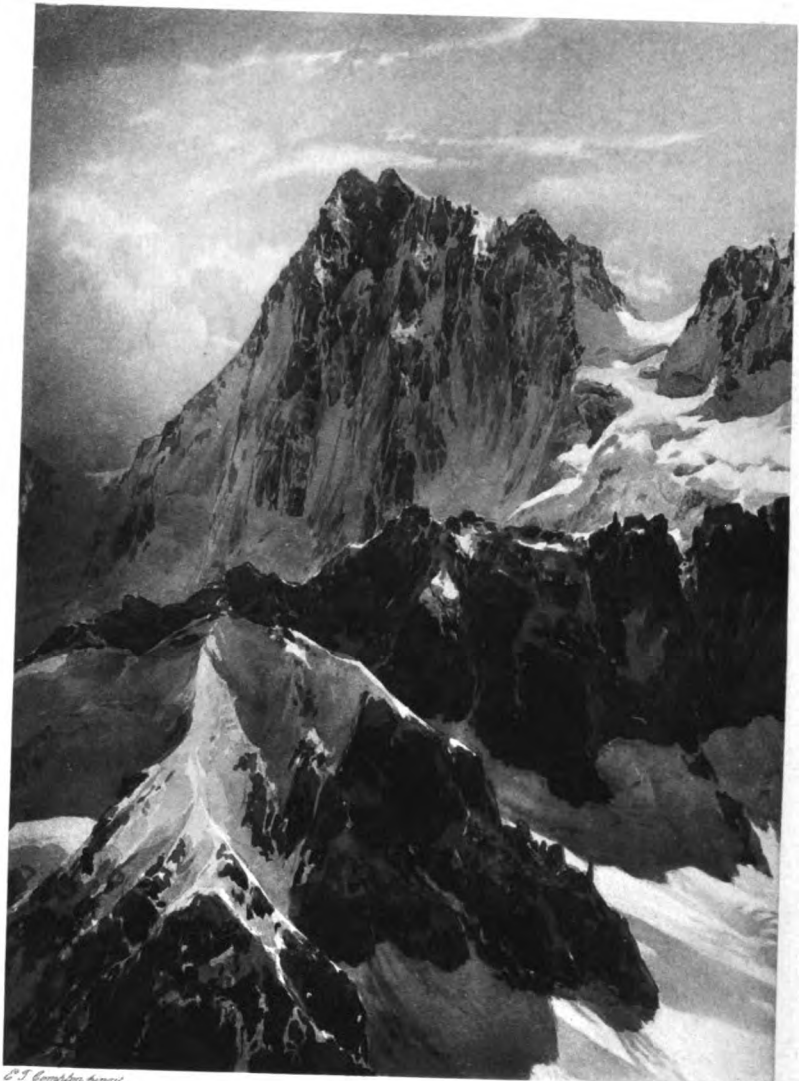




L. J. Compagnon, Paris

Les Grandes Jorasses, Chamonix

Les Grandes Jorasses, from the Chamonix

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TWO RIDGES OF THE GRANDES JORASSES.

BY G. WINTHROP YOUNG.

(Read before the Alpine Club, March 5, 1912.)

IN spite of their democratic character—orographically considered they are little more than a company of even summits upon a continuous wall, arbitrarily divided from their neighbours on either side by the accident of a considerable depression—the Grandes Jorasses have always been invested with an isolated, almost exclusive, celebrity that many independent mountain monarchs do not enjoy. Their reputation may be attributable partly to their theatrical position at the head of the most frequented and most exhaustively photographed of the alpine glaciers ; partly, possibly, to the severe even puritanical aloofness of their visible ridges ; partly also, and to my mind in large part, to a unique peculiarity of their majestic northern precipices. For their aspect is that of twin summits, duplicating the ferocity of their upward-sweeping lines, the vastness of their dark interspaces in a twofold association of strength, at once doubly satisfying to the eye and dominating to the senses.

It would appear to be one of the most primitive instincts of the human mind to associate the phenomenon of duality with the presence of supernatural force and mystery. Twin brothers built Rome, twin brethren saved her. The pairs of brothers or linked comrades march through the pages of legendary and

later Greek history, invested as deliverers or law-givers with almost divine attributes. Old Testament history is rich with the assonance of melodiously coupled names. Even as late as the Middle Ages the sincerest of the Lays concern themselves with the marvellous achievements of the dual hero.

It would be audacious to assert that the great twin Jorasses ever wrought as heroic actors in the Savoyard valleys; battled, as Jura and Jora, with the Griffin, or matched their Giant Teeth with the mythical Shark, before they finally retired to a frigid watch beside their chosen and frozen sea. But any one who has ever marvelled at them from the ridges of the Tacul or the Périades, couched like two colossal sphinxes under their lion's mane of snow, or shadowing shapeless heads against the Italian clouds, like two huge images hewn in a gigantic age as symbols of a yet untrammelled and impersonal nature-worship, will no longer be a stranger to some understanding of this primeval veneration.

Leslie Stephen speculated with delightful wit as to why the Col des Hirondelles, the most obvious pass in this region and over this range, should not have been attempted before his party traversed it. But mountaineers have such a habit of mysticism that it is possible we have found in this primitive sense of the sacredness of duality the reason why these summits remained so long inviolate. It took a race of giants to conquer them even in their frozen age. Whymper reached the first peak in 1865; Horace Walker the higher in 1868. And it must be recorded that, even so, these triumphs were won from the rear, where the spell of the dual aspect could not work. In 1864 the Mathews attempted the East shoulder from the Glacier de l'Eschaux, but were deterred. In 1864, also, the Wills, Taylor, and Milman reached the West shoulder, now called the Col des Grandes Jorasses, but found themselves unable to complete the crossing into Italy. In 1867 Hereford George and Mortimer reached the lower summit by a variant from the south. In 1873 Leslie Stephen, Loppé, Kennedy and Marshall at last traversed the Col des Hirondelles; and in 1874 Middlemore passed the Col des Grandes Jorasses, but again from Italy in the rear—an expedition that inspired a memorable controversy and one of the bitterest of alpine jests. This passage was repeated by Schintz in 1899, and a few days later by Mazucchi. In 1894 Evan Mackenzie completed the traverse of the pass in the opposite direction. The honour of the first lady's ascent of the summit fell to Miss Brevoort, with Coolidge, in 1867; and that of the first winter ascent to Güssfeldt in 1891. A noble



H. C. Jones, photo.

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GRANDES JORASSES, FROM COL DES HIRONDELLES.

list of names, and one that honoured the mountains even in their undoing. Ascents innumerable have followed up the rearward beaten track, but even to this day no one has been found so daring-hardy as to brave the black brothers on their dual northern face.

A materialist might assert that a reason more solid and less mystical is to be found in the far greater steepness of the rocks upon this North side. It is a fact that the nearer the approach to the precipices the more hopeless is their aspect. Most mountains seem to have been constructed with an eye to the future passage of man: the flaws and cleavages are contrived just within the compass of the average human reach. But Jorassic rocks would appear to have been erected for giants. The ledges, rare enough, recur at cyclopean intervals, and if a continuous vertical rift tempts the eye from in front, trial proves it to have been traced in mockery up some appalling overhang that leans out and over until even imagination grows dizzy in pursuing.

The stories of success in the Alps are single, and by their nature commonplace. The real romances and adventures are the manifold failures that have preceded the solitary success and made it possible. Of these only rumour informs us. The succeeding and successful bands of adventurers are fortunate if they find the evidence of a mean and discarded meat-tin to assure them that their predecessors at least suffered from hunger in approximately the same spots. But the rest of their heroism and the triumph they all but achieved have passed with their footsteps from the changing snows of the years.

Of the half-century of assault upon the Jorasses ridges we only know that it has been directed chiefly at the savage fascination of the East ridge, the ridge from the Col des Hironnelles. This ridge is marked at about a third of its height by a deep notch or cleft, the boundary of all attempts from this direction. Our President, with C. J. Hartley, undertook the first serious exploration in 1881 and 1882. Mummery, brilliantly led by Rey under conditions that demanded superlative iceman-ship, was turned back by the notch in 1892. Ryan, with the Lochmatters, attained only to the same point; and the same fate appears to have attended a party of guides sent out to explore the way for the Duc d'Abruzzi. The gaunt wall of precipice above the notch has defeated all alike.

Yet all of us, I suppose, who have concerned ourselves with the exploration have cherished different theories of how to

surmount or evade this barrier. To mention only the latest, H. O. Jones, after an investigation that must have considerably enriched the mountain photograph-sellers of half Europe, adopted, and I believe still educates at his own expense, an orphan belief that the ridge can be reached above the nick by the aid of magic climbing-irons and a glacier that hangs from the N. side of the crest as sheer as a wet sheet from a clothes-line. Some of us have even tested our infant theories. I have myself spent more than one night and an absurd number of days on futile efforts to cheat the ferocity of the ribs of the N. face. But the spell of the twofold sphinx has been on us all; and we have invariably fled incontinent, with a sudden and unconquerable preference for climbing yet another of the neighbouring Périades pinnacles. After a number of vacant years Knubel and I gave up hope, and 'with the West in our eyes' began, about 1906, to centre our intentions upon the ridge from the Col des Grandes Jorasses. But then came the lean climbing seasons, when nothing was possible but to make plans in England and forget them in the Alps. Meanwhile Jones had become active on the Italian side, on which, I believe, Mazucchi had already made one determined assault by the S. ridge, and with Laurent Croux he had attacked the S.E. ridge, best described as the ridge just round the corner from the Col des Hirondelles. Here they were beaten at about the same height, and not improbably by a continuation of the same impassable band as that which surmounts the notch on the E. ridge. In 1911 the drift of common failure, like the drift which assembles the derelicts in the Sargasso Sea, brought us together, and we agreed to join hands across the range. In London—London is the home of unrealised mountain ideals—our plan was to ascend from opposite countries and by the opposing ridges, eastern and western, on the same day, and to speak each other in passing on the top. After a week of realities in Dauphiné it seemed more practical and sociable to combine forces as far as the Italian hut, there to separate, and each swing out and up his chosen ridge. He chose the East: I the West. Jones is a scientist, and I am even less. Empirical research had not told him that the East ridge might not go, so he was going to try the East. Franz Lochmatter and literature had told me that it would not, so, for want of better argument, I was bound for the West. As you will realise, we had no sooner got to real grips with the mountain than we saw that we should have to concentrate all our forces to do even one ridge, and the romantic meeting on the top joined the lost legion of opportunities.

I had a premonition last year that it was going to be the season of seasons ; I am glad to think how often I said it in the spring, and how little I was believed. I may add in qualification that I have an invariable premonition every evening in a hut that the next day is going to be the day of days ; and as fortune has been most amazingly indulgent in this respect—I think we have only once been turned back by weather in ten years—I now enjoy an agreeable reputation as a ‘Glückskind.’ Guides will never allow that an amateur, in action, can be anything as competent as a ‘prophet,’ but they courteously concede that he may be ‘lucky.’ Dauphiné gave us all that we could wish for, even to me the precious opportunity of analysing the sensations of falling into a deep crevasse. Growing in impatience, as the weather gave signs of changing, with ever more frequent storms and clouded nights, we rocked and trembled across the passes of Savoy in hair-breadth motor-diligences to Courmayeur ; there to meet the guides safely circuiting with the baggage by forlorn Italian railways. No time was to be lost. We arrived in the evening, and in the morning despatched two sturdy porters to prepare a bivouac on the top of the Col des Hirondelles, from which we could determine, finally and for ourselves, whether the East ridge would yield to the unparalleled simplification of the hot season. The guides turned up, but with only a patriotic and unwarrantable faith that the luggage would follow. At mid-day we were still waiting. Why elaborate an old story ? Telegrams, Mercurys, motors were despatched down that fateful valley. The streets of Courmayeur were trodden frighteningly clean by the to and frowardness of our feet, and in a fury of resolution we vowed that at whatever hour the boots arrived we would start, if it meant tramping all night. At 8 p.m. fate repented, at 9 we set out. I have known few more sentimental starts. To ease our path up the long Val Ferret we had hired the only remaining chaise in the village. Into this were crowded Knubel, Croux, Jones, myself and the driver. The single horse had already been somewhere near to Aosta that day, and was suffering from melancholia. He rarely quickened to a walk, and as we stole imperceptibly through the moonlight we could only realise that we had moved at all, from hour to hour, by the slight readjustment of prominent landmarks. We had other causes for depression. One of the guides had not had a telegram from one of his offspring for at least four days, and was determined to believe him lost on the Brenva route. The depression was infectious, if not

convincing. Jones and I exhausted ourselves in casuistical attempts to escape the character of contemnors of the domestic ties. Only to be forced to abandon ourselves finally to the oppression of midnight, and to the marvellous quiet of the moon, as it prowled in and out of the ghostly spires of the Peuteret ridge and flashed haunting lights from the higher glaciers across our noiseless and interminable pilgrimage up the valley. The last of the moonlight left us, by this time on foot, stumbling doggedly up the wearisome slopes below the Frébouzie Glacier. The sight of the consecrated gîte at its foot proved altogether too much for the overwrought paternal feelings. We had barely reached the porters' tracks on the beginnings of the snow-covered icefall when the spirit of tragedy overcame even our hardened feelings, and we released an anxious parent so that he might return in time to set out on a search from Courmayeur at dawn. The sequel revealed to us that a comparatively comfortable night had been spent in the gîte only a few hundred feet below our sympathetic parting, and that the prodigal had returned riotously living, his only fault having been a preference for wasting his substance and time on the postal rather than the telegraphic system of his country. We remain of the opinion that there ought to be a clear understanding in such details between the members of an affectionate guide family, more especially if their activities are spread over two lands.

The glacier was in an unspeakable condition this year—what glacier was not?—and for myself, not being allowed a rope, I found the trapeze work among the seracs by the light of a single dip a nerve-wracking performance. But we consoled ourselves with the thought that we should get some hours' rest in the good gîte doubtless contrived by the porters on the col above. Suddenly, in an icy scoop in the very middle of the fall and far below the loom of the pass, Knubel stopped with a shout; and there, a dark mass, lay the porters, curled up in our sacks and too lazy or frightened by the seracs to have even forced a way to the warmer rocks a short shout away on our right. Brutally and without a word we kicked them out. Knubel crawled into the one sack, Jones and I into the other, and we fell asleep in a single breath. Within an hour dawn waked us, to the grim humour of watching the shadowy porters clacking their cold heels on the tiny ice island. We left them to cower again in our warm sacks, and tracked on, with the pensive feeling that we were depositing a good deal of our party by the wayside and that very little of it showed signs of

springing up. But the scales had still to touch the beam. We reached the pass with dawn, only to look into a fearsome blackness over the Mer de Glace, and to meet a driving storm heavy with stinging butterflies of snow. All idea of the E. ridge had now to be abandoned ; but we were still resolute to make certain of the unthoroughfaresomeness of the big 'notch,' once and for all. We left our sacks at the foot of the E. ridge, and climbing rapidly—I forget whether we used the rope—after some two strenuous hours of steep and satisfying rock work we clustered on the sharp little Pissgah on the hither side of the fatal gap. One by one, as we had ascended, the various traverses suggested by previous examination had been sadly rejected, and now as we faced the facts even the most shortsighted of us was silenced. Springing from the gap before us in a preliminary overhang of 60 ft., the ridge rose a clear 150 ft. above our heads to the first possible standing place. In fact from the notch upwards the ridge is no longer a continuous edge, but a series of colossal protuberances, marking at intervals a sort of salient but interrupted line up the huge rounded butt of the E. wall of the peak. On our right any possible evasion of the overhang was barred by a fortification of slab, undercut with a superfluity of naughtiness that I have never elsewhere seen approached. To the left any idea of a traverse was negatived, after a few feet of impracticable wall, by an enormous open couloir, down which all the refuse of the abominably rotten rock on the upper part of the face hooted continuously and harshly. Slightly to our left, and slanting crookedly up the overhang above us, was the crack of which we had heard report. It overhung for more than 50 ft., of which the first thirty alone offered any prospect of hold. Like John Silver beside the empty treasure-pit on Spyeglass Hill, without a word we 'found our temper and changed our plan before we had had time to realise the disappointment,' concentrating our examination on the prospect of a descent. Above the crack was a slight stance, from whence a man might be lowered and not suffer unduly ; above again, we thought we could trace, by crack and rib and ledge, a possible route to the remote impending nose, whence we knew the ridge eased backward to the summit. Satisfied of the absolute impossibility of an ascent under the most favourable conditions, we shot down the arête, to the detriment of our breeches, made sure of an easier line for the future through the ingenuities of the Frébouzie Glacier, dodged an avalanche in the torrent, drank a jaded tea at La Vachey, and trudged into Courmayeur to a late dinner, after some

21½ hrs. of almost continuous going and considerable unnecessary mental stress.

We had had enough for the time of the Jorasses, and the Brouillard ridge of Mt. Blanc was crying to us round the corner. The Twins waned into a dim and misty remoteness, and as Jones has already told you, on the next day we trudged the eight hours up to the Quintino Sella hut, took a second day exploring the route up the Mt. Blanc Glacier, and on the third sped over and back to Courmayeur, to the confusion of the 'bivouac' prophets. We would willingly have given Knubel a day's rest after his crowded and single responsibilities, and Jones and I even offered to make an interim attempt on the West ridge alone. But Joseph was wrought almost to tears by the thought of our innocence gambolling in and out of the teeth of such a monster; so we added Laurent Croux as relief for the roping manoeuvres, and set off the next morning for the Jorasses hut. We had decided to make sure of the descent of the E. ridge, of which we felt some immoral certainty, and to leave the still dubitable W. ridge to the still more doubtful future of the weather. Tunstall Moore—whose death, while this Paper was in preparation, has meant for our Club the loss of a most gallant and accomplished mountaineer—was the first to attempt this descent in 1902.* The fact that a party of such pace and power had spent six and a-half strenuous hours, and yet been turned back at a point where his guides were of opinion that further descent would only be possible with an additional 600 metres of fixed rope, was not encouraging. But the conditions were now widely different, and we had the memory of our previous exploration to assure us that, if we could only hold on long enough and firmly enough, 20 m. of rope and good fortune should see us to the col.

It is a matter of experience that guides are least enterprising in their own valley. Familiarity with the tradition of the unclimbed and the loud voice of the inferior herd uplifted against any attack upon the tradition weigh heavily on their initiative. As the moment approached for defying the terrors of the ridge, associated for him from childhood with the superstition of inaccessibility, our own local providence was evidently fighting a losing battle with the germs of valley pessimism. We dawdled on a somewhat hesitant line up the lower glacier, and on reaching the Rochers de Réposoir unroped and each

* *A.J.* vol. xxi. 425.

followed his own angle of inclination, with much better results. We crossed the great couloir to the Rochers Whympfer, and having hurried across the higher glacier halted for a time to examine Herr Pfann's enterprising variation route up the S. face,* which joins the ordinary ascent on the bluff of glacier just below the end of the rib which ascends to the Pic Walker. Then we advanced separately and in leisurely fashion on to the peak. Jones' recording notebook, that fluttered like a yellow folio angel in and out of his pocket on the most hazardous passages, gives our time as $4\frac{1}{2}$ hrs., with halts. There was nothing, not even imperfect weather, to stimulate us, and as we looked down over the grim foreheads of the Twin summits something of the old spell returned, and we lounged in the crisp snow looking out idly, and in my own case rather sadly, over the exquisite view of the Mer de Glace, with its long memories of lost comradeship.

But no sooner were we roped up and fairly over the edge than the mere steepness of our prospective descent braced us like cold water. The incalculable looseness of the higher rocks, every ledge loaded with crazy fragments, called forth our most delicate caution and a heartening freedom of language. Then the ridge stiffened into the bridge of one of its abrupt noses, and slanted us out more briskly and firmly to where its grey tip leaned dizzily against space and the deep-seen glacier. Close to the tip we came on some tins carefully lodged in a crack, as if for record, and there is little doubt that this nose marks the limit of the descent made by Tunstall Moore. The height of the whole ridge from the col is some 2500 ft. This point, as can be seen in profile, is from a quarter to a third of the way down the ridge, and from here the rocks suddenly sweep over in cliffs of a perpendicularity fearsome to any party which had only seen them from above. Tunstall Moore's guides estimated at the time that 1800 ft. of rope would be required to enable them to reach the 'notch' from here, and I am prepared to say that hardly a consecutive 50 ft. of the further way, and especially a passage immediately below this nose, could be descended with safety in the condition in which they found the slabs. Clear evidence is to be found in the fact that Moore's very fast party took $6\frac{1}{2}$ hrs. in doing the 600 preliminary feet of the rib, which occupied us only $\frac{3}{4}$ hr. The remaining 1100 to the notch took us, in admirable conditions, about 4 hrs. Under snow and ice, as the first party found them, the upper and lower

* *A.J.* vol. xxv. pp. 163-4.

sections of this flight of giant steps would have made impossible demands upon time and human skill.

We secured ourselves above the broken nose, while Croux, with an ever more and more vocal pessimism, that only drew songs and discords of purposeful gaiety from the rear, cut and clung down the flying bridge under the retroussé tip. It was an awkward passage: a sharply curving and holdless slab, with a faint fringe of ice on its upper edge down which steps had to be scraped. Knubel, as last man, shamed our timid crawl by waltzing down it on a single jodel. It is difficult to distinguish between the steps that followed. We clambered down crack and edge; and each time were pulled up abruptly on the bald grey pate of some huge gargoyle, craning into space and seeming to wriggle with pleasure in the wind at our disappointment. Each time we hoped it was the last, and each time the sheer distance to the pass looked further and the angle steeper. And each time we worked round and down the nose by some cleft on the South, and traversed back on to the ridge again.

The last 500 ft. to the notch we had expected to prove the real crux. The last but one of the great noses skewed out in a treacherous overhang above the Mer de Glace; and far below us, and to the right, we looked down on a small grey nob that we felt must be the 'step' overhanging the notch. But between us and it lay some 300 ft. of daunting slabs that bulged away over the rounded sky-line to our right. Beyond this sky-line, as we had seen from below, lay a big open couloir, and down its nearer side a possible line of descent. Both were now hidden from us. Whether we could have reached the couloir by a direct traverse across the slabs I am not certain. Anyhow it did not occur to us; and we prepared for a zigzag descent down and across the slabs to where the curve of the sky-line descended on the neck behind the lowest grey step. The slabs were faced with enormous crystal-shaped pillars, like magnified sections of the Giant's Causeway, sloped at an angle of some 70°. Between the pillar edges there were rectangular chimneys, with few holds but good friction. I do not think there was any portion of our descent here that could not be climbed, upward, by a first-class cragsman; but for security we made use of a succession of 'doubled ropes,' descending each time some 60 ft., traversing on some ledge to the right, and so descending again until we reassembled on the shattered rock-bridge behind the last nose. Viewed with a cautious eye over the rounded edge, the fall of the overhang to the col

- a Bracket to which doubled rope was fixed for the last overhang.*
- b—Beginning of crooked chimney*
- c Neck behind the last "Nose"*
- d—Remote commencement of final slabs.*



H. O. Jones, photo.

Swan Electric Engraving Co., Ltd

EAST RIDGE, GRANDES JORASSES Slabs above the "V" notch.



H. O. Jones, photo.

Swan Electric Engraving Co., Ltd.

WEST RIDGE : The traverse on South face. (Indicated by dotted line.)

looked terrific, and far greater than we had estimated. But for the memory of that little crooked chimney, crinking down somewhere to our right and back again invisibly below us, it is possible that even now we might have been forced to admit defeat, and have faced the formidable re-ascent of the slabs. Our first man was frankly despairing, and even the optimist chewed his cheeks in silence. Tentatively we crept down the wrinkled nostril on the S. and recognised, with very little reassurance, the casual opening of our small crack. A precipitous angular trough, it crooked downward through two sections and ended in a tiny bracket over space. Jones and I unroped, and ate bon-bons from green and pink paper on an airy perch, and made conversation, while the guides faded away down the trough. The ridge had played so many tricks that we were almost afraid to irritate it by confident speech. Presently the whanging of axes on the metal heads of pitons cheered us up, and I crept down the trough far enough to see Croux launching himself emotionally into the void, with the rope passed through two pitons that peeped like another pair of mysterious baby twins from an inspired cranny at the side of the bracket. A long series of grunts, a silence, and then one of the most relieved shouts conceivable from a human throat. It breathed at once the vanishing of many years of doubt, and of many days and hours of anxious foreboding. We, with our trials to come, echoed it with a cheer from above that contained still something of defiance; and then Jones followed. The manipulation of the unfamiliar rope-brake had such charms for him that he sacrificed a pet axe to the impatient Twins before he wound, and unwound, himself gracefully on to the little col. I came next. The first 25 ft. from the top overhang, and could never be ascended without a rope ladder. Then the crack bends back towards the pass below, and its interior provides some useful holds; useful, because a further direct descent on the rope alone would necessitate a deeper drop down a smooth wall to the steep ice of the couloir which falls precipitously past below descending from the South side of the little col. But by means of the holds we could keep in the crack, and follow it down and across towards the col, until we stood on a small traverse that ran all but on to the sharp snow crest of the 'V' notch itself. Knubel frolicked down; and the doubled rope—a rare triumph—followed without a hitch.

Muscularly tired, but content, we lunched on the now familiar Pisgah; and fretfully, as becomes men who have the interest of the day behind them, potttered on two ropes down

the remaining 2 hrs. of ridge to the Col des Hirondelles. The Frebouzie Glacier, grown even more intricate in the interval, was taken at a gallop; the ordained chaise of course failed to meet us at La Vachey, and we tramped once again in the dusk and dust into Courmayeur—a day of some 16½ hrs.

Descending is always less attractive than ascending. The muscular effort is greater, the pleasure in each finished effort markedly less. The nervous output is proportionately more considerable, for the possibility of a mistaken course is increased, while the consequence of error becomes more serious. With the consciousness that retreat means return up an ever-lengthening chain of stiff passages, the appearance of fresh and invisible problems brings an increasing measure of doubt that intrenches on delight. From below, the steeper a wall may appear to be, the better it can be seen, and the more the mind can concentrate on present action. From above, the steeper the wall may actually be, the less it can be seen, and the greater becomes the strain upon imagination, and nerve, and patience.

We were pleased with our big descent, the more so that we had previously proved, to our own satisfaction, that the ascent was impossible. But at the back of our minds was the feeling that the success would remain only lopsided unless we could ascend the West ridge, and so join up the climbs into one sequent traverse of the arête.

We took an off day—our first—in Courmayeur, for the good of our souls and tissues, and spent part of it in a sunny meadow, staring at the splendid prospect of the West arête. Above the Col des Grandes Jorasses the first nameless peak springs sharply against the sky, with a deeply serrated summit ridge. This we knew represented the limit of all previous attempts. Milman, describing the first ascent of the pass in 1864, when the Jorasses had not yet been ascended, first called attention to the ridge. He speaks of the 'inaccessible cliffs to the East,' which might 'be ascended for 200 or 300 ft,' whence 'some crack might communicate with the glaciers seen from the Val Ferrex,' but it would be 'very difficult and dangerous.' The foreshortening of the ridge, viewed along the line of summits, clearly deceived him as to the proximity of the glaciers. Subsequent parties have always been of the opinion that to evade the series of towers, the traverse would have to be made on the N. or French side. In recent years the first peak has been climbed by Ryan with the Lochmatters, partially by the two Brocherel with Signor Joseph Gugliermina, probably again by

the two Brocherels alone, when exploring for the Duc d'Abruzzi—and for crystals, and subsequently by two Austrian mountaineers, Herren Leuchs and Hoff. These two gentlemen took to the rocks of the N. face below the bergschrund that subtends the Col des G. J., and after a valiant day on the rocks, slept out near the summit of the little peak, but failed to advance further, and returned by the same route. All alike have been turned back by the sheer descending E. wall of this first little peak; the wall falls into a deep gap, from which again rises a cheerless serrated knife-edge to the nearer peak of the Punta Margherita. This last, formerly known as the Dome des Jorasses, was first ascended by the Duc d'Abruzzi from the S. and E. in 1898. Since then it has been closed to mountaineers until last season, when three parties—Herr Pühn's, Blodig and Todhunter's—and our own visited it in the space of a few weeks. We were not hopeful of succeeding where so many had failed, but we had a cheerful vista behind us, and faith in Farrar's principle that 'you can't say for certain it won't go until you have rubbed your own nose into a place.'

We returned once again to the jolly little Jorasses hut, Knubel, Jones and myself. The conditions of this season were of course incomparable, but the weather in August rarely took itself for granted, and the storms, which had been threatening us in brief evenings for all the fortnight, now began to encroach upon our nights and mornings. The few night hours of pleasant and by this time established companionship in the isolated hut among the glaciers, with still views over the fall of the southern alps, were full of anxious watching of a low pall of smoking clouds that herded and scattered like startled sheep about the peaks. We woke to a chilly and grey night, and nothing but an almost proverbial good fortune justified, in the issue, the optimist's insistence that there was a feel of sun behind, and that at all hazards 'the route must be explored for another day'—that well-known euphemism!

A silent rush took us up the glacier to the opening of the black throat of a couloir that descends from the Col des Grandes Jorasses; and here, on a little island of rock in the ice that gave protection against the fall of chance stones, we waited for a cold hour upon the dawn. The optimist sang conscientiously, to charm warmth and a cheerful heart, for Knubel is a true son of the hills and sunshine, and his moods darken with the sky. But what really braced us to a firmer hope was the sight on the faint horizon of our faithful friends the starry Gemini. It was a heartening coincidence, even for two such materialists as

Jones and myself, that on all our expeditions, whatever the mist and the foreboding of the night, these sympathetic stars never failed to laugh in our sleepy faces when the hour of starting came. They led us on the Ecrins, the Meije, the E. ridge of the Jorasses, and on Mt. Blanc. And it was the best of omens that when we were out to solve the last mystery of the great Twin summits, now one, now the other of the yet loftier twin Brethren flashed through the driving scurry of cloud, with an assurance of clear skies beyond.

With the first whisper of light we straightened our cold knees for the attack.

Between us and the base, some way above, of the rock buttress by which the ascent to the col is now made, intervened a huge hanging trough of hard ice, 20 ft. deep and 40 ft. across. It is the funnel down which the couloir (by which the first ascent was made) discharges all its refuse of rock and snow avalanche, and the hot season had beaten and polished it to rather more than a half section of glittering turquoise ice. The leader cut steps on an upward traverse down into and round its hollow interior. He paused to prospect under the curve of the farther wall, and the second man, to give him rope, moved in over the edge. A breaking step and the shrill grit of scraping claws and axes; and two-thirds of the party were whirring down the glassy trough to the bergschrund. The rope of connexion to the third man cut into the hard snow corner on a slanting curve, and had carved out a perfect sugar cone some 7 ft. high, when its deeper cleavage was arrested by the shaft of a deeply driven axe. The leader seemed rather braced than otherwise by the cool plunge; and a bandaged hand was soon forgotten in the strenuous wrestle with the slabs of the buttress with which we were soon engaged. We had been on the look-out for stone-falls, but for a year in which the shrinkage of ice had exposed remarkable depths of hitherto hidden and disintegrated rock, producing on many faces a horrid precipitation of pinnacles and bastions, this buttress showed comfortingly few traces of bombardment, those blue angry bruises that the evil tempers of the hills inflict upon their own bones. We followed the few wooden pitons that marked where the doubled rope had been used by previous parties. One had been knocked out, and another set loosely awry in the worst passage. The climbing we found of a decidedly exacting character. On the pass we emerged into the full dawn, and the growl of the northern glaciers came up to us on sudden gusts of biting wind that burned our cheeks with the ice pelt of high frozen snows. While we halted



H. O. Jones, photo.

Swan Electric Engraving Co., Ltd.

FIRST PEAK ON WEST RIDGE OF GRANDES JORASSES.



H. O. Jones, photo.

Swan Electric Engraving Co., Ltd.

WEST RIDGE OF GRANDES JORASSES,
PUNTE MARGHERITA E ELENA.

for a standing breakfast we noticed, to our discomfort, that the night had left a plastering of white drift on all the tiny but indispensable ledges of the N. face. This was a serious matter, as we expected to have to traverse largely on this face, and the slabs seemed in no cordial condition.

The first peak is climbed directly from the col, up the pendulous steepness of its N.W. face. The cliffs start abruptly and sternly. My friends in front and behind appeared to glide upwards with hateful composure, but for myself I found fingers, which frost-bite has rendered sensitive, of little comfort on the ice-clogged and infinitesimal hollows sketched as holds up the hanging slabs, where we wandered perpendicularly up a dim and alarming line of so-called least resistance. Knubel looked down on my dolorous wriggles with an expression of grave and half quizzical abstraction, the look which betrays, I feel sure, once the courtesies of the valley are remote, his real attitude of mind towards the motions of all futile mortals upon mountains, always excepting those of the adored Franz Lochmatter and some of his own.

Here and there on the higher reaches we came upon rope-rings, significant of the difficult retreats of earlier explorers; and as we clung dizzily up through the cold northern shadows keen golden triangles of dancing sun-specks poured through the black fangs of the ridge far above our heads, and suggested how thin was the gloomy supporting wall, whose southern face through all its countless facets was already saturated with the glare of day. It was a welcome and inspiring moment when we could at last traverse out and up into one of these golden angles not far below the first summit and warm our fingers and our hopes in sunlight. The ridge was like nothing I have ever seen. Behind and before us the sharp spires of bronze rock curled over to left or right like the alternating halves of an abbot's mitre, cloven jets of misty fire in the liquid morning light. The edge has for a space no continuity and no coherent backbone. Disregarding alike its position as an outline for purposes of view, and its duty as the traditional free way of the mountaineer, secure in its aloofness and its inaccessibility, the solid rock bursts upward in a foam of irrational rejoicing—a rock surf of fantastic impulse, surprised in a moment of frolic with the winds and the wasting of time.

From a shoulder behind the top of the small peak we looked out, across the precipitous fall of a great couloir in the South face, at the south-eastern wall of the Punta Margherita, distant and repellent. The wall of our peak dominated this couloir with

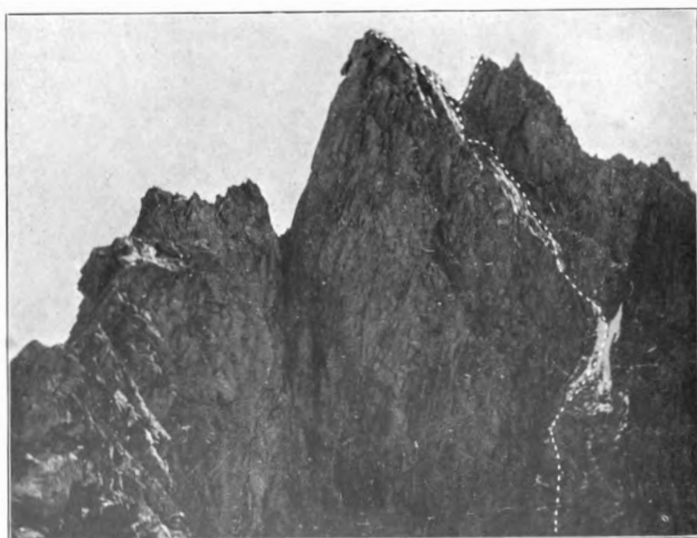
an apparent overhang of some hundreds of feet. Behind the top of the peak, on our left, the ridge bent away to the N.E., fringing the amphitheatre at the head of the couloir with a semicircle of ill-ordered spires, raw and unfinished, offering neither holds nor hope. Beyond these, the ridge finished on to the eastern summit of the Margherita with an insolent upward swirl of smooth crag that sufficiently accounted for the unanimity with which previous parties had turned back, refusing to be entrapped into a useless struggle with the introductory steeples of the sickle-shaped crest. We had resolved, and failing other issue we should undoubtedly have attempted, a descent and a turning movement of traverse on the N. face, but the sun and clear rocks of the S. wall were a great temptation, and the longer we looked at the Punta, the surer we felt that, could we but cross the intervening bay, we might force a way up a certain ragged depression in the S.W. face of the peak to a patch of snow, whence we could either traverse up to the highest summit from the S., or invent a crack up to the neck between the two summits. The problem was to find a way down from our eyrie and across the gaping couloir of corrugated and dusty slabs. Moving back along the crest behind the small summit, Joseph first took a prospect over its S. wall, and then with exaggerated solemnity—for had not the incomparable Lochmatters here desisted?—Jones was launched over on a trial flight, with a double of our light reserve rope as security. A crack that cunningly concealed the most surprising holds gave a delightfully easy descent, and on a shelf some 60 ft. below he was able to shout reassurance. A downward slanting traverse would clearly take us off the precipice of our first peak. We were soon reunited, with the comfortable feeling that should we be defeated later, a return up the tower would be feasible without the nuisance of having to abandon our spare rope as a precaution. A goblin of venerable standing had been exorcised with startling rapidity, and we embarked on the traverse of the cirque with light hearts. The whole length of the succeeding traverse to the foot of the depression was probably about 300 to 400 ft. The line ran on a wavering level across several incipient gullies, backed with a sort of concrete, and round the blind protuberant bases of one or two huge rock fangs. The rock was what is reckoned as perpendicular for climbing purposes, the holds gritty, often loose, and generally non-existent. About the middle we enjoyed—and we really did enjoy it—the ‘hundred-foot hand-traverse.’ For two short sections of this, as we contoured the breasting of the most



H. O. Jones, photo.

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WEST RIDGE OF GRANDES JORASSES,
FROM PUNTA MARGHERITA.



H. O. Jones, photo.

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PUNTA MARGHERITA : Line of ascent of S W face and W. peak.

ferocious of the towers, a defective architecture compelled us to swing freely from hand to hand, with only a graceless protest of friction from our lower extremities. At one point, on a 'sheer' wall, the hands, by a subtle winding of the body, had to attach themselves to a ledge between the feet, and thence to lower the useless body again to the extent of the arms. We had sound small belays for each other's protection, but I can recall few details, except a sense of selfish concentration on my next cranny and the growing extra weight of Knubel's sack. I have my own idea that the outposts of the hills have by now learned to use our sacks as a sort of postal service, for exchanging their dreams, so ponderous do the contents feel as we pass between the peaks, so trifling do they look when we come to open the sacks upon their summits. And the first thoughts of the yielding Jorasses were heavy thoughts.

It was a very sunny moment when we raced across the last slabs of the couloir and swung without a check up the more deliberate angles of the depression in the S.W. face of the Margherita. The peak still loomed above us, but we could choose our several lines up the shallow and broken trough with almost voluble certainty and not even the shadow of a falling pebble. The depression ended on a small snow slope under the wall of the summit, but a narrow and deeply cut crack soared steeply up to our left to the notch between the peaks. It was a dignified finish, with a friendly resemblance to a score of familiar British climbs. We bridged and serpented our way up it with grateful appreciation; and after a breathless and silent pause on the col, Joseph and I passed to erect a cairn on the W. peak in honour of its first conquest, while Jones made directly for the higher summit and photography.

The link which so many of us, and for so many years, had been forging was now made, and, though the feeling is a familiar one, I was never before so acutely conscious of the regret that walks with gratified desire. The brief pleasure of realisation was dearly bought with the ending of long hope, and with the solitary triumph of one actual route perished that happy family of pleasant courses, which had enjoyed for years, together and without prejudice to the other's chances, each its recurring moments of imagined success.

Three parties had already reached the Punta from the E., two of them only shortly before ourselves after a five years' enforced interval of waiting. We followed their reported line down the slabs of the N. face, though the better line undoubtedly this year would have been to have followed the arête. The slabs were

drowsy with snow and exceedingly tricky. Our progress down the loose knobs that projected from the smooth curtains of rock was cautious and laboured. Some of the long traverses were all that is most offensive of bleak and fragile instability. We came up at last on to the arête, and out into the sun by the small secondary peak which is known as the Punta Elena, with an unspoken relief, and in my own case with a touch of the suspicion that 'everybody else in the party is rather cross,' which usually accompanies a relaxation of one's own nervous tension.

We were now at the point where an easy face of rotten rock, descending on the S. of the main ridge, indicates the line by which the three previous ascents and descents had been made. 'H. O.,' very rightly considering that the new route was completed, prepared to descend; but I, who in all matters of principle am but as air and water to his substance, a sort, if I may put it shortly, of 'H. O.,' had a wish to reach one at least of the main summits beyond, and so far as was not quite absurd to connect the traverse of the two arêtes. The ridge was now absolutely straightforward, and much of it had been previously traversed. I can make no excuses for a watery idealism. But without a word of real dissension 'H. O.' stood looking intently down the wall, and I stared fixedly up the arête. In the harmonious issue he proceeded slowly down the face, in an isolated progress that was subsequently forced upon us all by the unspeakable state of the rocks, and Joseph and I fled like frightened 'agile Gibbons' up the ridge. We had allowed 45 mins. at the least, but in 25 we were panting on a snowy peak that we assumed to be the Pic Whymper. I am now convinced it was the small adjacent summit which forms the culmination of the Rochers Whymper on the S. side, and of the great westerly bastion on the N. I do not think that, even had we known our error, we should have added the extra 10 mins. of superfluous snow slope up to the supposed Pic Walker (but actual Pic Whymper). There are limits even to pedantry. In another 20 mins. we were back again, and shouting warnings of our distasteful progress down the detritus of the rotten rib. On the edge of the glacier we all roped up again, and marched with aching heads down the crevassed ice fall, slovenly and treacherous in the late sun. The sight of the hut, with its reminder of the despondency with which we had left it twelve hours before, first recalled us to a sense of what our present emotions ought to be, and brought us the yet sweeter soothing of a brew of hot tea.

The evening halt at the base of the actual climb is the fitting finish of a remembered day. Tea and the rest at the half-

way hut have cleared the brain, dull with the pressure of changing heights, and are fashioning laughter out of the petulance of passing fatigue. The solitude of impression is still free from the incursion of commonplace ideas; from the resolution of romance into a few stereotyped incidents; from the distortion of adventure by question and repetition. The breaking of the rhythm of movement has served only to release thought from its concentration upon an immediate purpose, and is preparing it agreeably, by a restful commune with slower and gentler sensations, and by a wandering attention, for the pleasant trifling of the levels, where we move at the call of convention and the clock and not to the undertones of time and death and chance.

Already the half regret with which we looked down from the peak and back along the broken enchantment of the ridge is forgotten. The summits are again above us, challenging and remote, each shadowy line no more than hinting at the memory of some hidden place of contest, and, for the upward glance, invested once again with the glamour of seclusion and difficulty. We might return and prevail a second time, but it would now be with no less effort and uncertainty than before. Even while we are still within the measure of our victorious day, we realise that we have already surrendered the few hours of success stolen from an existence as mutable in substance, and more indomitable in spirit, than our own. Could we repeat our ascent, the rocks would not be the same rocks, as we should not be the same men. Wind and rock and weather, and strength and mood and fortune, can never be matched twice in the same circumstances of conflict or lead inevitably to the same issue.

As we watched from the hut the great ridges of the Jorasses were already brightening with a new armour of frost, and noisily shaping fresh rock escarpments as a challenge to other explorers. For us, in any later season, their defiance will have lost nothing of its magic, and their distant splendour seem only the greater for the recollection of its formidable discovery. There is a charm in revisiting, with curious and different minds, the sights or stories that leave a familiar but mysterious aftermath in the sun-coloured pictures that survive from our childish impressions; but the mountain that we once have climbed recalls us afterwards with a more vivid appeal, the spell of a friendship formed in the fiercest moments of intense living, strange to our later and more subdued consciousness, but even in the imagination of its recovery alive with the memory of every detail of elusive pleasure once dreamed of in its company.