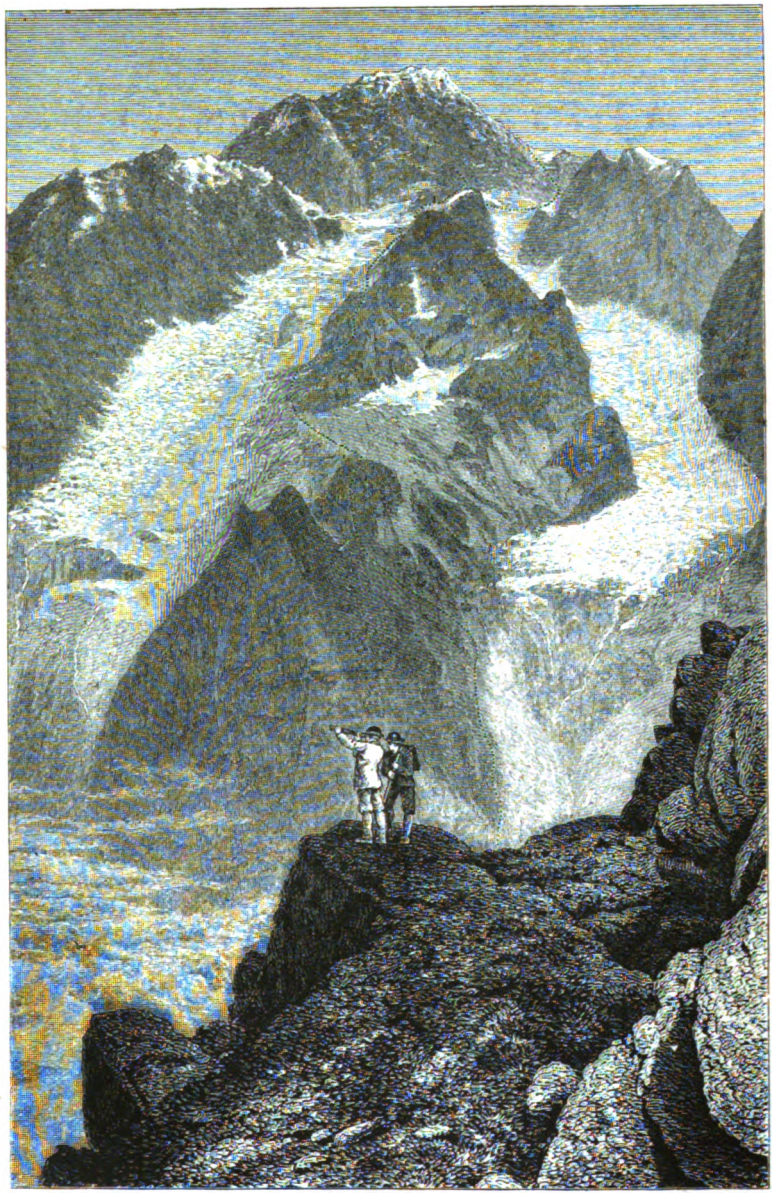

THE SOUTH SIDE OF MONT BLANC, SHOWING THE ROUTE TAKEN BY MR. ECCLES

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An Ascent of Mont Blanc by the Broglia and Fresnay Glaciers. By J. Eccles. Read before the Alpine Club, Dec. 18, 1877.

It is singular that, notwithstanding their close proximity to a good mountaineering centre, the glaciers of the south-western end of Mont Blanc have been, compared with other parts of the chain, so neglected by Alpine climbers. Even the Brenva Glacier, to my mind the most beautiful of glaciers, is but rarely visited, while of the others further south-west, the monotonous ice-canal of the Miage and the insignificant Glacier des Lancettes only are generally known. The visitors to the Fresnay, Broglia, Allée Blanche, and Upper Trélatête Glaciers may almost be counted on one's fingers, yet they present features of more than usual interest. The splendid view of the west face of Mont Blanc from the Aiguille de Trélatête, to which attention has already been called by Mr. Reilly, is by far the most impressive of all its aspects, and can be obtained by the most moderate expenditure of walking and climbing requisite for the ascent of a peak of nearly 13,000 feet.

The remarkable position of the Fresnay and Broglia Glaciers, right under the magnificent escarpment of Mont Blanc, and their wonderful combination of rock and ice scenery ought, one would think, to render them special objects of attraction; yet I believe that prior to the attempt of Mr. Kennedy's party in 1874, only two expeditions had been made to the upper levels of the Broglia Glacier; the first by Mr. John Birkbeck, junior, in 1864, and a subsequent visit by Mr. Utterson-Kelso. Early in July, 1875, I passed over from Chamonix to Courmayeur by the Col de l'Aiguille du Plan, intending to spend a day or two in examining the final rocks of Mont Blanc at the head of the Glacier de Broglia. I had then no intention of seriously attempting the ascent, for I was due at La Grave in a few days to join Mr. Middlemore, and I had previously arranged with him, if my reconnaissance of Mont Blanc in this

direction gave me reasonable hope of success, to return with him to Courmayeur and try the ascent in earnest.

Accordingly one day early in July (the exact date I have forgotten), I started from M. Bertolini's hotel about 10 A.M. with Michel Clement Payot, two porters, and a tent. This tent I purchased in a weak moment in 1870, and have ever since regarded it as a white elephant. In spite of Mr. Whymper's experience and recommendation, I look on tents as useless incumbrances, at least for Alpine work. I have used mine just twice, and on the last occasion if the porter had quietly dropped his load into a deep crevasse, I am sure the relief to his back would have been far exceeded by that to my feelings.

We ascended by the rocks and grass slopes immediately to the west of the end of the Fresnay Glacier; then passing along the moraine on the Broglia side of the ridge, we got on to the glacier for a short time, and turning to the right ascended a couloir in the rocks, reaching the gîte overlooking the head of the little Glacier de Chatelet, which had been used by Mr. Marshall in the attempt which ended so sadly in 1874.

Here we passed the night, and the next morning, starting at 3 o'clock, and following the same route as that adopted by Mr. Kennedy, we reached the upper level of the Glacier de Broglia in about 2½ hrs. It was not our intention after arriving at this point to follow Kennedy's route further, but descending slightly on the left, to cross the glacier and make for the deep prominent cleft in the ridge separating the Broglia from the Miage Glacier, and then to try to find a passage up the rocks descending to the cleft whereby we might gain the south-westerly arête of Mont Blanc de Courmayeur. To reach the cleft was apparently not difficult, but the rocks above were clearly very formidable. They descended to the cleft in smooth, almost vertical slabs, and examined through the glass from our present position presented no practicable breach. Nevertheless, thinking that closer inspection might reveal some weakness, we crossed the head of the glacier and mounted towards the couloir descending from the cleft. We soon found that the descent of the couloir later in the day would involve serious risk both from avalanches and falling stones, and here we were too much under the rocks above to be able to form any opinion as to the existence of a passage up them; so about 8.0 we retraced our steps towards the ridge between the Broglia and Fresnay Glaciers.

This attempted line of ascent is, I have lately ascertained, the same as that of Mr. John Birkbeck in 1864, and both were frustrated by the same cause. About 9.30 we reached a

rocky spur descending west from the highest point in the ridge, which from the Broglia Glacier appears to be an isolated peak, but is connected by a col little lower than itself with the great escarpment of Mont Blanc. Here we halted for breakfast, and being right opposite the great rocky face, we examined it long and eagerly. On the lower part of the face, on the Broglia side of the dividing ridge, the rocks were smooth, descending in huge, almost unbroken vertical planes; but about 800 feet above there was a decided change in texture; the rock was much more broken and the face was furrowed by numerous parallel snow couloirs, some of which seemed to afford access to the main ridge not far to the south-west of the summit of Mont Blanc de Courmayeur. Once above this belt of vertical rocks we thought the ascent would be possible, but Michel and I searched every cleft and joint with the glass in vain for a passage through the barrier.

We then ascended the peak to look round the corner at the rocks descending to the Fresnay Glacier, but we derived no encouragement from this quarter; so about 11.30 we commenced the descent to Courmayeur, convinced of the hopelessness of an attempt from this side of the mountain.

We had assumed the impossibility of ascending by the great south-easterly arête between the Mont Blanc de Courmayeur and the Aiguille Blanche de Péteret—an error, as the sequel will show, and consequently did not examine with any care the approaches to it from the upper basin of the Fresnay Glacier. That our assumption was natural will, I think, be admitted by anyone who has examined it, as I had done, only from the direction of the Col du Géant, where its upper portion is so foreshortened as to appear almost vertical.

In the autumn of the same year my vanished hopes revived in an unexpected manner. Whilst walking one day along the Strand I saw in a shop window a photograph of the south face of Mont Blanc, purporting to be taken from Mont Chetif, but in reality from some point west of the Cramont.

The photograph showed part of the arête nearly in profile; and besides, the upper portion of a broad couloir descending from the arête towards the Fresnay Glacier was clearly discernible. It was evident at once that we had much exaggerated the inclination of the arête, and if there should be no unexpected difficulties towards the base of the couloir, success was not yet out of the question; so I resolved to make one more trial on the first opportunity.

In the summer of 1876 I was again at Courmayeur, but the

weather was so bad that I had to leave without making an attempt. I endeavoured several times to get a view of the mountain from the Cramont, but without success.

Last season I took up my quarters at Chamonix towards the end of June, hoping, before crossing over to Courmayeur, to accomplish several excursions which I had previously marked out. Alas! the hope was vain. The weather was so unmitigatedly wretched that little could be done. By a great piece of good luck I succeeded in getting to the top of the Aiguille du Midi, but this was the only bright spot in a stay of more than a fortnight. An attempt on the Aiguille de Charmoz failed prematurely and ignominiously, and for the remainder of the time I was condemned to listen to the almost unceasing downpour of the rain, rendered even more depressing by the perpetual melancholy splash of M. Couttet's fountain.

At last on the morning of July 10, the previous evening having raised hopes of a change of weather, I found myself at an early hour on the Mer de Glace, with a vague intention of crossing to Courmayeur, but with no definite purpose as to the route to be adopted. This the weather soon settled for us, and in mist and rain we plodded along the familiar route to the Col du Géant. When some distance beyond the seracs the clouds suddenly cleared off, and, struck by a happy idea, I proposed to Michel that we should try a new pass between the Aiguille du Géant and the Aiguilles Marbrées. The suggestion was enthusiastically received both by him and his brother Alphonse, not only because the pass would be new, but, as Michel explained further on, also because by avoiding the Col du Géant the usual Chamonix tax of 2 francs per guide for that well-trodden old pass would be evaded; so we altered our direction and soon arrived at the col.

We found no difficulty in the descent over the Glacier de Rochefort, and in 3¼ hrs. from the col arrived at Courmayeur. I strongly recommend this col as an alternative route to that of the Col du Géant. The total time required is something less, and the view from the col to my mind much finer, while the descent over the Rochefort Glacier is certainly more interesting than that from the better known pass, although it is possible that late in the season the crevasses on the lower part of the glacier may occasion some little delay. The name Col de Rochefort will be appropriate to the new pass.

At Courmayeur the same evil weather pursued us, and as it was evident that for several days at least we should not have a favourable chance for the ascent, we started on the afternoon of the next day for the Châlets de l'Allée Blanche, and on July

12 passed over the Col de Trélatête to St. Gervais, arriving the same evening at Chamonix in torrents of rain.

In descending from the col on to the Glacier de Trélatête, we avoided all incidents of a sensational nature by turning to the left on reaching the formidable ice-fall, and descending by the rocks at the side. The advantage of this variation on the route previously taken will be clear from the fact that the descent from the col to the main glacier was effected in 1 hr. 22 min. of easy descent. Less time would have sufficed had there been any reason for haste.

Still another week of bad weather at Chamonix, during which I made a second false start for the Aiguille de Charmoz, filled up our measure of bad luck; but on the 19th matters began to mend, and the wind changed round to the north. We crossed to Courmayeur the next day, intending to remain there until we could attempt the ascent with some chance of success. For a week longer the weather was in a sulky mood, and the north and south winds had a daily conflict; but at last the north got the best of it, and we decided to try our fortune on the 28th.

In the meantime we had taken advantage of one morning less unfavourable than the rest to ascend the Cramont. For a couple of hours we had a capital view of the great arête, and the longer I looked at it through M. Bertolini's glass the more was I persuaded that it would present no insuperable difficulties if once we managed to get on to it. Michel was of the same opinion. But we were still no nearer solving the question as to the possibility of reaching it. The couloir mentioned as recognisable in the photograph was still an unknown quantity; we could see the upper portion of it, which was broad enough and looked easy, but the lower part was still hidden, as was also the upper basin of the Fresnay Glacier. Michel was apprehensive that we might be pulled up by a 'grande roture,' encircling the glacier head and cutting us off from the couloir, but admitted the force of my reply, that the broader the couloir the greater the chance of finding a passage over the 'bergschrund.'

We started from Courmayeur at 3 A.M. on July 28. Our party consisted, besides myself, of Michel and Alphonse Payot, and two porters carrying a couple of sheepskins and rugs and sufficient provisions in case we should be obliged to pass more than one night on the glacier. We calculated on finding a gîte as high as possible, and on dismissing the porters in time for them to get clear of the glacier before nightfall.

Our route was nearly the same as on the previous attempt:

past the old gîte near the Glacier de Chatelet, and across the western ridge which encloses its head, on to the Glacier de Broglia; then keeping well to the right along the slopes descending from the ridge which divides the Broglia and Fresnay Glaciers, and always parallel with it until we approached a well-marked snow col, from which we looked down on the Glacier de Fresnay below its highest ice-fall, if it is possible to distinguish one ice-fall from another in this wonderfully broken-up glacier. The ridge here is not so well marked on the Broglia side, and merges into a steepish snow-slope leading to the rocks of the peak from which two years before we had made our futile reconnaissance; while on the Fresnay side the rocks descend almost sheer to the glacier at a great depth below. We ascended the slope and reached the rocks referred to at 2.15 P.M.

We were now at a height of about 12,400 feet, being 100 to 150 feet higher than the summit of the Aiguille de Péteret, and as the rocks seemed to be of a reasonably accommodating nature—one might almost call them luxurious, considering the out-of-the-way character of the locality—we decided on establishing our night quarters here, and dismissed the porters.

After spending half an hour in some engineering operations of an elementary but tolerably effective nature, with a view to render our gîte more comfortable, the two guides started for the top of the peak, zigzagging by the steep snow-slope to the right, or north-east, with the double object of making good steps for the next morning, and, if possible, of obtaining a view of the couloir up which our route would lie beyond the Fresnay basin. They returned in about 1¾ hour with the cheerful announcement that the couloir was quite practicable; but as a set-off against such good news, and partly, as I suspected, as a corrective to my exuberant spirits, Michel indulged in some remarks of a discouraging tendency relative to the descent from our peak to the upper level of the Fresnay Glacier, and even ventured to hint the possible contingency of our not being able to reach the base of the couloir at all. Although at first my confidence was a little shaken by his gloomy prognostications, I quickly recovered, and began to treat his remarks in such a spirit of unaccustomed irreverence, not to say contempt, that he shortly subsided, and took refuge in a pipe, remarking finally that I would find out for myself in the morning how pleasant the descent would be.

After supper, which, thanks to M. Bertolini, was of so luxurious a description as to cause me to regret the absence of a 'menu,' we had ample leisure over our pipes to enjoy the

wonderful prospect before turning in for the night. I will not inflict an inadequate attempt at its description. It will not, however, be out of place to call attention to a phenomenon we witnessed, one of a class which, though often heard of, and known to most of us by its effects, yet has rarely been seen by travellers in active operation.

At Courmayeur I had heard several reports, none of them very precise, that something extraordinary was going on in the Val de Tignes, near St. Foi. One account was that a volcano had suddenly broken out in the valley; others were to the effect that about a month before a considerable landslip had taken place, and that the village of St. Foi had been rendered uninhabitable by the frequent fall of masses of rock from a neighbouring mountain. These reports, as far as I could trace them, rested on the second-hand authority of some voituriers who had passed over the Little St. Bernard, and not being able to obtain any direct or more precise information, I put them down as probable exaggerations on some slender substratum of fact.

Little then did I expect such a sight as now met my eyes. A great dust cloud of varying density overhung the Val de Tignes. Of this the higher and lighter portion rose to a considerable height above the mountains immediately bounding the valley, until, caught by a higher and swifter current of air, it was wafted right across the Ruitor Glacier, and beyond some miles down the Val d'Aosta. The Ruitor Glacier itself was at times partially obscured by the slowly passing clouds, while fresh and denser columns, rising quickly from the valley, bore witness to the spasmodic energy of the catastrophe which was going on out of our sight below.

It appears from the statement of an eye-witness, published in the 'Journal de Genéve' a few days later, which is reprinted on page 450, that this mountain-fall had been in operation for nearly two months previously, and judging from the indications we saw on this occasion, and also three days later, there could have been little, if any, mitigation of its intensity.

The night was calm and even warm, and we all slept soundly. I was the first to awake in the morning a little before 2 o'clock, and to my horror found that the clouds had gathered round us, and snow was falling briskly. This was a cruel blow to our hopes of the evening before. We waited shivering until 5 o'clock, hoping for the clouds to clear off, and then, having breakfasted, the snow falling thicker than ever, we stowed our provisions and sheepskins safely in the rocks, and commenced a melancholy descent. When near the bottom of

the Fresnay Glacier the clouds broke a little, and there was a transient gleam of sunshine; so we waited an hour in the vain hope of the weather clearing to such an extent as to warrant our return to the gîte, but the rain came on afresh, and we continued our retreat to Courmayeur.

We found the village *en fête*, but the fact that other people were enjoying themselves did not tend to alleviate our disappointment. We were somewhat consoled in the evening by the disappearance of the clouds, and by the wind changing back again to the north. We decided to start again next morning at 6 o'clock, and at 4 P.M. on July 30 we found ourselves once more at our sleeping place of two nights before. This time we had no reason to complain of unseasonable warmth. The air, though still, was bitterly cold, and we were all glad when the hour arrived in the morning to prepare for a start. After a light breakfast we again stowed away our sheepskins, and leaving behind a bottle of wine, in case it should be necessary to pass another night on these rocks, we started at 2.55 A.M on July 31, and in an hour we reached the top of the little aiguille by the snow-slope on its south-east side which runs up almost to the summit. Here it was necessary to work along an almost horizontal short broken arête, and then down some rocks descending rapidly along the side of a steep couloir leading to the upper névé of the Fresnay Glacier. The descent from these rocks into the couloir was very ticklish work, and was the only real danger incurred in the whole expedition. Had we quitted the rocks for the couloir earlier, we should have avoided all risk, but the opportunity of shortening the step-cutting process necessary in the couloir was tempting. The side of the couloir rising to the rocks on which we were was alarmingly steep, and was blue ice, and the rocks were covered with a glaze of ice, affording a most precarious hold for feet and hands, for until we arrived on the ice below it was impossible to cut proper steps, and, except here and there, we had to be content with chipping off the superficial coating on the rocks. Once fairly in the couloir all risk was over, for although it was of great inclination, and the snow was very hard, yet the descent was now merely a question of ordinary care and plenty of step-cutting. Michel was bent on making up for the diminutive size of the steps higher up by cutting disproportionately big ones here, which, it struck me, was a work of gross supererogation, seeing that further on we should have such a fine field for this branch of industry.

On reaching the névé below we turned round to have a look

at our couloir. It might have been illusion, but at that time I thought it the most formidable bit of work I had ever done. Possibly the light—the couloir being then in deep shadow—had something to do with this impression.

We now hastened with all speed over the uncrevassed upper basin of the glacier, and in 3 hours from our start arrived at the base of the great couloir descending from the long irregular arête connecting Mont Blanc de Courmayeur with the Aiguille Blanche de Péteret, which had been the subject of so much previous speculation. This must not be confounded with another well-marked couloir right across the glacier and close to the Aiguille Blanche de Péteret, the head of which overlooks the Brenva Glacier.

Here we halted 20 minutes for breakfast, just below the 'bergschrund,' and after passing this we arrived at some easy broken-up rocks on the west of the couloir, up which our progress was rapid; but this did not last long. We were obliged to exchange those pleasant rocks for the snow and hard ice of the couloir, and for the next 5 hours, with the exception of about 15 minutes of rock-climbing, every step had to be won with the ice-axe.

At 8.5 we reached the arête about half way between the Aiguille Blanche de Péteret and Mont Blanc de Courmayeur; and here at last we could see the whole of the route to be traversed as far as the latter mentioned summit. Barring accident there was now no doubt as to our success, and we were all in high spirits. There was no particular difficulty—it was simply a question of time and hard work for the guides. My own modest share in the ascent was henceforth almost confined to placing my feet securely into the convenient steps made by the leader, and admiring the energy which he put into his work. We had struck the arête at its easiest part. A few yards further on it narrowed, and the inclination increased rapidly, and except where two bosses of rock, one rather more than half way and the other immediately below the summit, broke its continuity, the ridge preserved an almost monotonous uniformity to the very top. Alphonse now came to the front, and had to keep this position as far as the first boss, about 2¼ hours, for we were obliged to go along the crest of the arête, which, although generally quite wide enough for one, was not sufficiently broad to allow us to change position on the rope. The fresh snow had nearly all been blown away from the top of the ridge, leaving a rounded surface of such texture and hardness that it was not easy to say whether it was ice or snow. It gave hard work to the leader, but good foothold to

those following in his steps. On either side below the ridge the work would have been much harder, and the risk not slight, as the slopes were blue ice with a thin covering of fresh snow.

Our progress was painfully slow, and we were all suffering from intense thirst—the result of indulgence in M. Bertolini's luxuries, so that on arriving at the first boss we were glad to halt five minutes, and find temporary relief in the wine-can, for water there was none.

We pushed on as fast as possible to the second boss, which we reached at 11.20, and in twenty minutes more gained the summit of Mont Blanc de Courmayeur, getting through the cornice with very little trouble. A few minutes' rest was not ungrateful, and although the ascent was not yet completed, we anticipated success over a quiet pipe all round. Hard work was now finished, and the remainder of the ascent was merely an easy stroll over the lightning-struck pinnacles of the Courmayeur summit, then down into a slight depression in the snow field, and finally up the very gently inclined slope to the true summit, on which we stood at 12.35 P.M.

Here feelings of self-congratulation gave place for the moment to those of a totally different character. On former occasions I had been fortunate enough to find the mountain in its normal condition of unsullied whiteness. Now instead of purity I found grievous defilement. Three separate parties, with a multitude of guides and porters, had already preceded us on the summit, and had left its surface widely strewn with the nauseous relics of their repast. The tracks also of nearly twenty pair of feet did not add a charm to mountain solitude; so to escape from these, and fouler abominations, we descended a little on the Miage side, where I meditated on the possible necessity of the Mont Blanc range being placed under sanitary inspection at some time not far distant.

After a rest of 25 minutes we quitted the summit at 1 P.M., and, descending by the Bosses, arrived at Chamonix at 4.40. Thus from our sleeping place the expedition had cost us a little over 12½ hours of actual walking, much less than our most sanguine estimate. That the work, however, had been unusually severe for the guides will be clear from the fact that we had no less than 6¼ hours of step-cutting between our gîte and the Courmayeur summit.

Both guides behaved admirably throughout. Of Michel it is unnecessary to add any recommendation; but as Alphonse is a guide of little more than a year's standing, I have special pleasure in calling attention to one of the rare exceptions in

his district. Both in this and in other excursions with me he has proved himself to possess capabilities of the highest order, and it will not be long before he attains a position in the front rank of guides.

THE WEISSHORN FROM THE SCHALLENBERG GLACIER. By J. W. HARTLEY. Read before the Alpine Club, February 5, 1878.

THE possibility of ascending the Weisshorn from the Schallenjoch had long been a disputed point between Davidson and myself. He was inclined to see no difficulties whatever, while I, though believing in the practicability of the climb, thought it could not be managed in one day from any reasonable camping place. When at Zermatt we stated our case to Hoare, and his vote being in favour of trying the expedition, we got him to join us, and decided to start as soon as the weather would permit.

Hoare's guide, Von Bergen, had succumbed to a sufficiently serious illness of the chest and lungs to place all hope of his being able to accompany us out of the question. I believe this illness was caused by the very rapid pace at which he was brought over the Matterhorn a few days previously; and so serious did it prove that a settled frown of puzzled incredulity appeared on the face of that hitherto unfailing leech, Peter Rubi, who spent the chief part of the day in wandering about the main street at Zermatt in Jaun's slippers, and in company with a large jug of some villanous concoction which he called tea, to my view easily accounting for the tardiness of Von Bergen's recovery. We tried hard to induce a gentleman who had designs on the Matterhorn to give us Moser; but neither the persuasive eloquence of Hoare, nor the specious arguments of that rising counsel, Davidson, could prevail on this stony-hearted monster to part with him. We therefore engaged Pollinger for the expedition, and he, with Rubi and Jaun, made an almost perfect trio.

On Tuesday afternoon, September 4, we drove down to Randa, laden with a brand new tent, which we had stolen out of the lumber-room at the Monte Rosa, and an innumerable supply of potted delicacies. On our way down we looked up at the Schallenjoch arête of the Weisshorn, and I believe all thought we were on a fool's errand. However, a particularly good dinner at the little Hotel Weisshorn induced our council to take a more cheerful view of things. Accordingly, a start