RAYMOND BICKNELL.

(1875–1927.)

RAYMOND BICKNELL was born on January 3, 1875, and was educated at Wellington College and at Christ's College, Cambridge. After some years of land agency he entered the employment of the Newcastle Breweries, and in 1916 became a Director of that Company. Not long after leaving Cambridge he married Miss Phillis Lovibond, who shared and encouraged his enthusiasm for the mountains.

Norway first attracted him, and while still an undergraduate he had in the course of two summers climbed a number of Norwegian peaks. In 1897 he had a most successful season, during which he made the first ascent of Mjölnir by its S.W. side (previously descended by Slingsby), the first ascent of the N. ridge of Store Midtmaradalstind (this is still known as Bicknell's route), and one of the earliest traverses of Store Skagastolstind. Then followed ten years during which he could not climb, but in 1908, 1909, and 1911 he was back in Norway. Hitherto he had climbed with Ole Berge or any other guide whom he could pick up, but from 1908 onwards down to 1924 he climbed guideless and as leader of his party. By the end of 1911 he had acquired a knowledge of the Jotunheim which could be rivalled by few and a considerable experience of neighbouring districts. The most remarkable feat of these years, perhaps of his whole career, was the first ascent of the gully between Manden and Kjaerringen, in the course of which he was cutting steps in hard ice continuously for over nine hours.

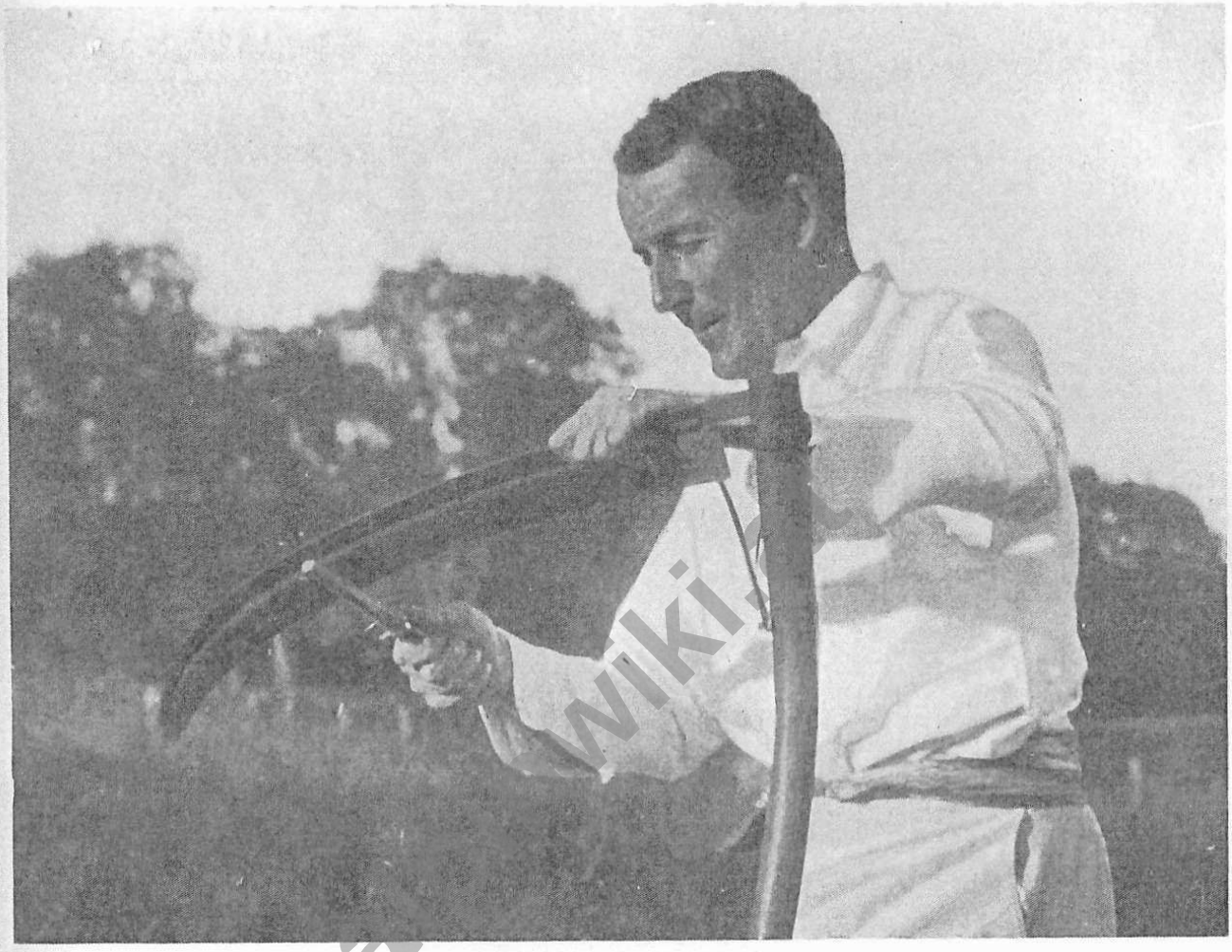
In 1912 he went for the first time to the Alps, and he was so impressed by them and by the more complicated problems of their ascent that he never again returned to Norway. His first Alpine season was spent in the Mont Blanc district, but the weather was so bad that even the ordinary climbs presented conspicuous difficulties.

Next year was better and he made what is believed to be the second ascent of the N. face of the Plan by M. Fontaine's route and found the N.W. ridge of the Ober-Gabelhorn in a condition that gave full play to his icemanship. From this period onwards he went more and more frequently to the Lake District, which could be reached easily from his home, and also made occasional visits to North Wales. He soon became very familiar with the difficult rock-climbing of these districts.

In the early part of the war he was over age for military service, but when the age limit was raised he at once obtained a Commission in a special service battalion of the Royal Marines. From the Armistice to 1924 every summer found him in the Alps. In these years he was at the height of his powers and climbed a large number of the great peaks of the Mont Blanc district, the Oberland, the Valais, the Dauphiné, and the Graians. The season of 1920 was particularly successful, and included a great week during which he made the third ascent of Mont Dolent from France by the Brèche de l'Amône, descended into Italy, climbed the Grandes Jorasses, and returned to France over the Col des Grandes Jorasses. But fate was soon to restrict his physical abilities. In the winter of 1924–5 he all but succumbed first to typhoid, then to appendicitis; phlebitis followed, and for a time it seemed probable that serious mountaineering would not in future be possible for him. In 1926, however, he was again in the Alps, but this time with a guide. Though still somewhat lame he traversed the High Level route and succeeded in ascending some big peaks. In 1927, again with a guide, he crossed a number of passes and peaks from Saas to the Dauphiné and found that his old powers were rapidly returning. He had been going so well that when after a month his guide had to return home he felt himself strong enough to lead his party up the S. Aiguille d'Arves. To those who have climbed with him it must be hardly credible that he can have fallen for any other reason than some sudden physical failure resulting from his illnesses of 1925.

He was elected to the Alpine Club in 1911, before he had ever been to the Alps. From 1920 to 1923 he was a member of the Committee, where his services were of great value, and in 1926 the Club elected him to the Vice-Presidency. In addition to occasional notes he contributed to the ALPINE JOURNAL two papers on Norway, entitled 'Two Norwegian Couloirs' (vol. **25**), and 'The Horunger' (vol. **34**), which every climber contemplating a first visit to Norway should read, and three papers on his Alpine experiences, 'The North-West Ridge of the Ober-Gabelhorn' (vol. **28**), 'Mont Dolent and the Col des Grandes Jorasses' (vol. **33**), and 'The Jungfrau from the Wengern Alp, Schalligrat, and other climbs in 1923' (vol. **36**).

Mountaineering was the dominating passion of his life. When



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When these were impracticable he would climb lesser mountains or preferably cross easy cols, for he never liked to tie himself to one centre. When conditions were too bad even for these he would walk over grass passes in rain or snow. When he could not get to the Alps he would go to the Lakes or North Wales. For single days he would go to the Northumbrian hills and moors. No one has more ardently sought the delight of the hard-won ascent, but to him the mountains were not a mere glorified gymnasium. In bad weather as in good he loved their form and colour, the slowly changing perspectives of the long hill walk as well as the near detail of clean-cut slab or delicately moulded snow.

He was in every sense a great mountaineer. Before each season he would plan carefully the climbs he proposed to make and familiarize himself with their history (it was indeed for this purpose that he compiled the index to the later volumes of the ALPINE JOURNAL which is shortly to be utilized by the Club). He was a born leader, and in the general plan of campaign as well as in the actual working out of each ascent his friends always followed him readily—even when his arrangements involved such inconveniences as a bivouac without special equipment on the Schallijoch or the ascent of a 4000 metre peak as a training climb. The efficiency which brought him such success in his career was noticeable in his management of the details of the night in the hut and of the early morning start. He had the temperament and the skill of the great master of mountain craft. While his massive build militated against his being in quite the first rank of rock-climbers, there can have been few amateurs who were his equals on ice or as all-round mountaineers. No one who has ever seen it can forget the sight of his purposeful back as with the short pick of his antiquated axe he would cut his way up some formidable ice-slope, or the resourceful caution with which in storm and gathering darkness he would steer his party into safety. The hard common sense which was such a conspicuous feature of his character enabled him to weigh chances and risks in a just balance, and often to snatch a victory where others might have been deterred by apparent rather than real difficulty or by the loudly announced sentiments of their predecessors. For such laurels as fall to the mountaineer he had nothing but contempt, especially when those laurels were earned by expeditions where the dangers were outside the climber's control, or, to use his own words, by ' those mistakes which it has now become the fashion to classify as variations ' on great routes.

But beyond this Raymond Bicknell was an original and dominating personality, at once masterful and lovable. He had supreme qualities, a courage to think out his own opinions and to abide by

spiritual—so much so that he seemed to many of us to be almost a permanent part of the universe. Whatever he did he did with his might, whether it were the climbing of a mountain, or the study and photography of medieval architecture, or the organization of a week-end camp with his family on the Cheviot, or even the driving of a motor-car.

Mountaineering no longer stands in need of defence or justification. We know that its risks are small, infinitesimal when compared with the reward it offers. But now here, now there, the great mountains exact their price. In Raymond Bicknell we recognize the essential good, developed year after year by the toil, the struggle, the danger, the beauty of the hills. The foreknowledge that from him some day the price was to be exacted would, we believe, have caused him no hesitation, have drawn from him no complaint. To us remain the memory and the regret.

C. A. E.