

Editor's Postbag

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ALPINE ACCIDENTS OF THE PAST SEASON. Disasters Due to Bad Luck and Bad Management.

By C. F. MEADE.

Of this year's Alpine accidents only two of the instances mentioned here seem to have been due to bad luck rather than to mismanagement. Owing to sheer bad luck a Swiss party was overtaken by an avalanche on the magnificent Guggi ice-route on the Interlaken face of the Jungfrau, when the famous guide Fritz Steuri was seriously injured in the rescue work that ensued; again on the Dent Blanche bad luck may have played a part when Mr. Geoffrey C. Gregson with the guide, Raymond Cottler, and porter, Theytaz, perished by falling through the cornice. In this case, however, some may question the prudence of taking the Viererselsgrat route in such a snowy year, when the elaborate cornices on this ridge are fairly certain to be in their most dangerous condition.

Such a season as occurred this summer was bound to be bad for the Matterhorn, of course. Many novices who are keen to ascend this classical peak have no idea that the standard of climbing on it may vary between extremes of easiness and difficulty according to the character of the season and that when the mountain is at its easiest the risk of falling stones is at its greatest, for the rocks are then less firmly cemented together with ice and snow. In any case stones dislodged by inexperienced climbers are at all times a danger to be reckoned with. Consequently it is better to be the first party up and the last to come down.

This summer two climbers who had omitted to take their ice-axes with them disappeared during the descent at about a quarter of an hour's distance below the summit. A slip must have occurred, for the two bodies were afterwards seen lying 4,000ft. below on the Furggen Glacier.

While a search party was out looking for them a young English lady was killed on the same mountain by a falling stone which swept her down the precipice and severed the rope that united her with her companions. The rope was said to be defective. On the Allalinhorn two inexperienced climbers were killed in consequence of a slip by the leader.

Another disaster occurred on the Macugnaga face of Monte Rosa, once ascended by the present Pope. This route has always had a great reputation for danger, and the notorious Marinelli couloir has to be crossed, followed by a snow and ice climb lasting for about ten hours as far as the top of the Dufourspitze, which is the highest peak in the massif. The dangers can certainly be minimised by choosing the right moment in the right season, and a season following a period of abnormally abundant snow is likely to be favourable. However, the two victims of this accident loaded the dice against themselves. When the weather turned bad, and a solitary climber who had accompanied them from the Marinelli hut wisely decided to retreat, they refused to do likewise, and deliberately bivouacked in a crevasse.

The next day, having reached a great height, they failed to find their way on to the rocks of the Dufourspitze, and attempted to make a short cut into Switzerland by crossing the Colle Zumstein. Only 150ft. below the watershed a slip must have happened, probably owing to fresh snow on the ice, and they fell. One was killed, and the survivor spent a second night out, without his axe, and with the body of his companion suspended on the rope below him. After three whole days without food — for only one meal had been carried — he was reached by a gallant party of guides from Macugnaga.

Unfortunately, however, while the guides were lowering the injured man down the funnel of the Marinelli couloir, an avalanche came down and swept him, together with the corpse, to the bottom of the couloir. Still alive, he was seen by a guide in the Marinelli hut and dragged to safety, only to die a few days later in hospital.

In connection with this accident it is worth noting that even in a favourably snowy year, when avalanches fall infrequently in the couloir, and the normal sources appear to be quiescent, avalanches are always liable to be started by the unpredictable breaking off of the cornices on the summit ridge of the Nordend, an origin that is too far up the mountain to be adequately observed from below.

Finally we come to Grindelwald, over shadowed by the ghastly tragedy on the north face of the Eiger. Even before the attack on the mountain itself had begun, disaster had occurred to two of the young men who had aspired to this expedition. On a training climb on the exacting Guggi route of the Jungfrau two of them had fallen, one of them being killed and the other gravely injured.

It must not be supposed that the attempts to climb the north face of the Eiger are a novelty. In 1932 a comparatively safe route up the north face was successfully accomplished by a Swiss party of four, amateurs and professionals, one of the strongest parties ever got together. The route that was attempted this year with such fatal

results, and which caused the death of two young men last year, is merely a variation upon that of 1932 with the supposed merit of being more obviously in the centre of the face. In the attempt that was made this summer the four assailants were stimulated by the ambition to win the Olympic medal awarded to the desperate pioneers of the new route on the Matterhorn in 1932. All four perished in spite of the most strenuous attempts to save them made by self-sacrificing guides.

Now as the ascent of the north face might conceivably be successful if there were four or five days of continuous fine weather, and as such a spell of fine weather could never be relied on, least of all during last July, it is scarcely surprising that the Swiss Federal Council has adopted the rather forlorn expedient of prohibiting all further attempts. It is hoped that the edict may at least do something to discredit the enterprise, and that even the most infatuated climbers will hesitate before running the grave risk of involving with themselves in common destruction the gallant professionals who can always be counted on to hasten to the rescue.

(The Field).

NEWS FROM THE COLONY.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Monthly Meeting.

The Monthly Meeting of the City Swiss Club took place on Tuesday last at Pagani's, over 40 members and friends being present.

Mr. P. F. Boehringer, President of the Club, informed the members about the arrangements which have been made by the Committee for the Annual Banquet and Ball, which is taking place on Friday, November 27th, at the Grosvenor House.

On the conclusion of the official part of the Meeting, the President introduced, M. Goby Walder, the well-known Swiss humorist from Zurich, who recited some of his own works in "Schwyzerdütsch," which earned great applause.

CONCERT.

Marietta and Martha Amstad.

Marietta and Martha Amstad gave a song recital on Tuesday last, at 3, Porchester Terrace, W.2 (by kind permission of Mrs. Mudie Cooke).

The sisters Amstad sang with grace, expression and sentiment duets of Italian, English, French, Swiss and German composers, which greatly charmed the audience. Marietta and Martha Amstad are delightful singers, who excel in musical taste, their art is especially well-suited to the style of the old music. The two soprano voices go very well together, and are equally well-trained, they are undoubtedly past mistresses of the "bel canto" and the music of the epoch.

The programme contained a number of old Swiss Folksongs which were warmly applauded by a large audience, and the great success they obtained was well merited. The accompaniment of some of the songs was perhaps a little bit too forceful, but on the whole Christine Ratcliffe at the piano gave an excellent performance. Many of the songs were encored. It was certainly a joy to listen to these charming and highly talented artistes.

They sang at Mme. Paravicini's "At Home" on Thursday last, at the Legation.

ST.

A FINNISH FILM AT THE "ACADEMY."

"Fredlös" — The Outcast.

This story of a Russian governor's tyrannous and cruel reign in Finland at the end of the last century is dished up very much in the old conventional style of melodrama. The bold bad villain is once again displayed in the familiar guise, devouring food in bestial quantities, surrounded by wine, women and song, and finally chasing the heroine around the table in the grand seduction scene, interrupted, of course, at the crucial moment by the hero's triumphant arrival.

For all this the film is an honest and sincere piece of work, and the interest is held throughout. The acting is of a very high standard particularly that of the two lovers played by Sten Lindgren and Gull-maj. Norin. They have both great power and utter simplicity.

The scenes of their wanderings and those of the peasant's life in Lapland all bear the stamp of genuine reality, and the whole film is of a rugged force which is extremely refreshing.

S.E.

CONCERT NEWS.



Carmen Hagmann.

On Thursday next, November 12th, Mme. Carmen Hagmann from Zurich will give a song recital at the Grottrian Hall, Wigmore Street, W.

Mme. Hagmann, who belongs to the younger generation of well-known "Lieder" singers in Switzerland, will present herself to the London concert public with a very attractive programme.

We hope that the members of the Swiss Colony in London, will attend in great numbers this very promising recital of our compatriote, and thus give her the welcome which she fully deserves.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

One of the features of our paper in the past has been the "Editor's Postbag" column, which is at all times open to correspondents.

Unfortunately of late some of our correspondents have introduced in their statements a rather too personal note, which is to be regretted for more than one reason.

The Editor would greatly appreciate if criticism of articles or utterances published in this paper by would be correspondents, would confine themselves to the facts or merits of the cause in dispute, leaving out any personal allusions, however witty or sarcastic they might seem to the writer.

EDITOR'S POSTBAG.

London, November 3rd, 1936.

To the Editor.

"Swiss Observer,"

23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.

Dear Sir,

In your issue of the 31st ult. you allowed Mr. E. Werner, — not to give his own views about the Swiss franc devaluation —, but to exercise decidedly unfair sarcasm at Mr. Wüthrich's expressed opinion on this subject. I know I am speaking the mind of a good few — possibly the majority of the long-resident Swiss here in London, — when I protest against this distasteful treatment of Mr. Wüthrich's sincerely stated views.

That, in addition, Mr. Werner has chosen to speak on behalf of the Swiss Colony in London is nothing short of arrogance and I hope, that on reconsideration, he will take an early opportunity of apologizing both to Mr. Wüthrich and to the prepondering mass of Swiss here in London, who are still prepared "to give honour to whom honour is due" and remain — as true Swiss should — ever grateful to Mr. Wüthrich for his long and signal services to one of the most important Swiss Export Industries.

Yours faithfully,

sig. W. E. Gattiker.

GROTRIAN HALL
Wigmore Street, London, W.1.

CARMEN HAGMANN
SONG RECITAL.

Thursday next, November 12th, at 8.30.

Pianoforte:
IRMA SCHAICHET.
Grottrian-Steinweg Pianoforte.

Tickets 9/-, 6/-, 3/- from Hall, usual Agents and
lbs & Tillett, 124, Wigmore St., London, W.1.