

vorzulegen.' ⁴⁸ (It is to be hoped that by next summer it may be possible for me to present evidence of the ascent, &c.)

Dr. Dübli is able to point out that when Dr. Meyer wrote these words he may not have been aware that Abbühl had been killed on March 3, 1830. But no further 'evidence,' as we understand that word, was, in any circumstances, possible, as Dr. Meyer, on reflection, probably saw.

Par. 3. I cannot agree that 'in 1828 the real question was not whether the ascent by the S.E. arête was feasible but whether the N.W. arête offered a better route.' My view is that Hugi proposed to repeat the 1812 route, and for that very purpose took with him Abbühl, who led on that occasion. When Abbühl got, as I hold, to the Frühstückplatz and saw the two distinct summits ⁴⁹ he, according to Hugi, realised his error in thinking that in 1812 he had reached the *higher* summit. Dr. Dübli thinks he only realised this when he reached the so-called Hugiattel; but from that point he could not distinguish the two summits at all and would gain no fresh knowledge.

I have always abstained from accusing Abbühl and his companions of any intentional deception, but it should be noted that when Abbühl and Huber, after their reputed ascent of the higher summit of the Finsteraarhorn on August 15, reached Grindelwald on September 3 ⁵⁰ they, 'who a fortnight ago were . . . on the summit of the Jungfrau, told us that the ascent is easy and without danger. But to climb the Finsteraarhorn is, so they say, a very risky undertaking.'

This is not the kind of statement a reporter could invent or get hold of by misunderstanding: it obviously suggests a certain willingness of the two guides to accept an unearned honour, since the ascent of the Jungfrau had been made by the two Valaisans Volker and Bortes and *they themselves had no personal knowledge of the ascent.*

With the utmost respect for the great authority of Dr. Dübli, I venture to adhere to the opinion as to the *probable* course of events, expressed in my article in volume xxvii. of this Journal.

MONT DOLENT FROM THE GLACIER D'ARGENTIÈRE AND THE COL DES GRANDES JORASSES.

BY RAYMOND BICKNELL.

(Read before the Alpine Club, February 1, 1921.)

IN his valedictory address at the end of 1919 our retiring President expressed views on the subject of guideless climbing in the high Alps which, to those of us who indulge in that most fascinating branch of our sport, were more

⁴⁸ *S.A.C.J.* xxvii. 385.

⁴⁹ See the picture with this paper, where they look equally high.

⁵⁰ *A.J.* xxxiii. 97.

encouraging than anything which had ever before fallen from the lips of authority in this room. Strengthened thereby, Shadbolt, Porter, and I left London on the third day of the following July to see what we could do in the way of putting precept into practice.

We began with a brief but strenuous campaign in Dauphiné, *terra incognita* to all three of us. A few hours after reaching La Grave we went to the Chalet de l'Alpe, and the next day ascended the Pic de Neige Cordier and crossed the Col Emil Pic to the Glacier Blanc. From our pass it had been our intention to descend to the Val Louise and to reach La Bérarde the next day by means of another modest climb. But right in front of us was the great north face of the Écrins, a brilliant and alluring vision of shining ice and snow under a cloudless blue sky. I suggested that it would be foolish to descend thousands of feet into a valley with so great a prize close above our heads; in a moment our good home-made resolutions as to a gentle beginning of well-ordered training walks were thrown to the winds, my suggestion was enthusiastically accepted, and instead of going to the Val Louise we slept at the Ernest Carron hut on the Glacier Blanc. By seven o'clock the next morning, with the help of a half-waned moon, crampons, and good snow, we were on the top of our peak, having accomplished the first ascent of the season.

For me this day was chiefly remarkable in that it showed at how low an altitude it is possible to suffer from every known symptom of mountain sickness, given a sufficient lack of previous training. I entirely disagree with the frequently expressed opinion that such ills are wrongly described as mountain sickness, being merely the result of insufficient training, for in my first few days in the Alps I invariably suffer acutely above 12,000 ft., whereas in Norway, where I have frequently made long and trying ascents immediately after landing, I have never noticed any traces of similar troubles.

We descended to La Bérarde by the Col des Écrins, and after resting there for a day we went to the Promontoire hut. Before we left the hut the next morning a gentle snow-fall had dashed all our hope of an ascent of the Meije; before we had reached the Brèche de la Meije the state of the snow had brought us to the unanimous opinion that our amended plan of an ascent of the Rateau must be abandoned, and in the end we were thankful to have got safely over the loose snow on both sides of the Brèche. At La Grave we learned that the Meije had not yet been ascended. Local opinion

was not very hopeful as to the possibility of a traverse so early in the season, but after two days of unbroken sunshine we thought otherwise and went back to the Promontoire.

In the last number of the ALPINE JOURNAL Harold Raeburn has expressed the opinion that 'for a party of three amateurs the Meije traverse will, unless they already know the mountain or have extremely favourable conditions, almost certainly result in a night out.' We found the mountain in a condition which could not have been described as extremely favourable, and I am glad to be able to do something to controvert Raeburn's gloomy forecast. We had no moon to help us, so could not leave the hut before dawn. Our time to the top of the Grand Pic was about the same as that given in the climbers' guide. So far we had little to complain of in the condition of the mountain. There were few places where we were not all climbing together, our only difficulty being in finding the way, and we afterwards regretted that we had not gone unroped up to the foot of the Glacier Carré. Beyond the Grand Pic there was an entire change. The northern slopes of the mountain were thickly plastered with ice covered with half-melted snow. The descent to the Brèche Zsigmondy required extreme caution, and occupied over two hours of continuous work. We had read of iron pegs and hooks. If they were there they were buried under the ice. The crack leading out of the Brèche was easy, but the slope leading up to the ridge immediately above it—a vile mixture of rotten rock, ice, and insecure snow—was very much the reverse. Doubts as to the soundness of the fixed rope caused us to abandon its help, and I thought the place distinctly difficult and for the leader a little perilous. The journey to the Pic Central went easily, but part of the descent to the gap to its east was almost as troublesome as that to the Brèche Zsigmondy. There followed a slow and anxious descent of the steep slope to the Col des Corridors, over snow so powdery that the wind whirled it into our faces in blinding clouds. Sir Claud Schuster may be interested to know that here we joyfully adopted the tactics for which he apologises in the third chapter of 'Peaks and Pleasant Pastures,' getting safely down the most doubtful part of the slope with the help of 120 ft. of light line doubled through a loop of rope, which in 1920, as in 1908, adorned the lowest patch of rock.

The net result of all this was that we reached the hut at the Rocher de l'Aigle with nearly three hours of daylight in hand. Thereafter, in spite of an unsuccessful attempt to

follow the wrong line on the Tabuchet Glacier and at a later period of the evening an involuntary, dark, and exasperating excursion into a jungle of scrubby bushes on a slope of slimy shale, we ultimately dined in La Grave. The next morning we suffered the terrors of a crossing of the Col du Galibier in a motor char-à-banc driven at a reckless speed down a rough, narrow, steep, and winding road, and we then took train for the northern side of the chain of Mt. Blanc, where we purposed to follow less trodden paths than in the Dauphiné.

My interest in Mt. Dolent dates from the reading of 'Scrambles in the Alps,' when I was a child. It was strengthened by the belief that three countries met on a snow pyramid at its top. Later came modern knowledge with its matter-of-fact disclosure that three countries do not meet on the top; but by this time I had seen the great rock wall which bars the extreme head of the Argentière Glacier and had been seized by a desire to climb over it into Italy. For a time that grim portal, the Col du Mt. Dolent, appeared to be the only direct road but before the war I had become aware of the possibility of a traverse of Mt. Dolent itself and in 1914 we had hoped to include it in a campaign, which was cut short after we had spent one day above the snow-line. From this time onwards the expedition kept a constantly high place in my ever-varying list of things to be enjoyed when the war should come to an end. So it was that when we reached Argentière this year it occupied the first place on our programme, and the day after our arrival we proceeded to the hut on the Jardin d'Argentière.

Mt. Dolent is roughly a pyramid, the four faces being divided by four sharp and well-defined ridges. The S.E. ridge running up from the Petit Col Ferret is the Italian-Swiss frontier, and divides the Italian Glacier de Pré de Bar from the Swiss Glacier du Mt. Dolent. The E. ridge, which is wholly Swiss, divides the Glacier du M. Dolent from the Glacier de La Neuvez. At the meeting of these two ridges is the highest point, 3833 metres, to the north of which there is a continuation of the Italian-Swiss frontier, on a ridge which for a short distance divides the Glacier de Pré de Bar from the Glacier de La Neuvez. The N. ridge, running up from the Brèche de L'Amône, is the French-Swiss frontier and divides the Glacier de La Neuvez from the Glacier d'Argentière. The W. ridge, running up from the Col du Mt. Dolent, is the French-Italian frontier and divides the Glacier d'Argentière

from the Glacier de Pré de Bar. These last two frontier ridges, the N. and the W., meet together on the Italian-Swiss frontier at a point considerably to the north of and about 200 ft. lower than the highest point of the mountain. The meeting-place of the three countries is not, therefore, as was once generally supposed, on the real summit.

The first ascent was made in 1864 by Whymper and Adams Reilly by the Glacier de Pré de Bar and the S.E. ridge.¹ With the exception of slight variations of the original route, no other way of reaching the top was discovered for thirty-five years. In 1901 M. Julien Gallet and his guides climbed from the Glacier du Mt. Dolent to the E. ridge, which they followed to the top.² This E. ridge, which is mostly snow and ice, looks exceedingly attractive from all points of view. I have examined it from high up on both sides and strongly recommend it to anyone who desires a fine ice climb, neither excessively difficult nor long. Porter and I once bivouacked for this ridge at the foot of the glacier, and spent a delightful night beside a juniper fire before rain came in the early hours and frustrated our attempt. In 1904 M. M. F. Fontaine and his guides climbed from the Glacier de Pré de Bar and reached the W. ridge at a point just east of the Col du Mt. Dolent. They then made the long traverse up and down along the ridge to the highest point.³ A month later MM. Julius Kugy and Graziadio Bolaffio and their guides reached the Swiss side of the Brèche de L'Amône from the head of the Glacier de La Neuvaz and thence made the first ascent of the N. ridge. They put it on record that the ascent of the upper part of the glacier was excessively dangerous, and anyone who has had an opportunity of observing their route at close quarters will have no difficulty in agreeing with them. It is essentially a dangerous rather than a difficult route and I most strongly recommend its avoidance.⁴

Thus were all four of the main ridges climbed without anyone having made an ascent from the French side. This final problem was solved by the enterprise of MM. Kugy and Bolaffio, who returned to the attack in 1906. From the head of the Glacier d'Argentière they climbed the steep rock wall which runs up to the Brèche de L'Amône and thence followed

¹ *A.J.* i. 374; ii. 101.

² *Jahrbuch S.A.C.* xxxvii. 6.

³ *L'Écho des Alpes*, 1910, p. 228.

⁴ *Alpi Giulie*, 1906, p. 109.

their route of 1904 along the N. ridge.⁵ In 1911 the second ascent from the French side ended in disaster. The party of Dr. Thomas, following the route of 1911, were close to the top when a great boulder, which was perched upon the ridge, overbalanced as it was touched by Auguste Blanc, the leading guide, and falling upon him, carried him to his death on the slopes of the Glacier de Pré de Bar.⁶ So far as I can discover, the ascent was not repeated till last year, and as we appear to be the only English party who have ever been on this side of the mountain I have thought that a description of our climb may be of interest.

We left the hut at three o'clock and by dawn we had walked to the head of the Argentière, and for the first time were able to examine our route at close quarters. The flat surface of the glacier is divided from the Brèche de L'Amône by a well-developed bergschrund, a short but very steep slope of ice and snow and a smooth rock wall. The rock wall is cut from its base to a point close to its top by a shallow gully, which inclines slightly to the left and ends directly below the Brèche. The line of ascent follows the general direction of this gully. It was obvious that the ice slope was going to give us considerable trouble, as the only two bridges over the schrund were placed, the one far to the right and the other far to the left. It did not, however, appear very probable that we should fail to find a way into the Brèche, the difficulties which we subsequently encountered on the rocks being matters of detail hidden from our eyes at that distance. These things having been contemplated, we put on crampons and crossed that one of the bridges which was to our left. We then climbed horizontally along the ice and snow immediately below the rock face and close above the schrund, in the direction of the gully. At times we were able to rely upon our crampons, at others we were obliged by the steepness and hardness of the slope to cut every step. At one place time was saved by a retreat into the narrow gulf between the ice and the rocks, where we progressed, ungracefully perhaps, yet enjoying a feeling of security unknown upon open ice slopes set at high angles. In all, the passage of this slope, from our crossing of the schrund to our arrival at the foot of the gully, occupied an hour. The rocks were grey granite of the best Mt. Blanc description, sound beyond reproach and cut into convenient

⁵ *Rivista Mensile*, 1907, p. 261 ; *Ö.A.Z.*, 1907, p. 9.

⁶ *A.J.* xxv. 731.

steps, up which we went in ease for some hundreds of feet in or close to the gully. The gully then dwindled for a space into a narrow crack of an unpromising aspect, and we followed in the steps of our predecessors by climbing out of it up a slab to our right. This slab is some 60 ft. high. Its lower part is easy, but at its top is a section, smooth, wet and almost devoid of foothold. The leader of the first party is reported to have surmounted this obstacle by a clever manœuvre with the rope. Porter, who, as usual, had been called upon to lead when the rock work became serious, was unable to find any way of helping himself with the rope, but went up with his customary ease and quickness. My clever manœuvre with the rope consisted in a direction to my leader to continue his ascent till he was able to hold it straight above me. I then grasped it firmly, and being at the moment more interested in a rapid arrival at the top of my mountain than in the technicalities of slab-climbing, scrambled over the bad piece without any very close attention as to the whereabouts of my feet. I am therefore in no position to gauge the exact difficulties of this passage, but Porter expressed the opinion that they were great and, his standard of rock-climbing being of the highest, it is safe to conclude that the place is very far from easy.

Above the slab we took a diagonal line upward to our left, over easy rocks, till we were back in the gully again. This we followed to the point, some 90 ft. below the ridge, where it comes to an end at the foot of a rock wall, which is an impassible barrier. Here our predecessors had traversed to the left round the buttress, which bounds the gully to the north, and by means of an overhanging chimney and a difficult slab had gained the ridge to the north of and a little above the Brèche. After a cursory and unsuccessful search for the overhanging chimney we returned to the gully. Our search was cursory because Porter had already announced that he didn't see what was to prevent him from climbing a straight narrow chimney, which divided the rock wall at the head of the gully from the buttress on its north side. This, then, he proceeded to do, taking out nearly the whole of our 80-ft. rope before he reached a ledge at the top. Placed in the Cumberland fells within a seemingly proximity to one's hotel and some 2000 ft. above sea-level, this chimney would probably rank as a fairly easy place. Encountered at an altitude of 11,000 and after a good many hours of hard work, it appeared to me to be distinctly difficult. An offensive

overhang of one wall caused the rope to pull me outwards and I had to go up, fortified, it is true, by its protection, but not directly helped by it to the extent that I would have wished. I must confess to having arrived at the top in a state of temporary exhaustion. Rucksacks and axes having been pulled up, Shadbolt followed them, I the meanwhile gasping on the ledge above and feeling uncharitable joy in hearing that he at least emitted some snorts as he came up.

On our narrow perch there was barely room for the three of us to cling. Some 15 ft. above our ledge, and to our right, was the narrow cleft in the ridge, which is the lowest point of the Brèche. To reach this cleft it was necessary to swing round a smooth rib of rock, our hands working up a secure crack but our legs in a state of semi-suspension. From below this passage had a highly displeasing appearance, but necessity having forced us to the attempt, we all found it unexpectedly easy. It may have been the deceptive appearance of this final traverse from below, which drove our predecessors to seek the route to the left, which they found so difficult, for, so far as the chimney is concerned, our route is the obvious one.

At 9.30, 6½ hours after leaving the hut and 5 hours after crossing the schrund, we were basking in the sunshine on the Swiss side of the ridge, happy in the knowledge that the most serious part of our undertaking was behind us. The northern ridge is for the most part narrow and sharp. For a time we climbed easily along ledges on the Swiss side. As we got higher the rocks became disconcertingly loose. At one point I kicked a stone weighing a few pounds down the side of the ridge. It fell a few feet on to the top of a boulder some 6 ft. long by 4 ft. wide. This great mass—'balanced evidently only by a miracle and with an instability impossible to have foreseen,' to quote the description of the similar boulder which caused the death of Auguste Blanc—instantly plunged down the slopes below us, gathering with it as it went a formidable avalanche of stones and snow, which swept down the southern head of the Glacier de La Neuvez, thereby finally confirming my opinion that the Swiss side of the Brèche de L'Amône is a place to be avoided.

Above this loose section of the ridge followed snow and ice, where a heavy cornice on the Swiss side forced us down into France. Here for an hour we made slow progress on a face broken into unpleasant curved furrows and ribs of the type which I describe on the authority of our President as

'accordion pleats,' and so steep that we were obliged to go with faces turned to the slope, on the one side of the ribs kicking steps into firm snow, on the other cutting into hard ice. This led us to the point where the three frontiers meet, above which is the scene of the accident of 1911, a chaos of loose rocks piled up upon the almost horizontal ridge in a state of great insecurity. Having very gingerly made our way over this, we reached firm steep slabs almost embedded in ice, where a good deal of cutting of steps and scraping of ice from the rocks on the Swiss side of the ridge took us to the snowy summit, which we reached at 2.15, 11 hours and 20 minutes after leaving the hut.

Mt. Dolent is undeniably a mountain with an easy side, and our descent to the upper part of the Pré de Bar Glacier and thence to the Col Ferret track and La Vachey in the Italian Val Ferret calls for no description.⁷

Time was when the Col des Grandes Jorasses was much maligned, and mountaineers have been scared away from it on insufficient grounds. From the French side the appearance of the pass is extraordinarily attractive. Immensely high up on the frontier ridge a delicate bow of shining snow fills the sharply cut gap between the dark cliffs of the Jorasses and the Rochefort. I could never look at this gap, nor even Donkin's photograph of it, which hangs on our stairs here, without wishing to stand in it.

The history of the pass begins in that great year of Alpine adventure, 1864, when Messrs. Alfred and A. W. Wills, F. Taylor and A. Milman with two guides and two porters left the Montanvert at 2.30 in the morning, and after a prolonged struggle with the difficulties of the Glacier du Mt. Mallet, reached the col soon after 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Here they looked down the great couloir on the Italian side and decided that a descent was impossible. In their written records of what they saw they made free use of such decisive phrases as 'No possibility however remote,' 'The descent proved hopelessly impracticable,' and 'Sheer drop of many

⁷ For a picture showing the La Neuvaz face of Mt. Dolent, the Brèche de L'Amône and the S.E., E., and N. ridges, see *A.J.* xxiii. 425.

Those who wish for fuller information as to the topography and history of Mt. Dolent should refer to the admirable monograph of Mons. Marcel Kurz in *L'Écho des Alpes*, June 1910.

COL DES GDES. JORASSES



THE GÉANT TO THE JORASSES
FROM THE PUNTA BIOULA

COL DES HIRONDEILLES

COL

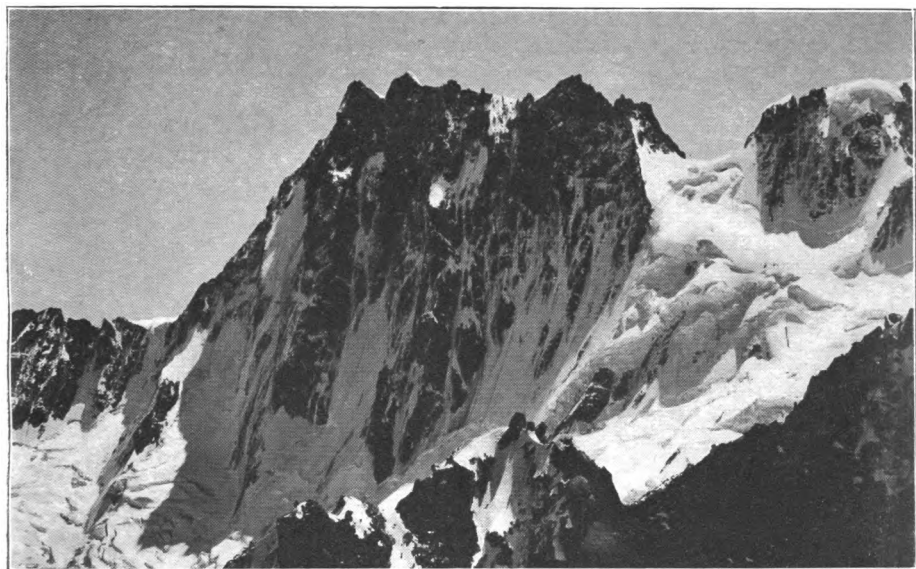


Photo S. Spencer]

GRANDES JORASSES AND N. SIDE OF COL
FROM LES PÉRIADES

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hundreds of feet of smooth and treacherous rock.' In that they decided not to attempt a descent so late in the day, their judgment was, of course, perfectly sound, though time has shown that the rocks upon which they looked down are not as inaccessible as they supposed.⁸

Beyond the bare record of the fact that Mr. Eccles once turned back from an attempt on the Italian side, I can find no further mention of the pass till its first crossing by our fellow-member, Mr. Thomas Middlemore, on July 18, 1874. His party bivouacked on the grass slopes just below the Glacier de Planpansière, reached the col by the great couloir and descended to Chamonix. In the following year Mr. Middlemore read a paper to this Club describing his expedition. Thereupon broke out a storm of protest, some part of which is reflected in the pages of our JOURNAL. To the impartial reader of the twentieth century, who has nothing to guide him but that part of each side of the case which is printed in the JOURNAL, it may well appear that the critics were denouncing sins of which there is little evidence in Mr. Middlemore's paper. He expressly states that in the couloir on the Italian side, the ascent of which was the chief cause of contention, he was able to keep out on the wall quite clear of the 'ice, stones, and such small débris' as from time to time came down it. Most of the falling stones which play so large a part in the story of the ascent appear indeed to have been dislodged by the leading guide.⁹

The second crossing, a desperate adventure in a snowstorm, on September 3, 1894, was also made by a member of this Club, Mr. Evan Mackenzie. No English account of this expedition has ever been published, and the source of my information is the 'Rivista' of the Italian Alpine Club. In August Mr. Mackenzie had made two unsuccessful assaults upon the Italian side, the second a determined effort, which only came to an end 100 mètres below the col after a narrow escape from an accident, when a porter fell off a guide's shoulders while trying to surmount a difficult rock. Mr. Mackenzie then went round to the French side, and, warned by the experience of the 1864 party, who had taken nearly fourteen hours to reach the col from the Montanvert, he bivouacked high up on the side of the Glacier du Mt. Mallet and reached the schrund immediately below the col at 8 o'clock the next morning. The crossing of this schrund

* *A.J.* i. 430; ii. 114.

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* *Ibid.* vii. 104 and 225.

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occupied $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours. On the slope above it they were overtaken by a snowstorm, and so difficult had the crossing been that they preferred to go down the Italian side rather than go back. The rest of the day was taken up with the descent of the couloir in heavy wind and continual snow. They groped their way down the upper part of the Planpansière Glacier through snow and darkness without a lantern and with only 12 metres of rope for a party of four, the rest having been left behind in the couloir. The remainder of the night was spent on the Rocher du Reposoir, and they ultimately got down to Courmayeur the next morning. This appears to have been the one and only crossing from north to south.¹⁰

The subsequent crossings of the pass have been few. I know of three made by Italian parties, in two of which members of our Club were concerned ; but I can find no other record of an English crossing other than that made by our late friend Broome in August 1898,¹¹ though one of Mr. Ryan's unrecorded expeditions with the Lochmatters seems to have taken him into the col in 1904, and in 1911 Geoffrey Young's party climbed the Italian side on their way to the first ascent of the western ridge of the Punta Margherita.¹²

For two nights after our traverse of Mt. Dolent we lay at the little chalet inn of La Vachey, the intervening Sunday being spent in rest and a journey to Courmayeur to fetch the necessary provisions for the continuance of our climbing. On the Monday we went up to the Grandes Jorasses hut, and on the Tuesday we climbed the Grandes Jorasses, finishing our ascent by a variation of the ordinary route, to which my attention was first called by the German mountaineer Fräulein Hasenclever, whose party was the first to follow it. From the top of the Rocher du Reposoir we did not make the usual and sometimes dangerous crossing to the Rocher Whympfer, but went in a straight upward line, first on a snow slope and then on rocks, to the frontier ridge. These rocks were so easy that we took off the rope before going up them. We struck the ridge at a snow-covered portion just east of the first rock tooth below the eastern ridge of the Punta Margherita. From this point we followed the ridge to the Pointe Whympfer without any difficulty, sometimes on a crest of sound snow and sometimes on easy rocks.

¹⁰ *Rivista Mensile*, 1895, p. 1.

¹¹ *A.J.* xix. 412.

¹² *Ibid.* xxv. 737 ; xxvi. 231.

We went somewhat leisurely, having ample time in hand, and as our time from the hut to the top was just about that which is given in the climbers' guides for the usual route, it seems that the variation takes little if any longer. If there be any doubt as to the behaviour of the snow it is the sounder route of the two.¹³ This day, with perfect weather and rocks and snow in ideal condition, was something of a picnic. The crossing of the Col des Grandes Jorasses, which we accomplished the next day, can hardly be so described, though it proved to be much easier than we expected.

We spent a second night at the hut, and moved out again soon after midnight. For a time we had nothing to think about, for with the help of a lantern we were able to follow our tracks of the previous day, and so made very rapid progress. Then we diverged to the left, and at dawn were in a line immediately below our pass. Above us was a fan-shaped slope of snow and ice, its curved base ending in a great semi-circular bergschrund, and its sides bounded at the top by smooth rock walls. Where these walls converged a narrow couloir filled with ice and at first only a few feet wide ran up to a saddle of snow at the top of the pass. In big mountaineering without guides the mind is often so occupied in considering the immediate problem of the moment that for a time it remains blank to all else. In looking back and trying to reconstruct this scene, I can recall very little beyond the appearance of the couloir itself, and I find that the strongest impression was made on my brain by the exceptional extent to which I had to tilt back my head before my eyes arrived at the snow saddle at the top of the pass.

At 3.30 we were over the schrund, and just above it we rested for a few minutes under the protection of a minute rock island, probably in the exact place used for a similar purpose by Geoffrey Young's party in 1911. Above this island the surface of the slope was of just that hardness which enables one to describe it as snow if one wishes to belittle a climb and as ice if one wishes to magnify it. Here was the great justification of the crampons, which had not done much in return for their portage since we carried them out of Argentière. A party such as ours does ill if it encumbers itself with any hard and fast rule as to who is to lead it. When the business of the day is to go far and fast, it had better make full use of such talents as are given to each of its members.

¹³ *Ö.A.Z.*, 1909, p. 268. *A.J.* xxv. 85.

Frequently last summer the front of our rope became the back and the back the front, nor did the man in the middle ever know that he might not be torn from his repose and called upon to assume a position at either end. So it is that Shadbolt, who was born with the talent of walking in steep and slippery places on claws, is now dragged into the limelight. Shod with a pair of super-crampons, long and sharp as to the spikes, heavy beyond belief yet excessively efficient, he raced up this slope at the head of our rope. I had one crampon only, the other having broken in half on the descent of Mt. Dolent. This, however, was of the long and sharp-spiked Eckenstein variety, and with its help and a tightly strained rope above me I was just able to keep pace with Shadbolt, or perhaps I should say, to hold him back to my pace. In twenty minutes we were at the top of the slope. Without crampons we should have had to cut every step with the pick, and I do not think that we should have done it in less than two hours.

We were pulled up under the rocks of the Punta Margherita by ice too hard and steep for further progress without step cutting. Consequently we cut horizontally across the slope to a patch of rocks on its W. side. Being not yet certain that the couloir would not throw stones at us, we made this crossing with some apprehension, and the necessary steps were cut with the utmost haste. Having reached the rocks we took off our crampons, climbed easily some hundred feet to the narrow entrance to the couloir, cut a few hurried steps back to its eastern side and again landed on the rocks, this time inside the couloir and close to its icy bed. The ice was quite unclimbable, being a series of perpendicular walls divided by horizontal shelves, a frozen waterfall rather than an ice slope. A little above the level of the ice and between it and the steep eastern wall of the couloir was a narrow slope of rock up which we climbed, often close to the ice yet out of reach of anything which might have come down it. In places the rock was much shattered, yet at this time of the morning the whole was so firmly bound together by a cement of hard ice that we were able to climb it in perfect safety. Our pathway came to an abrupt end at a point high up the couloir, level with the foot of a rock rib which divides the ice stream in two. Here we had a choice between the rock rib and the farther wall, which at this level for the first time began to look feasible. The rock rib being the nearer we cut across the ice to it and climbed to its flat top, which we reached

at 7.45. Here all possibility of danger on the Italian side being at an end, we sat down for our first meal.

Between us and the top of the pass, some 100 ft. above, was a slope of snow crowned by a cornice. I should have enjoyed my meal more could I have seen what was on the other side. At the end of the day it was observed that when we started in the morning each of us had been obsessed with a different false alarm. Shadbolt, his mind full of a vague knowledge that the Italian slope was said to be dangerous beyond reason, had raced up the ice below the couloir in imminent expectation of receiving a stone or a lump of ice on his head. Porter, misled by a description in the Austrian guide of what must be an alternative way on the buttress to the east, had expected that he would have to find an intricate route and lead up excessively difficult rocks. My fears were the last to be dispelled. I had more than once seen the final slope on the French side bare, icy and shining, the central part broken into an impassable ice cliff, the two sides guarded by a wide and open schrund. Broome had described it as 250 ft. of nearly vertical blue ice, and Porter had extracted from his guide-book the information that it is an 'Eishang' 80 metres high. I did not know the exact shade of meaning which should be attached to this word, but at the time it seemed to me ominous and appalling, and my food stuck in my throat as I thought of myself cutting 250 steps down it. It was well that I had not then read Mr. Mackenzie's account of a schrund which took $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours to cross.

The cornice did not give us much trouble. I was just able to get high enough to reach its crest with an outstretched axe, and in ten minutes had produced a sufficient hole. Then, supported by Shadbolt from below, I clambered into a niche prepared for the purpose, from that on to my axe thrust horizontally into the wall, got my arms into France, thrust into that country Porter's axe handed up to me by Shadbolt and pulled myself after it. There was a considerable chance that my precarious handhold or foothold might give way and precipitate me on to Shadbolt's head, but we were able to look forward to this calmly, for the snow slope below us was in a state of such admirable plasticity that we could not have failed to stick in it. Had it been hard, our method of crossing the frontier would have been more ceremonious.

Assembled on the top of the pass we became jubilant, for a glance was enough to assure us that we should get down without serious difficulty. Directly below us the slope curved

down and disappeared in a few feet, but at the sides we could see enough to know that it was snow rather than ice, while both to the left and right, close under the cliffs of the Rochefort and the Jorasses, were places where it seemed probable that we should be able to cross the schrund. Truth compels me to confess that the Eishang proved to be a very ordinary slope of hard snow at an average angle of 50° . Down this I went in one long diagonal line to the western end of the schrund, my left foot firmly supported by its crampon, my right requiring every step to be carefully cut for it. Once again I observed the cramped position into which the body is forced by the necessity of cutting down so steep a slope, and once again I wondered at the statement in the Badminton Library 'Mountaineering' that it is far easier to cut down than up. We hit the schrund at a place where the upper lip overhung the lower, and, Shadbolt having volunteered to jump, we wasted no time in looking for a bridge. Porter and I slid down some 12 or 15 ft. on a doubled rope, and Shadbolt, directed by us from below, made his way to the lowest possible point on the overhang, and then taking to the air landed neatly on the ridge of soft snow beside us.

Here ended all anxiety as to the result of our expedition, and our only concern was to so order our movements for the rest of the day that we might reach Argentière in good time for dinner. From the Pointe Whymper we had seen that if we patiently skirted round the extreme edge of the Glacier du Mt. Mallet, close under Mt. Mallet and the Périades, we should avoid the many impassable sections of that much-crevassed glacier and ultimately thread our way to the level of the Glacier du Lechaux. Patience was indeed needed, for we were soon wallowing under a burning sun in a morass of soft snow, and for a time we suffered the disgusting additional torment of finding that the only possible route down took us steadily uphill. The prospect of a fine afternoon being certain, we made no great haste on our downward journey, landed on the rocks of the Capucin ridge for a restful lunch, spent an hour over our tea at the Montanvert, and then crossing the Mer de Glace reached Argentière at 6.30.

At our last winter dinner our President urged us to lift our eyes beyond the much-frequented Alps and go to the unexplored mountains of Canada or Arctic Norway. Far be it from me to preach against such sound counsel. I am only prevented from following it by the fact, of which the President

himself reminded us, that it is well to be away for six weeks if one hopes for a fair share of climbing in a holiday spent amongst such distant mountains. There are some of us who are lucky if we can get away from our work for a holiday of more than half that length. For us, I fear, the Alps must continue to suffice. This being so, it is natural that we should desire to find fine climbs upon which the curse of popularity has not yet fallen. We seek opportunities of using our own store of experience in thinking out the details of our game, and our own judgment in deciding what may be safely done and what should be wisely left undone. So we look for places not yet overrun with other climbers, where it is improbable that we shall suffer the disappointment of finding professionally led parties in front of us. As climbing becomes more and more popular, and the average standard of skill higher and higher, this becomes a difficult quest, and we have got to be more and more on our guard against places which are unfrequented because they are dangerous rather than difficult.

Personally I have the very strongest distaste for those dangers which a climber cannot avoid, be his skill small or great. I have no use for slopes which are periodically swept by falling ice, and in the sport of stone-dodging, described with such gusto by Mummery, it has long appeared to me that the odds are not sufficiently in favour of the dodger.¹⁴ No one of the three of us looked upon either of the two expeditions which I have tried to describe to-night as exceptionally dangerous. Given a leader who can climb it, the face between the Argentière Glacier and the Brèche de L'Amône is a very safe place. Nothing fell down it while we were there, nor is it a place where anything of consequence is likely to fall at any time of day except after fresh snow. It has been proved that the looseness of the ridge above the Brèche can be a danger, and I am told that the accident to Blanc has made some guides reluctant to undertake the expedition. This is natural enough, but the accident might have happened on many popular mountains, and the north ridge of Mt. Dolent is no more dangerous than other loose places—for example, the rocks on the Italian slope of the Col de Miage, which have been used as mountain highways any time these last sixty years.

As to the Col des Grandes Jorasses, I give my vote for its acquittal of the charges brought against it, for with due

¹⁴ *My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus*, p. 37.

precautions as to time and weather I can see nothing on either side of it to make it more dangerous than other expeditions, which have long been looked upon with general approval. From our crossing of the bergschrund to the beginning of our descent, $5\frac{1}{2}$ hours in all, we were in or close to the couloir on the Italian side, and during that time we neither saw nor heard anything go down it, with the exception of one small stone, which fell from immediately below us and had probably been dislodged by our passage over it.

Let nothing which I have said be interpreted as an assertion that this couloir is a healthy place in which to spend an afternoon. It must be remembered that we were safe on the top of the rock rib close under the col before 8 o'clock in the morning. Up to that time no part of the couloir had been touched by the sun. Mr. Middlemore, on his much criticised first crossing, unaided as his followers have been by crampons and a comfortable hut more than 9000 ft. above the sea, reached the same point at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

SUCCESSSES AND FAILURES IN 1920.

By NOEL E. ODELL.

(Read before the Alpine Club, December 6, 1920.)

WE were greeted on our arrival at Argentière, on July 3, by torrents of rain, and every feature down to about 6000 ft. was enshrouded in cloud. This was at once attributed to the advent of that member of the party—a meteorologist, by the way—who has the reputation of bringing bad weather wherever he goes, at least in British mountains: it looked as if the extent of his evil influence was wider even than he had supposed! However, the optimists of the party triumphed, and by evening three happy individuals were to be seen visiting the snout of the Argentière Glacier, and even literally tasting glacier-ice once more after so many years' absence from its spell!

The day after arrival some of us walked down to Les Bossons by way of training, and endeavoured, with partial success only, to procure crampons from Simonds' 'Fabrique.' (In passing, it may be mentioned that Simond Frères turn out an ice-axe with wonderful balance and for real use.) We