberg intervenes. I quite expected to find some kind of rough track down the Winter-Lücke to the hotel in case I returned that way, as I had unfortunately formed an entirely wrong idea of its character. Moreover, although we had made excursions on the other side and to the end of the valley, including the Kielen pass and the Gwächtenhorn, which I had traversed with my eldest son, my brother-in-law, and the guide Gäma a few days previously, we had not explored the side on which the Alpligen-Lücke and Winter-Lücke lie, and did not know that the rocks on the Winter-Lücke are bad and loose and the slopes covered with friable débris, very tiring and troublesome to negotiate.

For about two hours we wound along a tolerable and very steep path over the alp leading to the Alpligen-Lücke. We then came to a series of smooth granite rocks with no certain path over them, which we passed without much difficulty, tracking a party who were in front of us, and leaving a cairn or two of stones to mark the place where we left them, and so help us on our return. Would that we had returned by that route! I should here remark that my wife is an excellent and quick walker and climber, and fit to go anywhere; but the boy, although he is a fast walker on smooth ground and gifted with great endurance and a good head, is a poor climber, and already had caused us to lose time. After the rocks we made our way over débris and the hard ice of a small glacier, and then up some short and easy snow slopes and a few rocks to the upper snow field, which is of small extent, leading to the crags of the Lücke. On our right was the Alpligen-Lücke, with the Lochberg, a mass of broken boulders and loose soil, rising to the right of it, about an hour's walk from the pass, and quite easy to all appearance, and in front of us was a curious window-like opening in the cliffs. We walked up the gently sloping hard snows for about thirty minutes to this point, observing by the way what I am told were the tracks of a bear on the snow, and looked over on to the Furka road and Realp, far below. After a short interval we returned to the rocks leading to the Alpligen-Lücke and lunched. We then scrambled up over loose boulders, which at first required some care, and a patch of snow

to the top of the Lücke, from which in clear weather there must be a good distant view of the Alps of the Valais. Though the day was fine there were so many clouds on the tops of the mountains that we decided not to ascend the Lochberg, as there would be no views of the greater heights worth the trouble. From the top of the pass the near view westwards is imposing. The Lochberg, as I said before, rises abruptly on the right; then comes the Winter-Lücke between it and the Winter-Stock, on the right front, and then the Gletscher-Horn and other peaks, with the Galenstock towering behind them almost directly in the front. Between the Alpligen-Lücke and the last-named mountains lies the deep valley which leads from the Winter-Lücke in a south-easterly direction towards Realp and the Furka road.

As we stood looking down the descent towards the Furka and the portion of the Winter-Lücke visible from where we stood the Lücke seemed, and really is, easy enough to manage on that side. Moreover we saw some people far below in the valley, who had evidently crossed the Winter-Lücke from the Göschenen Alp—presumably the same party I saw starting in the morning. The idea then suggested itself, as the day was pretty far advanced, that we might return by the Winter-Lücke, which seemed much shorter, and, as I imagined unhappily, easier, than the Alpligen-Lücke; and no doubt the actual distance to the hotel is less. Moreover the boy had been very slow over the rocks and snow of the Alpligen Lücke and I thought it might be easier for him to return by the other route. Here I made my first great mistake. I exchanged the known for the unknown, a risk, in mountains at any rate, not to be lightly run. We descended into the valley without difficulty, though I had to cut steps in the snow in one place for some distance for the boy. The snow was very good and firm, but he was too unsteady to go down, as my wife did, without any assistance. We next had a steep short ascent, partly over stones and partly over snow in capital condition, to the top of the Winter-Lücke. I noticed continually recent traces of a party on the snow all the way up, but its angle was too acute for ascending, and we kept to the rocks except for some distance near the top, where I again saw traces of the bear.

I shall not easily forget the dismay that I felt on looking over the other side. For several hundred feet down, lying at a very steep angle, extended a wilderness of huge blocks of stone on loose soil, which gave at every step and required great care. Interspersed with these were multitudes of smaller

stones of all sizes, which slipped away at the slightest touch. There was no appearance of a track, only marks at intervals where people had passed up and down. Far below was a snow slope with what seemed to be tracks on it made by travellers. On either side of this slope, which grows steeper where it descends on to the Winter glacier, are two long rocky ridges, of the same quality as the rocks at the top of the pass just described, reaching down to the glacier at the bottom. Some 2,000 feet below, the moraine of the Damma glacier stretches across and bounds the view, and along it is a path leading to the hotel. The hotel itself is not visible, being hidden by the rocks on the right. There is a magnificent view of the Damma glacier and the fine mountains from which it descends—the Dammastock, the Eggstock, the Sneehorn, and others—as well as of the Sustenhorn and its neighbours. It was too late to go back—it was already 4 p.m. After nearly an hour's careful and laborious descent, rendered more difficult by the boy's extreme slowness, we reached the rocks at the top of the snow slope. A glance showed me that it was useless. I turned to the left—the true direction—to make our way over the rocks to the rib above mentioned. At this moment the idea suggested itself that time might be saved possibly by cutting steps for a short distance across the extreme left-hand corner of the slope to a small island of rocks a few feet below, and thence to the rib we were aiming at. I thought that while I did so the others might rest. I made them sit down, and approached the slope at a spot where it was really very hard and slippery, though it did not look so. My eye nevertheless should have told me at once of the danger, but I was rather worried and in a great hurry to get on, and, I fear, for a moment careless, and did not observe the nature of the surface just where I stood. Before I had time to strike it with my axe I slipped, and in a moment was gliding down the slope towards the glacier below. I fell on my face at first, and grasping my axe tightly tried to stop myself by driving the pick of it into the hard surface, but without success, although I did put a great drag on, and undoubtedly in this way saved myself from acquiring such an impetus as would have ensured my destruction. I slid down in this way for an immense distance, still struggling to stop myself. Then I was suddenly turned over on to my back, my axe was wrenched out of my hand, and I was pushed, along with a considerable mass of loose snow, as by an invisible power, over towards my left and into a crack down which a small trickle of water ran. The pace was now terrific for

a few yards, and the slope far steeper than above. I began to get dazed and to think I was lost. All in an instant the snow piled up in the crack and stopped with a crunch, with me on it! I was saved for the moment at least. Whymper's adventure on the Matterhorn, when he fell 200 feet, is the only similar escape which I have read of. I jumped up at once and shouted and waved to the others. My legs and body were quite unhurt, thanks to the soft snow which stopped me. My left arm was bleeding from a bad scrape which I did not feel till long afterwards. My left hand was uninjured. My right hand was badly torn, and the top joint of the middle finger hung over useless, with the tendon severed right through by a clean cut down to the bone, as from a knife. The snow was speedily red with blood. I remembered Whymper, and staunched the wounds with snow. I was wet through with blood and snow. My axe was lying about thirty yards above me in the crack. Most luckily it had stuck there, and, as it turned out, was most fortunately just out of reach. Had I retained it I might have tried—not knowing the place—to cut my way on the wrong side of the slope, or might have fainted from the exertion, fallen off the steps, and perished. At the moment, however, it seemed a fatal mischance. I first stamped the snow into four or five steps, so that I could move a little. I then with difficulty found a dry rag to wipe the blood off my glasses. I took out my flask, but it was all but empty. I had omitted to see that it was full before I started in the morning. I then took stock of the situation. The other two were safe on the rocks almost in a line above me. It was past 5 P.M. I was shivering with cold, and I suppose the shock. Far below I could see five or six people on the moraine. We shouted and waved to them for nearly an hour. I could see my wife waving a handkerchief on an alpenstock, but we could not hear one another's words. The distance was too great. The people below slowly disappeared and we were left alone. It was 6 P.M. and fortunately a fine and warm evening, considering the altitude. I made an attempt to get at the axe, but gave it up at once. The risk was too great. I stamped the snow down firmly, but venturing a little too far sent a portion of the bottom of it crashing down the precipice. After that I returned to the upper end and speculated whether the water would wear away my snow. I concluded that it would not do so for some hours at any rate. I tried to warm myself by moving my arms, but the blood flowed so fast from my wounds that I had to give up

the attempt. About this time a large stone a foot and a half long came bounding down the slope as if aimed directly at me. I stood on my snow steps watching it, hoping to dodge it by moving my body, as I could do no more, the crack in which I stood being not two feet wide. For the second time within an hour I thought all was over with me, but it gave a final leap of twenty yards or so and buried itself in my snow just three feet above me, covering me with slush. I thought I might as well make use of it, so I dug it out and made a seat of it. Some smaller stones fell after this at intervals, but, as I saw they were coming down a few yards off, I did not trouble myself about them. So the time passed, and David's words to Jonathan were forcibly brought home to me—'As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.' But what is that—a yodel? Yes—again another from the rocks there on the right, high up. I shout; I wave my scarf. I hear the others too shouting and see my wife waving the handkerchief. Suddenly I caught sight of two boys moving rapidly over the rocks as only Swiss peasants can: one made straight for my wife, crossing ice and rocks with wonderful speed, though only armed with an alpenstock; the other hurried down the rock-bestrewn rib on the right till he came opposite me. I shouted and pointed downwards—'Hotel Damma Gletscher.' He nodded and disappeared like magic, and reached the hotel in under an hour and a half—a wonderful performance over such ground. I knew now that it was merely a question of time—perhaps of hours. Could I last till help came? I was shaking with cold again. It was impossible to lie down. I tried to sit on the stone, but gave it up. Standing up in my condition was intensely wearying. Suppose I should faint? I summoned up all my resolution and determined to fight on to the last gasp. Suddenly I saw the boy who had gone to my wife cautiously making his way over the rocks on the left and coming down the rib towards me. He presently got off the rocks and with incredible skill and daring worked his way over the slope obliquely towards me, picking out his course where the snow was a little softer step by step with the utmost caution, now stopping to stamp or scrape a foothold with his boot, now with his alpenstock, which I afterwards found was all but pointless! I forgot my own danger in watching him. A single slip meant death. Presently he worked down to within 30 yards or so of me, and nearly opposite my ice axe, which his quick eye had already noticed. Then he addressed me in English (which he had learned some-

thing of in the winter). 'Are you much wounded?' 'No,' I said. 'The lady is very well,' he said; 'she asked me to tell you so.' I pointed to the ice axe. 'Piolet,' I said; 'can you get it?' 'I see it,' he said; 'I will try.' Then presently as he worked towards it, 'What you call that in English?' said he, with a thirst for knowledge which even his perilous position could not quench. 'Ice axe,' said I. Just about this time a small stone came down close to us. 'Ach,' said he, 'it is not good to be here.' 'Have you a knife? It is too hard; I want to cut it: I cannot cross this piece.' He was then about six yards from the axe. I took out my knife and tried to throw it to him; but, being weak and insecure, I threw it short, but recovered it. I then tried again, and again failed, and this time it was hopelessly lost, although it slid back into my snow in the crack a yard above me. This was a great blow. Shortly after this, however, the boy managed to get into the crack between me and the axe, slid down to me, and stood by me on the snow. He then wormed his way up it and on to the slope on the other side of the crack, where the snow was somewhat softer, until he could touch the axe with his stock. He did not dare move nearer to it, because a hard piece of ice intervened between him and it, exactly as had been the case at the first attempt to reach it from the other side of the crack, when the knife was lost. I watched him with the keenest anxiety. If he failed to reach it I must remain where I was for the greater part of the night, which might mean most serious consequences, perhaps death. If he succeeded he might cut us out, a task I was unequal to with my maimed hand, from which the blood streamed at the least exertion. After about five minutes' careful fishing he somehow secured the axe, descended a portion of the slope with the axe in one hand and his stock in the other, got back into the crack, and joined me. It was a most daring and skilful feat. Nearly an hour had elapsed since I first saw him coming towards me over the ice. One mistake, however slight, would have been fatal. Yet he never faltered. I forgot my own danger in watching him.

As soon as he had joined me and had recovered himself I said to him, 'Cut steps; cut quickly; cut them large.' 'If I cut will you come?' said he. 'Yes,' said I; 'I don't fear.' It was 7 P.M., and there was just time to cut our way off the slope before dark. He said that the ice on the right side of the crack was softer than that on the left. We must try that side. In this I acquiesced. Then to work he went with a will, and merrily the chips of ice flew under the blows of

my good axe, which he wielded right deftly. I let him cut about thirty steps before I left my snow. Then very cautiously, using his stock as a support, I followed. The slope was terribly steep and afforded an uninterrupted view of the glacier far below. At first the boy led directly across parallel to my perch, then straight down over a softer piece of surface, then after a short interval across the slope again to a small cluster of stones, and finally at 7.30 I stood once again in safety on the rocks at the edge of the ice! The good boy hurried me to the shelter of a large rock, for fear of falling stones, placed a stone for me to sit on, borrowed my axe, and said, 'Now I go back to the others, and will stay with them all night.' Away he went, yodelling up the rocks to encourage them, and I was left once more alone.

Since my fall the other two members of the party had remained where I left them. My wife—whose feelings can be better imagined than described—when she saw that I was apparently uninjured, not perceiving, owing to the great distance, that I had lost my axe, at first shouted to me to make my way down to Göschenen Alp. Of course I could not hear her words, nor she mine. After about half an hour she made an attempt, which she immediately and most wisely abandoned, to get down the rocks on the left, so as to be opposite to where I stood, having told my son to remain exactly where he was till the rescue party arrived. Realising, however, that the idea was useless and highly dangerous she returned to him. Their position was awkward and any movement dislodged stones, likely to fall on me. She then determined, with admirable judgment, to remain where she was, if necessary, all night. When she heard the shouts of the two peasant boys, and saw one of them, in answer to her cries, coming towards her, not being able to speak German and being sure that he would not be able to pilot my son over rocks and snow, she tied a white handkerchief round his leg, to give the idea that he was injured and unable to move. When she found that the boy could speak a little English she asked him whether he could reach me, and he said he would try and at once started. Her interest in watching him was so intense that, as in my case, the time seemed to pass very quickly until 7.30, when she saw me safe off the ice. About 9 p.m. the boy returned to her, again crossing two dangerous slopes of hard, frozen snow, but this time with the help of my axe. From 9 until 10.30, when the rescue party reached her, she was mainly occupied in giving the boy lessons in English and in watching the lights of the relief party, coming up from below, being quite easy about me, owing to

the message which I had sent her that I was practically uninjured. I should say that all she and my son had between them was one crust of bread and a small cloak. The relief party reached me about 9 P.M. For an hour I had watched their lights and answered their shouts, so as to guide them to where I was. The moment the first man reached me I was violently ill for a few minutes, but quickly recovered. The party consisted of Herr Jütz, our host, who, with the utmost promptitude, had organised and headed the relief, Monsieur Montag, a Swiss artist, two porters, the other peasant boy, who had carried the news down to the hotel, and a splendid St. Bernard dog, belonging to Herr Jütz. A little later Gama, the guide, followed. As soon as my hand was bound up I wanted to go down with Montag and the boy, and send the other three up for my wife and son. This, however, Herr Jütz would not allow, thinking that I was far more injured than I was. I yielded to his wish and was wrapped up in rugs and placed under the rock, with the boy on one side of me and Montag on the other. I shall never forget the brotherly way in which he treated me, although I was a perfect stranger to him and had scarcely ever spoken to him; it was beyond all praise. We conversed a good deal, and I passed the time in this way and in watching the stars and the light of the waning moon on the Sustenhorn, opposite.

At 12 o'clock midnight the others joined us, and we stumbled down the mountain in the uncertain light, being obliged to use a lantern during the last hour or so, when we reached the path over the moraine of the Damma glacier. We arrived at the hotel at 2.30 A.M. having been out nineteen hours. Here we found that all kinds of preparations had been made, and Dr. Decio, of Milan, who was stopping in the hotel, ready to look after our injuries. He had actually followed the rescue party a long way up the mountain, by himself, but not being able to reach us he had returned to the hotel. I cannot say how grateful I am to him for his care and skill. If I had been his own relation he could not have been more anxious about me. My wounds were soon washed and bound up, the finger joint being the only hurt in the least serious, and we were all in bed at 3.30. None of us suffered any ill effects from this adventure. I was quite well the next day, though tired, and in two or three days, except for my right hand and left arm, which were stiff and uncomfortable, felt, if anything, better than usual, although unfortunately my hand prevented any thought of the climbing which I had planned for that year.