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Some Oberland Climbs in 1907.

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THE year 1907 was one of uncertain weather—one of those seasons when it makes all the difference whether one climbs on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, or on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, and when one can never foresee a week ahead the condition in which one's peak will be. The two Gasks and I arrived at the Ober Steinberg on July 7, and had a day and a half of rain to begin with. On the 10th George Gask and I started in mist and a warm south wind to begin our training with the rarely visited Tschingelspitz, the highest point of the Tschingelgrat, which is accessible from the Tschingel glacier by a couloir, a fairly simple rock-climb, and a ridge walk. The mists melted into a perfect day, but the fresh snow was soft and thick. So long as we followed the beaten track that led to the Mutthorn hut we got on fairly well; when we turned across 'the deep's untrodden floor' we broke through the crust and went in over the ankle at every step. Bad enough on a gentle slope, but when it steepened we sank nearly to the knee, each step became a distinct effort, and we had to rest about every twenty yards. We reached the foot of our climb, but there were many excellent reasons for not going on: the condition of the couloir suggested avalanches; the rather rotten rock-face with its melting snow murmured of falling stones; the final ridge promised more wading; and Gask began to talk about the accelerated action of the heart in his best bedside manner. So an hour and a half later we were down at the Oberhorn See, enjoying

the cool silver shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water

while our coffee boiled; and a sleep on the grass afterwards brought our halts up to 4 hrs. in a 10 hrs.' day. The weather of the next two days was typical of the season. We woke to find it raining hard; at 11 we were basking in sunshine and watching the peaks break through the clouds; at 5, when George Gask and I were well on our way to the Mutthorn hut, it was raining again, and we reached the hut in a snow-storm, which was still going on when we went to bed at 8.30. When my alarm-watch went off at 2.30 A.M. we found a cloudless morning, with a frost hard enough to give us excellent snow all the early part of the day. At 4 P.M. it was snowing again.

The peak on our programme was the Gspaltenhorn; but even if it would have 'gone' under the conditions, which was very doubtful, the trudge back over the Gamchi-lücke and across the soft snow of the Tschingel glacier was not to be thought of; so we decided to try the Lauterbrunnen Breithorn. Instead of going up to the actual Petersgrat we took a short cut over the ridge which runs down from the Tschingelhorn, and went round that peak to the Wetterlücke in 1¾ hr. I remembered the western arête of the Breithorn as a rock-climb, but it was now so deep in fresh snow that we hardly touched the rocks, and spent most of the day in traversing steep, sometimes very steep, snow-slopes on the southern face of the ridge. On the one tower which we could not turn iced rocks gave us a good deal of trouble. The snow was excellent at first, but naturally became worse and worse as the day went on, and we finally arrived at a slope where the heavy man of the party could not persuade the soft upper layer to support him at all, and had to make a sort of continuous furrow through it, from the basis of what one might call the palæocrystic stratum underneath. This was obviously unsafe, and we were already thinking with a little anxiety about the probable condition of certain places lower down. I unroped and went up to the ridge to explore, but found that we were a good half-hour from the top; so we made a cautious descent, and were down at the Wetterlücke again by 1.30, after spending 7½ hrs. on the mountain.

A rainy day, a clearing day, then nine days of almost perfect weather, from July 15 to 23. We had hoped to cross the Schmadrijoch, but the conditions put it out of the question, and on the 15th Sydney Gask and his sister joined us for the walk over the Petersgrat, which was in a state that made the rope almost unnecessary. The next day, without Miss Gask, we went up to the Bietschhorn hut. This was in a deplorable

condition, with damp straw, a very shaky stove, few blankets, and scarcely any spoons and forks. I believe that it has since become the property of the Swiss Alpine Club, which will no doubt keep it in good order. Our aim here was the traverse of all the little peaks on the ridge which bounds the Lötschenthal on the south-east between the Bietschjoch and the Adlerspitzen, namely, the two peaks of the Schwarzhorn, the Wilerhorn, the three peaks of the Kastlerhorn, and the Hohgleifen. Part of this traverse was done by Messrs. Benecke and Cohen in 1894, and the whole of it in 1896 by Mr. Barnard's party, who slept at a hut above Goppenstein and took the climb from the other end. I do not know whether it has been done before from the Bietschhorn hut, but I can strongly recommend it to those who enjoy a 'Gratwanderung' with fine views, and varied though not difficult climbing. The view from the Adlerspitzen (which are not marked on the map but are about ten minutes beyond the Hohgleifen, 3,280 m.) is particularly interesting, as they almost overhang the Rhone valley. The whole expedition could be done comfortably in less than 12 hrs., halts included, though we took much longer, as one of the party was out of condition; and it would be a pleasant second day for a party which had climbed the Bietschhorn. We made one mistake which is worth mentioning for the benefit of future climbers. The simplest way down is by the Kastlerjoch, between the Hohgleifen and the Kastlerhorn; but that pass is not the lowest point between the two peaks. It is, apparently, the next gap to the S., nearer the Hohgleifen. The lowest point looks like a pass, being a saddle with couloirs leading up to it from each side; and we started down, not indeed in the couloir itself, which was a narrow strip of ice, and an obvious channel for falling stones, but down the buttress on the right, which looked feasible enough. But it was rotten and steep to begin with, and became rottener and steeper as we went down, until a direct descent became impossible. It was about as unpleasant a place as I know. We might have got off the buttress by a traverse, but this would only have driven us into that evil-looking couloir at a lower point; and after spending more than an hour over it we climbed up again to the ridge, retraced our steps over the first summit of the Kastlerhorn, and made a fresh start down a fairly promising snow-slope. At first all went well; then the snow became thinner, and soon we were faced by the usual afternoon mixture, a few inches of soft snow on slushy ice. Before long the second man was complaining that the steps I cut were rather small,

and the third man that they were rather far apart. The retort was obvious: five in the afternoon is not the time to demand luxurious staircases. But fate relented; the snow deepened again, and in another half-hour or so we were at the foot of our nameless glacier. Then came the least pleasant part of the day, for there was no path to be found; and when it is about dinner-time, and one is still some 4,000 ft. above one's hotel, one is prepared to welcome the broadest and vulgarest of paths. We did strike one little track about half-way down, but it soon lost itself in the Niederwald; and after a succession of débris-slopes and thickets of bilberries or alpenrose we finally plunged straight down through the woods which clothe all the southern slopes of the Lötschenthal and emerged rather hot and tired at Wiler. Whether the proper descent, by the Kastlerjoch, has the same drawback I cannot say; but these slopes seem to afford little pasture, and are seldom visited; so paths are rare.

George Gask and I had arranged to join Farrar in the 10 o'clock train at Gampel on July 20, bringing porters with us. Our porters fell into a mistake as to Farrar's profession, which was dispelled as soon as they had exchanged a few words with him—they thought we were going to join *der Pfarrer von Gampel.* Our plan was to camp in the Baltschiederthal, climb the east face of the Bietschhorn, and the next day cross the Lötschthal Breithorn to Bel Alp. Preparations were made at an hotel in Visp, and Farrar, as an old campaigner, provided for all contingencies. We began with a kilo. of everything, and where we had any doubts we took 2 or 3 kilos. When the loads were completed and crowned with our sleeping-bags, it was only by a free use of the campaigner's most persuasive language that the porters were induced to shoulder them. As far as Baltschieder, at the entrance of our valley, we drove, in primitive vehicles over primitive roads. The 'Climbers' Guide' brands the Baltschiederthal as 'dreary,' and I am sorry to say that, before I knew the valley, I transferred that epithet to the new edition of 'Ball.' No doubt it represents faithfully enough the impression made on a climber descending to Visp, especially if he has crossed that very tedious pass the Baltschiederjoch, and the same could be said about many of the other minor valleys which descend to the valley of the Rhone. But it is not so as one goes up it, even under a heavy pack on a hot afternoon; rather would one call it wild and picturesque, with the special charm that attaches to all valleys which are almost uninhabited, unknown to the tourist, and seldom

S. Gask, Photo. *Swan Electric Engraving Co Ltd*

THE UPPER LÖTSCHENTHAL.

visited even by the climber. There is a good enough path and two Alps. At the first we bathed and had afternoon coffee; at the second we added wood and milk to our loads. About 7.30, 6 hrs. from the start, we reached the camping-place known as Martigschüpfe. We had hoped to sleep higher, but the heavy loads of the porters made them very slow. However, it is an ideal place for a camp in fine weather; in wet weather it would hardly do, as the actual shelter—a hole under a rock—is cramped and far from water-tight. But what camping-place *is* satisfactory in bad weather? Farrar asserts that the place is haunted, on the strength of the bad dreams he had there. As a member of the Society for Psychical Research, I cannot consider the evidence satisfactory. The porters slept in the hole; we took our sleeping-bags about fifty yards away, to an old sheep-pen, where we had level grass, the music of a little waterfall in our ears, and nothing between us and the stars.

We started a little before daylight, scrambled up steep slopes of alpenrose, then coasted round the eastern and north-eastern foot of the Stockhorn, keeping high, and reached the Baltschieder glacier above the icefall in 3 hrs. There we saw that we should have done better to follow the right moraine and the glacier itself. Our next stage was to gain the great bay, gradually narrowing to a couloir, between the south-eastern and eastern arêtes of the Bietschhorn. There was no difficulty, but even at 8 A.M. the snow was terribly soft. The 'Climbers' Guide' told us that Herr von Kuffner, in 1892, had crossed the bergschrund at the foot of the great couloir, then crossed the couloir itself, evidently to its northern side, and ascended by the rocks on its northern bank almost straight to the summit. This led us to expect a face-climb, but there was no climbable face to be seen. Mr. Dent's party, in 1878, on the other hand, driven from the couloir at once by avalanches, took to the rocks on the other side, and by a difficult and dangerous climb finally gained the crest of the south-eastern arête high up, and followed it to the top. The two routes are, for all practical purposes, entirely distinct. But the only rocks 'on the northern side of the couloir' are those of the eastern arête, and what Herr von Kuffner evidently did was to ascend the couloir itself, either on the snow or on some rocks which divide its upper part, as far as possible, and then take to the eastern arête high up. This route seems to have been almost exactly repeated in 1907 by the descent of Messrs. Oliver, Courtauld, and

Jardine, with Heinrich Fuhrer and Kaspar Maurer, recorded in the 'Alpine Journal' for last November.*

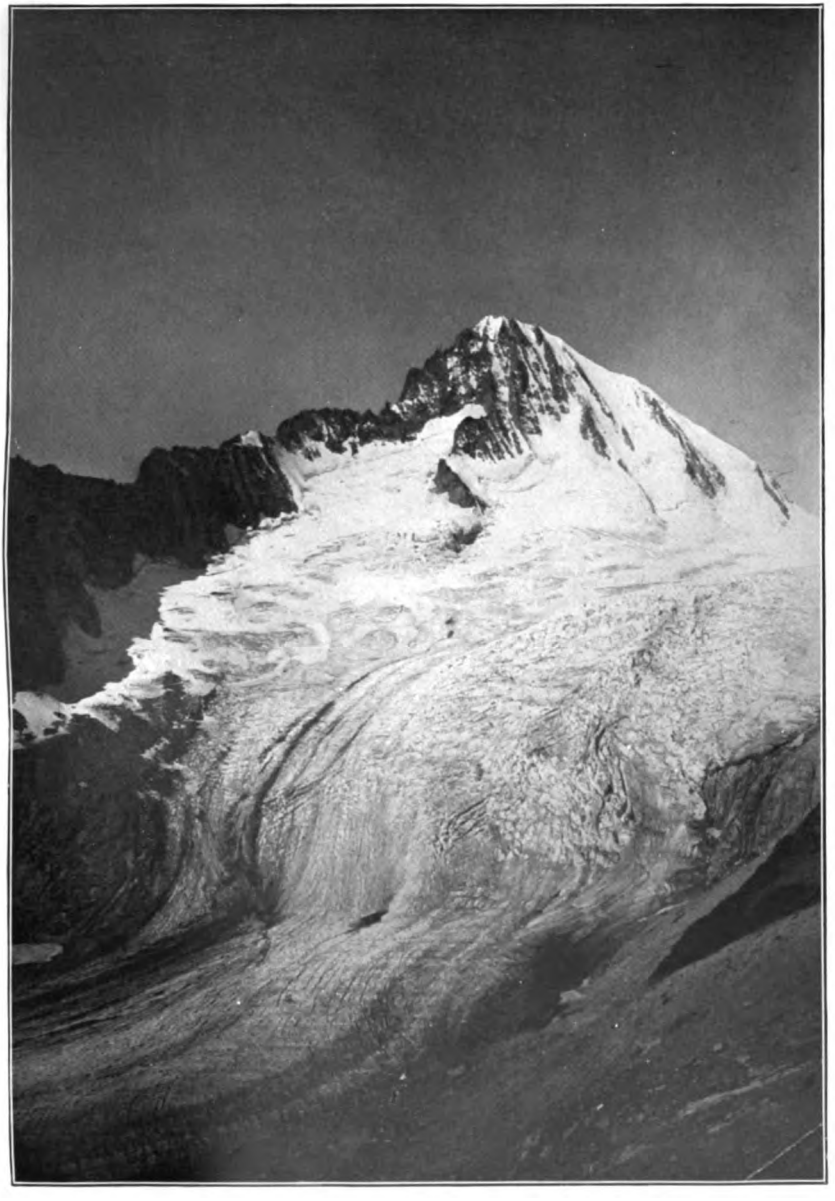
Our own route was partly indicated by the condition of the snow. The slope was steepening, and we sank in almost to the knee at every step; the obvious thing was to get out of the couloir at the lowest possible point. This meant climbing the eastern arête of our peak. But in any case we should probably have tried this very attractive arête. I had seen a note in the Ried Hotel Book that some one climbed it for the first time, as he thought, in September 1906, and found a bottle at the foot of it; but I did not then know that the book also contained a note of an ascent in 1903. No account of either expedition had been published so far as I am aware, but Farrar has now summarised all available information in the February 'Alpine Journal.'† The eastern arête begins with three great towers, the lowest of which is probably point 3,098 m. of the Siegfried map. I do not think that the most extreme purist would hold that one must climb over these before one can say that one has done the whole arête. After the third of them the rocks sink almost to the level of the snow, and the arête proper really starts. It was here that we reached it without any difficulty, and, like the 1906 party, found an empty bottle. The time was 11.30, eight hours from the start, and much too late to begin the serious part of the climb, when

> Snowy mountains wear
> The purple noon's transparent might.

Soft snow had delayed us considerably, but our halts had amounted to the disgraceful total of 2 hrs. and 20 min. I would suggest that any member of the club who wishes to write a paper of general interest should choose the subject of 'Halts.'

The arête on which we spent the next nine hours is one of the most interesting that I know—long, narrow, jagged, and for the most part good and sound rock. On the south, for some time, it fell away in an almost vertical cliff, and its northern slopes are a mixture of steep rock and ice, which offered no temptations to traverses. We were never, in fact, more than a few yards from the crest, and for the most part actually on it. If it is nowhere exceptionally hard, it is never easy for long together. Comparisons are difficult, but the

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xxiii. p. 651.
† *Ibid.* vol. xxiv. p. 87.



E. Bornand, Geneva, Photo. *Swan Electric Engraving Co Ltd*

E. FACE OF THE BIETSCHHORN, FROM GRUBHORN.

climbing throughout was of a distinctly higher order than on the three arêtes which we did later, the south-western arête of the Lötschthal Breithorn, the south-eastern arête of the Finsteraarhorn, and the northern arête of the Gross Grünhorn. I may mention also that it left in my fingers the holes which I usually associate with the Montanvert. After some two hours we came to a place where it was obviously possible to descend into the couloir on our left, and noted this as a line of retreat if we were pressed for time. The place where Herr von Kuffner struck the arête, and where Mr. Oliver's party left it—if indeed these places are one and the same—may have been here or higher up, it cannot have been lower down. We are unable to identify the 'obstructing tower,' some way further on, which persuaded Mr. Oliver's party to leave the arête for a rather dangerous traverse on the other side, the north. No doubt this tower, as is often the case, looked much more formidable from above than it is in reality. There was only one place which gave us pause. A tower had to be turned by a traverse just below the arête on the north, across a smooth-looking slab masked by snow of doubtful stability; but it was not long, and the snow held.

We had reluctantly decided that we must turn back at 4 o'clock, wherever we were. When the fatal moment came I pleaded vainly for another quarter of an hour. The top was no longer

> a light of hopeless snows
> That bright in virgin ether bask,

but well in sight, and what separated us from it looked fairly easy. Our arête was becoming less defined, and a little way ahead it apparently merged in a ridge coming from the south-east—not, I think, the main south-eastern arête—so that we should have had to turn northwards for the final climb. But we seemed to be still half or three-quarters of an hour from the summit, and I was only allowed to go to the end of the rope. Our time was 4 hrs. and 20 min. actual going from the foot of the arête, 10 hrs.' actual going from our camp. The descent of the arête took 4 hrs., and went smoothly enough, though we found at one place that it is easier to straddle along what is commonly called a 'knife-edge' of rock, and swarm up a steep little gendarme by rather small holds, than to reverse the process and descend on to the knife-edge. Farrar, who was last, sat on the top of the gendarme and looked at it for a bit, then remarked meditatively that he thought he had a rope sling somewhere in his sack, by which he could secure himself for the descent, and

that if he could not find that he rather thought he would try doubling the rope. Someone else said that as it was 8 P.M. he might as well make up his mind with all convenient speed. His reply to this suggestion showed that after 14 hrs.' going his natural force was not abated. We cleared the last rocks with the last of the daylight at 8.30. Lightning had played through the clouds

> All billowy-bosomed, overbowed
> By many benedictions, sun's
> And moon's and evening star's at once

in a magnificent if ominous way; but at present all was well, and we hurried down the snow in what Mr. Samuel Pepys calls a 'brave moonshine.' Farrar found a way through the edge of the icefall with great skill; the glacier, as we had expected, gave a much easier route down than the traverse under the Stockhorn which we had made in the morning, and we were soon on the right moraine. Following this too far we got into difficulties, for it ends in what seemed through the dim light to be smooth cliffs, and we had to retrace our steps and beat about for some time before we could get on the hillside. Then we began to realise, with some dismay, that we were not very sure where our camp was. By all the rules of the game our porters should have been sitting round a big fire and shouting at intervals; as a matter of fact they had gone placidly to bed, and our shouts were for a long time unanswered. But we roused them at last, and were in a little before midnight. It was only just in time. Ten minutes later

> That orbèd maiden
> With white fire laden
> Whom mortals call the moon

disappeared behind a ridge; without her aid we should hardly have found the camp. We had eaten nothing for a great many hours, but it was too late for a heavy meal, and after a light supper of hot milk and sweet biscuits we slept until we were awakened by the sun shining on our faces.

There were three distinct reasons for our failure—the low camp, the soft snow, and the time spent in halts. We found a good place for a camp some three-quarters of an hour higher up, just by an old chapel at the foot of the right moraine. Mr. Dent camped under the Fäschhorn, much higher up on the opposite side of the glacier, and Herr von Kuffner in an unsheltered place, which we must have passed in the morning, at the north-western foot of the Stockhorn.

But the 1903 party did the climb from our camping-place at Martigschüpfe, and with good snow the ascent from there should not take more than 9 hrs.' actual going. It might also be possible to camp high up on the southern side of the Lötschenthal under the Baltschiederjoch, and reach the eastern arête by crossing that pass, which would make it a Ried expedition.

An off-day was not on the programme, but after an expedition of more than 20 hrs. it was inevitable. And what can be more delightful than a fine off-day in a high camp, with no tourists, no table d'hôtes, no work, and no responsibilities? Nor did we lack one of the few things for which one welcomes the return to an hotel—a bathroom. To stand under 30 ft. of icy cascade is even more exhilarating than to dive into a mountain lake.

On the 22nd we waited for daylight, and were rewarded by finding a path as far as the moraine. Crossing the glacier, we ascended the débris on the northern bank of the Innerer Baltschiederfirn, went straight up the nearly level ice, and up a steep little bit of hard snow (the only place where we wore our crampons during the whole season), just on the east of point 3,045 m., to the névé under the southern face of the Lötschthal Breithorn. This is enclosed by rock walls on three sides, and with a blazing sun overhead and soft snow underfoot was almost unendurably hot. One of the party, who usually contents himself with a cap, now produced from his sack an aged and disreputable hat. He assured us that it had ascended more than 100 great peaks, and we could well believe him. He also resorted, more than once, to a snow shampoo. A little after 11, in 5½ hrs.' actual going, we reached the foot of a couloir leading to the south-western arête of the Breithorn. When Farrar had come before, the ascent to the ridge, mainly on rock, had taken half an hour. Now the rocks were masked by about 3 ft. of snow in the most exasperating condition, which gave no hold whatever, and had to be cleared right away. It was about the consistency of whipped cream. The rocks were firm enough when we got down to them, though not quite easy in one or two places. Farrar took his coat off and worked hard, but it was 2 hrs. and 20 min. before we looked down into the Lötschenthal. The ridge itself is straightforward, not really difficult anywhere, but always narrow, sometimes very rotten, and interesting throughout. It was here that the second man fully appreciated the advantages of Farrar's axe-sling. This is about 3 ft. long, secured to the axe by a

ring, which runs freely along the shaft between the head and a leather band fixed about 12 ins. from the point, the object being to enable one to cut steps with the sling still round one's wrist as a safeguard against losing the axe. The idea—due, I believe, to Mr. Fynn—is an admirable one; but if the full length of the sling is used on a rock-climb it means that the axe sweeps over a circle several yards in diameter. Now when one is moving at the same time as one's leader the nearer one keeps to him the less likely is the rope to get caught on the rocks. But it sometimes becomes a serious dilemma—whether it is better to risk a blow from his axe or the shock to one's nerves that is likely to result if at an awkward moment the leader is unexpectedly jerked by the rope. It is a question, in fact, of physical injury on the one hand or moral and intellectual damage on the other.

Three hours on the arête brought us to the top at 4.40, and we went on at once to the slightly lower snow-summit. The ridge between them is curiously deceptive, one might well allow three-quarters of an hour for it—in point of fact it took us just 10 mins. In another 25 mins. we were on the snow-plateau near the Gredetschjoch, and finding a good route down the left bank of the ice-fall we were on the Beich-firn at 6.30, and at Bel Alp by about 9.30—17¼ hrs. out, 15¼ actual going. The expedition is a fine one, and with good snow would be much shorter.

The rain came down that night, after ten days of fine weather, and lasted for three days, off and on. The hotel was singularly empty for the fourth week of July, but we met two other members of the club, very proud of their new pattern ice-axes. These have the head so long and the shaft so short that they seem to be reverting to the type which the volumes of the 'Alpine Journal' display on their outer cover. Or perhaps the model in view is a ship's anchor. Gask was unfortunately called back to England by business, so Farrar and I were left to continue the campaign by ourselves. There is only one way for a self-respecting mountaineer to reach the Concordia Inn from Bel Alp, and that is by crossing the Aletschhorn. But the steep ice of the north-western face is hardly practicable after fresh snow. Rather than wait for it to get into condition, we went up the mountain by the so-called south-western arête and down by the route taken by Mr. Tuckett on the first ascent, following the slopes of the N. face to the Aletschjoch and descending the Mittel Aletsch glacier to its junction with the main stream, whence we had a rather tedious walk of 3¼ hrs. to the Concordia. We thought

afterwards that we might have followed the ridge over the top of the Dreieckhorn and descended the E. arête of that peak to the Concordia in much less time. The ascent was really a face-climb: the south-western arête, though falling away sharply on the W., merges on the E. in the face, and one frequently leaves it for a snow-gully on the right, or rocks the other side of that gully. This route is perfectly easy—we did not rope until an hour below the top—but the 'Climbers' Guide' is quite right in saying that it is much longer than it looks. Our precaution of taking a Bel Alp guide as third man for the crevasses on the descent proved unnecessary; the snow-work was simple enough, and, as it happened, we did the whole distance in company with another party—the only time in the season that we met anyone else on a mountain.

The next thing on the programme was to traverse the Finsteraarhorn, reaching the south-eastern arête from the eastern side. Farrar had done this in 1883 and again in 1903, but he wished to repeat it in order to test the account of the alleged first ascent by Meyer's guides in 1812. His study of the evidence had raised strong doubts in his mind, even before his second ascent, whether the guides ever reached the top, and these doubts were confirmed by our observations on this occasion. As he proposes to discuss the question fully in the 'Alpine Journal,' I shall not say much about it, but it may be observed that few of those who have climbed the south-eastern arête reached it from the E., as Meyer did, and fewer still, perhaps none, have done the climb, as Farrar did last year, with Meyer's pamphlet in his pocket.

After some more bad weather we left the Concordia at 7 A.M. on August 1, went in 2½ hrs. to the Finsteraarhorn hut, and thence round to the Rothhornsattel, taking this route in order to examine the south-eastern arête thoroughly from the west as well as from the east. At the new and sumptuous Oberaar hut—it actually has a staircase—we found an interesting guideless party, consisting of two ladies and a man. Farrar was so busy discussing Alpine matters with one of the ladies that I could not persuade him to start for the ascent of the Oberaarhorn until the fashionable hour of 4 P.M. However, we were at the top by 5, and down again 20 min. later. He did not know that the lady was an artist, and that the result of the conversation would be a vivid portrait in 'Alpinismus und Wintersport.'

We left the hut at 4.30 the next morning, only to find it snowing and looking rather bad, so we returned and waited.

It was lucky that we declined to be frightened, for at 5 it was fine again, and we started. In less than an hour we were at the foot of the steep wall which leads up to the south-eastern arête of the Finsteraarhorn. The best line of ascent is obviously a broad rib of rocks set in a wall of ice, just on the left (as one looks upwards) of a little hanging glacier. Threatening ice-pinnacles above and a mass of débris below warned us to keep out of the way, even at 6 A.M.; and just as we began the ascent there was a tremendous crash overhead. I had a dim vision of toppling séracs, but there was no time to look or think; we both fled into the bergschrund close by,

> Let the legions thunder past
> And plunged in thought again.

We were quite clear of the track, but it is an exciting experience to have a big avalanche within a few yards of one. Above the bergschrund Farrar began cutting up the ice-slope to a place where the rocks looked easy; but the mountain had not yet done with us. There were no signs of fallen stones at the foot of the slope, yet we were not far up it before two or three little ones came skipping past us. Looking up we saw that the sun had caught the top of the ridge, and that the ice-slope on our left was slightly inclined towards us, so that anything which fell was bound to come in our direction. But Farrar was making straight up a little rib or hogsback of ice, and though I kept a look-out there seemed to be no reason to change our course. A few minutes later I saw something bigger on its way, and called to Farrar, who stopped work and looked up. It was a round, flat stone, about a foot in diameter, which, instead of coming down, like the rest, in a series of jumps, was bowling along on its edge at a fearful pace. Rushing obliquely across the slope, it cut across our track only a yard or two above our heads. Some one in the 'Times' not long ago wrote of stones 'buzzing like angry bees.' It would be doing that stone an injustice to compare it to a bee, but the sound was very like the whirr of a great bird passing over us. Now if every mountain has a right to defend itself by falling stones, the climber on his side has a right to demand that stones shall fall reasonably straight, and that when a proper channel is provided for them they should keep to it. This was a missile that should certainly have been prohibited by the Hague Convention. Farrar resented it deeply, and always referred to it afterwards as 'that swine of a stone.' Such was the third attempt of our peak to turn

us back—first the snow shower, then the avalanche, then the stone. And observe that if it had not been for the snow shower we should have been off the ice-slope long before the stones began to fall. We found later that there was still one weapon in reserve—the north-west wind—but that was never used seriously.

After this episode Farrar cut straight across the slope to the lowest rocks, and pleased me by showing that I am not the only amateur who makes the steps 4 ft. apart when he is in a hurry. The rocks were not quite easy at first, and the rib itself, which we reached a little later, was steep and sometimes 'slabby.' We had to make two or three awkward traverses and to go carefully all the time. On the whole, we thought this ascent to the ridge the hardest part of the expedition. It took us 2¾ hrs. from the bergschrund, of which 50 min. was occupied in step-cutting. Twenty min. on the ridge brought us to a little peak, which we believe to be the one where Meyer himself stopped and watched his guides reach the apparent summit. But this is not the orthodox theory, and I must leave the whole problem for Farrar's monograph. There has been a good deal in the 'Alpine Journal' lately about the climbing on this south-eastern ridge, and I do not propose to add much.* Mr. Compton (*ibid.* xxiii. 341) is surprised that anyone should call it difficult. Well, of course people's ideas about difficulty vary considerably. Mr. Norman-Neruda mentions a lady who declined to call the Schmidt-Kamin on the Fünffingerspitze difficult, and I have heard a member of this Club call the traverse of the Grépon perfectly easy. Judged by a Chamonix standard, this ridge is not difficult. There is nothing on it to trouble a competent climber. But it is not a place to play about; there are few bits which are quite easy, in fact it gives real climbing all the way. On the first part, up to the minor summit, both of us were usually moving at once; after that it was usually more convenient to move one at a time. The quality of the climbing on this last section of the arête is, in fact, one of the points which went to convince us that Meyer's guides stopped at the minor peak. It strikes one as more than men would have been likely to attack in the year 1812. The rope fixed across a slab on the western side is, like most fixed ropes, unnecessary, but it is convenient, as the rocks are very liable to be iced by

* Vol. xxiii. pp. 304, 389, 418, 488.

melting snow from the gully just above. The rest is fairly easy. Our time was 7¾ hrs. actual going, of which 4 were spent on the arête, 2 hrs. 20 min. to the minor summit and 1 hr. 40 min. from that to the top. In another 3½ hrs. we were back at the Concordia, so that the expedition may be called quite short. But taken as a whole it is a very fine one. No doubt it is finer still if one makes the complete traverse of the peak to the Agassizjoch. On the other hand, to reach the S. arête from the west instead of the east, and much higher up, as most people seem to do, is undoubtedly to lose some of the best climbing. If one does this, starting from the Finsteraarhorn hut and returning to it, the climb cannot be considered a traverse at all. We are still awaiting an explanation from a well-known guideless party which was actually at the Oberaar hut a few days before ourselves, and went round to the Finsteraarhorn hut—the back door, so to speak—in order to reach the southern arête. There are no possible objections to the ascent from the east. It is easy to keep away from the avalanches, and it was only our unusually late start which exposed us for a few minutes to falling stones.

However, there is something to be said in favour of late starts when you are near your climb and the question of soft snow does not come in, and it was again at 5 A.M. that we left the Concordia on August 4. Our object was to remove from the Gross Grünhorn the reproach of being accessible by one route only—the southern arête—a reproach which it shared with the Grandes Jorasses alone, I believe, among the higher peaks. Farrar had climbed it in 1903, and explored a little of the northern arête, but found it deep in snow. From the Finsteraarhorn this arête appears very formidable, as there is a big 'step' in the middle of it, which looks almost perpendicular, and clearly cannot be turned on the sheer eastern face. It remained to be seen whether the 'step' was as bad as it looked, and whether the western face would help us. In 3 hrs. from the Concordia we were at the bergschrund below the ridge on the W. The slope above was steep, and we anticipated half an hour or so of step-cutting, but the snow proved to be exactly right, and in another 10 mins. we were on the ridge at the lowest point between the Klein and the Gross Grünhorn, and had a good view of our climb. The step still looked very unpromising, a big yellow cliff, but the western face, not nearly so steep as the eastern, made a traverse possible. The objection was a broad gully, clearly a stone-shoot of the worst description. But, after all, prospecting of this kind, even with the aid of a prismatic monocular, must be classed

V. Sella, Photo. *Swan Electric Engraving Co., Ltd.*

GROSS GRÜNHORN, FROM THE WEST.

among Alpine games rather than among the serious duties of a mountaineer. One never knows what rocks will be like until one gets there; the history of climbing is strewn with the wrecks of reputations for inaccessibility. Richard Wagner, writing between 1850 and 1860, just at the dawn of modern mountaineering, gave poetic expression to this truth in his treatment of the Brünnhilde legend. Brünnhilde, lying motionless on her rocky height, clearly signifies a virgin peak; the flames that surround and protect her are its terrible reputation; Siegfried, the bold mountaineer, laughing at the warnings of Wotan, the ancient guide, passes unscathed through the fire and wins the summit. Wotan's spear, with the runes inscribed on its shaft, is obviously an old alpenstock. If further proof is needed, the Norns, at the beginning of 'Götterdämmerung,' use an old rope until it breaks, and then bind themselves together with the remains.

However, this particular ridge may never have been looked at seriously, for the Gross Grünhorn, though it belongs to the select company of peaks over 4,000 m., is not often climbed. It was a curious coincidence, therefore, that the ridge should have been descended the very next day by Herr von Hahn with two guides. The first part was easy enough, then it steepened, and there occurred a little episode which my companion has already mentioned in the 'Alpine Journal.'* We came to a vertical bit which had to be turned; I wanted to go to the left. He maintained that this would land me on a sloping slab covered with loose snow, which would obviously be unsafe. I ventured a mild remark to the effect that the leader for the time being should choose his own route. The result was a sudden and startling rise of the Fahrenheit thermometer. Proceedings were suspended while it was pointed out that 'all you guideless climbers,' who don't know what ought to be tried and what ought not, are simply going the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire. Even thus does a writer in 'L'Écho des Alpes' last month (March 1908), finding one language inadequate, speak of 'ces satanés führerlose.' The protest may have been justified, though I can still see the solid and satisfactory knob on that slab to which I proposed to attach myself. But the situation had now become one for which there are no definite instructions in the Badminton volume on mountaineering. It may not even be covered by a later manual, which, I see, tells you

* Vol. xxiv. p. 100.

what to do if your companion suddenly becomes insane. I could not retort in kind, for

> That in the captain's but a choleric word
> Which in the soldier is rank blasphemy.

But it seemed to me to come under the general head of climbing down gracefully. At any rate I gave the soft answer which turneth away wrath, peace was restored, and a friend was told afterwards that it was most annoying to climb with a man who always made you feel in the wrong.

From here to the big cliff the work was interesting but not very difficult, except for the quantity of loose stuff heaped on all the broader ledges, as was to be expected in a new route. The second man cleared it off by the hundredweight, in case we should have to return the same way. On all this part of the mountain the arête is not well defined; we were really climbing on the edge of a face. When we arrived at the cliff it did not appear at all necessary to go up it, and as our business was to get to the top we took an obvious traverse and did not attempt it. The Swiss party on the following day state that they kept closely to the arête, but only by using a long spare rope. They must have avoided this last traverse or they would have found our tracks. Probably the next party will climb the whole arête clean, and will be duly scornful of their predecessors. Our traverse proved perfectly safe, as it took us across the head of the big gully immediately under a sheer face of rock, and was not difficult, though the leader had to clear a lot of snow and ice off the rocks to find hold. It was not, however, as we thought it might be, a short cut to the top, but landed us on a minor ridge coming up from the north-west at right angles to the main one, which we regained in a few minutes. This was now a true arête, narrow and jagged. The last obstacle, rising abruptly from a gap, was quite of the Chamonix type. If it had beaten us we should have had to make a long traverse across the face to another minor ridge, and should have reached the top from the west; but it yielded to a frontal attack, and Farrar then remembered that he had come down it when he first looked at the northern arête in 1903. A few minutes later, just before midday (6 hrs.' actual going), our new route was a fact.

The ordinary south-western arête seemed very tame. It is built on the staircase plan, and must be as easy a route as one could find anywhere up a rock-peak over 4,000 m. in height. After descending a little way, one can leave the

rocks for the snow as soon as one likes, but there may be some little trouble in finding a way through the broken glacier lower down. Less than 3 hrs. took us to the Concordia. The traverse can be strongly recommended, and it will probably be found more interesting to take it as we did, from north to south, as one has the more difficult climbing up instead of down, which is always to be preferred, and is relieved from any temptation to spoil the pleasure of a fine route by using a doubled rope.

The view from the Grünhorn is splendid, as it may be said to stand in the centre of the Bernese Oberland, with the Fiescherhörner and the Grindelwald peaks on the north, the Finsteraarhorn on the east, the Walliser Fiescherhörner and the Aletschhorn group on the south, and the Jungfrau and Mönch on the west.

We hoped to end up our partnership gloriously by traversing the Weisshorn, but for once the weather failed us. Two incidents are perhaps worthy of record. The first was the behaviour of an Italian in the Rhone Valley train, who, rushing from one side of the carriage to the other in order to look out of what he took for an open window, dashed his bare head through the glass. Thanks to a good covering of hair none of his cuts were serious, and he was soon persuaded to see the humorous side of the affair. The other was the behaviour of my companion on the way up to the Weisshorn hut. Thunder was about and the heat terrific. He stopped for a minute, removed his sack, and murmured something about 'doing a shift.' I did not understand; but I had forgotten the Frenchman who translated Colley Cibber's play, 'Love's Last Shift,' under the title of 'La dernière chemise de l'amour.' For when he rejoined us his shirt was hanging from his sack, and he confronted the astonished herdsmen at the Jatz Alp with bare chest and arms. We had the hut to ourselves, and can guarantee it a comfortable place in the worst of weather; but we woke the next morning to see the lowest rocks of our peak white with fresh snow, and that traverse of the Weisshorn stands at the head of our programme for next season.

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