

THE PIONEER
ALLAHABAD, INDIA
29 SEPTEMBER 1905
(page 7)

THE KINCHINJUNGA EXPEDITION.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir,—On our return to Darjeeling on the evening of the 20th instant we all, that is Doctor Jacob Guillarmod, Mr. Reymond and myself were simply struck dumb at reading both the letter to the Pioneer of the 20th instant and the interview in the Darjeeling *Chronicle* with Mr. Crowley, our quondam leader, containing a mass of what we will term misstatements. I will give the true version of what really occurred. Mr. Pache's arrival at last camp without orders—I remember quite well an official order from Mr. Crowley coming to Mr. Pache at the Yalung camp asking him to come on. I told Mr. Pache then that apparently I was going to be the servant of the expedition and was being left behind, but he could tell Mr. Crowley from me, I would not remain, and would push on the next day. As far as I can remember the purport of his note, in French, to Mr. Pache was "We are here at camp IV where you can join us."

Mr. Crowley also forgets to tell you that when he and the Doctor left the main party it was on a reconnoitring [sic] tour for a few days. The coolie who first met his death left camp without orders, but I must here mention what the other men told me, viz: that he said he was going down to carry up the load of his father who was with me.

As to what decided me to leave the expedition, it was not at all what he tries to make out, but some lines in a letter he wrote to the Doctor trying to put all blame on me as in charge of the rearguard and failing to send up provisions, *plus* the firm conviction that, although Mr. Crowley might be a daring Alpinist, he lacked the first accomplishments of a leader, as I told him at Camp V. (you may be a good climber but a bad general). I may here add that the reason the Doctor came up with me was to depose him, by a general durbar, as leader of this expedition. So much for his belittling remark that it was entirely personal pique. Now as a matter of fact there were plenty [of]

provisions at Camp III when I arrived with my coolies, but the Doctor had no men willing to carry them up even with the promise of eight annas for each man that would go, as they were entirely demoralised by the death of the first man. I also noticed several loads abandoned on the snow slope, one a tin of *sattu*, one a unit of food for Europeans enough for five men for three days, Mr. Pache's valise and a Kashmiri kilt containing tins of petroleum, etc. Now as this road was, in Mr. Crowley's estimation, so perfectly easy, why did not he, instead of remaining at Camp V and starving, come down with his authority (the ice-axe) and persuade his coolies to bring them up? As to the statement made by Mr. Crowley in the *Pioneer* about *starving* for a day, he could not have looked at the food units, in which there was a good deal of tinned provisions; also on my arrival at Camp V—I found some raw mutton, a shoulder and ribs, I think, besides several tins of self-cookers and calorit. Mr. Reymond informs me he never had to starve; in fact, on the morning of the 1st he remembers making his breakfast before starting off a self-cooker, ox-tongue and chocolate. He especially mentions having made an extra good meal on account of a hard day's work in front of him. So much for the starving incident. Regarding the want of petroleum, this ran short on the morning of the 30th, but they were able to make tea by using spirits of wine in the small mountain-cooking lamp. Two tins of petroleum arrived from the Doctor at 5 p.m. that day, so they were never without a fire for cooking, besides as Mr. Reymond's remarks this would have been a small trial for Alpinists! Mr. Crowley in his letter to the *Pioneer* also remarks that he saved the life of a coolie by a sharp tap. I suppose with an alpenstock or ice-axe! He further states "that it is the only occasion on which I have had to strike a man;" he ignores or intentionally forgets, the cruel beating he gave Thenduck, senior, a man 53 years old because he complained he was sick and could not carry the valise higher, with the addition of an almost frozen tent, from 20,500 feet to higher slopes. The lowest estimate we could make of the weight of this valise and tent would be about 35 seers, not a bad weight on a dangerous track at that height. The beating which was with an alpenstock was so severe that Mr. Reymond made a note of it in his journal. He saw all this from a short distance which commanded a full view of Camp V; also he noticed that the man lay down and received several kicks from Mr. Crowley's well-nailed boots. Mr. Pache was near but, according to Mr. Reymond, apparently so disgusted with this proceeding that he turned his back on it. I

need not say more. This was the only coolie that did not run away. His son Chuktuk managed when he saw his father being beaten to run down the slope. Mr. Crowley ordered Bahadur Singh, his servant, to run and catch him, but this he could not do as the boy was too fast for him. All the other coolies had run away the day before. These came down to Camp III on their way to Darjeeling. I stopped them and by promising them on my word that they should not be made to sleep at Camp V. and that I would not allow the Burra Sahib to beat them, got them to come up and bring 3 tins of *sattu* and petroleum, also to take up Mr. Pache's valise and the abandoned loads. On arrival at the spot, where we last saw the valise, it was not there, having been carried away by a small avalanche.

To come to the accident and its probable causes, I shall confine myself to the opinions expressed by the Doctor and Mr. Reymond as Alpinists of experience. The road was badly chosen. They, on the day that this was done, strongly objected to it, firstly because it led over a steep slope abutting a precipice and also because of the quantity of soft snow which would easily avalanche if many passed along it. This is proved without a doubt since as many as three avalanches took place on the route, two falling by themselves and one being caused by the four men slipping, which latter carried us away. As to his wish to emphasise the trivial size of the avalanche he did not take the trouble at the time of the accident to come and try if it was at all possible to render any assistance. He admits he knew that four men were under the snow, and this being *a very small avalanche* we surely would have got them out with his assistance if he had only come, but why trouble? "They got there against my advice let them stop." Truly a noble position for a leader to adopt with companions in imminent danger. The slope according to Mr. Crowley was so easy, only 20°, but he did not try to "glissade" down it, preferring his own easy route, meets the coolies, who, on account of one of the self-fallen avalanches by the side of the rocky precipice, did not dare to go down the night before and passed a cold night huddled on the rocks, leaves them to their fate to come down as best they could. He of course had claws and easily managed it. In the opinion of both the Doctor and Mr. Reymond the avalanche fell about one hundred and fifty mètres and could not have been such a small one, seeing it took four hours to dig out our last man. Poor Mr. Pache was found head downwards in about ten feet of snow. So much for the "small" avalanche.

We now come to his serious charge against the Doctor and myself, in his own words to the *Chronicle* representative: "The Doctor and Righi managed to get away by severing the rope." Such an action is considered a crime by Alpinists unless full details are given and proper reasons stated. As soon as we stopped and managed to get to our feet, I loosened the knot and slipped out of the rope—the Doctor remained tied till we reached Camp III—and tried to dig with our bare hands to get if possible to our companions. It was not till we, fully an hour and a half after the fall, convinced of the futility of trying to find our friends alive after so long, decided to make our way back to Camp III that after much hesitation the rope was cut to enable us to form another corded party. The necessity of having a rope is proved by my slipping on a dangerous slope of ice three times and being retained by Mr. Reymond. I am glad to see by the *Chronicle* of the 23rd instant, Mr. Crowley retracts his former statement and says it is wrong, *vide* his letter. So much for his spiteful attempt to injure the Doctor's honour as an Alpinist. The desertion of our almost deposed leader took place much to our satisfaction on the 3rd instant. He said he did not believe in such sentimentalities as stopping to try and pay the last honours to the victims. I will ignore his charges as to stupidity, folly, and that I, in the goodness of my heart, would leave him only his servants, as this is not true. He wanted me to order coolies to go up and bring down, not so much the property of the expedition, as his own in particular. This I refused to order, but called for volunteers, as I did not want to have on my conscience the death of men whom I may have ordered to go up. I simply said "You are the Barra Sahib and you speak enough Hindustani to do the ordering yourself." He then sent for Nangar the sardar and asked him if he was sardar or the coolies' servant. Nangar replied he was the sardar, then Mr. Crowley said, "Take men and go up to Camp V and bring down our property." Nangar replied, "I will go if you give me boots and claws." These being supplied he left with 10 or 12 men, and I am glad to say managed to get safely up and down. I may add that at no time was I appointed as commander of the rear-guard. I was simply left behind without orders of any kind ; in fact, I had to send a man to ask for orders and actually left Camp I, for Camp III, without any orders reaching me. Mr. Reymond was not sent by Mr. Crowley, as he states in his article to the *Pioneer* of the 20th instant, but he came down to the rescue of his own accord. Mr. Crowley further says that we left him without men. Every coolie with him, owing I suppose to

fear of the mountain and of Mr. Crowley, had bolted the night before, so that he only had with him Thenduck, senior, who after his treatment at Mr. Crowley's hands and feet, begged of us to be taken down. This was the only man we deprived Mr. Crowley of; as on Mr. Pache deciding to come down with us (he was not persuaded by the Doctor) his servant, Bahadur Lama, came down with him, making thus our party up to six men. We, of course, could not refuse them, so to the charge that we left him without effective help, our answer is, we only took one man who was sick and bruised. He further states that had the Doctor possessed the common humanity and common sense to leave him men he could have sent an effective rescue party. This Doctor Guillarmod was unable to do as no coolie then would stop with such a Sahib, who convinced his coolies to march with the business end of his ice axe or the toe of his well shod boot besides, for the sake of economy, none of them were properly booted. As far as I know when we started he was in a tent, and did not see us off, so I do not understand how he can say we were all in a bunch. We had a 50 mètre rope and occupied its full length, the first man at one end and the last at the other. We had no rope trailing behind us. Another passage in his now famous letter to the *Pioneer*, with reference to the admitted coolie striking, says: The leader in fact fell who was *unroped*, but supporting him I caught and held him safely . . . he began to *untie* himself from the *rope*." If this man was unroped how did he manage to untie himself from the rope? Can any one explain this; or is it a hit against Sir Martin Conway or the Alpine Club hidden in a conundrum? To give you a final example of the character of the individual we had to deal with, I will add a few extracts from letters written by him to the Doctor long before the expedition started, these in face of my agreement with him and after paying him the equivalent of £100. As I could not afford that sum in cash I paid him Rs. 350 in cash, and after much haggling he took from me a fine Tibetan banner, a large piece of carved *lapis lazuli* and a necklace of green jade as an equivalent for the rest. These I will write in the original French and endeavour to translate them to the best of my ability, I may add the Doctor has given them to me to make what use I care of them, some refer to me :

"Mon cher J G.—Tout va bien ici. J'espere avoir avec nous le Directeur de l'hotel, jeune Italien, et prince deguisé, qui parle tres bien le tibetain et a l'habitude et de marchander et de voyager aves les indigenes Je vous conseille vivement du

donner du Bakshish au ' Babu ' qui pese votre bagages à Calcutta gare de Sealdah. Il m'a demande 35 rupies ; a pris 19, et 2 de bakshish. Les frais sont formidable sur la ligne de montagne * * * Il vient d'avoir un access un acces de fievre rheumatique—est-ce-le mot ?—qui laisse toujours le coeur affabili. Mais tout ira bien sans doute. Après son travail, l'emplacement de nos gros bagage a main camp, on pourrait le renvoyer, s'il se montre difficile, et sans ceremonie. Mais j'espere bien qu'il sera très agreable pour nous tous. Seulment je m'empresse de vous dire le pis, afin quil n'y ait point ' d'illusion perdue' " * * *

This is a translation of the above passages: "My Dear J G.—All goes well here and I hope to have with us the manager of this hotel, a young Italian and disguised Prince, who speaks Tibetan well and is in the habit to do business and to travel with the natives I warmly counsel you to give backshish to the 'Babu,' who weighs your baggage at Calcutta Sealdah station. He asked of me Rs. 35, took Rs 19 and Rs. 2 for backshish. The freights are formidable on the mountain line. The manager has just had a go of rheumatic fever,—is that the word?—which always leaves the heart weak. But in any case he will be very useful to make the coolies march and for lowering their prices, even if he can't do the heroic exploits of a PfannelThe manager has decided to accompany us ; he will save us much money as he knows the right price of all things which we must buy here and how to cut their rate very low. He is named Rigo de Righi. You must well understand that Righi will be very useful to us, and he is good enough companion but he is not all a 'gentleman.' He can get angry, and complain uselessly. We must then, I think, keep him at arm's length. But all will go well without doubt. After his work, the placing of our heavy baggage at the main camp, we can send him back, if he becomes difficult, and without ceremony but I hope he will be very agreeable for us all. Only I am trying to tell you the worst to the end that there shall be no 'lost illusions.' " These letters were written one from Drum Druid Hotel and the other probably from Calcutta from the Hotel de Paris, but I am not certain. This is the sort of man who was leader of the 1905 Kinchinjunga Expedition. Need I say more why we decided to ask him to give up his position? I leave your readers to form their own opinion.

Not content with all the charges he brought against me during the expedition he further charges me with, because I upheld Nangar in his just demand of the two pice per man commission as sardar, which was promised him by Mr. Crowley before leaving if he got the coolies to come for Rs. 20 per month and himself came for Rs. 30, having a share of this commission: and also that on everything that was brought on the road I peculated a commission, and that I was well known in Darjeeling for doing so. I told him it was a lie and a liar who said so. To this he answered that an officer friend of his had told him this. I told him I could not believe an English officer could be capable of making such a charge, and wish to hide his name. This when I demanded was refused. This comes from what, I suppose, would be considered a "gentleman" having been educated at the Cambridge University. In his opinion I am not quite a gentleman; if so, and if gentlemen are of his stamp, I am glad I am not one.

This rather long explanation is written in answer to his letter to the *Pioneer* of the 20th instant, and his interview with the *Darjeeling Chronicle* of the 16th instant, and as I think I have rebutted his charges against the Doctor and myself and do not wish to enter into any controversy with him, I shall decline to further to discuss [sic] the subject with him. My two Swiss companions sign this letter to prove I have their assent as regards where I have mentioned their names.

A. C. RIGO DE RIGHI.

Le sousigné reconnaît l'exactitude des faits a'legués ci-dessus et qui me concernent personnellement.

DR. T. JACOB GUILLARMOD.

Je certifie l'exactitude des passages de cette lettre où mon nom se trouve cité.

CH. REYMOND.