

Northern Messenger

VOLUME XXXIV., No. 11.

MONTREAL, MARCH 17, 1899.

30 Cts. Per An. Post-Paid.

The Battle of the Clouds.

ON THE RIFFLEBERG IN A TEMPEST.

(Dr. F. E. Clark in 'Silver Link.')

One day in the holiday season three Americans might have been seen starting out from Zermatt, about eight o'clock in the morning, with stout alpenstosks and their inevitable Baedeker. They had been anxiously scanning the clouds and studying the mer-

out above, radiant in the sunlight. This was discouraging, but the Breithorn shone resplendent, without a cloud on her vast white bosom; the Weisshorn, too, was visible, from head to heels; Castor and Pollux, like two gigantic good-natured twins (each rises to an altitude of about 13,000 feet), beckoned us on; mighty Lysskamm promised a good day; and so we started.

In spite of Mark Twain's chaff, the Riffelalp is a very respectable hill; even for Switzerland. Up, up, we climbed, the zigzags

majestic grew that mighty mass of rock and snow.

We made our way past the old church where are buried two of the rash climbers who first tried, in 1865, to learn the secrets of the Matterhorn; over the bridge that spans the roaring Visp just set free from the icy fetters of the glacier; through the woods of spruce and hard pine, until, after two hours of tolerably hard climbing, we came to the Riffelalp hotel, one of the splendid hostelries that the canny Swiss have planted on every coign of vantage in their picturesque domain.

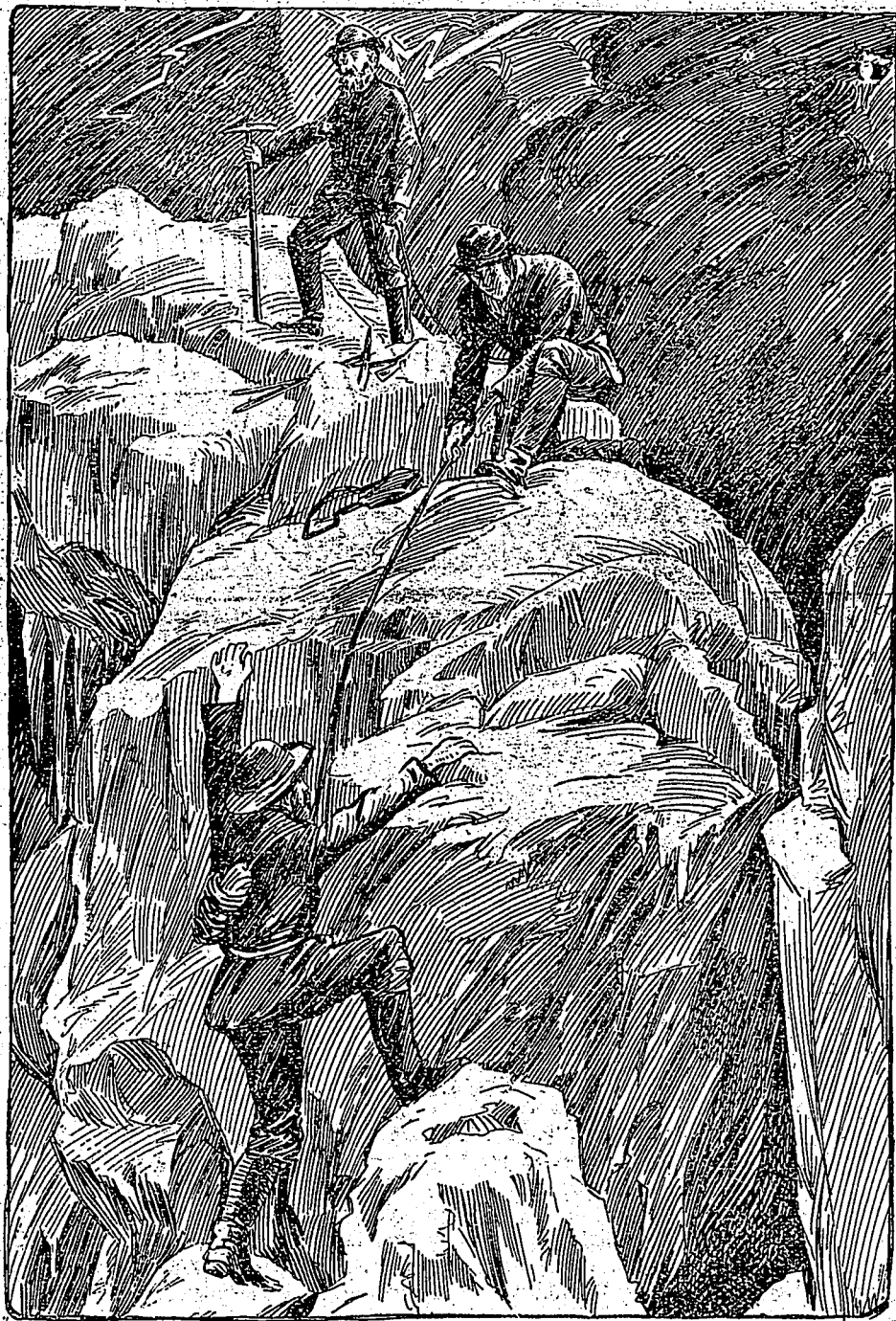
We press on more rapidly, for the clouds are coming down lower and lower on Mont Cervin, as the French call the Matterhorn. Not only his head, but his shoulders, his trunk, his hips, are covered now. Even the lower peaks put on their hoods; the wind rises and howls around our defenceless heads, as if it would blow us from the insecure ledge of rock around which we are trying to make our way, for we are far above the tree-line now. The rain begins to patter down; and as we get higher it turns to pellets of hail, which cut our faces and hands like minute bullets shot from an invisible catapult. But here we are at last, just as the storm begins in good earnest, at the Riffelhaus, another famous hotel, and one of the highest in all the Alps. Most grateful, too, is the warm fire and good cheer within.

From behind the ample vestibule, screened by glass on all sides, we watch the gathering tempest. Great billowy masses of storm-laden cloud sweep up from the Zermatt valley on the one side, and from the Zmutt valley on the other, while down from every titanic mountain peak other battalions of clouds rush to meet them. The Matterhorn wholly disappears from view; Monte Rosa vanishes behind her veil; even white-breasted Breithorn, nearest of all, is suddenly blotted out, as if it had never existed. All the world is without form and void. Chaos reigns supreme.

Louder and louder the demons of the air howl and shriek around us, but we can laugh at them behind the thick walls of our stone fortress. They cannot make it quiver. The rains descend and the floods come, and they beat upon that house; but it falls not. Then the snow drives down from the top of the highest Alps, where it has its perpetual home. A whitish tinge is given to the sombre cloud, and unfortunate tourists, who had set out for distant peaks before the storm arose, begin to struggle into the hotel by twos and threes, their faces looking red and parboiled by the snowy blast, and their coats covered with Nature's ermine.

Thus for four hours the storm rages, growing each moment more furious, and the cloud in which we are wrapped grows denser and blacker; when, look! look! by some invisible hand, in a single instant of time, quicker than on a mimic stage a curtain could be rolled up, the cloud curtain is rolled away, and in majestic splendor the Matterhorn and all his magnificent brethren of Valais shine out flawless, speckless, immaculately grand.

Below surge the baffled clouds, which the north wind is driving before him, filling the valleys, piling thick and deep upon the Gornier Glacier below. At once we started for the



A PERILOUS MOMENT ON THE ALPS.

curry, and though both insisted on going down, the one over the highest mountain-peaks, and the other below 'variable' in the barometer tube, they determined to start.

The Matterhorn, to be sure, persistently kept on his cap of clouds, most impolitely, considering the many tourists that had come to do him reverence that day. Monte Rosa was tipped with a cloud-fleck too, or rather wore around her neck a gauzy scarf such as, I believe, ladies used very appropriately to call a 'cloud,' while her silvery head peered

ever growing steeper and stonier, and the views ever more magnificent as each turn revealed some new glory. But always the Lion of Zermatt, the mighty Matterhorn was in our eye. We could not get away from it. Turn which way we would, it seemed to dominate the landscape. Like a mighty cathedral tower, fifteen thousand feet high, built by God of solid rock, we could seem to feel its presence even when we did not actually see it; and the higher we won our way up the Riffelberg, the more stupendous and