

THE MITTELLEGI OR EAST ARÊTE OF THE EIGER.

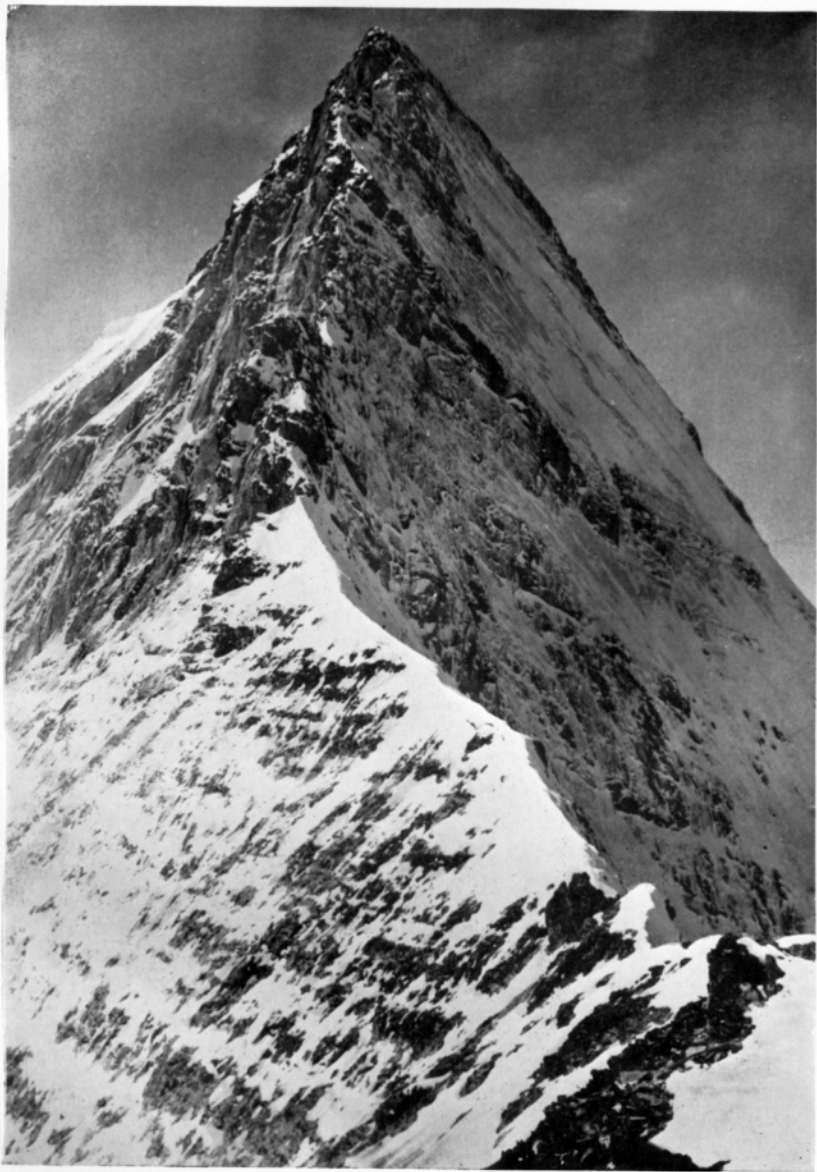
BY H. LAUPER, A.A.C.B., A.A.C.Z.

THE first attempt to climb the Eiger by the Mittellegi arête dates back as far as 1874, when on July 6 Messrs. J. W. and F. C. Hartley, with the guides Peter Rubi and Peter Kaufmann, set out at 5 A.M. from Alpighen to reconnoitre the possibilities of this arête. The party ascended the extremely steep ice slope which sweeps down from the very crest of the ridge, and it was only after 5½ hours of strenuous step-cutting that the party gained the crest at 4.30 P.M. at a point now called the *Mittellegipass*, and in the neighbourhood of which the Mittellegi hut was built in 1924. The hour being too advanced for a further attempt on the peak itself, Hartley's party descended to the Kalligletscher and to Grindelwald.

The next party to try the Mittellegi, Mr. P. W. Thomas with Josef M. Biener¹ (1878), started from the Kallifirn and covered a considerable bit of the ridge, but failed to reach the top of the 'Great Gendarme.' At the end of August 1879 Messrs. J. Oakley Maund and H. Seymour Hoare set out for another attempt from the *Eigerhöhle*, but were forced by ice and adverse conditions to admit defeat before even reaching the point of the ridge where Mr. Thomas had been stopped. In 1881 Mr. Oakley Maund made another attempt, this time accompanied by Mr. J. Baumann and seconded by the guides Johann Jaun, Andreas Maurer, and Emile Rey. Mr. Maund's vivid account of this attempt, on which occasion the top of the 'Great Gendarme' was reached ('A.J.' 11, 35 *seq.*), is well worth reading.

Four years later, on July 28, 1885, Herr M. von Kuffner, Oe.A.C., with two porters left Grindelwald at noon for the bivouac at the *Eigerhöhle*. His two guides, Alexander Burgener and Josef M. Biener, had started ahead to explore the direct ascent from the Kallifirn up to the gap to the S. of the 'Great Gendarme.' They returned to the *Eigerhöhle* with the news that the direct ascent was not to be thought of on account of overhanging rocks, but they considered that the ascent over

¹ One of the finest guides who ever put on a rope. His name is not mentioned even in *Pioneers of the Alps*.—Editor.



Photo, H. Lauper.

The MITTELLEGI Ridge.

the Mittellegi ridge, if possible at all, should 'go' in one day.

So Herr von Kuffner and his guides left the bivouac next day very early and gained the crest of the Mittellegi over the Kallifirn and easy rocks, E. of the first gendarme, at 3.30 A.M. Three gendarmes were climbed up to the foot of the 'Great Gendarme,' quoted on the *Siegfried map* with 3687 m. The ascent of this tower was made by Biener climbing on Burgener's shoulders. From there he succeeded in fixing a rope around some projecting knob, by which means and the additional push of an ice axe he managed to get on to the top of the gendarme. Now followed an easy bit of arête, and then, ascending a fifth tower, the last gendarme before the final rise of the Mittellegi ridge was climbed by a steep gully.

It was now 12.30. The guides proceeded to explore the descent into the deep gap S. of the 'Great Gendarme.' But things cannot have looked favourable, because at this point they resolved to try the *descent* from the top of the Eiger into this gap and *down* over the Mittellegi. For this purpose a rope was left on the 'Great Gendarme.' The party then began to retreat, reaching Grindelwald at nightfall.

For the planned descent nearly 200 m. of rope were obtained on the following day and another porter hired. Shortly after midnight on July 31 the party left the inn at the Kleine Scheidegg and reached the top of the Eiger at 7.20 A.M., where they rested for 45 minutes.

Leaving the porter behind to join another party for the descent, they began to climb down over the ridge, following the rock ledge to the S. of the snow crest forming the uppermost part of the ridge. At 9 A.M. they stood on the ledge where the ridge falls away in one sheer drop towards the Mittellegi. At first the party were able to climb down very close to the crest, but the farther they got down the more rotten became the rocks and many perpendicular or even overhanging steps were encountered. One place proved to be very dangerous especially; it consisted of a very steep step of 35 ft., beneath which a small inclined ledge had to be traversed. Another step had to be descended by means of a spare rope, whence once more they had to take to the N. face. Under great difficulties, but without an accident, the gap S.W. of the 'Great Gendarme' was at last attained—1.45 P.M.

Henceforward, the terrain being well known, good progress was made. At 7.15 P.M. the party left the ridge and descended to the *Eigerhöhle* where the night was spent. Next day it

was raining, but Herr von Kuffner's party reached Grindelwald at 8 A.M.²

The same year (1885) witnessed two more attempts (Messrs. W. W. Graham and E. Boss with Ulrich Kaufmann, and the same year a party of Grindelwald guides), both of which came to a stop in the gap S.W. of the 'Great Gendarme.' Then for a few years the Mittellegi seems to have been left alone until in 1890 Mr. Claude A. Macdonald made an attempt with Christian Jossi and Ulrich Kaufmann, but was turned back by much fresh snow. In 1894 Mr. Macdonald attacked the ridge once more and got as far as the top of the third tower. This attempt calls for special interest as the descent was made over the N. face ('A.J.' 40, 329). Mr. Macdonald was twice on the arête again, but the weather was always against him.

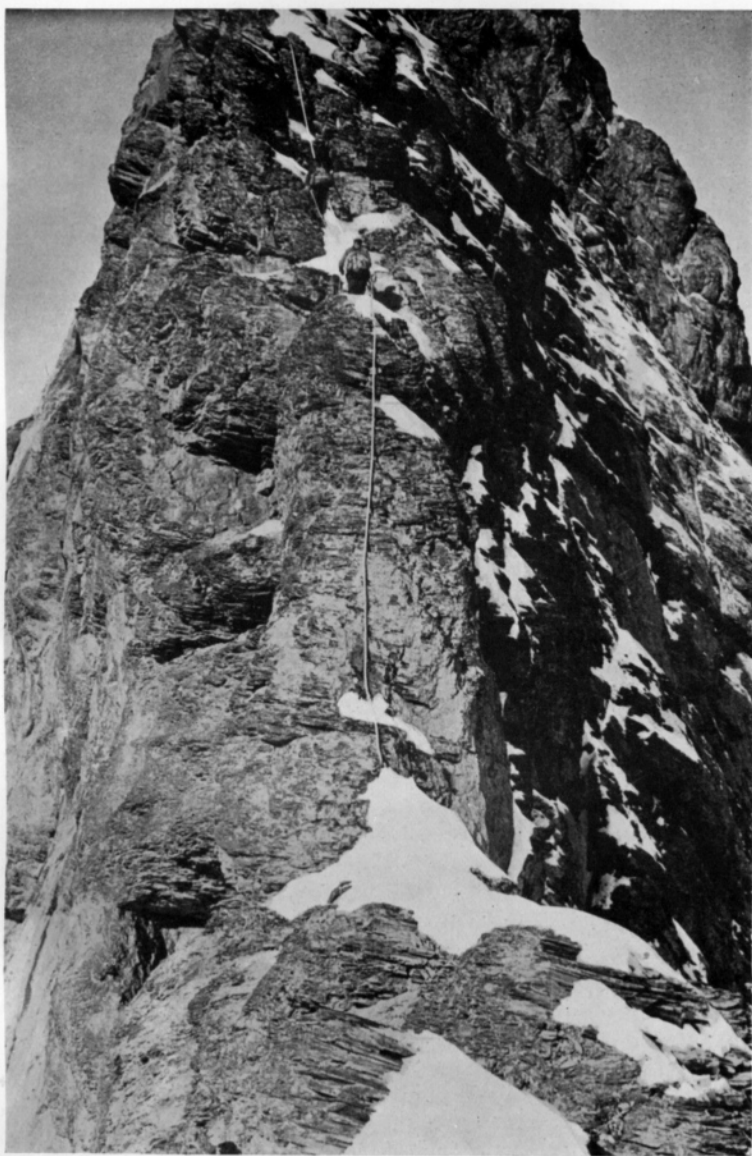
In 1904 Christian Jossi came back to the arête once again, when he and Fritz Amatter accompanied Mr. G. Hasler on the second descent. It is no wonder that a mountaineer like Mr. Hasler became quite fascinated by a ridge so much fought for, at the foot of which he had lived for so many years. Two months after his descent he bivouacked again on the arête with Fr. Amatter, and in 1906 also he was on the ridge again, this time with Mrs. Hasler and the guide H. Fuhrer. On each occasion the W. foot of the 'Great Gendarme' was reached, conditions preventing further progress.

Mr. J. Grande with Amatter, the Grindelwald guides E. and A. Steuri in 1912, Herr H. Pfann and Herr A. Horeschowsky in 1921, reached the same point. Pfann and Horeschowsky made also a fruitless attempt to descend from the top of the Eiger. Already Jossi had suggested ('A.J.' 40, 330) the employment of iron pitons, but it was only in September 1921 that these means were adopted by Fr. Amatter, Fr. Steuri, and S. Brawand, when, with the Japanese climber Mr. Yuko Maki, they succeeded in accomplishing finally the ascent of the Mittellegi arête ('A.J.' 34, 166-7).

Most mountaineers will certainly deprecate all such artificial aids. But in the case of the Mittellegi nearly fifty years had elapsed since the first attempt had taken place, and many a good climber had taken his shot without hitting the bull.

In 1924 the Grindelwald guides built a small but comfortable hut on the ridge (about 3200 m.), to the cost of which Mr. Yuko Maki largely contributed, and in 1925 Dr. von Kehl

² This, so far as I know, is the first account of the 'Kuffner' expedition to appear in English.—*Editor.*



Photo, H. Lauper.

Upper part of first Gendarme.

The Second Gendarme.

Photo, H. Lauper.



with Fr. Amatter, Fr. Suter, and A. Rubi made the third descent, leaving a good deal of rope hanging, which later on facilitated the fixing of the permanent ropes.

And it is now that the writer of this paper must confess that without these ropes, which make the ascent of the Mittellegi possible for a man of his abilities, it would never have entered his head to set foot on this ridge. Having accomplished the climb (it is still a real climb in spite of the ropes!), and knowing the Bernese Alps fairly well, I may be allowed to declare it as one of the best climbs of this region, both as regards the climbing as well as scenically.

On September 9, 1928, my wife and I, with our young friend Peter Lendorff, A.A.C.Z., scrambled down the rope-ladder leading down from the Eismeer Station to the Kallfirn. Accompanied by two German climbers, who were planning the same climb, we strolled down the Kallfirn and climbed over the rather rotten but not difficult rocks up to the Mittellegi hut, which we reached in less than 2 hours from the station. This hut, poised above the great steep wall falling right away for some 1500 m. to the green meadows of Alpiglen, clings sensationally on to the narrow crest of the Mittellegi ridge. The ascent up to the hut, whether made from Grindelwald (5 hours) or from the Eismeer Station of the Jungfrau Railway, is in itself alone a fine excursion. The view from the hut is magnificent—on either side.

After a comfortable night we left the hut next morning at 6.30 A.M., half an hour after the German climbers. An easy, almost level snow crest led us to the foot of the first gendarme. Here we had already caught up the Germans, and as the ridge is very narrow and sharp and allows no variations, we had to tread on their heels right up to the summit of the 'Great Gendarme.' We did not find the climbing difficult, although the rock is very rotten. Just where one would have to hunt for hand- and foot-holds the permanent ropes show the way up. Some fresh snow concealing the rocks in places made us make use of these ropes without much speculation as to whether this be a fair way of climbing or not. As the leading party was advancing very slowly we had ample time to enjoy the view and the exposure, which is all the time quite sensational. By the time we had passed Mr. Yuko Maki's bivouac place, and about 9 A.M., the 'Great Gendarme' came in sight. But only after we had scaled another very steep step could we see before us, still ahead, the fantastic form of the true gendarme. This gendarme is only 15–20 ft. high, but its front overhangs with

a considerable bulge. The Kalli face is very smooth and looks quite unassailable, while the N. face (where Emile Rey in 1881 turned this obstacle) is hidden by the crest. A little rope-ladder hangs down from the outcrop of rock to which Herr Kuffner's guide, J. M. Biener, in 1885, must have fixed his rope when his party conquered that tower by direct assault. It was here that the Germans allowed us to take the lead. With the rope-ladder to help us it was not difficult to climb this extremely exposed and airy rock step. A short walk on a level but narrow bit of the ridge brought us to the last gendarme E. of the great gap, on the top of which we sat down for breakfast at 9.30. The place was well chosen for a long rest, affording a fine view down over the sharp crest with the hut perched on its extremity like an eagle's nest, with the Wetterhoerner, and best of all the Schreckhorn, as a background.

A deep gap separated us from the great rise of the arête, the impression of which can only be described in the vocabulary of Mr. Geoffrey Young. The S. face consists of smooth slabs falling down nearly perpendicularly towards the Kallifirn, and the snow-covered N. face looks almost as unassailable were it not for the rope which shows that there exists some way up this terrific slope.

After a good rest we roped up again at 10.15 A.M. and descended into the gap.

And now began the real work of the day, the ascent of the final rise of the Mittellegi ridge, where, up to 1921, every party had been held up. An extremely steep step had to be climbed on the N. face, but very close to the crest. The few holds for hands and feet were hidden in fresh snow and very unreliable when, perchance, we found them. But where the rocks were free from ice and snow there was not much to get hold of. So, many times, we had to rely almost entirely on the fixed rope. This bit of the ascent must always offer considerable difficulties as it is extremely steep and the rocks are very smooth, as indeed they are on the whole mountain. We got to a small, ill-defined ledge which led us out on to the N. face. Another straight-up ascent brought us back on the ridge on warm, sunlit rocks, a welcome change after the traverse on the cold, shadowy N. wall. Other steep steps followed, we made good progress, and about noon the work lay behind us. Still, a good many steps of the ridge seemed to be the last before, finally, we got on to the sharp snow crest forming the roof of the summit.

We had gone through many stages of exposure during this most enjoyable climb, but then we had either had the ropes to

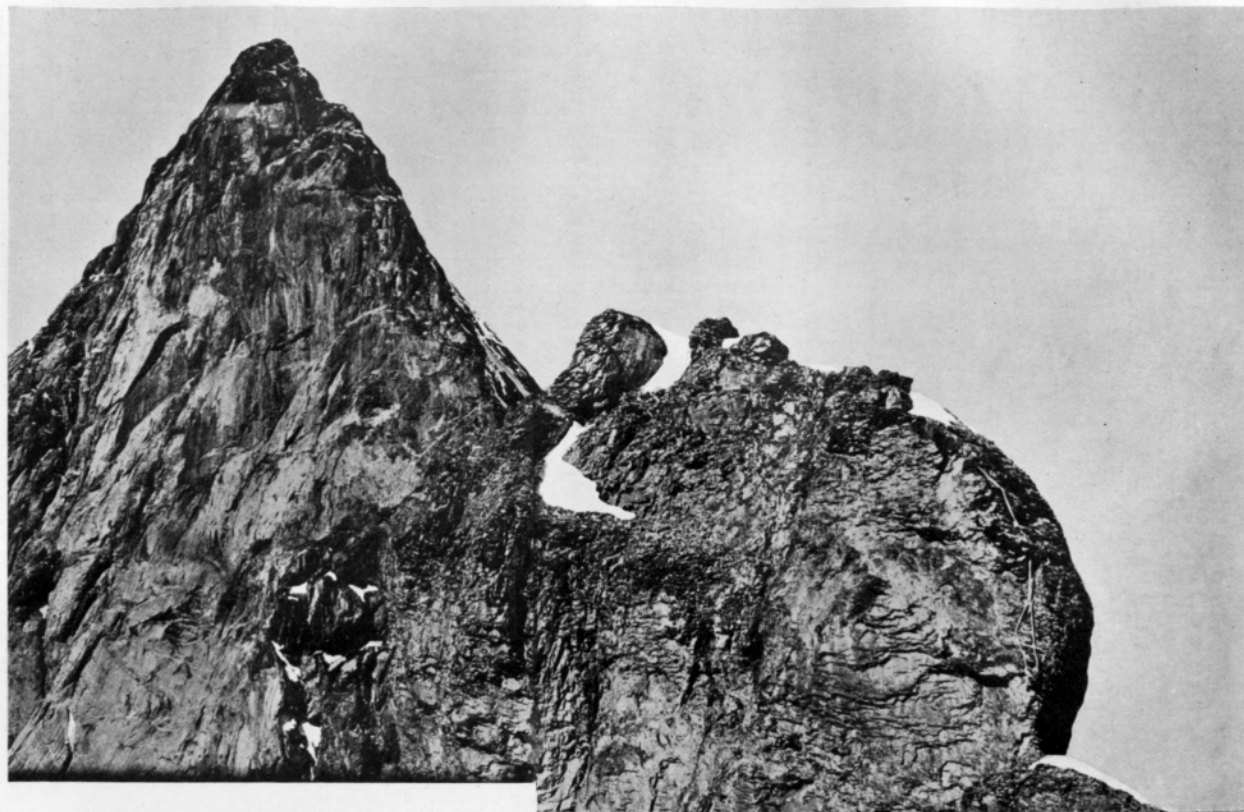
GREAT GAP.



3687 M.



GREAT GENDARME.

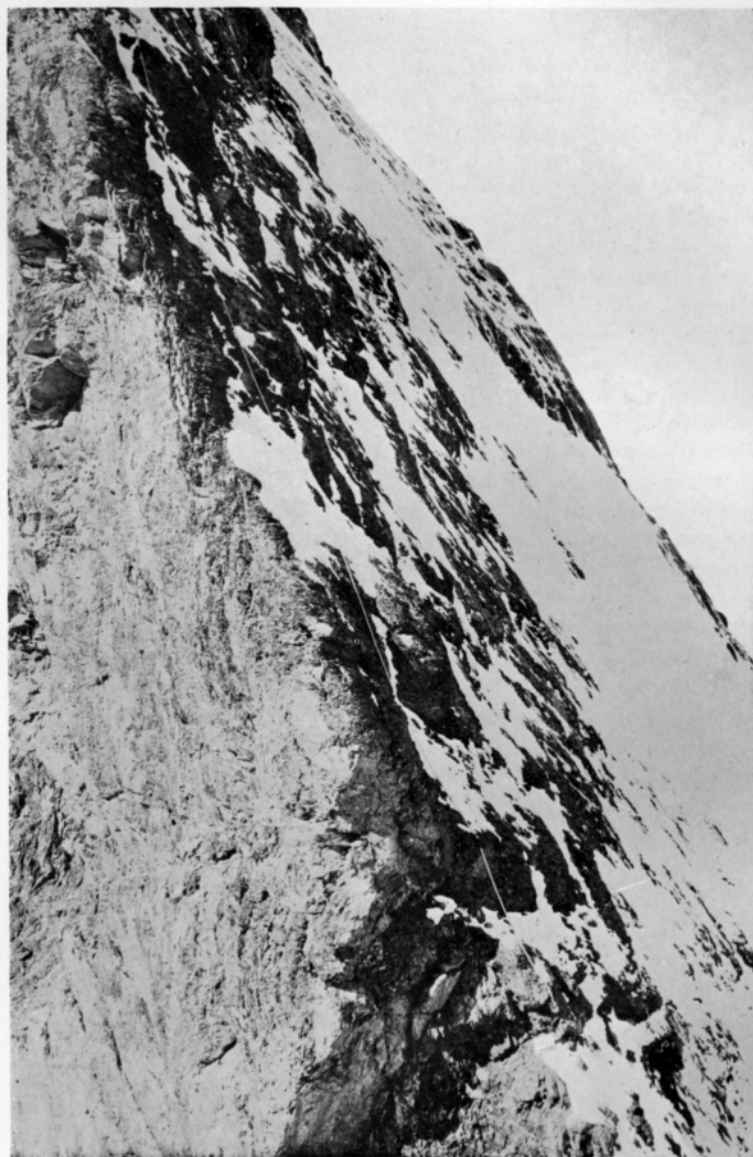


Photo, H. Lauper.

ROPE LADDER.

The KALLI face of MITTELLEGI and final rise of ridge; summit still invisible.

←  LOWER PART OF FINAL RISE OF ARÊTE.



←  N. FACE.

←  GAP S. OF
GREAT GENDARME.

Photo, H. Lauper.

From the top of the Great Gendarme.

steady us or the rocks to cling to, although these had mostly been very rotten, it must be admitted. But now we were advancing on the uppermost crest of our mountain, a crest sharp as a knife-edge and offering no support to our eyes but the slim undulating line running almost evenly towards the summit and the few yards of glittering snow on each side, and then nothing more between us and the crevassed Eismeer on one side and the green pastures of the Scheidegg on the other ! I could not help leading myself up and along this lofty path, just for pleasure's sake, in spite of the remonstrances of my companions. But while we were slowly approaching the summit clouds came up and we could get only occasional glimpses of the fine view which the Eiger affords on a clear day towards the Schreckhorn, Fieschergrat, Mönch, and Jungfrau.

Presently we descended on the S. side for a few steps on to a ledge of rocks which brought us in a few minutes to the actual top of the Eiger, at 12.50 P.M.

The rest is soon told : We spent nearly 2 hours on the top waiting for the clouds to lift. But when these showed no disposition to do so, we descended towards the Eigergletscher. The snow arête just beneath the top was quite icy (as was to be expected so late in the season). Soon after we had safely reached the rocks, the fog crowded in on us, it became quite dark, and progress was, of course, very slow for a while. Fortunately it cleared up again, and from then on it was all plain sailing. At nightfall we arrived at the inn at Eigergletscher, where we met Fritz Amatter. He seemed to be very pleased when he learnt whence we had come and that we thought 'Mittellegi' to be one of the finest climbs of the Oberland.

[We must express our grateful thanks to Dr. Lauper for this most interesting paper and account.—*Editor*, 'A.J.']

TECHNICALITIES.

By W. N. LING.

(Read before the Alpine Club, May 7, 1929.)

I HAD barely returned to my northern retreat after you paid me the honour of electing me Vice-President in December, when I was pursued by a peremptory demand from the