

MEMORABLE DAYS

By E. L. STRUTT

SINCE September 1939, mountaineering, so far as the British are concerned, has become but a subject of reminiscence. In the United States of America it may still flourish to some small degree. The Swiss, undeterred by a few 'British' bombs dropped promiscuously—for propaganda—may still practise in their lonely Alps. The Hellenic and Serb mountaineers with legendary valour are showing the world how hill warfare among abrupt and lofty crags is successfully accomplished. But when that is said little else remains.

During the European war of 1914-19, Percy Farrar, despite or perhaps because of his only son's death, determined to keep the ALPINE JOURNAL alive for us and the succeeding generation. How well he realised his aim the pages of Vols. XXX-XXXII clearly indicate. To follow in his footsteps during a still more terrible struggle is difficult. It has occurred to the Editor and to some of us to attempt a sequel to *Days of Long Ago* by a few recollections of days spent with great leaders. In my own case the difficulty is further increased by the fact that both my said great leaders are happily alive. In these random lines I must crave their kind indulgence as well as that of my unfortunate readers—if any—as Alfred Godley used to express it.

JOSEF POLLINGER¹: PENNINE GUIDES

I became friends with Josef on the Zinal Rothorn in 1896. Together with his brother Alois, also a very great mountaineer, and an exceedingly pleasant but inexperienced American, he was traversing the mountain under very bad conditions. The American's name was that of the present U.S. Secretary for War, and I have often wondered whether they could have been one and the same personage. Josef's leading was magnificent, while that of my own party was the reverse. Descending just behind Josef's party, we were rapidly left far astern. Twice we were obliged to use a long spare rope, and the second time, becoming jammed, the said rope had to be abandoned, since

¹ For portraits of Josef Pollinger, see illustrations facing *A.J.* 33. 405, 35. 263; Christian Klucker, *Adventures of an Alpine Guide*, facing p. 174.

neither of my companions was capable of climbing up again to release it. The weather was perfect and fortunately so, for we spent hours on that N. arête. It was not till late in the evening, having left the summit about 11 A.M., that we attained Mountet. Stimson's party had arrived about 3 o'clock! Next day we all returned together over the Triftjoch in bad weather. Incidentally, this crossing of the col to Zermatt was one of the last times that the pass was used as such. The accident to an English lady,² killed by falling stones a few months earlier, caused the pass to be discarded for the traverse of the Trifthorn, a far safer and more interesting expedition. I had been so impressed by Josef's supreme competence that, as a great friend of his father's, I engaged him whenever he was free.

Ever since Mummery's renowned (1894) second ascent of the Zmutt ridge of the Matterhorn, together with the Duke of the Abruzzi³ and Norman Collie, Josef had become famous in the Nikolaital. Mummery had chosen him as the Duke's leader on that day, and indeed, with the possible exception of Roman Imboden and Pollinger's cousin, Josef Lochmatter, there was no other young guide in the valley of the same class. Cesar Knubel, owing to an accident, was past his best. Josef Pollinger, then aged about twenty-one, was and was destined to continue to be, throughout his life, quite supreme on ice and snow. On the most severe rocks he *may* have been surpassed by the wonderful Franz Lochmatter, then a boy and almost unknown, but in the course of my not short experience I have never seen Josef's equal as an all-round mountaineer. Add to this his complete calm and unruffled nature in difficult situations, and you have surely the ideal mountaineer and guide. Hardly any difficult Chamonix Aiguille was climbed, *guided*, in those days save under the leadership of one or other of the Pollingers or Lochmatters, while of the first dozen ascents of the Zmutt Matterhorn practically all were accomplished by Josef—no Zermatt guide would look at it. Another great guide in the Nikolaital was the cheery and excellent Johann Summermatter of Randa, then a long and weedy youth, who became, as a *Swiss*, quite outstanding in the most difficult Dolomites. Heinrich Burgener of Eisten was still a most promising boy. Of the older men still active in 1895, Alois Pollinger, Josef's father, and Alexander Burgener reigned almost alone since Josef Imboden's virtual retirement. Old Alois was in most active and constant employment with life-long patrons. In that year he led Edwin Oppenheim and myself over the Lyskamm traverse, solely, I believe, to point out to Josef and

² A.J. 17. 563.

³ A.J. 37. 227.

ourselves the dangers of the enormous cornices. I do not think that we ever came within 20 ft. of the edge—at any rate we kept yards below the existing tracks, yet our traverse was among the quickest then made. That was my first meeting with Josef.

As for Alexander Burgener, it was curious to meet him on Monte Rosa leading droves of indifferent German tourists for whom he had the utmost contempt, and to listen to his extremely audible comments. Strange how a great guide could have fallen so low, as indeed Kugy has hinted.⁴ To British mountaineers Alexander was friendliness personified. Another survivor of the post Golden Age was J. M. Biener, 'der lange,' whose name has too long been neglected in Alpine history.⁵ A great St. Niklaus guide, his skill has descended in full measure to Franz, his son. Of the Zermatt guides of that date—save for the Gentinettas, Julens and Alois Biener—the less said the better. All the good men were found lower down the valley or in the Saastal, where Ambrose Supersaxo was a handsome and sympathetic figurehead.

Even in 1895 Zermatt was said to have deteriorated as a centre for mountaineering; still there were many climbers, young and old, congregated there. Nearly all were British, and vague rumours existed of a youthful prodigy, never seen in Zermatt, but disporting himself daily on combinations of forbiddingly distant peaks, alone, it was said, or with a Zinal guide. That prodigy is now President of our Club. Other nationalities were but sparsely represented, and none but Austrians, universally popular and respected, were permitted in the sacred precincts of the Monte Rosa where old Madame Seiler then reigned alone. Among such mountaineers were Dr. Kugy, Louis Friedmann and Heinrich Pfannl. Germans were beginning to flock to Zermatt, but few were to be seen except in the vicinity of the *Bergschrund* of the Mont Cervin. Eduard Hahn, a keen and attractive personality, was a vivid contrast to the rest. I cannot recollect a single Frenchman, and but one excellent Italian—Mazzuchi. Edward Davidson, from his throne at the Riffelalp, dispensed for two months unlimited help to the elect. Sometimes he descended majestically to Zermatt en route for some great climb, accompanied by the then best pair of guides in the Alps, Klucker and Josef. Franz Lochmatter was about to replace the former as Josef's second-in-command. Charles Wollaston

⁴ *Alpine Pilgrimage*, p. 259.

⁵ His name is linked with the early exploration of the Mitteleleggrat of the Eiger; he accompanied P. W. Thomas in 1878, and in 1885 was with Herr Moriz von Kuffner and Alexander Burgener when the whole ridge was explored (*A.J.* 13. 553, 41. 282; *O.A.Z.* 1885, p. 222).



Photo, W. Bellows.]

THE NORTH FACE OF THE MATTERHORN.

was a severe if occasionally genial critic of youthful indiscretions from Zermatt. Ewart Grogan, later famous as an African explorer, was then fancied as the successor to Mummery, whose death in the Himalaya was about to sadden his many friends in the Nikolaital. Among the old guard of 'Seiler' retainers, survivors of Whymper's epoch, there flourished Jost and Viktor. The latter, who long outlived the former, was the more sympathetic character of the two.

Later in the season I wandered with Josef, via Zinal (where the food contrasted most pleasantly with that of Zermatt) and the High Level route, to Chamonix. It may have been then, or perhaps some years later, that an incident occurred during our traverse of the Charmoz-Grépon which Josef will never forget. We had descended to the gap before 'C.P.', followed by a big Frenchman guided, I think, by Ravanel, *le rouge*, and Demarchi. During the short traverse where it is, or was, necessary to turn round so as to grasp the edge leading upwards to 'C.P.' we heard a deeply booming voice exclaim 'Je vais tomber!' followed by a dramatic pause. Then a second and still deeper note: 'Je vais tomber!' A still longer pause and then an organ-like 'Je . . . tombe!' And not only did this occur but, belayed as he was fore and aft, the man contrived to turn upside down. In this unusual position he succeeded in grasping the edge of 'C.P.', where his leader deftly righted him. The fall of course did not really take place, the head and feet of our big Frenchman merely exchanged places—and no damage resulted.

Another curious day on the Grépon occurred later. Josef's father, old Alois, was at Montenvers and desired, as usual, to ascend the mountain. Bill Baker, who had just arrived, gave Alois leave, while Josef and I were commanded to accompany the old gentleman. We started in the dark, but a few yards up the path were joined by four young porters who saluted politely by doffing their *bérets*. The spokesman asked leave to accompany us so as to 'apprendre la route'; he added that one or all if necessary would lead the Mummery crack. Alois Pollinger had evidently been talking. Arrived at the *rognon*, two more young Chamoniards joined us from Plan de l'Aiguille. Alois had talked far and wide. We were now a party of nine with at least ten or twelve long ropes, while each man had generously provided food for Josef and me as well as for himself. From the Charmoz-Grépon col onwards there was a babel of conversation, and the tail of the roped-all-together party was barely leaving the col before Josef had attained the taking-off place for the famous crack. As the Pollingers and I paused we



Photo, W. Bellows.]

SUMMIT OF THE MATTERHORN ; MONTE ROSA IN THE BACKGROUND

could hear each man below volubly boasting how *he* would lead the crack and display his prowess to 'les Suisses.' Arrived at the take-off and picturesquely grouped on the exiguous accommodation for such a party, a silence as of death descended suddenly on all. In the midst of it Josef quietly moved off, traversed, and then equally quietly and without pause climbed the crack. I followed with little grace and many gasps, joining Josef above amidst encouraging cheers from the Chamoniards. We waited for old Alois, but it was a French head that appeared at the end of the rope. Alois had tied himself on last. In succession and amid much laughter head after head had appeared, but at a point soon after the crack's commencement successive volleys of oaths had been noticeable. We now discovered that Alois, waiting till each man seemed committed to the chimney, was gently lobbing stones on to each victim's head as it came into view from his seat at the take-off. Then Alois followed; we hustled the Chamoniards off the platform for fear of reprisals. But Alois had other views as to how the crack was to be climbed. No less than four ropes were let down to the base, and, grasping two in each hand, Alois *walked* up the chimney, an enormous boot being the first object to reach our dazzled eyes on the platform. We continued gaily and noisily to the summit, Josef and I scrambling up the N. peak en route. A few years ago I read somewhere of the first ascent claimed for this peak about 1930, after much exertion in *Kletterschuhe*! Josef in his boots climbed it in two minutes and almost simultaneously hauled me to the top. Arrived on the summit, we listened to Alois just below indulging in long conversations with the Frenchmen, none of whom spoke German. It seemed to make no difference to those concerned. The weather and conditions had been perfect, and the sight of the long party of nine all roped together sliding down the Nantillons, each about 60 ft. apart, with myself leading with the solitary axe, was most awe-inspiring. The young Chamoniards went excellently, and before parting affectionately on the moraine, each man, presenting his book, requested me to write that the owner of the same had *led* the Grépon! I look back to few climbs with more pleasure. I might add that one of these men—needless to say none had received the desired endorsement—was kind enough to inform a friend of mine that *I* had led the party! In those far-off days the Grépon was considered the most difficult climb in the Alps; consequently I still enjoy a certain respect in non-mountaineering circles. Alois in the course of his long career was taken to the 'top' of the Grépon on many occasions by his sons or his nephews, the Lochmatters. His proceedings

were invariably as described and, I believe, he always stayed at the base of the summit pinnacle. Peace be to the memory of the best of guides and comrades, whose sense of humour was unfailing.

About this period (1904) several remarkable parties were active from Montenvers. Chamonix was at a low ebb and unpopular with the average mountaineer; nevertheless Arthur Thorold, with Josef and usually Alois Pollinger, jun., accomplished many noteworthy expeditions, including the Grands Charmoz from the Mer de Glace.⁶ Wicks, Claude Wilson and Bradby were still prominent on the southern slopes of the chain, and it was in the year 1904 that their extraordinary crossing of the Col de la Brenva, made in a single day from Courmayeur under the most icy conditions, was accomplished.⁷ Later still in the same season (1904) came the sensational ascent of the Aiguille de la République, accomplished by means of a rope-noose 'fired' out of a cross-bow. But this climb was regarded as not being a genuine ascent. The parties, however, that excited most attention were composed of one (all French): Émile Fontaine with the brothers Ravanel, and the other (mixed): V. J. E. Ryan with the brothers Josef and Franz Lochmatter. Fortuitously perhaps these parties became rival claimants to the few reasonable plums still available. Fontaine was a veteran mountaineer of great topographical knowledge and remarkable technical skill; he was travelling with the best Chamonix men of that indifferent period. Ryan, of very youthful years, of fabulous speed and endurance but little geographical sense, was accompanied by professionals unsurpassable in past or future chronicles of mountaineering. It was a strange contrast to see the four guides and Alfred Simond laughing and chaffing together, while the *Herren* carefully avoided any contact. The fault did not appear to lie with the senior, who was affability itself with other British, and whose great knowledge of Mont Blanc and the Aiguilles was available to all his acquaintance. His articles on climbs in the range, published in *Echo des Alpes*, are models of restraint and lucidity. His rival in the field published nothing; he seemed often devoid of any knowledge of where he had been, relying solely on his guides as regards the locality or history of any fancied climbs. On the whole during this period of rivalry honours remained even. Youth was effectively balanced by experience.

Before the 'command' ascent of the Grépon just related, Ryan had requested me to look for a belt of his, forgotten on the summit or at 'C.P.,' but it might even repose on one or other of

⁶ A.J. 19. 597.

⁷ A.J. 25. 497, 572; 26. 264 *sqq.*

the Aiguilles du Dru ! This we had done without success. A day or two later Josef and I thought to have a look at the main ridge of Grandes Jorasses east of the col of that name. It was a long tramp to the 'pass'—there were no superfluous Requin or Leschaux huts in those days. In fact, when Ryan and the Lochmatters accomplished the Brenva route of Mont Blanc, the start was made from (and to) *Montenvers*. On reaching the col, the final slope to which was in good condition, we turned on to the rocks of the first peak on the Jorasses ridge. This precipitous top was nameless, indeed we looked upon it as merely a step in the great ridge. If modern vulgarity must demand a name—and personal one to boot—for every excrescence, then few can cavil at its present appellation, *Pointe Young*. I found its ascent very difficult ; it was composed of smooth bare slabs set at a very high angle, interspersed with little ribbons or runnels of black ice. Holds were few and far between, and the climb has been tersely and aptly described as lying up 'a dim and alarming line of least resistance.' The rock was not good and what we *could* lay hold of shattered frequently in our hands. So thin, almost transparent, were the slabs that light could readily be perceived between—a phenomenon referred to subsequently by Geoffrey Young. I have no exact recollection of how long we took over the ascent, it was perhaps two hours or even more from the col. Eventually we emerged on the top with its dramatic view. One glance at the terrible ridge leading towards the distant summit was sufficient ; we never thought even of the wonderful turning movement to the S., by which the Young-Jones-Knubel party of seven years later regained the watershed. But a recent and purely fictional account of the traverse of the *crest* between our point and *Punta Margherita* still rankles in the mind of that editor of *A. J.* who was weak enough to publish it.⁸

The hour in any case was far too late for any further investigation ; thick clouds were billowing up from Italy. We prepared to descend. Suddenly we caught sight of a tiny cairn, and alongside of this lay the cloth belt of Ryan's Norfolk jacket ! I put it in my pocket and we commenced the first of many *rappels* down that grim and horrid face, which seen through mists looked doubly repellent. Presently we found first one rope-ring, then others, left behind by the Lochmatters during their descent of the point. Eventually, after expending much exertion and care, we debouched on the Col des Grandes Jorasses. The French side being clear of clouds, our descent from the col and traverse of the Géant Glacier's crevasses were rapidly accomplished—we had

⁸ *A. J.* 42. 342 ; 43. 63 *sqq.*, 255 ; 46. 412, with references.

been through those crevasses too often that season to be held up even momentarily. We regained Montenvers about nightfall after a very long day. It was not usual then to record a failure, still less to claim as a 'first ascent' the furthest point attained in the course of that selfsame failure. Consequently, in conversation with the Lochmatters no allusion was made save to the want of success of their day and ours.

Josef Pollinger's great ice expeditions, descent of Mont Blanc by the Brenva, N. face of Aiguille de Bionnassay, the crossing of the col of that name, all made with R. W. Lloyd, belong to a far later date.

When writing of Josef Pollinger it is difficult or impossible to recall any but incidents of a frivolous nature. With guides of his class serious or regrettable incidents simply do not occur. I can remember a traverse of the Aiguille Verte made alone with Josef. With splendid conditions we attained the top, via the Moine ridge, in what seem now impossible times. On the summit we found Hahn with brother Alois and a Tyrolese guide. The 'couloir Whymper,' by which both parties descended, was extremely icy and falling stones compelled us to keep very close together; accordingly it was late afternoon before we attained the glacier. Hahn was very tired and lagged considerably behind on the moraine. If either of his guides waited for him, Hahn—the best-natured of men—swore violently at him and waved him on. Suddenly behind us came a crash as of breaking glass, followed by an immense splash. Glancing round, there was nothing in sight. We ran back, and lo! in the centre of a large marginal glacier pool was the head of Hahn and nothing more. He was dragged out with difficulty, the men getting very wet in the process, owing to his entire refusal to do anything to help himself. We wrung his clothes out, put him between us, and continued on our way. Hahn, nursing his wrath, said not a word. At last Alois ventured to ask how he felt and whether he was *very* wet. Then came a raucous Prussian bark: 'Alois, bis übermorgen bin ich unsprechbar.' On arrival at Couttet's, Hahn went to bed *bis übermorgen*, when he emerged in the best of spirits.

Perhaps my most enjoyable seasons with Josef were spent in the Bregaglia. There were (1908) but two or three guides in all the Alps who knew it, and, except for the now almost time-expired Rydzewsky, but one amateur. The Sciora, just completed, was the sole hut, except for the better known Forno further east. To visit the Albigna glen you had to start from low Vicosoprano, and the rough path was positively dangerous in the dark. On the Italian side existed the (unnecessary) Badile and (useful)



Photo, Alfredo Corti.]

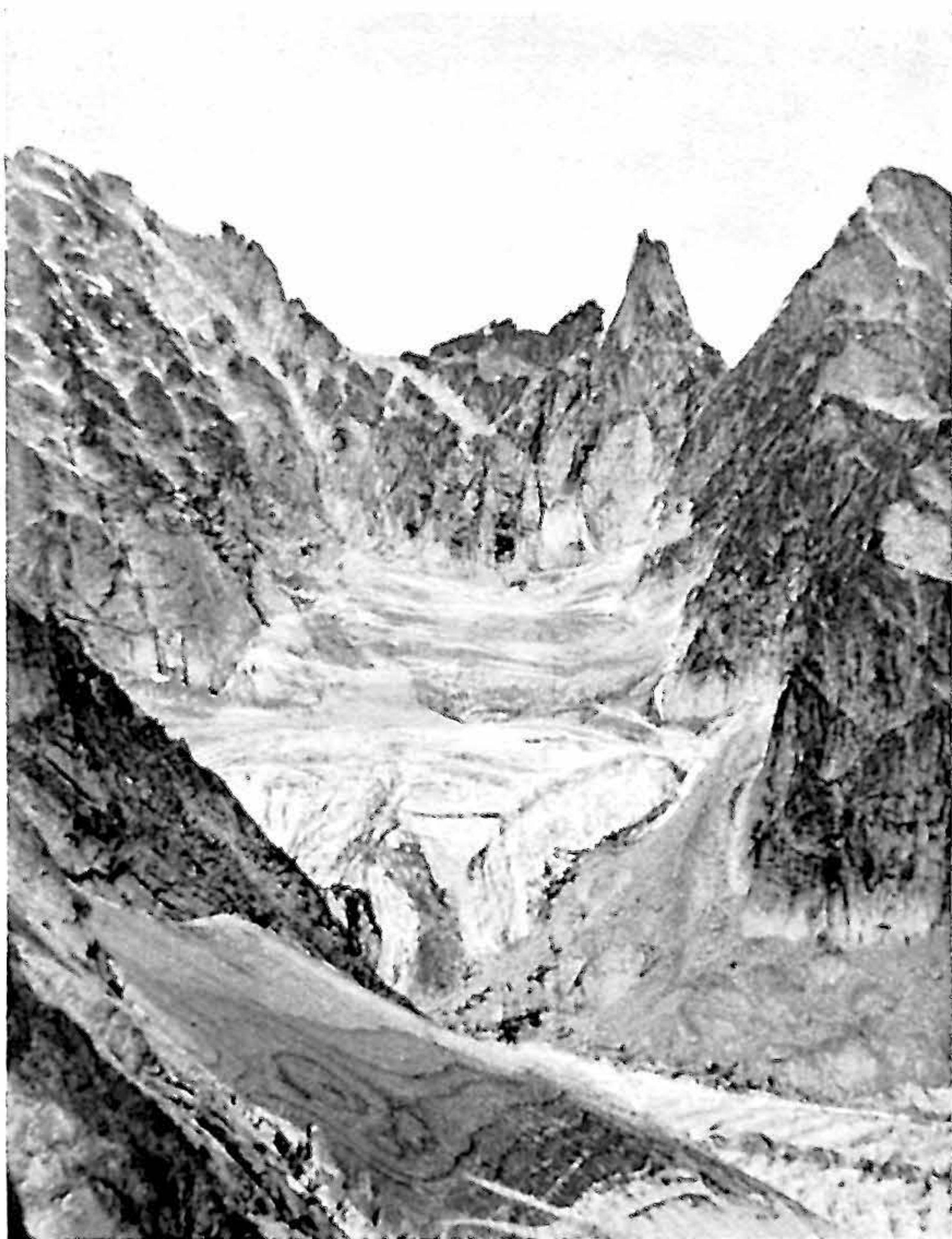
TORRIONE DEL FERRO AND CIMA DELLA BONDASCA (E. PEAK), N. FACES,
FROM COLLE DELL' ALBIGNA, 1935.



Photo, Alfredo Corti.]

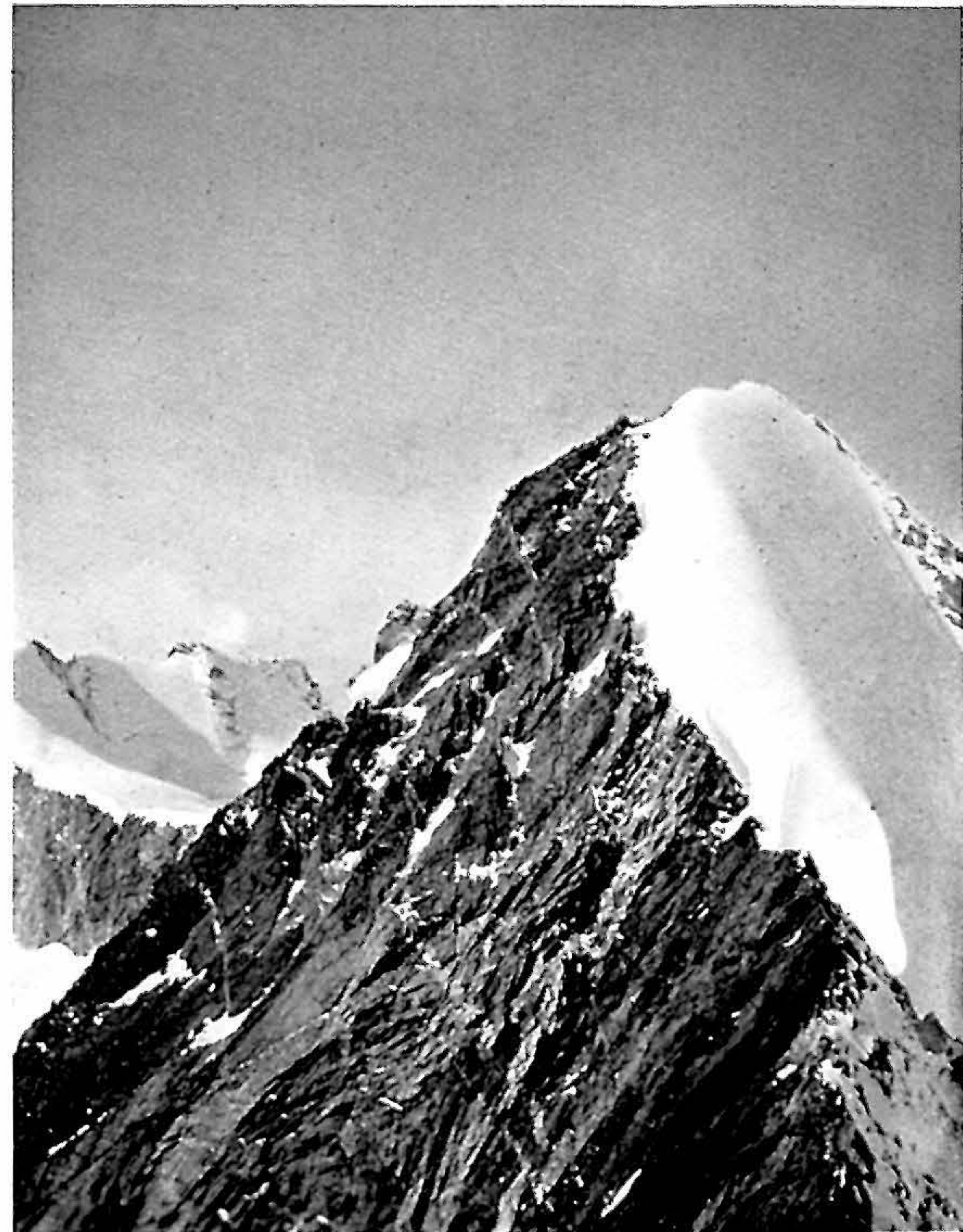
PUNTA QUALIDO (FERRO ORIENTALE), N. FACE, FROM COLLE DELL' ALBIGNA,
1935.

[To face p. 18.



Photo, N. S. Finzi.]

AGO DI SCIORA, FROM ZOCCA PASS.



Photo, N. S. Finzi.]

CIMA DI ROSSO, FROM CIMA VAZZEDA.

Cecilia huts, both in deplorable state, while the new Allievi had been destroyed by an avalanche. What a contrast to the exploiting of the district since 1919! Yet in 1908 these glorious and deserted glens were infinitely more charming than they now are. Engineers had not then desecrated the magnificent Albigna waterfall—one of the wonders of the Alps in spring or early summer. Mountaineers on the Italian side were not persecuted—even fired upon—by ill-mannered hooligans calling themselves ‘Fascist youths.’ On the Swiss slope we were not called upon to view Nazis befouling the northern slopes of Gemelli, Cengalo, Trubinasca and Sciora with senseless nails so as to qualify for a medal award from ‘that evil man.’ The tremendous N. buttress of Piz Badile was still virgin. I have often been asked by friends why Josef and I never tried it then. The answer is that Klucker, the sole person who had ever set foot on it, considered that one step of over 300 ft. was so excessively difficult and exposed as to be of positive danger even with pitons. I was climbing for the sake of pleasure and the new ‘Coolidge’ *Guide*; Josef and I considered Klucker’s opinion as final. I notice now at last an ever increasing respect for the great buttress with its growing and grim record of fatalities. The corresponding face of Cengalo, once climbed, was never feasible during the early seasons—June—that I spent in the Bondasca. The enormous summit-ridge cornice was always present and threatening.⁹ Still we did climb Badile by three routes, and only a fearful storm defeated us on a new combination on Cengalo.

The Albigna glen was still less visited than the Bondasca, and the Ferro peaks at its southern end were virtually unknown. In 1913, early in June, Josef led me up the great ice slope between Torrione and the E. peak of the Central Ferro. Attaining the base at dawn, we found a couple of inches of snow frozen on to the blue ice. The couloir was fearfully steep—indeed, on the upper part, I kept bruising my chin against its surface. Josef cut up with matchless skill and speed, yet at the very steepest part, 300–400 ft. below the watershed, one of the only two incidents—the other was on Pic Sans Nom from the Col du Pelvoux—that I have experienced with Josef occurred suddenly and without warning. The entire slabby face of Central Ferro to our right, plastered with gigantic ice stalactites and snowy bosses, peeled off into our couloir. We never looked round and Josef continued his cutting without pause. Between my feet as I shifted them I saw the masses raking our line of steps and thundering down the gully; I was less than 10 ft.—putting it mildly—above the margin of the

⁹ Cf. Klucker, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 141, 157; *A. J.* 37. 153; 50. 336.

fall. We reached the watershed ; to our left towered the sharp and apparently hopeless slabs of Torrone : Risch has since descended them. To our right, as hopeless-looking, reared up the ridge of Central Ferro ; in front of us overhanging rocks plunged for hundreds of feet into Val Ferro. We turned towards Central Ferro : Promontogno was our aim and from Torrone, even if attained, nothing but a descent into Val Ferro was feasible. A long slanting crack led up the first slabs, even Josef appearing to be really extended : eventually, after perhaps 80-100 ft. of ugly progress, he attained a minute platform. Up this crack, where the diagonal rope offered no help, I gasped my way, carrying both sacks and axes. I can only remember reaching the platform in a dazed and done-to-the-world condition. Above, the ridge appeared quite hopeless ; Bonacossa has since told me how with a long rope he had quite failed to descend it. But, just to our right, a vertical-seeming crevice filled with slushy snow furrowed the grim slabs. The traverse to the crevice, not more than 6-8 ft., was desperate-looking. It consisted of a wet snow boss just adhering to the rock. Josef leaned over and with his hands fashioned two or three deep steps in the slush. Silently but smiling at me, he committed himself to it ; all held fast and in a few seconds he attained the crevice. This latter he quickly mounted till our 100-ft. rope ran out. I followed, both being now helplessly committed to the slushy surface, which we both climbed simultaneously at our utmost speed. In five minutes more we attained broad and easy ledges leading to the short good rocks of the summit.¹⁰

Although the entire climb had taken but comparatively few hours, I do not think that Josef will forget that day. Risch has, I believe, since followed the watershed from Torrone to Central Ferro, while Rütter has later still attained Torrone from a bifurcation in the ice gully. But the fearsome upper gully or couloir leading to the watershed has not yet been repeated. In June 1914, a day or two before the Serajevo outrage, Josef and I came over towards Promontogno from Masino-Bagni. Promontogno boasted an old-fashioned hotel in those days, but the place, being perhaps the most picturesque and magnificent in the Alps, naturally attracted no visitors. Lindsell and I were the sole guests, and the said building, having failed on numerous occasions, became derelict in 1935. The hotel at Vicosoprano was closed at about the same time for visitors. Consequently, except for rustic inns highly unsuitable as residences, there exists no visitors' accommodation between Maloja and Chiavenna !

¹⁰ A. J. 27. 446.

Photo, A. D. Side.]



CRODA DA LAGO.

Turning once again towards the head of the Albigna Glacier, in addition to the other Ferro peaks and Monte Zocca, there rises precipitously a sadly neglected mountain, Punta Qualido or Eastern Ferro Peak. With other intentions Josef and I wandered thither, while Lindsell, with Alois Biener and a second very inefficient man, prepared to climb Qualido by the E. arête. Our projected expedition looked very unpromising.¹¹ There were masses of snow on all the peaks, including even Ago di Sciora. However, this snow on a cold day gave almost infinite possibilities. The N. face of Punta Qualido is enormously steep and, when dry, is composed of the smoothest slabs of a general angle of 60° , approaching even 70° in many places. From the Sciora peaks, this face of some 2500 ft., writing from memory, is especially striking. Somewhere about 1924, even the enterprising Pierre Blanc refused to recognise its possibility when *dry*. But in 1914 we rightly adjudged the ascent as feasible. Crossing the easy bergschrund, we were at once launched on the steepest possible snow slopes. These were composed of absolutely perfect material and, scraping steps, we mounted with extreme rapidity. In those days of long ago neither Josef nor I ever wore crampons; in fact, with a step-cutter of Josef's class no time would have been saved, on *snow*. On ice, steps must be cut, crampons or no crampons. There may be advantages for crampons—just as there are for skis! To resume: we were cutting straight up making for the summit, when about midway on the face small particles of ice began falling on us from the W. ridge cornice. The falls were painful if not dangerous, and we bore very gradually away towards the E., striking a kind of very steep buttress leading to a prominent gendarme on the summit ridge just E. of the top. This proved the solitary difficulty encountered; the snow lying on precipitous slabs was but an inch or so thick and careful balancing was necessary. Soon we were under the watershed and a great overhanging cornice confronted us. Josef made himself into a ladder and with a glance round gestured me first on to his back, then shoulders, head, and finally axe. I carefully cut away the edge and soon scrambled on to the ridge. As I attained the crest at the base of the gendarme, Lindsell's party appeared. We all went on towards the top, after Josef and I had amused ourselves by scaling the gendarme. So far as I can remember, two hours had sufficed for the ascent of the face, with ten minutes added to attain the summit. Anyway the times were eloquent of Josef's marvellous powers, as well as of the exceptional conditions of the face. So far as I know the ascent of the N. face has not been repeated.

¹¹ A. J. 28. 394 sqq.

On another occasion of that year, Josef and I found ourselves at the northern base of the Colle dei Gemelli just before dawn. Conditions and snow were good and the col looked far less formidable than the great Cengalo couloir, just to the W., that we had climbed some years before. There was, however, a curious warm feeling in the air, and we both hesitated before committing ourselves to the attack. I left it to Josef to decide, and he finally turned away regretfully towards the Passo di Bondo. We passed on to the Central Ferro and thence along the watershed to the Sciora di dentro, where we again found Lindsell's party. My own party was feeding somewhat disgruntledly on the top, when there came a tremendous roar from the Gemelli couloir just opposite. A stupendous avalanche of Himalayan proportions swept that couloir from end to end; rocks, ice and snow hurtled over the couloir's great bergschrunds, extending to a point about the centre of the Bondasca Glacier. Had Josef's judgment been at fault, we should have been about midway in the couloir. Our spirits rose remarkably, but stones and snow continued to howl down that gully till long after we had attained the floor of the Bondasca glen, while the path of the avalanche and its débris could be seen clearly from Promontogno for days afterwards. The second crossing of the Colle dei Gemelli has yet to be achieved. Under June 1914 conditions I would recommend it highly to all wearers of the swastika.

Since 1914 Josef and I do not often meet, and we have accomplished but two or three ascents together. Adolf, his only son, was of my party on a disastrous day of 1923.¹² He is a worthy descendant of that Josef, aptly termed by a great mountaineer and writer as the Prince Rupert among guides.¹³

ANTONIO DIMAI : DOLOMITE GUIDES

I first beheld the Dolomites from the top of the Zuckerhütl in 1892. Three times since have I seen that same Stubai view. I still think it among the most entrancing of the Alps. In fact, I am now tempted to consider that Dolomites are best seen from a considerable distance. From a close-up, even more from one of the actual peaks, the colour has departed, the screes are mean, the crests are shattered, even the shapes have lost all distinction and grace. This remark applies of course far more to all the limestone ranges north of the Inn. But I did not think this in 1892. At the end of that summer I visited Cortina—now, but not then, one of the Alps' most unattractive spots.

¹² *A.J.* 35. 314 sqq.

¹³ *On High Hills*, p. 102.

In 1893 I made numerous ascents with various guides, while in 1894 I had a prolonged season with the subject of this memoir. At that time Toni Dimai was aged about twenty-six and for the previous two or three years had been considered the finest cragsman in the Eastern Alps. This in fact continued to be his well-merited reputation to the day of his retirement some thirty years later. In figure he was moderately tall and slight, with the pink and white complexion of a girl. On rocks he was like a cat, and it was an extraordinary sight to see him catapulting down a chimney, apparently rocketing from side to side. His grace and finish were remarkable, and truly he seemed as one of those who cannot fall. I saw little of him on snow, but good judges have assured me that even with small experience his form was first-rate. His speed was tremendous on a mountain ; on hill paths or scree, like all Dolomite guides, Toni was formidable. In 1933, at the age of nearly seventy, Toni fairly laid me out—you can imagine what he was like in 1894. He had great charm of manner and was not temperamental like most Süd-Tirolese guides. At that time Sepp Innerkofler of Sexten was his sole and most devoted rival. Each had a great respect for the other's powers. I came across a great number of other Dolomite guides and climbed with several, notably Mansueto (Rydzewsky's old companion) and Giovanni Barbaria, a very good fellow who is, I believe, still alive. Others were Constantini, Michele Bettega, Zecchini, Bartolo Zagonel and Angelo Zangiacomi of Cortina or San Martino. The latter accompanied me to the Gross Glockner group. All were capable men on their own rocks, some, like Bettega, being quite outstanding, but all were more or less temperamental and, from lack of practice, at sea on snow and ice. The famous Michael Innerkofler indeed lost his life on the Cristallo from this cause.

The Dolomites suffered from the German invasion at that remote period—they suffer still more at present. A most unlovely and noisy crowd pervaded the inns and paths, but *not* the mountains. How the Tyrolese loathed them ! The horrible ' Panzer ' inns of San Martino were their unhappy ' sport ' rendezvous. A certain number of Austrians, many of them famous climbers, were to be encountered in the remoter districts. All were pleasant fellows, anxious to help an English boy in every way. Other nationalities were sparsely represented, but those I met, Dutch, Hungarian, Italian and British, were all agreeable. Some of them were ladies rapidly acquiring what became well-merited reputations.

Nothing changed quicker in those days than the standard and

quality of Dolomite climbing. By the end of 1894, I can say that, so far as quantity and even quality of climbing was concerned, I had accomplished as much as or more than any amateur. By 1896 I had literally but two or three 'difficult' ascents to my credit: on a 1920-38 standard I have absolutely nothing! Regarding Dolomites strictly as mountains and not as mere climbs, it can be ventured that excepting for a few detached teeth, such as the Vajolet Towers and Campanile di Val Montanaia, nearly all the mountains have a perfectly easy route to the summit. For guideless climbers on the ordinary routes the one and only difficulty is the finding of the way, but this is really a serious obstacle. *Kletterschuhe*, now universal even on the easiest routes, leave no marks on the rocks, while all these latter look alike from below and still more from above.

In July or August 1894, the late Wilfred Clive and I joined Toni Dimai at Campitello, Giovanni Barbaria also accompanying us. On the following morning we left the rather unsavoury inn in a thick fog. Toni proposed to climb the Winklerturm, of which no previous British ascent had been made. There was a milk-like darkness, but dim patches of what seemed to be blue encouraged us to proceed. For hours we pounded up tracks, grass and screes—Toni appeared to know the direction perfectly—and suddenly high rocks loomed directly in front. This was the Winklerturm. We roped and Toni led off at express speed—in *Kletterschuhe* of course. He was wearing a new pair of the then unknown felt-strip variety. They were very slippery at first and several times Toni's feet skidded badly, to his great amusement, as one finger on the rocks provided *him* with sufficient stability. The rest of us were wearing the horrible, string-soled Innsbruck variety which rarely survived one climb. It was many years before decent climbing shoes could be obtained locally. I can remember but one difficult and short bit in the ascent, which I climbed—Toni being out of sight in the fog—to the right instead of up the centre of the chimney. It was most strenuous but pleased Toni immensely. We duly reached the top, but fog enveloped us completely. The traverse of the three peaks, Winkler, Stabeler and Delago, had not then been invented, so we descended by the same route, using a short spare rope at times. It will save repetition to state that the fog continued the same all day. Nevertheless Toni led us up and down the Stabeler and then proposed to try the hardest, or Delagoturm. We were suffering from the usual curse of the Dolomites, want of water, but Toni cruised about in the fog until he found a trickle of snow-water. Refreshed, we tackled the peak up a long, steep and

unusually deep chimney. It was very strenuous, being mostly perpendicular although provided with good holds. We reached the top considerably bruised about the head, owing to the want of visibility in the chimney. I recollect finding Robert Corry's card on the top ; his ascent, one of the very earliest, was in 1893, I think. We descended on an extra long spare rope by the same route. The *Pichlriss*, leading to the Stabeler, had not then been discovered—in any case it is, I think, useless as a descent of the Delago to the valley. It was dark on the summit as Toni prepared the very long spare rope for the descent. There were no pitons in the chimney, and at each take-off Toni inserted rolled newspapers between the hitch and the rope. Everything went like clockwork ; it was a splendid sight to see Toni as last man swinging down in long pendulum-like swirls of 150 ft. : sometimes he appeared to be 10–20 ft. clear of the rocks. He relied on the foot-brake entirely. Despite our numbers and the length of the great chimney, we were soon at the base. A long walk home with the sun at last breaking through brought us to Campitello. I had been up the Rosengartenspitze in 1893 and thence had perceived the Vajolet emerging from steam-like clouds. Otherwise I have never yet seen the peaks from less than 30 miles off. From first to last, throughout our long day, three of the party remained in complete ignorance of where we happened to be !

A day or two later we traversed the Grohmannspitze, then said to be the second most difficult peak in the Dolomites. We went up by badly iced rocks and descended through a long waterfall. On the following day Toni declared his intention of climbing Fünffingerspitze by the famous *Schmittkamin*. Ever since Robert Hans Schmitt's first ascent of the peak in 1890, it had been considered in Eastern Alps' opinion as the most difficult climb in Europe—nay, in the world ! The ascent was regarded in the same light as would the conquest of the Muztagh Tower or Jannu, by future generations of the Himalayan Club. It had been climbed once since by a much advertised and be-photographed Dutch-Teutonic lady led by Dimai. The easy *Dau-menscharte* route had recently been found and climbed once. Now as we prepared for 'Fünffingerspitze by *Schmittkamin*, 3rd ascent,' there entered the inn one Ludwig Norman-Neruda ; he stated that he had just climbed the notorious *Kamin*, alone. He told us that it was terrible, and indeed his was a great feat, although he knew something of the mountain, having climbed the N. face with Klucker a year or two before.

Toni was still keen, and we started from the inn next morning. I found little difficulty—with the rope above me—at Neruda's

crucial point, the *Kanzl*, but above and nearing the top the trouble was great. Clive, Barbaria and Toni were all about 100 ft. above me on a secure platform, and I took off from a similar ledge on to a short overhang. As I did so, swinging the rope so as to have it vertically above, I dislodged a great stone. I dodged it more or less successfully, but for the first and, I hope, last time came right off. The others held me easily and I soon scrambled up. Clive was delighted at my performance; he had come off badly on the Canali in the Pala group a week before, and so we were now 'all square.' We soon reached the top, having enjoyed what must always be a fine climb, although its glory departed for ever a year or two later. It began to thunder on the top and Toni hurried us off, roping down a little ice slope close to the top which, I believe, still exists. The *Daumenscharte* route is both easy to climb and, what is more important, easy to find. In the final chimney above the screes we found Pietro Dimai (a cousin of Toni), an Austrian amateur, and a well-known Ortler guide proceeding upwards. Such was the weight of the latter and his clumsiness on rocks that Pietro utterly failed to pull him up. I suggested our trying as well with a second rope, but Toni declared that we should merely snap our own as well as the 'cable' to which the guide was secured. Eventually both parties descended, the Ortler representative losing his axe in the process. That winter Neruda published a controversial and rather unkind article in the *Zeitschrift* on the degradation of the Fünffinger. He said that the *Schmittkamin* (4th ascent) had been climbed 'by a couple of young fellows whose second or third mountain it was. Dimai had great difficulty in holding one of them when he tumbled off.' This rankled with both Clive and myself: he had been climbing since 1891, and I even longer. Neruda himself perished in the selfsame *Schmittkamin* in 1898.¹⁴

On returning to Campitello that evening—this was long before the existence of any huts in the district—we encountered a jovial Austrian. He assured the party that he was the fastest and best climber in the Alps, that no guide could live with him; in fact, he was the very devil of a fellow. Dimai was deeply impressed. We took a day off and Barbaria led us on the next up the Langkofel by a variation of the easy but then rather dangerous ordinary route. Dimai had, with a wink, asked leave to accompany the Austrian; however, the latter, whose name I have forgotten, was not yet quite keyed up to racing standard. We returned to Campitello, and on the next day, descending to breakfast at 8.30 A.M. on a fine warm morning, saw Toni drinking coffee and

¹⁴ A.J. 19. 268.



Photo W. Bellows.]

IN THE PITZTAL, 'TYROL, AUSTRIA.

[To face p. 26]

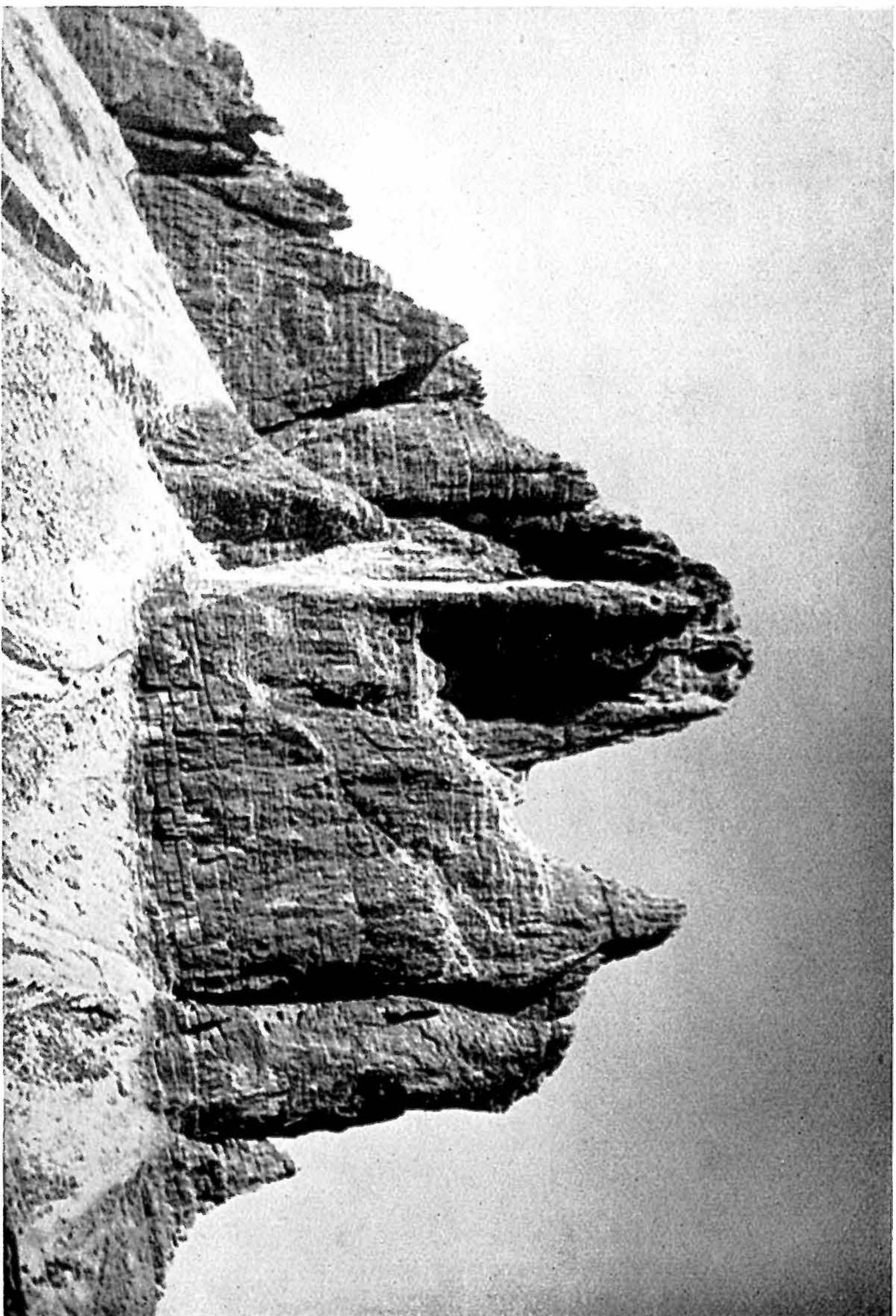
the Austrian quaffing beer by the bucket outside the inn. I said, 'Hullo, you have never started then?' 'Oh yes, we have,' retorted the Austrian, 'we have been up the Fünffinger.' He and Toni had taken $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours up and the same time down by the *Daumenscharte*, from and to *Campitello*! About lunch-time the *Wirt* came to Clive and me saying the Austrian was very ill in his room. There was no doctor, no conveyance and no telegraph; the nearest possibility of help lay at Vigo down the valley. Toni was fast asleep, and Barbaria was helping with the harvest somewhere. Accordingly, I borrowed a fat farm horse and galloped bareback down the valley; twice the brute got rid of me, the last time somersaulting himself over a heap of stones. I at last found the doctor, we inspanned my animal, now dead lame, into a trap and hurried as best we could up to Campitello. We arrived about 6 P.M., but by 6.30 all was over, the doctor saying that nothing could have saved the wretched Austrian's life. Apparently the quantity of cold beer he had swallowed was finally responsible. The man's companions arrived that evening and relieved us of further responsibility. We left next morning for a place, the name of which I have forgotten, close to the north and glacier face of Marmolata. On arrival Toni looked very ill and soon collapsed. Fortunately he had a married sister in the immediate vicinity. We carried him on a shutter to her farm, where she made him comfortable.

Next day the news of Toni was good, so with Barbària we climbed Marmolata from the north, descending by the Piz Vernail ridge, which was then interesting and unprofaned by its modern spikes and bicycle handles. We rejoined Toni, and he said he would stay 'put' for a day or two and then rejoin us at Cortina, our destination. We started off by bridle paths—this was long before the Dolomite road—lunched excellently at Livinalungo, crossed Falzarego, and descended to Cortina in the early evening. That was a long day, but the worst of all was the ascent to Faloria. Barbaria was splendid and carried our rucksacks as well as his own. I fear this tale is of a boresome nature, but the craze for records and racing still persists, and not only in Nazi-Fascist circles.

Madame Menardi welcomed us with all her charm, and Toni rejoined next evening quite restored. He attributed his comparative immunity to hot *Feigenkaffee* instead of cold beer. Clive temporarily left the party to join his family in mild climbs and walks, while Toni and I strolled via Tre Croci to the tiny inn at Misurina. What a contrast to the present day: the bridle path replaced by a racing *autostrada*, with glaring and vulgar

summer palaces polluting Tre Croci and Misurina ; the lake and lovely forest scenery all ruined, and an artificial lagoon and barrage created below at Auronzo.

Toni and I left the rustic inn before daylight, walked over the Zinnen plateau and descended towards the Rimbianco glen. When almost directly under it, we attacked the Kleine Zinne by its N. face. I found this just about the most difficult climb that I have made in the Dolomites, but Toni was climbing tremendously fast, intent on further deeds. We duly reached the summit, but I have forgotten all intermediate details. Arrived on the top, we saw just below us on the south two German *Führerlose* making frantic efforts to scale the not very difficult *Zsigmondykamin*—that same chimney climbed later by Sanger Davies, upside down. Toni eventually took pity on the youths and threw his rope down to them. Even then both came off while we were hauling them up, and one lost his boots ! In the descent we had to shepherd their trembling limbs over the easy if exposed traverse, and altogether wasted much time during the descent. Between the Zinnen I presented the bootless one with my old *Kletterschuhe* to replace his own disintegrated pair, and asked him why he climbed guideless. He replied, ' Because one learns so much more.' We fed, and in boots—as was always the case in those days—climbed the Grosse Zinne by the then usual route. It was quite interesting and, a contrast to most Dolomites, the near rock scenery was striking. We stayed some time on the top and then descended to our sacks in the gap between our two accomplished summits. After a long feed we skirted round the Grosse Zinne and in rather thick weather tackled the rarely visited Western Zinne. The rocks were not very steep, but were covered with loose boulders and scree, giving the mountain an indescribably ruined appearance. Everything looked alike, not difficult but monotonous and dreary to a degree. I cannot remember whether Toni had ever been up before, but we both hated it and swore that never would we go near such a peak again. Thirst and fatigue were perhaps making us unduly disgruntled. We *did* reach the top, which looked exactly like a shelled village, and turned to the descent at once. I did not distinguish myself, losing the way on every possible occasion. Toni was angelic and merely laughed. We seldom retraced our footsteps, just slithered and rocked round or over the obstacles. The mountain really ' went ' everywhere, but we scattered stones and boulders in all directions. It mattered not at all : no one would ever be found in that hell of desolation at that hour of the day.



Photo, Margaret Side.]

KLEINE AND KLEINSTE ZINNE.

Arrived once more at the base, we stumbled quickly down, parched with dust and that thirst never elsewhere felt save among limestone. At Misurina we consumed coffee by the urn—tea was always undrinkable in Austria¹⁵; beer, I think; anyhow we settled everything down with a bottle of Asti, followed by a 'half' of the same. Thus encouraged, the long cool walk to Cortina was simply delightful; stiffness and fatigue had all vanished, and there remained but the glory of dusky woods and the evening glint of the lake.

But little remains to be told. In the following years, with Jack Phillimore and Raynor, Dimai added fresh fame to his record. Then came the Broome-Corning years, when Toni led his very hardest climbs. Then days with King Albert. Had that great man lived, how different might have been the course of history in recent years! I saw little of Toni henceforth. In 1903 we had an unpleasant climb together up the *Pompaninkamin* of Croda da Lago, meeting on the way down by the ordinary route Hasler and Christian Jossi, sen., the latter bitterly bewailing the absence of 5000-ft. ice slopes set at an angle of 55°. Perhaps the rain descending heavily on us rendered Jossi unduly pessimistic as he jammed himself in dripping chimneys. Anyway he enchanted Toni. A day or two later we climbed Piz Popena by the long 'Tre Croci' ridge. It was the end of May and the ridge was a snow climb. Toni allowed me to lead throughout, and, except for a stormy descent by the ordinary route, the day was about the most enjoyable I have spent in Cortina.

In 1933 I found myself attending a general meeting of the U.I.A.A. at Cortina. Between futile discussions among delegates I wandered off to find Toni. He looked almost the same, slim and elegant, with all his former grace of movement. I suggested a climb and he brightened still more. At 7.30 A.M. next day we started from Faloria in a car, and in forty-five minutes, of which the last ten were a nightmare of terror, found ourselves at the new hut under the Zinnen. We started off for the Great Zinne with all, or nearly all, Toni's ancient pace. Just under the take-off on the rocks, a large party hove in sight, convoying two bathing-drawered and stockingless youths. These had been spending the last forty-eight hours on the piton-ladder of the N. face, sleeping in slings during two stormy and rain-drenched nights. It was, I think, the third ascent by this insane and unsportsmanlike route. The party appeared aggressively happy. At the *Einstieg*, Toni handed me a pair of *Kletterschuhe* and discarded his boots

¹⁵ Misurina has, however, been part of Italy since 1866—one of the curious results of Custozza and Lissa.



Photo, W. Bellows.]

EARLY MORNING CLOUDS, FROM THE SCHWARZSEE ABOVE ZERMATT.

for a similar pair. We carried nothing but a rope : with two huts and a motor road within hail of the rocks, who would burden himself with food ? Indeed Toni assured me that mixed parties in warm weather climbed stark naked. Many hundreds of combatants during the first European war had polished the rocks beyond all measure, and our rope soles were amply justified. I enjoyed the climb and so did Toni, till on the last abrupt step we came on ghastly relics of a fatal accident of the day before. From the summit we shook our fists at the adjacent Western peak. I think its terrible N. face and precipice was then still undefiled by spikes. Picking our way among the dread relics, we hurried down those dignified and impressive rocks, regaining the hut at 12.30, where an enormous hot meal rewarded our strenuous labours. We were back at Faloria by 3.30 in ample time for a delegate tea in the car-stifled village. Toni had gone magnificently, and nothing could make him consider his day otherwise than 'for love.'

May old age be long in finding him, and may we meet again in happier times.

In writing these reminiscences of more than forty years ago, without notes and without references, it is possible that I have been guilty of some inaccuracies as regards the dates of the various mountain episodes related. For instance, I have been three times on Grépon and Grosse Zinne, twice on Kleine Zinne as well as on several other peaks mentioned. It is often difficult to remember the different occasions. For such possible shortcomings and other failings I must express my regrets and apologies.