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"ON THE KINCHIN LAY."
V.

MOUNTAINS OR METAPHYSICS.

[This article, written on the third evening of the accident, has undergone no material alteration.]

Laying no claim to the angelic temperament attributed by history to Bishop Berkeley and the Rev. F. F. Kelly, I must confess that my last article, written during the night of the "accident"—since, in default of a specific term, the word is applied to the "I didn't know it was loaded" class of murder—was composed more in anger than in sorrow.

I have already felt that if I were killed on a mountain the circumstance could not but act prejudicially upon my career; and even a remote connection with an "accident" makes me feel like a curate who has just realized his mistake in thanking his bishop's wife for a pair of slippers really made by the Vice-President of the Dorcas Society. I feel like Mr. Bernard Shaw when people take him seriously (or humourously, which is it?) I feel like the Czar when his farthing's worth of tea arrives done up in a bit of an uncensored *Daily Mail*. I feel like the Rev. R. J. Campbell when he sees the R.P.A. publications on a railway bookstall, and like Mr. George Jacob Holyoake when a kind old lady gives him a tract.

Now you know how I feel? All right: let's get on!

But just a word of explanation by way of parenthesis as to why I did not go down at the time of the "accident."

(*a*) I was under the (false) impression that the Doctor and Righi were on one rope, and the rest (supposed even by themselves to be five men, and not four!) on another. What I supposed to be the matter was that these five had been seen to fall over the cliffs on to the lower glacier. All help would have been but to risk more lives. There was no means of checking this, the "avalanche" being so small as not to be noticeable (as

distinguished from what a deliberate glissade might have made) in the failing light. The shouts were *Panch admi girgiya* (five men have fallen) and then Righi's hysterical "Help!" which meant nothing, or at most that his nerves were shattered by the horror of the sight. True, the shouter appeared to be some distance off the proper road, but I expected no less from the Doctor. True, they seemed very far down for such a short interval of time; but a glissade on such a slope might have been merely the Doctor's idea of a short cut. The freedom with which they walked about precluded the idea that they were (more than ordinarily) in need of help. Being within such easy distance, they might have given all particulars of their accident, instead of the single misleading phrase quoted above.

(*b*) I was in bed at the time of the first shout making tea, after twelve hours without food in the snow; and it would have taken me ten minutes to dress. Reymond had his boots and patawe on, ready to start; I told him to call me if, when he found what was wrong, he needed my assistance. He did not call me.

(*c*) In the Irish fashion, I may answer by asking why, on arrival at Camp III, about 9 o'clock, they did not send up some if not all of the 50 odd coolies at their disposal.

(*d*) Though both the Doctor and Righi were visible moving about, only the latter called for help. The Doctor's only remark was "*Chap raho*!" (shut your mouth). Nobody would pay any attention to anything Righi said.

(*e*) Nobody who was not there can judge of the circumstances; and I was the only person who was there who knew one end of a mountain from another.

(*f*) The Doctor is old enough to rescue himself and nobody would want to rescue Righi.

At earliest dawn, therefore, and not before, I arose and girded myself and set my tent in order, and got my slaws and hefted up mine axe, and ran at great random down the slopes, like Galahad going for the Grail. (I hope I am justified in asserting a casual connection between the purity of my heart and the decuplation of my strength.) Hardly five minutes from Camp V, I came on the place; and like the late John Keats, except that they were boots, I stood in my shoes and I wondered, I wondered, I stood in my shoes and I wondered. It was a baby avalanche on a baby slope. Exceptionally timid ski-runner as I am, I had proposed the previous morning to go down on ski. Reymond had glissaded down to the rescue; a fact which speaks volumes, that even Reymond had not discovered a cornice (Reymond, I should explain, "sees cornices" everywhere just as

some other people “see snakes.”) I would gladly have started a similar avalanche and sailed down on it—head first if required—for the sheer fun of the thing, as I have done many a time in the Alps and elsewhere. So I gazed thereon.

There needed no ghost to come from the grave to tell me what had happened. Six men closely roped will set sliding a mass of snow where a solitary man would pass safely. Six men roped sliding down in a whirl of snow—each man hampers his neighbor, neutralizes his efforts to keep on top, drags him deeper, and perhaps jerks the very breath out of his body.

There are undoubtedly uses for ropes—a lot of people would be better hanged—and these are of course situations in mountaineering when a rope properly used—*properly used*, PROPERLY-USED conduces to safety.

But most people put on a rope as an African savage hangs a spent cartridge case to his waist to ward off fever or the attacks of ghosts; and think that as long as they have got it on, they are immune to all the shocks of Fate. Despite the tragedy—and a true Greek tragedy it is, seeing how the ultimate catastrophe was involved in, and deducible even at the first to a truly wise eye, from the characters of the Doctor and Righi one experienced, the theory of mountain craft ever next one’s heart, a certain somber joy, such as Cassandra must have felt, when she beheld tall Ilium lapped with flame, and heard the crash of the ruining palaces, and the death-cry of their thousand heroes. The Doctor’s last words to me had been “Je me f..de vous” which may be decently translated “I don’t care *that* for you!” Don’t Care was made to care; Don’t Care was nearly killed in an avalanche.

Considering the text of the agreement, signed by all of us “Aleister Crowley shall be sole and supreme judge of all matters respecting mountain craft, and the others will obey his instructions” on which sole condition I had travelled 8,000 miles, and contributed much good gold, this open defiance was a very flagrant contravention. Even Reymond (that morning) had been very difficult to start; but the counter to his “Tu commences a m’embêter” “Et vous a me tutoyer” had aroused his better self.†

Hearing noises on the rocks below Camp IV. I did not descend the avalanche track, where the sight of two bamboos some five feet below the path puzzled me, since I still supposed the “accident” to have occurred on the steep ice below Camp IV. but approached that Camp, calling aloud “Who is there?” No answer: the noises died away. Soon they began again: I could

have sworn I heard voices. Again I called, and again dead silence fell. Almost I began to think myself the prey of an hallucination. Passing Camp IV. I went down the snow, and on arriving at the steep ice, saw that the snow which should have covered it had fallen away for some twenty feet of width and only fragments of the regelated track still stuck to the ice. Here, I thought, was the scene of the catastrophe, and I began to suspect that there had been two "accidents." Instead of one. Moving slowly across the bad patch, I felt that curious certitude that there was somebody behind one which most people will recognise, a sensation, presumably a relic of some ancient savage aptitude.

Turning, I saw the pallid line of coolies, fifteen or sixteen of them, whom the doctor had chased from me and the comfortable coolie tents of Camp V. and who had passed the night in a scared condition under the rocks. (It should be well observed that these men, unroped had passed in safety the place where the combined weight of the roped men and the Doctor's head had caused the death of two-thirds of their number.)

They now stood silent and spectral, prepared to follow me. I warned them that they would probably be killed if they did, and told them to go round over the snow-slopes; but they answered never a word, and by dint of much step-cutting with an axe they had, they got over a little before I arrived at Camp III.

At that delightful spot I found my comrades and Righi very sick and sorry for themselves; the Doctor with a back and a knee, but without traumatic injury to the brain: while on the other hand, the cephalic enlargement from which he had been suffering had practically disappeared; Righi somewhat sobered by his adventure, to the almost complete suppression of the *Three Men in a Boat* atmosphere, with a sore rib, which nobody could persuade him was not a rupture of the heart, a twisted knee and a "partial moan" which ought to have been audible for miles.

The reason for our rear guard troubles was soon apparent. Bahadur Singh and Salama being in obvious difficulties with my sleeping valise and dispatch-box, which I had told them to bring, I wished to send off a couple of regular coolies to their aid, so that I could start off home next morning. But Righi whined that no coolies could ever be got to go up, that he wouldn't take the "responsibility of trying to persuade" them and so on, till, heartily sick, I turned to Nanga Sirdar, and told him that if he wanted a good testimonial from me I had got to have those things P.D.Q.—a Hindustani expression signifying "at the earliest possible moment."

Without a murmur the thing was done, and well done. Not two but twelve men went, and brought down not only my things but the rest of Camp V. as well. Just so the Doctor has been trying to bribe men with presents of boots and claws to take up a third of a load. The coolie, it may be explained, is always 'trying on' to see what his master is made of. For instance, one of them came to me complaining that for food he had "only—*sattu*." "That's all right," I replied "after next march you'll get only snow." He grinned and I grinned and all went cheerily on.

Even at Falut they had come to say they could go no further, because there was no water, no water! When one could wring gallons out of one's clothes. But I told them quite solemnly that I had heard about that, and brought champagne for them. It was only their fun. But if you are fool enough to take these complaints seriously, they naturally play it up to the limit. Consequently, a man who spends his time in stupidly moaning over their wickedness, or being stupidly angry at their little jokes, cursing, groveling and whining, all without reason, complains constantly of them and never gets good work out of them. They had got a soft thing and they knew it. The relation of the traveler to his coolies should be that of a father to his children. Not the foolish fondness of the American father, who tries to make up in endearment what he lacks in certainty, but the grave authority and wise kindness of the high caste Hindu father, or the best type of British father, who teaches his sons to love, honour, and obey him. The first great rule is never to lose your temper; the second, always to keep your temper; the third, if you are really obliged to beat a man, let it be within an inch of his life! Otherwise he will jeer at the light arm of the sahib. But of course I should have sent Righi back at once when I heard of his ridiculous antics with Mr. White's coolies. He took out his Kukri and revolver and threatened them. They knew he would not dare to use either, laughed at him, and went off.

But let us not leave out the supernatural interpretation of the facts?

It turns out that Righi, like most-class Italians is intensely superstitious; he attributed his escape to a little image given him by a Lama, and confessed that he rarely took any steps without consulting it. Probably therefore the image was in conspiracy with the Demon of Kinchinjanga to starve me out!

It also appears that he was afraid that people in Darjeeling would "say we had treated him as a servant" and so was discontent with being appointed to the second most important du-

ty in the expedition, that of Transport Officer. As if we were not all servants! As if the proudest title yet arrogated to himself by men were not “Servant of the Servants of God!” It is the mongrel dregs of dollar-ridden America, perhaps the only country in the world where not even the shadow of liberty may fall, that say “hired man” for “servant:” it is the voice of the Lord of the Universe that gently says: “He that would be greatest among you, let him be the servant of all!”

I should have kept silent as to Righi’s misdemeanours, but as he “gave me warning” just before the catastrophe, I do not feel bound to regard him as a comrade. His no-reason for desertion was the publication of my first article! As, weeks before, he had copies this article for me in his own handwriting, his surprise and indignation at its contents are no better than a lie; and the use of the pretext implies premeditated treachery, or an unusual slowness in making up his mind. A slump is feared in the Darjeeling market for foreign noblemen.

Utterly sick at heart, I made all my preparations for retirement to those dear domestic joys that make the heart of every true born Briton go plunk-plunk-plunkety-plunk. For me

All the rains and ruins are over,

And all the seasons of snows and sins,

The days dividing lover and love—

But will my peace be as sweet as that now known to these dead men? Not if I know my wife!

Now that one begins to get proportions of things the tragic side glimmers up in the Aristophanic gloom. To us it is ever to regret Pache infinitely, the courtly gentleman, the soldierly spirit, the good comrade, let me add for my part, the only one of the party who understood his duty and did it. While he was rear-guard, there was little or no trouble about supplies; and nothing is to be more deplored than the unfortunate misreading of his instructions, due to a damped letter and my vile handwriting, which brought him up to Camp IV and began the series of disasters.

It has just been suggested to me (an unnameable insect is crawling outside my tent) that some hypersensitive member of the Alpine Club, or other person pledged to attack climbing without guides‡ may feel hurt by the strictures which I have thought necessary to pass upon some of their methods, and turn to criticize mine. I hope so, that I may renew my confidence in that adage of my nonage “Even a worm will turn.” My position will be to take no notice of any criticisms on climbing made by anyone who is not at least good enough to repeat

some of the climbs I have originated. I therefore hereby challenge any man who has climbed only with guides to repeat my ascent of the outer pinnacle of the Devil's Chimney on Beachy Head from the sea, *i.e.*, without touching the top of the cliff at any point during the ascent.

I choose this climb because of its proximity to London, and lest anyone should complain of the expense, I will pay for his first-class single railway fare to Eastbourne for his dinner, bed, and breakfast at the best hotel, and for a scavenger and a bucket at the foot of the cliff.

Thus I forestall the triple-distilled venom, the piffle about the folly of climbing without guides, which the satraps of Savile Row are doubtless collecting "in their teeth, and in their throats, and what is worse, within their nasty mouths." Lower down the street are nine tailors busily trying to make a man, but at the top six hundred things do their best (one must suppose) and the result is pretty poor.

To return to pleasanter subjects (my boy has squashed the unnameable insect), I have written my report of the "accident" to the Deputy Commissioner, and am ready to return to the rains and leeches of outrageous Sikkim.

I have made the necessary suggestions as to searching for the bodies, building a great commemorative cairn, and so on—suggestions only, for no longer will I give one single order, when up on the glacier, crying to heaven, are the murdered monuments of disobedience.

I have uttered no word of reproach to the Doctor, nor he any word of explanation to me. The former, since he is genuinely sorry for his error (as if that were any good) or at least for the pain in his back; the latter, probably in fear of the retort "Vos explications sautent sur quatre cadavers"—"Your explanations stumble over four dead men."

It must be clearly understood that the words of criticism I am compelled to print are dictated solely by regard for the true theory of mountain craft, the which I will maintain with my life. No personal grievance should induce me to pen one line against a good friend, nor should I condescend to notice an enemy, but the misrepresentations which those professional liars who have exhausted all the meannesses of trickery§ in the endeavour to prevent the names of the people who climb without guides being known so that their own foul names may a little longer enjoy a fictitious reputation which the British public are certain to circulate, compel me thus to speak out fearlessly and frankly the true causes of this disaster.

So I muse, as I wander down the sweet-smelling meadows, watered by delicious streams, and clad in exquisite flowers, which fringe the lower part of the Yalung Glacier. It is indeed

> "A land of clear colours and stories
> A region of shadowless hours,
> Where earth has a garment of glories,
> And a murmur of musical flowers."

And so from musing I slide into meditation. True it is that materialism has conquered, but only by extending its connotation to something very like what Berkeley meant by spirit. True that man is only a machine, or even less, a thing all cause and no purpose; the admission only requires that the idealist should take a larger unit. True, above all, that all this beauty and tragedy have no existence, but in my own mind, and it comes upon me, as upon Mansur el Ballai long ago, "Ana 'l Haqq, wa laysa fi jubbatj it' allah." (I am the truth, and within my coat is nothing but God) or upon the Osirian in ages beyond history: "I am Osiris! I am Osiris! I am the Lord of life triumphant over death! There is no part of me that is not of the gods!" Let this be my epitaph upon my good friend Alexis Pache: and not that other consciousness which comes intrusion, as I walk alone over the vast abyss of wanton stones, that there is no consciousness, no purpose, nothing but a giant stress of things. . . . . (Excuse my imitating the Love letters of the Brownings and Mr. H.G. Wells, in trying to express the complete works of Spinoza, Puddhaghosha, and myself, by a series of dots).

But, in the final analysis, it matters little; but one thing I beg, let no Dualist cock crow upon the dung-heaps of Darjeeling!

So far as I know, I am not a Sufi or a Taoist, but I must go to China and Persia, and find out for sure.

In the meanwhile, back to Darjeeling, which I am sorry to say, has been only partially burnt down in my absence. It will be my tenaciously-gripped privilege, by the wonderful courtesy of its brilliant young manager, "Count Alcesti C. Rige de Righi," my late comrade—the only fault I have to find with him is that he seems to think that he has the same sort of control over his guests that the governor of a prison has over his—for the absurdly-inadequate remuneration of nine and fourpence a day, to stay at Drum Druid Hotel, and feast, as I am sure Lucullus never feasted, upon the really ingenious substitutes for human food, which, figuring in the menu under French names, recall

with a sweet anticipation too deep for tears, the delights of Paillard's and of Leon's. (I gather from official criticism of my first article, in which a sentence, somewhat similar, though not so fine, appeared, that it should be held to apply only to the occasions when I dine out, because the food at Drum Druid is *actually* human food and *not* an ingenious substitute. How the mind broadens by travelling!)‖

But though I may grip tenaciously, I shall not grip for long. The little devil that with his accursed whisper "Go on! Go on!" makes me think at times that I must be the wandering Jew is already at my ear, and I have no whither in particular to go. Like Lord Curzon, I am out of a job.

ALEISTER CROWLEY.

† *Translate*.—"Thou (the familiar address of equals) beginnist to annoy me" or "to make tired"—"And you address me familiarly."

‡ The only really climbing. Some Alpine Club President I forget which, there are so many and all alike jeer at a certain Anglo-Indian traveler that he only went where he could be carried. The President in question has only gone where he could be pulled.

§ The great Mummery was blackballed at the Alpine Club on the snobbish lie that he was a bootmaker! Who in England knows the names of urtschelier, Eckenstein, Lammer, Rickiners, Pienul and others, who, climbing without guides, hold, with one exception, all the mountain records of the world?

‖ September 26th. It is only fair to add that on my return I found (in spite of the absence of the brilliant young manager) that the food and attendance at this hotel had very much improved, even to excellence.

* *Cause of avalance*.—Weight of party travelling at an improper time and in an improper manner. Improper composition of party.

Width of avalanche.—At top, about 20 feet, seven shortest steps. At bottom between 40 and 60 feet, a mere estimate, perhaps very inaccurate.

Height through which it fell.—250 feet—a close and careful estimate from above, below, and at various places between. Such error as there is, is an error of exaggeration.

Angle of slope.—Having no clinometer, I made a rough measurement with the ice-axe and a bootlace; also with the ice-axe and eye. I put it at 20°, with limits of error 25° max, and 12° min.

Place of avalanche.—The party had a slight depression on their left as well as on their right; that is, they were walking along the practically level crest of a very obtuse-angled ridge.

Abuse of rope. No steps taken to prevent conversion of slip into fall.—It might perhaps have been possible for the Doctor (or for the last man, if one of the middlemen slipped first to save the party by running down to the left. At least, it was the only chance. The snow slipped away, actually from the dividing line made by the well-trodden track. There were no marks of any one having been dragged from below.

It is consequently certain without error that at the moment of the catastrophe the line of six men extended over not more than 20 feet or so; in other words, they had absolutely closed up. Allowing 24 feet for the rope used in tying them, there were thus 25 feet of slack rope dragging on the snow. [September 27th. Taking their own estimate of the length of the rope, 150 feet, this 250 is reduced to 100, which does not modify my next remark.] Such abuse of the rope would have been gross, in famous and abominable if any member of a party so roped had been a responsible mountaineer. In the Alps a surviving head guide against who such facts were proved would be convicted of manslaughter.

I cannot forget that in 1902 Dr. Guillarmod was ascending the Choji Ri Lungma with a coolie, roped, and that the coolie having fallen into a small crevasse, Doctor Guillarmod failed to pull him out, untied himself from the rope and returned to Camp XI alone. Eckenstein and I hastened to the rescue, and the former pulled out the man *with one hand* as a demonstration.

Nor were Dr. Guillarmod's "explanations" any less elaborate than those I expect to hear put forward in the next few weeks. But lies if so transparent that it needs a great many to hide four dead bodies.

[This foot-note was written up on September 16—20th from notes made at the time.]

'I seram; Nepal, 4th September.

Note—Personal experience of Alpine Guides.

1875.—Was born.

1890-93.—Learnt to climb rocks in the British Isles.

1894.—*Suldenspitze*. My first snowslope. Got on to ice, slipped, and the guide failed to hold me, but himself fell.

Ortler.—Guides refused to attempt the true ridge of the Pontere Grat.

Ortler.—Climbed this ridge alone (a first ascent) in about 1 1/2 hours; on top met American and guide; latter drunk. Helped them down in 9 1/2 hours, glissading to avoid the rocks, and the steps being ready cut.

Ortler.—Descending to Payer Hut; found guide and employer helpless in a crevasse some eight feet deep. Pulled them out.

Konigspitze.—Guides too drunk to start. Went a solitary climb up Eisseespitze, reported facts, and they were struck off the list.

1895.—Resolved never to be on a rope with a guide unless on the clear understanding that he was the one who needed the help.

Silberhorn.—Guide (acting as porter only) fell twice; I stopped him.

Eiger.—Going alone met Rev. W. Weston near top. Both his guides incompetent; one drunk.

Jungfrau.—With Rev. W. Weston who took me as his third guide, on the suggestion of his guides, both first class men as guides go. Other guides both drunk; narrow escape from “accident.”

Wetterlücke.—With Mr. W. Armstrong and a man acting as porter. He refused to climb icefall, but was pulled up. I, being very fatigued, allowed him to lead on the last easy slopes, half an hour from the hut; he went round in circles, and rejoiced to find his own tracks multiply, and saw in them evidence that he was on the right road.

1896.—*Aiguille de la Za*.—Met party with two guides who solemnly warned me that I should be killed if I went alone. Five minutes later they all four fell into a crevasse, and I had to help them out.

1897.—*Petite Dant de Veisivi*. All guides declared the Arolla face impossible, as it overhung, With Mr. M.W. Travers found this an easy climb.

Boulder.—Offered 100 francs to any guide who would go up a certain way I had climbed. Kept my money in my pocket. Taught a lady to climb it.

Vuibez séracs—Strong party of Alpine clubmen and guides (seven men) were beaten by the first obstacle, which they declared impossible. With Mr. Travers and his brother climbed the whole glacier, including the said obstacle.

1898.—Guide having to spend the night in a tent on a glacier, nearly lost his few wits from sheer fright.

1899.—Climbed through the Géant seracs direct, both alone and later with Eckenstein, challenging the guides in the district to follow. None did.

1900-1.—Went to Mexico, and discovered that the average native is as good as the best Swiss guides, or at worst requires a few months training to make him so.

1902.—Went to Baltistan and found the average native as good on mountains as the best Swiss guides.

1905.—Went to Nepal and ditto, ditto; though not equal to the Balti.

With this as experience, and the reports of other men to confirm it, can it be wondered that I am against the system?