Ascent of the Mönch, by Reginald Somerled Macdonald.

AMONG the various discomforts that enhance the pleasure of mountaineering, few are more prized by the climber than those which attend a nocturnal bivouac in the Alps. To be fully impressed with the importance of the hills, one must have spent one night at least among them. Then indeed they solemnly assert their majesty, and man is fain to believe that his intimacy with them is founded more on their tolerance than on any prescriptive right of his own.

Never did I more fully enjoy these pleasures than on a superb night in July, 1863, when I found myself the solitary tenant of the lower of two caves which are held to constitute the Faulberg. I spent much time on a rocky shelf immediately above our resting-place, admiring the moon-lit glacier and its bounding ridges. No wonder that I somewhat reluctantly ceded to Melchior's humble appeal in favour of the practical advantages of the rocky bed which he offered me as a substitute for the magic beauties on which I was gazing. But it was already 9 P.M., and we were shortly to start for an attempt on the Mönch, whose sturdy and successful resistance to more than one attack made on him during the previous season, from more than one starting-point, had excited at once both my curiosity and my ambition. So I abandoned my chilly vantage-ground, descending into the rudely finished sarcophagus where I was to be for some few hours interred, and submitted to be solemnly wrapped up by Melchior and Almer in sundry blankets and waterproofs, much like an overgrown baby, swathed by male nurses, in an ill-formed cradle. Is it too much to say that I slept there as well as on any feather bed? I can at any rate assert that in my solid rock couch I slept continuously and soundly till I was roused by the guides at 12.30. But then there had been nobody to dispute with me the tranquil possession of my blankets, or to infringe on my allotted portion of rock. My only regret was that I had nobody to converse with during my waking moments. Melchior and Almer had retired to the upper sleeping place, and I now felt somewhat annoyed that there was no one at hand to whom I could communicate the fact that I had enjoyed a comfortable repose, which happy condition, to judge from written accounts, must be rare in the history of Alpine bivouacs.

Whatever my comforts or discomforts may have been, the stern necessity of an early start alone reconciled me to a

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desertion of my warm resting-place, and to turn out, somewhat sulky, and still more shivering, into the cold night-air. I must confess that at that moment I almost envied those who in England were then talking over the last notes of the opera, or otherwise amusing themselves with the prospect of a long sleep in a warm bed still before them. But once in the upper cave all such unworthy feelings of dissatisfaction vanished, and I began to pity those poor mortals whose hard fate condemned them to London hours and London luxuries. Warmly welcomed by a bright fire, I eagerly drank a bumper of scalding wine, much as one swallows soup at Swindon, and then stepped out, believing myself eager for the fray. Even the guides discovered that a more substantial breakfast might come into collision with a recent supper; and at one o'clock we were fairly off, *en route* for the Mönch.

The moon still afforded us so much light that we proceeded for some time cheerily on our way, enjoying the charming effects produced by her beams on the neighbouring crags, till, by suddenly and vexatiously dipping behind the Lötsch Sattel, she obliged us to have recourse to our lantern. The crevasses we had to jump, and the steady though gradual incline of the glacier, caused us already sufficient exertion to keep us warm; but we had not left the Faulberg more than two hours ere the increasing depth of the fresh snow led us to suspect that aloft it might cost us some time and trouble. The Jungfrau Joch, our first goal, lay before us. We had rashly, as experience proved, determined to assault the Mönch by its south-western arête, hoping that, even were this route to prove impracticable, time would be left us to complete the ascent by the south-eastern ridge. I then imagined the latter to be the one by which Herr Porges, our only predecessor in this ascent, had successfully reached in 1858 the summit of the mountain. But Almer, who had been one of that victorious party, seemed to wish that the route should now be varied, and though he represented the rocks of the western face as formidably steep, still he thought that this way deserved at least a trial. And thus it came to pass that we found ourselves at 5.30 looking over the northern plains of Switzerland, with the Wengern Alp at our feet. Immediately to our left lay that depression which one whom I know has not hesitated to stigmatise as being 'obtrusively and almost offensively a pass.' *Entre parenthèse*, I must remark that I prefer even this invidious appellation to so hybrid a nomenclature as 'Col de la Jungfrau.' From our position we could well see and judge of the difficulties which had been encountered by the band of climbers who first forced

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their way from the Wengern Alp to the Æggischhorn. On this perch we held a council of war as to the plan of attack we should adopt to vanquish the Mönch. Almer clearly wished us, for some reason of his own, to try from the west. He had accompanied Messrs. George and Moore during the previous season in an attempt to scale this mountain from the Wengern Alp, in which attempt he not unnaturally failed. But, on the other hand, he could boast that he was present on the only occasion when the Mönch had been climbed.

I may observe that I do not clearly understand the account of Herr Porges's ascent as given in the lately published Guide to the Central Alps. It is there stated that the first ascent of the mountain was effected by the eastern ridge, or that which descends towards the Mönch Joch. On the other hand, I understood Almer to say that he led M. Porges to the summit by the south-eastern arête, the one we eventually selected as our route. Now, Almer pointed out to me the very rocks among which his party had on the former occasion spent the night. These rocks were nearer to the col between the Trugberg and the Mönch than they were to the Mönch Joch properly so called. And it is almost inconceivable that the party of M. Porges, comprising first-rate guides, should have disregarded the nearer and easier ridge in favour of one both more remote and apparently more difficult. I may, however, have misunderstood Almer in this particular. But whether or not M. Porges ascended and descended by our route, I feel confident that he must either have gone up or come down by it, not only from the minute knowledge that Almer possessed of the most unimportant peculiarities of the ridge we chose (a knowledge he must have acquired on that previous expedition), but because I further remember how he laughingly described the nature of the system of progression adopted by that party on the ridge up which we were then going.

And I think I may add it may be inferred from the account given by Mr. Trotter of his unsuccessful attempt of the Mönch in 1862, that he believed M. Porges's ascent to have been made by the same route as that which he tried. He writes in a former paper of this Journal: 'Peter Bohren, who was one of the guides on the only previous ascent,' that of M. Porges, 'had reached the summit in about two and a half hours from the col; we had already exceeded that time, and were by no means at the top.' Now, Mr. Trotter certainly ascended by our ridge; for I can easily recognise the very features of which he elsewhere speaks in his paper, and yet he seems to think that his route, and that of his Austrian predecessor, were identical. Had I

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thought, when on the Mönch, that M. Porges had undertaken the enterprise by the eastern arête, I should more easily have understood how he contrived to spend three days on the expedition. Of that ridge, suffice it to say, that I recommend nobody to try to follow in his footsteps.

But this digression has left us stationary on or near the Jungfrau Joch, not the place one would choose for so long a halt or so cold a morning. The north-west wind was unpleasantly chilly, and gave us a foretaste of what we might expect above. I was left to suffer alone, for Melchior and Almer had gone off to reconnoitre, and, if possible, to discover a path among the red rocks that towered above my head. When their voices and the clatter of their footsteps had died away in the distance, the sense of isolation that at once oppressed me was almost strong enough to make me regret that we had not accepted our good host Wellig's offer of such an additional number of porters and guides as would, in his opinion, insure our success and his profit. Still more did I miss George, my travelling companion, who should now have been with me, had he not been confined down below in durance vile by a bad attack of neuralgia. But my reverie was interrupted by the return of my men, who informed me that the cliffs above were very steep, and the probability of success by that route more than uncertain. So we made up our minds to try the surer though far more distant shoulder, which may, I think, most correctly be called the SE. one. Only a long trudge through deep, fresh snow was necessary to land us on the rocks at the base of this ridge. But this bit of snow-wading was most trying, even to trained muscles. I noticed that the guides exchanged the lead at what I considered to be ridiculously short intervals. Fired by an excusable rashness, I volunteered to lead the way. I fortunately stipulated that the distance during which I was thus to distinguish myself should not be long, and that the proceeding should be treated merely as an experiment. But much before I had led for the fifteen minutes that I had assigned to myself as the term of my labour, I mentally resolved that never again would I inflict on myself any such avoidable torture: not that the slope was steep, but a frozen crust covered over a deep and incoherent bed of fresh snow, and at each step one plunged knee-deep into a floury mixture, from which to free oneself required no small muscular exertion. I hailed with much pleasure our arrival on solid rock at the foot of the buttress which was henceforward to prove our path to the summit. And here we breakfasted. I have heard it said that to the dweller in the

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plains who has accidentally floundered into an Alpine Club publication, nothing is so tedious as the ever-recurring account of Alpine meals and Alpine views. Is it to be expected that he who normally looks on breakfast and dinner as a not unpleasing occupation for otherwise idle moments, who eats at predetermined hours as the result of an acquired habit—can such a one understand what it means to eat and drink when really hungry and really thirsty, what to feast on black bread and enjoy sour wine? Is it to be expected that he whose hard fate, or worse fault, has condemned him for ever to live on the level, can participate in the pleasures of those who have, ere now, seen fair lands spreading far and wide at their feet?

The Alps are ever ready to extend their benefits to those who seek them. Let mountaineers praise their meals—let them boast of the views that they have beheld; and let those who now complain of the mere mention of enjoyments they cannot understand try but for one season what mountaineering means, and then let them tell others what they then think of Alpine scenery and Alpine appetite.

From here our road was plain; we had but to follow the ridge that rose steeply above us till the very summit of the mountain. We had strong hopes of success. But the cold, strong wind led us to fear that on that edge we might find it hard to fight our way to the peak. Wrapped up in all our spare garments, with hats tied down, with warm gloves pulled well up on to our wrists, we started for the fray. We were at once greeted by a cutting blast, driving against us sharp particles of ice; the stormy mist settled down on our path, whitening us with both hail and snow: in fact, it seemed as if the spirit of the Mönch had called forth all his allies to aid him in his resistance. Our very standing-ground was not of the most secure. A narrow edge of ice, not much more than a foot wide, and steep into the bargain; falling away on either hand into a slope of ice that might well be called a precipice, each descending far into the neighbouring ice-valleys: such was the ladder which turned out to be sufficient for the occasion. Melchior, the first in the line, was hewing steps of such a size, that I remember at a desponding moment having fancied, though only for a moment, that he feared we might have to spend the night in one of them, and that he was therefore rendering them as habitable as possible. Next to him came Almer, polishing up the steps, and sweeping out of them the bits of ice that fell into them from Melchior's eager strokes. Last of all I came, wondering at the strength and skill with which these men wielded their long and clumsy-looking axes, and envying the

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warming exercise which they most evidently enjoyed. Steeper and narrower still became the ridge, the cliffs on either side fell away further and steeper, when, as if by magic, the wind ceased howling about us, the mists drew off, were succeeded by the welcome sun, and Melchior cheerily shouted, 'Our difficulties are nearly over.' I gladly heard the news, for I was most undeniably uncomfortable in my then position. Even the noble views on either hand failed to make one entirely forget one's cold hands and still colder feet. But the knife-edge soon widened out into a broad and nearly level pathway; and here the deep snow, which below had been a foe to our progress, became our ally. It was no longer needful laboriously to cut out steps; we made the running at a quick pace, and almost before I knew it we were on the top.

Not the very top, however. We were standing in the centre of a small plateau, from which rose two small snowy peaks, neither of them more than a few feet higher than the snow on which we already stood. It was, however, necessary, according to strict Alpine law, to ascend each of these mamelons.

So the guides spontaneously stood back, and following me in Indian file, we each in turn ascended the southern peak, descended into the miniature valley, and then walked up its northern brother.

However, this process was carried out with a solemnity that completely failed in its object, and made me give utterance to a shout of laughter, which was not less heartily taken up by the guides.

Then Melchior insisted on beating me about the hands and feet till I began to doubt whether even frost-bite might not be more tolerable than its cure. The remedy once effected, we sent down howls of defiance from the northern edge of the plateau in the direction of a dog whom we distinctly heard barking at the Wengern Alp. It was now 8.50, but we could discern round the little hostelry no witnesses of our triumph. Almer was in tremendous spirits at our success, and recapitulated the account of his former ascent. He would hardly let me make use of the short time we had to stay to gaze around. Of the view we enjoyed I will not speak. A mountain that combines all the fine scenes of the Mönch Joch and the Jungfrau Joch requires no praise. But I consider that the view from the top is still finer. To see the Schreckhorn from this point is alone worth the ascent, even admitting that the very climbing is not an already sufficient reward.

After a halt of 25 minutes, we hurried down the steep and narrow arête to the rocks where we had left our provisions.

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Dense mists now filled up the trough of the Aletsch, and the scorching we underwent in journeying through that cloud-land was almost more trying than the freezing we had suffered above. Nor was it easy to find our way through the mists, our footsteps being filled up by the newly-fallen snow. Still we reached the Faulberg safely and joyously at two; but not so joyously as we arrived at the Æggischhorn—to be welcomed by the greetings of friends, and by other luxuries which, at least, we considered ourselves to have deserved.

SUMMARY OF NEW EXPEDITIONS DURING THE SUMMER OF 1864—(continued).

Alps of Dauphiné.

Col de la Muande: *July* 21.—Mr. R. W. Taylor and the Rev. T. G. Bonney, with Joseph B. Simond of Argentière, made this pass from S. Christophe to Riou du Sap. It has been known to the natives for at least one hundred years, but is very rarely used by them; and has never (it is believed) been crossed by English travellers before this year. The glacier on the north side is difficult, and might at times be even impassable. The descent, at first down a steep snow slope and then over rocks and pastures, is easy. Ascent to col, 6hrs. 25m.; descent, 1hr. 55m.

Graian Alps.

Col du Ruitor: *July* 12.—Mr. Bonney and party ascended to the col on the left of the highest peak of the Ruitor by the route followed by Messrs. W. Mathews and Bonney in 1862, and after climbing the peak descended a steep glacier into an upland glen. Following a steep and narrow goat track on the left bank of this, they reached the valley about a quarter of an hour above the village of Val Grisanche. They found that if they had followed the other side of the glen they would have descended to Fornet, three quarters of an hour higher up the valley. Ascent to col, 5hrs.; ascent and descent of peak, 50m.; descent to Val Grisanche, 2hrs. 35m.

Range of Mont Blanc.

Aiguille du Tour: *August* 17.—Mr. Heathcote, with Moritz Andermatten, ascended this peak on the way over the Col du Tour. From the great plateau which feeds the glaciers of Orny and Trient it rises in a double head, of which the one to the left or SW. is the highest. The ascent presents no real difficulty, and the view is far superior to that from the col; and as the whole expedition from Orsières to Argentière only took 13hrs., this ascent may very safely be recommended to future passers-by.

Col de Trelatete: *August* 28.—Messrs. C. E. and G. S. Mathews, with Michel Balmat and Jean Carrier, made a new and difficult pass

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