

BOOK REVIEWS

Climbs on Mont Blanc, by Jacques and Tom de L epiney, translated by Sidney Spencer. Pp. 179. Edward Arnold & Co., London, England, 1930. 10/6.

The well-known intrepidity of the brothers de L epiney is brilliantly, and withal, modestly exhibited in this very convenient-sized volume, containing impressive, if rather small, pictures of their daring and guideless climbs. Their enthusiasm for the magnificent ar etes and peaks of the Mont Blanc chain is communicated to the reader through unusually lively and intimate descriptions, in which French and Italian writers excel. Other French climbers, J. Lagarde, Henri de S egogne, and Henri Bregeault, joined the brothers on some of these thrilling exploits on notched knife-blades, vertical walls, dangerous ice-cliffs, chimneys with overhangs, and difficult, exposed cracks. References to previous climbers, in particular English craftsmen, are numerous.

The longest chapter, covering fifty pages, describes climbs on the Italian face of the Monarch. There are vivid accounts of the arduous and risky traverse of the Brenva col and the ascent of the Aiguille Blanche on which Jacques de L epiney made his ninth bivouac. Apart from technical excellence of the writing in which the volume abounds, there are attractive personal touches such as "the bearing of Lagarde (on the last-mentioned climb) emitting a halo of energy and sane boldness," and of Jacques, after being lifted by an electric discharge on the summit ar ete of Mont Blanc, sliding down a couloir and owing his salvation to a rope which had been luckily wound around a rock. His ice-axe, crampons and rucksack disappeared forever. Safety had to be sought by lying flat on the snow; a not unusual experience, which along with nights spent at exposed elevations, raises the question, whether one really climbs for pleasure and the enjoyment of a holiday.

The Clochers de Planereuse provided most arduous climbing for the two brothers, who found in them a problem involving extreme muscular and nervous tension and demanding all their

technical skill. After two unsuccessful attempts with other climbers, the brothers negotiated the Pointe de Lépiney. This involved another and tenth bivouac, during which they were disturbed by a fall of snow. On all their climbs *rapells* were in constant use. The Aiguille du Peigne, a magnificent climb, accomplished by the brothers and a companion by the Chamonix face and west arête, after several attempts, "offers 700 meters of one of the finest walls of the Alps." A solitary slab near the summit reduced them to seeking the aid of comrades, who had reached the top by a different route, and who pulled them up by the rope.

The Pointe Lagarde and northeast face of the Aiguille Verte involved a tremendous struggle for the experts Lagarde, de Ségogne and Tom de Lépiney. On the way back all got stuck in the treacherous snow of the bergschrund, not far above the Couvercle, and had a narrow escape from being benighted and perhaps finished.

Ice- and rock-work of the first order of difficulty were involved in reaching the Caïman-Crocodile arête and the ascent of the Aiguille du Plan by the north face. The leader, Tom de Lépiney, pays a fine tribute to the moral and intellectual qualities of his companions, de Ségogne and Lagarde: the former the gayest and safest of all, the latter "of powerful impulse, phlegmatic, and climbing with a monocle in one eye."

This book will be enjoyed by all who have climbed in the Mont Blanc district. The translation appears to be accurate, but occasionally rather too literal. Recognizing that mountaineering in Europe has necessarily narrowed its field, and that whereas the aim of explorers was, in the first instance, to reach the highest points by any, and usually the easiest routes, the aim now is to vanquish the peaks by the hardest ones, the authors oppose the view that this must, of necessity, lead to a diminution of esthetic enjoyment in climbing. "Quite on the contrary, we believe with Mummery that the most difficult walls are often the most beautiful, and that it is from near at hand that they should be seen; we are convinced that the impression of beauty derived from a mountain is closely connected with the efforts accomplished in conquering it" (p. 153). But does the infinite variety of emotions and views which succeed one another during the course of an ascent always heighten our receptivity for esthetic impressions?

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