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TWO NOTES ON THE WEISSHORN.

WITH A POSTSCRIPT.

By G. WINTHROP YOUNG.

(Read before the Alpine Club, February 6, 1906.)

I FEEL that your natural criticism may justly expect some explanation, and my own sense of modesty certainly demands some gentle excuse, for the audacity of my venturing to speak to you of such an old friend as the Weisshorn. Mountaineers are notoriously jealous wooers, and this summit many of you must have known and courted far longer than myself. I might make the usual claim that I was told to do so, and that obedience to one's leader is a lesson early enforced upon us climbers at a rope's end, or perhaps more frequently at its middle. I prefer, however, to ask you to look upon me as a messenger carrying news between old friends, something like the foot pages in the ballads :—

But never a look had the great Lord James
For the little foot page upon bended knee ;
For he brought him news from a distant land,
News of the love of his White Ladye.

If service of 'foot' or 'bended knee' entitle the messenger to any share in the attachment of any Lord James here present, there is some justification for the pages of my message. It is a number of years since the incomparable symmetry of the Weisshorn drew me to commence a very importunate acquaintance, and I might claim to have performed acts of devotion upon 'foot' and 'bended knee' over a large proportion of its possible surfaces. Even old admirers may not be unwilling occasionally to hear of some fresh characteristic, some unexpected attraction in the object

of their devotion, and in the case of such a perennially reigning beauty as the Weisshorn a younger climber may, perhaps, claim indulgence, if he has sought to establish a relationship upon lines less a matter of public property than the approaches discovered by his fortunate predecessors, and charted and printed in handbooks, where the record-breaker who merely 'runs' may read.

My first message is from the west face of your 'White Ladye.'

In 1879 Mr. Passingham,* with F. Imseng and L. Zurbücken, tried this face twice. On the first attempt they reckoned to have got within 3 hrs. of the top. Bad weather compelled a return under very trying conditions. On their second attempt they slept out at the top of a snow couloir. Stones fell during their ascent. They finally reached the ridge rather to the north of the summit. Mr. Passingham wrote, 'If future climbers make for our first stone-man and thence right up for our second, they will have no difficulty about the route.' As Mr. Passingham was climbing 4 hrs. to the first and 6 or 7 hrs. to the next cairn it is not surprising that later climbers have found some difficulty in identifying or following his excellent climb. He took 12 hrs. in the ascent.

In 1889 Mr. J. P. Farrar,† with J. Kederbacher, crossed the rib which divides the Weisshorn Glacier, and ascended 'the steep and narrow couloir which opens on the large snow-field half-way up.' From this he saw 'a huge couloir sweeping down to his left.' He traversed across almost to the Schalligrat, then struck straight up, then traversed at a level back to the left. There he spent the night, and reached the summit from the north. 'Very few stones fell,' but 'over the slabs little assistance beyond example is possible,' and the 'easy way is very difficult to find.' This remarkable ascent occupied some two days and a night.

In 1888 the intrepid Herr Winkler lost his life in attempting the ascent alone from this side; it is supposed at a height of 3,800 metres.

In 1889 Mr. Cornish,‡ with Hans and Ulrich Almer, made a sensational ascent, following approximately Mr. Farrar's route. They reached the N. ridge half an hour from the summit. Mr. Cornish 'never saw such rotten or friable rocks.' His account is worth reading. He took 13 hrs.

* See *Alpine Journal*, vol. ix. p. 366, and pp. 427 foll.

† See *ibid.* vol. xi. pp. 416-7. ‡ *Ibid.* vol. xv. pp. 192 foll.

Magnificent as these climbs must have been, in security and facility they still left something to be desired, and, presuming that the true 'Badminton' ascent from Zinal had still to be found, I had fixed on the long rib, or rather wrinkle, that ascends at a high angle from the Weisshorn Glacier to the great Tower on the N. ridge as the only route presumably free from the risks attending the smooth expanses of formidable slabs which go to make up this face.

After three seasons' occasional and somewhat tentative exploration, in September 1900 the two brothers Louis and Benoit Theytaz, of Zinal, and myself definitely moved up to the attack. In 1899 I had seen nothing of the mountain. In 1900 it promised hardly better. Twice we slept out in soothing rain in a transparent stone shanty on the Arpitetta Alp, consoled at night by glimpses of stars through the unassuming roof, and cheating the malignant day by bathing in the little lake below, whose waters are, to my experience, even more breathlessly icy for a header than those of the Märjelen See itself. A clearing sunset at last enticed us to try, in defiance of a possible complication of ice or fresh snow. Pressure of time advised the attempt, combined with a respect for the valley patriotism of my two guides, whose local feeling had impelled them the previous year to make by themselves the ascent of a ridge on the Dent Blanche which we had designed to do together, and had left me only the poor consolation of following subsequently as 'first amateur.'

We left at 2.50 A.M. The traverse of the somewhat complicated north bay of the Weisshorn glacier, crossed on its southern rim, had been simplified by previous exploration; but we lost much time in darkness among the icefalls, and it was not until 6 o'clock that we scaled by a steep ice-slope the back of our rib, just where it leaves the main mass of the mountain and curls round to enclose the lower, southern bay of the glacier. For the first 10 minutes the rocks went very rapidly, then we passed slightly to the left, and for some 15 minutes followed iced rocks and snow patches, returning again above on to the edge of the rib. Care was necessary in dealing with the glaze on these first few hundred feet. This diminished with sunlight, and we made cheerful progress, though the progressively steepening ridge and an occasional awkward step checked the pace more and more as time went on. The angle was high, but the rock excellently firm, and there was no call to concern oneself with anything but one's own holds. The climbing was exceptionally interesting. The wrinkle looked very narrow, winding up the face above

like a large rough caterpillar. At any moment one felt it might be broken by some impassable step, and the smooth hopeless-looking slabs, a little below to left and right, swept by occasional rockfalls, offered very little hope of lateral escape or of a strategic turning movement. The boots and stockings of the guide ahead, contorting on the rough granite notches, only occasionally decoyed the eye from the few feet of steep rock that formed the field of active interest.

I afforded some distraction to the professional element by leading on the first part of the climb. But two or perhaps three passages occurring, which called for some support of the leader from the second man, made it evident that the brothers worked more rapidly and harmoniously together. In compensation I gradually found all the heavy luggage of the party gravitating, pack by pack, on to the top of my own. At about half the height of the ridge the crux of the climb was reached, one which had caused agitation to the further end of the telescope on previous examinations. The rib rises in a precipitous step, unassailable direct. Fortunately, however, the step itself is not quite so broad as the rib below and above it, and on its N. side it had looked possible to traverse on a ledge, to the left of the projecting buttress, into the right-angled corner where it springs from the main mass. The ledge proved to be crumbling chips, cemented with ice, and had to be laboriously refashioned by the axe; but there was excellent anchorage half-way along it, and also again in the corner. At the half-way pinnacle I took a double turn with the rope, and prepared to watch the brothers give a *matinée* performance of 'Man and Superman.' The corner was some 30 to 40 ft. high, a right angle enclosed by smooth walls and capped at the top by a projecting block. Half the height went easily enough, but then it was necessary for Louis to help his brother, first on to his shoulders, then his head, and finally on to his axe, while Benoit clawed for hold, out and round the block, on the sheer right-hand wall. From his gasps and kicks he obviously found it none too easy. Thrice he tried it, while I quoted caution from Tennyson:—

But ever when he reached a hand to climb
One stayed him: 'Climb not, lest thou break thy neck;'

and twice, accordingly, he redescended lightly on to his brother's cranium. With suitable applause from the gallery he at last disappeared over the edge and vanished up an ice chimney, which sloped back at an easier angle in the direction

of the main ridge to our right. The rope soon ran out, and Louis was forced to follow, with a good deal of patois and some ethical support. Just at the moment when he was squirming round and over the smooth corner came a shout from above. A large flat stone, some two ft. square, loosened by the rope, spun cheerfully out of the invisible, ricocheted flatly off his back, and hummed off into space, playfully opening the back of my right hand in passing. I mention this incident because it has a temperance moral. I had protested previously, on principle, against the number of bottles thought necessary to celebrate this expedition. Louis had maintained, also on principle, that

Mountain grapes and mountain cheer
Make the merry mountaineer.

Now, the stone left Louis uninjured, but every bottle but one in his sack was smashed! I had only time for a very short homily in polished patois, when I was interrupted by the call to follow. My right arm was for the moment useless, but I was reassured from above, and started. All went well up to the overhanging block, but here the right hand failed at the pull, and for the first and, so far, the only time in my Alpine experience I swung out, gently oscillating, across the polished wall of the tower. My requests for additional support were met by an emphatic statement from the unseen Louis that, whereas his situation was all that was satisfactory according to cantonal canons of security, he could *not* spare more than one hand to the rope. The feat of lifting oneself by one arm on a rope, when dangling at its end, is one that is best practised first in less stimulating surroundings. It was only after three failures that with the help of my teeth I got high enough to secure a toe-hold on the rock. I had plenty of time to meditate on the incompleteness of Ecclesiastes as a climbing prophet, who declares, if you recollect, that 'two are better than one, for if they fall, the one *will* lift up his fellow.' The ice chimney after this seemed comparatively simple.

On regaining the rib the climb followed its old lines, somewhat steeper perhaps, the holds somewhat slighter, but all generally firm and satisfying. Where the rib soars up in the final wall of the great tower a very little examination advised its abandonment. It was the appearance of this tower that enabled the north ridge so long to preserve its reputation for impassability. We turned to seek another way. The wrinkle by this time had lifted itself some

height off the face, and was occasionally projecting in large irregular rock cornices over the slabs to our right; down the face of this cornice a loose, easy chimney, debouching just above the highest small pinnacle, gave ready access to the uncompromising expanse of couloir. We descended on to the slabs some 100–150 ft. below the small well-marked col to the south of the great tower. The holds on the Platten, ascended diagonally, were microscopic, but quite solid enough for one, with an occasional reassurance of a foothold enough for two. The col was gained at 10 A.M., after $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours' actual climbing from the glacier. Here the first short halt for food was taken. The snow of the north ridge to the summit proved in admirably frozen condition, and the top was surmounted, going quickly in 55 minutes, or in $8\frac{1}{2}$ hours in all from the *gîte*. Any slight exultation resulting on the ascent was soon corrected. On the cone sat a lady, a proud lady of somewhat mediæval aspect, who chillily refused all overtures for space until a proper, formal introduction had been performed for all the new arrivals. This at once restored the normal, suburban equilibrium of our party, and served to let us know our place, in case the height might have gone to our heads as well as to our feet.

The guides, it subsequently transpired, had an engagement at Zinal the following day, and the attractions of a return by the whole north ridge, the Bies-Joch, and the Col de Tracuit were chanted so flamboyantly that any mild protests on the score of fatigue or snowy weather faded away:—

Indeed, we were waxen weary; but who heedeth weariness
Who hath been daylong on the mountain, in the winter weather's
stress?

When a mere mortal is fated to enjoy at one and the same moment the fascination of looking down on the Matterhorn and the charm of a conventional drawing-room conversation it is difficult to protest that anything would be impossible.

We gave our censorious 'Vision of the Heights' a long start, and I confess (even to a masculine audience), with a timorous consciousness of my want of gallantry, that, as I watched the slow descent of that prim, grim dame I found myself murmuring—of course only to myself—

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world he stands.
He watches from his mountain walls,
The wrinkled *she* beneath him crawls;
Then——



Alfred Holmes, photo.

Swan Electric Engraving Co.,

THE WEISSHORN FROM THE BIESHORN.

We hurried off the peak.

The north ridge, by which we descended, is now too well known to call for description. At that time, if I remember rightly, it had been traversed only twice or three times at most. In 1871* Mr. Kitson, with Christian and Ulrich Almer, had ascended the ice of the north face from a *gîte* on the Bies-Joch, and had joined the north arête just beyond the great tower. He was followed shortly by Mr. Coolidge† and Miss Brevoort. In 1898 Herr Biehly‡ traversed the whole ridge, and was followed in 1899 by Mr. Cooke§ with the Theytaz, who made, in passing, the first ascent of the tip of the great tower.

We went over the top of the great tower on the return, in 50 minutes from the summit, just for the satisfaction of doing it; but the impressiveness of the north ridge and its great series of impending castles, plastered with ice and inconvenient snow, appealed rather faintly to fatigued muscles—travelling, perhaps, somewhat beyond a rational pace. Later in the day a silent trio cut protesting steps down the ice of the Bies-Joch, and tramped doggedly, but with returning good humour, over the Col de Tracuit. We regained Zinal in a cloudy, storm-ray sunset, at 7.20, in 7½ hours from the top; the whole expedition occupying 16½ hours.

The later history of the ridge has been killed by kindness. *Sursum corda* is an excellent climbers' motto, but the guides have read a subtle secondary meaning into *sursum corda* that has resulted in tying up many a vigorous climb in infantile swaddling bands. The following year eleven of them, led by the Theytaz, fixed 1,000 metres of rope on this rib. A Teuton brother subsequently wrote to several papers proclaiming his first uplifting on these cords. In 1903 they were, I think, renewed, and at the difficult corner a loosened stone again attacked one of the Theytaz, this time more seriously. On our ascent, however, with the one exception mentioned, the climb was free from all the accidental risks, and I know of none, and I can imagine there are but few, big rock climbs in the Pennines to compare with it in sustained and varied interest. That is, in its natural state. An easy climb it can never be; in any but favourable conditions it might be found really difficult, but I have little doubt that in

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. v. p. 274.

† *Ibid.* p. 277.

‡ *Jahrbuch S.A.C.* vol. xxiv. pp. 76-90.

§ *Alpine Journal*, vol. xix. p. 597.

objective security and comfort it compares well with other recorded ascents of the mountain from Zinal. The ridge does not emerge on the actual summit, but it enjoys the distinction of a separate and recognisable identity. It has been suggested that it might be called the *Turmgrat*, from its relation to the great tower. To prophesy is dangerous, but when Nature has had time to remove from this rib some of the cordage, rope-wrack and rigging, at present masking hand- and footholds to the public danger, I have every hope, if age and figure still permit, of getting up the 'steep corner' once again; and this time, I trust, in a more seemly manner.

And now for another message.

Seen from a distance, there are few more hopeless-looking faces in the Zermatt district than the triangular, pallid smile that the 'White Lady' turns south-east upon Zermatt. From neighbouring summits, and yet more often from that much-frequented point of abstract and idle speculation the peak of the Riffelhorn, I have often meditated on its evil reputation.

Professor Tyndall,* in his account of his first ascent by the east ridge in 1861, gives an eloquent description of the sight of a great rockfall on this face.

Mr. Leslie Stephen † in 1864, descending from the east ridge, 'watched one of those great showers of stones.'

In 1860 Mr. C. E. Mathews, with Melchior Anderegg and Kronig, ascended the great snow couloir at the east end of this south-eastern face, and were driven back by dangerous conditions when only 40 minutes distant from the ridge.

In 1869 Mr. Horace Walker ‡ and the late Mr. G. E. Foster, attempting to traverse below the east ridge, were forced down the face at its eastern end and descended on to the great buttress, thence making their way to the lower Schalliberg Glacier.

In 1877 Messrs. Davidson, Hartley, and Hoare § gained the Schalligrat, 1,500 feet below the summit of the mountain, by the couloir and buttress at the western end of this face. They ran considerable risks from rockfalls, and Mr. Hartley, in his delightful paper, was of opinion that 'the stones preferred going down the ribs.'

In 1900 the late Mr. Cockin, || with Messrs. Corry and Brant, descended this face in an irregular traverse from the

* *Hours of Exercise in the Alps* (London, 1871), pp. 91-113.

† *Alpine Journal*, vol. i. p. 43. ‡ *Ibid.* vol. xxiii. pp. 180-1.

§ *Ibid.* vol. viii. pp. 340 and 419-25.

|| *Ibid.* vol. xx. pp. 255-9.

summit towards the east. In their account of their terrible experiences they mention the special danger incurred from stone avalanches.

I had noticed in almost all these descriptions that stones were spoken of as only falling from immediately below the summit itself, and I was encouraged to hope that an ascent inclining from the east might avoid the chief danger during a great part of the day. I shall return to this point shortly. The recollection of the firm rocks of the *Turngrat* encouraged me to hope also that some ridge might yet be found to clear the general character of the face. Chance and weather were the real agents responsible for a fulfilment of these old hopes in 1905. Mr. Ryan, with Josef and Gabriel Lochmatter, and myself with Joseph Knubel, were combined for an attack on the Schalligrat. (I refrain from recording that that year, for obvious reasons, the unkindly ridge was locally renamed the Schantigrat.) Weather and fear of the open Schalli Glacier drove us down from the hut and put an end to much indolent chess-playing. In the subsequent recriminations we vowed that, if we could not get across the glacier to the Schallijoch to reach the old route, we could at least strike straight up the face and make our own. In this mood chance brought us across Mr. W. E. Davidson's path in Randa, and with real generosity he supplied us with a sketch and a description of his own and other previous ascents on this face. This served to determine our purpose. In bad weather we returned on Sunday, August 27, to the hut, pledged to wait for a favouring day, and with confidence in the 'Monday luck' so noticeable that year. There had been some talk of a *gîte* on the rocks, but I have never attained to the superexcellence of Goldsmith's 'Traveller' in this department, who professed to find that

Though the rocky summits frown,
These rocks, by custom, turn to beds of down,

and where possible, in uncertain weather, I prefer the distant but at least waterproof Capua of a *cabane*. Ryan's persistent wakefulness proved too much for the efforts of mist and guides alike, and a somewhat doubtful party was launched from shelter at 4.45 A.M. We followed the ordinary route across the little glacier and up the chimney in the small containing ridge, trudging steadily; a mere matter of 'boots, boots, boots, going up and down again.' Striking to the left, north-west across the eastern bay of the Schalliberg Glacier, we threaded the crevasses at a high level, and turning slightly down again struck the great split buttress by an easy

chimney somewhere below its ultimate fork.* This was the buttress from which Mr. Mathews started in 1860, on to which Mr. Walker descended in 1869, and which has formed the starting-point of most attempts on this face. We followed it to some height, and rested at its top, below the snow slopes, for breakfast and a pipe. Personally I rank a pipe before all the articles of the mountaineering creed. A confession of faith is dangerous, I am quite aware, so I will temperately limit myself to saying that it supplies the place for me of food, of drink, sometimes of sleep, and, to a certain extent, of warmth. In this last respect, however, I must admit that it can be tried too highly. I remember once negotiating with unspeakable struggles the exit of a delightful, 100-foot quartz-funnel, discovered by a friend and myself on the Hohstock above Bel Alp. I emerged triumphant, but accompanied only by the rags of a silk shirt, my pipe, and my boots. I cannot say that, during the period of waiting in a bitter wind until my companion rejoined me with the remnants which he had collected on his ascent, I found smoking more than a rather cloudy substitute. But all merit has limitations. Leaving the buttress we turned diagonally up to the left, across steep hard snow, past the foot of the great couloir by which Mr. Mathews all but reached the east arête in 1860. The bergschrund was crossed with little loss of time or of step-cutting, and passing still further to the left we struck the end of the second of the long, shallow ribs which descend to the Schalliberg Glacier from various points on the east arête. A powdering of new snow and an occasional glaze of ice were not sufficient to interfere with the good firm holds and comfortable angles that these rocks enjoy. We ascended rapidly for about half an hour, then crossed upward and westward over a depression to the next rib, followed this some distance, and then struck west again. The climbing was quite straightforward, and we were making as far as possible a direct line for the summit. The guides pretended a desire to follow one rib right up to the east ridge, but they were glad to be overruled. 'Dieser Querweg ist a very queer way,' was Joseph's attempt at a bilingual pun. Some 800 to 900 feet, approximately, below the summit the rocks became steeper and less frictional, and drapings of ice and snow suggested caution in traversing. So a short halt was called, and the ropes, which had hitherto not suggested themselves

* We found this chimney difficult in 1906: it is sensitive to weather changes.



W. H. Goeve, photo.

Swan Electric Engraving Co.,

THE WEISSHORN FROM THE N. END OF THE PLATTENHÖRNER.

as necessary, were put on by both parties. The majority, Ryan with the two Lochmatters, led the advance; a minority of myself and Knubel followed, slightly varying the route of the first party at our pleasure. The first passage to the left called for some care; then followed another upward, easy-going wrinkle, and another careful, shallow couloir. Finally, some 200 feet immediately below the summit, a very fine stretch of precipitous slabs had to be clung across on an upward diagonal. I let Knubel have his full 70 feet out before following. The minute but firm holds at long intervals made this a most stimulating crossing. About half-way over I was checked for some time by an utter absence of further handhold, although Knubel, whose reach is considerably shorter than mine, had not apparently found much difficulty in advancing. At last a tiny but sole-supporting crinkle revealed itself behind a projecting corner, and suggested to me, as I put it to its proper use, a new interpretation of the old maxim that to 'know-ledge is better than reach-is.' This traverse brought us out on to a broken little rib rather to our left of the top. Then we pelted direct for the summit and surmounted the final snow crest, I say five, but Ryan obstinately maintains three, feet to the west of the highest point. This was at 11.15. The whole climb so far had taken 6½ hours. Not a stone was seen to fall during the ascent, and the lower snows showed little trace of previous falls. A considerable covering of fresh snow made it difficult to judge, but the general appearance of the rocks confirmed my previous impression that such falls as there are come generally from the still unsettled rocks just under the summit, and confine their principal action to the couloirs immediately below it and off the line of ascents from the east.* This agrees with the experience of Mr. Davidson's party in traversing immediately below the summit on their first ascent to the Schalligrat. It also is confirmed by the starting-place of the falls, as witnessed by Professor Tyndall, Sir Leslie Stephen, and others. I have not had the advantage of Mr. Broome's † observations when he made the first ascent from the Schallijoch in 1895, but Mr. Davidson, following the same route in 1902, 'particularly observed into the matter of falling stones and ice, and though the day was magnificent and cloudless he did not see one single stone fall.' He believes, however, 'that it

* This view is confirmed by the observations of Mr. Mayor and myself during our ascent of the west rib in August 1906.

† *Alpine Journal*, vol. xviii. pp. 145-55.

was abnormal and wrong on their part not to have done so in showers.' His actual observation agrees with our immunity in 1905, but I cannot do better than record his opinion that 'the face fulfils all the conditions of a decidedly dangerous face,' and that 'it is so lofty that anything big that does come from fairly high up must ricochet all over the shallow ribs, once it has struck.' Apart from this risk the climbing is devoid of any special features, and in a good year it might well be possible for a party, starting early and travelling fast, to ascend the surprisingly easy angles of the face at almost any point and in almost any direction.

In spite of keen wind and snow we halted under the top for lunch, for we had

Found hard rocks, hard cheer, or none,
And we were emptier than a friar's brains.

The breaking weather induced us to abandon our intention of descending by the Schalligrat. Indeed, the powdery snow of the ordinary, sharp east ridge gave us difficulty enough. Coming off the steep slope of the final peak, a sitting glissade was suggested. As a sometime schoolmaster I should not have forgotten my Roger Ascham, who as early as the year 1545 had discovered that 'a man may, I graunt, sit on a brante hill-syde, but yf he gyve never so lytle forward he cannot stoppe though he woulde never so fayne, but he must nedes runne heedling, he knoweth not how far.' I did, however, neglect him for the moment. I did 'gyve a lytle forward,' with the result that I crossed the well-covered schrund in one of those attitudes which are familiar to all of us, but which never lose their freshness of humour from the spectator's point of view. The remainder of the climb just kept the interest going. A strange diffusion of yellow light in the gathering mist made a singular and spectral wasteland of even the last dreary rubble-heaps of the descent. Josef Lochmatter was sent on from the ridge to arrange for the return from Randa to Zermatt. He vanished like an animated grey avalanche, and we followed more quietly, reaching Randa in dreamy contentment in about 3½ hours from the top. On the way we passed four-and-twenty unhappy souls ascending to our previously lonely hut, for a night of discomfort and a morrow of disappointment. We could only sympathise. They suffered for want of faith in the year's Monday-luck.

Kindly Fortune thus made it possible for me in only two completed ascents to make the acquaintance of four

several routes up and down this most perfect of all mountain forms. The Schalligrat alone of the main ridges invites another visit, and since, in order to maintain the average, some sixth way will have to be found for the descent, it may have to wait some time. Possibly it may be reserved for some remote 'combined' ascent that shall fulfil more closely Tennyson's conditional approval, who bids us each take, if you remember,

Some comfortable Bride to grace
Thy Climbing life.

These are the two messages from an old acquaintance; they have, I fear, lost much of the original freshness with which they were given, and have grown shamelessly blurred and dog's-eared on the way to you. But I have been asked to add to them, with no cover of excuse—for it is not even a new message—a short scrawl from the Furggen Ridge of the Matterhorn. I will ask you to allow me to call it a postscript to the messages. I inquired of a small cousin of mine what he thought 'P.S.' at the end of a letter meant, and he suggested 'Positively Scandalous.' This is the nature of so many postscripts that I feel it may even cover the sort of way I am introducing this one.

It is a commonplace now to say that there is an incomparable fascination for mountaineers in the sombre magnificence of the Matterhorn. Whatever our views as to the comparative merits of our favourite climbs and peaks, I suppose we should most of us agree that as a mountain to look at, a mountain to spend time and energy in lurking round and exploring in all its mysterious, mist-haunted recesses, a mountain on to which we find ourselves drifting almost inevitably every season, and with which we hope to keep in touch as long as years will allow us to totter up to a Théodule Pass or a Staffelalp, nothing can really take its place.

Personally I find it almost magnetic in its infinite varieties and fascinating in its memories—nights of wild storm and snow in the hut on the Italian ridge, when the timbers creaked in their efforts to parachute into space, and it took three of us $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours to regain the Col du Lion by iced slabs on which we had ascended in twenty minutes the evening before; days of scorched and monotonous pounding up and down the parched and dusty east ridge, whose innumerable drearinesses can only be compared with Dante's descent through the circles of his *Inferno* (be it noticed, by the way, that Dante always took a Guide); weeks of wandering round the Furggen

Grat and the tremendous ruins of the southern precipices, where we made an abortive and ill-timed attempt, wisely abandoned, to reach the Pic Tyndall direct from its base, and 'departing, left behind us footsteps' (more than I care to remember) on the ice of the southern and eastern glaciers.* Of all perhaps the most memorable was a night spent round the camp fire, on the side of the Zmutt ridge, the eve before our ascent, while a circle of Lochmatters and Pollingers jödelled into the frosty starlight, and in the distance the Dent d'Hérens and the Dent Blanche chuckled a hoarse chorus of spasmodic avalanches. It is not surprising then, that the Furggrat, the last of the four main ridges, drew Knubel and myself to attempt at least an examination. We laid a lot of emphasis to one another on the fact that we only meant to examine it.

The previous history of the ridge is probably well known to you. Mr. Whympfer looked at it, and tried it from the huge couloir on its west, whence he was driven by a terrific stone-fall. When he started by himself up to the right—the true line of attack—his guides refused to follow him.

In 1880 Mr. Mummery made the first ascent in stormy weather, and just below the head traversed across to the top of the Swiss shoulder under rather perilous conditions.

In 1899 the indomitable Signor Guido Rey failed to get beyond this same point without the aid of a cord let down from above; some 200 ft. higher he was compelled to return. He subsequently ascended by the west ridge, and had himself lowered on a rope-ladder over the cliff to his previous highest point, reascending and then descending to Zermatt, 'thus visiting,' as he modestly says, 'every foot of the ridge.'

At the Schwarz-See hotel I met Mr. Ryan with his two Lochmatters, bent on the same errand; only, whereas I thought at most of trying the traverse to the east ridge, he had conceived the bold idea of prospecting a possible traverse across the south face to the Italian ridge. Mr. Farrar kindly informs me that Daniel Macquignaz also suggested this. We agreed to work together, though keeping our several parties. We started at 12, an hour too soon I thought, and arrived, still in starry darkness, at Ryan's previous *gîte* on the top of the ridge north of the Furggjoch. We tried to while away time in inspecting his admirably constructed sleeping-

* A successful ascent direct to the Pic Tyndall was made this year (1906) on August 10 and 11 by SS. Ugo de Amicis Ferraris and Augusto Ferraris without guides.

place and abandoned stores. Ryan makes a *sine qua non* of a large fowl, with the occasional alternative of several beef-steaks, for hut cookery; to this perhaps he owes something of his exceptional staying power. Knubel and myself agree on light rucksacks. Knubel's argument is striking. 'If you get back,' he maintains, 'you can always eat; if you don't, good food is wasted; and you are more likely to get back if you have a light sack.' It is something like the reasoning of the man—you possibly know it—who refused to subscribe money towards sending missionaries to the savages of the New Hebrides, because, he said, he was a vegetarian.

The wind soon beat our patience, and so, still in the dark, we made for the narrow crack that gives access from the Furggrat to the Furggen ridge—or rather edge, for it is more properly the edge of the south-east face than a definite ridge. The crack was so sporting that it raised hopes of the climb to come, all too soon to be disappointed. Once on the face one can run practically anywhere one pleases; and adopting the line of least resistance, for reasons of pace, we must at one time have been ascending on a line fully a third or more out across the face towards the east ridge. This line cuts the arc of the first great outward curve in the edge, and rejoins the actual ridge where it again swerves in. Dawn indulgently waited to appear until we were probably about half-way up to the head; but, as it at once announced its arrival on the summit by a succession of express messengers, despatched with a careless disregard of their destination, we bore back discreetly to the edge on our left. Progress was very rapid, and only occasionally checked by anything calling for slower negotiation or more than ordinary care. The actual passage, up and across some steep broken chimneys, on to the shoulder, or rather notch, just under the overhang of the head, was not so easy. The rocks were iced and friable, and a slight cord, probably left by Signor Guido Rey, proved more of a hindrance than help.

Once in the notch three of the party secured sketchy front seats on the base of the rocks. The other two sat astride of the little snow fork. The situation here is certainly impressive: below and under the left foot the face falls away, with its edge swaying in and out, in one gigantic swirl to the Matterhorn Glacier; under the right foot gapes the vast couloir where, thousands of feet below, clouds are seething in a seemingly fathomless cauldron, whose sheer, pitiless walls seem a perpetual prison for the hollow writhings of lost mountain mists. Above, the precipices, wet, crumbling, red and black, in twisted,

shattered strata, overhang with the most uncompromising aloofness. The idea of a traverse across the south face was at once abandoned. On firm rocks, such as are found lower on the ridge, the attempt might be just possible, though hazardous ; but on these disintegrated, peeling, shale shelves it should never be in question. To return down the ridge was a dull notion, and would mean longer exposure to assault than on the traverse to the Swiss shoulder. The risks of this traverse were known to us before, and our hearing and sight now confirmed them. 'In all kinds of climbing,' writes Edgar Allan Poe, 'it is, as Catalani says of singing, easier to get up than to come down.' At all events if we had difficulty in leaving our high notes it was not for want of wind, of which there was much too much for long meditation. The discussion that took place was, however, given the circumstances, curiously amusing. One amateur was all for trying the corner above us—of which some 50 ft. more would probably go—in spite of a stone-douche down the only line of attack ; to which one guide responded with a murmur as to his growing family, and another with dry references to an incipient attachment which ran risk of premature closure. Finally the traverse was resolved on, and it may be here stated that no sooner were we out on the face and in a better position for seeing, than all unanimously agreed—even the youngest of us—that the corner was impossible, even apart from its inevitable risks. The only conceivable line of advance leads for a short way up a stone channel to end in an overhang. We found the start from the shoulder was not easy, down a steep slab and under an impending corner. Then followed the traverse of an open, loosely built couloir, where the risk of falling stones is greater than on the rest of the traverse. We took this very rapidly, and on unsatisfactory, featureless slabs, coated with fresh snow and broken shale, we wound across the face, contorting ourselves into all the attitudes inevitable in hanging on to loose, rotten rocks, sloped at a high angle and uncertain in their own minds whether they, too, do not want a change of station.

Unhappy, most like tortured men,
Their joints new set to be new racked again,
To mountains they for shelter pray ;
The mountains shake and run about, no less confused than they.

Cowley must really have known what it felt like to make a traverse on crumbling rock. From above only a few stones fell, and those chiefly outside us. We were, in fact, surprised

throughout the day at our comparative immunity. The last 200 ft. on to the Swiss shoulder, as we expected, proved the real difficulty. Had we not remembered Mr. Mummery's account we should have been tempted, as he was, to descend on to the next sloping, repulsive snow-terrace below, and try on that level. Of course some 500 ft. lower the difficulties almost disappear, but there the risk of stones would be greater. The leader here moved meditatively. To the second party he seemed to crawl like the hour hand of a clock. Possibly our gentle passivity may have suggested to the crowd watching us from the Swiss shoulder that we were stationed there permanently to register the action of falling stones, and were indulging to the full the delight of 'counting the dewy pebbles, fixed in thought.' Knubel was firmly anchored behind me, but I noticed that all the first party were performing on very insufficient hold. With real altruism I suggested that we should join on and give them a firm basis of operations. With all five on the two ropes it was just possible for the leader to get a secure position on the shoulder before the tail left its base. Incidentally I may remark that I do not think that a less altruistic pair than Knubel and I had shown ourselves would have had at all a comfortable time in getting on to the shoulder unassisted. Virtue, however, is its owner's reward. The traverse ends at the very top of the shoulder just at its junction with the steep slabs of the head. Much of the crowd that had assembled there to watch our traverse had dispersed by now, and we managed to jostle and shoulder and shove our way to the summit in about 20 min. In spite of bitter weather and frozen rocks it was a 'parade day' for Zermatt, and solid peasants were hauling themselves and yet more solid masses through the trackless mazes of ropes and chains. I half suspect it may have been in prophetic anticipation of the usual 'Sunday out' on the Zermatt ridge of the Matterhorn that John, Duke of Buckingham, remarked centuries ago—

Behold some toiling up a slippery hill,
Where, though arrived, they must be toiling still ;
Some with unsteady feet, just fall'n to ground,
Others at top whose heads are turning round ;
To this high hill it happens still that some
The most unfit are forwardest to come.

We are told that 'of old sat Freedom on the heights,' but 'freedom' would now be an inapt description of the manacled Matterhorn. Would it not at least be as much in the interests of the best guides as of the mountain itself and its

admirers if these gyves were removed, and the cords unwound which are twined grotesquely like the straggling straws of insanity round Cervin's sombre head? Subscriptions are even asked at the hotels to renew these atrocities: in one place this year a cord was represented only by just a little bit of string, as a forcible hint that more funds were needed. Ryan, indeed, incurred some additional odium by picking up the end of this and offering it to a perspiring guide in the crowd, under the misconception that it was hanging out of his pocket. In spite of these assistances one stout party blocked the narrow corner so long that a permanent residence seemed our only outlook. At last, however, I remembered my Wordsworth, and appealed tragically to his guides.

A word from me was like a charm :
They pulled together with one mind,
And their huge burthen, safe from harm,
Moved like a vessel in the wind.

At least he swung out of the way and let us pass. At the top we waited an hour, pondering on the infinite void and filling a perhaps more finite one from the sacks.

Even so the shoulder proved a hardly less congested district on our descent; some parties hardly seemed to have altered anything but their expression. We unroped below the old hut and hurried down as best we might to get the penance of that monotonous and detestable descent over. A dangerous solitary climber, one of the numerous crowd we passed, amused himself by discharging a hundredweight of loose rock at our vanishing heads. We urged him pressingly to wait until the shot should be at least taken from a more sporting distance. He complied, but solaced his soul by dismal and derisive howls, growing gradually more distant until they finished with a final wail and a resumptive stone-discharge as we turned the corner below the couloir. As we had got into the way of using Wordsworth it will probably have occurred to you that we at once quoted 'Peter Bell' in chorus:—

Among the rocks and winding crags,
Among the mountains far away,
Once more that ass did lengthen out
More ruefully a deep-drawn shout.

Just below the last little wall of rock above the new hut we descended upon a triple line of tourists, seated in a gaily-garbed half-circle. They were applauding the returning heroes as they severally descended, and immortalising with

a gross of cameras the dashing fashion in which their grandfathers and grandsons negotiated the final step into the auditorium.

You will probably agree by now that the content of my P.S. is 'positively scandalous;' but if I have talked scandal of the Zermatt Ridge it is because I wished the postscript to supplement the notes, by emphasising in its contrasts any justification that might be needed for the previous climbs.

The vulgarisation—if one may call it so—of many of our chief ridges is the inevitable result of the growing popularity of mountaineering. The price that mountaineers have had to pay for their present immunity from journalistic charges of lunacy is that they have become something of a fashion. They are now no longer left to wander in enforced but pleasant solitude among 'the precious things of heaven, and the dew, and the deeps that couch beneath,' and 'the chief things of the ancient mountains, and the precious things of the lasting hills.' In further lands it may be still possible, within the compass of a fortnight's holiday, to find something of the romance with which the Alps were invested for the earlier generation, but it has to be sought, it no longer runs to meet us. To sleep in the huge and noisy caravanserai on the summit of the Brocken in the Hartz Mountains during Walpurgis-Nacht, when the only devils that assail you will be little demons of an extremely irritating and concrete species, will dispel most of your Goethesque illusions; but a night in the little lightning-shattered chapel, half filled with snow, on the summit of Mount Athos, watching the storm surging in the great gulleys of its northern face, and drinking herb-tea maybe with a white-haired hermit, whose only previous thought of England has been the sight of the solemn procession of British battleships passing on their silent watch 5,000 ft. below his eyrie, is a romance a little more remote of attainment. Within four days (if you will) you can see from Parnassus the snowy range of Olympus floating in mid-air, like some silvery cloudland of the gods, upon a haze of blue shadow that fades into the indistinguishable greyness of the sea. Within four days, too, you may find yourself toiling up the long snow slopes of that other Olympus in Asia, with the red roofs and dazzling minarets of Brusa nestled in green mulberry trees in a fold of the hills at your feet. Within but two days more you can be seated on Zeus' own rock-throne on the summit of Ida, looking away to the north where the impetuous Scamander bursts its course through rocky gorge and olive grove out on to the soft green levels of

wind-enchanted Troy, while behind you the blue waves of the Ægean fringe with white surf innumerable lilac islands, and to the south the low barren uplands of Asia melt into a hot distance of sun-coloured mist.

But in the nearer region of the Alps romance has retreated into remoter fastnesses, and those who seek it there must often incur the charge of wilful avoidance of the obvious way. We have spoken of the Matterhorn, but any popular climb would yield as good a moral. Have you ascended the Jungfrau in a good year from the Concordia Pavilion? The shriek of the train is just round the corner; the snow track is visible at 10 miles; near the summit guides and parties have trodden out a vast set of 'woppin' old stairs.' It befell me once to fall into one of these so-called 'steps,' and I was only extricated with much difficulty. If I had perished there, imprisoned, the words found graven upon my heart would have been 'Eiger Junction.'

Year by year a melancholy antiphone grows louder in an ever larger number of Swiss valleys. Listen any still evening to the voice of the Rhone, growling hoarsely to drown the hoot of the busy engines bustling their long burthens up and down the desecrated valleys. It is chanting in a clamour of indignant surprise, 'Line upon line, line upon line!' Listen again and you will hear from the distant silver peaks, as they lift appealing heads to the uneasy wind that frets in vain to free them from their ravelled drapery of cord and chain and iron, an echo like a drowsy anger of response, 'Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords, and sin as it were with a cart rope.'

It is, indeed, only the climber prepared to leave, with all due precaution and knowledge of the conditions he is encountering, the snowfield trampled into buffalo-wallows or the ridge-climb polished pink with frequent feet, who can still find the cloud-wisps of romance clinging round glacier and peak, in the new pleasure of untrodden snow-way or unviolated summit.

If it were needful to find a motto to embody the essential doctrines of the mountaineer's creed I should myself choose the 'good and godly' distich attributed to James V. of Scotland—

Brother, hearken what I say,
Grip ere thou slide, and, keep forth the highway.