

THE MONTE DI SCERSCEN FROM THE SCERSCEN GLACIER.

By B. WAINEWRIGHT.

(Read before the Alpine Club, April 5, 1887.)

FOR the last fifteen years or more—in fact, ever since I began to climb—I have usually spent part at least of my summer holiday in the Engadine. I am aware that the ‘happy valley’ is not much in favour with members of this Club; nor is this altogether to be wondered at. First there is the long journey to get there, and then the difficulty of reaching any other climbing centre from thence; to which may be added the absurdly high tariffs and the scarcity of reliable local guides. Last, but by no means least, comes the uncongeniality of the life there in vogue to the hardy and perhaps somewhat ascetic mind of the orthodox mountaineer. It is true that one hears vague rumours of some of our most shining lights, having so far fallen from grace as to carry *pâté de foie gras* and Christmas pudding up well-nigh inaccessible rocks, or to bask in the smiles of beauty after the toils and perils of Mont Blanc, their features glowing with triumph at the memory of the cannon’s roar which announced their victory, and perhaps also from the genial influence of the bottle or bottles of ‘Bouvier.’ However, putting these scandals aside, there is assuredly a strong feeling amongst us that lawn tennis, dances, evening dress, and theatrical performances are hardly what one either expects or wishes for in the solemn presence of the everlasting hills.

When I first knew the Engadine some, if not all, of these uncongenial elements were present; but I am sorry to say that each year adds to them. New hôtels arise; the roads are more and more thronged with *Einspänner*, omnibuses, and even private carriages; lawn-tennis rackets are at least as common as alpenstocks, and some of the most beautiful walks amongst the pines are disgraced by refreshment booths and skittle grounds. Still all these things are, I fear, the inevitable accompaniments of popularity in any Swiss district; and what I wish to maintain is that the mountains themselves, at least the more difficult of them, have escaped vulgarising as well as, or better perhaps, than those of Zermatt, whilst their surroundings are certainly no more incongruous than those of the Chamonix district or the Oberland. I think, then, that the mountains of this range have been most unfairly depreciated; being little climbed, they are

thought not worth climbing. This is far from being the case, however, as I believe anyone will admit who takes the trouble to go and try for himself. Disparaging as the reflections are that are constantly cast upon this much maligned group, it is curious to note how few of the harder expeditions have been repeated. The Crast' Agüzza, a first-rate rock-climb, is scarcely ever attacked. The Güssfeldt Sattel has, I believe, never been crossed by English mountaineers. The Bernina Scharte has not been traversed by any native-born member of this Club, nor has the ascent of Piz Roseg from the Sella pass been repeated, whilst the Monte di Scerscen, about which I have the honour of addressing you to-night, had, previously to our attack on it last summer, only been ascended by three persons—namely, Herr Güssfeldt, Professor Minnigerode, and Mr. Williams—who all took the same route from the Tschierva glacier. Hoping that these remarks may stimulate the curiosity of some members looking out for interesting and certainly not hackneyed climbing, I will now pass to a short description of the geography of the Scerscen and its surroundings.

The Monte di Scerscen, as many members of this Club are doubtless aware, lies to the south-west of Piz Bernina, of which peak it might almost be considered as a large spur, and is separated from the Piz Roseg on the west by the steep ice-wall which has received the name of the Güssfeldt Sattel. Starting from Piz Morteratsch, a magnificent semicircle of peaks embrace the Tschierva glacier, in the following order, from north to west: first Piz Morteratsch itself, next Piz Bernina, then Monte di Scerscen, and finally Piz Roseg. Between Piz Morteratsch and Piz Bernina lies the Fourcla Prievlusa, from which a snow arête stretches to the notch known as the Bernina Scharte. Passing from Piz Bernina towards the Monte di Scerscen there is first a rather narrow but nearly level snow arête which ends in a shoulder, to which I shall have to allude presently, then rather a steep dip leads to a snow Sattel, the same that Mr. Williams reached from the Tschierva glacier. From this point an exceedingly narrow and jagged ridge runs to the highest peak of the Monte di Scerscen. From the shoulder of Piz Bernina, which I mentioned a moment ago, and which marks the junction of the main Roseg-Zupo arête with the great northern spur on which is Piz Bernina, a snow arête descends on the east towards the Crast' Agüzza, running nearly parallel to the arête by which the Bernina is usually ascended, and reaches the upper névé of the Morteratsch glacier, just at the top of

the Crast' Agüzza Sattel, which connects the Morteratsch and Scerscen glaciers. I must crave your indulgence for this somewhat tedious description and now proceed to tell my story.

For some years past I have wished to try the Scerscen from the Italian side, as it was one of the few things that still remained unattempted in this district. I had examined a way which I thought was practicable, but would prove difficult. None of the guides of the place, however, seemed very eager to try it, as the route, from the Tschierva glacier, seems to have given them a decided dislike to the mountain, and most of them thought that the other side would prove still more formidable. But last year Messrs. C. C. Branch and E. T. Garwood and myself talked over the thing and decided to attempt it, and Branch made the suggestion that we should also cross the very long arête leading from it to the Bernina. We examined this arête with glasses from the slopes of the Fourcla di Surlei and thought we could probably manage all except one place, where a drop of a hundred feet or more, which looked quite sheer, promised to prove a serious if not an insuperable obstacle. We thought, however, that this might be got over by means of a long rope, or possibly by turning it on the opposite side. It was settled then that we should make the attempt; but unfortunately delay after delay occurred, and finally Branch was obliged to leave. Garwood still remained, and, as we had climbed Piz Roseg together as well as doing a good deal of scrambling without guides, we knew something of one another's powers. But when we tried to secure guides we found it far from an easy matter. Hans Grass was engaged, and every other guide whom we asked to go spoke gloomily about a wife and family, and ended by flatly refusing to have anything to do with the expedition, with the single exception of a youth of nineteen named Schnitzler, who was willing to go as porter. In this dilemma M. Lionel Dècle, who was staying at the Kulm at St. Moritz, came to our assistance and kindly offered me his guide, Johann von Bergen, of Meiringen. I at once gratefully accepted his offer, which seemed to come in the nick of time to smooth away our difficulties. But another disappointment awaited us. The next day I crossed the Capütschin pass to Sils with Dècle, and on the way down the Fex glacier Von Bergen bruised his leg. This bruise proved very unlucky, as instead of coming to Pontresina next morning, as he had engaged to do, to make a start for the

Scerscen, he failed to put in an appearance ; so that Garwood and I waited about all day for him, to the ill-concealed delight of the local guides.

At last, finding this style of thing unbearable, I set off for St. Moritz in an *Einspänner*. We had not got far from Pontresina before one of the wheels came off—a very common occurrence, but particularly annoying at this moment. I had to return to the Krone in no very amiable frame of mind, and there found a telegram from Dècle to say that Von Bergen's leg was too bad for him to come. All seemed over with our expedition ; but the name of an Oberlander had done its work, and Martin Schocher and Schnitzler offered to go with us. So the next morning Garwood and I, with Schocher and Schnitzler, left Pontresina at 3 A.M. and drove up the Roseg valley as far as the Restaurant. We then went up the Roseg glacier, made our way through the séracs, and crossing the Sella pass reached the Scerscen glacier. We next bore to the left until we reached a spot nearly under the Crast' Agüzza Sattel. Here we made a halt of about two hours, in the hope of being able to reconnoitre our peak. In this, however, we failed ; for, although the day was fine, our particular mountain remained provokingly in cloud all the time. So we gave it up, and turning to our right descended the glacier and then some rather steep rocks to the Scerscen Hütte. In coming down these said rocks, being oppressed by the weight of a heavy knapsack, and in anything but first-rate training, I disgraced myself, and indeed nearly broke my neck ; for taking hold of a firm-looking rock, and trusting to it without trying it first, I dislodged and very nearly followed it.

This clumsy performance of mine made a deep impression on Schocher ; for when we reached the hut Garwood overheard him talking to Schnitzler in a very lugubrious tone, and asked him if he thought we should fail. He answered, ' Well, the mountain is very difficult. I know nothing of your climbing, and as to Mr. Wainewright, he is not nearly so good as I expected.' This was not inspiring, and a careful survey of the rocks we were to attack next day through the telescope did not improve our opinion of them. The mist had now cleared off and the face of the Scerscen seemed an unbroken wall, steep, smooth, and forbidding.

Still I have been so often deceived by looking at rocks thus that I tried to cheer myself and the others by representing how little you can really tell about such places till you get there, and also by pointing out that that side of

the Roseg which I had actually crossed looked as bad or worse.

Nevertheless the evening passed gloomily. Heavy rain came on, and we retired into the hut. There was no water near, and the unfortunate Schnitzler was obliged to make an expedition of half an hour in the rain in order to get some from the glacier. The surroundings inside the hut were also depressing. There were few and dirty blankets, and on the wall hung a tablet to the memory of poor Marinelli, who had persuaded the Italian Alpine Club to build the hut, for the purpose of climbing the peaks of this range from the Italian side, and who perished, with Ferdinand Imseng, in their attempt on Monte Rosa from Macugnaga.

I certainly thought much of him during a sleepless night in this wretched hut, especially as I had seen him at Pontresina just before his accident in the best health and spirits.

With the morning came the necessity for exertion, and it was hailed with pleasure both by Garwood and myself; for I found that he also had been a prey to the gloomy thoughts suggested by the inscription on the tablet. We got up, and after the usual struggle with boots, which in my case was more severe than usual, and the stereotyped farce of attempting to breakfast, we left the hut, without any regret, at ten minutes past three, and by keeping to our right avoided the rocks, which would have been very nasty in the dark, and went straight up the glacier till we reached the foot of the Crast' Agüzza Sattel. After a short halt here we commenced the attack. Before us lay a broad ice-slope, ending on the left-hand side in a belt of rocks about one-third of the way up our peak, and extending on the right in the form of a broad but exceedingly steep slope of pure ice up to the snow *Sattel* which separates the arête of the Scerscen from the Bernina. We mounted the lower part of the ice-slope, which was rough, without difficulty, until we reached the level of the belt of rocks before mentioned. Here we encountered the bergschrund, and after an ineffectual attempt to cross it Schocher turned to the left and tried to climb the rocks. These proved steep and glazed with ice, and it was not until we had tried them at several points, and made a long and rather disagreeable traverse of the ice-slope below them, that we succeeded in reaching a broad terrace of rock above the schrund. (Time, 6.15 A.M.) We now saw that we had made a mistake, as by keeping to the right we might have easily turned the schrund and saved at least half an hour and much scrambling. Then turning our

eyes on our peak we at once realised with equal surprise and satisfaction that we had apparently succeeded, as far as reaching the top was concerned. This side of the Scerscen is a rock face broken into a series of rough and narrow ledges covered with loose stones. Our chief difficulty, in fact, here was the rottenness of the rock, which came away in large pieces and required a good deal of care. One incident occurred. Schocher was leading, I came next, then Garwood and Schnitzler last. We were on rather a steep place, and Garwood having found that two large stones were loose, informed Schnitzler of the fact. In spite of this warning he laid hold of them and promptly descended in their company, carrying Garwood after him. Fortunately Schocher and I were firmly placed and held him without much difficulty, though his posture was neither dignified nor agreeable—i.e. on his face upon the rock without any hold in particular. Meanwhile Schnitzler was groaning and crying below, and declared that he was killed (which seemed the more improbable from his saying so); at last he modified this statement and said that his foot was hurt. We tried to persuade him to come on and relieve Garwood from his unsatisfactory position, but this he declined to do in the most decided manner, and we soon found that he had taken off the rope and was trying to get up another way. In this endeavour he got stuck, and Schocher was obliged to go to the rescue and bring him up. After this all went well—Schnitzler making a good deal of fuss about his foot, but apparently walking without much inconvenience—and we reached the top at 9 A.M. (Time from hut, a little under six hours.)

There is not much top about the Scerscen. It is merely the highest part of a ridge, like the dorsal fin of a fish, and when you reach the crest you at once look almost perpendicularly down upon the Tschierva glacier. As soon as our heads appeared above the edge we heard distant jödels, which, as we afterwards found, came from old Christian Grass, who saw us from Piz Morteratsch. There was a bottle on the top with the cards of Güssfeldt and Minnigerode. We now took a moderate refreshment, but could not admire the view; for although the day was warm and the sun bright our peak was enveloped in a light mist, which prevented us seeing far. We could see our arête, however, and rejoiced in the fact that there was no wind (for it did not look the sort of arête on which one would feel comfortable in a storm). After an hour's halt we started again,

and now the tough work began. We found the ridge uniformly of the narrowest; there was often only just room to tread, and in these places we must have stood out well against the sky. At other times upright progression became impossible; and every now and then we were obliged to keep a little below the crest, with but scanty foot or hand hold, the looseness of the rock, which was as well marked as ever, greatly increasing the difficulty, as each stone had to be tested before trusting it, and we were continually sending down specimens to one or other glacier. This kind of work was varied from time to time by short stretches of snow or ice. After one nasty bit I asked Schocher if he thought it would be worse farther on? He answered, 'It cannot be worse.' After about three hours and a half of this we came to a place where we had to descend a smooth and nearly vertical rock with a crack in it, with exceedingly little hold of any kind; in fact, just like the Crast' Agüzza, but not so much of it, fortunately, as Schocher remarked. Down this we proceeded with the greatest caution, with our faces to the rock, and reached a cleft in the ridge. We now met with a part of the arête which was ice for about 30 feet, with a fine overhanging cornice. Schocher seemed inclined to cross the top of this cornice, and when Garwood suggested the danger of doing so, as it looked extremely fragile, he excitedly exclaimed something to this effect: 'Here on the mountains you must follow where I lead. I am master here.' Feeling that he was right we assented. But Schocher, having relieved his feelings by this declaration of independence, proceeded to adopt our view and cut steps across a very steep ice couloir below the cornice, which we had to cross with great care. This brought us to a little piece of the ridge composed of loose boulders piled carelessly upon one another, between which we could see the Tschierva glacier. We now again heard jödels, this time from the Scerscen glacier, far below us, and could make out a group of people, who turned out to be my brother and some friends with the guide Rauch. They had been watching us for an hour and a half with a glass, and had seen every movement distinctly. A high and smooth rock now seemed to bar our progress. Schocher scrambled up it and I followed as best I could, but had no sooner gained the top than Schocher called to me to stop, and after examining the place well declared it, with some strong language, to be impossible. We had, in fact, come to the break in the ridge, about which we had always had misgivings. Schocher and I had to return to the others, as

the drop was almost absolutely perpendicular and there was nothing to which one could attach the rope.

After a consultation we decided to attempt a traverse on the side of the Scerscen glacier. This proved one of the hardest parts of the climb and our progress was slow. The foot and hand hold was very slight, and the rocks, if possible, more crumbly than ever. We went with the utmost care; but nevertheless dislodged volley after volley of stones. We could not now see my brother's party, so jodelled after each discharge to assure them of our safety. The traverse took a long time, but at length it was over and we reached the snow Sattel, where our route joined that of Mr. Williams up the Bernina. (Time, 3 P.M.) We had thus spent five hours on the arête.

After resting a few minutes we again started and followed Mr. Williams's route as far as the shoulder of the Bernina, before described, which we reached at 3.30 P.M. Just before getting there we had to pass under a pinnacle of half melted snow, weighing about a ton or so. Schocher gave it a blow with his axe, and as it did not move we crossed below it. We just got over in time, as it fell the moment we were passed, and we certainly narrowly escaped being carried away. All that was new in the climb being now over, and as it was getting late, we agreed not to go on to the top of the Bernina, but to descend by the second snow arête to the top of the Crast' Agüzza Sattel, which we did and then went down through the Bernina ice-fall (rather a dangerous thing, by the way, in the afternoon), Schocher leading at a hand gallop, and crossed the Morteratsch glacier to the Boval hut and thence by the path to the Morteratsch restaurant, where we had a glass of wine with the guides, and then drove on to Pontresina, getting in at 9 P.M., the whole expedition taking about 18 hours.

I should like to mention that Mr. Graham, of Himalaya fame, repeated this excursion a few days later with Schocher and Gross, going on, however, to the top of the Bernina, and did it, I believe, in very much shorter time. He did not seem to consider it difficult, but he had two experienced guides (one of whom had found the way only a few days before) to himself. However in writing this account I have felt bound to give the impression produced on Garwood and myself. A first expedition is, I think, always more impressive than subsequent ones, as, when the route is known, many difficulties can be avoided and much time saved.

I wish before closing to bear testimony to the fine

climbing powers of Schocher. He is an admirable rock climber, and will make a first-rate guide when he divests himself of the idea that nothing more is wanted in a guide than in a chamois hunter.

So ended a very pleasant day; and I hope some other members may feel inclined to follow in our footsteps.

THE FIRST ASCENT OF THE HÜHNERSTOCK.

BY FREDERICK GARDINER.

WHEN my friend Mr. Coolidge, in writing to me from Dauphiné regarding our plans for a short autumn campaign in the Oberland last year (1886), proposed that we should include the ascent of a virgin peak of about 11,000 feet, I confess I wondered that any such peak should still remain in that well-worn district. As an indication to whet my curiosity, he mentioned that it is near the Pavillon Dollfuss, above the Unteraar glacier, and that it is the highest peak in the Oberland proper, east of the Gauli pass and the Wetterhörner. A short examination of the 'Alpine Journal' and of the map led me to the right conclusion, that the mountain he referred to must be the Hühnerstock.

On the 7th of July, 1886, Coolidge, with the brothers Christian and Rudolf Almer, had slept at the Dollfuss hut, intending to try this peak, but the weather was so bad next day that they could not even see the mountain, and they had to descend disconsolately to the Grimsel hospice. This piece of ill-luck was my opportunity, as otherwise I should not have had the chance of joining in what proved to be one of the most exciting and interesting ascents that I have ever made.

In 1867 or 1868 Herr G. Studer crossed a pass at the east foot of the peak, and between it and the Bächlistock, leading from the Unteraar glacier to the Gauli glacier, to which he gave the name of Hühnerthäligrat.* He casually mentioned

* *S. A. C. Jahrbuch*, 1868-9, pp. 651-8. Coolidge sends me the following note:—'Herr Studer refers to a mention of this pass by J. R. Wyss in his *Reise in das Berner Oberland*, vol. ii. p. 711 (1817—not in the French edition), who in his turn takes it from a description of the passage of the Gauli pass, close to the Ewigschneehorn, published in 1811 as a supplement to the *Berner Zeitung*. I luckily possess a copy of this latter article. It is an eight-page leaflet signed "R. St. von Z." (= R. Stettler of Zofingen), and is most interesting. It was published in 1811 by reason of the recent appearance of Herren