

CLIMBING IN THE 'SIXTIES AND THE
'SEVENTIES¹

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AN ambitious and an ambiguous title! The 'Sixties,' the days of the heroes when most of the giants succumbed, and to which *Scrambles*, *The Playground* and *The Alps in '64* referred. And the 'Seventies,' not a bad follow-on, will perhaps be remembered best for the emergence into respectability of Guideless Climbing effected chiefly by Charles and Laurence Pilkington and Frederick Gardiner; for, in spite of the achievements of Hudson and Kennedy in the 'fifties, and those of Cust, Cawood and Colgrove in the mid-'seventies, the feeble activities of the Rev. A. G. Girdlestone² and the criticism they evoked had left Guideless Climbing in a sorry plight.

It was in the later 'seventies that I began to climb, and was able in the autumn of 1879 to send in a three-year qualification which sufficed. But it is not of those far-off days that I am going to speak to-night, but rather of the sere and yellow, the seventieth and eightieth decades of life. In 1920 I passed my sixtieth birthday, and having spent a few weeks of every summer since then in the Alps, it has been thought by some that, as an encouragement—or a warning—or both to a younger generation, some traces of an increasingly lugubrious tale might be told.

In July 1920, Bradby, W. A. Wills and I were at Argentière with a Wills boy and girl and Miss Overton—four men and two ladies, and we hardly expected to do much more than walks and picnics. But I was much surprised to find that I, the senior member of the group, could go nearly as well as in 1914, and our party of six, on two ropes, traversed Les Périades, climbed the Chardonnet, and made several expeditions among the Aiguilles Rouges de Chamonix, a part of that charming little range which stretches

¹ Though a contribution on the 'Sixties' had been contemplated some years ago, not a word had been written till, to comply with a request to fill an unexpected gap, these very personal notes were hastily written round a series of lantern slides which happened to be available. As few if any illustrations can appear in the JOURNAL, the disjointed narrative has been somewhat modified while some notes relating to 1937 have been added.

² *The High Alps without Guides*, 1870.

from the Brévent to the Dents du Midi, and which, with sufficient of glacier, of limestone, of shale, and of superb granite, and with one of the most horrible moraines in the Alps, should suffice for the needs of the most fastidious. There I have been several times since 1920, but have also visited many districts of the Alps largely new to me and have climbed such outlying sentinels as Le Sirac, Piz Linard, the Parseierspitze and the Habicht, as well as picking up left-out trifles like the Mönch, the Eiger Hörnli, Monte Leone, the Basodino, the whole of the Rhône Glacier group, and many climbs in Grisons both north and south of the Maloja Pass.

Have any lessons been learned in these years? Yes, and this is the chief one, as our revered President has often said to me with a wealth of adjectives which I have judiciously omitted: 'You can't go as you once could, but you should be thankful that you can go at all.' And I am. Though I go slower and slower as the years pass by, it was not till my mid-'sixties that this lack of pace and spurt began to become noticeably obtrusive, and it has gradually developed to such a pitch that I am quite unfit to be anyone's companion on a rope, unless on rocks where one only moves at a time, or on ice where the leader cuts steps, for in these situations the general pace approximates to mine. On the other hand, after a few days' training I can generally—at my pace—'continuer' as Pierre Blanc put it—that is to say, go on and on like the tortoise: and if I start early enough and the others late enough for a hut I may even get there first.

Then I find a rope a nuisance on easy ground. I hate to tug at the man in front of me and I hate to be tugged by him. But both happen downhill as well as up. Fortunately on a good many minor climbs one does not need a rope, or needs it only for a short time, and it is the long tramp over snow-covered glaciers that is the worst ordeal for all concerned, but I go less and less to such places.

I have climbed with a good many guides, a few of whom will be mentioned later on, with many companions for two or three expeditions; while with a few I have made a good many. In the early 1920's I could keep up with Bradby and Wills. With Mothersill in 1925 I was beginning to go slow. But Strutt and Blanchet have borne the brunt in recent years, and their patience has been beyond praise. Both are stars of the first magnitude, but their glory differs. As W. S. Gilbert says of Agib, one may say of Blanchet that 'his gentle spirit rolls in the melody of souls' which, says Gilbert, 'is pretty, but I don't know what it means.' But of Blanchet I know very well what it means. It



Gabriel Loppé pinx.]

MONT BLANC FROM BUET.

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Photo, A. Corti]

CIME VAZZEDA AND DI ROSSO, N. SLOPES.

means Bach and Busoni and some others, and if I want him to go slow or stop, I have only to speak of Busoni and all is well. Not so with the President ; his patience has been inexhaustible, but I might talk about Busoni till I was black in the face without disturbing the inward workings of his turbulent spirit. Though age increases one's disabilities, the enjoyment of the mountains and of congenial companionship remains. And there's the rub ! But enough of this dismal musing.

In selecting a few samples from the eighty or ninety excursions above the snowline which have been made during these years, I have chosen some from the earlier, some from the middle, and some from the later years, and have been influenced a good deal by whether or not I had slides to illustrate them. In 1923 I was with Christian Klucker in the Bregaglia, and he took me up the Pioda di Sciora and Il Gallo—not very long before the top fell off—and after Bradby had joined us we at last got up the Ago. In 1929 I made the traverse of and my third ascent of the Cima del Largo, and, with Strutt traversed Vazzeda and Rosso, a charming expedition for a fine day, which no one visiting the Forno should omit.

At the other end of the Alps is Le Sirac so striking and alluring from so many points of view, but quite hidden from the Val Gaudemar except from its extreme end. Strutt and I climbed it with Pierre Blanc in 1928, but when quite near the top and nearly as high, found ourselves separated from the actual summit by half a dozen formidable gendarmes. I think I know now how they could have been rounded, but the ledge was invisible, being plastered with ice and snow. Here I had a reminder that if speech is silver—which it wasn't—silence on my part would have been golden. On various mountains I had failed to reach the top at the first attempt, and Strutt had a similar experience on the Cima Codera with Josef Pollinger, not to speak of Everest. He and I were resigned. Not so Pierre Blanc—'Jamais de la vie, jamais de la vie,' he cried with increasing vehemence, had he failed to reach a summit. I was incautious enough to say that I had done so more than once. That, he replied, he could very well understand, but *he*, Pierre Blanc ! 'Jamais de la vie,' and he gave a tug at the rope which nearly jerked me off my ledge—but not quite ; so he did not have a chance to 'save my life.'

Several times during these years I have been at Gletsch, and in 1925 when, with Mothersill, I discovered some pinnacles on the Galengrat which had not been climbed ; Solly happened to turn up, and we went up one of them, Solly leading. He left a penny on the top which, so far as I know, is there still. Swirling

rain came on, but though we had to come down, we caught occasional glimpses of another tower to the west which reminded us of the Napes Needle. In 1927 I went there again with the late Paul Arni and a guide, when we scrambled about on the western gendarmes where Paul took some photographs. One sees a certain resemblance to the Gable Needle, and the picture of its shadow on the snow below is both curious and beautiful.

I now turn to the Wetterhorn which I ascended twice during these years. I had been on the top three times previously—and up or down by four different routes and on it—but not *up* on one or two more occasions. But these latter-day ascents were merely up and down by the well-worn couloir. In 1921, as in several later years, our party was for the most part guideless, and the ascent was made with the object of taking Miss Frances Wills—a beautiful climber and grand-daughter of the great judge with whose name the mountain will ever be associated—up it. We were quite a party at the Gleckstein, for in addition to W. A. Wills and his daughter, their friend Miss Stobington was there, and also Bradby, Farrar and Hasler. The latter two led with Miss Stobington between them, while the rest of us on a rope of four followed, W. A. Wills leading. The other ascent was in 1927, alone with Siegfried Burgener and with the unworthy motive of seeing if I could get up on the 50th anniversary of my first ascent, for the Wetterhorn had been my first Swiss mountain, when in 1877 I and my brother Frank were led by Peter Bohren, who had been one of Alfred Wills' guides in the famous ascent of 1854. On this (1927) ascent I found that I could still put on a bit of a spurt if it were really needed. Melting snow would have caused danger from stones while descending the couloir unless we got out of it before another party entered it at the top; so we hurried up and down the pyramid while they lunched at the col before going up.

Let us jump ten years and turn to 1937 when I flirted with my early loves of sixty years ago. Titlis had beaten me in 1877, and though in 1937 Strutt and I had two or three perfect days at the Engsteln Alp, and a short day making sure of the way up from the Joch Pass, yet by the end of the week, when I had got fairly fit, the weather, as in 1877, had become hopeless, and never got right again except for one or two cloudless but deceptive days, till I had to come back home at the end of July. Though in this year I never got up a mountain, I spent many days above the snow-line and was snowed-up at the Dossen hut (8757 ft.) for 36 hours of blizzard. Then I was really flirting with the Wetterhorn again, though we had mentioned the Wellhorn only to our

kindly host, Herr Brog, at Rosenlaui. No glacier that I know in the Alps has retreated in my time as has the Rosenlaui Glacier. It was on July 16, 1877, that I first slept at the primitive old Gleckstein hut, and we came down to Rosenlaui almost all the way by the glacier whose snout was an object of beauty from the hotel. There was then no Dossen hut, and when it was built I do not know ; but it was there in 1898 when Wicks, Kesteven, Bradby and I made an attempt on the Wetterhorn direct from Rosenlaui. The glacier had already retreated, but we reached the hut largely on ice and snow, and the upper rocks were easy. On leaving the hut we kept too long to the left and reached the upper snows by way of the steep Renfern Joch, eventually encountering knee-deep snow on the Wetterkessel, where we gave up and returned to Rosenlaui. When the present ingeniously engineered route was made up rocks which, without the ladders, wire-ropes, and iron stanchions, would in places be impossible, I do not know, but it was probably rendered necessary by the further retreat of the glacier. Anyway, on July 15, 1937, the route was a revelation to me, but I reached the hut in six hours, as against the regulation four. That the date so closely coincided with my first night at the Gleckstein, just sixty years ago was accidental, as our movements were determined by the weather, and July 15 began as a very fine day. My old friend Christian Kaufmann went with me and we arrived at the hut at 4 P.M. and sat outside it in sunshine for half-an-hour. But soon after 5 it began to rain, and when Strutt and my grand-daughter, Diana Moinet, who had started after lunch, arrived at 6 P.M. they were drenched. About 7 it began to snow, and continued to do so for 36 hours, so that when we left the hut at 8.30 on the morning of the 17th there was nearly a foot of new snow obscuring the Rosenlaui route and burying the iced rocks and ropes. The snow had stopped, but though we were enveloped in fog we had come to the end of our provisions, and we started down by the always tricky route among the ledges and cliffs of the Urbachtal. On these ledges we had close-up views of twenty or thirty chamois, and their traces may have helped us here and there. But we got below the clouds in 2 hours, and reached the bridge at the head of the valley about noon. I had not been there since 1878, but though the tops were still in clouds, the lower limestone cliffs of the Engelhörner were as impressive as ever. They offer as favourable a site for the modern piton-school as does the face of of the Tour Sallière above the Val d'Emaney, or indeed the N. wall of the Eiger.

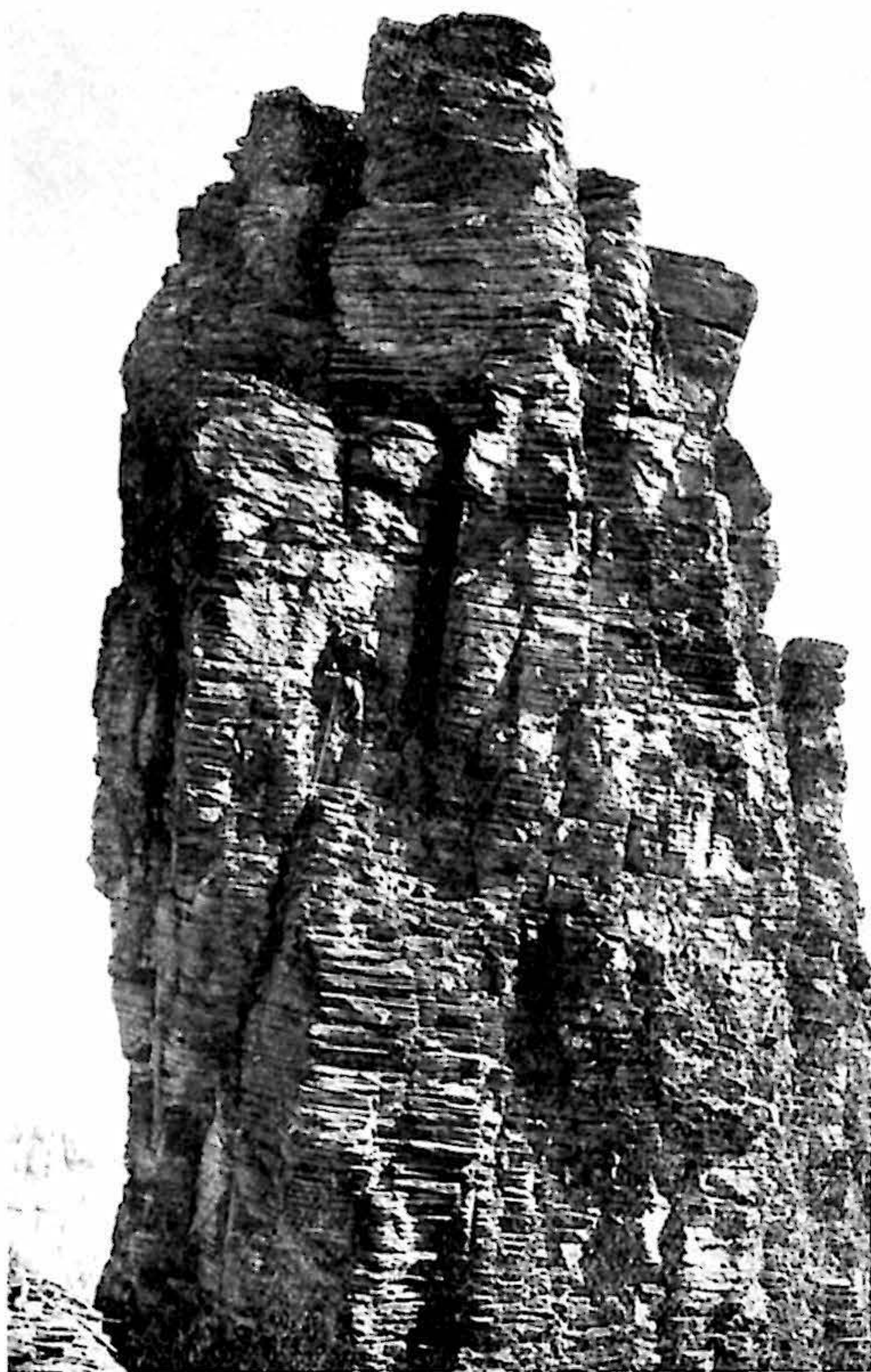
The climb up the Wetterhorn from Rosenlaui is, counting the

ups and downs of the route, about 8000 ft., and the Dossen hut is well above half-way up ; so that with good snow I should probably have got up it on July 16, but it was not to be ; and the enforced rest at the Dossen was probably better for me than the climb to the top on the 60th anniversary of my first ascent.

So much for 1937 ; but while in the Oberland, as already mentioned, I got up the Mönch which had eluded me twice ; first in 1878 when our guides took us in fog up the Trugberg by mistake from the Concordia, and again in 1914 when with Wicks and Bradby we were overtaken by blizzard and heavy snow at the Guggi. In 1927, by aid of the railway, Siegfried Burgener and I got up and down very comfortably from Grindelwald between breakfast and dinner. The new snow had been our undoing at the Guggi in 1914, but at the end of my holiday in 1926 a heavy fall enabled me to cross the Lötschenlücke on ski, with fortunately no modern scorchers to observe my leisurely and deplorable technique.

The circumstances were unusual and perhaps worth relating. Finding myself alone at Brigue when it began to snow and was frightfully cold, I went through the Simplon tunnel for a weekend at Stresa. Back at Brigue the weather cleared showing snow nearly down to the valley ; so, having two days to spare, I wired to Christian Almer III, with whom I had often been in winter on the Scheideggs, Männlichen, and Faulhorn—to get out my ski. Leaving Brigue by an early Lötschberg train, and lunching at Grindelwald, we arrived at the Jungfrauoch in time to run down to the Concordia for supper. The snow was rather heavy in the late afternoon and we had to skate for a mile or more, but next day, once the steep crevassed bit below the col was crossed, powder snow and perfect weather took us joyfully to the Fafler Alp. At Goppenstein we parted and I got back to Brigue in time to dine comfortably and get into a sleeper for Paris, thus ending very happily a bad-weather holiday.

To come to recent times, last year (1936) I had but four fine days in July, and once only, but fortunately on one of the fine days, got above the snow line, when we crossed a pretty little pass in the Silvretta, and I went to sleep on some warm rocks, while Strutt and our guide ascended the Dreiländerspitz and got back much too soon. But in 1935 I had splendid weather, and went for a solitary week of training to Kandersteg ; and when from the Blümlisalp hut, I spied in the distance the Tschingel-lochtighorn I thought it would be fun to traverse it : so I went for it with a young Fritz Ogi—possibly a great-grandson of



TSCHINGELLOCHTIGHORN.



BARBERINE 'LAKE' WITH LES PERRONS.

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old Abraham of that ilk, with whom I had made my first glacier excursion (the Tschingel Pass) in 1877.

It is curious that there should be in the neighbourhood of Kandersteg two Tschingels with no apparent connection and also an Oeschinen and an Ueschidental. The latter is a very long valley—four or five hours (I took more)—to the rocks. There was no time to traverse, and I contented myself with a twelve minutes' climb to the highest summit (N.E. tooth). Never have I seen elsewhere this curious formation of rock, like the tops of hundreds of marble washstands glued together, very slippery and very steep; not easy for hand or foothold when only a flat inch or so projects, and impossible where they overhang.

Thence I went to Finhaut to join Blanchet for ten days in the little range alluded to earlier, a happy hunting ground of his, and where I had been with him and Montagnier in 1932. We went up the Grand Perron from the queer little shanty at Emosson by the ordinary route, and here as on all of our climbs we had our mountain to ourselves. From Salanfe—to which the walk from Salvan is charming—for the second time we ascended the fine E. arête of the Luisin, climbing the Clocher *en route*, and ended up with a long but glorious day traversing the Cheval Blanc and the Buet to the Pierre à Berard and on to the railway just catching the last train back to Finhaut. Even those who ascend the Buet from the S. should go a little way down the N. arête to get a view of the *corniche énorme* as Blanchet called it, which guards the E. face above the historically interesting but lonely and now almost unknown valley of Entre les Eaux.³

I have touched upon perhaps a dozen of these, mostly minor, expeditions, but many other interesting and unfrequented climbs are on the list, and some of them in much frequented districts. Many of the Tyrolese mountains are spoiled by pitons and wire ropes. Even the easy route up the Habicht is thus defiled. But there are several routes seldom made on this fine mountain, while there are lots of interesting climbs in the Stubai such as Hohe Villerspitz and the Schlickersee Mandln which are quite free from ironmongery and very seldom visited; and the same may be said of other valleys. In the Engadine very few visitors to Sils make a direct route up the Corvatsch, or climb the fine W. arête of Piz Tremoggia, while the interesting peaks on the N.E. bank of the Upper Inn are known to but few, and to those mostly by routes best reserved for the descent. From the Valais the N.W. arête of the Dent de Morcles is a perfect bit of rock, and once at the top of the horrible moraine above Salanfe there is plenty of

³ A.J. 47. 197.

interesting climbing on the Dents du Midi, while the curiosities, historical and topographical, of the Pointe Beaumont (Dent de Fenestrale) would form matter for an entertaining brochure. All of these are examples among hundreds of interesting expeditions suitable for the aged climber who has learned his job in younger days. They are less fatiguing and more amusing than long tramps, and there is still lots of room in the Alps for everyone who appreciates the grandeur of solitude in the mountains, while avoiding crowded districts in the height of the season.

To say more of my doings would merely be to repeat similar experiences in other areas, and I might well end up here were it not that a few months ago I had been invited by the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club to attend and speak at a meeting entitled 'Climbing over Seventy.' Had I known what I was in for, I should have made some excuse, but there was nothing in the summons which suggested that the diet of the elderly mountaineer was to be subjected to a fervent appeal for simplicity. I took with me a few slides, imagining that others would be doing the same.

But ever since then this question of diet has rested uneasily on what remnants of conscience remain at an age when one might hope that conscience, which in my youth used to be such a frightful nuisance, would have died a natural and welcome death. Yet I think I might have said 'Yes, I agree' when I knew I did not, had it not been for my sense of responsibility to medicine and physiology, and especially to the Royal College of Physicians which would not hesitate to remove my name from its list of Fellows if it was known that I had told a lie—so I bungled. The distinguished opener of the discussion, my good friend Sir William Ellis, whose opinion on many subjects commands universal respect, and who is to be very heartily congratulated on his excellent performance, attributed his good form largely to what may perhaps be briefly summarized as a very simple nursery diet, and his persuasive eloquence appeared to convert the assembly—composed chiefly of younger men who were not directly affected—to the view that the aged climber should avoid anything approaching to an appetizing repast. Discussion was invited, but silence reigned: and silence seemed to assume that general assent was complete. I looked at Haskett-Smith, but failed to catch his eye, for his cheery smile was replaced by a sphinx-like and impenetrable expression, and his ever-ready flow of merry words was stayed. Whether his thoughts were centred on his recent triumph on the Napes or strayed in sorrow to the Lucullan feasts which some of us have been privileged to share

in his company at the Fishmongers' Hall will be buried, I fear, in oblivion. I was called upon to speak and turned at once to my slides hoping thereby to side-track an embarrassing issue, for I had by no means been persuaded that what suited A was necessarily best for B. But I was cornered later on and definitely asked my views; and when, to avoid controversy, I simply said that at a hut or inn I drank beer if available and consumed ham and eggs and cheese or what was going, a wave of pained surprise spread through what had been till then a happy gathering. I appeared to be in a minority of one, and in a confused state of mind descended into the tube and got into a wrong train, arriving at my destination at a late hour in a taxi, from some remote and unrecognized locality.

But I am really unrepentant, for the question of diet in health at all ages and for all occupations is, in my view, though dependent on a few simple cardinal elements, susceptible of very great variety in detail, and each individual, if old enough to choose and given the opportunity, is guided by considerations physiological and psychological to select what he thinks will suit him, and it generally does. Sir William Ellis in mature years was so guided, but he is by no means alone in preferring an unusual regime: and indeed I know very well a highly distinguished mountaineer who, in the prime of life, accomplishes the most arduous expeditions on a diet the mainstay of which is porridge. But when with him, I cater for myself. On the other hand, when I had as my companion the late H. F. Montagnier, I was always glad to leave the commissariat in his capable hands, and it was he who introduced me to the pleasing idiosyncrasy (alas, all too seldom indulged—once only on my own initiative, and then it was not forthcoming) of splitting half a bottle of champagne (a modest quantum) instead of ordering tea when we descended rather tired in the late afternoon.

Age strikes its victims from many angles and capriciously; some it deprives all too early of their once luxuriant locks, while in other cases it seems to fertilize the thatch. I think with envy of my late friend Lord Conway, and with pity of myself and Mr. Bradby. Age hits some veterans first in the eye, some in the ear and some, but not all, below the waist.

Of course, many old people, and some by no means old, have, for medical reasons, to be as contented as may be with a restricted and monotonous diet, while unusual and even freak diets appeal to certain cults, all of which believe that theirs is what all should adopt.

To end up on a cheerful note, I may perhaps refer to a day in

the life of an old gentleman of over ninety—a lover of the Alps, and in his time a first-rate all-round sportsman, whom I was asked to see about a year ago. He was feeble on his pins, hard of hearing, and nearly blind ; but I was told that he ate and slept well. The latter he somewhat reluctantly admitted, but maintained that his appetite was poor : so, to get at the facts I asked that a list of his nourishment should be kept next day, and the report I received is encouraging to those not yet so far advanced in years, as revealing a diet by no means deficient in proteins, carbohydrates, fats and vitamins, and one which obviously suited him ; though I make no claim that here, as elsewhere, it would be safe to argue from the particular to the general. In some, but not in all, the good digestion which waits on appetite is among the last of the vital functions to fail : though in this case while the good digestion was there, appetite was said to be wanting. Yet this is what he had :

7.30 A.M. Tea and biscuits.

8.30 A.M. Grilled mackerel, scone and butter ; toast and butter ; jam. Coffee.

10 A.M. Half a grape fruit.

During the morning grapes, gooseberries and acid drops.

12 (noon) Glass of port and biscuits.

1 P.M. Boiled salt beef. Carrots. Onions and potatoes. Milk pudding and stewed fruit. Biscuits and cheese. Cherries. Cider.

Slept for an hour and a half.

4.30 P.M. Tea. Sandwiches, shortbread and cake.

7.30 P.M. Salmon mayonnaise with tomatoes, lettuce, cucumber and beetroot. Bread and butter pudding. Cherries. Whisky and soda.

Slept well.

I saw him again in the afternoon of Christmas day, just waking from a refreshing doze after a moderate mid-day repast consisting of turkey with trimmings and a spot of plum pudding.

Here surely is a heartening example for those who believe that food was given us for enjoyment, as well as for aliment, though should my conclusions invite discussion, I shall be more than satisfied.