

SOME CLIMBS ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF MONT BLANC.

BY HUMPHREY OWEN JONES.

(Read before the Alpine Club, April 4, 1911.)

IT is in obedience to the behest of an energetic secretary that I appear before the Club to give an account of some of the climbs on the south of Mont Blanc. Actually, even after four seasons spent almost entirely in that district, there seems to be little that is new to tell. Much of my time seems to have been spent in exploration, as yet rather barren of result, and a great deal of the remainder in waiting about in bad weather, in ascending to and descending from huts or camps, or in giving up expeditions chiefly owing to weather and conditions, or both; in fact *il faut renoncer* seems to have been the burden of my song. The tale of these unfruitful explorations and many defeats shall remain untold lest the few successes achieved should seem insignificant in comparison. This paper however will have served a useful purpose if it succeeds in directing the attention of members of the Club to this magnificent district, which seems to be so neglected by mountaineers, and especially by English mountaineers, though during one week in 1910 I met more Englishmen there than I had seen during the three previous seasons.

The reasons for this apparent neglect are not far to seek. Courmayeur, the centre for the district, is not very easy of access, and it is popularly supposed that most of the expeditions in the district are rather long, arduous and difficult; hence it comes about that few mountaineers come to stay, and most appear there merely as birds of passage on their way to or from the traverse of Mont Blanc or the Col du Géant, while few stay to climb the Grandes Jorasses. The passage of the Col is often combined with the ascent of the Aiguille du Géant: a most interesting climb if all the ropes save one be left severely alone.

Yet there are many delightful expeditions, some neither long nor difficult, to be made from Courmayeur, and there is the additional attraction in most cases that a party of climbers will probably have the hut and the mountain to themselves; at least that has almost invariably been my good fortune. This fact should appeal to those who have suffered from overcrowded huts and from the density of the population on the



H. O. Jones, photo.

MONT BLANC AND MONT MAUDIT — FROM MONT BLANC DE TACUL.

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mountains around certain much-frequented centres. This solitude constitutes to me one of the greatest charms of the mountains, and the expeditions which have made the most lasting impression on me have been those in which our party was alone on the mountain. It would be difficult to find places in the Alps in which solitude and the sense of complete isolation can be enjoyed more fully than in certain places on the south side of Mont Blanc, or to find more savage Alpine fastnesses than the tributaries of the great Italian Glacier de Miage or the upper Brenva Glacier.

There is also much to attract those who love exploring and find their pleasure in striving to conform to Mummery's definition of a true mountaineer—'a man who loves to be where no human being has been before, who delights in gripping rocks that have never felt the touch of human fingers.' Many new expeditions may still be made; until recently several virgin peaks, one of them exceeding the magic 4000 metres, were to be found, and some smaller ones still await their conquerors.

My interest in Courmayeur was first aroused by reading the admirable refutation of certain heresies concerning the exhausted Alps in 'Climbing on the Himalaya and other Mountain Ranges,' but my actual introduction to it was due to O. Eckenstein. Further I owe much to the fact that his remarkable knowledge of mountains and admirable power of organization have been available during three out of the four seasons which I have spent there.

The only quarrel I have with Courmayeur is that it has certainly behaved badly as regards weather, which has always been unsatisfactory and unsettled, though in the last four seasons, which have become successively worse, the blame for this cannot be laid entirely on the centre.

The chief defect of Courmayeur as a climbing centre is supposed to be the lack of expeditions which can be made in one day or which do not involve a long journey to a hut or camp. Yet there are many attractive expeditions which belong to this class, the discovery of which is due in great part to the efforts of Signor Hess and of Dr. Claude Wilson's parties. The foremost place among these must be assigned to the Aiguille de la Brenva (10,522 ft). This remarkably steep peak can be ascended from the left bank of the Brenva Glacier * and, if more difficult climbing is desired, the ridge traversed

* Hess, *Riv. Mens.* (1898) xvii. 340 and 466.

to the north and back again; or the highest point may also be reached from the north-west * and the peak thus traversed. The simple ascent is well worth repeating: the climbing is excellent, the rock is sound, the taste for sensational situations is fully satisfied, and the whole expedition may be made direct from Courmayeur in about ten hours, or if preferred the night may be spent at a camp or even at the Mont Fréty.

The ascent of the Punta Innominata, which also falls into this class, will be mentioned later.

Another expedition was recently added to these: Les Monts Rouges (de Triolet).† This mountain consists of a pair of peaks, 10,860 and 10,742 feet high, which look impressive from the Val Ferret and attracted the notice of Forbes in 1848. Yet although it had a name seventy years ago and has a hut at its foot, this mountain was still virgin in 1909.‡ On the last day of July of that year, after a severe defeat on the Punta Margherita had convinced us that the higher peaks were unapproachable for some days, Laurent Croux and I set out for the Triolet Hut in order to attempt the ascent of Les Monts Rouges and, if possible, to traverse both its peaks the next day.

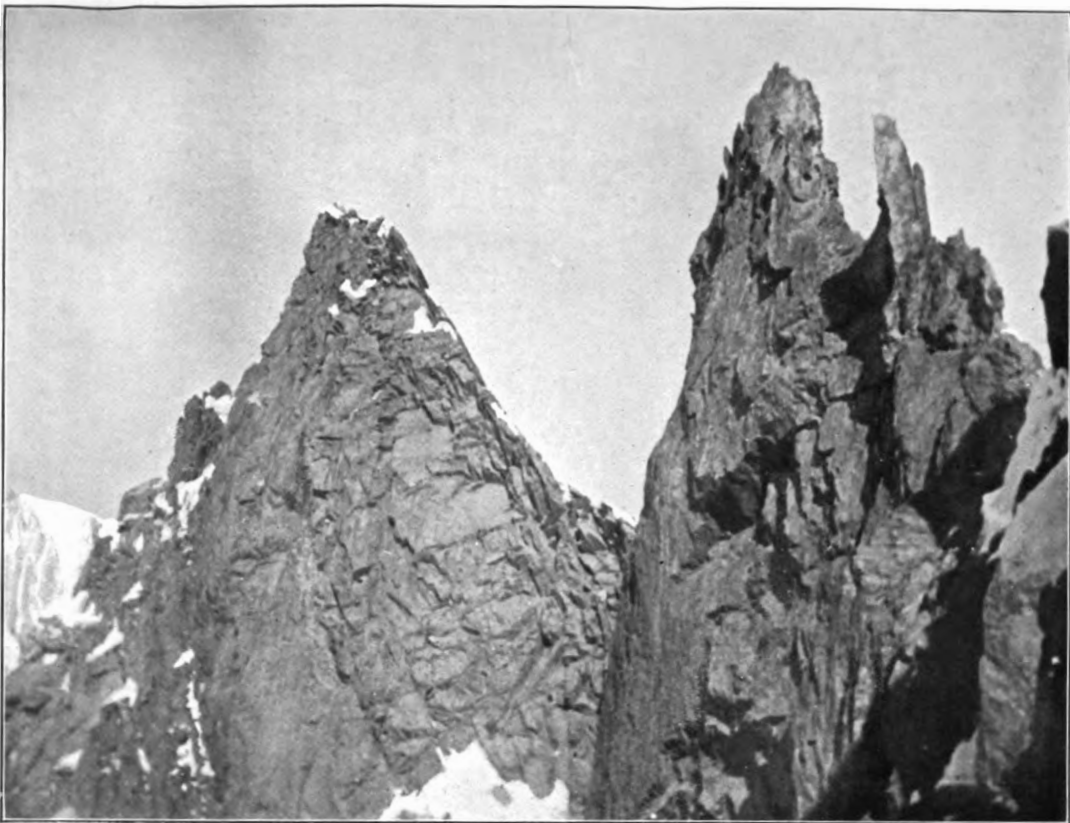
We did not expect this to be a very serious undertaking; so all the reconnoitring we did consisted in examining the peak from the Val Ferret with the aid of Zeiss binoculars, which showed us that the ascent of the lower peak would probably be feasible. There was one point only where there might be some difficulty; but we could not pick out a route from the lower to the higher peak. We however hoped that one would be found on the Pré de Bar (east) side of the peak. Our experiences will show how completely we were deceived, and how effectually the mountain took its revenge for this inconsiderate treatment.

Next morning, after an early start, progress was rapidly made by the rocks, south-west of the broad couloir descending from the gap between the two peaks, which provided an easy route diagonally upwards to the right until the ridge descending from the lower peak was reached. On our way we spent

* Wicks, Wilson and Bradby, *Alpine Journal*, xxii. 320.

† *Alpine Journal* (1910) xxv. 357.

‡ The point ascended by Hess and Centner in 1905 (*Riv. Mens.* xxiv. 273) is situated between Les Monts Rouges and l'Aiguille de Triolet, nearer the latter peak.



H. O. Jones, photo.

PUNTA MARGHERITA, FROM THE EAST.

some time in examining the higher peak and saw that the only possible way of reaching its summit from this side would be to cross the couloir, to strike the ridge leading to the higher peak at a well-defined notch about half-way up, and to continue the ascent on or near this ridge, as the face bounding the couloir above this point was abnormally steep.

Continuing the ascent we were soon faced by the obstacle we had seen from the Val Ferret on the previous day. This consisted of a very steep step in the ridge; a shallow recess and a crack were the only aids provided for its ascent. After inspection Croux pronounced the pitch impossible, while I was optimistic; it was finally surmounted at the expense of some effort.

The summit was then reached without further difficulty and from it we enjoyed not only beautiful views of the peaks around us and of the distant Graians but also a most impressive view of the higher peak towering above us. Our examination of the face of this peak did not reveal a possible method of reaching it from this side. On the Triolet side we knew that it would be necessary to descend a considerable distance to reach the notch already mentioned. A short distance below us on the east face we espied a terrace leading round the mountain. We decided to descend to this and follow it until a possible route to the higher peak was found. The terrace was reached by descending some steep rocks and we walked merrily along it for some time until we found ourselves entirely cut off by a stretch of impassable slabs, the result of a recent rock fall, remnants of which were still visible on the glacier below. Sorrowfully we realized that we were beaten and descended to the glacier, whence we saw that the only reasonable method of reaching the peak from that side was by ascending to the north ridge by an easy couloir and following it for a long way to the summit. Croux told me that the same point on the ridge could be reached from the other side since chamois crossed over at this place; we now knew two possible lines of ascent from the Triolet side.

It was already nine o'clock and it was decided for a number of reasons to leave the ascent of the higher peak for a future occasion. No further attempt was made on the peak in 1909, though, had we known what was in store for us, I doubt if we should have left it.

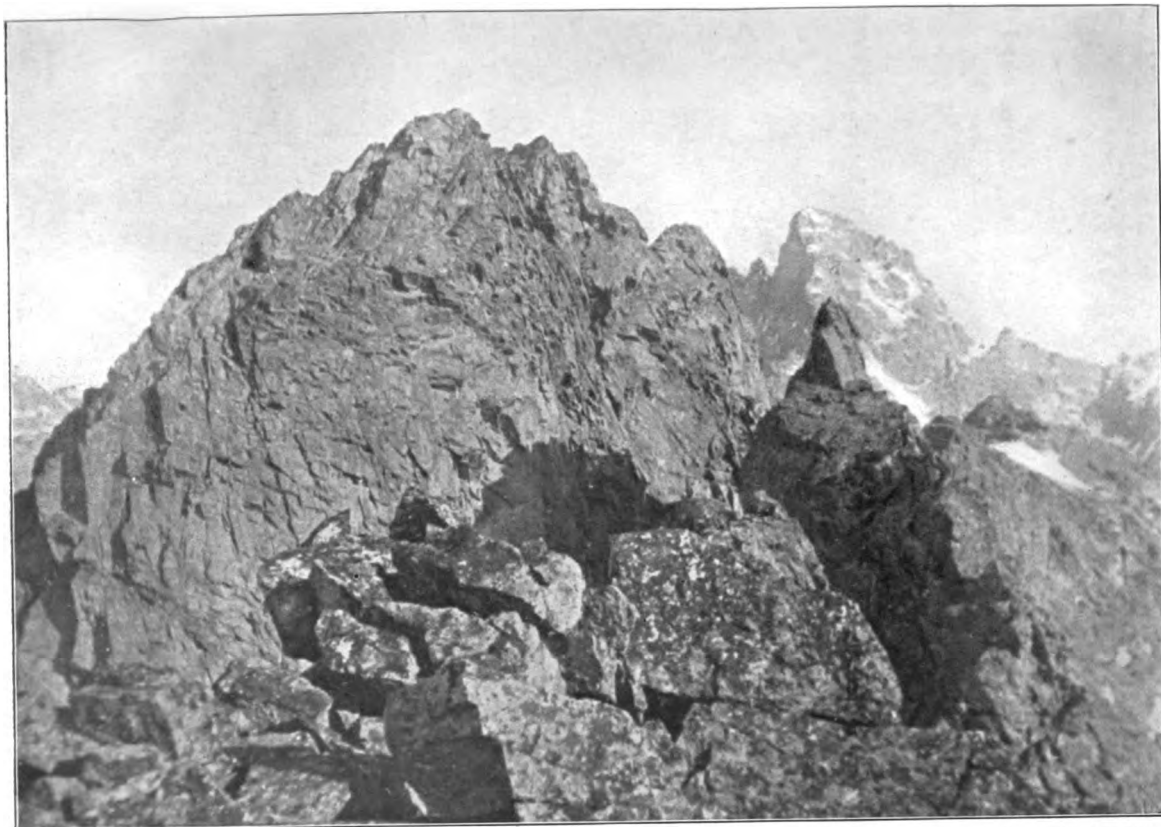
A very short experience of the weather and the condition of the mountains in 1910 made it clear that it was the time for the smaller mountains, and the ascent of Les Monts Rouges at

once took a prominent place on the list of proposed expeditions. Accordingly, having seized the opportunities offered by passages of the Cols de Triolet and Talèfre for further examination of the west face of the peak, soon after midnight on August 22 a party consisting of my sister and myself with Henri Brocherel set out in a carriage, reached the Triolet Hut in due course, and proceeded towards the higher peak. We reached the foot of the broad couloir descending between the two peaks, ascended the easy rocks on its south flank for some time, crossed it and reached the well-defined notch in the ridge leading to the higher peak by ascending steep rocks. From this notch we took what appeared to be the path of least resistance; but there was scarcely a step that was not interesting. We first followed a subsidiary ridge slightly north of the main ridge, on which we climbed smooth slabs with small holds, we made exposed traverses and climbed steep ribs. Then a small replica of the 'bicycle track' on the Grépon led us for about twenty yards to the south to a grey water-worn gully which was ascended until it gave out on a very steep slab. Brocherel recommended to my consideration a small crack capable of accommodating the fingers only, but this seemed to me too desperate a piece of work for the Alps and one not to be lightly undertaken even in Britain. So I ascended some slabs on our right for about forty feet, and then regained the bed of the gully by rounding an awkward corner and descending a few feet; from this point the route to the summit seemed open before us without serious difficulty. But the mountain had not yet done with us: during our complete absorption in the work of the last half hour or so, clouds approaching from the direction of the Col Talèfre had completely enveloped us, and at this point we found ourselves in the midst of a thunderstorm which, with the rapidly falling snow and all the concomitant phenomena, left us no alternative but to descend as rapidly as possible. The descent which was accomplished with no little difficulty was certainly not agreeable. We reached Courmayeur about 5 P.M. in bright sunshine but smarting with a sense of injury and feeling that the mountain had not played fair with us, so we determined to be revenged as soon as possible.

Hence it came about that two days later at 2.30 A.M. we set out once more, intent on completing the conquest of Les Monts Rouges, and at 10 o'clock had reached the point at which we had been turned back. We then ascended, bearing slightly to our right until the main (south-west) ridge overlooking the

Point
3311

Aiguille
de Tind



H. O. Jones, photo.

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LES MONTS ROUGES.

broad couloir was reached, and this was followed to the summit by 11 o'clock. The climbing was always on steep, sound rock, and the interest was maintained throughout. After certain rites had been performed, we were rewarded by superb views and were also pleased to be able to trace out a possible route for ascending from the lower summit which had been overlooked last year. Finally we turned reluctantly to the descent. We followed the north ridge, over two minor summits, to a well-marked couloir on the Triolet side, and descended partly by it and partly by the rocks on its right side to the left bank of the glacier. The whole expedition from the hut and back took us five and three-quarter hours; it is interesting throughout, and could easily be made from Courmayeur in the day with the aid of a carriage.

Comparisons are difficult, but the expedition seemed to us to be more difficult than the traverse of the Charmoz and longer than the actual rock traverse of the Grépon. The latter we three accomplished a few days later in three hours, an impending storm which caught us at the Col des Nantillons acting as an efficient accelerator.

The Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret must rank among the most attractive peaks on the southern flank of Mont Blanc. Few acquainted with its history can have seen this beautiful peak without wishing to ascend it; the mystery which has always surrounded it and its reputation for inaccessibility have given it a rare fascination. Having fallen a victim to its lure it seemed to me highly undesirable that it should be branded with such an evil reputation for danger, and remembering Leslie Stephen's familiar aphorism anent the possibility of ascending every peak in perfect safety, it became one of my ambitions to extend this generalization to the Aiguille Blanche.

The desire to verify statements for myself, presumably the result of a scientific education, led me to make a careful examination of the Brenva face of the peak, which however did not lead to the discovery of anything overlooked by those who had already ascended this face.

The Punta Innominata is the only place from which the Fresnay side of the peak can be examined, so on August 11, 1909, Croux and I set out to ascend the Innominata and inspect the south-west face of the Aiguille Blanche. This expedition is not in any way difficult and its interest is due to the fact that as a view-point set in the midst of one of the most magnificent cirques of precipices in the Alps the Innominata can hardly be surpassed: the views of the southern face and of the Peuteret

ridge of Mont Blanc from this point are the finest I have ever seen.

The day was not a good one for the purpose, but we traced out to our satisfaction a route from the foot of the peak to its summit, which we decided was not exposed to the danger of stone falls. The state of affairs now must be very different from that described by Sir H. Seymour King* in 1885, as no stones could be seen on the glacier in 1908 and 1909.

We next spent a night in a bivouac near the summit of the Aiguille de Tronchey and sustained a severe defeat on the south-east ridge of the Grandes Jorasses; then on August 15, cheered by the prospect of a couple of fine days, we engaged two porters and set out to camp with a view of attempting to ascend the Aiguille Blanche by the south-west face on the next day.† We found a suitable camp on the slopes to the left of the Brouillard Glacier quite close to one which had been used previously, probably by the brothers Gugliermine before the first passage of the Col Emile Rey.‡ One of the porters descended at once, then the two men, Laurent Croux and his cousin of the same name, and I proceeded to make things as comfortable as we could with a light silk tent and sleeping bags.

The next morning we were off at 3.25 and with the aid of our crampons ascended the steep Brouillard Glacier to the Col de Fresnay. The only difficulty encountered was in crossing the large crevasse near the Col. No steps were cut, whereas without crampons continuous step-cutting would have been necessary, as the slopes of hard snow or ice often exceeded 45°.

From the Col we descended to the lower basin of the Fresnay Glacier and, taking care to give the great ice-fall a wide berth, we crossed it to the foot of our peak, which we reached at 8 A.M. Here we realized that much time might have been saved in reaching this point by crossing the Col de l'Innominata and ascending the Fresnay Glacier, which is feasible between these two points. Croux was of opinion that the Col was unattainable from the Chatelet side, but my view that it had been reached turned out to be correct.§ The bergschrund was crossed on the true left side of the second couloir south-east of

* *Alpine Journal* (1885) xii. 431.

† *Ibid.* (1909) xxiv. p. 677 (with the route marked on a photograph).

‡ *Boll. C.A.I.* (1902) vol. xxxv. no. 68, p. 229 *et seq.*

§ *Hernite, Echo des Alpes* (1893) p. 121.

Col. des Peuteret

S.W. face of Aig Blanche



Dr. E. Fankhauser, photo.

Swan Electric Engraving Co., Ltd

GLACIER DE FRESNAY, FROM THE PUNTA INNOMINATA.

the great ice-fall, the couloir itself was soon crossed, and by ascending the rocks on its north-west side we reached at 11 A.M. the point at which we proposed to leave the rocks, traverse to the upper basin of the glacier and thence complete the ascent by the route followed in the first ascent.* The steep slope, however, looked particularly uninviting, for patches of hard blue ice were visible where a thin covering of powdery snow had slipped away. About this time too certain disquieting signs in the sky indicated that storms were brewing. A consultation was therefore held, the proposed route was abandoned and it was decided to follow the rock rib, on which we were, to the ridge. Croux refused to consider seriously the suggestion that we should turn back; that, he said, we had done often enough already and, even if we had to spend the night in the open, the peak must be ascended. Further, although the idea of traversing the peak to the Brenva Glacier had been discussed, no definite decision had been made and we hoped to return by the same route, so had left most of our provisions and spare clothing at the camp. Now it was clear that if we got to the top and a storm was imminent, we should be forced to descend on the Brenva side because bad weather would make a safe descent of the rocks above practically impossible. It was therefore decided to continue the ascent of the rocks leading to the more northern of the two rock towers on the ridge, a decision which we proceeded to carry out with all convenient rapidity, and between this and 6.30 we stopped less than twenty minutes altogether.

The rocks from this point on were decidedly more difficult and two passages in particular impressed me. In both cases Croux, though a good judge of rock, doubted his ability to get up, but encouraged by his companions and the idea of avoiding descent thereby he did get up. The first passage was rather remarkable and one of the two photographs taken on that day represents it. The first step was surmounted by the aid of an ice-axe inserted, up to its head, into a crack about shoulder-high and used as a foothold. Croux then disappeared round a corner on our left and ascended to the full length of a 100-foot rope, during which process I unroped. The porter then

* The route followed by Sig. G. Gruber with Emile Rey in 1880 on their ascent of Mont Blanc was on the rocks between us and the great ice-fall on our left, and it was on these same rocks that Professor Balfour and Johann Petrus met with their fatal accident (*Alpine Journal*, xi. 90).

ascended and finally the rope came down to me, with instructions to bring up Croux's axe and sack. After mounting the first step I found that, owing to the slope of the crack, the axe could not be withdrawn from above and so I had to descend and reascend without its aid; after this the rest was comparatively easy. On more than one occasion Croux has adopted the effective method of giving me his sack in order to impress upon me the difficulty of a passage about which we had had some slight difference of opinion. The other difficulty was partly due to the fact that Croux traversed to the left a few yards and then ascended to the full extent of the rope between us, so that I was compelled to make a direct ascent in which, at one point, a fist jammed in a crack was the only available hold. The remainder of the ascent was over continuously steep rocks and we eventually arrived on the ridge about 2.30 to find ourselves enveloped in dense fog which dispelled all doubt as to the evil intentions of the weather. The ridge carried a slight cornice only but the snow on its Brenva flank was in very bad condition, so that we advanced very cautiously, usually two on one side of the ridge and one on the other, using 200 feet of rope, until the summit was reached at 4 o'clock. Here we found ourselves in the midst of a violent thunderstorm with snow falling rapidly. We recorded our ascent on a scrap of paper which was deposited in a bottle containing some cards, whose I know not, which we found among the rocks just short of the summit, and then without delay turned to descend. I have read several descriptions of the sensations experienced while in a thunder-cloud at high altitudes, but had certainly never realized them, and the actual thing was a startling revelation. The most striking of the phenomena was the way in which hair was erected so as to lift a hat from the head and to cause a moustache to stand out almost horizontally. The sensation meanwhile was exactly like that experienced when holding the terminals of an induction coil. As soon as we were well below the summit the phenomena became less pronounced, but the thunderstorm continued intermittently throughout the night and the brush discharges from pointed rocks were sometimes very beautiful.

Before leaving the subject of natural phenomena, I wish to put on record a very remarkable observation made on that day, the like of which does not appear to have been described. While on the summit ridge in the mist, just before 3 o'clock, the clouds lifted a little behind us, and the feebly-shining sun cast our shadows on the mist filling the basin of the Brenva Glacier, and

Aig. Noire

Aig. Blanche

Point 4381 mètres

Mt. Blanc de
Courmayeur



H. O. Jones, photo.

PEUTERET RIDGE, FROM MONT MAUDIT SHOWING UPPER PART OF
BRENVA ROUTE.

each shadow was surrounded by a brilliant circular halo in rainbow colours: in fact, an excellent manifestation of the 'Brooken spectre' which is seen so often in Britain but rarely in the high Alps. The remarkable fact, however, is that to the right, that is to the south, of this 'fog bow' there was another circular halo in rainbow colours, smaller and fainter, quite clear of the larger one. There appears to be no record of this phenomenon having been observed before, the nearest thing being the intersecting halos observed by Whymper on the Matterhorn in 1865. The origin of concentric fog bows (I have seen such on two occasions) is understood, but two suggestions have been made to account for these separate bows: one that the fainter halo was caused by a mock sun (the relative position of the two halos approximated to that required by this hypothesis); the other that the source of light was a hole in low clouds through which sunlight was reflected from a stratum of cloud at a higher level. The second of these suggestions is more probably correct than the first, because a mock sun is unlikely to give enough light to produce a halo such as that I saw.

But to return to the expedition, as soon as we left the steep *calotte*, we hurried down almost at a run. Once we were forced to stop by the violence of the hail, and clung to the rocks for nearly ten minutes while avalanches of hail, reaching almost to our knees, descended the small trough in which we were standing. On leaving the top we had feared that we might have to spend the night high up on the face; but when, in spite of the fog, we succeeded in descending rapidly and without difficulty, we cherished hopes of better things. Just before 6.30 we reached the rib of rock separating the two great snow-fields on the face, the rib on which Güssfeldt camped when making the first ascent from this side,* and found a large overhanging stone admirably adapted to provide shelter; whereupon a further consultation was held. If the night had to be spent out, then there was no better place to be found between this and the slopes on the other side of the glacier; we were still in dense fog, snow was falling, and it seemed probable that we should not be able to get across before dark: we therefore remained sitting under this rock the whole night through.

It was not as unpleasant as I had expected, because it did not become really cold; the rock sheltered us from the snow, and had it not been that our clothes were damp, and were

* *Der Mont Blanc*, p. 255 et seq.

kept moist by the fog, we should have been still less uncomfortable. During the descent no stones fell, but two large falls occurred about 1 A.M., which were probably started by snow avalanches. Twice during the night the mist cleared, revealing the lights of Pré St. Didier, 8000 ft. below us, as if close at our feet, and we were able to note the eclipse caused by persons passing between us and the lights of the hotel. At daybreak the fog was as thick as ever and snow was still falling, so at 5.30 it was decided to move.

. Owing to the fog we missed the only bridge over the great crevasse which extends right across the snow-field from the rock rib to the base of the Dames Anglaises, and our mistake cost us an hour. We arrived at Courmayeur at noon after an absence of fifty-one hours. Some anxiety was felt as to our fate, and our arrival was opportune; for in another half-hour scouts would have started to seek tidings of us.

Thus ended the finest expedition it has been my fortune to make; the primary object of the expedition, namely, to find a safe route up the Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret, was, I think, achieved. The fact of having been benighted was unfortunate, as it indicated a lack of finish, but we felt confident that had it not been for the fog we should have saved some time on the summit-ridge, and, in any case, should have been able to reach Courmayeur the same night.

The only other subject which will be referred to concerns the Quintino Sella Hut, which is situated at 11,155 ft. on the right bank of the Glacier du Mont Blanc and can be reached only after about seven hours' good walking. It has been my lot to go there four times. Each year we were the first party to visit the hut, and there is no need to explain what that involves in the case of a hut so old-fashioned and so situated as this.

In 1907 Eckenstein, Bellars and I spent twelve days there, on eight of which the weather was bad, usually very bad. Our objects were to make an ascent of the Rocher du Mont Blanc and to explore the Brouillard Ridge.

The Rocher du Mont Blanc is a beautiful rock peak of 12,707 feet whose claims to be considered a mountain are indisputable, as it is surrounded by glaciers on all sides and rises some 500 ft. above the snow; yet though so many must have passed it on their way to Mont Blanc, it was still virgin.

The conquest, however, was effected in several stages, so that it may appear that too many bites have been made of this cherry.

Dôme de
Conitate

Mt. Blanc

Rocher du
Mt. Blanc

Mt. Blanc
de Courmayeur

Pic Laig
Avalanche

Col. Emile
Rey

Mt. Blanc



Drawn by E. T. Compton.

MONT BLANC — FROM DÔME DE MIAGE

(Mt. Blanc de Courmayeur, Rocher du Mt. Blanc and Tête Carrée are in same vertical plane).

On June 27, after six days of continuous snowstorm and one fine day, we set out and, though the route followed was complicated, we reached the peak at the south end of the summit-ridge only to find that the mountain consisted of a long ridge running almost due north and south, on which three other distinct peaks, differing little in height,* were visible. (Actually there are five peaks altogether, and the north peak is the highest.)

After six days confined in a hut we had felt somewhat out of condition and had moved so slowly that it was too late to attempt to complete what might easily turn out to be a long expedition, so we reluctantly turned our backs on the mountain and resolved to return the next day, or as soon as possible. During the next two days the weather was as bad as it could be and, as the third day promised to be similar, we sorrowfully descended, and the next day two of us returned to Cambridge and proceeded to take up our Long Vacation duties.

A few weeks later the second and third summits counting from the south were ascended by Blodig and Eckenstein.†

In July 1908, after a considerable period of broken weather, during which the only expeditions accomplished were ascents of the Aiguille de la Brenva and the Aiguille Noire de Peutret (the latter rock peak is well worth ascending for the interest of the climbing as well as for its beauty and remarkable structure), I went to the hut again in the distinguished company of Blodig and E. T. and E. H. Compton.

The next day while the two senior members of the party set out to ascend the north peak of the Rocher du Mont Blanc‡ the juniors were ordered to ascent Mont Brouillard and examine possible means of ascending the Pic Luigi Amadeo, one of the two *Viertausender* still wanting in Dr. Blodig's bag. This formidable peak has been ascended once only, by the brothers Gugliermina (*loc. cit.* 244), who took three whole days from the hut to the Janssen Observatory.

After a successful day we all returned to the hut together in time to escape bad weather, which continued for the next two days, and again I returned to my duties.

The traverse of the Rocher du Mont Blanc occupied a prominent place on the programme for 1909, but owing to

* *Alpine Journal*, xxiii. 647.

† *Zeit. d. deut. u. öst. Alpenverein*, xxx. 160.

‡ *loc. cit.*

reports of the icy conditions and pressure of other business on hand it was transferred to the 1910 programme. On August 2, L. Noon and myself, with Laurent Croux, Henri Brocherel, and a porter set out for the hut. Knowing from previous experience the advantages of arriving some hours before sunset, Noon and I, being lightly loaded, did arrive early to find that the outer door had been blown away, and the accumulation of hard ice on the floor and in the roof was much greater than usual. Hence, after several hours' continuous cutting, we were very tired before the rest of the party arrived in a snowstorm which continued all that night and the next day. We had not been able to get the mattresses and blankets dry and there was a continuous drip from the roof, so that the hut was more than usually uncomfortable for the first visitors of the season. The second morning broke clear and bright on a glorious scene, which however beautiful to the eye was not encouraging to the intending rock climber. With high hopes for the morrow we set out to examine our peak, with the result that some photographs were taken and the professionals returned with an exaggerated idea of the difficulty of the proposed expedition. Very soon after our arrival at the hut the weather showed signs of breaking, and it did so in real earnest later in the day, so that after a cold night we were forced to abandon the expedition for some days and descend. Noon's unavoidable return to England, and the arrival of my sister, necessitated a visit to Chamonix, which enabled us to accomplish a few climbs; after which, on August 18, for the fourth time, I set out for the hut accompanied by Brocherel and a porter, with a view of again attempting to complete the expedition on which so much time had been spent already. During the night there was a strong gale from the north-west, so, much fearing a repetition of previous experiences, we did not start until 6.30, and then the prospects were not encouraging.* The foot of the peak was reached by ascending the slopes directly above the hut, a route which had not been advisable in previous years. The south peak was reached by a direct route, leaving the original (1907) route on our right on two occasions, for the ascent of the first hundred feet or so and again for the final peak.

Heavy clouds moved rapidly over the Col de Miage and twice enveloped us in dense fog; yet though several of the surrounding peaks were always covered Mont Blanc remained

* *Alpine Journal* (1910) xxv. 358.



Drawn by E. T. Compton from a photograph by H. O. Jones.

Swan Electric Engraving Co., Ltd.

ROCHER DU MONT BLANC. FROM THE EAST.

clear. These disquieting signs however served to quicken our movements to the utmost, and the ascent took less than two hours.

We then descended directly to the gap between the first and second peaks. The remarkable cleft which separates the two peaks was found to be completely filled with snow, and after ascending the second peak we reached the third at 9.20. From here to the north (fifth) peak the route was new and previous inspection had led us to expect some difficulty. The descent (about 100 ft.) from peak No. 3 was very steep, but, though near the bottom the rocks were iced, there were enough holds to render the use of a spare rope unnecessary. The ascent of the fourth summit was effected by its west side, and the climbing from this point to the north peak was highly interesting. The steep grey rocks of which this is composed give climbing of quite a different kind from that on the reddish protogine of the other peaks, and we scrambled over a very narrow bepinnaled ridge to the highest point at 10.15. The weather now showed distinct signs of improvement, and we were glad to shelter from the wind, bask in the sun and enjoy the glorious view which lay before us, among other things a splendid view of Herr Pfann's * route from the upper Glacier du Mont Blanc to the summit of the Monarch, which seemed to us the best of the three routes which have been taken. The descent was effected first by the rocks on the north side of the couloir which descends from the north summit to the glacier and then by the couloir itself. We were back at the hut by midday, and, after a suitable interval for refreshment, we descended, reaching Courmayeur before 5 o'clock, much pleased to have accomplished in the end a climb from which I had been turned back so often by bad weather.

The expedition last described is, I fear, too far away from the centre to become popular, but the Quintino Sella hut ought to be visited much more frequently than it is, since in addition to the ascent of Mont Blanc by Kennedy's route, to facilitate which the hut was built, it is a convenient starting-point for Pfann's route to Mont Blanc, and for the ascent and traverse of Mont Brouillard, an interesting expedition which has been fully described by Blodig. † It may be well to record the fact that though the route to the hut is often safe enough, yet

* *Alpine Journal* (1910) xxv. 164.

† *Oestr. Alpenzeitung* 29, 1; *D. u. Ö. A. V. Zeitschrift*, xl. 164.

on the occasion of my last visit the passage from the Glacier de Miage to the right bank of the Glacier du Mont Blanc was exposed to the danger of stone falls. A large quantity of debris had been carried by an avalanche from the grassy banks on to the latter glacier, and between the beginning and the middle of August the snow had melted, leaving the stones lying on the ice, from which position they descended with uncomfortable frequency.

The expeditions above described are only a few of the many which Courmayeur has to offer to the mountain lover. Those who delight in snow and ice work can enjoy it to the full on the ascent of Mont Blanc by the Midi route, by the Brenva ridge, or by the Aiguille de Bionnassay, also on the Grandes Jorasses or on the Rochefort ridge. Then those who delight in rock climbs will find enough to occupy them on the Peuteret ridge, the Aiguille des Glaciers, and some of the expeditions described in this and the preceding paper, while those who desire viewpoints can scarcely hope to find any finer than many of those in a list which includes the Aiguilles de Trélatête, Mont Dolent and the Punta Innominata.

On account therefore of the many excellent expeditions of various kinds which may be made in this district, and above all for the solitude which it offers to the true lover of mountains, the south side of Mont Blanc well deserves to take a higher place in the estimation of mountaineers than it now appears to hold.

I wish to record my warmest thanks to Dr. Claude Wilson for so kindly allowing me to make use of the map which he had prepared to illustrate his paper.

FROM NOON TO MIDNIGHT ON AN ICE SLOPE.*

BY W. SYMMES RICHARDSON.

IN August 1909 I was camping in the Ice River Valley in the Otter Tail Range of the Canadian Rocky Mountains with my friend, Malcolm Goddard, of California. We had with us the Swiss guide, Rudolf Aemmer, and had gone into the valley in the hope of making the first ascent of the North Tower of Mount Goodsir, the last unclimbed peak of the first

* A description of a new Pass over the Otter Tail Range from the Ice River Valley to Haskin Creek, in the Canadian Rocky Mountains.