

A la descente, près du village de *Valtornanche*, le vallon se resserre et le torrent se précipite de cascade en cascade avec un fracas effrayant. De Valtornanche à Châtillon il y a trois lieues.

(*To be continued.*)

### THE FINSTERAARHORN BY THE S.E. ARÊTE.

BY W. C. COMPTON.

HAVING a most pleasant recollection of the climb of the Finsteraarhorn by the S.E. arête on August 30, 1899, of which my companion, Mr. Valentine-Richards, has left a record,\* I was glad to seize the opportunity afforded by one of the few spells of fine weather the climbers of August 1905 were favoured with to repeat the expedition in the company of my nephew, Mr. E. Harrison Compton, a young climber who had so far never reached the magical 'vier tausend Meter' that seems to exercise a peculiar charm over our comrades from the D.Ö.A.V. In doing so I was also influenced by the hope of making this route more popular by showing that, except in specially difficult conditions, the expedition need not be at all hazardous or exacting.

It was after one of those spells of bad weather that we started (August 18) from Stein for the Grimsel *via* the Zwischenthierbergen Limmi and the Trift hut, spending, on the following morning, a rather chilly half-hour upon the Dammasstock, and breaking up from the Grimsel for the Oberaar hut on the Monday (August 21), at a fairly comfortable hour of the day, with Johann Stoller, of Kandersteg, as our companion. It had been our intention to push on to the new Finsteraarhorn hut, just opened on the rock marked 3,237 m., almost due south of the summit of our peak; but a strong, guideless party, who had kept their intentions dark so far as concerned the hour of their departure, got the better of us, and were seen well up the Oberaar glacier when we left the green moraine. Their halt below the new Oberaar hut was just about to end when we overtook them. Our time up the glacier was probably rather less than theirs, thanks to the experiments they had made, with varying success, upon the bridged crevasses. The new hut perched at the foot of the Oberaarhorn—the old one on the opposite side of the col having been removed to the site selected for the Finsteraarhorn hut, mentioned above—seemed to invite inspection. This requires a scramble of a

\* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xx. p. 142.



*A. F. Valentine-Richards, photo.*

*Swan Electric Engraving Co.,*

FINSTERAARHORN (1) FROM OBERAARJÖCH.

few minutes up the rocks to the right (N.) of the pass. On reaching this haven of rest the force of a well-worn proverb impressed itself upon our minds, especially that of our guide, and we resolved to desist from the pursuit of other fowl. A shout to our friends, now rapidly descending towards the Gemslücke, met with no response, but found its interpretation later on when they had the 'bush' to themselves—a bush, it may be added, which, if it contained a nest, had as yet no lining to it, for there were no blankets. Meanwhile the Capuan luxuries of the well-appointed Oberaar hut were ours; and could we not start all the earlier as there was a good morning moon, even though we might not, as we had hoped, find a way up the ridge before us from the east?\*

A rapid ascent of the Oberaarhorn would help us to decide our route, if one could be found up the east face of the arête. So in a few minutes we were scrambling up the loose slabs that overhang the hut, and before long the snowy peak was under our feet and we had before us the view sketched by Mr. A. Cust.†

My original idea had been to try the east arête, climbed first on September 24, 1898 ‡—unless Meyer's ascent in 1812 was by this route; and it was a route of which the guides who then made it spoke very highly in the book at the then Oberaarjoch hut. But at the Grimsel other counsels prevailed. In 1904, it was said, a lady had spent 72 hrs. on the mountain, ascending it by the east face; and this event had occasioned a fall in the demand for the route in question. Yet the Meiringen guides had fixed the rope across the awkward slab (*see* illustration III.), in the hope of popularising this route from the Grimsel, and thus from Meiringen also. So, ruling this out of court, we had only to see how the slopes could be attacked from the Studerfirn, so as to reach the saddle I had made from the opposite side in 1899. Not having formed any definite plan of campaign before leaving England, I had unfortunately omitted to arm myself with a 'Climbers' Guide,' and without it or the fuller accounts of Herr Bodenehr's ascent,§ or that of Herr Blezinger,|| it was the more difficult to discover a way. At the foot of the slope at every point there appeared to be a yawning bergschlund

\* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xi. p. 369.

† *Ibid.* vol. viii. p. 263.

‡ *Ibid.* vol. xx. p. 142.

§ *S.A.C.J.* vol. xx. p. 459.

|| *D.Ö.A.V. Zeitschrift*, vol. xiv. p. 505.

or a hanging glacier to negotiate.\* To cut the matter short, shameful though it may be, wisdom pointed to a reversion to the route of 1899. This at any rate was familiar to one of the party and was not likely to afford serious difficulty.

On our return to the hut about sunset we found our title disputed by a rather noisy party of guides or the like. Gradually we were able to distinguish a German lady and gentleman—both quite young—their two guides, and about three labourers engaged in the construction of the other (Finsteraar) hut, for whom, for some reason, it appeared to be ordained that they must make ours their nightly resting-place. Perhaps the blankets, which had decoyed us from the path of sterner virtue, were also their justification. Something of pathos was imparted to the scene by the distress of the German couple, who had taken guides from Rhone Glacier (!) for the ascent of the Finsteraarhorn by the Hugisattel, and were betrayed by the hopeless incapacity of one of these during their ascent of the Oberaar glacier. They had allowed this guide, as it appeared, to order, as an indispensable item, a certain fluid, of which he seems to have been a devotee and of which he had possessed himself. That praiseworthy spirit of loyalty had made it impossible for the younger guide to send him back. What made the situation more desperate was the fact, which transpired later, that they had not provision to last over a day, while fresh forces could be summoned from below, and—though it was not then apparent—the following was destined to be the last good day for some time to come.

With a bright moon overhead we started at 2.30 for the Gemslücke (reached in 70 minutes), on the further side of which there was practically no snow. This made the descent less pleasant than it might have been. The stones were very loose and it was more difficult to see one's way on the dark side. As we crossed on to the rocks at the S. foot of the point 3,597 m. a chamois threw down a few small stones upon us. Thinking I must have dropped something into a hole at the edge of the rock we stopped to strike a light, but, as nothing was to be seen and I could not find anything missing, we proceeded, and soon heard more stones falling, knocked down, no doubt, by chamois. Day now began to dawn and the traverse of the rocks ended on the snow-slope, which afforded easy going till at 5.45 we reached the point 3,536 m. Here we

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\* The E. face is seen in Mr. Valentine-Richards's view from the Oberaarjoch.

Minor Summit.

Red Rib.



W. C. Compton, photo.

Swan Electric Engraving Co.

PINETOPAHORN (II) FROM WEST.

made a brief halt ( $\frac{1}{2}$  hr.), partook of a very light meal, and left behind all that we could dispense with. A short half-hour brought us (6.40) across the bergschrund at the same point as that we had made in 1899. Hence our way, on that occasion, followed the red rib between the two snow couloirs (see illustration II.), and we should have saved, perhaps, as much as half an hour had we now followed the same line of ascent; but it appeared to our leader that the rocks on the left (N.) of the first (N.) couloir were equally good, and we proceeded up these with the couloir on our right. Soon, however, it became evident that the rock was not so sound, and it would be as well for those who make this ascent to prefer the rib between the couloirs. Taking once or twice to the couloir—which of course required step-cutting—we reached the arête by 8.10 A.M., and after a brief halt attacked the good rock leading up to the 'minor summit' (4,175 m.). This portion of the climb is steep, but the rock is exceedingly good, and there is no difficulty whatever. Arrived upon the 'minor summit,' we had the comparatively level ridge before us, with the 'slab' and the real peak a hundred feet or so above it (illustration III.). This is the portion of the ascent about which there has been considerable difference of opinion. The 'Climbers' Guide' describes it as a horizontal distance of 350 m., vertical 100 m.; 'yet 2-3 hrs. are required to cover it, save under very favourable circumstances. (The 1899 party climbed from the rope [slab] to the top in 20 min.)' [and from the minor peak in about  $\frac{3}{4}$  hr.]. Herr Blezinger, who was with Captain Farrar in 1883, says, 'Noch nie sah ich einen Pfad mit solch' schroffen Abblicken wie von hier bis zur höchsten Spitze.'\* His guide had estimated it as requiring 1 hr., but it required 3, of which 40 min. were taken in crossing the slab. The final chimney above the slab is described as a 'Schneerücken.' Dr. Strauss says his guide, 'Kederbacher, versicherte es sei dies eine seiner exponiertesten, wenn nicht die schlimmste seiner Klettereien gewesen.'† M. Cordier says he found 'rochers très difficiles, successivement à droite de l'arête, puis à gauche, puis de nouveau à droite, et enfin sur un trenchant même.'‡ In  $1\frac{3}{4}$  hr. they came to a hopeless *impasse*. After a halt of half an hour they renewed the attack on an 'arête d'une incroyable difficulté—une série d'obélisques, bizarrement placés,' &c.

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\* *Zeitschr. D.A.Ö.V.* 1883.

† *Ibid.* 1889.

‡ *C.A.F. Ann.* vol. iii. p. 398.

Herr Bodenehr \* ascending from the east reached the arête probably near the usual point (above our red rib) at 7.45, and, like M. Cordier, found 'Felsenzacken' ('obélisques bizarres'), with some cornices overhanging to the east. At 9.30 he was face to face with the final obstacle, which he negotiated by a drop into the couloir below the slab, reaching the summit at 2 P.M. Thus it would appear that, in his case, 1½ hr. was required for the part from the point where the arête was struck, over the minor summit to the slab; and from thence to the top (a matter of about 150 ft.) 4½ hrs., including the halt, the length of which is not indicated.

A concise summary of 10 recorded ascents by the S.E. arête will be found in the 'Deutsche Alpenzeitung,' 1902-3, No. 17, pp. 118, 119.

There is, however, an unrecorded ascent in 1903—the second by Capt. Farrar—who describes the ridge, as I learn from Mr. Coolidge, as 'really very difficult.'

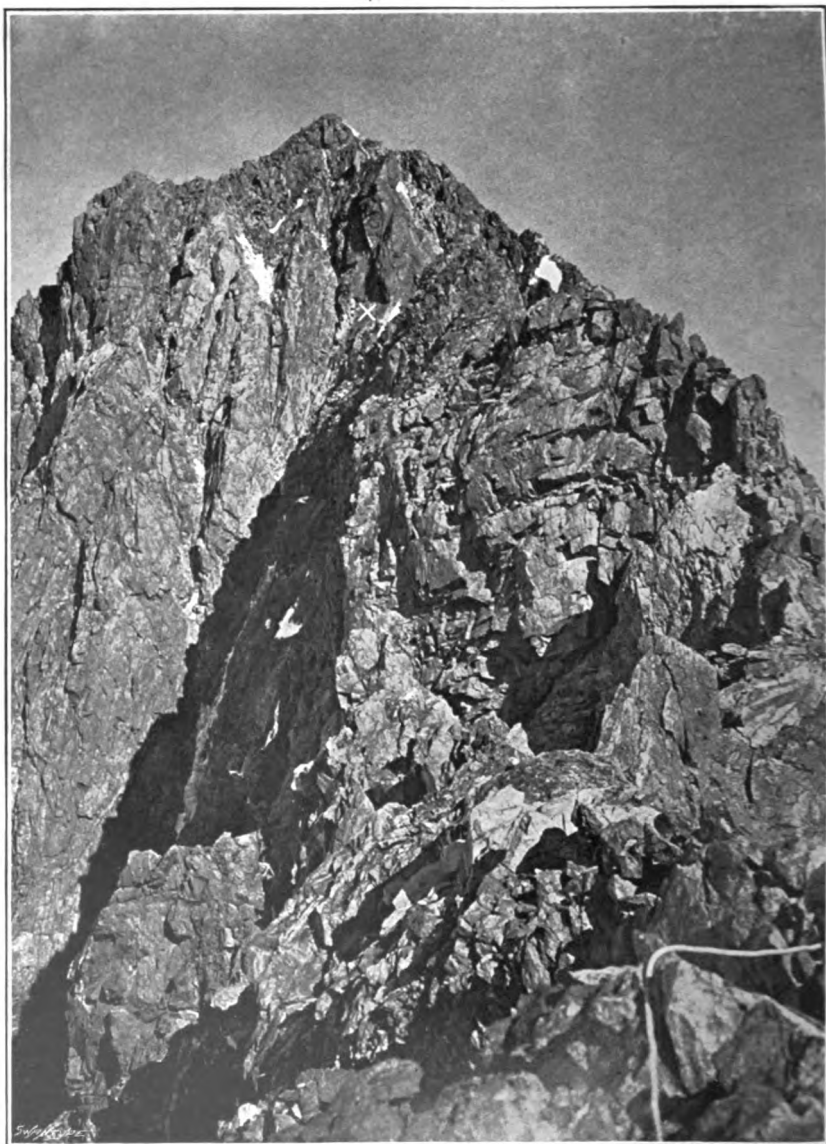
On September 24, 1898, four Meiringen guides made the ascent from the Studerfirn, surely 'a new way,' though the 'Alpenzeitung' claims that it is only a repetition of Meyer's route in 1812. I read their account in the visitors' book at the Oberaarjoch hut in 1899, and fully understood that they followed a rib from the Studerjoch almost all the way to the final peak, crossing the S.E. arête just below the slab where they fixed the rope we found in 1899 and again in 1905. Their object appeared to be to open this east face ascent, as I have already mentioned.

Finally Herr Hasler (in the article mentioned above) describes a descent by the S.E. arête in 1902 (September 20). This party ascended from the Schwarzegg hut by the Agassiz Joch, and commenced the descent at 4.30 P.M. The rope was used that had been fixed across the slab, of which Herr Hasler says it was hardly needed, as a descent of a few steps would have made the traverse easy, though even so it is 'nicht besonders schwierig.' Hence followed a good climb over pinnacles, which, in view of the good rock, was a real delight. *The rocks are nowhere very difficult*, but such that a moderate cragsman can thoroughly enjoy ('Die Felsen sind nirgends sehr schwierig, sondern gerade so dass ein mittlerer Kletterer sein helles Vergnügen daran hat'). After 1 hr. and 35 min. on the ridge he decided to follow Meyer's route down on the W. side—apparently rather to the N. of the red rib by which we ascended in 1899, as Herr Hasler concluded when

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\* *S.A.C.J.* vol. xx. p. 459.

Slab.



← Slab.

*A. V. Valentine-Richards, photo.*

*Swan Electric Engraving Co.,*

**FINSTERAARHORN (III)**  
SUMMIT WITH FINAL CHIMNEY AND "SLAB"

he compared his time with ours. Our ascent between the bergschrund and the ridge had taken about an hour and a quarter, and in his descent of the same portion of the mountain (in the moonlight) he took  $11\frac{1}{2}$  hrs., reaching the glacier at 5.45 A.M.

After this digression upon the records of the ascent from the 'minor summit' to the top I must return to the fortunes of my party on August 22, 1905. The conditions were precisely as they had been in 1899, when we took  $2\frac{1}{4}$  hrs. from the point at which the arête was struck to the summit. I have no record of the time taken on either occasion in reaching the 'minor summit;' but allowing only  $\frac{3}{4}$  hr. for this—a low estimate, the time required for this part being given in the 'Climbers' Guide' as  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 hrs. (Farrar 1 hr. 20 m.)—there would remain  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hr. for the rest. Our time in 1905 was just 2 hrs. from leaving the point at which we struck the arête; for we were on the final summit at 10.20. Mr. Coolidge, following the majority of the records referred to above, gives '2-3 hrs., save under very favourable circumstances' (referring to the 1899 party). But, as I hardly thought the circumstances exceptional, I was anxious to see how I might fare at a second attempt. When I wrote to acquaint him of the result, his reply, which I have now before me, indicated that he was 'of the same opinion still.' 'You have obviously had great good fortune on both your ascents.' So that I prefer to believe others must have had bad fortune, for there was nothing exceptional in the weather conditions on either occasion. The rocks were not iced: that is all. In a fairly large number of ascents I have brought off I have very rarely encountered the difficulty of glazed rocks. From this I infer that it is the exception, and that probably Captain Farrar—I hope he will see this and let us hear why he considers the rocks so difficult—was unfortunate enough to find the mountain in bad order. As for the older narratives, one knows that pioneers meet with difficulties which their experience has smoothed away for the humbler folk who follow in their tracks. The 'slab' which can be crossed without touching the rope in a couple of minutes (8 or 10 steps at the outside) took Herr Blezinger 40 min. out of the 3 hrs. occupied between the 'minor' and the final summit, a climb he describes as along a ridge from which the precipitous views down to the glaciers below were such as he had never witnessed before. It may be that the route I followed on both occasions avoided, by a traverse on to the west face, some of the 'very difficult' places that

may no doubt be encountered if the ridge is adhered to all the way. We did not, however, miss an interesting bit that recalled the 'enjambée' of the Matterhorn.

My friend Valentine-Richards, writing in 1899,\* says of this climb that 'it may be reckoned among the finest climbs in the Alps, in some details resembling the Italian side of the Matterhorn; but when the mountain is in good order it presents no point of special difficulty.' I entirely endorse these words, confirmed as they are by a second acquaintance; but in doing so I should wish it to be understood that the Matterhorn has a stronger claim, by points, to the honours conferred by the epithets lavished upon the Finsteraarhorn by the S.E. arête. Since writing the above I have had an opportunity of reading Mr. Claude A. Macdonald's account which appears in 'Alpine Notes' in the present number of this 'Journal.' His experience seems sufficiently like my own to justify me in recommending our expedition in good weather to any members of the Club who may find themselves in the district.

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#### RUWENZORI.

H.R.H. THE DUKE OF THE ABRUZZI has promised the Royal Geographical Society to furnish it with an account of his recent ascents in the Ruwenzori range. The paper, which will be read at the Meeting on January 14 next, will be illustrated by a number of photographic panoramas and views taken by Signor Vittorio Sella during the expedition. It is hoped that these may also be shown at the February meeting of the Club.

His Royal Highness, who has visited London since his return, reports that he has climbed the twelve highest peaks of the range, none of which exceed 17,000 ft. They all lie within a radius of seven or eight miles in a compact group, or rather a cluster of small glacier groups separated by high but snowless passes. On only one ascent, that of the highest peak, was any serious difficulty encountered. The party had no trouble with the natives, whom they found friendly and serviceable. Whatever reports to the contrary have been circulated were due to the imagination of a press correspondent at Entebbe.

The letter from Dr. Wollaston printed here gives an interesting account of his attempt to reach the western glaciers of Ruwenzori and of the reason of its failure:—

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\* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xx. No. 148, p. 142.