

AN EXPERIENCE AND A LESSON.

ON Friday, March 30, a party consisting of twelve ladies and six gentlemen left Crianlarich about 9.30 a.m. and climbed Cruach Ardrain (3,428 ft.) by the easy route over the Grey Heights. The summit was reached in mist, visibility about 50 yards, and a fresh breeze, with a temperature below freezing point, was sweeping over the ridge from the East. From the summit there is a steep descent of about 600 feet to the Stob Garbh Col. This descent, although requiring care, presents no difficulty to an experienced mountaineering party taking proper precautions. In the present case some of the party were not properly equipped. After a short discussion on the advisability of proceeding, it was decided to descend the slope, this decision being influenced by the fact that steps appeared to have been cut down the slope by some previous climbers, thus lessening the labour of step-cutting. The party roped up on four separate ropes, the most experienced members being distributed between the different parties. It was soon found that the steps seen in the snow only descended a short distance and, while the leader had to cut steps, the remainder, inactive behind, suffered considerably from cold. One roped party of four returned to the summit after a very short descent, and a second party of four also wisely returned, after descending about half way. Both of these parties experienced slips, happily without serious consequences. The leading party of five were about half down the slope when the party of four who had followed them swept past out of control and disappeared in the mist below. It appeared later that the leader had slipped out of the steps, the remainder of the party had not been anchored properly, and all were precipitated down the slope, a distance of possibly 250 feet. The remaining party, after cutting down for about 20 minutes, came on the others lying on the snow and immediately attended to them. Two had badly cut heads, one a badly bruised shoulder which was at first

thought to be dislocated, but beyond some bruises and scratched hands the fourth had escaped injury. All were suffering from shock but very pluckily faced the return to Crianlarich under the guidance of their rescuers, and there received the kindly attention of Mrs. Stuart and her assistants.

Enquiry brought forth the following facts:—The party who slipped were led by two ladies, equipped only with walking-sticks. They were, of course, following in the steps cut by a preceding party, but had little means of repairing the steps when damaged. The third on the rope was a lady equipped with axe, but only anchored by the pick of the axe. The last on the rope was a gentleman, with only two previous snow climbs to his credit, anchored with the shaft of his axe in the snow. The rope was not taut between the members of the party and the rear man on the rope had difficulty in getting his axe properly anchored. It is obvious that the party was not strong enough for the work in hand and should have turned back when the difficulties of the slope were realised. Under the then existing conditions, all members of the party should have been equipped with axes, or a minimum of two axes between the four, the other two having stout, spiked sticks of strength equal to an axe shaft. Only one member should be descending at a time, the others having the shaft of the axe deep in the snow, slightly above the position in which they are standing, and with the rope leading to the next below passed round the back of the axe shaft close down to the snow. The rope at all times must be kept taut between the parties. If the depth or nature of snow did not permit of the axe shaft being properly driven into the slope for anchoring, there was nothing to be done but to retreat, more especially as the mist hid all view of the nature of the ground in front. Although unfortunate enough for the parties concerned, it is matter for congratulation that the consequences were not more serious.—W. M.