

of the Argentière glacier, and I was in doubts myself as to whether there was any novelty in the passage, till I returned home and communicated with Mr. Tunstall Moore. I then saw that his pass lay on the south side of the Aiguilles Mummery and Ravenel. The descent of his pass must certainly have been difficult and dangerous, for the couloirs coming down to the glacier are excessively steep, and a large number of stones fall.

As far as our expedition was concerned we had perfect conditions, and under them found no serious difficulty or danger. In our humble way we had by a lucky chain of circumstances apparently solved the riddle of the great ridge, and, unworthy as we were, had realised the inspiring dream of old Auguste Simond. Verily

All we have willed or hoped of good, shall exist ;
Not its semblance, but itself.

Scoffers indeed say, not without some reason, that the modern climber keeps only to well-worn tracks and has no initiative ; but there are still some who, sitting by the winter fire, see a party of the future sturdier than they successfully breasting the last rocks of the great north face of the Grandes Jorasses. Let them so dream.

One man with a dream, at pleasure
Shall go forth and conquer a crown ;
And three with a new song's measure
Can trample a kingdom down.

THE DENT BLANCHE BY THE EAST RIDGE (COL DE ZINAL).

BY HAROLD RAE BURN.

DOMINATING the head of the Val d'Anniviers, as the Matterhorn dominates that of the Visp Thal, the magnificent mass of the Dent Blanche presents from the N.E. a splendid spectacle. The shattered and pinnacled precipices of its eastern and north-eastern ridges, and its northern flank, sheeted with shining hanging glaciers, appear to forbid all access to its summit from this side. As a matter of fact, very few ascents from Zinal or Mountet have been made, and these only by the N.E. ridge. So far as known no guided, and only one amateur party, had succeeded in making the ascent by the E. ridge before the date of the expedition now described. This previous ascent was made, starting from the Schönbühl

gîte as a base, by two Swiss climbers, Messieurs Albert Martin and Léon Dufour, on August 15, 1900. The climb was boldly conceived, and the ascent ably executed, in excellent time. But for difficulties encountered through bad weather, on the descent, it would have ranked as a thoroughly successful climb. The neglect, however, of the two climbers to provide themselves with sufficient food and clothing might easily have led to serious consequences. They were fortunate indeed in escaping collapse in their long struggle to gain the Staffel Alp, after a night of storm, spent high up on the southern ridge.

It seems to be often the correct thing to assume, in papers written for the 'Journal' on old and favourite mountains, that all readers are perfectly familiar with the shape of, and routes up, the peak. There is a well-known saying that, 'familiarity breeds contempt.' Now I should be sorry to even mention such a word in connection with a truly grand mountain like the Dent Blanche. Rather might we say, as an old schoolmaster of mine used to put it, that, 'familiarity breeds, not contempt, but a less degree of impressibility.' Personally, before last season, I could not claim, except perhaps in a literary sense, the smallest degree of familiarity with the mountain. I had been only a worshipper from afar. The actual climb my friend Ling and I had, certainly increased my familiarity, but hardly, I think, decreased my impressibility, and certainly greatly increased my respect, and affection.

Disregarding the assumption at the head of the last paragraph, the following short sketch and notes of ascents may be acceptable. They may be looked on as supplementary to the papers by Dr. Coolidge, 'Early Ascents of the Dent Blanche,'* and Dr. O. K. Williamson, 'The Dent Blanche from the West.†

The great peak of the Dent Blanche is curiously like the Matterhorn in many ways. Like that peak, it has only one true or watershed ridge. In the case of the Matterhorn, this is that which runs from the Col du Lion up the Italian ridge to the summit, and down the Furgg ridge to the Furggjoch.

In a similar way, the main ridge of the Dent Blanche runs from the Col d'Hérens, on the south, over the summit, whence it bends first N.E., and then slightly S.E., till it falls to the Col de Zinal.

The N.E. arête of the Dent Blanche corresponds very closely to the Hörnli ridge of the Matterhorn. The northern faces of the two mountains are also much analogous, and the N. ridge

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xv. p. 64.

† *Ibid.* vol. xxiii. p. 107.

of the Dent Blanche, falling to the Col du Grand Cornier, may be very closely compared with the Zmutt arête. Both these latter ridges are formed in their lower parts by a long snow arête of easy angle, and neither is a true or continuous arête. The great overhanging 'nose' on the Matterhorn's Zmutt arête is repeated, in an even more forbidding manner, on the N. ridge—or buttress rather—of the Dent Blanche. The similarity fails somewhat on the W. and S.W. sides. Here, after the great western rib, the Dent Blanche exhibits a weakness entirely absent from the unique structural strength of its great Zermatt rival.

The Matterhorn, in its natural condition, may safely be said to possess no 'easy way' up it. The Dent Blanche, however, in certain conditions, early in the season, with good snow, Captain Farrar informs me, on the authority of Joseph Pollinger, can be ascended on the S.W. side with comparatively little difficulty. By this route, or mainly by the S. ridge, all the first seven ascents were made.

The S. ridge is of easy general angle, but is interrupted by several steep and difficult steps—so called gendarmes—usually traversed on the western side.

A striking feature of the Visp watershed of the Dent Blanche is the great mural precipice called the Wandfluh, which stretches from the S. face of the final peak to near the Col d'Hérens, above the Schönbühl and Stock glaciers. This wall, until comparatively recent times, forbade all access to this side, and forced the Zermatt parties to cross the watershed by the Col d'Hérens, or above the Stockje, and to make the ascent in reality by the Ferpècle route.

The first ascent of the Dent Blanche was made from Bricolla, on July 18, 1862, by Mr. T. S. Kennedy's party, with J. B. Croz.* This was, as Dr. Coolidge demonstrates (Mr. Kennedy's description, owing to bad weather, is far from clear), mainly by the S. arête, and partly by the S.W. face.

The eighth ascent was that of Miss Brevoort and Mr. Coolidge, with the Almers, two other guides, and two porters. This party started from Zermatt, and, by camping out high up on the S. ridge, avoided the necessity of going down to Bricolla at all.

Since the discovery of the route up the Wandfluh rocks to near the foot of the final peak, at the figures 3,912 on the Siegfried map, in or about 1889,† and the destruction by an avalanche of the hut built on the Stockje rocks, the shepherds'

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. i. p. 33.

† *Ibid.* vol. xv. p. 370.

lair on the Schönbuhl gazon is the usual starting-place.* Sometimes the peak is ascended direct from Zermatt by this route. In August 1908—a bad season—two Scottish ladies, Miss Lowson and Mrs. Douie-Urquhart, of the Ladies' Scottish Climbing Club, with the brothers Fuhrer, of Meiringen, climbed the Dent Blanche by the Wandfluh from Zermatt without sleeping out at all.

The favourite and easiest route is still, however, the old route, and by starting from the excellent hut on the Bertol Col the peak, in good condition, can be gained by even very moderate climbers.

Two routes have been forced directly up the S. face—by Mr. Whitwell, with Chr. and Johann Lauener, in 1874,† and by Mr. Eckenstein, with Matt. Zurbrücken, on September 2, 1889,‡ the latter, it is said, in a year and at a time of exceptionally favourable conditions. Yet it is stated to be 'the worst route yet discovered.' It touched the E. arête at one point. Neither of these routes in any case is likely to be a favourite. The S. face of the Dent Blanche, in most conditions, is almost constantly swept by falls of snow, ice, and stones from a fairly early hour in the morning. Of his route Mr. Whitwell remarks, 'Except in perfect weather, and with exactly the right amount of snow, I think the expedition could not be made without great risk.'

The great western rib above Ferpècle is also a route of very considerable difficulty.

It was first descended, by Mrs. E. P. Jackson and Dr. Schulz, with A. Pollinger and J. J. Truffer, in 1884.§ It is best known from the terrible disaster of August 28, 1899,|| when Mr. O. G. Jones and three guides perished, and from the wonderful feat of the survivor, Mr. Hill, in completing the ascent and reaching Zermatt alone.

It is better used as a descent, and in good condition should not present any excessive difficulty if the party is accompanied by a guide who knows the ridge.¶

Dr. Williamson gives a good account of the route of ascent in his paper in the 'Alpine Journal' for May 1906, 'The Dent Blanche from the West.'

The north arête of the Dent Blanche has not been ascended,

* This year (1909) the Swiss Alpine Club propose to build a hut on Schönbuhl.

† *Alpine Journal*, vol. vi. p. 107.

‡ *Ibid.* vol. xiv. p. 499.

§ *Ibid.* vol. xii. p. 122.

|| *Ibid.* vol. xix. p. 591.

¶ *Echo des Alpes*, 1903, 'La Dent Blanche,' by A. E. Kühlmann.

and in fact could not be ascended direct. A traverse, probably exposed to falling stones and ice, would have to be made to get from under the overhang of the great upper buttress.

From the summit of the mountain a long, high, and narrow arête leads in an easterly direction for about half a mile, falling only about 1,000 ft. in that distance. It then splits into two, the longer, of easier angle, falling straight towards Mountet, near where its foot is lost under the ice of the Durand or Zinal glacier, just opposite the rock island of the Roc Noir. The other or E. ridge is the watershed ridge. It drops steeply, interrupted by huge gendarmes of red rock, with various gaps and pinnacles, to the Col de Zinal. Between these ridges is a great rock-face or precipice, streaked here and there by steep patches of ice, on the whole, however, too steep to allow, even on this cold aspect, of much accumulation of snow. By the N.E. or Mountet ridge a party of four—Messrs. Stafford Anderson and G. P. Baker, with Ulrich Almer and Alois Pollinger,* made, in 1882, the first ascent of the Dent Blanche on this side. It was the remark of Almer, 'Wir sind vier Esel,' when asked what he thought of the climb, that gave the well known name of Viereselgrat to the whole ridge. The party did not leave Mountet till 3.50, and apparently started with the Col Durand in view. Some way up the Zinal glacier they changed their object to a traverse of the Dent Blanche. They turned to the right, and 'made straight for the second of two snow couloirs which we could see running up to the arête.'

They ascended here, 'taking first to the rocks at its right,' and then, when about half-way up, cutting across it to the rocks on its left.' They kept on the left just below the arête for some distance, reaching it at a height by aneroid of 10,500 ft. Thence they climbed, 'partly by the N.W. (N.) face, but mainly by the arête,' to the 'junction' gendarme, then mainly by the arête to the summit. The date was August 11.

Though Mr. Anderson's account of his party's route seems perfectly clear, and with the aid of a map and photograph it can be followed easily in all except the most minor details, nevertheless some confusion regarding it appears to have arisen. This appears to have originated among the Zinal guides. In the 'Alpine Journal' for 1899 (vol. xix. p. 248) there is a note by Mr. O. G. Jones calling attention to an ascent of the Dent Blanche by three Zinal guides on September 28, 1898. This note was written under the impression that the climb was at least a partially new route.

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xi. p. 158.

He states 'they climbed by the N. face on to the E. ridge.' This is, of course, to the Viereselgrat ridge, not to the Col de Zinal ridge. This route *was*, in its lower portion, somewhat different from the original route.

I have been favoured by Messrs. Anderson and Baker with the loan of the original sketch and photograph of their route. Mr. Anderson has also marked in, in red, the Zinal guides' 1898 route. This is from information supplied by Mr. Hermann Roos from his guide Louis Theytaz, one of the three Zinal guides who made the second ascent of the Viereselgrat in 1898. It reaches the lower part of the Viereselgrat from the N. from the Col du Grand Cornier route, just before the arête becomes seriously steep. Louis Theytaz has also sent a sketch, on the Federal Map, of his 1898 and 1899 routes.

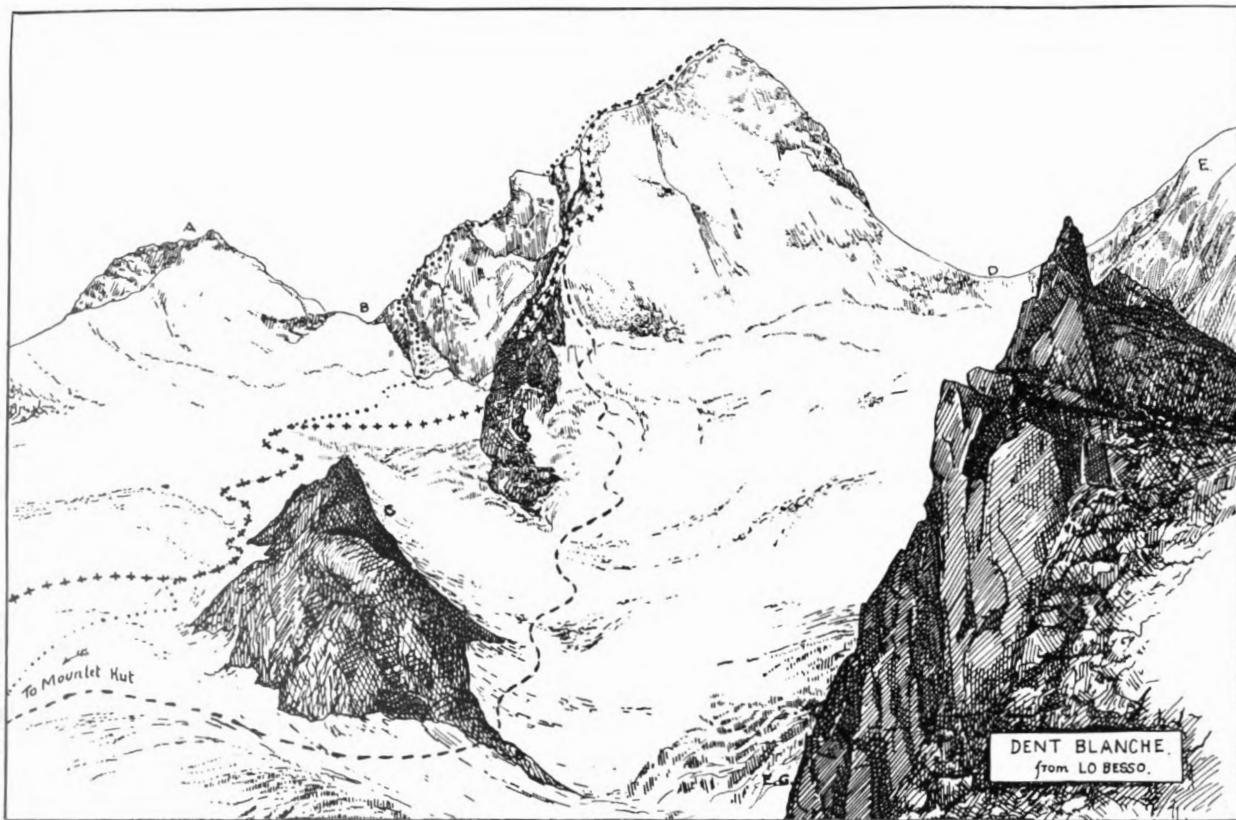
The originator of this second ascent was Mr. G. Winthrop Young. He had wished, in 1898, to make a traverse of the Dent Blanche from Zinal. The guides persuaded him that the pioneers had ascended by the E. face to the Col de Zinal ridge. The line of this supposed ascent, as shown to me by my friend Mr. A. M. Mackay, is by the way obviously impossible to one who knows the place. Mr. Young therefore proposed to make the ascent by the Mountet ridge, which he thought, and rightly so, would afford a better and more direct route of ascent.

However, the guides that year declared it too late in the season to attempt the traverse, and Mr. Young was obliged to leave. After he was gone, however, the three guides, Louis Theytaz, Benoit Theytaz, and Félix Abbet made the ascent themselves.

In 1899 Mr. Young returned, and, along with Mr. A. M. Mackay and the same three guides, made the third traverse from this side on July 28, 1899. This time, however, almost the exact route of the original pioneers was followed. The party ascended the S. branch of the Zinal glacier, and curved round above the Roc Noir and the mass of schrunds and séracs lying between the upper part of the Roc Noir ridge and the foot of the Mountet ridge of the Dent Blanche. They then climbed to the arête, by one or other of the couloirs and rock ribs which lead up to the ridge on its E. face, 'not far above its last plunge to the glacier.'* This is marked on the Siegfried map as 3,200 mètres, or 10,496 ft., the same height as that given by the 1882 party.

Thence they followed the arête as much as possible. They were driven off a good way on the N. face for a considerable

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xx. p. 53.



+++ ANDERSON-BAKER, 1882.

--- ZINAL GUIDES, 1898

+++ YOUNG-MACKAY with Zinal Guides 1899

.... RAEURN-LING, 1908.

A. POINTE de ZINAL. B. COL de ZINAL. C. ROC NOIR.

D. COL du GRAND CORNIER.

E. GRAND CORNIER.

Drawn by Eric Greenwood.

time. This was some distance below the 'junction' gendarme, at the same place where, as shown by Mr. Baker's dotted line on his 1882 sketch, the original party were also forced off the arête on to the N. face.

The Dent Blanche had always been one of the peaks which had fascinated my affections since my first visit to the Alps in 1901. I had seen it suddenly burst upon my spell-bound vision in all its dawn-tinted glories. It was as we first reached the arête of the Matterhorn, after struggling in dusty gloom up the dreary scree slopes above the hut. Such a memory can never fade, but it was not till 1906 that I again found myself in its neighbourhood. Ling and I had then the invidious choice forced upon us, owing to exigencies of time, of trying the crossing of the Matterhorn by the Zmutt arête or attempting the Zinal traverse of the Dent Blanche. The magnetism of the great Zermatt peak, perhaps owing to proximity, made us choose the former.

In 1907 our party was far away in Dauphiné, the Graians, and on Mont Blanc; but in 1908 we returned to Zermatt, with the Zinal route over the Dent Blanche in the forefront of our planned expeditions.

Messrs. W. A. Brigg and Eric Greenwood had arrived in Zermatt the day before us, and with the energy characteristic of these gentlemen had already been up the Rimpfischhorn as a training walk. They had planned to take a few peaks and cols on their way over to Italy, and we agreed to make our training climb in their good company over the Rothorn to Mountet.

On July 29, on a somewhat showery afternoon, we walked up to the Trift.

Next morning we rose betimes, but, alas! thick mist and heavy rain greeted us, so we retired to bed again. The weather improved later, but the summits of the Rothorn and Gabelhorn were never quite clear all day. At dinner that evening we were joined by three other parties, who had come up with their guides, a German, an Austrian, and a German lady climber.

The Austrian was very voluble. It was his first visit to Zermatt, though he had done many peaks in the Dolomites and in the Eastern Alps. After having duly impressed the party, and especially the lady, with a long recital of his deeds of daring, he turned to the latter and said, 'And madam, what peak might she be about to attempt?' Madam replied in a matter of fact and bored manner, that as she had done *all* the great peaks in the Zermatt district, she now thought of doing one of the smaller, probably the Wellenkuppe. The sudden change in the Austrian's

manner put one in mind of a too exuberant collie pup who receives a severe check from his master.

As our party were all, especially Messrs. Brigg and Greenwood, heavily loaded, and intended nevertheless to be on the summit of the Rothhorn before the others, we left at 1.45 A.M. on July 31, a fine, bright, starlight morning. Looking back when just at the foot of the Eseltshuggen rocks, we could distinguish the other parties by their lights. Two, we could see, were, like ourselves, bound for the Rothhorn. A third, the lady with her two guides, had taken the route for the Wellenkuppe or Gabelhorn. There was, however, a fourth party, also bound Gabelhorn-way, which we could not understand, and had seen nothing of before. These lights were those of the three unfortunate Bernese clergymen, who only a few hours later, were to find a sudden and violent death on the icy slopes of the Gabelhorn. Shortly after this, and just before the fast coming dawn had quenched the brightness of the planets, we were all startled by a brilliant light. Looking up we could see, and watch for quite a number of seconds, a most vivid meteor rushing across the sky overhead; so bright was it, that it quite lit up the dark rocks overhanging the route, and cast our shadows clearly on the snow. No one of our party had ever seen a meteor of such splendour before.

We reached the top of the Rothhorn at 8.15 in splendid weather, and had it to ourselves for half an hour or so before the others appeared. We had also the pleasure of meeting a fellow-Clubman, Mr. Symons, who came up the N. ridge. We descended by this ridge. The mountain was in good condition. Only on the top part of the N. ridge was there some ice and new snow, which rendered the descent of the 'Great Gendarme' a matter of slow pace and considerable care. Only three steps in ice had to be cut by our leader on the 'slabs' of the ascent. Judging from the Rothhorn, therefore, there should have been nothing in the condition of the Gabelhorn to render its ascent unjustifiable for a competent amateur party, which apparently the Bernese pastors were. The disaster therefore, I think, should be put down to a true accident, such as occasionally happens to even the best found and conducted enterprises.

The ice ridge above the glacier was in good order, though the snow was becoming soft. We walked easily down in the foot-steps made by Mr. Symons' party. It was extremely hot on the glacier under the Besso, and we were glad to get into the cool, clean rooms of the bright little new hotel at Mountet at 1.30. We had done the traverse easily in under 10 hrs.' going time.

Next morning Brigg and Greenwood rose early. By the

later hour that Ling and I appeared for breakfast the two were already black dots, zigzagging their way slowly up the steep snow slopes leading to the Col du Grand Cornier (Col de la Dent Blanche on the map). At 6.35, Ling and I started on a reconnaissance of the Dent Blanche.

The upper part of the southern branch of the Zinal glacier flows past Mountet from a wide recess, walled in by the great ridge, running from Lo Besso over the summits of the Rothhorn, Trifhorn, Wellenkuppe, Gabelhorn, Mont Durand, Pointe de Zinal, and eastern face of the Dent Blanche. The upper corrie forms an almost flat névé basin, lying under the steep crags of the Dent Blanche, and the ice slopes of the Col and Pointe de Zinal.

At the lower lip of this basin stands up a rock island, 'jardin,' or 'rognon,' called the Roc Noir. This splits the flowing ice, and the left or narrower stream, dropping steeply between the Roc Noir and the Dent Blanche's N.E. foot, is riven into great séracs, and huge crevasses. The right-hand stream is of gentler angle and smoother nature. The Viereselgrat parties, except the guides in 1898, have gained access to that ridge hitherto by ascending this smoother stream, then, passing the Roc Noir, have curved round the edge of the upper flat basin, above the séracs. They then gained the ridge by one or other of two snow couloirs, or partly by their rock banks, very conspicuous in views of the ridge from the E. or S.E. Our party, making a short détour towards the Trift Joch, to avoid a number of open crevasses, then curved round towards the Roc Noir, and keeping close to it walked up the glacier, then across the upper névé to the schrund at the foot of the Col de Zinal.

Ominous dirt streaks and grooves led down to this from the steep rock slopes of the Dent Blanche above. As yet, however, the batteries had hardly opened fire. Only a 'sighting shot' or two came down, mostly falling short in the schrund. The slopes leading up to the Col de Zinal are steep, and now the warning gleam of ice seemed to occupy almost the whole width of the opening. The rocks on our right seemed, however, fairly easy, and if attacked in the early morning ought, we thought, to furnish an easier and pleasanter mode of access to the east ridge than several hours' step-cutting. Accordingly the schrund was crossed, and what was considered an adequate staircase, giving access to the rocks above, was cut. Thereafter a speedy retreat and a short glissade placed us out of range on the névé plain below. On our way back to the hotel a traverse from the S. was made of the Roc Noir. This S. arête is very

steep and extremely narrow, a true knife-edge, even more attenuated than any part of the Ecrins ridge. Taken this way the Roc gives a capital little climb.

The snow on the upper glacier was deep, and crusted in that peculiarly aggravating and tiring, 'half-bearing' manner that our own British snow so often is. The upper foot or so of snow on the Dent Blanche was evidently new, or July snow. The cornices promised to be in rare fighting form. We had an excellent dinner in company with some other guests. They, however, afterwards left for Zinal. We therefore found ourselves in possession of the whole upper floor of the hotel that night.

We had left word to be called at midnight. Perhaps owing to the day being August 1, and the consequent festivities, or possibly owing to our mistake in paying our bills, and also a liberal 'pourboire' the previous evening, we were not called at all. It was only after a tremendous and prolonged tattoo, played by my ice axe on the wooden walls and door of the kitchen, that coffee and breakfast was forthcoming. Our just wrath was turned aside by ample and, I think, sincere apologies. Apart from this lapse we have nothing but praise for the cooking and conduct of the bright and clean little place. I had mentioned to the landlady the day before that we intended to try the traverse of the Dent Blanche, and therefore should require to start at a very early hour. Possibly, however, some of the guides would tell her that we *might* be competent mountaineers, but in their opinion were safer in bed.

However, thanks to our alarm watch, we got away at 1.10, and, following much the same route as the day before, reached the bergschrund at 3. Above this the steps cut on the 1st were found to be either swept away or melted out, and had mostly to be recut. The distance was not great, and we soon gained the rocks (3.25). Though there was no moon, and the dawn was still some way off, yet there was enough light to enable the lantern to be put out and stowed away.

These rocks are disagreeable and loose rather than difficult for a considerable way. This is not a place to be on, however, long after the sun lights the fires of dawn on the great red towers of the arêtes above.

As we mounted slanting towards the Col the rocks became steeper and slabbier with here and there a good deal of ice. The climbing in the uncertain grey light now stealing down the great walls overhead became decidedly difficult. Some distance below the arête a very steep and difficult gully, or chimney, was encountered. But for its loose and insecure-

looking walls being cemented together by a strong veneer of ice I do not think we could have ventured to attack it, the only apparent route. It was much longer and decidedly harder than the ice chimney on the Petit Dru, as we have known it. Above the chimney the angle eased off, and easy scrambling then led to the arête (5.55).

We were now on the first platform above the Col de Zinal. We looked down on the Schönbuhl glacier and across the tremendous S. face of the Dent Blanche to the Wandfluh and the S. ridge. Down these rocks we must find our way, should we succeed in gaining the summit. It was, therefore, with great interest that we studied them and worked out a possible-looking route down them and off to the Schönbuhl glacier. In the event we found that we had hit off almost the exact route taken from the Schönbuhl gîte. This almost certainly saved several hours' difficult and fruitless scrambling, a very probable fate of any party attempting the descent of the Wandfluh rocks without a previous acquaintance with the route.

Above the first platform the climbing is easy for a time. Then comes the first gendarme. This, like most of the so called gendarmes on an ascending ridge, is really only a kind of step—a sudden steepening of the arête, followed by a platform; more usually, perhaps, a continued rise, but at a more gentle angle.

We were here forced out to the north-east, and encountered a series of extremely loose and rotten chimneys before being able to work back to our left again and regain the arête. Some more easy ground followed, and we gained the shoulder. The ridge here slopes *down* in a steep snow arête to two sharp rock towers and a snowy gap beyond.

From the shoulder the shape of the ridge could not be made out directly, but the eastern sun rays were now streaming through the gap and over our ridge.

On the vast white drawing-sheet of the Schönbuhl glacier was clearly written, albeit in Gustav Doré-like exaggerated outline, the notched and pinnacled form of the lower part of the eastern arête—a grandly beautiful and impressive sight. The ridge, though extremely narrow, and corniced in places, was fortunately good snow and not ice. The two rock towers proved milder than they looked. The spare rope, which had been got ready, was not required, and we swung down the vertical wall of the second on to the snow col.

Soon we were regaining the lost height, on an arête always interesting, but not seriously difficult.

All this time hung above us, and on our spirits, the vast, vertical or overhanging red walls of what we call the 'Great Tower.' We knew that the Swiss party who had preceded us on this climb had passed this tower by going out on the face to the left. We could now also see that the tower was, in a sense, an impostor. The roots of its great 1,000-ft. wall are planted on the pitiless, stone-swept face between the two eastern ridges of the mountain. Our arête led high up on its southern flank till it lost itself on its great slabs.

Arrived so far, we found that but for the considerable amount of snow and ice the slanting upward traverse across the S.E. face of the Dent Blanche would have presented little difficulty.

The July sun had, however, melted the ice in contact with the projecting rocks. The snowfall of three days back had filled up these spaces with powdery snow. Frequently good stands and hitches could be got by scraping, kicking, or pulling out the snow with the ice axe blade, and little cutting was required. Little time was really lost. Presently we could look down below us on the upper snow edge of our 'bête rouge' with its two great lighthouse-like gendarmes, so conspicuous from a distance. Soon we approached the junction of the two ridges of the E. and N.E.

Here at last we came upon evidence of former ascents in a small cairn and a black bottle. The time was only 11.45, and the aneroid somewhat optimistically declared the height to be 13,800 ft. (really about 13,300).

Only some 1,000 ft. below the summit! We could surely afford time for a short rest and some well-earned lunch.

We knew that most of the remaining distance was along a narrow arête, more than likely to be heavily corniced. The date was early and the season a bad one. The day, however, was perfect. Only a gentle breeze blew, and that from the best quarter, the north. We had plenty of time before us. What ought to be a great advantage in pace, and also in safety, I consider, in such a place, we were only two. At noon we began the traverse of the upper ridge. After several steep little gendarmes, which were climbed over directly, the way was barred by an 'impossible' tower spanning and barring the arête. On the S. vertical red walls led down for a couple of hundred feet to the avalanche-swept S. face of the mountain. On the N. ice-plastered steep (over 60°) slabs carried the eye with a grand sweep to the northern Glacier du Durand, 3,000 ft. below. The only way, evidently, was up these icy slabs on the N. The ice fortunately was usually thick enough to permit

of footholds and handholds being cut. Taking advantage of every little knob of rock projecting from the ice, for holds and hitches, the arête was presently regained beyond the tower. This arête now became extremely narrow—a perfect wall in fact—and the snow ridge lying on it got higher, more unstable, and corniced. After a lot of this another and quite impossible-looking tower loomed ahead. The tower was cut off by a little gap, from which a shallow gully led up, to end under an overhang of the N. edge of the tower. Lying quite loose, and partially buried in snow at the foot of the gully, was a piece of thin cord, the second, and only other sign of fore-runners seen by us on this side of the mountain. This cord is probably one of those placed there by the Theytazes in 1898, when they made what they thought was the first ascent of the N.E. ridge.

The gap was easily passed and the gully climbed. Arrived under the overhang, however, the prospect was far from inviting. But for the structure of the rocks here the passage would be impossible, and a way would have to be found elsewhere. The rock is split in slabs horizontally. The lower of these slabs have fallen out, leaving the others much undercut and very insecure-looking, but giving splendid handholds on the edges of the cracks.

This is one of the few places on the Alpine peaks where I consider a fixed rope would be justified.* No amount of balance, skill, and strength on the part of the leading guide is sufficient here to keep a proper margin of safety, where the whole weight must be slung up on rocks of very doubtful security. The fall of the leader if the rocks gave way would certainly break the rope, if hitched. His next stop would be the Durand Glacier, about 4,000 ft. below. The place was treated with the utmost gentleness and respect. We were both glad, after a stiff climb, to find ourselves again on the arête.

From here, the summit of the peak now seemed no great distance off. The great rocks that buttress the summit on the N. appeared close at hand, but the cornice was of the most troublesome character. Running almost level for a while, then slightly down, the way seemed straight and plain for the final peak. Strait enough in one sense it was, though far from plane. The rock wall of the ridge was topped by another wall of snow; sometimes a narrow knife-edge; now

* Another, I consider, is the 'mauvais pas' on the S. Aiguille d'Arves.

corniced, first on one side, then on the other, and frequently, and most disconcertingly, corniced on *both sides at once*.

Our modes of progression had to be constantly varied to meet the ever varying nature of the road. At one time we would do some delicate tight rope walking along a 2-inch edge of hard snow; at another we would try to crawl along, in soft snow, under the cornice on the S. side. Again, driven over to the N. side, we would hew steps in hard snow and ice, below the cornice bending over on that side. Now, we would boldly attack the cornice, and bodily remove it in large masses. Perhaps in places beating it down with the sideways-turned ice axe would answer. Anon we would assault it with repeated kicks of our nailed boots. Sometimes we were compelled to ride it *à cheval*, hoisting ourselves along by the hands, as on a vaulting-horse. Occasionally we were reduced to four-footed animals; even lower took up the burden of the curse of the serpent on some steep bit of the unstable edge.

A most extraordinary difference existed in the state of the snow in the short space of a foot or two. Against the N. face of the ridge blew a steady, slight, but very cold breeze. Our kid gloves had become pretty well 'ganz kaput' on the rocks, and our working pairs of woollies were beginning to give out with the immense amount of burrowing work.* It was a huge relief, after a spell of northern traverse, to cross to the S. side or get the hands occasionally on some south-facing rock. Sensation and comfort returned at once. The snow, however, on the S. side of the ridge was in a thoroughly unsafe condition. The least thing started an avalanche, and we could never venture on a traverse here without one of the party being anchored on the N. side or summit of the ridge.

The rope's length and anchoring plan, though of course fearfully slow, was almost always adopted. Each in turn with well driven in axe watched his moving comrade as a cat a mouse, ready instantly if a slip occurred or a bit of the cornice gave way to check the slide if need be by hanging to the rope down the opposite side. Fortunately this was not required to be done. No slip occurred throughout the whole climb, though many tons of cornice were dislodged.

Steadily, if slowly, we fought our way along the cornice. At length we came to a place, not very far from the summit,

* Mr. G. Winthrop Young in his account of this ridge in the *Yorkshire Ramblers' Journal* mentions the crimsoned holes in the cornice made by the bleeding hands of the leading guide. In our case we kept our hands whole at the expense of several pairs of gloves.

where the labour and difficulty became so great that we determined to try the, by no means inviting, N. face in preference. The edge of the final peak shot steeply upward, with a slight cornice on the N. side. The snow, however, lay loosely, from one to two feet deep, bound with a slight crust, on ice. Struggle as we might we could not get up here. The feet, or the feet, knees, and elbows combined, could get no 'point d'appui' in the unstable mass. It was impossible to reach the solid ice beneath, to lay it bare for the ice axe.

After a struggle we gave it up, and descending the N. face for a short distance traversed for a time, and then made for the arête again. This was one of the most difficult movements of the day. The face was very steep, glazed with ice, and extremely rotten. In fact the only reliable holds on it were those held together by the ice veneer, and the cutting had to be judiciously done, so as not to disturb those holds.

At last we managed to get an ice axe stock driven into the good snow of the corniced edge of the final peak and hauled ourselves through. The rest was easy, as the angle eased off, and at 5.35 we were shaking hands on the summit of the Dent Blanche. The hour was late, but this was entirely due to the most intractable state of the cornice, and after all other parties had been on the peak almost as late. All hopes, of course, of now getting down the unknown rocks of the Wandfluh before dark had entirely departed.

There was plenty of time, therefore, for a much needed period of rest and refreshment. The weather was quite perfect, and with minds at ease we could lie and admire the magnificent scene, lit by the already slanting rays of the sun. The wonderful sky-cleaving wedge of the Matterhorn lay close at hand, across the great ice rivers of Schönbühl and Zmutt, with its gleaming scimitar of the lower part of the Zmutt arête and the jagged rock-step outline of the Italian ridge.

In the dim distance, south of the Matterhorn's grim obelisk, lay a few rival vapour mountains floating in the azure void, high above the Italian plains. These were later to furnish the background curtains for the loveliest of heaven's pyrotechnic displays it has been our good fortune to see. At about 6.15 we packed up and began the descent of the S. ridge.

This was in fairly good condition, and for some distance down presents no difficulties. We quitted the ridge at the 'great tower,' traversing for a time on the western face. There is a piece of rope fixed in a crack here—quite unnecessary, but no doubt useful to the leading guide on the ascent.

Again coming to a steep part we thought we might do better

by traversing again on the western face. This was a mistake. The steepish slabs here were covered in many places with ice, and though this was often snow-covered, and would therefore have been quite easy in the morning, now it was different. The afternoon sun had been beating straight on these western faces, and the snow was little better than loose slush. Hours of step-cutting would have been necessary to descend them, and darkness was rapidly approaching. We therefore returned to the ridge and continued the descent by that. By now, if we were to believe our watches, it should have been already nearly dark. Very strangely the light seemed to be rather increasing than diminishing. Looking straight polewards a most wonderful effect was seen. Absolutely indescribable was the splendour of the heavens, and the soft richness of the glowing colours, that stained the northern horizon and streamed upwards like auroras of flame.

We were at a height of about 12,000 ft., and looked over everything—in the world—to the N. and N.W. The Juras seemed close at hand. Leagues on leagues of the plains of France and Germany, to a dark line of forest-clad hills on the N., glowed under the strange illumination. The rays, striking from the N.W. into the dark chimneys and couloirs of the Dent Blanche, filled them with a most marvellous light, of a vivid green colour. Such a sunset and afterglow I have never seen before and can hardly hope to see again.

We learned later from home papers that on this date, August 2, 1908, most remarkable afterglow effects had been witnessed all over Western Europe, even in fog-beclouded Britain.

None of the writers to the papers could, I think, have had such privileges as Ling and I, high above the eagles' flight, 12,000 ft. above the sea, on the S. ridge of the great 'White Tooth.'

Before the last fires had died out in the N. we were well down the ridge. The white sickle of a young moon, close to its setting, guided us across the snows of the small glacier to the top of the Wandfluh rocks. Here the lanterns were lit, and a sheltered spot just over the edge, and out of the rather chill night breeze, was selected. Out came our aluminium stove and a brew of hot soup was soon ready. No water was available, but plenty of snow still lay in the crevices. The fresh eggs, boiled in shell in the soup, formed an attractive item in the evening meal. As the hour was now after 11 we made preparations for bed by stripping and putting on shetlands next the skin, replacing all clothing, donning shetland helmets and gloves, and battening down generally. Ling took off his boots,

replacing his wet stockings by dry ones, and putting on a pair of felt slippers of which he is greatly enamoured. I contented myself by changing stockings. We carefully and fairly divided the available sacks and ropes, as mitigators of the inhospitable hardness of the rocks, and lay down side by side. We hardly expected to sleep, and did not. We could scarcely regret this loss in watching a splendid display of lightning that blazed for hours in the southern heavens. We were high enough (about 11,000 ft.) to look past the Matterhorn far into the Italian hills. Though shut out, to some extent, by the great mass of the Dent d'Hérens on that side, we could look through its cols likewise.

No less than three separate and distinct electric storms were going on at the same time—blue shimmers and pink flushes to the right of the Dent d'Hérens and Matterhorn respectively; a huge fountain of purest white that lit from base to summit a cloud mountain somewhere in Italy, just to the left of the Zermatt edge of the latter peak. The stars and planets above us blazed clearly and frostily in a pure, unclouded sky. Though not the slightest sound was heard the riot of coloured electric fires that shone from the south lit our rock niche every few seconds with a light as of day, glittering on the ice walls at the back of the cave and showing every small article of the camp with startling clearness.

Towards dawn these displays paled with the paling planets. At 5 we had finished a hot breakfast and were ready to start, when Ling discovered the awkward fact that his boots were so hard frozen that he could not get them on. I have heard of a similar difficulty in like case got out of by burning paper inside the boots. In this case a few drops of spirit in the cooking lamp soon put matters to rights. The descent of the Wandfluh presented little difficulty in daylight. It might easily have done so, however, had we not got a good view of the wall from the Zinal ridge the previous morning. From the foot of the Wandfluh we at once crossed the glacier to the left bank, and contoured round to the Schönbuhl shoulder, without again going near the ice. We had some difficulty in finding the Schönbuhl gîte. A dirty and dismal place it is, and we felt no regret in having spent such a glorious night in the 'higher purer air' of the Wandfluh summit.

As our friends at the Monte Rosa might by now be getting anxious—we of course knew nothing of the accident on the Gabelhorn three days before—we resisted the allurements of the Staffel Alp Hotel and walked straight back to Zermatt, first by the moraine, then by the pastures on the left bank of

the Zmutt glacier. We arrived there in good time to enjoy a couple of 'grands bains' and to assume a civilised aspect before joining our friends at a much appreciated 'déjeuner.' If any comments on this climb as a whole are required I cannot do better than refer to the very just remarks made by Mr. Anderson at the end of his paper. With regard to a comparison between the two ways of reaching the upper part of the Viereselgrat ridge, I think that there can be no doubt that the obvious and direct route from Mountet, *i.e.* the N.E. ridge, is by far the easier. The pace at which the first and third parties moved over the lower part of the way shows that it could not have been difficult. Mr. Anderson's party rose 1,500 ft. in less than $1\frac{1}{2}$ hr.

Mr. Young remarks, 'The ascent went dangerously smoothly. . . . It was almost dull.' *

At no part of the E. ridge could smoothness and dulness be appropriate descriptions of the climbing. The second party on the N.E. ridge, the Zinal guides, no doubt took an inordinate amount of time. Starting at 3 A.M. from Mountet, they did not reach the summit till 2 A.M. on the following morning. This was said to be on account of having to fix ropes. I think, however, and my suspicion is confirmed by Mr. Young's account of his ascent, that a great deal of time was wasted by the guides wandering off into difficulties on the N. face, instead of sticking to the arête. Of course the last two ascents were done on September 28 and July 28 respectively, and the N. face would be utterly impossible on the earlier date.

The party who preceded ours on the E. ridge climbed very fast. They took only 2 hrs. 25 mins. from the Schönbühl gîte to the top of the Col de Zinal, and from there to the top of the mountain 7 hrs. The date was August 15. The conditions seem to have been very good. Thus traversing the 'Bête Rouge' they found one of the easiest places on the mountain, when we had slabs covered with ice and masked by new snow.

On the Viereselgrat they made many comments on the loose rocks, and only met with the cornices for the last $1\frac{1}{2}$ hr. of the ascent. We saw no loose rocks and had cornices practically all the way from the 'junction.' Messrs. Dufour and Martin remark, 'Les arêtes rocheuses sont exceptionnellement bonnes cette année' (1900), while the reverse might very truly be applied to the conditions of the Alpine peaks and ridges in July and August 1908. In any condition and by either ridge this traverse must always be a long and severe climb.

* *Yorkshire Ramblers' Journal*, vol. ii. p. 270

I don't agree with Mr. Anderson's suggestion that advantage would be gained by sleeping out at the foot of the ridge. The gain would not amount to more than an hour and a half or so.

Our route by the rocks on the left bank of the Col de Zinal to the arête is not a good way. It would undoubtedly have saved an hour or two if the direct Zinal Col route had been adopted. I have been asked if our party wore crampons. We did not. Under the conditions encountered crampons would have been worse than useless; they would have been dangerous.

I think it is not sufficiently recognised by many amateur climbers how dangerous crampons can be if ignorantly and recklessly used. It is a very ominous thing that the last two or three fatal accidents to entire parties of four should have the note attached, 'All were wearing crampons.'

Used, as I have seen them, to load still further the already gigantic tusk-nailed boots of an amateur party, plodding ponderously up the soft snow of the well used track up Mont Blanc by the Mulets, they are merely ludicrous. Used in the afternoon, to save step-cutting on a snow-clad ice ridge, or on the descent, under the same conditions, say, of the Wetterhorn,* they are quite possibly tragic. Crampons have their uses, and undoubtedly time can be saved under certain conditions. They cannot take the place of a thoroughly reliable ice axe and the knowledge of how to use it.

NINETEEN DAYS IN CORSICA.

BY T. G. OUSTON.

CORSICA appears to be treated by the Britisher like the woman with a past; to be looked at in a play, read of in a novel, spoken of with bated breath; interesting because fascinating, romantic and beautiful, but otherwise to be left severely alone.

In spite of the eulogies of Mr. Douglas Freshfield, British mountaineers have appeared by their neglect to have endorsed the above opinion, or perhaps not to have considered the Corsican peaks worthy of serious attention; they may at least, however, claim the merit of not being hackneyed.

For a good many years I had 'fancied' a visit to the Corsican mountains, and when three friends took up the idea of

* See *Alpine Journal*, 1908, vol. xxiv. p. 348.