Ascent of 'Iztaccihuatl.'

By H. REMSEN WHITEHOUSE.

IZTACCIHUATL FROM THE WEST.

TWO snow-covered giants are visible from the city of Mexico: 'Popocatepetl,' 18,750 feet; and 'Iztaccihuatl,' 'the woman in white,' as she is called, on account of a supposed resemblance to a female figure stretched at full length with hands crossed on the breast.

I am not aware of the exact height of Iztaccihuatl, but should estimate it at some 200 or 250 feet lower than Popocatepetl—say 18,500 feet.*

The ascent of Popocatepetl is frequently made, and presents no obstacles beyond the tedium of a long snow grind; up to last autumn Iztaccihuatl was generally supposed to be inaccessible.

I have long intended to attempt the ascent, and have several times fixed upon a day for my departure, but my diplomatic duties have invariably interfered, and only on November 8 of last year was I really able to start on the expedition.

Just five days too late, however. To my intense disappointment, I learned, when starting, that Mr. James de Salis, a Swiss climber, who has been after the virgin 'lady in white' for the last two years, had at last placed his con-

* See note at end of the article.

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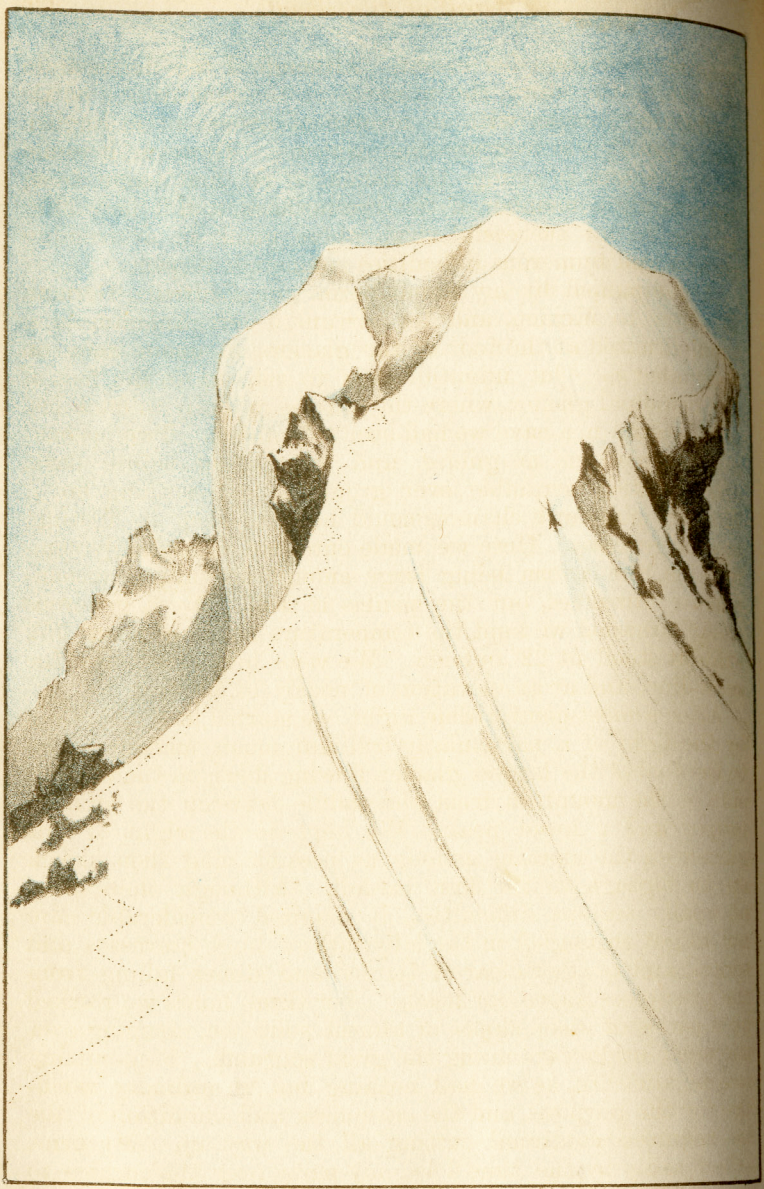

"Iztaccihuatl."

Looking from Col. Summit on left of sketch. overhanging ice + snow on right. arête of hard snow with cornice + precipice on left, + very steep slope on right. dotted line our tracks. The ice slope where so much step cutting was necessary is below Col on left hand of sketch. Summit is due North of Col.

quering foot upon her breast. Although I was inclined to disbelieve the story, the presence on the summit of a bottle containing a paper with an account of his ascent in English and Spanish was overpowering evidence. However, it would be ungracious to grudge the honour of the first ascent to so persevering a member of the brotherhood, and I here offer tribute to my successful rival, whose pluck in overcoming serious and numerous difficulties commands respect.

Accompanied by my friend Baron von Zedtwitz, German Minister to Mexico, and his servant, I left Amecameca, a town situated at the foot of the glaciers, at about noon on November 8. Our intention was to ride up to the foot of the principal glacier, where the natives go daily to fetch ice, and to camp in a cave we had been told about. Two 'peons' accompanied us as guides, and brought us before dark, after a steep scramble over ground, where nothing but a Mexican pony or a chamois could hope to keep its footing, to a large cave. Here we made ourselves exceedingly comfortable, the cavern being large enough not only to accommodate ourselves, but the ponies as well. By a generous use of firewood we kept the temperature inside at about 55°, while it stood at 22° outside. We were here just below the snow-line, and at an elevation of nearly 14,500 feet.

After a most comfortable night, we started at 4 A.M., and, by the light of a particularly brilliant moon, made our way to the foot of the largest glacier, flowing down on the western side of the mountain from the saddle between the summit proper and a lower peak. We kept to the right of this glacier on the moraine as long as possible, and then struck up in zigzags to the first ice-fall. Although there were no really serious difficulties, it required considerable care not to get entangled in the labyrinth of huge crevasses and séracs, and to steer clear of the ice and stones falling from the precipices above our heads. For three hours we worked up a series of steep slopes of almost solid ice, creeping over the snow-bridges spanning the great schrunds. Step-cutting was no sinecure, as we had nothing but an ordinary wood-axe for the purpose, and the steepness and condition of the ice required continual cutting all the way up. My arms ached sadly by the time I led my party over the cornice to the saddle between the peaks, and we also suffered considerably from the cold. The sun met us, however, as we stepped on the arête, and a bite of chocolate and a pull at the flask soon made us ready to attack the arête leading from where we stood to the summit. This arête, although

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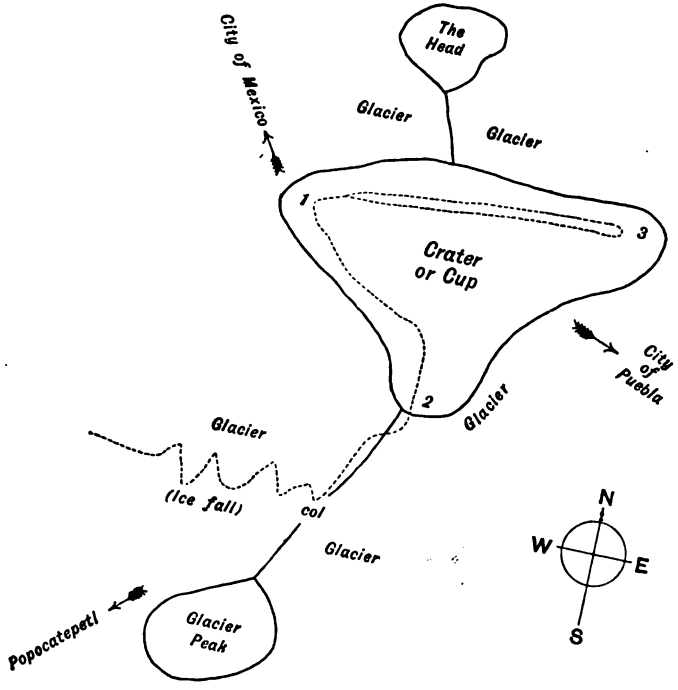
narrow, and dangerous on account of the over-hanging cornice of rotten snow, presented no difficulties. Before nine o'clock the summit was safely reached, and the unwelcome bottle and card which M. de Salis had left five days before was found.

The view is similar to that from Popocatepetl, but the surroundings are infinitely grander. On all sides gigantic ice cliffs (the largest I ever remember to have seen) hang over the glaciers below. The arête we climbed would appear to be the only practicable route to the summit. Some 800 or 1,000 feet below us, and separated by a wide glacier-filled



1. Highest summit, 18,500 feet (?).
2. Summit (perhaps 20 feet lower).
3. Summit (perhaps 20 feet lower).

Crater, or cup, at greatest depression is hardly more than 50 or 100 feet lower than summit, and is a large field of névé.

. . . . . Our tracks.

chasm, rises another peak which forms the head of the reclining woman as seen from Mexico. The sharp summit would seem to offer special attractions to the lover of a steep rock climb, alternating with knife-like arêtes of ice, and

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I have promised myself the pleasure of a scramble there at an early date.

Iztaccihuatl is undoubtedly an extinct volcano, and the crater, although entirely filled with ice and snow, is clearly distinguishable, forming a cup with gently sloping sides between the three almost equally high summits, from one to the other of which one could drive a four-in-hand. I doubt if it would be possible to reach the summit or summits by any other route than the one we took, as on all sides, as far as I could discover, there were sheer ice walls and precipices.

We remained about an hour on the summit, and then began to carefully retrace our steps. The climb down from the saddle to the moraine was long and tedious, and not unattended with danger, as the ice was in a particularly nasty condition, and the snow-bridges most unsafe. However, we safely reached our cave, and after a good meal, to which all did ample justice, we mounted our beasts and commenced the break-neck descent to civilisation. A few hours after dark we entered Amecameca in triumph.

Note on the Heights of the Mexican Peaks.

The third ascent of Iztaccihuatl was made in April last by Professor Angelo Heilprin and Mr. Mark C. Baker, of the Philadelphia Scientific Commission. They were prevented from reaching the actual summit by two enormous crevasses, developed since Mr. Whitehouse's visit, which 'completely crossed the crest of the mountain.' In the first report of this ascent it is stated that barometric observations gave a height of 17,150 ft., or some 25 ft. less than Popocatepetl. This estimate seems, however, to have been subsequently much reduced, Popocatepetl being set down at 14,700 ft., and Iztaccihuatl at about 14,450 ft. Upon this Mr. Whitehouse remarks as follows:—

'Here we have a mountain covered the year round with snow running some 2,000 or 3,000 ft. down its sides (according to exposure), and situated within the tropics, set down as lower than Mont Blanc!

'Iztaccihuatl is probably some 250 ft. lower than Popocatepetl, or say 14,450 ft. high, according to the Professor's calculations, and would consequently be more than 1,000 ft. lower than Mont Blanc. And yet here is a peak, situated in the tropics, from which glaciers descend, some nearly two miles long, presenting the same features as the Swiss glaciers, and broken by crevasses, seracs, and ice-falls.

'The climate of the city of Mexico, perched on a level with the Riffel Hotel, nearly 8,000 ft., is warm and pleasant the year round. Snow never falls there, and during the coldest winter nights there is rarely even a slight frost. And yet we are asked to believe that over

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yonder, across the semi-tropical vegetation of the valley of Anahuac, that glittering ice-peak of Iztaccihuatl is nearly 1,000 ft. lower than the Swiss giant whose hoary head looks down on many dreary months of hard winter, and a few weeks of oft-interrupted summer.

'From the tropical city of Vera Cruz, situated but nineteen degrees north of the equator, and sweltering the year round, with the thermometer in the nineties, we look up at the eternal snows of Orizaba, the summit of which, the Professor tells us, is not 15,000 ft. above us.

'That Orizaba, and not Popocatepetl, is the highest of the Mexican giants, I have always been inclined to believe. Seen from the summit of the latter, at a distance of at least 80 to 100 miles, it still appears the higher, and I was struck by the same evident fact when I made the ascent of Iztaccihuatl on November 9 last.'

REMSEN WHITEHOUSE.

In April 1888 Herren J. Felix and H. Lenk, who were driven back by a storm when about 500 ft. below the peak, had measured it trigonometrically at 4,800 m. = 15,754 ft.* It is to be hoped that the White Lady is not going to share the fate which has been predicted for another North American mountain—viz., become a mere depression in the ground.

ACCIDENTS IN 1890.

THE past season has been more fertile of accidents than any since the fatal year 1882. Happily we have to deplore the loss of only one member of our Club—indeed, of only one Englishman. But the brotherhood of the mountains is not limited by speech and language; nor will the members of foreign clubs doubt that we sympathise with the sorrow which the loss of valued colleagues must have caused to them. The special point, however, which will strike everyone who reads the accounts of the recent disasters will be the almost unprecedented number of guides who have perished. Between June 24 and September 12 no less than nine guides, some of them among the very first in their profession, and at least two porters, have lost their lives—eight while actually employed, one while on his return after completing the tour for which he was engaged. Another, though with a party, was at the moment separated from them; and both these were undoubtedly due to want of precaution on the part of the unfortunate men. But the remaining seven, and the two porters, seem to have died literally in harness, with the rope round them and their sacks on their shoulders. Except in 1870, when three travellers and eight guides perished in one storm on Mont Blanc, there has never been in one year such a tale of slaughter among those who earn their bread by helping men from the lowlands to climb mountains. At the same time, we have no right to be greatly surprised. Practised mountaineers have long foreseen something of the kind—if mountain-climbing

* *Oest. Alpen-Zeitung*, No. 300, p. 166.

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