The Dent Blanche from the West, and the Breithorn Joch.

By O. K. WILLIAMSON.

(Read before the Alpine Club April 3, 1906.)

MY feelings to-night in bringing to your notice two expeditions which we made last summer are somewhat akin to those which might be experienced by a chaperon escorting two damsels to a dance, having indeed little fear as to the future of the elder (to whom I may liken the Dent Blanche), who is already well known, albeit she is appearing in a somewhat unusual garb; but, on the other hand, deeply anxious for the success of the younger (represented by the Breithorn Joch), seeing that the latter is making her *début*.

After spending a few days in the Lötschenthal last July, Henry Symons and I with our guides—Jean Maitre and Pierre Maurys—crossed over to Ober Steinberg, that delightful spot at the head of the Lauterbrunnen Valley, taking the Lauterbrunnen Breithorn *en route*, having as our object the reconnoitring and attack of one of the peaks between the Tschingelhorn and the Jungfrau by a new route. We then proceeded critically to examine the same with a Zeiss field-glass, but were reluctantly forced to agree with our guides that the proposed ridge was, owing to the slabbiness of its steep rocks, probably impossible.

It now clearly behoved us to find something to justify our presence here. Failing a new route up a peak, it seemed to us that an untrodden pass would be a worthy object of ambition, and scanning the ridge between the Grosshorn and Lauterbrunnen Breithorn on that glorious summer morning, my eye was arrested by a Col, that between the latter peak and the summit, 3,387 m. on the Siegfried map.* This, always provided that it could be reached from the side of the Lauterbrunnen Valley, and likewise if it should afford a means of escape on the south side, would be a new pass across the main chain of the Bernese Alps.

This idea was no sooner conceived than I discussed the matter critically with the other members of our party, with the result that they were as eager as I was to attempt the expedition, and Jean went so far as to express an opinion favourable to our chances.

* Peter Baumann informs me that this peak is locally named Zuckerstock or Zuckerstöckli.

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A brief summary of the passes across the ridge just mentioned may not be out of place. Taking them in order, from north-east to south-west, they are:—The Roththal Sattel (3,857 m.), the depression between the Roththal Horn and the Jungfrau, although it was reached simply in order to ascend the Jungfrau thence and was not crossed as a pass, was first reached from the west or Roththal side by a difficult and dangerous climb by Messrs. L. Stephen, R. J. S. Macdonald and F. Craufurd Grove, with Melchior and Jacob Anderegg and J. Bischoff in 1864. The Lauithor (3,700 m.), the gap between the Gletscherhorn and the Gespensterhorn, was first crossed in 1860 by Messrs. John Tyndall and F. Vaughan Hawkins, with Ulrich Lauener and Christian Kaufmann. These passes, especially the first-mentioned, are dangerous from avalanches. The Gletscherjoch, between the Ebnefluh and Gletscherhorn, does not seem to have been reached from the north. The Ebnefluhjoch (3,750 m.), between the Mittaghorn and the Ebnefluh, was first traversed by Messrs. J. J. Hornby and T. H. Philpott and Mr. F. Morshead, with Christian Almer, Christian Lauener and Jacob Anderegg in 1866. The work appears to have been very difficult. The Mittagjoch (3,704 m.), between the Grosshorn and Mittaghorn, was reached from the north in 1880 by Herr H. Dübi, with Fritz Fuchs and Fritz Graf. The Schmadrijoch (3,311 m.), between the Grosshorn and Lauterbrunnen Breithorn, was first crossed (from the south side) by Messrs. J. J. Hornby and T. H. Philpott with Christian Almer, Christian Lauener and Jacob Anderegg, in 1866. The descent on the north side was effected by the rocks of the Grosshorn and a steep glacier. The Wetterlücke, between the Tschingelhorn and Lauterbrunnen Breithorn (3,159 m.), was first crossed (from south to north) in 1864 by Mr. A. W. Moore, with Christian Almer and Anton Eggel. This beautiful pass is frequently traversed nowadays. Thus it will be seen that since the last of these passes was crossed for the first time, a quarter of a century had elapsed.

In reading the accounts of first ascents by mountaineers of a past generation, one is struck by the extraordinary preference exhibited for avalanche-swept couloirs over ridges. To the modern climber this is hard to understand. Besides being, from the nature of things, far safer, a ridge climb would seem to be incomparably superior, as regards variety of scenery, to that on a face or in a gully.

To return to our proposed expedition. The second day following our arrival at Ober Steinberg saw us relapse into

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that condition of restive repose caused by the advent of bad weather. The same fact will serve to explain a lamentable interest in the culinary proceedings which was also observable. That evening, however, the outlook was sufficiently promising to impel us to make plans for an early start next morning. We agreed that it was not worth while to camp out, as the furthest suitable spot for this purpose that we knew of was not more than about two hours distant from Ober Steinberg.

We were awakened about 1 o'clock on the Monday morning to find doubtful conditions of weather and to the necessity of solving that most difficult problem as to whether these were good enough to make it desirable to start. This problem having been solved in a negative sense (to my secret joy), I retired to bed once more, leaving my companion to finish his breakfast and study Shakespeare. Of course, as soon as it was too late to start it became obvious that the day would be a brilliant one. This was occupied by a morning stroll and a bathe in the Oberhorn See and afterwards by a delightful walk along the hillside to Mürren. On the way back, during which Symons again insisted on having a bath in a stream, the peaks at the head of the valley and those bounding the Roththal, seen soaring above the evening mists, presented a weird and marvellously beautiful appearance, reminding us of photographs we had seen of Himalayan peaks.

The situation of Ober Steinberg, facing the great wall from which rise the peaks to the south and east, is truly a magnificent one. For this reason alone, the spot deserves to be better known. We found the Hotel Ober Steinberg, moreover, simple it is true, but comfortable. That evening we decided that there was no excuse for further sloth, that the conditions were now sufficiently good to justify our expedition, and that stern duty would necessitate our start on the following day. Although there had been nearly two days' bad weather, there was but little fresh snow to be seen on the mountains.

Our plan was not only to cross the pass, but also to ascend the Grosshorn *en route*. How absurd this idea was the sequel will show. Strolling out to have a look at the peaks after dinner with two Englishmen, who had arrived that evening, some such conversation as this took place:

'What expedition are you planning for to-morrow?' 'We think of trying the Grosshorn.' 'Which way do you attack that?' 'The natural way would be from the Schmadrijoch.'

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'What is the route to the Schmadrijoch?' The way was indicated. 'We shall look out for you on that slope at such and such a time.' Now we, of course, had not the remotest idea of going over the Schmadrijoch, neither had we the slightest intention of divulging our plans. Hence the above, perhaps, excusable deception.

About six hours later, or, to be accurate, at 2 A.M. on Wednesday, July 26, in perfect weather, the four members of our party solemnly marched out from the hotel and proceeded in single file along the narrow path leading to the Oberhorn See. I know not whether any member of our Club can honestly say that he enjoys this part of an expedition. I will confess that to say so would be, as regards myself, a 'terminological inexactitude,' and that my temper at this time of day (or night) is at its worst.

Leaving the Oberhorn See on our right, and climbing up in the dark execrable slopes of the moraine of the Breithorn glacier, we descended on to the glacier.

A few words of description will make clear our further route. Running northwards from the wall supporting the upper glacier, which itself arises from the névé immediately under the ridge extending from the Zuckerstock to the Lauterbrunnen Breithorn, is a secondary ridge of rock, which at its northern extremity (marked on the Siegfried map as 2,316 m.) falls abruptly to the Breithorn glacier. We were now exactly opposite to the end of this ridge, and our intention was to mount the glacier to the E. thereof, and finally to ascend to the secondary ridge itself, near the point where it abuts on the main wall, and so to reach the upper glacier.

Daylight was fast approaching as we halted to rope. We now diverged to the right from the Schmadrijoch route, and ascended the glacier with ease by slopes which after the commencement were quite gradual. Turning to the right we reached the col immediately S. of the highest point of the secondary ridge. It was now considered desirable to refresh the inner man. I felt in that condition of semi-moroseness, the usual result of an early morning start before one's mental and physical activities have received the stimulation of any real difficulties. We expected that the problem of the practicability of the ascent to the pass would be solved within the next few hours. Turning once more to the right, Pierre cut steps up a short and narrow couloir of snow. About this time we were first greeted by the morning sun. To the left

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of this couloir we took to easy rocks. A steep wall of rotten rock, some 20 ft. in height, now demanded careful treatment. It may, perhaps, be doubted whether experience tends to make one climb rock of this sort more quickly, although undoubtedly the experienced mountaineer will climb it far more safely than the novice. It led us up once more to a continuation southwards of our secondary ridge, which we followed without difficulty to the upper glacier. At this point we erected a stone boy. We now traversed snow slopes to the right below a conspicuous overhanging sérac, and turned sharply to the left, now proceeding in a S.E. direction towards the foot of the final slope leading up to our col. I do not remember having ever seen more impressive scenery than what greeted us hereabouts, the Breithorn being striking beyond any description. The peak as here seen rises from the glacier in a great fluted wall of quite uncompromising steepness. Consisting in the main of ice, the face is made up of shallow couloirs, separated by ribs, with here and there rocks jutting out from them. We made rapid progress, and felt considerable satisfaction at the fact that no crevasses presented any serious difficulties. The slope steepened up before we reached the bergschrund guarding the final wall that stretches between the Zuckerstock on the left and the Breithorn on the right, and we here paused to plan our final attack.

At only one spot did there appear any probability of our being able to cross the schrund, which elsewhere was of most formidable width. At the point in question it was narrow and was partly choked by snow; these advantages, however, being counterbalanced owing to the fact that the upper lip was at a considerable height vertically above the lower. The slope above was of its kind the most formidable that I have ever had the luck to climb. Of similar nature to that forming the northern face of the Breithorn, it also was of very considerable steepness. From just below the bergschrund I carefully measured the angle of the slope with a clinometer, and found that from the foot to the highest point visible, probably two-thirds or three-quarters of the distance from the foot to the top of the slope, this was exactly 65°. Above the bergschrund the slope rose for some feet in hard ice, which then gave place to more or less continuous patches of the calcareous rock of which the range here is composed. These extended upwards for the greater part of the height of the slope in a flattened, ill-defined rib. Up this we proposed to climb. Further to the left of these rocks the slope appeared to consist of bare ice, leading up to the Zuckerstock. The sun

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was now just touching the topmost rocks, but we neither saw nor heard any signs of falling rocks on this side of the pass.

We now placed ourselves on the lower lip of the bergschrund, and Pierre proceeded to climb up me, and, standing on my right shoulder, was enabled to reach the upper edge and started to cut steps in the slope above.

Mr. Dent, in his Alpine classic, 'Above the Snow-line,' speaks of the bergschrund as 'a god-send to writers on mountaineering in search of material to act as padding.' On this occasion, however, we thought fit to reverse the natural order of things, and acted as padding to the bergschrund, stowing ourselves away in its recesses and admiring the gigantic icicles dependent from its upper edge. After a time a distant 'Venez, Monsieur,' called upon us to follow, and we one at a time emerged on to the ice-slope. By the time that the last man had fairly started on the slope, Pierre had reached the lowest rocks. These we negotiated with extreme care, owing to the steepness of the slope, not that they were in themselves difficult, but they were not of the nature upon which one could place implicit reliance. Moreover they had a covering of fresh snow. A well-defined rock platform was soon reached, and from here we climbed continuously up the rib, the angle becoming less steep, till we finally emerged on the ice-slope above the rocks and ascended this for a short distance. Above us the snow covering faded away, and to avoid the bare ice we had to traverse horizontally to the left a few yards, some jutting knobs of rock affording welcome hand-hold. Owing to the excellence of the steps which Pierre was manufacturing, ample time was afforded to us here to contemplate the glorious scene around us, whilst the music of the Schmadribach Fall, thousands of feet below, was broken rhythmically by the ring of Pierre's axe. A few steps down the slope, which here consisted of snow, were taken, followed by a short further traverse, and we ascended hard snow at an angle of 65°. This soon commenced to ease off, and in a few steps our leader looked over on to the Valais side and directly after we were all together at the top of the wall which falls away to the Jägi glacier.

We had taken nearly three hours from the bergschrund, having consumed nine from Ober Steinberg, one of which had been spent in halts, and estimated the height of the final slope as about 700 ft. Owing to the almost complete absence of wind, the temperature had been ideal, although during the greater part of the time of the ascent of the ice-wall we had been in shade. What a view greeted us as we looked back!

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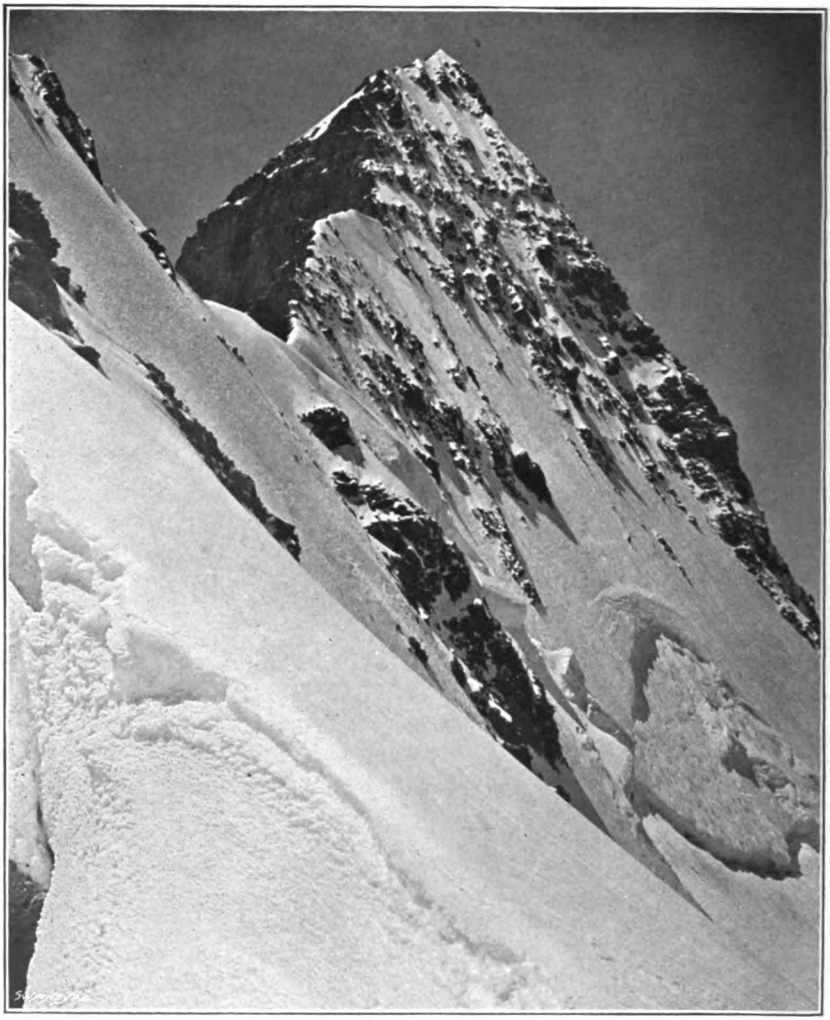

O. K. Williamson, photo. *Swan Electric Engraving Co.,*

THE LAUTERBRUNNEN BREITHORN,
FROM BREITHORN JOCH.

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and in truth we were just in the frame of mind to enjoy it. To the left was the noble Lauterbrunnen Breithorn, in the opposite direction the equally formidable northern slopes of the Grosshorn ; beyond this again, the shapely peak of the Jungfrau reared herself above the bare rocky slopes bounding the Roththal. Away to the west we recognised such old friends as the Blümlisalp, Altels and Balmhorn, and the grandeur of these peaks was enhanced by contrast with the quiet beauty of the northern view. In this direction the eye seemed to sweep the whole upper Lauterbrunnen Valley, whilst far away to the left we were able to recognise Berne. Beyond this, the plains of N. Switzerland and the Schwarzwald faded away in the blue haze of distance.

In the opposite direction across the Lötschenthal rose the Aletschhorn and Schienhorn. Beyond these some Zermatt peaks closed the vista in this direction. Looking down the slope which we had just ascended, we were greatly struck by its formidable appearance and, had we reached the col from the opposite direction, should certainly never have contemplated descending these northern slopes. The col itself is a saddle of snow a few feet in width, from which fall away southwards precipitous rocky slopes to the Jägi glacier. 'Round the strait pass, whose perilous edge shows like an evil dream.' Judging from the height of the Zuckerstock, that of the pass must be almost exactly 11,000 ft. An hour and a half passed in enjoyment, only marred by the necessary labour of photography and by the discovery that a certain porter of Ried, whom we had engaged to bring over to Ober Steinberg certain delicacies, including a tin of peaches, for our proposed expedition, had himself taken possession of them (he had returned to Ried with a friend of mine some days previously) ; and at 12.30 we started for the descent.

The direct route down to the glacier was voted out of the question. It was accordingly decided to descend obliquely to the left. Walking along the good snow of the ridge in 10 min. we reached the top of the Zuckerstock, 3,387 m., and continuing eastwards arrived at the base of a large rectangular rock tower. We now started our climb down the southern wall. The work here resembled that met with during the ascent of the Lauterbrunnen Breithorn by the ordinary route, the rocks being loose but not difficult; they were, as on the N. side, partly covered by fresh snow. Bearing on the whole slightly to the left, we, after a time, descended a gully followed by a short chimney. This gave an enjoyable scramble. Climbing down the right-hand wall of it we

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dropped upon the upper edge of a snow-slope, which was separated from the rock wall by a fissure. This slope, which was of no great height, stretched horizontally for a considerable distance, dividing the rock face into two parts.

Here I endeavoured to obtain a photograph of the curious antics exhibited by the two last members of the party, but could find no suitable spot on which to place the camera, so waited, 'lying on the snow like any other fly.' Traversing the snow-slope obliquely to the left, we now once more reached rock. This was of different character from that above, being granite or something similar, and had the further advantage of being dry and free from snow. Climbing down the slabs the angle steepened as we approached the glacier, and the climbing became most enjoyable. A point was reached where a council of war had to be held, and when (as usual on similar occasions) we had abundant opportunities for studying the *patois* of the Val d'Hérens.

It was, owing to the fact that the glacier sloped away to the east or left, desirable to strike it as high as possible in the opposite direction where the rock wall was of necessity of less height. To the right, however, there seemed to be a cut-off owing to the smooth glacier-worn rocks, and the majority decided against a chimney below us. Finally a route to the left was decided upon, and afforded the best rock-climbing of the day, reminding me forcibly of the Mont Blanc aiguilles. A ledge leading downwards, affording in the crack between it and the overhanging rock above good hand-hold, was followed, the cameras being here responsible for some gentle remonstrances. Enquiries from Jean, who was leading, as to the nature of the work below, elicited merely that monosyllabic sound of deprecatory evasiveness which is one of his distinctive characteristics. Near the lower end of this crack was a convenient resting-place where the hinder members of the party anchored themselves in turn, whilst those in front descended to the extreme end of the fissure. Swinging ourselves over a wall of rock 6 or 7 ft. high to the right, we thus reached the bergschrund. We had occupied 4 hrs. excluding halts from the pass. We now trudged rapidly down the Jägi Firn, for the crevasses gave us no difficulty as they were well bridged over, and, once more joining the Schmadrijoch route, reached the right moraine, at which we freed ourselves from the encumbrance of the rope, and descended some easy slabs to the lower glacier. Halting for photographic reasons, and in order to take a last look at our pass and the Grosshorn, we descended along the right-hand side

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of the glacier to the Lötschenthal, which we reached just about the time that 'the western waves of ebbing day roll'd o'er the glen their level way.'

Here Symons, according to his wont, took a bath in the icy Lonza, whilst the rest of us refreshed ourselves with milk. It was dark ere we reached Blatten, and the intricacies of that village were such that it was only after a prolonged rest on a tree-trunk in the 'High Street,' during which our guides, at the expense of much vernacular, succeeded in lighting the lantern, that we were able, owing to previous experience, to rescue ourselves from what might have been an unromantic end to our expedition. We then tramped steadily on to Ried, which we reached at 10.5 P.M., having occupied 20 hrs. including halts, or about 16 hrs. of actual going. An all too short night followed, owing to the necessity of packing, for we were to leave Ried early next day.

The expedition had been, owing to its great variety, to all of us one of unqualified enjoyment, and if this paper induces any members of the Club to repeat it, one principal object of its author will have been achieved. The weather had been perfect, and we had, moreover, observed no signs of falling stones.

To those who cross the pass in the future we would advise first that the pass should be crossed, as in our case, early in the season, for, not to speak of the difficulties of the final ice slope in the autumn, the Jägi glacier might present serious obstacles to those descending it late in the day. And, in the second place, that it should be taken from N. to S., for in a descent it would be extremely difficult to hit off the point of crossing of the northern bergschrund. We suggest the name Breithornjoch.

The beautiful scenery of the Lötschenthal, till now unaffected by the inroads of the modern tourist and rendered more fascinating by its prosperous villages and large cornfields, has for me a great attraction.

The Dent Blanche.—The following week we had an unsuccessful quest of a new way up the southern peak of the Dents des Bouquetins, a peak, I may parenthetically remark, of such difficulty that since its first ascent by Mr. A. G. Topham, in 1894, it does not appear to have been once climbed. Although, however, we climbed no peak, we had some remarkably fine rock scrambling. The chief incident which remains impressed on my memory was the descent of the final wall to the Italian Za-de-zan glacier, during which my companion chose that particular moment when he

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was completely immersed in a waterfall, down which lay our route, to deliver to me a carefully reasoned discourse on some important questions of the day.

A day or two later we walked round to Ferpècle, intent upon the W. ridge of the Dent Blanche at the first favourable opportunity. In driving up the Val d'Hérens the previous week we had noticed that the mountain was exceptionally 'dry,' and it was clear that many seasons might elapse before we should be again afforded another such opportunity. Jean Maître had for many years past been anxious to attack the peak by this route, and had, I believe, once confided to me a secret hope that it might become the favourite way up from the Evolena side.

I would now in a few words remind you of the various routes on this side of the mountain. The W. or Ferpècle arête of the mountain separates the extremely precipitous northern wall from the S.W. face; the latter may be considered as being divided into two parts; namely, that which falls away from the S. arête and the portion between it and the W. ridge, the second being in reality a gigantic couloir narrowing from below upwards. The south-eastern wall of this couloir is exceedingly steep, and is separated from the remaining part of the S.W. face by a well-marked rib. (On looking at the mountain from Evolena this rib cannot be distinguished from the W. arête.) This description will be clear on examining a photograph of the mountain from the Aiguille de la Za. It should also be mentioned that the W. arête does not start from the summit itself, but articulates with the short snow ridge which runs northwards from the latter. It was by a combination of the S.W. face and S. arête that the peak was first climbed in 1862 by Messrs. T. S. Kennedy and W. Wigram with J. B. Croz and a porter. The second ascent was made in 1864 by Mr. J. Finlaison with Christian Lauener and Franz Zurfluh by the S.W. face, the party having reached the foot of this at about its central point. Owing to the unsatisfactory nature of the rock the party kept dividing their attentions between ribs and gullies, and Mr. Finlaison compared the process to the dancing of a bear on hot plates. In this climb the face is either ascended direct to the top or else the S. arête is struck about 20 min. below the summit. There appears to be some risk of falling stones by this route. It was not till 1876 that Mr. F. Gardiner made the first recorded ascent by the S. arête, the route which is now usually followed. In 1884 Mrs. E. P. Jackson and Dr. K. Schulz, with Alois Pollinger and J. J.

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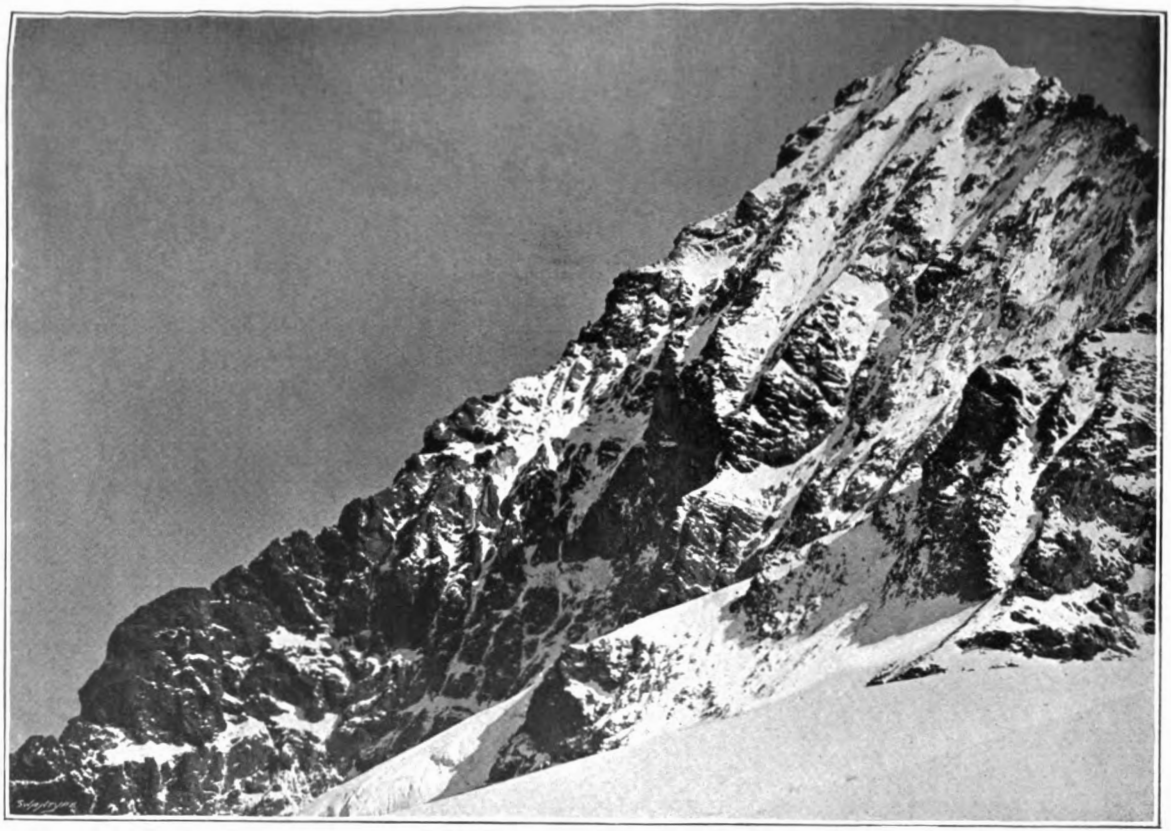

O. K. Williamson, photo. *Swan Electric Engraving Co.,*

THE DENT BLANCHE, FROM COL D'HERENS ROUTE.

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Truffer, climbed the W. arête for the first time, using the ridge for the descent.

The note in the 'Alpine Journal' states that they 'followed the W. arête in its entire length to the southern branch of the glacier de la Dent Blanche. . . . It is described as very long and difficult.'

In the 'Oe.A.-Z.'* Dr. Schulz says: 'Vom Ferpècle-Gletscher aus durch die Mitte der süd-westlichen Wand, direct zum Gipfel erstiegen . . . abstieg über den bisher noch nie betretnen westlichen Grat nach Ferpècle. Wegen bedeutender Schwierigkeiten wurde auf diesen Grat in einer Höhe von ca. 4,000 m. bivouakirt. Am 25. August war es sehr schön; am 26. früh trat Nebel und Schneesturm ein. Aufbruch, 6 h. Der ganze w. Grat wurde bis zu seiner letzten sehr steilen abfallenden Erhebung verfolgt, dann auf der s. Abdachung desselben unter grossen Schwierigkeiten abgestiegen und ein südlicher Seitenarm des Glacier de la Dent Blanche erreicht. Ferpècle, 5 h. Nachmittags.'

In the 'Mitteilungen d. D. und Oe. A.-V.' 1884, p. 291, Dr. Schulz says they descended the W. ridge 'bis zum letzten Thurm. Die Überschreitung des westlichen Grats ist sehr lang und schwierig, jedoch dem gewöhnlichen Weg über den südlichen Grat im Falle der so häufigen Vereisung desselben vorzuzeichen. Der westliche Grat hat keine vereisten Platten.'†

Alois Pollinger, senior, has kindly marked for me on photographs the route taken. This shows that the party followed the arête itself (with the exception of a short traverse on to the S. side at the scene of the 1899 accident) until they were below a steep, nearly vertical portion of the arête, near the junction of the middle and lower thirds, where they left the ridge to descend by the S. side. Of subsequent ascents and descents by this route the only ones I have heard of have been as follows: An ascent by Mr. Schintz with Alois Pollinger, senior and junior, in 1893. On this occasion the point at which the 1884 party left the ridge was reached by ascending the northern slopes. An expedition guided by Alois Pollinger, senior, of an unknown date, on which the same route as that taken by the first party was followed.

The terrible accident during the ascent of 1899, resulting in the death of Mr. O. G. Jones and three guides and the

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* 1884, p. 267.

† I am indebted to Mr. Coolidge for the references to these two accounts.

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wonderful escape of Mr. F. W. Hill, will be fresh in the memory of you all. In his account of the accident,* Mr. Hill implies that the party followed the ridge except for one traverse on to the S. side to the point where the accident occurred. He speaks of 'steep slabs broken and easy occasionally, but on the whole far too smooth,' and of places where the leader had to be pushed over an overhanging rock.

In 1904, Mr. Oppenheim and Alois Pollinger, junior, and Heinrich Pollinger descended by this route. Alois Pollinger, junior, has kindly indicated for me on photographs the routes followed on the occasion of this descent and on that of Mr. Schintz's ascent, and shows that these coincide with the route followed by the first party down to the point at which they left the ridge. I am told, though I have no details, that Mr. Eckenstein has descended the mountain by this arête.

Ferpècle is, like Ober Steinberg and Ried, 'a charming spot,' quite unspoiled as yet. Although the weather had been unsatisfactory for a few days, there was but little fresh snow to be seen on the peaks around, and August 3, the day after our arrival there, was perfect.

Our plan was to camp out under some rocks at the foot of the W. ridge and to start at daybreak the following morning. We made all our arrangements, including the engaging of a porter to accompany us as far as the sleeping-place, and 'slowly climbed the many-winding way,' soon after mid-day, reaching the bivouac before 5 in the afternoon in 3¼ hrs. This is on the S. side of a ridge of rocks known as the Rocs rouges, which stretch W. from the foot of the W. arête of the Dent Blanche, and is near the foot of the latter. It consists of a low-pitched cave. To the S. it is protected from the glacier air by a high moraine. We were quite glad to escape from the severe heat in the shelter afforded by the cave. Our route was to lie up the glacier which lies on the uppermost shelf immediately under the S.W. face of the mountain, and Pierre Maurys started to cut steps up the ice-fall, so as to save time on the morrow.

It would seem that to become an adept in the art of rock-climbing is the chief aim of the modern mountaineer, but surely proficiency in snow and ice craft is at least equally important, especially for the would-be guideless climber. Admitting that most amateurs cannot hope to be anything like equal to a good guide in the matter of step-cutting, they could do much to diminish this inferiority by a little

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xix. p. 591.

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systematic training. An hour or two spent wood-chopping during leisure hours would do much to develop the necessary muscles, or better still, why should not the Alpine Club provide, in these days of artificial ice, a frozen surface which with its solid substratum could be tilted up to any angle and thus afford to its younger and more enthusiastic members opportunities of learning and practising the art of step-cutting on slopes of all degrees of steepness?

After an excellent supper on fried bacon, we turned into our goose-down sleeping bags, the only bar to a perfect night's rest being the occasional dripping of water from the roof of the cave. Next morning, after breakfasting and packing our sleeping-bags and cooking apparatus for the porter to take back to Ferpècle, we started at 4.5 A.M. in perfect weather, and after roping ascended the glacier by gentle slopes in a S.E. direction. The slope steepened, we bore to the left, and passed rapidly under an overhanging sérac and along an ice ridge. A jump now landed us on the gently sloping névé above the ice-fall. We ascended, keeping, roughly speaking, parallel to the base of our peak, until we were almost at the level of a nearly horizontal shelf in the mountain wall, well shown in photographs, which strikes the W. arête immediately below that vertical portion to which I have alluded in the description of the first descent. After a few minutes' rest, we reached at 6.15 A.M. the rocks of our peak at the base of the gigantic couloir above-mentioned. A few minutes up easy rock brought us to the above-mentioned ledge. Fragments of rock of all sizes were scattered hereabouts, but throughout the day we saw no falling stones. We now ascended the rock wall in a direction on the whole directly upwards. Above the ledge the loose rocks rapidly disappeared and the climbing became more interesting. Zigzagging to and fro, a pretty traverse to the right round a buttress brought us to the foot of a truly sporting slab, which our leader negotiated to the right whilst we made the direct ascent. Above this a steep wall of unreliable dark grey rock, made sufficiently easy, however, by good ledges, led us to the foot of a chimney. This afforded us a splendid climb of 20 or 30 ft. in height and landed us at 8.35 A.M. in a well-defined notch * in the W. arête at no great distance to the E. of the above-mentioned vertical portion.

* This point is at the centre of the right-hand (W.) ridge in the photograph of the peak taken from the W. Pointe de Mourti, and at the junction of the middle and lower thirds of the left-hand (W.) ridge in that taken from the Col d'Hérens route.

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The terrifically steep N. face of the Dent Blanche down which we now gazed is familiar to all who have crossed the Col du Grand Cornier, and is one of the most imposing precipices in the Alps. 'The sudden deeps; where slip or fall brings swiftly crashing end.'

Here a halt for breakfast was taken. Jean now made the remark that the Dent Blanche was a particularly bad mountain to be on during bad weather; seeing that, although there was some wind, the sky was cloudless, this oracular utterance, although doubtless true generally, appeared to us not specially applicable to the present circumstances. Starting again at 9.5 we now clambered along the ridge itself, traversing for a few steps on the N. side, then following the actual crest, and then again turning to the S. side. This kind of thing continued for less than an hour, the traversing being mainly on the S. side, but always being near the actual crest. The climbing was enjoyable but not really difficult, being somewhat similar to that met with on the E. ridge of the Weisshorn. We now reached a point where we first obtained a view of the wall of rock looming several hundred feet above us which was the scene of the accident to Mr. Jones's party. Up till now the climbing had been nearly entirely on firm red rock. We now traversed, more or less horizontally, into the great couloir on our right, having for the next hour or two to negotiate slabs of friable dark grey rock. Having reached the centre of the couloir, we crossed it, and with frequent exhortations from Jean to 'aller doucement,' ascended an ill-defined rib on the side of the couloir opposite to the W. arête. On account of the steepness and smallness of the holds, great care was necessary, although the technical difficulties were not great. 'While fast I clung where treacherous stone no foothold more allowed.' The summing up of the situation, to judge from sundry remarks emanating from our senior guide, was that the locality was a 'sale endroit.' The angle steepened and small fragments of ice playfully skipped past us, going as near as possible without touching us, reminding us of a similar experience affecting a certain lean cat alluded to by the editor of the ALPINE JOURNAL in a former number. One's attention was more or less divided between the look-out for fragments from above and the more urgent need of attention to the holds. In fact, it was impossible here not to recognise painfully one's inferiority to certain extinct animals in that the back of one's head was unprovided with an eye. It was now necessary to cross the couloir again to the left

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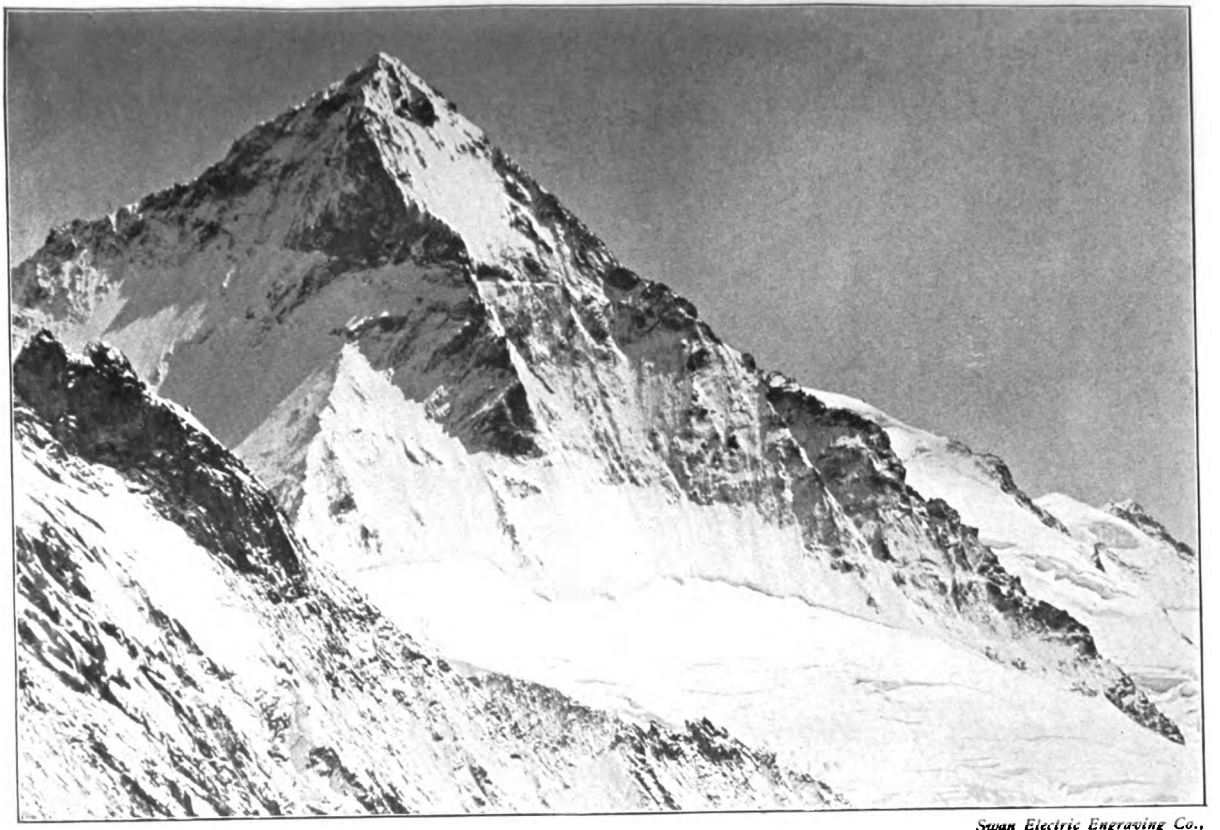

O. K. Williamson, photo. *Swan Electric Engraving Co.,*

THE DENT BLANCHE, FROM THE WEST POINTE de MOURTI

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at its narrowest point. Above and opposite to us towered the ill-omened Gendarme. The slabs here, although sound, were steeper than ever, and were wet owing to the melting of the snow above. The leader proceeded carefully to the rope's length. 'Est-ce que vous êtes solide, Pierre?' 'Non, Monsieur, mais il faut que vous viendrez,' was the reply. Thus it came about that for some minutes, whilst the whole party was on the slope, the leader could get no satisfactory anchorage. Reaching the rocks on the opposite side of the gully, we climbed straight up these and once again breathed more freely. Then leftwards a few minutes over easy rocks at a comparatively gentle angle brought us to the ridge just above the Gendarme at 11.55 A.M.

A short halt was now taken, as we felt fairly confident that, although we were still a considerable distance from the summit, all serious difficulty was past. Above this level there was a small amount of fresh snow on the mountain. We now followed the broad snow crest of the ridge itself. This was succeeded by alternate snow and rock to the right of the crest, the side of which here merges imperceptibly into the S.W. face. A steep ice-slope with some rocks jutting out from it brought us once more to easy snow and rock, by which in a few minutes we reached the short snow arête which runs northwards from the top, and walking along this at 1.49 P.M. we arrived at the summit, having occupied $1\frac{3}{4}$ hr. from the time that we passed the Gendarme, or about $8\frac{3}{4}$ hrs. actual going from the sleeping-place.

A long rest followed, during which we consumed a much-needed meal, then walked by the ordinary route down the S. arête. The slabs below the great tower were in first-class condition, and the whole descent corresponded pretty accurately with my recollections of it twelve years before. On account of the risk of falling séracs we thought it better to avoid going down by the upper glacier, which we had ascended in the morning, so tramped along the Wandfluh ridge until we reached the S. side of the point (3,912 m.). Clouds had been gradually collecting ever since mid-day, and these now treated us to some superb sunset effects behind the dark Perroc ridge.

We had, indeed, ample leisure to study the artistic side of mountaineering whilst waiting for Pierre to cut steps down the crest of an ice-ridge, which were necessary before we could reach the easy rocks leading down to the Ferpècle glacier. Down this Jean led us in the fast gathering darkness with that masterly skill which excited our admiration

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and envy, threading his way among the crevasses at a trot, although the details of the glacier were of necessity unknown to him, seeing that he had not been on it for two years. We thus reached the 'dry' glacier below just as the last gleam of daylight was vanishing. Jean's cautions to us as we stepped over a few small crevasses by lantern-light resembled the exhortations of a conductor on the 'twopenny tube.'

Right glad were we on reaching the moraine to cast off the rope. By the (to me doubtful, seeing that one of my companions effectually screened me from it) aid of the lantern we traversed the hill-side on that night of inky darkness, crossed streams which in number seemed to approach the infinite, and it occurred to me that a well-known terse saying of Mr. Mantalini's would have very inadequately expressed the situation. How interminable seemed the descent from Bricolla, and how execrable that most wretched apology for a path! To cut a long story short, however, at 12.55 A.M. on August 5, we re-entered the Hôtel du Col d'Hérens, and were soon experiencing that soundest of sleep known only to the tired mountaineer.

That same night the threats of bad weather were fulfilled, and were destined to result in a most unusually heavy fall of snow on the peaks, as we discovered during an ascent of the W. Pointe de Mourti on August 7; so we were able to congratulate ourselves on having accomplished the climb when we did, as it would probably not have been again possible any time during the succeeding fortnight.

One word as to our route. Our climb up to the point of striking the ridge was a good sound rock-climb, and we can recommend it from this point of view, although it is probable that there is at times risk from falling stones. To judge from Mr. Hill's remark that from the place where the accident occurred it would have been impossible for him to descend, the route followed by his party must be more difficult than ours up to the point where we left the ridge to make the long traverse in the couloir.

This latter part of the expedition, we feel bound to state emphatically, as will be gathered from the above description, that we are unable to recommend. It seems quite probable that the best way of turning the Gendarme during an ascent may be that adopted by Mr. Hill. During the descent I understand that the direct route over the Gendarme is taken by the aid of a spare rope.

I must not forget the guides. They worked together on all occasions admirably, and it would be hard to give Pierre

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greater praise than is implied in saying that he is a worthy pupil of his uncle, Jean Maître.

I cannot agree with those mountaineers who are content with having 'done a peak,' and would deem it a waste of time to repeat the ascent. To me the want of novelty in a second expedition is more than compensated for by the recollections called up of incidents of bygone days, linking one as they do with memories of the past; and I should be well content to spend all future climbing expeditions wandering among the rocky buttresses and over the shapely snow arêtes of the Lady of the White Tooth.

The Aiguille Blanche de Péteret.

By E. T. COMPTON.

'UNE montagne où l'on ne s'est pas un peu cassé la tête, les Anglais n'y viennent plus,' declared the immortal Bompard. This indispensable qualification does not, fortunately, as yet belong to the Aiguille Blanche de Péteret, but that noble peak possessed until quite lately another and perhaps unique attraction. It had in due course been ascended from two different sides, but *no one had ever descended* —at any rate more than about a hundred feet from the top— it having been treated, in spite of its 4,000 odd mètres, simply as a stepping-stone to Mont Blanc.

My friend Dr. Blodig and I arrived last summer at Courmayeur with the determination to give the Aiguille her due as an independent peak, making her the goal of our ascent, provided only we could establish one *conditio sine qua non*— namely, that, at an hour not too late in the afternoon, stones ceased to fall in dangerous quantities on the line of ascent.

Our first day, July 18, was accordingly spent in reconnoitring from the opposite ridge of the Mont de la Brenva. The weather was thundery, and therefore only too favourable to *chutes de pierres*; but, as far as we observed, there was comparative silence as soon as the sun left the east flank of the mountain. Moreover we were rejoiced to see that the central part of the glacier at our feet was apparently less crevassed than our predecessors had found it, and that the bergschrund, that skirts the rock buttresses, appeared to offer no very serious obstacle. One other important point we especially wished to decide was how to reach, if possible before daylight, the débris-covered slopes on the near side of the Brenva glacier without having to tackle the

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