

AFTER THE ACCIDENT.*

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The day may be stormy and everybody roped and cautious, or it may be a pleasant sunny afternoon, with everybody full of the joy of life. More often the climbers are tired or scrambling on easy ground, with tension relaxed and caution consequently gone to the winds. Whenever it happens the bolt comes from the blue; and a bigger problem in mountaineering faces the party.

(It will hereafter be presumed that the injured man needs carrying to the valley).

A definite line of action must calmly be decided upon. No false sentiment of humanitarianism, of which we read in books of mountain instruction, should disturb the main thought that whatever we do *a connection with the valley must be maintained*. The safety of the member, or members, chosen to run for help is of infinitely greater importance to the damaged climber than is his mental or physical comfort. I say this ruthlessly after long deliberation.

With a party of two, and perhaps when there is a weak third member, if the valley connection is endangered by attempting to reach the injured man to make him happy, or even secure, no such attempt should be made. If he can be reached he must always be tied to a belay. Since the leader (and probably the best climber) may be injured, it may be necessary in a party of three for the two sound members to leave him and to continue together to save him. Unorthodox, inhuman and callous though it may seem, the life and limbs of the messenger should be considered before our fallen friend. Of this the history of mountain accidents supplies ample proof. But this will never be any excuse for not attending to a damaged climber easily accessible to the party. Even so, time must not be lost: speed in bringing succour—the succour of equipment, heat, and painless oblivion—is of greater import than is rapidity in moving him to the valley afterwards. If I were the injured man I would in all cases selfishly demand everything to make me comfortable—food, drink, and clothing.

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The swiftest of the party would descend to the valley, the most sympathetic and the cheeriest would remain. But they would remain to work: to comfort the patient (for such the climber has become); to anticipate the arrival of the transport by building shelters for primus stoves, fetching water, reconnoitring or making a route, or doing whatever their ingenuity suggests to them. The swift messenger to the valley, using his own judgment, need not spare himself with the thought that he has to perform a further deed of heroism by reascending the mountain. His work will be done and he should be at the last gasp, *if so his judgment decides*, when he has told his story to the valley. Naturally, if he considers it essential that he should act as guide to the rescue party, he will spare himself; but a life may depend on his speed.

The whole valley should be roused. Even if only a single man is injured, it should not be his friends only who have the chance of coming to the rescue. Never can there be too much help. And if any of us be in the valley, however unsympathetic we may be with the damaged party, it is on our own conscience if we do not offer our assistance.

The proper man will automatically become, or be appointed, leader: he may not be the best mountaineer. He will have the valley ransacked for equipment, for the best stretcher, for medical haversacks, hot-water-producing equipment, food and clothing for the bearers as well as the patient. The number of bearers required to bring a man off the rocks is usually underestimated. The rescue party, fully equipped, should not feel distressed if they find on reaching the patient that they have been called out in such large numbers unnecessarily. The leader may decide on a supporting party to leave at a later time, after food and sleep, and *their* leader will be appointed. He will detail one of the supporting party, or a person useless on the mountain but intelligent in the valley, to communicate with the ambulance headquarters and perhaps a doctor, and with the injured man's relatives, because in our thoughts the friends will come next to the patient. Probably it will be decided that the messenger from above shall not describe the accident to the Press whilst he is in a condition of anxiety.

The ambulance should be instructed to proceed to, and to wait at, the nearest possible point to the site of the accident; this may not be in our valley. For example, all climbers injured

on Pillar should be taken to Ennerdale—motor cars may be sent round from Wasdale. An ambulance brought unnecessarily need never be a matter for regret.

The individual members of the rescue party should insist that neither the leader nor an accompanying doctor do hard manual work, except in an emergency. The leader must keep his mind clear and calm, and see that others do their appointed jobs. Those who know most about first-aid, and possibly least about mountaineering, should be lowered on to the ledge on which the man may be lying. Every endeavour must be made to take the stretcher to the man, and not to hoist or lower the man to the stretcher. More lasting damage has been caused by the rescuers than by the mountain itself.

By this time the primus will be in action. Plenty of hot water to get the man warm, and if necessary for him to drink, should be prepared before he is ready to receive it. Heat and freedom from pain are more essential than speed. Morphia is usually essential if a man is to be free from pain. Pain produces shock, and the movement to the valley should be for him a relief and not an agony. If he has pain, something must be done to relieve him. To repeat, it is usually pain and cold that kill, if a man recovers from the immediate effects of the fall.

His wounds should simply be painted with iodine and covered. Any bleeding will usually have been stopped already by plugging, or by a handkerchief or a rope tourniquet. A fractured arm should be splinted and bandaged to the body. A fractured leg should have been so immobilized by a Thomas's splint, according to the instructions in the haversack, that even violent movement will not cause pain. If there has been the possibility of a fractured spine, as may be even remotely suggested by pain in the back, numbness, or weakness of the legs, he should be rolled at the very beginning with infinite gentleness onto his face and placed on the stretcher. He can be fed with anything hot, but large quantities of sugar and water are best of all. Alcohol may be necessary in extreme cases, but it is rarely advisable until he is within one hour of the ambulance. Continue to keep him warm and free from pain.

When in the ambulance it would be better to stop at the first doctor's house to see how far he can be transported. Generally speaking, an injury *above* the waist is better taken to the nearest

local hospital. An injured spine or fractured lower limb (that is, an injury *below* the waist) is better moved to a big general hospital in a large city, where the trouble can be treated from beginning to end by the specialist. And remember that recovery may take months,

Then our work is ended, but our troubles begin. We have to think of the world. Our actions from the moment that the accident occurred will be open to criticism, and we must expect it and put up with it. In our duty we should communicate with the Press, by telephone or otherwise, a statement which has previously been put on paper after full consideration.

The relatives, who perhaps will be most critical of all, must be kept fully informed; and if the accident has proved fatal, we must give full and open evidence to the Coroner. We should remember that it is his duty to find the cause of death, to decide as to whether or not it was accidental, and to search for negligence on the part of anybody. It will not be our concern to explain to the jury how that accident might have been avoided: it will be obvious to them that a mishap could easily have been avoided by taking an easier route, by more care on the part of the victim, or by walking the valleys instead of climbing the mountains. We should not express our unconsidered opinions to anybody, lest we spread dubious rumours, which may cause unhappiness to any one concerned, or cast aspersions on our sport.

We should endeavour to draw a moral from each accident, so that the technique of mountaineering may be advanced and mountaineering may be made safer for those who follow us.