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THE ASCENT OF THE FÜNFINGERSPITZE.

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(Read before the Alpine Club, June 7, 1892.)

ON September 4, 1891, at 5.5 A.M., my guide, Christian Klucker, and I left Santa Christina, in the Gröden Valley. My intention was to try again at a more favourable time of the mountaineering season, and with a different guide, what I had the year before failed to accomplish with an indifferent guide and at an unfavourable time for difficult rock-climbing—the ascent of the Fünffingerspitze. Students of German Alpine literature, especially readers of the ‘*Österreichische Alpen-Zeitung*,’ the ‘*Mittheilungen*,’ and the ‘*Zeitschrift des Deutschen und Österreichischen Alpen-Vereines*,’ will remember having seen the name of that mountain mentioned, either as Fünffingerspitze, or Punta delle Cinque Dita—the Italian equivalent for the former—and will have come to the conclusion that such a name would most likely be given to a peak resembling in its outer form a hand. So it does; only you must not be too accurate in counting the fingers. However, the appearance of the mountain sufficiently justifies its name, at any rate, more so than the shape of, say, the Jungfrau, Mönch, and Eiger justifies theirs. On July 21, 1888, Dr. Darmstaedter, of Berlin, now a member of our Club, had made the first attempt to scale the at that time unnamed peak, and failed. His description of this attempt\* and of his repeated failures in the following year† had the not unusual result of spurring others to gain the laurels denied him; but although there were few active Dolomite climbers who in 1890 had not the Fünffingerspitze

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\* *Zeitschrift*, xx. p. 295.

† *Mittheilungen*, 1889, p. 172.

on their programme, only two parties went near the mountain—namely I, on June 20 and 21, and Messrs. Robert Hanns Schmitt and Johann Santner on August 8. I failed; the two Austrians conquered. According to their custom they went without guides. The route they took lay principally in a steep, at places overhanging, chimney on the south-east face, and was the one I had selected for myself. But in June the chimney was filled with ice, whereas in August the ice had melted to water, which rushing down (so I am informed) in extraordinary quantities, though thoroughly douching the party, could not prevent them from reaching the summit, and building two stone men, well visible from the Sella Joch, as evidence of their success. The description by Mr. Schmitt in the ‘*Österreichische Alpen-Zeitung*’\* caused the editor of the ‘*Alpine Journal*’ to opine that nothing short of Mr. Willink’s illustrations to ‘*Snap*’ could give an adequate idea of the more exciting incidents of the climb.† However that may be—I did not take Mr. Schmitt’s route when I went up, and offer no opinion—the words used by Mr. Schmitt caused some excitement in Austrian climbing circles, for never before, except once (the south face of the Dachstein), had he called anything difficult; moreover, he seemed to believe that the Fünffingerspitze would not be climbed again, unless he repeated his ascent. Nevertheless, he challenged the world by ending his only too short notice with the question, Who would fetch the visiting-card deposited in one of the stone men? He little imagined that the one who would have a right to that trophy could not even claim membership of the mountaineering brotherhood, for it was—a woman! But I should anticipate events, were I to tell you how that came about, before disposing of a little necessary information regarding the group of mountains of which the Fünffingerspitze forms a perhaps insignificant, yet to the so-called rock-gymnast highly interesting, part; and I also wish to say what, more than any other reason, more even than the desire to conquer where I had before been conquered, made me turn once more to the Gröden Valley in violation of my plans for September 1891.

When at Zermatt last summer I made the acquaintance of an eminent member of the Austrian Alpine Club, and amongst other things Alpine we discussed the Fünffingerspitze and the chances of a second ascent. My friend did not believe that any of the Tyrolese guides, and still less

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\* 1890, p. 215.

† *Alpine Journal*, vol. xv. p. 367.

a Swiss, would be able to scale that wonderful rock. This rather annoyed me, for my old friend and guide, Klucker, who had been my companion on many delightful and difficult expeditions, seemed to me to be a man who need not be afraid of competing with anyone in the world on rocks, and I ventured to express my belief that I could with impunity back him to do anything that had been done before—given the same conditions. Incredulity on the part of my friend, who pointed out that my guide had never before climbed a Dolomite peak, made me eager for the fray, and shortly afterwards, carefully concealing our plan of campaign, Klucker and I left the Valais for the Tyrol. I will pass over the incidents of the journey during which my companion managed to show that, though an exceptional guide for travellers in the mountains, he could not guide my baggage and that of two friends—to whom I had boasted of his proficiency as a courier—over the Swiss railway system, for we had to make a halt of four days at Lucerne in order to recover the things he had lost on the way there. Finally, Klucker and I, provided with a pair of Scarpetti each, arrived at Santa Christina on September 3. Santa Christina is a place of importance in the valley of Gröden, and is documentally mentioned as far back as 1277, although it must have existed long before that.\* There is only one inn, of a somewhat primitive character as far as the food is concerned, but the accommodation is very good and the obliging host and hostess do what they can to make their guests feel comfortable. It is difficult to get information as to the mountains in the neighbourhood, unless you are satisfied with the correct names of the groups and an extremely vague and generally incorrect idea of the individual peaks. Guides, so to speak, there are none to be had, unless you put your trust in what an otherwise excellent little guide-book—'Die Dolomit-Alpen,' by A. Waltenberger, 1887—has to say about them on page 148. In 1890, thinking it desirable to engage a local guide, I did put my trust in that little book and asked for one Alois Schenk. He turned out to be my host. He explained that he had been a guide many years ago, which, judging by his appearance, must have been in his infancy. He only knew the Langkofel, Grohmann Spitze, and the Plattkofel by name, and was able to show me to the foot of the first, but never in his life had he, as far as I understood his half German, half

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\* See *Zeitschrift*, p. 336.

Ladinian language, been called upon to explore those mountains in a more vertical direction. But *quam quisque norit artem, in hac se exerceat*. He knew the art of making humble things in his hostelry appear most agreeable, and he exercised that knowledge to our entire satisfaction.

Well, as I have already said, Klucker and I left Santa Christina at 5.5 A.M. on September 4. For the first time since we had made mountain excursions together, I had the satisfaction of showing Klucker the way, and, when he at the very outset would have taken the wrong path, of assuming that good-natured smile of superior knowledge that I had always tried not to see when he produced it in a district he knew better than I, and when I made a mistake. Leaving the 'Zum Dosses' inn we had to turn to the right and follow the road down the valley for about a hundred yards and then to cross the Grödener Bach. It would not be easy to miss the way, for you have the Langkofel group before you and a fairly good path to follow, principally over beautiful meadows. On your right is the Seisser Alpe, in the background the Schlern with the Euringer and the Santner Spitze. Much nearer, and seemingly towering to a tremendous height, is the Langkofel; on its right the much lower Plattkofel. The Langkofel group consists of six named and conquered peaks forming a horse-shoe, surrounding a nameless and as yet unclimbed little peak. The former are the Langkofel (3,179 m.), the Fünffingerspitze (about 2,997 m.), the Grohmann Spitze (3,174 m.), the Punta de Pian de Sass (about 3,090 m.), the Zahnkofel (about 2,950 m.), and the Plattkofel (2,956 m.). The unclimbed peak is considerably lower, but owing to its isolated position will, no doubt, sooner or later find an amateur, and consequently a name. The Fünffingerspitze is separated from the Langkofel by a pass called the Langkofeljoch \* and from the Grohmann Spitze by one without a name, as far as I know. The two ends of the horse-shoe point north-westwards, and are separated by the Langkofelkaar, and this sends several branches into the gaps between the different peaks; but whereas the branch leading to the Langkofeljoch is free from snow in summer, the greater part of the others is covered by the only glacier of

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\* The Langkofeljoch is an interesting route for good walkers who wish to go from Santa Christina to Campitello, or *vice versa*. On the Campitello side it joins the Sella Joch and the Col di Rodella routes.

the group; the Grohmann glacier,\* so named because it seems to originate at the foot of the peak bearing the name of the first explorer of this and other Dolomite groups.

The way into the Langkofelkaar leads over most delightful ground. We crossed the soft meadows of the Tschandevapes Alpe, sauntered through the refreshingly cool wood called the Christiner Ochsen Wald, and later emerged into the Montesora Alpe. I remembered that we had now to proceed more in the direction of the Plattkofel and then to turn to the left towards the Langkofel in order to avoid ascending and descending a hill. The foot of the Langkofel was soon reached and the footpath found, which, though sometimes but faintly indicated, leads to the débris of the Langkofelkaar, where it ends. So far, albeit the other peaks of the group, notably the toothlike structure of the Zahnkofel, attracted our attention, the Fünffingerspitze remained unseen, and this caused Klucker to inquire if I really knew where our aim was situated. Indeed, approaching it from the Santa Christina side without a positive knowledge as to its position and exact size—as I did in 1890 accompanied by two guides, one of whom had never before been in that part of the Dolomites, whereas the other so-called 'local guide' did not even know its name—one naturally scans every rocky part of the scenery with great suspicion, and yet again with some confidence, for is it not called the peak of the five fingers? But it is not before you have entered the Langkofelkaar and renewed your acquaintance with the pleasure of walking over débris on a steepish slope that it suddenly dawns upon you that the scraggy bundle of monoliths right in front of you, and separated on its left by a kind of pass from the Langkofel, must be the very mountain you are looking for, for it resembles the back of a right hand. We walked on for a while until at 7.15 we could see the hitherto invisible right part of the peak. We took a short rest (7.15 to 7.30), a long drink and some food, and then discussed our plans.

My desire was to try a route straight up the face, but from our point of view that seemed almost hopeless. It was clear that the way could be but one of exceptional steepness, and that its upper part would have to lie in a series of chimneys, for the wall itself decidedly overhung in several places. The question was whether such chimneys

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\* See Dr. Eduard Richter, *Die Gletscher der Ost-Alpen*, p. 270. Stuttgart, 1888.

could be found, and to determine this we proceeded to examine our mountain through the telescope. Dr. Darmstaedter's excellent guides had stated as their opinion that from this side the peak was inaccessible,\* but I had a firm belief that they were mistaken, and this was strengthened into conviction when Klucker suddenly jumped up and ejaculated: 'It must be the very devil if we don't succeed! But,' he added, 'it will be extremely difficult.' He explained the line he proposed to take, and that proved to be the one I had wished to follow the year before. We packed up and continued our way towards the Langkofeljoch, but later on turned to the right and ascended by the Grohmann Glacier. One must keep in mind the true nature of a glacier to accord the name of such to the Grohmann Glacier. Dr. E. Richter states in his book on the 'Glaciers of the Eastern Alps' that it is of too humble proportions to be measured.† After a short time we again turned to the left and crossed the Bergschrund of a couloir—one of the several which descend from the rocks of the Fünffingerspitze into the glacier. The couloir was filled with ice, and steps had to be cut into it. But soon we left the ice, and, scrambling up a little chimney, just missed some small stones coming from above. They served to impress upon us the necessity of being very careful on our way back, when, in all probability, the power of the sun would loosen a greater quantity of them. This was the only place not quite safe from the most important danger to the mountaineer in the Dolomites. Our plan was to climb nearly straight up, at the same time bearing a little to the left so as to reach the long chimney, which, remembering the five-finger shape of the mountain, lay between the forefinger and the third finger, and would very likely prove the principal difficulty of the ascent. A little higher up we left our rucksack in a place of safety against falling stones, and Klucker exchanged his boots for the more convenient scarpetti, or climbing-shoes. So far nothing of great difficulty had presented itself, and our progress was by no means slow. Continuing our way, a steep little terrace was reached, where one of the ice-axes was deposited; the other we took with us on the chance of there being ice in the chimney. Shortly after we stood at the bottom of a very steep and open chimney, which seemed to us to afford the only means of further progress. We had now come to the more difficult

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\* See *Zeitschrift*, vol. xx. p. 296.

† *Die Gletscher der Ost-Alpen*, 1888, p. 270.

part of the ascent. It was a quarter past ten o'clock. While Klucker entered the chimney, and slowly climbed upwards, I divested myself of my coat in order to be more comfortable. As soon as the rope came to an end, Klucker stopped, and I followed him. The nature of the rock was such as to afford but little handhold, and scarcely any foothold, but, proceeding with great caution, we managed to attain the end of the chimney. Several shorter chimneys of considerably less awkwardness followed until we reached a small platform on a projecting rock. I agree with Dr. Helversen, who made the second ascent by my route, and has published an account of his experience in a German Alpine journal,\* that this spot could be reached by variants of the route we took, and, as a matter of fact, his party managed to avoid the difficult chimney on their descent by choosing one quite close to its left side. Dr. Helversen (p. 75) explains that, though intending to follow my way up, he was not quite certain that he had taken the right one until he had come to the little platform, but that the fact that he there found the straw of an Italian Virginia cigar caused him to suspect that he was on the right track—a conjecture he considered proved beyond doubt when he found an English newspaper a little higher up. I admit that I should have similarly argued and have come to the same conclusion had I been in his place, and I suppose most people would have done the same. I mention this to give an instance of how little a newspaper, a straw, or things of that kind, easily borne by the wind, prove, when found on a mountain under similar circumstances; for, although Klucker may have dropped the cigar-straw, I know for certain that neither I nor Klucker had an English newspaper, or any newspaper, amongst our luggage on that day. And even if some of our food had been wrapped up in a newspaper, we could not have left it so high up, for the rucksack was, as I have already said, left behind much lower down, and no food and no drink was taken out of it. However, I am glad that a friendly gust of wind rendered Dr. Helversen and party a service I should have rendered them with pleasure had I known that they would follow my footsteps. How did the paper get there? Perhaps Mr. Wood, who, on September 9, 1891, made the fourth ascent of the Fünffingerspitze, could give us the necessary explanation.

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\* *Mittheilungen des Deutschen und Österreichischen Alpen-Vereines*, 1892, p. 74.

It was getting late in the day, and we had still the most difficult part of our journey before us. The chimney, which begins near the little platform where we were now standing and ends to the left of the summit, was not the one we had singled out as a means of attack on our peak.\* The one we had originally intended to try was separated from it by a rock wall. In order to inspect it we traversed a few feet to the left along a narrow ledge and looked down into it. But as we found a good deal of ice in it, which made it look very uninviting, we returned to the platform to find out whether the other chimney looked more promising. It did seem as if there were just a chance of success there, and we made up our mind to try it. Scarcely less than 200 feet long, it is divided into three parts of nearly equal length. The first, and fairly easy one, is the widest, and its only difficulty is an overhanging block wedged in between the two walls of the chimney. For a tall man it is not so very difficult; but how Klucker managed to get over it I don't know. When it was my turn I found that it required my full length to get a handhold just above the block. I then put my right foot against the right side of the chimney and, pulling myself up, was able to reach the top of the block with my left knee. The second part of the chimney is the most difficult, and requires great care and attention. It is much narrower, and the sides are not provided with cracks and fissures, which would, by admitting the fingers, enable you to pull yourself up; besides, it is overhanging, and a wedged-in stone compels you to climb outwards, so that the line of ascent actually surpasses the vertical and overhangs. It took us some little time to wriggle up, the principal work being done by the elbows, the knees and the knickerbockers. The hands and feet were nearly useless. At one place I did what I have never done before; I climbed by the aid of my head. I had got into a position where I could not hold on well if I moved either elbows, knees, or back, and thought it would be necessary to climb down a few inches in order to get into a different attitude. But before deciding

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\* Dr. Helversen seems to have misunderstood me when I explained to him the route we had taken, for on page 75 of the *Mittheilungen*, 1892, he remarks that he understood me to say that it lay between the fore-finger and the third finger of the hand. What I said to him was that we had originally intended to take that way, but had changed our plan when we saw what it was like, and had chosen a chimney, which he correctly describes as being situated in the wall itself—*i.e.* to the right of the other.

to do so I looked up to see how much more of the chimney remained to be done, and in so doing the back of my head—I had left my broad-brimmed hat with the second ice-axe and other things at the beginning of the chimney—struck against the rock, but at a place where there was a faint cavity. This enabled me, by pressing my head into it and thus gaining a hold, to free my arms and raise my shoulders, which now could be pressed against the wall a little higher than before. The knees followed, and after a few more minutes of similar contortions I reached Klucker, who had found a fairly convenient resting place in a bend to the right of the chimney. We rested our panting lungs for a short while, and then continued our way up. The third part of the chimney is easier, and as soon as we had entered it we knew that we had won the battle. It was a curious kind of chimney, for we discovered that it owed its origin to a split in the mountain which extends right to the other side of the peak, where it was of use to Messrs. Schmitt and Santner when they went up in 1890. Klucker was waiting for me about halfway up, when suddenly we heard voices somewhere not far away. My companion suggested that someone must have reached the summit from the other side; but I declared that in all likelihood the voices belonged to a party on the neighbouring Langkofel. I had scarcely said as much when again we heard a voice—this time a very young and clear one—which caused Klucker to say that there must be either a woman or a boy on the other side of the mountain, and very probably in the same crack of the rock, but invisible on account of a bend in it. It soon turned out to be but too true. Klucker climbed on until he reached the end of the chimney, after having scrambled through a hole formed by the two sides of the chimney and a stone jammed in between them. This hole is very small, and is placed at a point where the rock wall overhangs, so that it is not easy for a long-legged person to wind himself through. At one time I stuck, unable, as I thought, to get either up or down. Klucker, who was carrying on a conversation with the other party, which had just arrived at the summit, seemed to have forgotten all about me, and allowed the rope to catch somewhere, and this prevented me from going down, and the knot of the rope on my back rubbing against the rock did not allow me to go up. Finally, I succeeded in turning round a little, and after a desperate struggle I got myself free. A few seconds later I reached

Klucker.\* We now turned to the right, and an easy scramble took us in a minute or two to the summit. It was 12 o'clock precisely.

The other party, which had arrived on the top a few minutes before us, consisted of a Dutch lady, Madame Imminck, who has during the last years climbed many of the most difficult Dolomite peaks, and of her two guides, Antonio Dimai and Giuseppe Zecchini.

The latter were full of pride at their feat, and Dimai danced about with childish delight on the platform of the summit. All three bore the marks of their work in the shape of extremely torn clothes, but, more lucky than we, they had been able to carry a little food and some drink, a fact of which we envied them. Madame Imminck offered me a drop of brandy, but it was literally the last drop in the flask and only made me wish for more. At about one o'clock she and her guides—forgetting to pocket Messrs. Schmitt and Santner's visiting-card—started on their way down by the same route they had taken when ascending. For several minutes we heard their voices and the fall of the stones they loosened, and then all was quiet. Not being a collector of visiting-cards other people leave on mountain tops, and not thinking it would be necessary to have other testimony as to our expedition than the other parties, I left Messrs. Schmitt and Santner's card in its tin box, adding to it and Madame Imminck's my own. Strange to say, Mr. Schmitt's card still remains on the top of the Fünffingerspitze, although four parties have been on the mountain since his ascent, and his question, 'Who will fetch our card?' so far remains unanswered.

Klucker and I left at 1.16. We took great precautions on our descent, and even went as far as to use a thin but strong rope, in addition to the ordinary one. To begin with, we tied it round the stone wedged into the upper part of the chimney, and threw both ends, weighted by stones, down the chimney, calculating that it would serve as hand-hold where Nature had not provided such; but at the only

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\* When Dr. Helversen made his ascent, only the guide (Stabeler) worked his way through this hole, whereas the three tourists avoided the disagreeable bit of work by climbing up this part of the chimney outside the stone which nearly blocks the way. This may be easier, but certainly more risky, unless one relies entirely on the rope. Dr. Helversen admits as much when he describes this part of the climb as being *allerdings sehr exponirt*. See *Mittheilungen*, 1892, p. 76.

place where I should have liked to use it, and where I turned round to catch hold of it, it was out of reach at a distance of about two yards; a fact which sufficiently proves that the chimney overhangs considerably. However, we repeated the process of tying the rope to conveniently placed rocks, until we got tired of finding the contrivance useless and, moreover, apt to slip into cracks, out of which it was hard work to pull it. So, not wishing to lose any more time, we gave it up. Against our expectation the most difficult part of the ascent proved not so terrible on the way down, for we could let ourselves slide down through the chimneys with comparative ease and perfect safety, always, however, taking care not to forget that some of them were overhanging, and to climb more into the mountain where that was the case. The easier parts of the ascent seemed more difficult in descending, partly because it is generally more difficult to climb down over steep rocks than up, partly because we made several mistakes, and, finally, I dare say, because we were getting a little tired. Picking up in succession my hat, ice-axe and coat, Klucker's boots and rucksack, we reached the Grohmann Glacier at 6.23 p.m. We had not had anything to drink for eleven hours and taken no food for twelve. At 6.50 p.m., after having to some extent satisfied the inner man, we left the glacier and arrived in Santa Christina at 8.30 p.m.

The Fünffingerspitze is the most difficult rock-climb I have ever done. The Kleine Zinne, the Croda da Lago, the Cima di Canali, the Cima della Madonna, and other peaks of reputed great difficulty I have climbed cannot for one moment be compared with it; in fact, they are mere child's-play by its side. As to whether Mr. Schmitt's route requires greater strength and more skill than ours I cannot say. Schmitt thinks so. On the other hand, both Klucker and I agreed that Schmitt's way must be the easier, for had not a lady conquered the difficulties it presents? And we felt sure that no female would repeat our ascent. Vain speculation! On September 16, that is, twelve days after we had been on the mountain, Mrs. Helversen accompanied her husband and another gentleman when they climbed it by our route. This, again, proved to me the futility of prophesying as to the possibility or impossibility of the repetition of an ascent, by whomsoever it may be, when once it has been shown to be possible by one person.