

Trost

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Somehow Bernard fought his way down the rest of the route and brought his climber in safety to the Festi Hut. That storm is remembered by mountaineers all over Europe. Never has a storm broken so rapidly. It raged from the Austrian Alps to Dauphiné, and it continued unabated for three days.

When Bernard told me this story I did not at first understand its true significance, having never climbed the Teufelsgrat. 'Of course, a ridge would be much more exposed in a storm,' I suggested, remembering some of my own experiences on lesser peaks.

Bernard laughed. 'I shouldn't be here to tell you the story if we'd been on the Teufelsgrat,' he said. 'It's a much longer climb. We should not long have left the summit when the storm broke. I could never have got down the Teufelsgrat in that weather. It would be impossible for any climber. Nor could a rescue party have got up to us. The storm went on for three days, remember.'

'You would have been lost?' I asked.

Bernard nodded. 'Without a doubt. It's a hundred per cent certain that we should have been killed.'

'And do you believe that Benedict's dream really was a warning?'

Bernard smiled thoughtfully. 'I just don't know,' he replied, 'but I often think about it.'

The third story concerns the death, last summer, of the famous guide Otto Furrer. As in the first story, the incident is connected with the Italian ridge of the Matterhorn. All mountaineers and skiers, as well as many non-climbers, will have read of the tragic circumstances of Otto's death. Seldom has any guide met such an undeserved fate.

Otto was killed on Thursday, August 26th, by the breaking of the fixed rope called the Grande Corde, some distance below the summit of the Matterhorn on the Italian ridge. The catastrophe seems even more deplorable from the fact that only on the previous Monday Otto had remarked to Elias Julen, another Zermatt guide, that the Grande Corde needed renewing. That incident, however, remarkable though it is, is not the point of this particular story.

I arrived in Zermatt a few days after the accident and Bernard Biner gave me the following account.

On the night of Wednesday, August 25th, there were, at the Matterhorn Hut, four parties whose objective was the Italian ridge. One party was composed of two guides from St. Niklaus with a Swiss girl of seventeen; another consisted of an Englishman with a guide from Randa; the third was Bernard Biner and a young Englishman from Cambridge; and the fourth was Otto Furrer with Frau Erlanger, a well-known Swiss lady climber with whom he climbed regularly every season.

The weather was good, and all four parties met on the summit and rested there for half-an-hour. Bernard was struck by two things as they sat on the summit exchanging anecdotes. One was the particularly friendly and happy state of mind of Otto Furrer, whom he had known, of course, all his life. The other was the distracted demeanour of Frau Erlanger. In Bernard's hearing she said to Otto: 'Otto, I have climbed with you for twenty-one years and I have never been frightened before. But to-day I cannot bear to

look down the Italian ridge. It terrifies me. I could not sleep all night for thinking about it.'

Otto took this remark with his usual cheerful and philosophic calm. 'Well, we can't go back now,' he said lightly, 'so we have to go down the Italian ridge.'

The guides from St. Niklaus and their girl climber went first. Otto and Frau Erlanger followed. The guide from Randa and his tourist went next. Bernard Biner and his companion brought up the rear.

Not far below the summit the guide from Randa called to Bernard: 'Something has happened. I see the St. Niklaus guides climbing up again.' Bernard joined him and went ahead down the ridge. He reached a point from which the Grande Corde can be seen. More than two hundred feet below he saw Otto and Frau Erlanger lying on the rocks; the St. Niklaus guides were bending over them; and — the Grande Corde had disappeared.

Bernard Biner and the guide from Randa upheld, at that terrible moment, all the best traditions of the great Alpine guides. Without fuss or excitement they replaced the missing fixed rope by knotting their own ropes. The Randa guide went down first; Bernard lowered the tourists to him, and finally came down himself. The whole operation took over an hour. When they reached the other party Otto Furrer was already dead; Frau Erlanger was unconscious.

It fell to Bernard Biner to assist the doctor to bring Frau Erlanger back from Breuil to Zermatt by car. This involved a long detour and the crossing of the Col de la Forclaz. It was not until nearly seventy hours after the accident that Frau Erlanger completely recovered consciousness and realised the full extent of what happened. As the car was passing through Sion in the Rhone valley on the journey back to Zermatt she whispered to Bernard: 'Bernard, do you remember what I said to Otto on the summit of the Matterhorn?'

'Yes,' Bernard replied sadly, 'I remember.'

No doubt other stories of this type could be told by many mountaineers. It seems impossible to decide just how much importance, if any, should be attached to them. So far, I am glad to say, I have never been the recipient of an apparent warning. But, if such a thing were to happen to me, I am inclined to think that I might pay considerable attention to it.

TROST.

Wenn dich ein bittres Weh befällt,
Wenn dir ein Glück vorübergleitet,
Dann schau, wie in der grossen Welt
Ja alles blutet, alles leidet.

Tritt hin, wo schwer im Todeskrampf
Ein Mensch liegt auf dem Sterbebette,
Und sieh, wie Liebe, Hass und Kampf
Des Lebens ungeheure Kette.

Dann wird dein Herz einermal
Sein Weh mit andern Augen messen,
Und wird bei Andrer Todesqual
Sein eignes, kleines Leid vergessen.

Rudolph Riesenmey.