Aletschhorn and Furggengrat.

By E. R. BLANCHET.

(*Translated.*)

I. Aletschhorn (S.E. Face).

THE S.E. face of the Aletschhorn towers above the Mittel Aletsch Glacier and is exactly opposite the Eggishorn at a distance of 8½ kilometres.

Except for a short step somewhere about the point marked 2567 m., and to which corresponds a zone of crevasses, the glacier rises at a gentle angle from its junction with the Gross Aletsch Glacier towards a height of some 2700 m. Higher up the glacier steepens rapidly and becomes a true labyrinth of crevasses and séracs, the direct traverse of which—always long—becomes in certain years most arduous, or even impossible.

With the exception of a diagonal and steep ledge of snow, on a level approximately with the beginning of the S.E. arête, and of a bastion rather lower down and more to the E., this face of the Aletschhorn is entirely rocky. Nevertheless, on nearly all the photographs the face appears as speckled or striated with patches of white—a valuable proof of the special weather conditions prevailing on this mountain. Gullies and ribs seam the precipitous face, approximately 2700 ft. in height. Several snowy tongues projecting from the base of these gullies creep upwards into the wall.

From the Mittel Aletschjoch the left-hand, or S.E., arête appears as very steep. Its first step abuts against a sharp needle, Point 3966 m. of the Siegfried map. Thence the arête leaps upwards uninterruptedly towards the summit. This arête was climbed in 1898 by Messrs. Wilson, Wicks, Bradby and Kesteven.[1]

The other, or right-hand, side of the face is quite different; it is shapeless, and instead of a rocky wall we have a tremendous icy cliff, generally smothered in snow and from which two *rognons*—to quote a Chamonix expression—emerge. Both the height and angle of this face diminish as we look E. Farther still lies the easy Aletschjoch. It is by that col that parties

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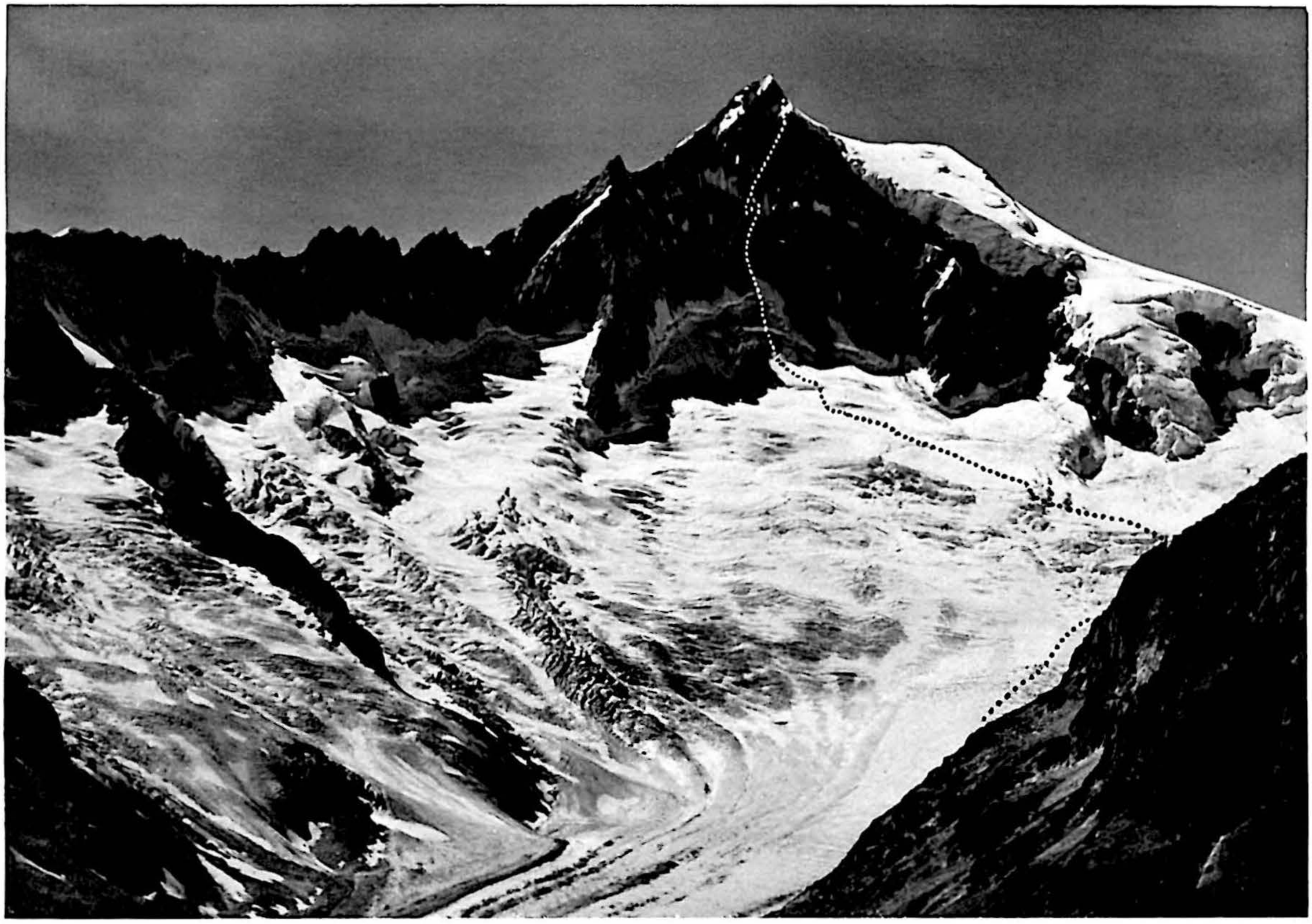
[1] *A.J.* **19,** 251; **41,** 404.



Photo, Gaberell.

ALETSCHHORN.
From the S. (Showing 1929 route.)

proceeding from the Hôtel Jungfrau, at the eastern base of the Eggishorn, start for the ascent of the Aletschhorn, a climb rarely affected in spite of its ease and beauty. It is, however, very long, as the 9½ kilometres of horizontal distance are increased by two obligatory deviations from the straight line. I have never understood why the S.A.C. abandoned its intention of building a Club hut near the Point 2651 m.

It was certainly not with the intention of discovering a shorter or easier route that I launched myself at the S.E. face. I was sure that this ' short cut ' would prove more fatiguing, as well as more dangerous and time-exacting.

My first attempt on this face was stopped at the junction of the Gross Aletsch and Mittel Aletsch Glaciers. The two following were nipped in the bud—by my bedside ! In my fourth attempt I got very far in distance, if not in height. After a prolonged struggle with séracs and crevasses, we had to turn back at a horizontal distance of 500 m. from the base of the rocks.

From all these wasted attempts we gathered that :

(1) To traverse the Gross Aletsch Glacier from the Märjelen Lake to its junction with the Mittel Aletsch it is necessary to describe a huge curve above.

(2) In the night, the moraine blocking the junction is simply infernal, and we accordingly erected cairns along its vile surface.

(3) It is obligatory to mount the centre of the Mittel Aletsch Glacier for its lower 3½ kilometres.

(4) In 1929, when proceeding to the face from the contour 2700 m., it was necessary to bear round in a long détour to the E.

On August 25 the weather suddenly cleared up. Hitherto we had spent the only fine days in journeying from Zermatt to the Eggishorn and back, and I was still in very poor condition. Nevertheless in eight days I was able to accomplish a new route on the Kienhorn, the first ascent of the Aletschhorn, by the S.E. face, and the descent of the *Furggengrat* of the Matterhorn !

At midnight of August 28–29, 1929, the weather at the Eggishorn still appeared doubtful. My guides, Kaspar Mooser and Linus Pollinger,[2] were profoundly depressed at our repeated weather disappointments, but for once I was an optimist and determined to start at all costs. We glanced at the barometer : it was going up !

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[2] Son of Heinrich and grandson of the late Aloïs Pollinger of St. Niklaus.

A quarter of an hour later, lanterns unnecessary, we took the too well-known path of the Märjelen Lake. Moreover, the main frontier ridge to the S. was covered with cloud; summer lightning played continuously, giving daylight-like effects. Every now and then the powerful searchlight on the Jungfraujoch appeared, seeming, at 8½ kilometres distance, like a great and setting constellation. The storm-clouds dispersed gradually, and by 5.50 A.M. we had arrived a little above the contour 2700 m., somewhere about the *M* of the word *Mittel* Aletschgletscher on the map, where the gentle angle of the glacier suddenly steepens.

On our last attempt we had steered from this point straight for our mountain's S.E. face and encountered every sort of glacier trouble; we had struggled there for hours, not even knowing whether some tremendous crevasse would not bar the way higher up. Smothered in mists, only the marks of our crampons showed the downward track. In some years, or earlier in the season, this region may possess totally different characteristics.

Rather than commit ourselves to this labyrinth, we resolved to try to turn it by the right. To do this we were at first obliged to bear towards the Aletschjoch. The steep icy slope, facing due S., is fortunately much honeycombed as regards its surface. According to the 'Imfeld Panorama,' the original of which is the pride of the Hôtel Jungfrau dining-room, this part of the glacier is called the Ahrengletscher, but the Siegfried refuses to adopt this possibly time-expired nomenclature. We mounted rapidly, and in less than an hour, with splendid weather, attained the height of 3100 m., where the dry glacier vanishes under a coating of hard snow. We put on the rope; Mooser's mountain instinct had led us well, and nothing now prevented a straight course towards the base of the Aletschhorn.

Without difficulty, steering W., we continued up to the base of the great ice cliff, interrupted only by the two *rognons*[3] or hot-plates previously mentioned. An avalanche had fallen to the base of the cliff. We stood spell-bound gazing at its extraordinary shape; the enormous mass, geometrically perfect, resembled the hull of a ship at anchor on the glacier, the stern turned towards us being an exact reproduction. In all probability we shall never see such a striking object again. We

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[3] The scene of the disaster of 1912, when Andreas Fischer lost his life, his companions, Dr. Jenny and Ulrich Almer, surviving: '. . . they battled like men but the mountain won.' *A.J.* **26,** 456–7.

tore ourselves away from this extraordinary vessel, and soon the great rocky face of the mountain required all our attention. For half an hour we advanced across a conglomeration of fallen icicles resoldered together by frost. The danger from falling séracs was continuous. Further on, in a sheltered spot, we took our first meal after 8 hours of march. Linus Pollinger, with his eighteen years of life, helped us to make a vast hole in the provisions.

A great and prominent rib or buttress divides the entire S.E. face into two unequal parts. This rib is well to the right, E., of the plumb-line of the summit and finishes in a snowy bastion of the E. arête. Séracs lying further to the E. overhang the face. This formidable step was conquered in 1928 by Mr. J. W. Alexander [4] with Oskar Supersaxo. Starting from a bivouac near the foot of the Klein Dreieckhorn, the E. arête was attained *via* the rocks on the E. slope of the great rib, and the arête was then followed to the summit. The rib throws out at its base a great salient projecting into the Mittel Aletsch Glacier.

To the left, W., of the great rib is the wall descending from the summit and which constituted our objective. Other ribs, couloirs and ledges make up a very complicated terrain, twisted, moreover, in its upper part by a diagonal striation from left to right. Opposite the rib and forming the western margin of the face, another rib of terrific steepness mounts to the tower, Point 3966 m. ; this rib is still unconquered.

We started at 8.35 ; the air was still, while the increasing heat caused the snow to soften. At 9.0 we attained the prodigious bergschrund. Owing to the angle of the slope, its lower and overhanging lip had concealed it hitherto. No direct crossing seemed possible, but some 90 m. to the left we discovered a rickety structure spanning the depths with an appearance of careless strength. A diagonal ledge enabled us to descend into the void, choked at this spot by an avalanche filling it to within 5 or 6 m. of its brim. A crevice in the ice wall opposite was scaled exactly like a rock chimney. Emerging at the end of 20 minutes, we found the snow near the upper lip still further softened. Stones, invisible from their speed, whistled about our ears ; it was nearly half an hour before we could attain the rocks. These latter were so precipitous that, hoping to save time, we mounted by that snow tongue leading highest into the couloirs. The high angle rendered our advance over this

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[4] *A.J.* **41,** 404. Mr. Alexander is one of the finest of latter-day American mountaineers.—*Editor.*

cream-like substance exceedingly arduous. The danger of falling stones compelled a ceaseless watch on the couloir above. Consequently no one grumbled when another and impossible crevasse forced us on to the marginal rocks. Hardly had we taken to the rocks when a shower of stones came down ; these gradually compacted themselves and then flowed gently down like a stream of water. Our present Alpine equipment is still deficient in shrapnel helmets or shields ! We jammed ourselves against the face, but several ricochets caused us to display unwonted agility ; we squirmed up narrow cracks affording hardly room for feet or hands. So swift was our flight that a naturalist would have found in us three specimens of the ' Missing Link,' hitherto supposed to inhabit Java !

The light, almost white, appearance of the rocks recalls, in the steeper parts, certain scrambles on the banks of the ' Whymper ' couloir of the Aiguille Verte. For 20 minutes the stream of stones continued unceasingly. The majority leapt the bergschrund and ploughed up the deep, soft snow. Long before the ' Cease fire ' sounded we had passed a little platform level with the uppermost end of the snowy tongue. We then pulled out to the left, crossing two small stone-swept couloirs.

The Chamonix-like granite was succeeded by a great stratum of dark and shattered rock. All care must be exercised in not breaking or disturbing anything. Gingerly and cautiously handling each slender hold, we endeavoured to discover some safe if distant grip, treading the while with stealthy footsteps—almost as if we were caterpillars. At 10.30 we attained a rib slightly to the right appearing to mount directly to the summit. It was, however, impossible to be certain. A previous reconnaissance of the S.E. face from the Mittel Dreieckhorn would have been useful, despite the latter's position.

The rocks composing the rib are very firm and as rough as those of the towers on the Lenzspitze-Nadelhorn ridge, where, with no trouble or expense—save the tariff—all can imagine themselves brilliant cragsmen ! For half an hour we mounted rapidly, perceiving occasionally between our feet the base of the wall or the upper extremities of the glacier all speckled with the stones shed by the mountain. Already we were counting our chickens before they were hatched, when all of a sudden the rib reared itself almost upright, and for 20 m. we were forced to crawl up one at a time. This was followed by a wall, smooth and perpendicular, affording neither hold nor hope. But at these moments there exists always some saving ledge ; it

is simply a question of searching. The one we discovered, smooth, narrow and outward sloping, leads to the left. A rock protuberance cuts it off a few metres further on. Behind this angle lies the solution of the riddle—or the defeat of the party.

The solution consists in a couloir parallel with our rib, where patches of snow, undermined by a stream of water, rest on a glassy surface, smooth like a roof. Between the ledge and the couloir stands a vertical wall. This wall can only be crossed by a diagonal *descent*, where success depends on the nature of the rare and distant holds. This traverse is the key to the entire expedition. We set about it quietly and methodically, each of us copying the other and availing himself of the same holds. Finally, the party reunited itself on the margin of the couloir, by no means a cheery spot! 'So, jetzt!' exclaimed Mooser in the most cheerful tone of voice, just as if we had landed on a high road with all our cares behind us.

I have stated elsewhere that a *born* mountaineer's ankle has more play than that of a plainsman. The angle it forms between the big toe and the leg opens out and closes again far more, even presupposing the subject not a mountaineer by inclination or profession; and I would add that Mooser, on these polished slabs, almost invariably places his feet *flush* with the slope, while I am continually finding myself obliged to place my feet *across* the said slope.[5]

Higher up the angle eases off several degrees, and this at once turned an awkward climb into an easy one. The couloir next bifurcated into two parallel gullies; we chose the right-hand (ascending) one, of which we climbed the true right edge. At 12.15 a glance behind showed that we were level with the gendarme, or Point 3966 m. This quite made up in our eyes for the troublesome sight of great clouds rolling up from E. and S.

At 12.40 we once more regained our trusty rib, a sure safeguard against falling stones, and, after 15 minutes of ordinary scrambling, attained a platform suitable for halting. We stopped for 10 minutes, our second and last halt between the Hôtel Jungfrau and the summit.

The E. arête was now but little above us, and after 15 minutes of further scrambling, instead of making straight up to the junction of rib and arête, we bore diagonally to the left across

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[5] See the late Mr. G. E. Wherry's *Alpine Notes and the Climbing Foot*. Macmillan & Bowes, Cambridge, 1896.—*Editor*.

easy rocks, attaining the said arête at an acute angle to its crest. The S.E., or watershed arête, and its point of intersection grew ever nearer and the summit appeared close. We made out that the top must lie a little beyond some rocks, perhaps 100 m. distant, emerging from the crest. We now felt that the Aletschhorn was conquered and the struggle over. We strolled lazily along with complete *nonchalance*. Suddenly, without any change of colour, the snow turned into ice; not the blue ice, polished and shining, but thick and dull in appearance. We had to cut every step. Mooser objected to putting on crampons, considering that we should take less time cutting a few steps than in strapping on the irons. However, beyond the rocks, the arête lengthened out and continued icy to within a few metres of the summit. We took nearly half an hour to cover a distance we could have accomplished in 5 minutes with crampons. However, at 2.15 P.M. the ascent was completed.

It was the second time that I had attained the top of the Aletschhorn, each time by a new route.[6] To-day, by descending to Belalp, I was about to learn a fourth route, a very common and easy one.

Lying prone on the top we gazed indifferently at the vast *cumuli* circling above us like the inflated gas-bags of a balloon. We were at peace with the world. However, if we were to avoid a thunderstorm we must obviously hurry. At 2.45 we left the top, and, to cut a long story short, at 8.15 P.M., amidst the din of a thunderstorm, dripping and blinded by rain, were knocking at the door of the Hôtel Belalp.

II. Furggengrat.

Nowhere in the Zermatt region are descents *en rappel* strictly necessary. I have related elsewhere the remark of a local guide by whom the chance of an engagement in the Chamonix Aiguilles was still awaited: 'All right for Chamonix your low-down tricks, but here our precipices are far too high!' And yet it is at Zermatt that such descents find their fullest scope.

No one who has gazed at the outline of the 'Furggen' arête

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[6] On August 9, 1925, M. Blanchet, with Kaspar Mooser, made the ascent by the N. face—a variation of the previous 'Lochmatter-Ryan' line of *descent*, *A.J.* **37,** 373–4, with marked illustration. For a note on other routes on the N. face, see *A.J.* **36,** 92.—*Editor.*

can ever forget it. To mountaineers it has been at once a terror and an obsession. Only Mummery in 1880,[7] Guido Rey in 1899,[8] Winthrop Young and Ryan in 1905,[9] and Piacenza in 1911,[10] have come to grips with it. No Swiss has tried it hitherto. Yet, is it not the finest arête of the most striking peak of Europe? And do not the Swiss hold an honourable position in mountaineering?

Of the four parties mentioned above, two only were able to tackle the true problem—the discovery of a feasible route from Shoulder to Summit. One party, that of Rey, sought the solution on the N.E. slope of the ridge; the other, that of Piacenza, found it on the southern, or Italian, side. First Mummery, then the Young-Ryan party had already scaled the ridge as far as the Shoulder, their principal anxiety consisting in the avoidance of falling boulders. They were forced to renounce any attempt beyond the Shoulder, and escaped by traversing towards the Hörnli arête.

We spent Friday, August 30, in moving from Belalp to Zermatt. The storm of the day before had cleared the atmosphere entirely, without leaving even a sprinkling of fresh snow on the tops. What a pity it all seemed; never could the Furggengrat have been in better condition! Should we ever find again this favouring warmth for those breezy high-altitude descents on the rope, such absence of wind or threat of thunderstorms?

It was obvious that we ought to try the arête at once. By going up to the Hörnli on the following day we should take advantage of Sunday, a day of almost total rest for the Matterhorn. Stone avalanches would be rare in consequence; but for Mooser it were better to run these risks in all their amplitude than dodge his Sunday religious duties.

On Saturday, with my wife, I scrambled on classical spots on the Riffelhorn—'Sky Line,' 'Glacier' Couloir and 'Lake' routes. From the top I gazed eagerly at the Furggengrat; a cloud was materializing on it. Every day during this long spell of fine weather, such clouds appeared, thickening and spreading, black and threatening, only to vanish again at nightfall.

That evening we made our final preparations, the purchase of all that Zermatt could provide in iron pitons, rope-rings, etc., while Mooser looked to his drill and hammer. We examined our long-span rope of 82 m.—cut into two unequal pieces for the

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[7] *Mummery*, pp. 24–44.
[8] *A.J.* **20,** 17–20.
[9] *A.J.* **23,** 270–3.
[10] *A.J.* **26,** 80–1; 150–8.

exploration in 1928 of the Matterhorn's N. face by Mooser and Viktor Imboden.[11]

To save exertion I determined to take young Linus Pollinger as far as the summit. He should carry all our ironmongery and spare rope, and then descend alone by the same route. Also I decided to sleep on Sunday night at the Schwarzsee Hôtel so as to avoid hearing once more at the Belvedere the din of a breakdown danced, over one's head, in wooden clogs 'borrowed' from the neighbouring S.A.C. Club Hut.

At the Schwarzsee were few visitors. The E. face of the Matterhorn was steaming from summit to base. The shifting vapours clung to the wall, describing great curves over its left-hand margin—the Furggengrat. Night would doubtless dissipate this daily phenomenon, seeming to grow ever more threatening. Another day was bound to increase its black and menacing appearance.

At 5 P.M., their consciences doubtless whitewashed, Mooser and Pollinger rejoined me. Nothing had been forgotten, the collection of 'peak-baggers' was present and correct. We were ready to find the answer to all riddles, and doubtless the Furggengrat conceals many.

After a slight shower the weather cooled off while the clouds shred away into space. I slept till 2 A.M.; the moon was not yet in its first quarter, but countless stars attested a clear and mistless night. We were 2000 m. below our summit—rather a long way to start from when attempting the descent of a Furggengrat! Unluckily Mooser was suffering from indigestion. We trusted that movement followed by rests would cure him. At the Solvay hut we met an Austrian party which had climbed the mountain by the Z'mutt ridge; they had bivouacked within a few steps of the hut. At 10 A.M. we reached the summit. By our gentle ascent we had restored more or less the strength of our invalid; at all events, he stated his readiness to start after a fresh halt. The 82-m. rope was transferred from Pollinger's rucksack to Mooser's together with some food and drink. We also took a light sleeping-bag weighing some $6\frac{1}{2}$ lbs.; folded up, this latter can be stuffed almost into a pocket.

Linus was instructed to endeavour to communicate with us during his solitary descent to the Hörnli Shoulder. We had accomplished the entire ascent without the rope; now, however, this latter was brought into use.

At 10.35 a start was made. The beginning of the Furggengrat

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[11] *A.J.* **40,** 404.

is nothing else but the left-hand edge of a vast sloping glacis ; to the N.E. lies a tremendous precipice, while on the contrary, to the S.W., there is no suspicion of an abyss. No comparison is possible between ours and a real knife-edge, like that of the Rothhorn for instance. We seldom followed the edge, we chose rather a tortuous line of least resistance, meandering among huge loose boulders which sometimes compelled us to leave their vicinity. The dislodgment of one single rock appeared likely to cause a complete landslide. Our line of descent was often broken by steps several metres high, at other places seemingly smooth and sloping slabs intervened. These were, however, sufficiently rough for frictional progress. The general effect consisted in a chaos of little ' roofs,' some plunging down towards the S., others facing N.E. or W. The sun glinted brightly on these intersecting blocks, darkened or discoloured when in shade. Dark crevices opened out between the stones. At one spot, hung up like the gutter of a roof, above a considerable drop, we let ourselves slide on to a narrow ledge overlooking the north-eastern abyss. Gradually the arête took shape ; to the S.W. and quite close a great chasm opened out. So far the mean of the angle had not exceeded some 45°. At the spot where the chasm begins, our ridge appears to support and hold up its downward plunge describing a kind of horizontal segment of a circle. This is obviously the edge of an enormous and precipitous drop of the great wall yawning to our left. Speechless, we hung over it for long. A tower prevented further horizontal progress along the crest. Tower and platform are easily recognized on photographs ; they are the solitary examples of such on the sky-line from the summit to the great Furggen Shoulder. We knew that further on the angle of descent became excessively steep, prior to the great overhanging step. Accustomed as we were to the sight of downwards-plunging voids, we yet felt on passing the little excrescence bordering the platform an involuntary tightening of the heart-strings : doubtless the same feeling experienced by the budding air pilot when his machine falls into an air pocket.

At this spot commences the descent of that part of the crest appearing quite perpendicular from Zermatt and which closely precedes the impossible section of ridge. Taking every care, clambering from hold to hold, we followed the crest of the arête. The chasm to our right, S.W., opening out into a precipice and far below our present level, was crossed by Piacenza. It is a terrifying spot ; into this fearsome couloir or chasm must fall countless stones and icicles, where everything around and above

is loose and shattered. One of the conquerors of the S. face of the Täschhorn has summed up the success of 1911: 'that a party should have actually started upon this route, after seeing what we saw, is even more surprising than their luck in escaping from it alive on to the summit' ('On High Hills,' p. 224).

A little further on the arête plunges into space; we continued along its Swiss slope, although close to the crest. A glance over the opposite or Italian side showed me, some 20 or 30 m. lower down, a curious heap of white detritus, all of similar shape and caught up in their fall by some narrow shelf. The idea at once flashed on me; they must be the remains of Rey's ladder. I wished to clear up the mystery, but my guide appeared deaf on one side. He was anxious to continue, since at this spot begins the crux of the descent, the place on the Furggengrat where the climber begins his struggle with the laws of gravity.

Before reading the magic pages of Guido Rey devoted to the Furggengrat, I was under the impression that his attempts to scale it had been by the Italian side. Nothing could convince me to the contrary; yet Rey had stated that the attempt was witnessed from the Schwarzsee. When I understood that the remains might be the rungs of a ladder, I was no longer in doubt that they were those of Rey; for had he not stated that the party had hurled the ladder away into the gloomy depths, from perhaps the very spot where now we were standing?

I followed Mooser in a diagonal descent to the left to a ledge projecting from the great wall. We were approximately below the tower forming the margin of the platform in the ridge of which mention has been made previously; this spot constitutes the southern edge of space. In spite of the overhang not beginning till lower down, we decided to commence the *rappel* from this very ledge, since space both for movement and preparation was available.

Opening his bloated rucksack Mooser pulled out hammer, drill, and spare rope. There was no sign of any pitons! Without noting their absence Mooser had allowed Linus to commence his descent carrying all our irons. We were completely at a loss and would have been compelled to abandon the expedition if Mooser had not suddenly remembered having left in the sack's outer pocket two or three pitons and a rope-ring for possible use on the Aletschhorn. It was impossible to judge correctly of the height of the step.[12] Mooser drove a piton into a crevice of

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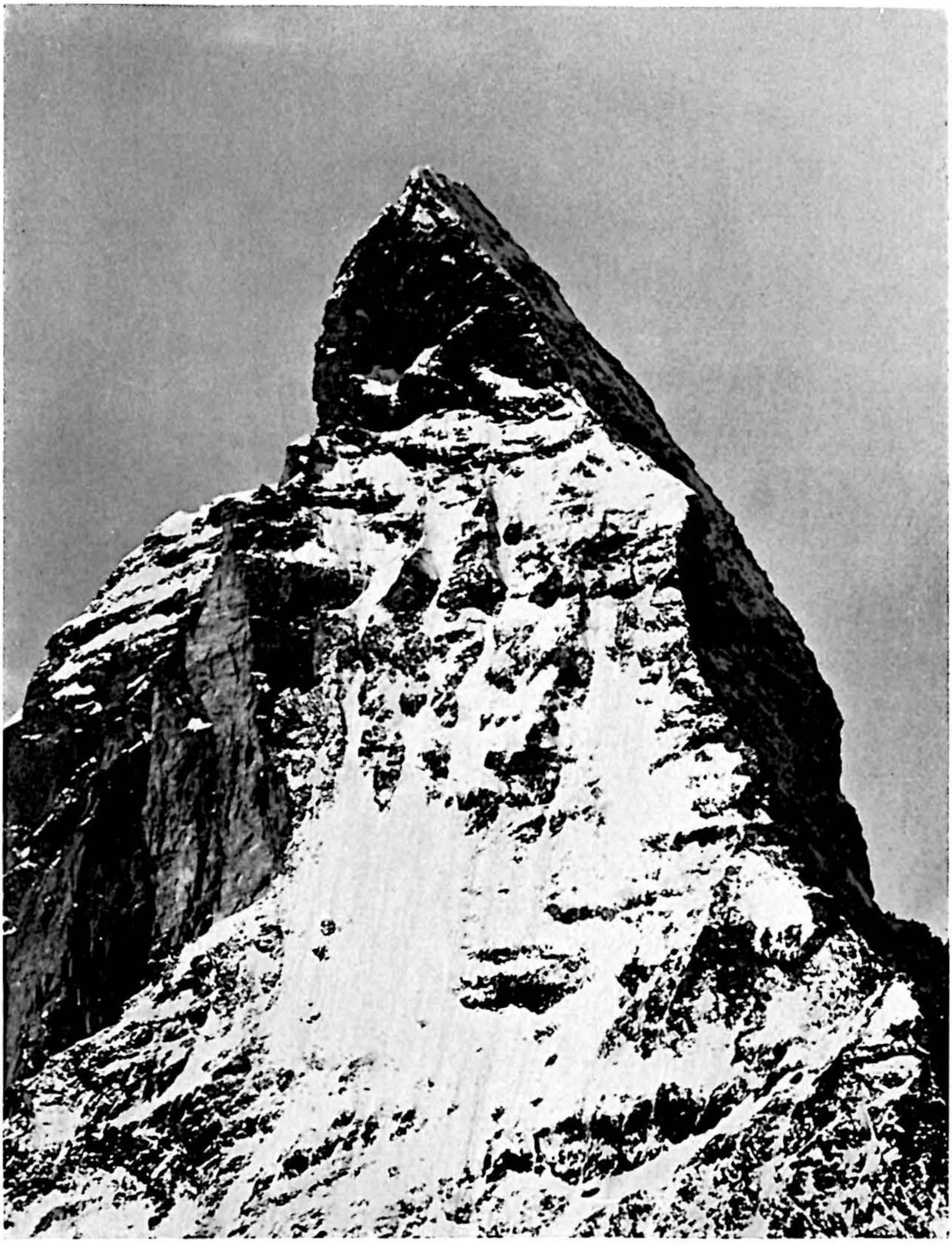
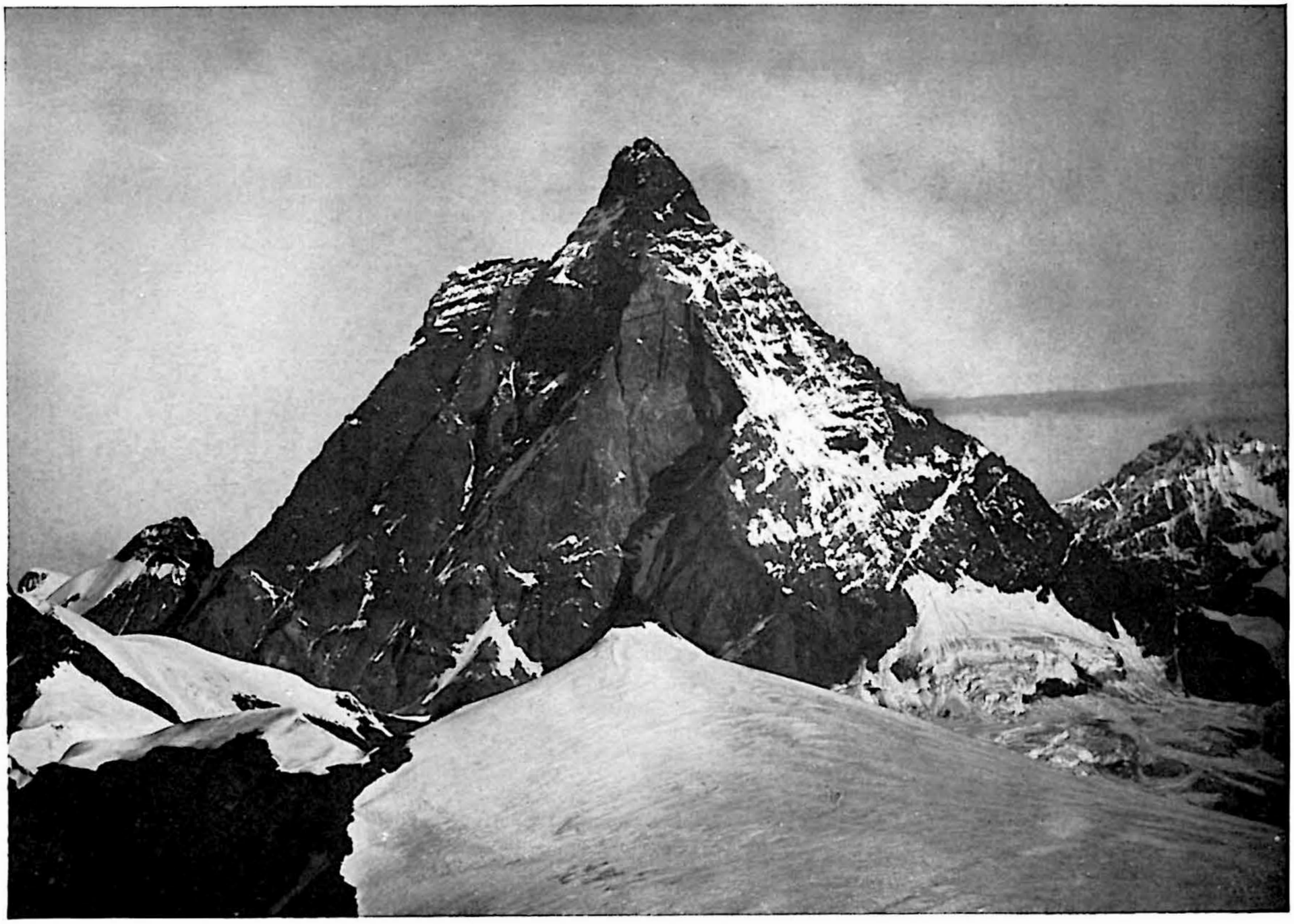
[12] Three *rappels* proved obligatory, or a total of 95 m. The slant of the second *rappel* is insufficiently removed from the vertical to be



Photo, Wehrli.

MATTERHORN. Showing FURGGEN and HOERNLI Shoulders.



Photo, V. Sella.

MATTERHORN. From THEODULHORN.

gneiss ; the blows of his hammer seeming to break an almost holy silence. We knotted together the two pieces of long rope, slipping them through the ring of the piton.

Clouds were, however, rolling up. Below the Shoulder and as far as the Théodule masses of vapour were creeping mysteriously along. I have written elsewhere of the danger of the climbing-rope incurred in the descent of an immense overhang, in the autumn of 1928.[13] Our experiences on that occasion convinced us of the advisability of an unroped descent. Mooser decided to go down first, clearing away débris from the vicinity of the overhang. I was to descend last—an honour, but one without responsibility when the party is unroped !

Soon Mooser was 15 m. down the wall, leaning over space and gauging the possibilities of a landing-place. The position of his body, almost horizontal and at a right angle with the wall, proved that the work was really serious. Hardly had he assumed a normal position when he started off again and vanished. Every now and then the rope quivered, while all around me circled wisps of mist. It was a long wait, but at last a faint cry of ' Kommen ' reached my ears. Carefully and gingerly I slithered down the wall. Holds and irregularities were not wanting, although all were thoroughly unreliable. On the Pointe Beaumont I had descended a precipice of 40 m., of which 29 m. were completely in space. On that occasion it was the *last* step of a descent of increasing interest, but here a 23-m. *rappel* beneath an overhang represented but a beginning. In another moment I should have severed all connexion with the upper Matterhorn, but how were we to re-establish it with the lower ? We were at the mercy of a possible jam of the rope when pulling it down after us. The fact of the fall of a stone or of one of the huge surrounding icicles cutting the rope or stunning us, is but a common risk. Still the sight of those shining, hanging masses, viewed at this spot when climbing the Hörnli arête, was far from encouraging. The risk spurred me to haste, but as soon as I slid clear into the open, a kind of exaltation permeated my limbs. The space between me and the wall widened out. I began to revolve, slowly at first, then quicker. Sometimes I saw every detail of the dark adjacent rocks, sometimes only blue sky, or light and circling mists. This diorama suddenly ceased ; I was standing by Mooser on a comfortable if narrow

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able to calculate the difference in levels. Rey fixed his 80-m. rope lower down, and, to the spot where it was secured, his guides seem to have descended without extraneous support.

[13] *A.J.* **41,** 74–5.

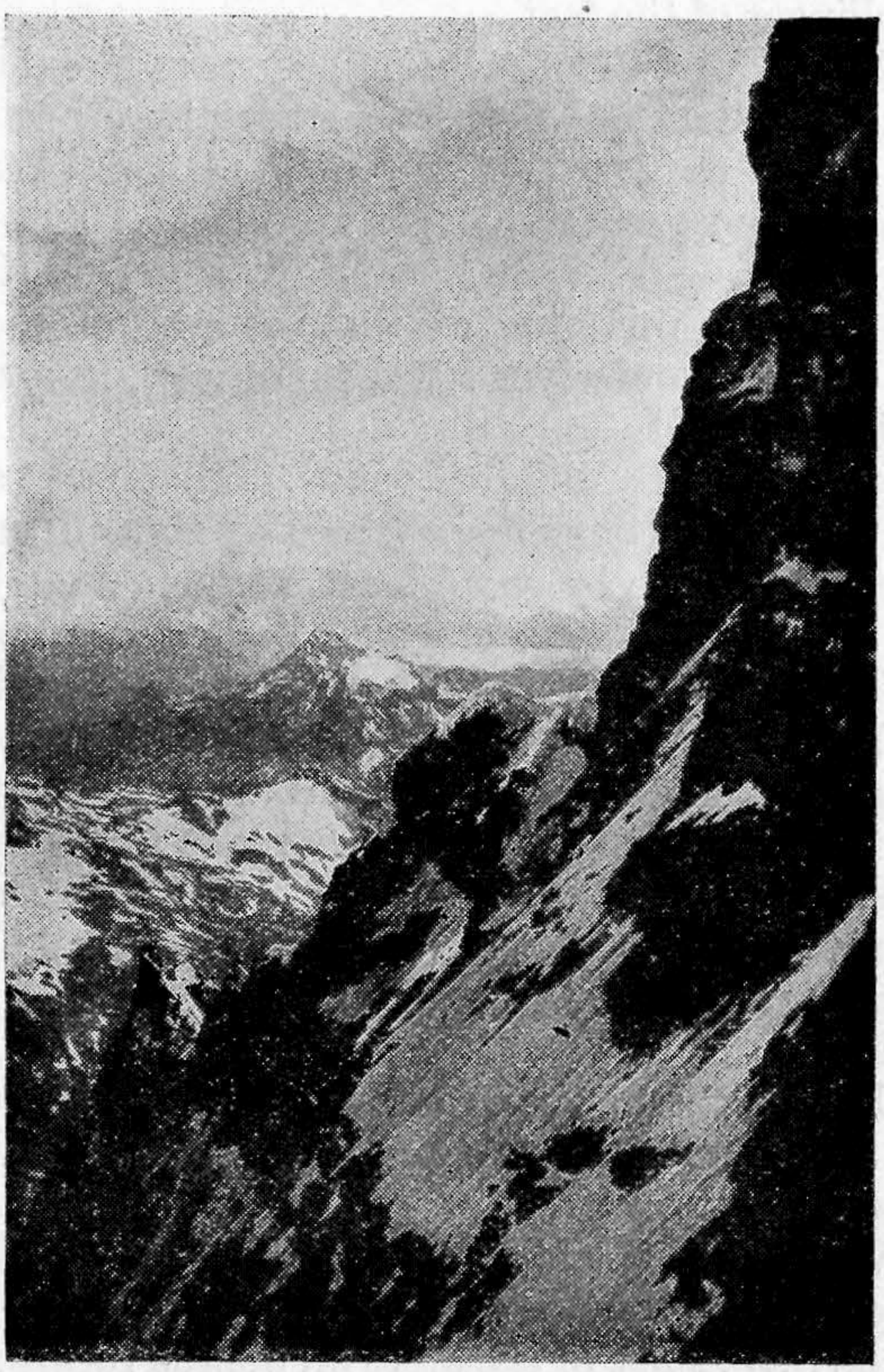
ledge. Shouts emanating from the Hörnli ridge reached us. Had Pollinger seen us or was he anxious? We shouted back in turn. . . . It was now midday.

In spite of all the usual manœuvres the rope refused to follow us and resisted every pull. Yet we were dragging at the right end, namely, drawing down below the *knot*, and we had noticed no crack in which it might have caught. There was, however, a frictional step above the overhang, some 15 m. high. We could only move sideways and this gave little help. A descent of a few steps into space would alter the direct lie of the rope, the trouble being obviously caused by the intersection of the rope with a nearly vertical and an overhanging section. A move, I say, would suppress this unfortunate angle, obtuse as it was, which was wrecking our best efforts; suddenly, however, all resistance ceased and the rope came down with a swish.

To the S. descend diagonally a series of chimneys, vertical, but not overhanging, although a *rappel* is equally necessary. Drilling out a hole in a crack we fixed our solitary rope-ring; we then slid gently downwards for some 25 m. to a fairly spacious platform. Here again we hammered in a piton securely and Mooser restarted. Standing motionless between two abysses, I soon lost sight of him. A few moments later, after 12 m. of vertical descent, I spun round like a spider at the edge of its web, but my own feelings ascribed complete immobility to my body; it was the Matterhorn, the distant Breithorn, the thickening mists, the vanishing blue sky, which were spinning around me. In these gyrations appeared suddenly a patch of snow, then Mooser himself. This overhang of 23 m. was still more into space than the first. To the spinning motion was added gradually a kind of pendulum-like swing; both ceased suddenly and my descent at once became laborious in the extreme. The rope, just now sliding over back and thigh, became immediately hard and erosive: Mooser had seized the two ends, thus causing me to struggle painfully against a useless brake. Finally, stiff and sore, I landed beside him. Mooser had tried to spare me the swing, alternately over Italy and Switzerland, undergone by himself. I should have preferred such revels; my thick if rather worn knickerbockers were seared by the rope, and I was bleeding profusely.

We both drew down the rope gently; it fell at once partly over the edge. When the Furggengrat shall have become 'an easy day for a lady,' it will be advisable for *two* at least of that sex to attempt the descent, as their united strength will be required to pull down the rope!

Mooser inquired whether I had seen the aeroplane, and I naturally replied that I had seen and heard nothing. However, it appeared that during my descent an aeroplane had flown quite close, and that its observer had made signals. Was it the



Photo, Perrochet-Matile.]

On the Furggengrat.

same machine which I have omitted to say, so common has this become, had flown over the Matterhorn's summit a short while ago, reminding us of the din of civilization and home? Heavy raindrops, drying at once, now quickly diverted our thoughts, while the voice of Pollinger calling to us was audible.

Once and again the slope dipped downwards before us. Winding up the rope we descended diagonally to the left, crawling across narrow ledges or scrambling down little steps. This kind of staircase ceased at the brink of a precipice steaming

like a boiler. Soon to the right we found an exit and with it the end of our adventures. A sort of easy and diagonal couloir, chimney in parts, ledges in others, led downwards some 20 m. to a well-marked shoulder : it was the Shoulder of the Furggengrat. We reached it at 2.30 P.M., and our yells speedily informed Pollinger of the fact.

Others have found themselves on the same Shoulder. Some defeated after gallant and desperate struggles, others obliged to surrender before the last assault ; only Piacenza can boast of having been here *en route* to a true victory ! But what a contrast with us : his guides and himself, their nerves stretched to the utmost limit, quivering at the thought of the frightful struggle ; while we ourselves stood there, care-free, nerves and muscles alike relaxed.

The mists are bent by different winds. They twist and writhe about the crest of the Shoulder warmed by the still present sun. A sea of cloud, driven by some blast, spreads and clings some hundreds of feet below us, creeping higher, however, on the mountain's eastern face. A halo appears, and in this halo is traced a faintly human outline. The sun had penetrated the clouds behind us, and on the lower and thicker screen appeared the Spectre of the Brocken. Long we gazed at it, but soon the phenomenon grew paler and vanished. 'Sehr Schön !' ejaculated the matter-of-fact Mooser. He had not read Whymper's book, describing a similar or analogous vision, or of the terror it inspired in his men.

It will be remembered that only 15 m. intervened between Rey and triumph. How, then, did it come about that we had to descend two complete overhangs, or 43 m. completely in space ? We certainly did not hunt for a route that would reduce the overhangs to a minimum ; moreover, I had attributed to the *S.W. slope* of the arête all details furnished by Rey as to the *N.E. slope* conditions, and, in an *ascent*, appearances naturally would have been far different. Geoffrey Young writes : '. . . alternatively we argued for a direct assault upon the unclimbed corner bending into the sky above us. Simply as climbing we agreed that the corner would go ; and I still think so . . .'[14] Less positive, Mooser considers that a few wooden plugs might *possibly* lead to success. I am even less convinced ; yet two plugs, despite all appearances to the contrary, *did* yield the key to the ascent of the Rothhorn in 1928.[15]

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[14] *On High Hills*, p. 224.

[15] *A.J.* **40,** 378.

In any case the fact remains that Rey and his guides studied on several occasions the riddle of the Furggengrat, both from top and base. Rey, alone, has set his foot on every point of the wall for a distance of 65 m. The evidence is conclusive that on the occasion of the desperate attempt of 1899 a different route from ours was followed. Naturally that route, although *entirely* different from ours, was yet extremely adjacent.

Two routes are open for the descent to Zermatt. One, of ill fame, shorter, raked by stones and extremely difficult at one spot—the horizontal traverse towards the Hörnli arête. The other, longer and awkward only at the take-off—the descent of the remainder of the Furggengrat.[16] There is no comparison between this take-off, although much exposed to stonefall (at the top of Rey's Couloir), and what Mummery and Young-Ryan found when pulling out towards the Hörnli.

We succumbed finally to the attractions conquered with such difficulty by Mummery and his successors.

To begin with, a short *descent* is required. Some snow and a damp kind of slippery, sloping roof led to the upper exit of the 'Couloir Rey.' By this couloir, inserted between the main arête and a secondary buttress, projecting lower down into a kind of promontory—as viewed from above—and outlined in strong relief on the slope, a party can avoid the great step below the Furggen Shoulder. The said step just removes the reproach that the lower part of the Furggengrat is, in Geoffrey Young's description, 'little more than a retaining rim of the great S.E. face of the Matterhorn.' The main stone-shoot lies in the angle of the 'Couloir Rey' and the great blank void. We slipped rapidly across the line of fire, glancing up anxiously to the heights now concealed by very black mists and straining our ears for the slightest sound. Behind us re-echoed a clatter of falling stones; we fled like a herd of scared chamois, but soon resumed a slower but safer progress.

Gullies, ribs—these latter curving in and out of the face—and we saw the Hörnli arête before us. We braced our muscles for the fierce and final struggle; but where was the difficulty? We seemed to have missed it, because with *great* ease we struck, at 3.40 P.M., the arête between the two lower pitons of a group of four, constituting the supports of an old and useless rope.

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[16] The nature of one step, quite low down on the Furggengrat and far below the Shoulder, is appreciated differently. It is certainly short, and Piacenza crossed it unroped. He climbed the arête as far as the Shoulder in 2½ hours and without the rope.

Former parties, with the summit as their objective, must have instinctively edged *upwards*, while we bore, naturally, *downwards*. So, somehow or other, we had found the easy variation to a much abused route. Still, it is an awkward traverse, where the ankle must be greatly bent to enable the foot to cling to outward sloping slabs. Were it not for snow patches and dripping slabs, *Kletterschuhe* would be of splendid use. We had debouched on the Hörnli arête within 15–20 minutes' walk of the Solvay hut, where we made a prolonged halt. Mooser spent his time bending over the N. face and gazing into its ghastly depths.

Finally, we lazily commenced the descent by that route where sardine tins rattle down in avalanches. So slowly did we move at first that only the fear of a rescue party eventually quickened our footsteps. At 6.30 P.M. we entered the Belvedere. Thirst and many showers delayed us long in the Schwarzsee Hôtel, and our arrival at Zermatt was very late.

On the following morning a telegram despatched from Zermatt to the *Gazette de Lausanne* announced 'the first descent [17] of the *Z'mutt* arête.' Linus and Mooser were not the only disgruntled persons in that valley of Zermatt!

A Month in the Canadian Rockies.

By L. S. AMERY.

(Read before the Alpine Club, February 4, 1930.)

I BELIEVE it is a matter of dispute among historians whether the last words ever uttered by the younger Pitt were 'My country, how I leave my country,' or 'I think I could manage one of Bellamy's pork pies.' I can assure you, beyond dispute, that when the late Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs and the Colonies received his notice to quit, at the end of May last, his reflections on leaving Downing Street were not 'The Empire, how I leave the Empire,' but 'Now I can manage a climb in the Rockies.'

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[17] The first *descent* of the Z'mutt ridge was accomplished, Aug. 31, 1894, by two separate parties: Miss Bristow with Josef Pollinger and Mattias Zurbriggen; Captain Farrar with Daniel Maquignaz and (?) another. Miss Bristow made the ascent by the Hörnli ridge; Captain Farrar went up and down the Z'mutt. *A.J.* **37**, 226–7.—*Editor.*