



Photo, T. Graham Brown.]

THE BRENVA FACE.
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THE BRENVA FACE

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Substance of a Paper read before the Alpine Club, March 7, 1939

I. INTRODUCTORY

WHEN, during the first days of September 1933, Basil Goodfellow drove me home through France after the fine traverses in Dauphiné which he so admirably described to the Club,¹ my mind was filled with the usual regret for the inevitable end of a climbing holiday. This feeling soon faded to the hum of the engine and became drowned at last in the growing realisation of past good fortune. For nearly two months, climbing had been so nearly continuous that no day of rest, chosen or enforced, had broken its sequence for the first three weeks, and not many thereafter. During activity one thinks chiefly of the latest climb and the next, but all fit together in proper series when the last has been made. So it was now. Some climbs at Zermatt had been succeeded by a number of traverses of Mont Blanc itself, then a scheme of great passes had not wholly been ruined by bad weather, and the final climbs in Dauphiné had formed the fitting dessert to a varied feast which yet had given no satiety. As these assembled themselves in thought, contrasts and similarities wove the season's passes and peaks into a fine pattern, and it became impossible not to realise that this may rarely have been excelled. Irrational disappointment at the few days of enforced inaction and at the altered plans which had sometimes to take the place of greater projects melted away to leave clear and happy memories.

Amongst those memories there then stood out, as they stand out now, the two ascents of the Brenva face of Mont Blanc which are here to be described. Many of our climbs had been of the same high standard and interest, but Col Major and the Via della Pera had a personal quality which the remainder lacked, because one was the long-delayed revenge for an old defeat, and the other was the completion of a plan which had long been denied.

When Freshfield made the ascent of the Tour Ronde in 1867² he was the first to see the finest view of the grandest mountain

¹ *A.J.* 46. 45.² *A.J.* 5. 232.

face in the Alps. He wrote of this at the time that no other view had left upon his mind 'a recollection of such overpowering magnificence,' and his repeated recurrence to this memory in later years is proof of the strength of that first impression.³ No one who has seen that view will challenge Freshfield's estimate. The Brenva face is shown in its entirety as a great wall of rock and ice which falls steeply from the twin summits of Mont Blanc and Mont Blanc de Courmayeur in the wide recess between the N.E. ridge of the former and the Péteret arête of the latter. The rock descends in wild ribs, the intermediate ice hangs in tiers of nearly vertical ice cliffs, and an almost continuous wall of ice crowns the whole face from the exit of the old Brenva route at its north edge to Mont Blanc de Courmayeur on the south. But that wall is not impregnable. There is a definite gap under the summit of Mont Blanc, a possible way through or round under that of Mont Blanc de Courmayeur, and, between the two, a weakness in the cliff where it crowns the terminal buttress of the ridge on the true right side of the great couloir which is so prominent a feature of the face. Unless the ice formations should greatly change, those three points will remain the only ones at which the terminal ice cliffs may be forced, and to each of these exits a magnificently direct climbing route leads up—the twisting rib of the Sentinelle route to that on the right, the rib which carries a great pear-shaped buttress to that on the left, and the grand ridge of Route Major to that in the centre. There are no other direct routes on the face, and no other ways on it unless you should care to traverse under dangerous ice cliffs or to pass under them from one direct route to another.⁴

Complicated as is the Brenva face, and broken as are its ribs, the magnificent wall nevertheless has a grand simplicity from the mountaineer's point of view: one direct route to Mont Blanc, one direct route to Mont Blanc de Courmayeur, and one direct route to the high pass between the two summits. This simplicity presented itself to me as an almost unique mountaineering picture, a great triptych, the achievement of which in its entirety was a worthy objective. Before the commencement of climbing in 1933, the panel on the right was long since finished, but the final touches had still to be put to the central panel, and the execution of that on the left offered all the excitement of an adventure long denied and of uncertain outcome.

It was therefore natural that, during our journey home, the

³ *A.J.* 6. 384; 14. 13; 21. 206.

⁴ Such routes were actually made subsequent to those here described. (See footnote ¹².)

achievement of those two climbs should have prominence in thought even amongst their peers, and to the satisfaction which each gave each added a different emotion, the grounds for which arose from a common cause. The Brenva face had so dominated my climbing life that, in the act, the making of the pass and the completion of the third route had seemed to be the inevitable reward for five years of disappointment. Now, in review, the reward seemed no longer to have been so inevitable. While the Leschaux hut, almost within view of the face, had been overcrowded with candidates for the N. face of the Grandes Jorasses, it must surely have been some miracle of blindness which preserved the Via della Pera from becoming a current 'last great problem of the Alps.' In retrospect, that climb filled me with wonder that it had been possible to tackle it without feverish competition,⁵ and the pass filled me with amusement that blind neglect had left it to me to make the second as well as the first ascent of the most beautiful route on Mont Blanc. The admirable reticence of the Brenva face, or blindness produced by the limelight on the neighbouring 'problem,' must have been the ultimate cause for that wonder and amusement.

Despite its reticence, others had seen the possibilities of the Brenva face before my time, although none had actually set foot upon it. But the Sentinelle route had been climbed, Route Major had been planned, and the Via della Pera had begun to take shape before I myself heard that any other climber had entertained projects on the face. The inception of the climbs on the Brenva face was therefore due to a personal accident.

2. THE ORIGIN OF THE ROUTES

A. E. W. Mason's fine romance, *Running Water*, came into my hands before the 1914 war and before my first visit to the Western Alps. The description of the ascent of the old Brenva route in the novel made the party reach the foot of the Brenva buttress across the glacier *from left (W.) to right (E.)*, as Moore's actual first party on the route must have done.⁶ Tracing the way on Baedeker's map, I placed the buttress and the route on the limiting E. ridge of the Brenva Glacier, so making the route pass

⁵ My party, however, was not the only one to have had designs on the Via della Pera. Exactly a week after our success on that route, my friend Signor Zanetti told me that he and Albertini had made two attempts to reach the lowest rocks of the rib in 1930. Further, he also told me that a third Italian attempt to do so was made between the two ascents later to be described in this paper.

⁶ *A.J.* 42. 126.

over the Tour Ronde and Mont Maudit to Mont Blanc.⁷ The shading on the map seemed to justify the roundabout way, and this error was the true origin of my Brenva routes, because it asked the question why the (apparent) cliff had been avoided, and I thought : *might a direct way be made ?*

During the 1914 war, daydreams of climbing had to take the place of the real thing for me as for so many others, and in my own case they were framed in terms of British crags with suitable alterations of scale. One of those, based on a fleeting glimpse during a walk across Kirkfell, was later fulfilled by the discovery of Boat Howe crags. Another, the finest, was a Brenva face which presented itself as a stupendous and complicated cliff. My mistake had at once asked the question why the Brenva route did not go directly to Mont Blanc, and my dream rectified the indirectness in a delightful manner. The Brenva face itself rather than a direct way to Mont Blanc thus became the subject of the dream, which created a strong hope to go in fact where the dream led in fancy. Ill health after the war retarded my first visit to the Alps, and thereafter it was not until 1926 that I got my first view of the actual Brenva face. When Brocklehurst, Herbert and I sat down at Plan Ponquet on our way to the Dôme hut that year, the old Brenva route became properly orientated—‘that silver stair above the silver door.’⁸ It was obvious, however, that the Brenva face still asked its compelling question. The face is seen much foreshortened from the valley, and it was possible to trace a direct route up its lower part which looked much more simple than the old dream.

In the course of the following winter I read Finch’s book and examined his view of the Brenva face from the Torino hut.⁹ It seemed probable that the rib in the centre of the face (that of Route Major) must be the upper part of what I had seen from the valley. Should you look at an unclimbed Brenva face to choose a first route up it, you would search for the best way up the face as such, and would not consider the directness of that route to either of the crowning summits. The Sentinelle route (which can scarcely be seen either from the valley or from the old Brenva route) would be too insignificant to attract notice, however directly it may lead to Mont Blanc, and the Via della Pera (which can only be seen in full face) would be too deterrent. Attention would be fixed on the great ridge of Route Major, which had thus become the subject of my own hopes.

⁷ A somewhat similar route was actually taken by Kuffner’s party in 1887 (*A.J.* 14. 404).

⁸ Claud Schuster, *Peaks and Pleasant Pastures*, 1911, p. 60.

⁹ Finch, *The Making of a Mountaineer*, 1924, p. 224. I had not myself yet visited the Col du Géant.

Early in the spring of 1927, Herbert and I discussed our future plans, which centred on the great routes to Mont Blanc. It was then that I put my greater project to Herbert, and the Brenva question was admitted to our plans. The weather that season was, however, atrocious, and forbade any contact with the face so long as we were together, although we were able to examine and verify my route from the Col du Géant and again from the valley on our way to the Col de Trélatête. Herbert's holiday came to an end in a series of snowstorms, and I was fortunate to find Smythe (whom I then met for the first time) unattached at Montenvers, and to discover that he too would like to try the Péteret ridge which had been one of our own plans and on which he himself had recently been turned back. Herbert, during his last evening, spoke of my project on the Brenva face and generously gave up his own claim upon it. Smythe was willing, we eventually reached the Col du Géant in good weather, and climbed—not Route Major—but the Sentinelle route.

That the least significant of the routes on the Brenva face should have been the first to be ascended is a climbing anomaly and requires an explanation which is part of the history of the origin of the climbs. Soon after Herbert's departure, Smythe told me that he himself had seen a way on the Brenva face whilst ascending the old Brenva route a few weeks before in Ogier Ward's party.¹⁰ This he described as 'up snow slopes like the Brenva route,' but he had no other clear memory of its detail. When we arrived at the Torino hut, I pointed out my own ridge of Route Major, and Smythe was emphatic that the final buttress was impracticable. He then in turn indicated a route of his own. This was to ascend near the broken ridge of rock which parallels the line of the old Brenva route at no great distance to the left, and above the top of which Collie, Hastings and Mummery tried to force their way through the ice cliff at their first attempt on the Brenva route in 1894.¹¹ But our inspection at once showed that the ice cliff above the rib was quite unclimbable, and Smythe said that his idea had really been to come back under the cliff to the exit of the old Brenva route, because he knew the way through it.

Such a route would have been merely a variation of the old Brenva route which cut out part of its interest whilst adding to its danger, and it appealed to me as little as did my own route to Smythe. A tentative proposal to go along under the ice cliffs

¹⁰ *A. J.* 40. 45 (and see next footnote).

¹¹ *A. J.* 17. 537. Ogier Ward told me later that he had reminded his party of this, and had pointed out the place, when they paused on the outer end of the Brenva snow arête during their own ascent.

in the other direction was scarcely serious,¹² and we had clearly reached an impasse. Smythe went into the hut and I again examined Route Major, still believing it to be practicable. Then my monocular glass searched the face more generally, and suddenly the insignificant twisting rib of the Sentinelle route became significant, because it offered a *via media* in two senses of the word to Smythe's route and mine. I traced the route and eventually proposed it to Smythe when he emerged some time later, with the suggestion that we should bivouac near where the foot of the broken rib must be,¹³ and with the diplomatic promise that, should my new-found route fail, we would then go by his way up the rib and so back to the old Brenva route. Next day, we reached a suitable bivouac place under the rock which we called the 'Sentinelle rouge,'¹⁴ and on the day following we were successful on the Sentinelle route. This then is the explanation of an apparent anomaly. The Sentinelle route is technically easy but exposed, and although it may not nearly approach its two neighbours on the Brenva face in standard or grandeur, it is nevertheless a fine and direct way to Mont Blanc. That such a route was first detected on one day and completed within the next 48 hours is perhaps something of a curiosity.¹⁵

The manner in which Route Major arose out of the first dream has been described above. During our ascent of the Sentinelle route in 1927 I was able to make out a practicable way up the N.W. face of the final buttress of Route Major, but my suggestion that we should return to the Torino hut and try it was vetoed. Farrar's encouragement after our return home, however, placed

¹² A somewhat similar route seems actually to have been taken by Gréloz and Roch on August 8, 1936 (*Revue Alpine*, 44. 91), and to have been repeated by another party in 1938. Another slightly different way has also been taken on this part of the face. After the ascent of the Sentinelle route in 1927, Signor Allegra, who had ascended the old Brenva route by the now usual 'Coolidge exit' in 1901, confused that exit with what may be called the 'Sentinelle gap,' and thought that Laurent Croux must have led the party from near the top of the old Brenva route along under the ice cliffs to the Sentinelle gap (*Riv. Mensile*, C.A.I., 49. 23). This error led to the erroneous inclusion of a so-called 'Allegra' route in the Climbers' Guides, and the route was actually climbed for the first time on July 2, 1937, by Dr. Azema with Armand Charlet (*Alpinisme*, 12. 205). It is indirect and dangerous. My information is based upon what Croux himself told me.

¹³ The lower half of the Brenva face cannot be seen from the Torino hut.

¹⁴ The origin of the name 'Sentinelle' may be of interest. I had suggested 'Col de la Porte' as an appropriate name for what is now called Col Moore, and also that our bivouac rock should be called the 'doorkeeper' or some similar name. But 'Concierge' would hardly have done and it was Smythe who proposed the more romantic name, 'Sentinelle.' Farrar later suggested 'Col Moore,' which was adopted but thereby took the meaning from the 'Sentinelle rouge.' The route itself takes its name from the rock.

¹⁵ It has been said that T. S. Blakeney had previously suggested the Sentinelle route, but he himself tells me that the idea never occurred to him.

it amongst our plans for 1928, and he also suggested to us that we should use Route Major in order to cross the great col between Mont Blanc and Mont Blanc de Courmayeur.¹⁶ In doing so, Farrar transmitted to us Oliver's original idea, and to the latter is due the inception of what I later called Col Major.¹⁷

There remains the inception of the third route on the face, and it was early in the autumn of 1927 that the idea of the Via della Pera began to take shape. Whilst examining my photographs of the Brenva face, I noticed a shadow on the snowfield to the left of the base of the final buttress of Route Major and realized that it must be cast by a small aiguille. My first thought was that it would be amusing to add another *Viertausender* to the Alpine list. This thought soon began to fade in the interest of the way up to the small needle, dominated as that way is by the great 'Pear' buttress which ultimately became a sort of end in itself. In this manner the small aiguille faded as a motive and the Via della Pera itself gradually evolved as a projected route to Mont Blanc de Courmayeur. Therewith, the Brenva face became a complete picture, with its direct and separate routes to the two great summits and to the great pass between them. The completion of this as a whole, rather than the achievement of each of the three routes necessary thereto, became a compelling ambition.

Smythe was willing to try to get to the small aiguille from above, but not from below, and the great pass was therefore the chief of our projects in 1928, when our plan was to bivouac on the pass after ascending Route Major, so as to descend the other flank next morning. We were successful on the route, but the bivouac was vetoed and the crossing of the pass was abandoned. For the next five years the completion of the pass shared my hopes with the Via della Pera.

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I found a partner for these projects in Alexander Graven at the very end of the 1928 season, but it was not until 1933 that our hopes were at last to be fulfilled. At none of our repeated visits to

¹⁶ Farrar called it 'the highest, most inconvenient, and least useful pass in the Alps.' Finch tells me that Farrar recognized from the first that the state of the snow for the descent of the W. flank of the pass in the afternoon was the chief problem of the passage. Farrar suggested that, for this reason, we should bivouac on the crest of the pass, and this was our plan in 1928.

¹⁷ It had long been my hope to revive this ancient and forgotten name by giving it to the great pass should I succeed in crossing it. The old name had been the title of one of Montagnier's most remarkable historical papers in the *Journal* (*A.J.* 33. 323, and 34. 347). The sad coincidence that, in place of a letter which I expected from him, I heard of his death on my return to Courmayeur after crossing the pass confirmed this intention.

Courmayeur was the weather sufficiently settled or the conditions on the route sufficiently safe to justify a first attempt on such a climb. Repeated examinations during these visits nevertheless taught us much. We were able to make a close inspection of the outer face of the Pear buttress when we made for that purpose the first ascent of Pic Moore in 1929, Kagami and Gottfried Perren coming with us on a second rope.¹⁸ We had a fine view of the N.W. face of the Pear in 1931 from the old Brenva route, and we looked down upon its S.E. flank from above the Eckpfeiler on the Péteret ridge in 1932.

As year succeeded year, the denial of actual attempt gave an overpowering compulsion to the Via della Pera, and its great Pear buttress seemed to become grander and more dominant with each examination. For the completion of the triptych of the Brenva face, Col Major must be crossed in addition, and this would remove the sting from my former defeat, but the repetition of Route Major necessary thereto became itself as strong a compulsion as the Pear, for its own sake alone, pass or no pass, revenge or no.

It is obvious even to casual inspection that Route Major is not only far less exposed to objective danger than is the Sentinelle route, but must also be of far higher standard and climbing interest. As these years passed, it was nevertheless the Sentinelle route which was repeated, whilst the grander route suffered from strange neglect. Perhaps the Sentinelle route attracted because it led so finely and directly to 'the highest summit in the Alps,' but I thought it more probable that mountaineers had been given a wrong impression of Route Major.¹⁹ In my memory, its passages summed to something great, but detail is apt to make too strong an impression when you are finding the way in the tension of a new ascent, and I longed to have my impressions confirmed or corrected by somebody who had repeated the climb. But none did, for the grand route was neglected, and it began to call to me as something forlorn. Route Major itself and my memories of the first ascent called alike for rediscovery.

The completion of the triptych therefore promised many different satisfactions as the climbing season of 1933 approached. Basil Goodfellow was to join us again for part of the time, and Alfred Aufdenblatten was added to the party that these and other

¹⁸ *A. J.* 42. 105. This, but particularly the complete traverse which we made in 1933 after the first crossing of Col Moore with Michal Vyvyan also in the party (*A. J.* 45. 365), makes an unusual and interesting expedition from the Torino hut.

¹⁹ Even so late as 1937 Route Major was actually described as 'less ideal' than the Sentinelle route (*Deutsche A.Z.* 32. 313).

climbs might be tackled in two pairs. But Goodfellow's date of joining us was postponed (when we decided to devote ourselves to Dauphiné, were the Brenva face by then to be completed), and it was thus a party of three after all which slept on July 25 at the Col du Géant with the intention of attempting the Via della Pera on the morrow. Our plan was to do so without bivouac direct from the Torino hut and to reach the rock rib far below the Pear buttress by a horizontal traverse from Col Moore. Our hopes were to be shattered.

3. COL MAJOR : FIRST PASSAGE ²⁰

We left the Torino hut at 12.56 A.M. on July 26 and reached Col Moore over the Col Est de la Tour Ronde at 3.50, having gone sedately in view of the long day in front. Thence we made a nearly horizontal traverse on and through the rocks above the W. bay of the upper Brenva Glacier. The passage was not uncomplicated, nor was it easy work with a lantern, but at 4.50 we reached the edge of the steep slope of ice and snow which forms the foot of the Brenva face between the ribs of Route Major and the Via della Pera. Here, in line with but far below the Sentinelle rock, we were above the level of the great bergschrund (a double one in 1933, if not double always) which denies direct upward ascent to the rocks below the Pear. Perhaps half an hour's work on the ice slope (so we had reckoned) would take us across to the rocks of the rib, and these would lead up to the Pear and the great question which it asked.

We paused, and the Pear buttress, high above our level, looked incredibly dominant in the dim light. We had always known that it might prove after all to be impossible on trial, and our plan in that case was to spend the night at its foot and to come back across the ice slope early next morning, because this traverse is safe only before sunrise. As we looked, the dominance of the buttress had a strong psychological effect. Despite our intentions, it was decided now to alter our plans. Graven said to me : ' This is the end of the Pear ' (he was to repeat those words again), and for me it was the end of a dream. After a pause, Graven said : ' What shall we do ? ' and I pointed with my ice-axe up Route Major, for we might still win the pass. We went back across an ice gully, and then went straight up from near the edge of the glacier to the Sentinelle rock. The climbing was not simple, but detail is unnecessary because that way is unlikely to be taken

²⁰ For technical detail, see *A.J.* 45. 365.

again. We reached near to the Sentinelle bivouac at 5.34, having climbed very quickly, but having wasted much time by our *détour*.

Here we came again to ground with which I was familiar, and now began the climb to which I had eagerly looked forward. Five years had passed since the first ascent, and in approaching the route for the second time, it was in the hope of meeting an old friend, but yet almost as if it were known only by repute. To leave myself free to form clear judgments I had decided to take no part in the leading, nor did I do so save for some insignificant yards at one place. My sack was even a little heavier than on the first occasion, and *that* sensation was recaptured. It was as an old friend that the route greeted me, but once or twice so heartily that I experienced again the feelings of the former occasion when the issue was still in grave doubt. In such manner did this strange and beautiful climb arouse feelings which elsewhere accompany different kinds of expeditions—repetitions of old favourites and adventures on new ways.

We went forward without pause from the Sentinelle. After crossing the ice couloir which gave us some trouble in 1928, we came to the edge of the great couloir over broken rocks and crossed it at a higher level than before, next reaching the ridge of Route Major by the way which I had taken in regaining it on the first occasion, the rocks now being less heavily iced.²¹ After a pause we went up the ridge, so to reach the outer end of the first snow arête at 7.25.

The route, now about to disclose its first characteristic features, had so far been of ordinary Alpine standard. According to the conditions, ice on the rocks anywhere, or at the gully near the Sentinelle, may of course be troublesome, and the great couloir might conceivably present difficulty, but it was very easy on both occasions and may perhaps always be so.²² At the first part of the actual ridge you are on the steep lower part of the Brenva face below the great snow easement, which is not too easy to realise from the photographs. What chiefly characterise this portion of the route are the glorious views across the face.

²¹ The conditions met in 1928 and 1933 were remarkably similar, but there was more ice on the rocks in 1928, and the snow on snowy passages was softer because we were later in the day and there had been recent heavy falls, although an exceptionally dry July before them. The chief differences were the presence in 1928 (not in 1933) of bare ice on the slope immediately around the rock tongue on the final buttress, and the presence in 1933 (not in 1928) of a real terminal cliff of ice. The various snow arêtes were alike on the two occasions, save for the actual consistency of the snow.

²² Graven estimated the breadth of the great couloir at its narrows to be 115 ft. and its angle there to be about 30°. The average angle of the couloir is probably about 35°.

The first snow arête, which we now tackled, well deserves mention. On both occasions it was found to be by far the narrowest and least easy of the snow arêtes to be met. In its features it is extremely like the famous arête on the old Brenva route, but it is shorter. The outer part of this present arête was so thin and fragile that we were now compelled to take it *à cheval*, a comparatively rare experience; and, in comparison with the time taken in 1931 on the longer Brenva arête by a comparable party, our present traverse took half as long again. This feature must, of course, vary with the conditions, but it conformed to my memory. In 1928, however, I led it by going along the steep flank just under the narrow crest.

This arête ends rather dramatically against the foot of the middle buttress, which rises in front as a fine mass of rock about 240 ft. high. It has that pleasant appearance of steepness and complexity which promises that a route must be there but asks that the route should be found. We now repeated the former way so exactly that I recognized the small holds on the slabs. We went first up the great couloir flank on the right, there meeting exposure on the slabs, which are perhaps 50 or 60 ft. high. After we had engaged these, Graven thought it wiser to take the lead again, and it gave me a small thrill that my climbing on the buttress had been uninterrupted on the first occasion. Thereafter we traversed the outer face to the left, meeting ice patches (about 35 ft. broad in sum) as before, and again we climbed the ice chimneys on the way up on the left to the top, which we reached at 8.20. The combined passages of the snow arête and the buttress had occupied only 47 minutes, whilst in 1928 my lead took so long as 75 minutes. The way had then to be found and there was more ice, but nevertheless the two times well illustrate the relative efficiencies of the two leads, especially as a pair should here have climbed faster than a party of three.²³

Here, about 1400 ft. above the Sentinelle rock, you are a little higher than mid-height on Route Major, whether you measure the route from Col Moore to Col Major or from the Sentinelle to the ice cliff. Save for the last two passages, the standard of the route has been moderate only, and even these do not raise it to any exceptional level. Our average rate of ascent from the

²³ Our climbing time from the Sentinelle had been 2 hrs. 6 min. In 1928, when I led this stretch (with the very short exceptions noted below) by a longer route, the time was 3 hrs. 25 min., but that time included unrecorded pauses during which I examined a possible traverse to the Pear. On that occasion, after in both cases having been safeguarded down to it, Smythe went first at the brief crossing of the great couloir and at a shorter revisit to the edge of its floor a little higher up.

Sentinelle bivouac had in fact been about 670 ft. per hour (307 on the middle buttress), and this is a little faster than that of a comparable party on the Macugnaga face of Nordend in 1935. That ascent and this (so far) are perhaps of not very dissimilar standards. When we sat down to rest at the same cramped place as before, I found my feet on the upper edge of the self-same flake of rock. This old friend reminded me of the detail on the slabs, and that of my small thrill, so that I wondered what Graven himself thought of the route. 'Quite good,' he said, but after a pause added in qualification, 'for guideless climbers,' and I became duly modest again. He estimated the traverse of the face of the buttress as 'not quite difficult'; the ice chimney 'not easy, nice climbing.' In reality, the slabs are exposed but easy enough.

The first steepness of the Brenva face was now below and we were at the outer edge of the great intermediate easement. Immediately in front lay the second and third snow arêtes which are separated by a small outcrop of broken rocks. Each is composed of two or more segments, and all but the earliest to be met are really the facing right edges of the snowfield on the easement. Nowhere nearly so narrow as the first snow arête, the passage is rather humdrum (or was so on both occasions), but at the inner end of each series (where the angle rises to 35° and 30° respectively and the snow is thinner) there had to be a short spell of step-cutting, more now than in 1928. Perhaps because of the relative lack of interest, I found my memory at fault with regard to the great lengths of these arêtes—indeed Graven estimated that of the longest segment at more than 900 ft. Easy as the actual going may be, the fine airiness and the long duration of the passage combine to give the arêtes a curious quality of formidableness which is difficult to analyse.²⁴

A not too simple snow chimney in the pedestal of the final buttress took us to the sloping snow platform below its serious part, and there we halted again at 10.40. As I fully expected, Graven's estimate of the route (including his qualification) was the same as before, but it surprised me that he seemed to think that our difficulties (such as they had been) were now over, and I told him that they were only now to come.

²⁴ Our time on the arêtes was 1 hr. 40 min. In 1928, with Smythe leading, the whole passage took a little less than $2\frac{1}{2}$ hrs., but this includes a long unrecorded halt and the going on the softer snow (later in the day and after a more recent snowfall) was necessarily much slower. Save for the state of the snow, the arêtes were remarkably alike on the two occasions, and may perhaps usually be easy. A curious low leaf of ice seen at one place in 1928 (it did not get in the way) was absent in 1933, and Smythe's picture (*Climbs and Ski Runs*, 1929, p. 281) sufficiently indicates the general character of these upper arêtes in either year.

There are at least three possible lines of ascent on the final buttress. You reach the platform just under the angle where the outer face joins the N.W. face, that above the great couloir and to your right as you look at it. Far to your left, an obvious way leads up the outer face, but it is dominated by unstable ice cliffs.²⁵ Far in along the N.W. face (but this place you cannot now see), there is what may be an easy enough way up broken rock, but again exposed to falling ice. Midway along that face, however, there is a recess which offers the safer and very interesting way which I detected from the Sentinelle route in 1927. From the halting place on the platform you look along the nearer and overhanging part of the N.W. face, from the foot of which a steep snow slope descends to your right towards the great couloir, ending above steeper rocks. Then the face turns in to your left at a right angle, and from its base at that point a low rock tongue descends the snow slope for about 35 ft., whilst the wall, having turned in, next resumes its former direction as the back of the recess. Your way must obviously lie along the top of the snow slope under the near part of the wall, and the obstacle of the rock tongue must as obviously be overcome either by crossing at its root (the only possible place) or by going round under its lower end. On its far side is a broad ice couloir which falls from the foot of the wall at the back of the recess, and the way leads up that wall.

The root of the rock tongue is gained by ascending the right-angled re-entrant corner between the main overhanging wall and the tongue. This corner leans out and there is a crack in its angle, whilst a sloping ledge above its facing right wall is to be gained. The distance from snow (then ice) to shelf was about 12 ft. in 1928 (less on the second occasion) and the climbing is stiff, but not exceptionally so, because, at the fourth of our attempts in 1928, I was able with the help of Smythe's back to get up level with the shelf although wearing crampons. Thick verglas on the shelf denied any hope of a safe exit, and since then I have thought of the place as the 'unclimbable' corner, a name which may be retained here for convenience.

We left again at 11.15, walked along the top of the snow slope²⁶

²⁵ Two subsequent parties on the route (and perhaps more) have taken this line, which should be avoided.

²⁶ This slope is short (about 100 ft. to the 'unclimbable' corner) and its angle, at first about 35° or 40°, steepens just at the rock tongue to about 50° below the tip of the latter. In 1928, when Smythe led along it, the recent snow had slipped off round the rock tongue and for a few feet on the near side, there leaving bare ice which filled the foot of the corner. At a little distance below the corner, and thence downwards and round under the tongue, there was a thick layer of verglas on the ordinary ice, derived from melted snow on the rock tongue and from snow melted above the overhanging wall.

in one or two minutes to the 'unclimbable' corner, and Graven at once robbed the latter of any right to its name. Then I joined him, and in less than 15 minutes after our setting out we had all come together on the top of the rock tongue, there to experience the most dramatic moment of the whole ascent.

For several hours you have been engaged on the grand ridge, and the first intimacy of the steep lower part of the Brenva face has given place to the greater spaciousness of the fine upper snow arêtes. There, the Péteret arête and the N.E. ridge of Mont Blanc on either hand, so different and each so splendid, have fallen a little from their former high estate. The openness has unfolded, the sky seems wider, and the final buttress is in front. You approach it in expectation of a climax of wide exposure, reach the rock tongue, and look round into the recess to view the way. There, suddenly, you are confronted with a steep and complicated wall, and with an intimacy of rock detail which would be more at home amongst the Chamonix Aiguilles or (save for ice and snow) upon a British crag. In place of spaciousness you find unexpected seclusion, however exposed the actual climbing is to be.

In 1928, this view disclosed itself less abruptly as I cut round the rock tongue with other things to think about. Now, its suddenness almost took me by surprise, and it certainly surprised Graven. 'Where do we go now?' he said, and I pointed out the way. The mouth of an upper rock gully breaks into the wall at the back of the recess at its facing left side, and considerably above its base. This gully is to be reached, but cannot be entered directly. You must ascend and cross the broad ice couloir which falls from the foot of the wall. The wall itself overhangs in places but is ledged and fissured, and, having reached the foot of the wall below its right side, you ascend steep rocks (more iced in 1928 than in 1933) to a ledge below a shallow chimney or re-entrant corner scarcely 10 ft. high. The facing left side of this is formed by a protruding flake of rock which has a level top under an overhang. This gained, you must then take a long and exposed stride to the left on to a most fortunately placed knob of rock under the abrupt near end of a ledge. The ledge, partly occupied by a mass of ice in 1928 but only by snow in 1933, appears to end as abruptly about 15 ft. to the left, but it turns round the corner along the near wall of the upper rock gully, and then all the difficulties of the final buttress are below you if you take the correct way.

Graven was apparently unconvinced, and asked again, 'Are you really quite sure?' There could, of course, be no mistake, but the question made me look again to make certain of the

undoubted. I must, however, have been affected by Graven's scepticism, because the problem, which should have been : Is that my old way ? now suddenly became : Will that way go ? and for a moment I again had the feelings of doubt with which I had seen the wall in 1928.

Whatever it may have been in 1928, present doubt was a fantasy, and I put it aside, telling Graven that the way was certain. Then a happy thought struck me and I pointed to the top of the flake at the small chimney, saying : ' Be careful, there are some loose stones there ' (but these cannot be seen from below). This settled the question. Graven cut across the ice couloir, reached and won the chimney, found the loose stones, took the long stride, and secured himself on the ledge. Then I joined him, having first brought the third man up to the foot of the chimney. As I came along the ledge, I found Graven at the same place which I took in 1928, and it was interesting that he adopted my former tactics, passing me through him round the corner into the gully as I had passed Smythe. There we all arrived at 12.25.

This passage would not be considered more than difficult were it on a British crag, but altitude and ice upon the rocks make a big difference. The entry into the upper gully cannot be much more than 50 ft. above the top of the rock tongue, and the whole complicated movement is certainly very much shorter than one rope's length. In 1933 we had the great pass in front of us and were moving as fast as safety permitted, but this short passage occupied the party for so long as 55 minutes. In 1928, the time which elapsed between my leaving the foot of the ' unclimbable ' corner and entering the upper gully was 2 hours and 45 minutes, but this time included the ice traverse. Perhaps that time should be equally divided between the ice traverse and the rock wall.

Having entered the rock gully, the greater part of the final buttress (about 230 ft.) is still above you, but the way is easy and occupied 20 minutes only, whilst the effective climbing in 1928 took only about 5 minutes longer. We left the gully by the first exit to the right and later ascended a 50-ft. rock wall between two successive snow slopes by the same route which had been found before.

We reached the top of the final buttress at 12.50, to find a formidable cliff of ice. There had been none in 1928, but by 1931 the ice had already advanced and there was now a cliff which was overhanging in most places and at its lowest was more than 30 ft. high. A flake of ice with vertical edge and horizontal top came out from the cliff, and the angle of its flank only just permitted ascent. Graven's fine work (the flank took



Photo, T. Graham Brown.]

MIDDLE BUTTRESS, ROUTE MAJOR, FROM FIRST SNOW ARÊTE.
Twisting rib of Sentinelle route on right.

[To face p. 192.]



Photo, T. Graham Brown.]

'UNCLIMBABLE' CORNER, ROUTE MAJOR.



Photo, T. Graham Brown.]

ROUTE MAJOR, ROCK TONGUE AND UPPER
PART OF 1928 ICE TRAVERSE.
(Bird's-eye view.)

20 minutes) appeared to me to be as severe as that on any part of the 'ice-nose' of Piz Scerscen which he overcame in 1930. A painful movement *à cheval* along the sharp upper edge of the flake was then followed by more ice work, and at that the upper slopes were reached. When I joined him, Graven said something to me which took all qualification from his former estimate, and now put Route Major in the highest class to which it belongs in fact. Later on he spoke of the detail: the 'unclimbable' corner 'might be impossible,' the small chimney 'difficult, but the holds are good' (add, 'such as there are'); the subsequent traverse 'exposed'; the rest of the final buttress 'nice easy climbing'; the ice cliff 'as one finds it.'

The time was 1.25 P.M. and we went on after a good rest, so reaching Col Major at 2.44.²⁷ The day was brilliant, but clouds had formed on the Glacier du Mont-Blanc and the snow which we now descended on Kesteven's route on the S.W. flank of the pass was too soft. Going down very rapidly, we met dangerous snow at 3.25, when we also reached the ascending mist. For a moment we looked across to the rocks of Kennedy's 'Rochers' route, but the state of the snow denied a traverse. There was therefore nothing for it save to retrace our steps. The ascent was steep and laborious, and we did not regain Col Major until 5.5.

We were in two minds whether to sleep at the Vallot hut and to return and complete the pass next day (an untidy proposal) or to do so at once by Kennedy's route. When we reached the highest exit of that route over the Calotte of Mont Blanc at 5.40 (we had halted on the pass), the clouds had cleared again and we turned down its rocks. The evening was most beautiful, and we interrupted the fine descent with two long and serene halts. Then we jumped the bergschrund on to the Glacier du Mont-Blanc at 9.30, just before the lantern had to be lit. Night closed on us as we went towards the Sella hut, and dangerous snow stopped us yet again when only 15 minutes above it. So we had to reascend to find a bivouac place, which we did at 10.40 P.M. By that time our actual climbing had occupied 17 hours and 23 minutes from the Torino hut.²⁸

It was a cold and sleepless bivouac on snow, but we had taken the risk in order to cross the great pass in a single day. That day had been one in which even the disappointments were fortunate.

²⁷ Our actual climbing had then occupied 10 hrs. 40 min. from the Torino hut, but we had lost considerable time by our *détour* towards the Pear. Col Major, the depression between Mont Blanc and Mont Blanc de Courmayeur, is about 4740 m. or 15,550 ft. in elevation.

²⁸ Our second descent (by Kennedy's route), excluding the reascent to the bivouac, had taken 2 minutes less than 4 hours of actual movement.

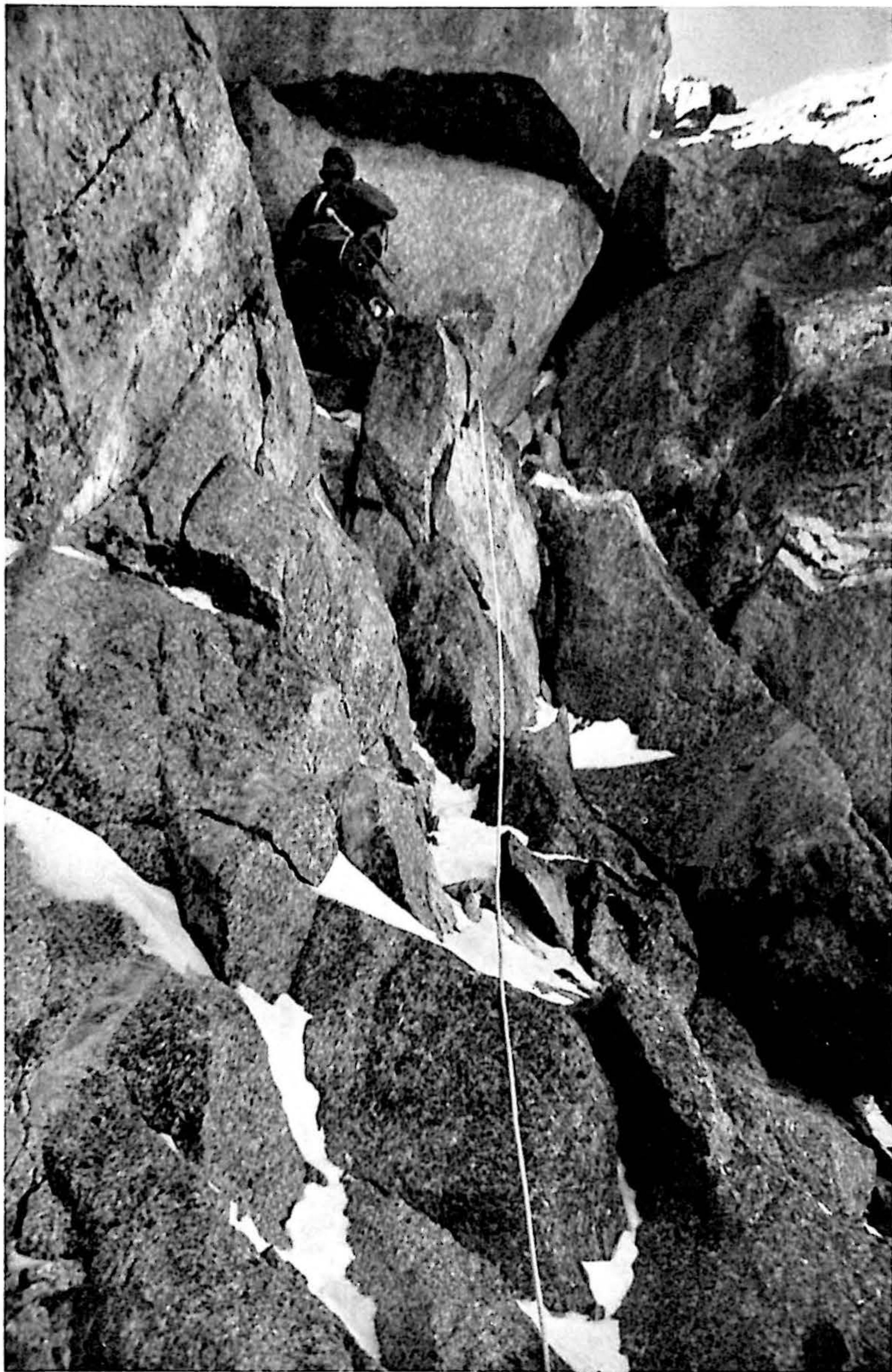
The bitter disappointment about the Pear was, in fact, to last for but a few days, and it was to give us Col Major and the Via della Pera in the proper order, so to complete the great face with the greatest of all its routes. The climb itself had been full of good things. It had been a wonderful privilege to watch the finished manner in which a great guide overcame the obstacles which I had tackled at the first ascent. It had been grand to find that an old friendship was confirmed, and grandest of all merely to renew acquaintance with this beautiful route. The thin mist over old memories had dissolved in the sun of this glorious day, and the features of the route were clear again. The disappointment about our first line of descent forced us to cross the pass in a less 'pure' manner than I had hoped, but perhaps that also was fortunate. In any case it sent us down the finer way of descent by far, and one moreover which I think must be the 'proper' route for the pass. The snow and ice conditions on Kesteven's route may always perhaps be dangerous in the afternoon of a fine day, although safe enough in the morning, and the sane mountaineer will have the choice of crossing in two days by the more direct route, or of crossing in a single day by the grander route of descent. I prefer the latter, and in any case what matters 'purity'? Countless parties have more or less traversed Pointe Helbronner by its S.E. arête, but has any party yet really crossed the Col du Géant?

* * * * *

The completion of the triptych was for the moment as far off as ever, but on August 3 it was decided to my inexpressible relief to make a serious attempt on the Via della Pera, be the buttress what it might. We went up that day to the Col du Géant in wonderful weather, but I had picked up a cold after exposure to a severe storm of wind on the Brouillard ridge two days before, and fairness both to route and to party forced me to spend August 4 in bed at the Torino hut. That day Graven and I went over our plans, fixing our projected times on the approach so that we should reach the base of the Pear buttress at sunrise—an essential for safety.²⁹ My cold improved sufficiently to justify an attempt on August 5.

Now, on the eve of the climb, the route was still in safe condition, the cornice above it having already fallen and all the ice cliffs to which we would be exposed being stable—the other

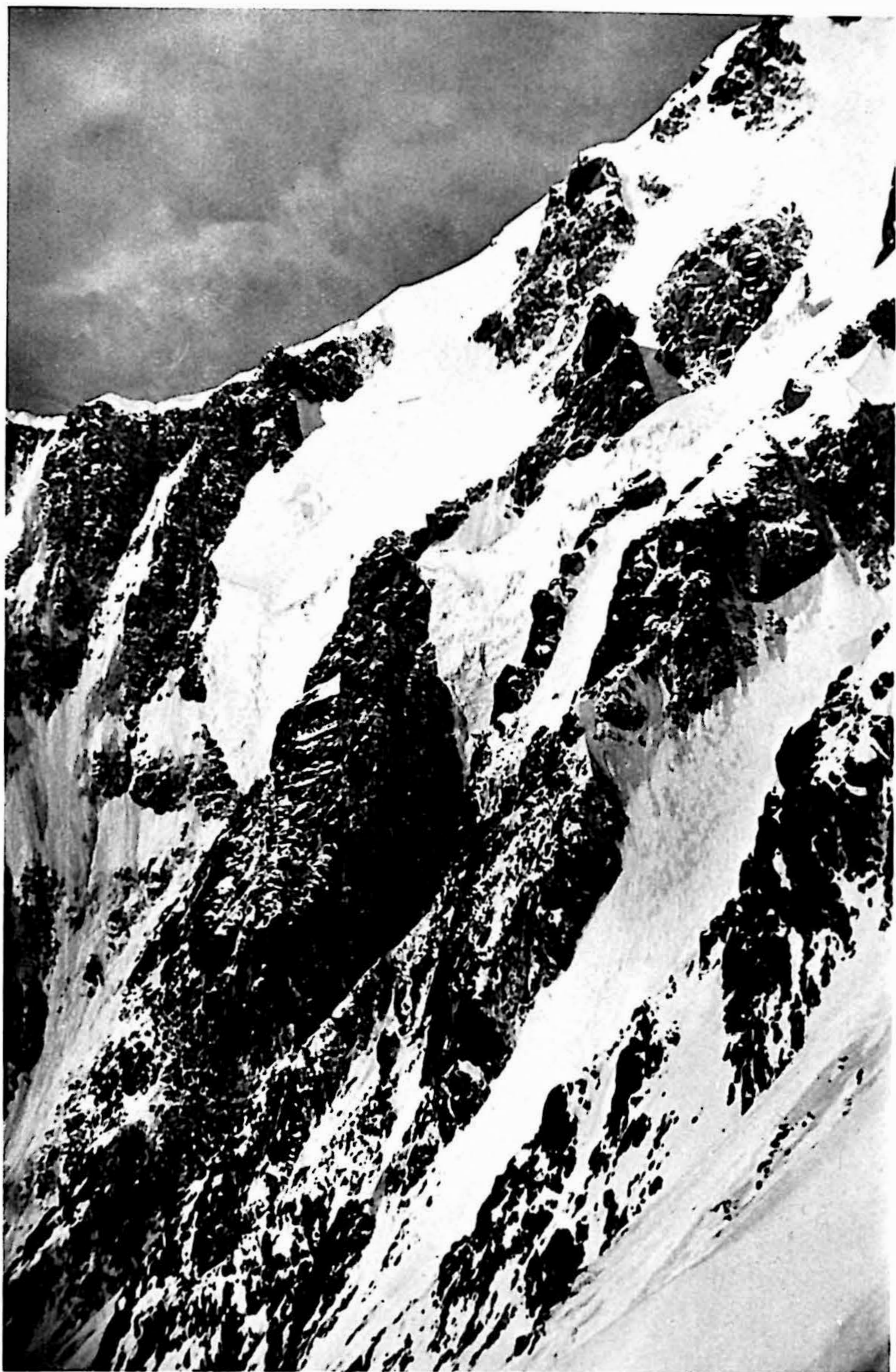
²⁹ The conditions of the routes being safe, it should be regarded as an additional essential for safety that any party must reach the foot of the twisting rib on the Sentinelle route, the crest of the ridge on Route Major, or the foot of the Pear buttress, *at or before sunrise*.



Photo, T. Graham Brown.]

GRAVEN TAKING THE 'STRIDE,' ROUTE MAJOR, FINAL BUTTRESS.

[To face p. 194.]



Photo, T. Graham Brown.]

PEAR BUTTRESS, OUTER FACE AND N.W. FLANK, FROM SNOW ARÊTE ON
OLD BRENVA ROUTE.

The prominent pointed black rock on ridge above the Pear is the Aiguille de
la Belle Étoile.

essentials for a safe ascent. Because the morrow would be a Saturday, we must reach the valley that night, and we resolved to try to do so by way of a descent of the Péteret arête, because, were the Via della Pera to be won at all, we believed that we would reach Mont Blanc de Courmayeur in time for that descent. With weather full of promise and all plans settled, there was now nothing to do until it came to action. An annoying cough had ceased. In great happiness and contentment, I went early to sleep.

4. VIA DELLA PERA : FIRST ASCENT ³⁰

It was the night of the full moon when we left the Torino hut at 12.17 A.M. on August 5, and we had no need of the lantern even when we reached shadow on the central bay of the Brenva Glacier and entered deeper into it on the line of our previous traverse. As we went along from Col Moore in the rocks above the W. bay of the glacier, the great face was incredibly magnificent and vague, so that we seemed to be penetrating the very essence of a grandeur which knew no measure and had no form.

Ten days of good weather had passed since we took that way before. There was thus much thinner snow on the flank of Col Moore and the further rocks were iced, whilst ice had replaced the former snow on some of the slopes. When, therefore, we came at 4.15 to the place at which we turned away on the previous occasion, we were 15 minutes later than our appointed time. We at once set out on the traverse. The nearer part of the slope was covered with snow which was interrupted by ice at the several terminal chutes of the great couloir, one of which gave a little trouble, but so rapidly did Graven nick the steps that I could hardly keep pace with him. Then came stretches of bare ice which each of us ran across in crampons whilst safeguarded by the rope, and so fast had our passage been that the whole traverse (perhaps 500 ft. in breadth) occupied only 22 minutes in place of the half-hour which we had proposed for it. Thus we regained 8 of our lost minutes.

Next came 500 or 600 ft. of height on a ridge of ordinary Alpine standard. The first rocks were slabby and awkward to the crampons, but we came to a little snow point and could then take them off. Above that, the ridge narrowed and presented interest, so that this lower part of the route would itself be enjoyable even were there no Pear buttress above it. That buttress again was grandly dominant, and, as we ascended toward it, the snow of Col Major began to lighten in the first livid manner and soon

³⁰ For technical detail see *A.J.* 45. 368.

glowed up gradually to a bright pink. When we were nearing the Pear, the indefinite edge of a dull redness came down to meet us, and at the instant when we could first touch the nearly vertical lower slabs of the buttress with our fingers, our shadows were cast clearly and definitely upon them. We had reached the foot of the Pear at the very moment of sunrise.

This great buttress, perhaps 900 ft. in height (but that depends on what you take to be its base), is really shaped like a pear hanging in the natural position. The lower ridge ends against it at its point of greatest 'girth.' The outer face is therefore very steep and slabby there, but its angle decreases a little higher up, as would that of a real pear, then again to steepen at the pear's neck. But the wonderful N.W. face, on which the sun perhaps never shines, is almost sheer in the whole of its great height, and to make a true model you would have to remove a large part of the right side of the pear with one slice of the knife. For even greater completeness, similarly slice the facing side of the pear, but leave the piece in contact after sliding it a little down and to the left.

We had feared that the steep lowest part might perhaps stop us for good, but it presented a way up by chimneys and slabs, after which we gained more broken rock above. This we ascended to the left until, at 5.58, we at last reached a place where the three of us could find rather precarious seats. There we rested to eat and get warm in the sun. The views were magnificent and, to the left looking out, the profiles of the old Brenva route, of the frontier arête of Mont Maudit, and of the Aiguilles du Diable, one behind the other, made a wonderful pattern.

The direct ascent of the upper part of the outer face of the Pear appears to be impracticable. The S.E. flank appears to offer the easiest way up here, as we had seen from the Péteret arête in 1932, but this is exposed to objective danger.³¹ My own preference had been for the N.W. face could we get round on to it, because the latter face, whilst apparently the more difficult, is completely free from the danger of falling ice. Although it was a problem whether it would be possible to get on to that face, we now resolved at least to try. If the model of the pear has been followed, it will be seen that the more broken and less steep part of its outer face ends against, and is extended to the right by, a more clean-cut and vertical part which may be called the

³¹ MM. Gréloz and Roch made the second and so far the only other ascent of the Via della Pera on July 24, 1937. Failing to find the weakness in what is called the 'curtain' below, they risked the S.E. face and were there nearly overwhelmed by a fall of ice (*Alpinisme*, 13. 197).

'curtain.' This and the N.W. face join at a right angle, the edge between them being extremely steep but not unbroken.

We set out again at 6.21 to see whether a point might be found at which the 'curtain' was climbable and the edge might be turned. Steep but broken and interesting rock took us up to the right towards the lower of two larger ledges on the outer face which appear to carry permanent patches of snow. It was not until we had come between the levels of these patches (so I think) that the 'curtain' offered a possibility of ascent, but there or thereabouts it permitted Graven to make the way up to an easement on its steep right edge, whence it proved possible to turn the corner on to the N.W. face. The sheer ascent had been a fine and finished piece of climbing.

The N.W. face proved to be as exposed as had been expected, but far less broken. Its narrow ledges sloped out and were snow-filled, as possibly they always may be. A first series of ledges and intermediate slabs took us upwards and in for about 130 ft. Then a more direct ascent of about 65 ft. up slabs had to be taken. This was followed by a traverse on ledges up and out for perhaps 70 ft., the way being greatly exposed, as on the whole of this face. Next we had to ascend about 30 ft. more directly, and here or hereabouts we came to an impasse.

On either side of a holdless piece of rock there appeared to be a possible but very difficult line of ascent. Graven chose that on the right, but was stopped by it. After a little he said to me: 'This is the end of the Pear,' and I replied: 'Come down and try on the left,' but he repeated: 'This is the end of the Pear.' I urged him to try again, and he made a great effort and overcame the difficulty. It puzzled me that Graven had been so convinced that we were stopped for good although there was at least a chance that the other way might have gone, and I asked him about it afterwards. He told me that he had felt the line of ascent to be so single and exposed up to that place—there had been no alternative to our route anywhere, and the smallest unclimbable obstacle must have turned us back—that he had been impressed by the feeling that, if we should be stopped, there could then be no alternative way. In that frame of mind, both my own words and what he had himself seen seemed alike to be unreal, and this incident well illustrates the tension produced by that face.

Above the obstacle there came a third traverse, now upwards and inwards. It was again interrupted by steps and was longer than before, ceasing dramatically at about 160 ft. of upward slant. There the narrow ledge ended abruptly against the smooth face of an upright extension of the rock which formed its floor. This

was like a shallow buttress rising from a narrow terrace against the wall of a building, and it ended some 20 or 30 ft. higher against the sheer wall of the Pear. In the angle between the two there were, however, sufficient holds, and Graven won the top of the leaf, there to find a chimney on its far side. This led up to a platform, above which more climbing and an ice-filled chimney took us to the top of the Pear buttress, where we came again into sunlight and freedom. Graven's lead had been magnificent.

We found a place to rest at 8.25 and there sat down in great happiness because we knew that there would now be no insuperable difficulty in front. Going on again, we went up a ridge of moderate quality towards my little aiguille, which rose abruptly before us as an almost unfissured needle of rock. From the neck between it and the Brenva face, an ice couloir descended and swept round the front of its base to the right. This we reached and ascended, so coming to the neck and thence going up to the summit of the aiguille. There we built a cairn and christened the aiguille with a name of which I had long thought. Small as it was, this rock had played a significant part in the history of the Brenva face, so that it well merited a distinctive name. One which would signify both achievement and good fortune was at hand in a forgotten older name of the Aiguille Blanche de Péteret,³² and I called the little aiguille the *Aiguille de la Belle Étoile*. If others also use this name it will rescue a beautiful one from oblivion and give it a higher habitation than before in its own glacier basin. The aiguille itself is worth visiting for more than the splendid route which leads up to it: it affords the best view of the huge upper ice cliff of the Brenva face, an amazing sight and one of the wonders of the Alps.

After crossing a broad ice couloir, we ascended broken rocks (the counterpart of the final buttress of Route Major) and so came to the place where the great ice cliff turns at a right angle up towards Mont Blanc de Courmayeur, there being a steep ice couloir between the cliff and the rocks of that summit. My plan had been to cross the foot of this couloir to the left and then ascend by the rocks, but whilst we were on the summit of the Aiguille de la Belle Étoile there had been considerable stonefalls from these rocks (the only ones which I have seen on the Brenva face in the course of four visits, or five if the old Brenva route be included, as well as many examinations), and the way by the rocks was obviously prohibited for the time being.³³ The ascent

³² See *A.J.* 11. 90.

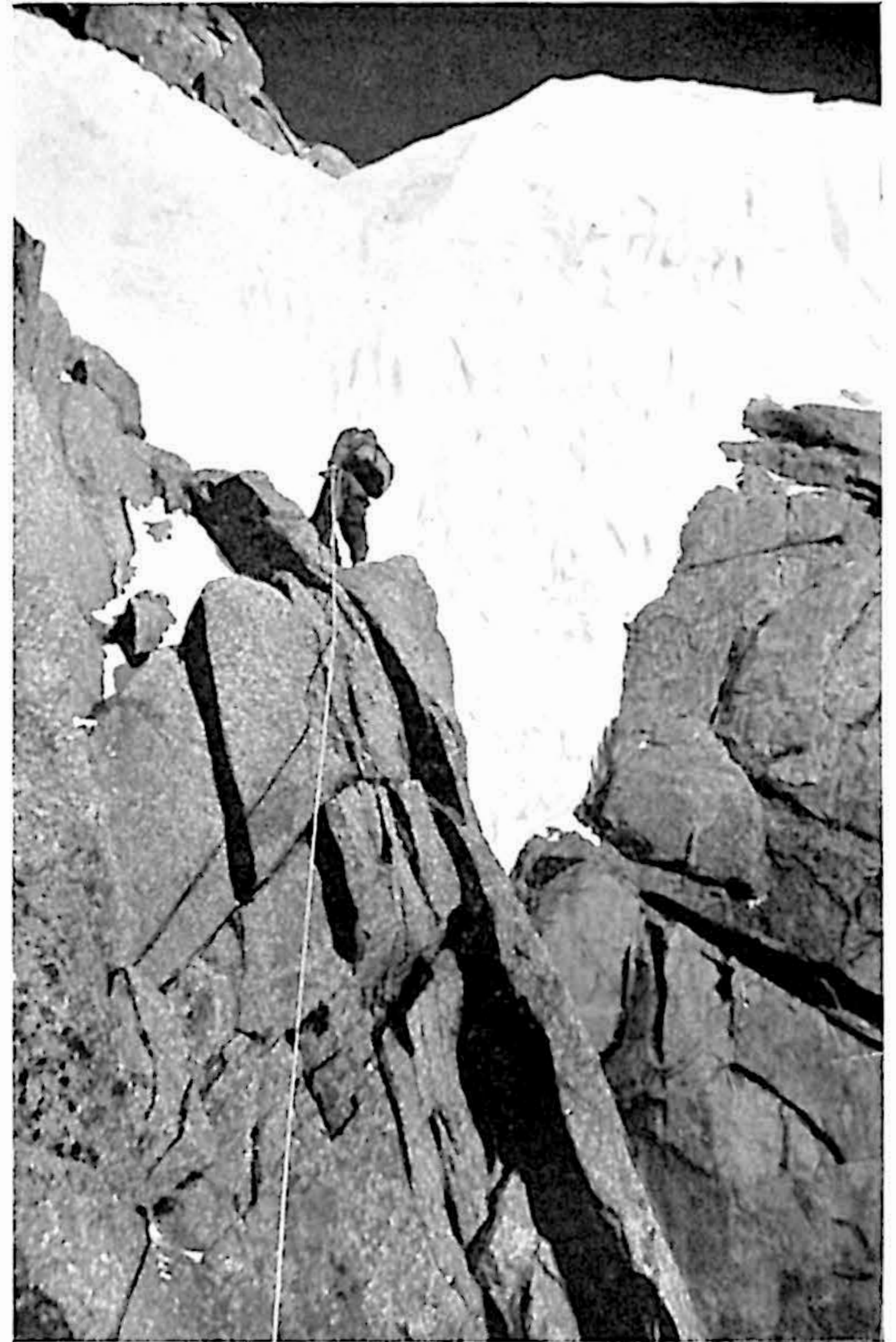
³³ These rocks were broken and looked to be similar to those which lead up to the ice cliff. This exit was taken by MM. Gréloz and Roch at the second ascent of the route, and is more direct than that to which we were forced.



Photo, T. Graham Brown.]

ON OUTER FACE OF PEAR BUTTRESS,
BELOW THE 'CURTAIN.'

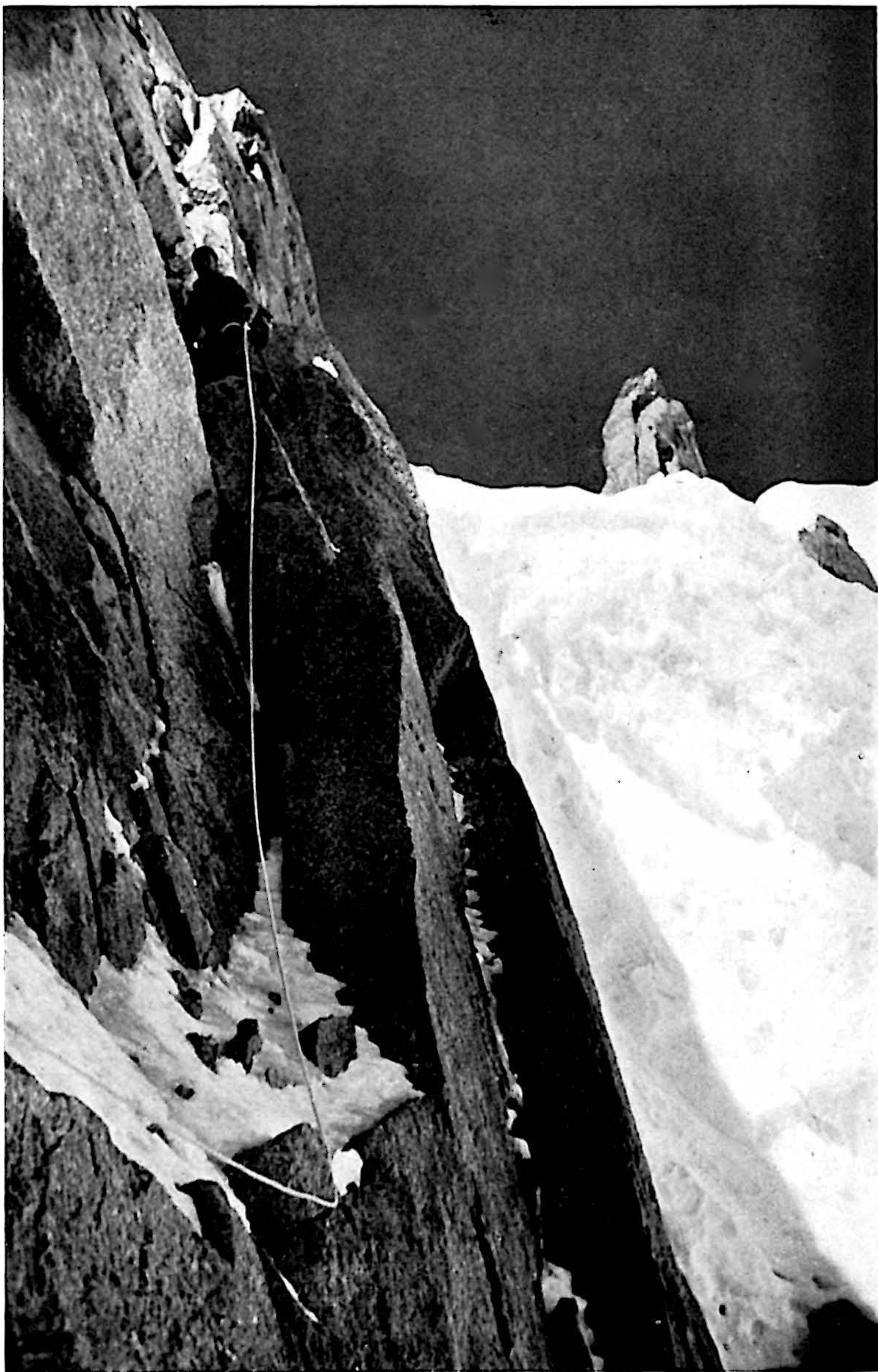
(Bird's-eye view.)



Photo, T. Graham Brown.]

GRAVEN ON TOP OF THE 'CURTAIN,'
PEAR BUTTRESS.

[To face p. 198.]



Photo, T. Graham Brown.]

END OF THE LAST TRAVERSE, N.W. FLANK OF PEAR BUTTRESS.
Top of Aiguille de la Belle Étoile above ice cliffs on right.

of the ice couloir was long, delicate and difficult, but at last we emerged through the séracs at its head at 11.55 and sat down nearby.

All the difficulties of the Via della Pera were now beneath us, and we rested to enjoy our success and to eat. I took the food as it came, thinking about the climb. We were surrounded by light and the heat was great, but it seemed as if a pool of cold darkness, partly of the night through which we had come and partly of the night's unspoken thoughts, still must lie about the feet of the Brenva face, hidden from us by the steepness. As the dimness had then taken all form from the face but had left its grandeur, so now the glare seemed to drown the detail of the route and to leave it merely a splendid but featureless whole. That first impression has remained, and despite its wonderful and varied detail, despite even the great Pear buttress itself, the Via della Pera in its wholeness seems to be a single thing which rises up out of darkness into light, and we to have been like divers who broke surface at last in this fierce brightness where the route was won.

We reached Mont Blanc de Courmayeur ³⁴ and then turned down the Péteret arête. But the strong sun of this and the previous days had had its way with the thin snow, and after a time we met bare ice, so that it soon became evident that the rate of step-cutting would prevent us from reaching the valley that night. We therefore returned and reached Mont Blanc at 3.6 P.M. We took a long rest at the Vallot hut and descended to the Dôme hut, where we had a good supper before going on. Finally we reached Courmayeur at 1.59 next morning, having been by then in actual movement for 19 hours and 23 minutes since leaving the Torino hut.

During our moonlit walk down Val Veni, my mind was occupied with the fine detail of the Via della Pera and the incidents of our climb, and next my thoughts dwelt on the Brenva face as a whole—the triptych and its panels. The Sentinelle route was good enough for a beginner's piece, but the other two were in another manner. Try as I might, I could fix no preference between them, so finely do they differ. The Via della Pera must be the most difficult of the direct routes on Mont Blanc, and one of the grandest. Route Major is (to my mind) the most delightful and the most beautiful way on Mont Blanc, and certainly not the least in order of difficulty. There the two great routes may be allowed to stand in equal partnership, and none may know the grandeur of the Brenva face who has not tasted the beauties of both.

³⁴ Our climbing time from the Torino hut had then been 10 hrs. 30 min.

When I came to Plan Ponquet I honoured an old habit and turned aside to look at the Brenva face, now long familiar and at last complete. But it was in shadow from the moon and again had the aloofness of an unknown face, as when I had first seen it from this same place seven years before.

The details marked on the frontispiece photograph, taken from the S.E. arête of the Tour Ronde, are as follows :

- Via della Pera, 1933.
- . — . — Col Major, route followed in 1933.
- Traverse to Sentinelle (1927, 1928), and route to ' 1928 ' arête used that year.
- — — — Route de la Sentinelle.

- A. Mont Blanc de Courmayeur.
- B. Col Major.
- C. Mont Blanc.
- D. Sentinelle rouge.
- E. Pic Moore.
- F. Foot of S.E. arête of Pic Moore.

- 1. Col Moore.
- 2. N.W. end of crest of Col Moore.
- 3. Edge of snow slope under Brenva face.
- 4. Foot of Pear buttress.
- 5. Top of Pear buttress.
- 6. Aiguille de la Belle Étoile.
- 7. Top of sérac wall on Via della Pera.
- 8. Route Major : lowest snow arête.
- 9. Route Major : rocks between middle and upper series of snow arêtes.
- 10. Route Major : final buttress.
- 11. Lower part of great couloir.
- 12. Sentinelle route : Twisting rib.
- 13. Branch couloir.
- 14. Ice arête on Brenva route.