

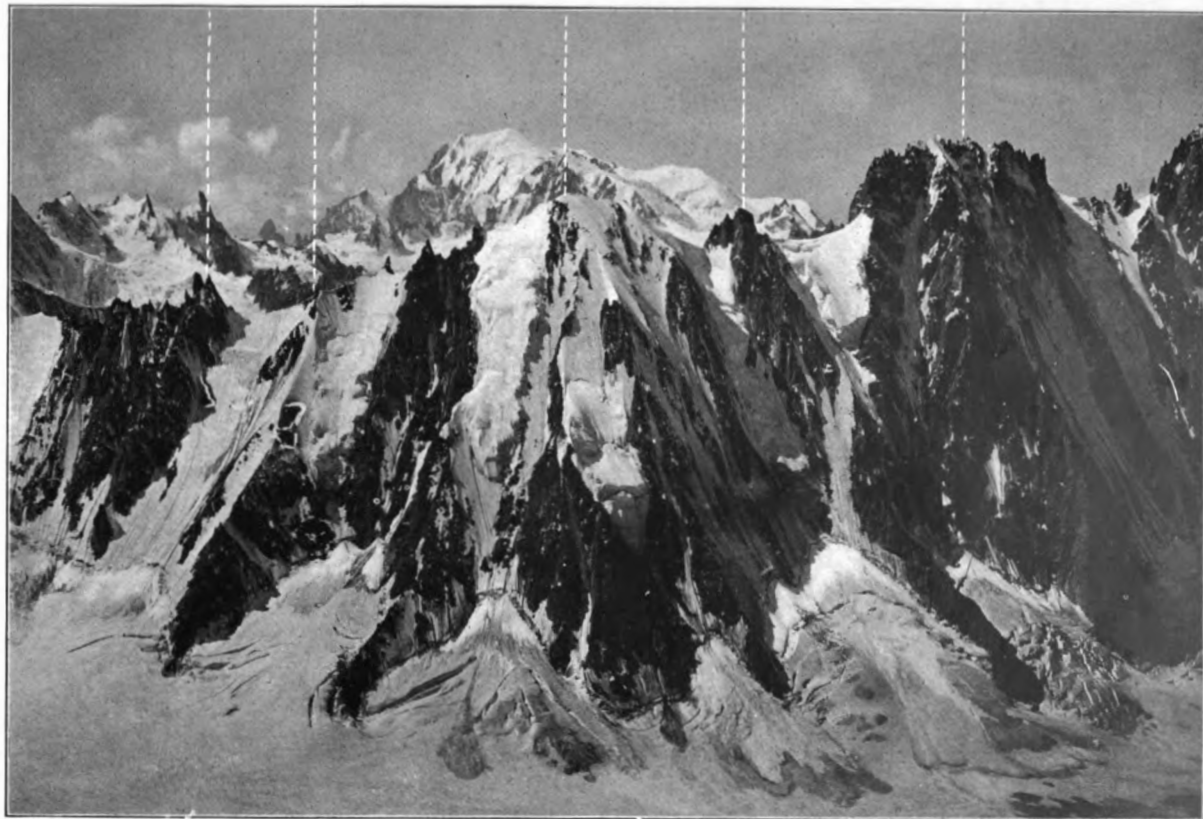
Aiguille
Mummel
and
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Col des
Crisauv

Les
Courtes

Tour de
Courtes

Les
Droites



Sydney Spencer, Photo.

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THE RIDGE OF LES COURTES,
FROM THE TOUR NOIR.

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THE COL DES CRISTAUX.

By J. J. WITHERS.

(Read before the Alpine Club, May 4, 1909.)

THE tourist who goes from Chamounix by the little electric railway towards Martigny, as he passes the station of Argentière, having ascertained the absence of a buffet, and being so constrained to consider less important matters, looks up at the tongue of ice which forms the end of the Argentière glacier and makes disparaging remarks about it. On referring to his guide book for further information he dismisses with a smile of incredulity, and 'in the easy vernacular of the day,' the flattering comments which are to be found there. As a matter of fact, the glacier from this point does not present an attractive view. It has evidently shrunk of recent years considerably, and the slopes beneath it of bare rock and a wilderness of stones with dwarf shrubs upon them are not a pleasing sight—very much the reverse. Even these natural drawbacks have been further accentuated by the works for the railway and the large blasting operations which are now carried on there, which give the whole of the slopes beneath the glacier the appearance of an untidy quarry. Curiously enough the mountain railways have the effect of keeping the crowds of tourists on their lines, and of preventing them from entering upon and so vulgarising the wonderful scenery even in the closest vicinity; for if the would-be sight-seer took the trouble to get out of the station of Argentière and walk on a good path some 2½ hours above the little village to Lognan and on to the Argentière glacier, the view that he would meet would very much surprise him. No description of what he would see can be better than that given by Moore in his 'Alps in 1864,' on page 166 of the last edition. 'Looking

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south, we saw up the whole length of the glacier, which is remarkable, first for the unusual directness of its curves, and secondly for the singularly slight inclination of its bed. It is indeed an almost level field of névé, nearly free from crevasses, and hemmed in on three sides by precipitous walls of cliff, that on the east being broken by several considerable bays filled by steep lateral glaciers. The very head of the glacier is closed by a tremendous wall extending from the Mont Dolent on the east to the Aiguille de Triolet on the west. The Mont Dolent is one of the most beautiful snow peaks I ever saw, and rises steeply from the general level of the ridge to a perfect point. From this side it is quite inaccessible, but it was subsequently ascended by Whymper and Reilly from the Col Ferret without very serious difficulty, and they report the view from it to be even superior to what might be expected from its height of 12,566 ft. The great wall connecting it with the Aiguille de Triolet is seen with snow couloirs of great length and steepness, all hopelessly inaccessible in appearance, which may also be said of the Aiguille de Triolet, a superb tower of rock rising to a height of 12,727 ft., far more massive but less graceful in form than the better-known Aiguille du Dru. The line of precipices extending northwards from the Aiguille de Triolet to the Aiguille Verte, which forms the left bank of the Argentière glacier and separates it from the basin of the Glacier de Talèfre, is of the same character as that above described, but loftier and even more forbidding in appearance. It rises about midway between the two Aiguilles into a very beautiful sharp snow peak, the highest point of the Tour des Courtes, but otherwise preserves along its whole course a tolerably uniform elevation. It has always been a dream of the Chamounix guides in general and of old Auguste Simond in particular to find a passage somewhere over this ridge from the Glacier de Talèfre to that of Argentière; but although it is possible without much difficulty to scale the ridge from the former glacier close under the Aiguille de Triolet, no one has yet been rash enough to attempt a descent of the crags on the east side, nor is any traveller likely to waste time in such a foolhardy expedition, for the pass if effected would be of no use for any practical purposes. North of the Verte the general level of the ridge is much lower, and a considerable lateral glacier comes down towards the main stream, over which and the Glacier des Grandes Montets on the other side lies an easy pass to the Chapeau and Montanvert.'

Such was the state of the case in 1864, but a good deal has happened since then. In the first place, Mont Dolent, although

described by Moore as quite inaccessible from this side, has recently been climbed * from the Argentière glacier. In 1865 Mr. Whymper made a pass over the ridge at the end of the glacier, known as the Col du Mont Dolent, which he has so graphically described; while, as a matter of fact, the ridge on the left bank of the glacier between the Aiguille de Triolet and the Aiguille Verte inclusive has since been traversed at several points—I believe seven in number—although, as far as I know, not one of the expeditions have been repeated.

In order to understand the excursion which I propose to ultimately explain, I think it would be advisable to shortly describe the various passages over this ridge, for I have not seen them summarised in any English publication so far. I think the best thing will be to begin from the northern end of the chain and take the traverses in order from north to south. I do not propose to deal with the Col des Grandes Montets, which is an easy pass well known to all of you on the north ridge of the Aiguille Verte.

1. To begin with the Aiguille Verte itself. The first attempt to ascend the mountain from this side, starting from the Chalets of Lognan, was apparently made in 1876 by Lord Wentworth, with the guides Emile Rey and Lorenzo Lanier of Courmayeur, which ascent is said to have failed owing to an indisposition which occurred to the last-mentioned guide when the undertaking was in a fair way of success. But probably bad weather and the night coming on had also a good deal to do with the abandonment of the attempt. The mountain was, as a matter of fact, ascended from this side on July 31, 1876, by that strenuous party Messrs. H. Cordier, J. Oakley Maund, and T. Middlemore, with the guides J. Anderegg, Johan Jaun, and Andreas Maurer. The climb is fully described in the 'Alpine Journal,' vol. 8, pages 289 to 297, and it is summarised in the 'Climbers' Guide,' page 48. The way is rather difficult to follow, but it is admirably depicted on a diagram published at p. 295 of vol. 37 of the 'C.A.I. Bollettino' (1904-5). The ascent took 9 hours and 15 minutes from the bottom; the route has been accomplished only once; the mountain has never been descended by this way; it is only practicable under exceptionally favourable circumstances, and even then is dangerous by reason of falling stones in the couloir.

2. Just to the left, that is the south, of the actual peak of the Verte is a rocky point known as the Grande Rocheuse,

* *S.A.C. Jahrbuch*, xliii. (1907), p. 337.

and the second traverse practically of the Verte from this side was made by the crossing of what has been known by the name of the Col de la Grande Rocheuse, the depression lying between the Verte and the Grande Rocheuse. This lofty passage was made by Messrs. Val. A. Fynn and P. Goudet, without a guide, towards the end of August 1895. An account of this expedition is given in the 'C.A.I. Bollettino' above mentioned, where the route is shown on the diagram already referred to. The party left the Saleinaz Club hut about midnight, with the intention of climbing the Aiguille de Chardonnet by the eastern ridge, but, owing to the exceptionally good conditions of the northern wall of the Aiguille Verte, they decided to attempt the ascent of the latter. Having crossed the Col du Chardonnet and traversed the Argentière glacier, they began the upward climb between 3 and 4 in the morning by the lengthy couloir which falls to the Argentière glacier in a direction slightly south of E. from the Grande Rocheuse; they left this and took to rocks, which were at first extremely difficult, but afterwards easier, and which brought them to the foot of the Grande Rocheuse; here the rocks, though not presenting the same difficulties as those below, formed so steep an ascent that the climbers held that it would have been impracticable if the mountain had not been in such excellent condition. Having turned the foot of the Grande Rocheuse towards the east, at about 5 o'clock P.M. they reached the depression after thirteen hours' ascent. In view of the lateness of the hour they decided not to climb the Aiguille Verte, and made up their minds to descend by the usual route to the Talèfre glacier, which they did.

So much for the Aiguille Verte itself. Its tremendous precipices on the east side, save for these two traverses, remain untrodden.

3. South of the mass of the Verte is a depression between it and the mountain known as Les Droites. It is a snowy saddle, falling on to the glaciers on both sides by terribly steep ice slopes. The aspect of this col from the Argentière side is one of the most forbidding I have ever seen, and it is quite extraordinary how any human being could possibly have ventured to traverse it. However, this depression, known as the Col de l'Aiguille Verte, was crossed on July 25, 1901, by Messrs. G. F. and G. B. Gugliermina, with the porter Giuseppe Brocherel, of Courmayeur. A short account of the traverse, which is fully described in the 'C.A.I. Bollettino,' vol. 36, p. 157, and marked on the diagram above referred to, is as follows: Having started at 8 o'clock on the 24th from

the Pavillon de Lognan with the idea of making a mere survey of the Argentière glacier and studying the climb for the next day (the condition of the mountain was extremely bad, owing to the abundant snow which had fallen during the previous night), the splendidly calm weather induced them to attempt the ascent that very day, expecting to reach the easy slopes on the Talèfre side before night. At midday they surmounted the 'bergschrund,' which did not present serious difficulties, and thence making their way onwards by means of rocks, which were not difficult but extremely steep, and cutting steps and excavating holes for the hands in the ice slopes, their progress being rendered very slow owing to the fresh snow with which everything was covered, they were caught by the bad weather at night, and compelled to bivouac on a rock projecting above the couloir at about 3,600 metres. On the next day at 7.30 A.M., in a heavy snowstorm, they resumed the ascent, and got to the col at 11 o'clock, twenty-three hours from the bergschrund. They descended forthwith, in somewhat better weather, on to the Talèfre glacier, and thence by way of the Jardin to the Pierre-à-Beranger, where they at length rested. Starting again at 6.30 P.M., they reached Montanvert at 9 P.M.

The great mass of Les Droites has never to my knowledge been traversed.

4. North of Les Droites and between it and the beautiful snow summit of Les Courtes lies a depression, in the centre of which is a very noticeable rock peak known as the Tour des Courtes. Right and left of this peak are two snow saddles, coming down on to the Argentière glacier in huge ice slopes of great steepness. The most northerly of these two depressions, that is to say the saddle between the Tour des Courtes and Les Droites, is known as the Col des Droites, and this has been traversed once. The crossing was made on August 9, 1902, by Fraulein Eugenie RoCHAT of Stuttgart, with the guides Jean Ducroz and Camille Ravanel. The story is told in the 38th volume of the Swiss Jahrbuch, p. 51, *et seq.* in very great detail, which I will try to summarise. The party left the hotel at Lognan at 3.10 A.M., reaching the bottom of the couloir coming down from the col on the south side of the dividing rib which projects into the glacier at 5.10 A.M. They seem to have passed a little to the south in ascending, and to have climbed up a subsidiary ridge of rocks which runs up into the couloir, till 8.10 P.M., when the ridge merged into the face of the couloir. Here they breakfasted, and had 20 minutes rest. From that point, namely, when they left at 8.30, they apparently traversed

to the N. and got into the couloir which comes down on the N. side of the Tour des Courtes, and keeping always on the S. side of this couloir they ascended over ice slopes and ice-coated rock amidst the greatest difficulties to the col, which was not reached till 7.15 P.M. After 20 minutes halt they left, descended to the great couloir running down to the Talèfre glacier, and ultimately, at 12.14 A.M. on the following morning, reached a possible bivouac near the foot of the couloir, where they remained till the sun warmed them the next morning. On the following day they arrived at Chamounix. It is a very astonishing thing to me, on reading this description by Fraulein Rochat, that anyone who had been going through the great physical strain of such a climb could remember and note with accuracy almost every step of that terrible ascent, which took from 5.10 in the morning till 7.15 in the evening, or 14 hours.

The impression left in the mind of a reader is that of an unroped climber on an ice-slope of exceeding steepness, with one foot in a precarious step, the other dangling over space, trying to hook with an axe an exiguous rope which two guides, relying on their mutual insecurity, are trying to throw to her. The idea is a nightmare, and those who would be further harrowed are referred to the original.

As far as I know the snow saddle south of the Tour des Courtes has never been traversed.

5. With regard to Les Courtes itself, an ascent was made on this side on August 4, 1876, by the same party as made the first ascent of the Verte on this side, namely, Messrs. H. Cordier, J. Oakley Maund, and T. Middlemore, with the same guides. Roughly speaking they traversed the mountain by ridges from north-east to south-west. A summary of the account is given in the 'Climber's Guide,' p. 52.

The climb seems to have been attempted on another occasion, namely, by the Abbè Chifflet on July 4, 1885, but the party met with an accident, and fell on to the Argentière glacier, where they were found.

6. South of Les Courtes the ridge begins to fall, being broken by several pinnacles of rock, the first of which in order is known as the Aiguille Croulante, 12,349 ft., and the next the Aiguille qui Remue, 12,218 ft. Then there is a gendarme which I will refer to later, height 11,991 ft. Next comes a peak with two summits, one of which is known as the Aiguille Ravenel, 12,126 ft., and the other as the Aiguille Mummery, 12,139 ft. A jagged ridge leads to a snow saddle, which is known as the Col des Courtes. This Col des Courtes was ascended from the

Argentière side by Mr. Mummery, with Messrs. Collie and Hastings, without guides, on August 3, 1894, and the climb is described by Mr. Mummery in his inimitable style in his 'Climbs in Alps and Caucasus,' page 239. His graphic account of the traverse of the formidable bergschrund, and the elaborate breakfast which Mr. Hastings provided, are well known to all members of the Club. The party seem, as far as I can understand, to have climbed the great snow curtain leading directly up to the saddle, or the rocks on its northern bank, to the ridge itself, a little to the N. of the snow saddle. On the ridge they did not ascend direct to the Glacier de Talèfre, but being bound for the Col de Triolet, they went S.E. along the ridge and ultimately got on to the Glacier de Talèfre, which rises by a curious offshoot known as the Glacier des Courtes right up to the level of the ridge north of the Aiguille de Triolet. Then they passed over the Col de Triolet to the Italian side. It may here be noted, as stated by Mr. Mummery, that the maps are very inaccurate as to the position of the ridges to the W. of the Aiguille de Triolet, which does not stand at the intersection of the Verte-Droites-Courtes ridge with the frontier ridge, but further to the E. The true position seems correctly indicated on the diagram given on p. 36 of 'La Montagne' for January 20, 1909.

The first true crossing of the Col des Courtes was made on July 26, 1900, by Mr. J. B. Tunstall Moore, with the guides Alphonse Simond and Edouard Payot of Chamounix, and the first authentic note of this expedition is found in the November number of the 'Alpine Journal,' 1908, at p. 361. They left Lognan at midnight, got to the bergschrund under the pass at 4.30, and ascended more or less over Mr. Mummery's route, but bearing slightly more to the right across two stone-swept couloirs to the summit of the pass. The party did not, as Mr. Mummery had done, go south along the ridge, but descended direct over steep rocks much exposed to falling stones, to the Talèfre glacier, and Montanvert was reached at 4.30 P.M.

As far as I know, this was the position of affairs in the summer of 1908, although I was far from knowing the true history of the ridge at that time. I had read Mummery's graphic account of the Col des Courtes, and I knew Moore's inspiring words about the ridge, and that was all. For family reasons I had to spend my holiday at Argentière, and going out in the train I had only with me a copy of the 'Climber's Guide' and Mr. Whymper's excellent handbook. I naturally turned to this ridge to look up what was said about it in the 'Climber's

Guide,' and I am bound to say that anyone looking at this ridge from the point of view only of the 'Climber's Guide' would have his appetite whetted in the most astonishing way, for the only crossings of the ridge between the Col des Grandes Montets and the Aiguille de Triolet there mentioned are the two ascents of the Verte and Courtes by the party of Messrs. Cordier, Maund, and Middlemore, which I have mentioned before. The passes are referred to, if at all, as having been frequently attempted but found entirely inaccessible from the Argentière side. In Mr. Whymper's book there was simply a note that the ridge had been crossed somewhere by Mr. Tunstall Moore on the date mentioned. No particulars of the place, time, or difficulties met with were given.

I had seen the ridge in the early summer some years ago from the Argentière glacier, and it impressed me as being the most magnificent thing of the kind in the Alps. It was not merely a rock wall such as the south face of the Meije, which, being pure rock, looks, although steep, much less forbidding, but its memory remained to me as that of a stupendous barrier, formed of ribs of rock of exceeding steepness, running up into the sky, between which were couloirs of ice, guarded at some point at least in every case by huge overhanging seracs.

My guides arrived in due course. They were both from Saas, my old friend Adolf Andenmatten, the handsome, the silent, and the safe, and his brother-in-law Andreas Anthamatten, a huge jovial giant of immense strength. One of our first expeditions was the ascent of the Tour Noir. We slept the night at the horrible little hut which has been erected on one of the spurs of the Aiguille d'Argentière at the Jardin d'Argentine, just where the Glacier des Améthystes turns off from the main glacier to the east. Next day we made the ascent of the Tour Noir by the ordinary way, and had a most delightful climb, for it was one of those perfect days in a generally bad summer when there was not a single cloud to be seen. The peak stands out in some curious way from its fellows, and gives a very extensive view, so that we saw absolutely everything.

On the way up I told Adolf that I was very anxious indeed to find a safe and easy way over the great ridge on the other side of the Argentière glacier, and he laughed at me. When we got to the top we sat and looked at the ridge, wondering where Mr. Tunstall Moore's pass was, and one of the Chamounix guides with another party told us that the ridge had been crossed but once, and pointed out the Col des Courtes, Mr. Mummery's pass. This naturally made us inquisitive, and

as we sat we speculated upon the various ways by which the ridge could be gained. As the Col des Courtes had been done, or reached at any rate, that was ruled out. To the north of it the stone-swept couloirs gave no encouragement, but my eye was caught by a very promising buttress which came down to the glacier, just to the north of the two Aiguilles Ravenel and Mummery. It certainly did not look very easy, but I saw that the ridge was low at that point, and I also noticed that the rib came out very far into the glacier, which looked as if its general inclination might be less than that of the other buttresses which did not project so far. I pointed this out to Adolf as he smoked his pipe, and all I could get from him was 'perhaps.' Andreas was a little more enterprising, and he began to work out the details with me. It was impossible at the distance we were at to judge of the steepness or the texture of the rock, but we noticed that the falling stones that had come down were lying principally on the north side of the buttress, and the left side seemed very free of them. There were no marks on the snow. Assuming the rocks were fairly good, it looked as if we could make a considerable way up them, till we got on to some snow or ice, which apparently got very steep indeed; the angle we could not tell; and finally the ice looked as if it got almost perpendicular. That we came to the conclusion was the really ticklish point. If we could traverse this we could get on to some further rocks and reach the main ridge at the gendarme next north of the Aiguilles Mummery and Ravenel. On our way down when we got to the glacier we had another look at the rib, and we all of us agreed that it was the best rib; if it did not go it was unlikely any other would.

I must just break off here for a moment to tell of a curious occurrence which took place on the glacier as we were returning to the hut. Two friends of mine, the Messrs. Francis, with their guides, were on in front, and I was sauntering slowly along with Adolf in the rear, some ten minutes or so behind the Francis'. As we were walking along talking, I heard what I thought was a party running after us, and Adolf apparently heard the same noise. We turned round both together, and to our astonishment saw, rising up from the glacier about 30 or 40 ft. from us, a column of water about 4 ft. high, and about 6 in. in diameter, which was making the noise which had attracted our attention. We stood and looked at it for a minute or two, and it suddenly faded away just as the water from a hose-pipe fails when the supply is cut off. We went on and looked at the hole; there was nothing very noticeable about

it. Adolf said he had never seen anything of the sort before, and we walked on. As we got opposite the hut the Francis' were waiting for us, and one of them said to me, 'A little time ago on the glacier as we were walking along I saw a most extraordinary thing; a sort of spurt of water shot up in the air.' He had passed the spot about 10 minutes before ourselves, and apparently the same occurrence had taken place when he was passing as had taken place when we were passing. I mention this as an odd fact, as I have never seen anything of the sort before.

After this expedition, in our various other climbs, I was always going back to the possibility of crossing the ridge. I am bound to say Adolf was not particularly encouraging. He said we might get to the top of the ridge on the Argentière side, but how on earth were we to know whether we could get down on the other? That seemed sense, so we moved round one day to Montanvert and made an expedition up Les Périades, on the way getting a very good view of the ridge from the other side, above the Glacier de Talèfre. It was easy to locate the position of my proposed pass owing to the curious appearance of the two Aiguilles, Mummery and Ravenel, and to my astonishment I saw that on the other side of the Glacier de Talèfre, as far as I could judge, the slope coming down to the glacier immediately north of those two points was more gradual than elsewhere. Underneath those two Aiguilles and to the south the ridge was very steep and cut up into broken couloirs, where stones obviously fell in great quantities, but to the north the slope was fair, and obviously very much broken, but to what extent we could not tell. Adolf said without hesitation that at any rate this side would go. We made up our minds accordingly that it should be tried, hoping that this was not the place where Mr. Tunstall Moore had made the pass shortly referred to in Mr. Whymper's guide-book.

Accordingly, on Monday, August 24, 1908, we trudged up after lunch in the hot summer sun to Lognan, where there is now a very comfortable little hotel. Sitting on the terrace in a characteristic attitude was my old friend Bowen, who received us with many greetings, and informed us that his travelling companion Staffurth was upstairs. They were going to spend the night, and next day go up the Tour Noir. Other members of the Club arrived, and that evening we had quite a collection of members of the Club at dinner, only Britons being present. The coming climbs were discussed in the friendly way in which these things are dealt with in those unconventional surroundings. Mutual success was wished,

and we asked Bowen, who was returning to Montanvert the following evening, to inquire when he arrived whether we had passed through. If we had not passed through we bade him the following day to come and look out for us on the side of the Glacier de Talèfre.

Next morning I was awakened early by my watch, and went downstairs to see the guides. They were looking out of the door, and I joined them. The weather looked anything but promising. Curious clouds hung about, and, as Adolf said, we should probably have rain before an hour or two were over. The others came down, and we decided that we would at any rate make a start. Accordingly our party got away first, at 3 o'clock, closely followed by Bowen's. We went up on to the Argentière glacier by the usual way, and as we got further up the glacier we began to mount up the névé to the west. Opposite the hut Bowen's party turned off, wishing us all good luck. We went on till we came to the buttress which I have mentioned before and which we had chosen from the Tour Noir. It is the last one which comes down into the glacier north of the Aiguilles Mummery and Ravenel. I was surprised to see how much height we had made on the névé when we got to the foot of that buttress. We moved round to the south side, where there were traces of fewer stones, and turned round on to the rocks, which were not difficult, and climbed on to the crest of the buttress, where we arrived at 6.25 A.M. We sat down for a quarter of an hour, and had some breakfast; the weather began to look more settled, and we girt up our loins and decided that work was now going to begin. Andreas, the strong man, was put in front, as there would probably be a good deal of step cutting, and Adolf brought up the rear. The rock at first was very easy and not unduly steep, and we made rapid progress for 35 minutes. We then came to a little snowy saddle on the ridge, very steep on both sides, and coming up to a knife edge. We cut steps across it, and were met on the other side by a blank wall, perpendicular, without a vestige of foothold or handhold on it, rising well above any reach. At this point I was doubtful of what was going to happen, but Andreas worked round to the right or north side on to the rock, and after some steep and very interesting climbing, bearing to the right, the obstacle was passed and the rib was again gained at its crest. Rocks again were found, steep and good. Then came a slope of frozen snow, just that nice crisp stuff where one chip of the axe makes a good step. Andreas is excellent at this sort of work, and he cut them very rapidly indeed. We mounted up very

quickly here on to further rocks, keeping to the ridge the whole way. The rocks were again easy, but much steeper, and suddenly Andreas picked up a beautiful crystal. It shone in the sun and it attracted his attention. He stopped and showed it to me. I said it was a very fine specimen, and then we began to look about us. All over the place were bits of crystal of various sizes and shapes. There was one beautiful stone some two feet square with its whole surface covered with crystals. I would not let the guides knock off the crystals, and the stone itself was much too big to carry, so we left it where it was. But all up these rocks we found very numerous bits which the guides immediately began putting into their pockets and into their sacks when I let them stop at all, but I was anxious that the time should not be wasted, as I did not know what we were going to meet with. The rocks came to an end, and we then saw that we were at the place which from the Tour Noir looked so very doubtful, but instead of the razor-like edge of ice and snow which we had feared would be met with here, a perfectly easy though somewhat steep slope of frozen snow led up to the final rocks. It was of the same consistency as before, and we chipped the steps, making height rapidly. We traversed left and got on to the last rocks, where there were more crystals, and ultimately hit the main ridge just under and to the north of the first big gendarme north of the Aiguilles Mummery and Ravenel. Between us and these Aiguilles the ridge fell to the true col. It was only 9.15 A.M.; we had taken from the bottom of the buttress only two hours and three-quarters or thereabouts. Of course if there had been ice, hours more would have been spent, but the pass was in splendid condition and could not be better. I see from 'La Montagne' for January 1909, page 36, that M. Vallot has kindly calculated the height of the point where we reached the ridge as 3,655 metres, or 11,991 ft., the foot of the buttress we had climbed being 3,023 metres, or 9,918 ft., the pass being thus 2,073 ft. above the foot of the buttress. The rate of ascent, namely, 2,073 feet in 2 hours 35 min., shows that the climb was an easy one. We sat down underneath the gendarme and had lunch. I looked round where I was sitting and I found a little pile of the most beautiful crystals just under the gendarme. I picked up four or five and put them in my pocket. The guides took a number of others, but I warned them that they were heavy and that they would have to carry them a long way. We looked for the parties going up the Tour Noir, but could not see them. We shouted but could get no response. The day had turned out a splendid

one, and the view was magnificent. I was in good spirits, and as Adolf sat stolidly smoking his pipe I called out to him

While three men hold together
The kingdoms are less by three.

He asked what I was saying, as he did not understand, and I found it extremely difficult to put into idiomatic German the last line. Adolf smoked contentedly while I was explaining it, and after I had finished he said he quite agreed that three men on a rope was really the safest way to climb.

We did not wait long on the top. We built a cairn and put one of the larger crystals on the top, and we started to leave at 9.45 A.M. The slope of the descent down to the Talèfre glacier could not be seen for very far, and I am bound to say I did not like very much the look of the first piece. Whereas the ridge we had come up consisted of beautifully firm rock, everything on this side was loose and at a fair angle. We chose a rib running right down from the gendarme, almost in a straight line with the line of our ascent, and began to follow it. There was no difficulty, properly speaking, although the rock was very rotten and one felt that the whole slope might come away with one. After about an hour the rib we were on failed, and we began to look round to see what we had better do now. It was clear we ought to keep to the left as the Talèfre glacier was rising in that direction, but I did not like the look of the gullies which came down on our left, and below which on the glacier were ominous heaps of fallen stones. We crossed, however, a gully, and began keeping down a subsidiary ridge. When this failed we again crossed and descended the next, and so on, bearing gradually to the left or south. We were rapidly approaching the glacier, and came upon a very large couloir, where stones obviously did fall in large quantities. We took shelter under an overhanging rock and prepared for a run. We gathered up the rope and made a dash for it, crossing without difficulty. There was no need to have done anything of the sort, for no stones fell. We descended the left bank of this couloir by easy rocks, and then we saw that a tongue of the glacier, right under the Aiguille de Mummery, came up and bounded this ridge on its left side. We got down by more difficult rocks on to this tongue of névé. There were a considerable number of fallen stones on the névé, and it was very hard frozen and not very easy to stand on. However we saw that it was important to get off it as soon as we could and we slid and glissaded down very rapidly on to the main Glacier de Talèfre, which we reached at a point just under the

Aiguille Mummery. The time was 11.30 A.M., that is to say we had taken one hour and three-quarters coming down. We saw no stones the whole time, but I can well imagine that if there has been snow and it was melting the traverse of this face would not be particularly nice. In dry weather, however, apparently, it is all right. There was nothing to make us stop, and we ran along down the Glacier de Talèfre, past the Jardin, where we were hailed by shouts of roystering tourists. We took off the rope, got on to the moraine on the left bank, passed the Pierre-à-Beranger, and ultimately reached the level of the Glacier de Leschaux. The weather was splendid, and here we thought we might indulge in a proper meal. We sat down accordingly on some rocks in those magnificent surroundings, looking up at the Grandes Jorasses, and wondered whether any of the ribs on its northern face would prove as easy as our rib had been. We ended up with a cup of hot tea from the Thermos flask. It was so hot that at first we could not drink it; and then we sauntered back to Montanvert after an hour's halt, arriving there at 3.40 P.M. It had taken us exactly 12 hours and 40 minutes to go from Lognan to Montanvert, including halts, and the distance on the map is considerable, apart from any question of climbing. We had indeed found a simple and easy way from the Argentière glacier to Montanvert, although Moore said no traveller was likely to waste time in such a foolhardy expedition. He had added that the pass if effected would be of no use for any practical purpose, but I venture to suggest that climbers coming from the side of the Glacier de Saleinaz, or even starting from Lognan or the new hut above-mentioned, can make an easy and interesting high level route to Montanvert by this pass. Such at any rate were our views as we walked into Montanvert and found the polyglot crowd which had come up by the railway enjoying itself as usual. We told Simond to bring us a bottle of Bouvier. He did so, and we were explaining to him where we had been, when he was called off to give a saucer of milk to a thirsty poodle dog, which seemed much more important.

This was no place for us, so we trudged down to Chamounix. On the way the guides showed great interest in the crystals exposed for sale in the numerous booths, and we reckoned that at current sale prices they were carrying about 150 francs' worth in their sacks. We caught the train, walked up to our hotel at Argentière, and were in time to have a bath and dine at 7 o'clock. M. Auguste Tairraz, at the Hotel du Planet, would not believe that anything new remained to be done on the sides

of the Argentière glacier, and I was in doubts myself as to whether there was any novelty in the passage, till I returned home and communicated with Mr. Tunstall Moore. I then saw that his pass lay on the south side of the Aiguilles Mummery and Ravenel. The descent of his pass must certainly have been difficult and dangerous, for the couloirs coming down to the glacier are excessively steep, and a large number of stones fall.

As far as our expedition was concerned we had perfect conditions, and under them found no serious difficulty or danger. In our humble way we had by a lucky chain of circumstances apparently solved the riddle of the great ridge, and, unworthy as we were, had realised the inspiring dream of old Auguste Simond. Verily

All we have willed or hoped of good, shall exist ;
Not its semblance, but itself.

Scoffers indeed say, not without some reason, that the modern climber keeps only to well-worn tracks and has no initiative ; but there are still some who, sitting by the winter fire, see a party of the future sturdier than they successfully breasting the last rocks of the great north face of the Grandes Jorasses. Let them so dream.

One man with a dream, at pleasure
Shall go forth and conquer a crown ;
And three with a new song's measure
Can trample a kingdom down.

THE DENT BLANCHE BY THE EAST RIDGE (COL DE ZINAL).

BY HAROLD RAE BURN.

DOMINATING the head of the Val d'Anniviers, as the Matterhorn dominates that of the Visp Thal, the magnificent mass of the Dent Blanche presents from the N.E. a splendid spectacle. The shattered and pinnacled precipices of its eastern and north-eastern ridges, and its northern flank, sheeted with shining hanging glaciers, appear to forbid all access to its summit from this side. As a matter of fact, very few ascents from Zinal or Mountet have been made, and these only by the N.E. ridge. So far as known no guided, and only one amateur party, had succeeded in making the ascent by the E. ridge before the date of the expedition now described. This previous ascent was made, starting from the Schönbühl