

MONT BLANC AND THE GRÉPON IN 1911.

BY HUMPHREY OWEN JONES.

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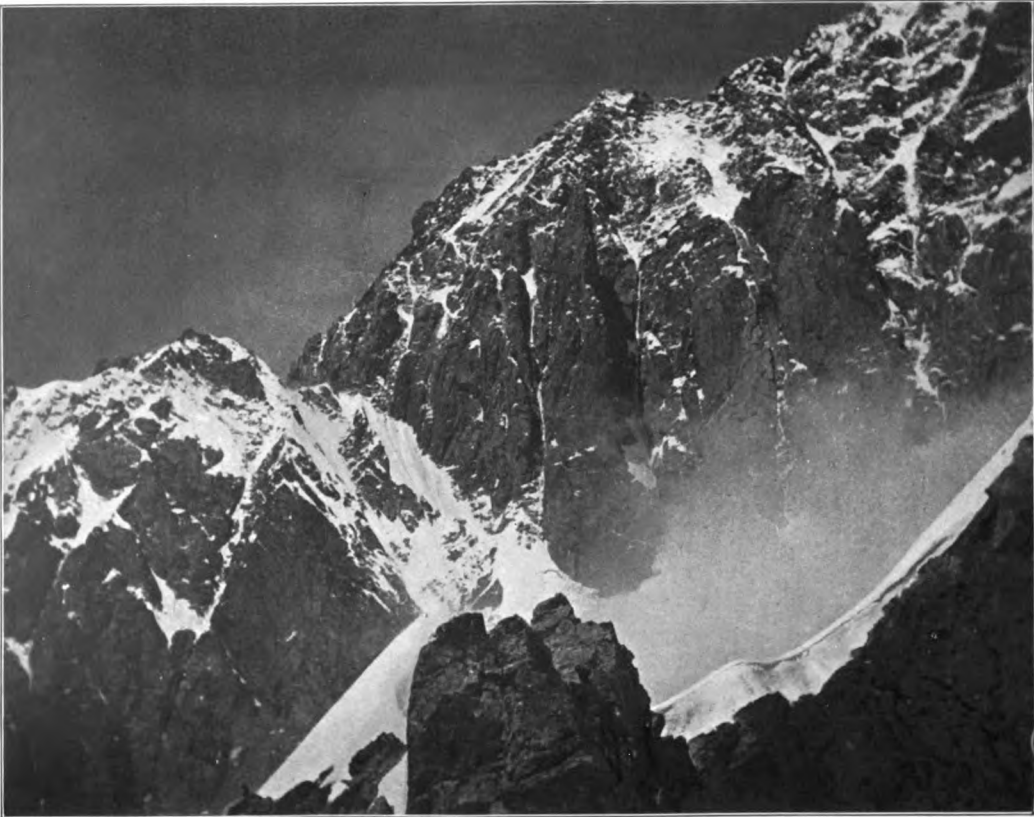
Di reverenza gli atti e il viso adorna,
Sì che i diletti lo inviarci in suso.—*Purgatorio*, xii. 82.

THE climbing season of this year will be memorable not only for the extraordinary spell of unbroken fine weather and for the magnificent condition of the rock peaks, but also for the troublesome state of most glaciers and for certain unusual peculiarities. Thus, in the early part of August the weather often showed every sign of breaking up; the nights and early mornings were characterised by a marked absence of the low temperatures which are usual at these times in fine weather, yet this never portended more than a passing thunderstorm. Lastly, the snow mountains and ridges were still snow and not ice: a striking contrast to the state of things in 1906.

It was therefore clear that here was the opportunity for tackling certain problems for which all had been waiting for the last four years. This view the guides also held and stated strongly in the form: 'A rock peak that does not go this year never will go,' so I looked forward to realising or relinquishing hopes raised by the explorations of previous years in the chain of Mont Blanc.

It was my good fortune to accompany Geoffrey Young and R. Todhunter, two old Cambridge friends, with neither of whom had I previously climbed in the Alps; but well I knew that in their train I should be expected to move quickly, especially on rocks. We worked together in various combinations with one or more of the guides, Josef Knubel, Laurent Croux and Henri Brocherel, until the temporary break in the weather in the latter half of August hastened the departure of my companions. Altogether the party made six new expeditions, and it falls to my lot to describe two of these: an ascent of Mont Blanc by the Brouillard Ridge and an ascent of the Grépon from the Mer de Glace.

The contrast between these two expeditions is very striking; the former completes the exploration of the chief rock arête of the Monarch of the Alps and provides a route to its summit



Mt. Brouillard

Col. Emile Rey.

Pizzo Luigi
Amedeo.

H. O. Jones, photo.

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BROUILLARD RIDGE, FROM PUNTA INNOMINATA.

which is certainly among the finest ; the latter is a fancy rock climb of the most difficult kind on a peak which has been described somewhat unjustly as ' *nur ein Kletterblock vom Montanvert.*'

With long expeditions in the Mont Blanc chain in prospect we decided to get into training elsewhere, and for this purpose selected the Dauphiné, a district new to all except Todhunter and Croux. We all met on the way and duly arrived at La Grave, whence four of us set off the same evening for the Chalet de l'Alpe. We slept the second night at the Promontoire Hut, and the third in the bivouac beside the Glacier du Vallon de la Pilatte, in which we were completely sheltered from a heavy thundershower of considerable duration. The next day all six made a new route to the Dôme de Neige des Ecrins by its west arête and traversed it, the Pic Lory and Les Ecrins. On the descent the Glacier Blanc gave us a considerable amount of work to do, and the downward jumps over two enormous crevasses were of the biggest and most exciting kind. The next night saw us again at the Promontoire Hut, whence Todhunter and Brocherel reached La Grave by the Brèche de la Meije, while the rest of us made a most enjoyable traverse of the Meije under ideal conditions in about nine hours, including many halts that amounted to two and a half hours. The behaviour of the weather surprised us all, but we were obsessed with the idea that it could not last and that it behoved us to make the best use of it as long as it did. Consequently we made all haste to Courmayeur, crossing the Cols du Galibier and du Petit St. Bernard in motor diligences. The passage of the former in a light car of the topheavy variety, which skidded continually on the narrow, rough, and dusty road, I shall always remember as one of the most dangerous experiences of my life.

The prospect of a return to the chain of Mont Blanc restored my spirits. To me this group so far surpasses any other I know in beauty and interest that I find it impossible to understand how it could have been thought that 'he has neither the beauty of the Oberland nor the sublimity of the Dauphiné.'*

The passage of the Petit St. Bernard was less nerve-shattering, and landed us on August 4 at Courmayeur, where our arrival was awaited with impatience for reasons which I will endeavour to explain.

* Whympier, *Scrambles*, p. 222.

My connexion with the ascent of Mont Blanc by the Brouillard Ridge is due to Dr. Blodig, the well-known Austrian mountaineer, who set himself the task of climbing all the peaks in the Alps of 4000 metres or over. This task (a 'fantasy,' as he calls it) was thought to have been completed in 1906 when the Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret and Mont Brouillard were added to the bag, bringing the total up to sixty-five. In the meantime, however, two new peaks had been added to the list by being ascended, named and duly recorded on the new Barbey-Imfeld-Kurz Map. Here then was Blodig at the age of forty-seven faced with the problem of ascending the Punta Margherita and the Picco Luigi Amedeo in order to complete his self-imposed task and earn his well-merited repose. The first was a comparatively simple problem, and it was only necessary to wait for a year, when its north face would be free from ice, a state of things which was not realised until this year; but the ascent of the Picco Luigi Amedeo was quite a different matter. This peak was first ascended in 1901 by Signori G. B. and G. F. Gugliermina, who, starting from the Quintino Sella Hut,* climbed the west face by means of difficult rocks, on which they spent two nights, and reached the summit of Mont Blanc at 9 p.m. on the third day. A repetition of this magnificent expedition was not suggested by Blodig, even in moments of greatest enthusiasm, so some other method of attaining his desire had to be found, and inspection made it clear that the west face might be neglected for this purpose. During the last fifty years many well-known mountaineers had already studied the Brouillard Ridge, including the east face of the Picco Luigi Amedeo, from the Brouillard Glacier, and though little information relating to most of these expeditions or attempts is to be found in the literature the following are recorded: Mr. Birkbeck (1864),† Marchese Durazzo (1870),‡ Messrs. Utterson Kelso and Girdlestone (1873),§ Messrs. T. S. Kennedy and T. Middlemore (1874),|| Mr. J. Eccles (1875),¶ Dr. Collie and Major Bruce with H. Thapa (1899),** Signori Gugliermina (1899).†† In many cases the opinion that the ridge is unclimbable from that side is definitely expressed.

In 1908 therefore Blodig contemplated making a descent

* *Boll. C.A.I.* 1902, xxxv. 244 *et seq.*

† *A. J.* viii. 409.

‡ *Boll. C.A.I.* vi. 292.

§ Moore, *Alps in 1864*, pp. 420, 425.

|| *A. J.* vii. 110 and 225.

¶ *A. J.* viii. 409.

** *Climbing in Himalaya*, p. 178.

†† *Boll. C.A.I.* xxxv. 191.



H. O. Jones, photo

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from Mont Blanc to the Col Emile Rey by the Brouillard Ridge, a rather unattractive proposal, which was carried so far that enormous quantities of rope of various kinds appeared at Courmayeur. However, careful scrutiny of the east side of the ridge from a convenient view-point on the road near Courmayeur revealed a couloir, or rather a gully, descending to a point just below the Col Emile Rey, and this gully Eckenstein persistently maintained could be ascended, at any rate if free from ice. As the gully is obviously the main outlet for the water coming from the conspicuous snowfield above it would probably only be dry in a fine year. This view so far prevailed that in 1908 E. H. Compton and I ascended to the Col Emile Rey, which took us three hours and twenty-five minutes from the Quintino Sella Hut. While my companion sketched industriously, I descended to the foot of the gully and examined it. It was then filled with ice and its sides garnished with pendent icicles, which conditions precluded any thoughts of ascending it at the time. It looked however to my optimistic eye as if it could be ascended without much difficulty when dry, and it was certain that once up the first 200 feet or so it seemed very unlikely that any insuperable difficulty would be encountered. The slope soon becomes less steep, the slabby protogine gives way to a different rock, more broken and dark brown in colour.* This view was confirmed by further inspection from the summit of Mont Brouillard, which we ascended. There seemed to be another route, a short distance west of the Col, which might be feasible, but though it would usually be found free from ice it would obviously be much more difficult. This report and the onset of bad weather that same day sent Blodig home in a very sorrowful mood.

In 1909, two days before the arrival of Blodig and myself at Courmayeur, the gully was reported free from ice; but it was certainly iced for the rest of the season, and, as we failed in an attempt to ascend the Punta Margherita, Blodig departed more despondent than ever.

Last year (1910) it is almost needless to say the expedition was

* Dr. Bonney has kindly examined a specimen of this rock, and reports that 'it is a biotite gneiss, not rich in quartz, with some iron oxide, epidote and minute accessory minerals, mostly decomposition products from the felspar. It belongs to the older Alpine group of gneisses and crystalline schists, and thus is more ancient than the well-known protogine.'

absolutely out of the question from the first, and Blodig never even came to Courmayeur. Meanwhile others had taken up the task of ascending all the 4000 metre peaks, and in 1909 one of them, Dr. Pühn, had ascended the same sixty-five peaks as Blodig. Also, Blodig's attitude towards the ascent of the Brouillard Ridge altered somewhat, and he came to regard the chief object of the expedition to be the making of a new route to Mont Blanc by its main south ridge. When we arrived on August 4 this year Blodig was in a state of great excitement, he having thought that we were coming on August 8, while I was under the impression that the date appointed was August 8. Further, Dr. Pühn had already ascended the Punta Margherita and had designs on the Picco Luigi Amedeo. Herr Pfann was also there with the intention of ascending Mont Blanc by the Brouillard Ridge. However, partial equanimity was finally secured by urging the consideration that the full moon, which we had agreed was very desirable, if not necessary, for the expedition in question, was not due until August 10; by Young consenting to join the party with Knubel, an accession of strength which assured the success of the expedition if it was feasible; and by an arrangement with Todhunter to set out for the Punta Margherita on the morrow. We met again on August 6, Blodig having ascended the Punta Margherita, while Young and I, with Knubel, had had a strenuous day of twenty-one and a half hours exploring the east ridge of the Grandes Jorasses, and it was agreed to start the next morning for the Quintino Sella Hut. At 10.40 A.M., a most unusually late hour at which to start for this hut, Blodig, Young, Knubel and myself, with two porters, set out. We arrived at 6 P.M., pleased to find that the hut had already been occupied this year and was dry, but not pleased with the prospect of the weather, as it was raining.

It was decided to start at midnight, but at 11 P.M. we were enshrouded in mist; so counsels of prudence prevailed, though Young's impatience was curbed with difficulty. We spent a part of the day on the eastern branch of the Glacier du Mont Blanc, working out a route to the foot of the couloir leading to the Col Emile Rey. This part of the glacier had been reported impassable, and it was fortunate that we made a preliminary reconnaissance. The couloir, which is over 400 metres long and at an average angle of about 47° , would be a formidable obstacle if it contained much ice. On my two previous visits to it there was a certain amount of hard

ice in it, but this year, to our great delight, it was filled with snow in excellent condition. We returned in cheerful mood, enjoyed the magnificent panorama from the hut, rendered still more beautiful by the evening colours, and retired with high hopes for the morrow.

At midnight we rose to find a cloudless sky and brilliant moonlight. So having put on our crampons we set off at 1.10, and, following the tracks made the previous day, had crossed the bergschrund, at the foot of the couloir leading to the Col Emile Rey, at 2.20. Here we unroped and ascended to the Col, which we reached at 4.22—earlier than we had expected. The moon had served us well, and as we ascended it gradually disappeared behind the Aiguilles de Trélatête, the shadow of which followed us up the couloir. The situation is admirably described in Shelley's words :

'The cold earth slept below ;
Above the cold sky shone ;
And all around,
With a chilling sound,
From caves of ice and fields of snow,
The breath of night like death did flow
Under the sinking moon.'

Blodig and I sat down to await the appearance of the sun, while Young, showing his usual inexhaustible energy, made certain of at least one peak by ascending Mt. Brouillard with Knubel. This ascent took them nine minutes from the Col, and caused Blodig to mutter many things about the foolishness of a man of his age coming out with such '*Teufelsgänger*.' These insatiables having returned we learnt that Knubel was confident of being able to ascend the gully on the east, in the bed of which there was but little ice, and even of being able to reach the ridge by the more difficult route on the west of the Col. We then breakfasted, and tried to cheer Blodig, who could not yet be brought to believe that he would soon have attained his long-desired object. It was agreed that, if we were to succeed and to avoid an involuntary bivouac, it would be necessary not to lose time ; so at 5.15, in brilliant sunlight now, we roped up and moved on to the foot of the gully. This we ascended mainly by its true right wall. The climbing was interesting, but a corner requiring some delicacy of balance and a fairly difficult slab of about 30 feet provided with small holds were the only passages which needed serious consideration. In an hour we had reached easier ground near the ridge, where

we rested and unroped. Then at 6.40 we were on the snowfield which is so conspicuous from Courmayeur,* and continued the ascent by the low rock rib on the east of this until the main ridge was reached at 7.50,† and the summit of the Picco Luigi Amedeo fifteen minutes later. Blodig stepped first on to the summit of his last *viertausender*, his face wreathed in smiles, and proceeded to call three cheers for the Climbers' Club, the ascent having been made by the one and only honorary member of that club and two ordinary members with a Swiss guide. We were actually a very cosmopolitan party, as no two of us had the same native tongue. The air was still, everything was perfectly clear, and we fully enjoyed the glorious prospect spread out before us ; but after forty minutes of these joys the consideration that the greater part of the day's work was still before us caused us to turn our backs reluctantly on all this and to move. The rope was put on and retained until we had passed the gap between the Picco Luigi Amedeo and the arête of Mont Blanc de Courmayeur and had ascended the first step in the latter. This was somewhat difficult, owing to our choosing a chimney in firm rock on the left instead of the easier route over looser rock on our right. At 9.15 we had surmounted the obstacle, and, after discussion, Young and I elected to go on unroped, while Blodig and Knubel decided to follow roped. Young led rapidly up the easy serrated ridge over an apparently unending succession of rock towers : we roped again on the snow ridge. Later this carried a small cornice, which grew into a large one near the summit of Mont Blanc de Courmayeur, as near as possible to which we passed at 11.25. The summit of Mont Blanc was reached just after midday.

It would be presumption in me to attempt to write of the view, as this has been done so admirably by so many masters of Alpine description. Let it suffice to state that it was at its best. Yet, though there was very little wind, the cold forced us to forgo the enjoyment of the superb panorama, and we elected to wait in the shelter of the hole where the Observatory had once stood. Blodig and Knubel arrived about half an hour

* I am informed that at the end of August the snow had entirely disappeared from this place, and that no one remembers any previous year in which this had occurred.

† The point at which we struck the ridge must be near that at which the Signori Gugliermina reached it on their ascent, whence easy rocks led to the summit.

Picco Luigi
Amadeo

Mt. Blanc de
Cotrimayen

Fentretet Ridge



H. O. Jones, photo.

Swan Electric Engraving Co., Ltd.

SOUTH EAST FACE OF MT. BLANC FROM PUNTA INNOMINATA

later, and we left the summit at 12.45, intent on rest and refreshment at the Vallot Hut, which we reached at 1.7 and left at 2.45 to descend by the Dôme route. The two enormous bergschrunds gave us considerable trouble, and were only crossed by a combination of sidling along vertical walls of ice and some exciting jumping. Then we found the glacier so badly crevassed that for some time it seemed doubtful if we could win through. During this time Blodig, though surprised at the rapidity with which the ascent had been made, yet finding it difficult to disabuse his mind of the preconceived idea that the expedition would involve at least one involuntary bivouac, thought that, after all, the time had come for the said bivouac, and incautiously made a joking remark to Knubel about choosing a suitable place for it. This called forth a burst of patois, from which we gathered that the *heilige Strohsack* was called to witness that, rather than bivouac, he would make *pitons* of the ice-axes and use them for crossing crevasses as long as they lasted. Eventually the hut was reached at 5.30, where we indulged in half an hour's rest, and later we had another at La Visaille. The long walk down the Val Veni by moonlight was beguiled by an exchange of impressions of the day, and as we were all very cheerful the way did not seem long. Blodig was so happy that, if the rest of us had had no other reason for feeling the same, the fact of having contributed in some measure to his happiness would have been enough. Young was delighted to have made his first ascent of Mont Blanc by such a fine new route, and derived additional satisfaction from having broken what he calls the Courmayeur tradition of bivouacs; while I was greatly pleased with the expedition, all of which I had enjoyed so thoroughly, and agreed with Young that, even if nothing more was done, the season would still be a memorable one. We entered Courmayeur at 10.30 to the surprise of all; none expected us back that night, and some had even predicted three bivouacs for us. The machinery of the Hôtel Savoie was put in motion for providing us with food, and we soon retired to rest in a very contented mood after a day of over twenty-one hours.

Thus was that long-standing problem, the ascent of the Brouillard Ridge * of Mont Blanc, solved and a new route to

* Later this year Les Monts Rouges du Brouillard were ascended from the Glacier de Miage by Mr. A. W. Andrews; thus the whole of the great Brouillard Ridge has now been climbed.

that magnificent peak made over the greatest of its rock arêtes. The expedition is a highly interesting one, in which there is a combination of first-rate snow, ice, and rock work for which it would be difficult to find a parallel. Under really good conditions, such as we found this year, which are however probably rare, the expedition presents no particular difficulty, but it is undoubtedly very long, and speed is necessary if it is to be completed in the day. We had moved rapidly throughout, and the pace at which Blodig still moved on the descent caused his juniors to marvel greatly, and to wonder how near it they would be able to get at the same age.

During the ascent we saw no stones fall, but later in the day some stones must be expected, both in the couloir leading to the Col Emile Rey and also in the gully above this. In the couloir all danger from them can be avoided by keeping on its left side, but in the gully little or no shelter could be found.

It seldom happens that at the time a new expedition is recorded there is so much subsequent history to tell as in this case. The expedition just described has already been repeated twice this year. On August 11, two days after our ascent, Herr H. Pfann and Count Ugo di Vallepiana started from the hut at midnight and reached the summit of Mont Blanc at 5 P.M. On August 18, Dr. Pühn with Adolfe Rey and a porter set out at 8 A.M., and reached the summit of Mont Blanc at 6.30 P.M. Both parties spent the night in the hut on the summit and were exposed to some risk from stone falls before reaching the Picco Luigi Amedeo.

The next day Blodig returned home, proposing in the future to be content with the ascent of lower peaks in the Eastern Alps. Young and I set out for other expeditions, the chronicles of which will be written by him in a style more fitting to the subject than is at my command. Meanwhile Todhunter had been busy, and among other expeditions had made the first traverse of Mont Gruetta. On August 16, Todhunter and I went to the Quintino Sella Hut with Brocherel, my sixth visit, and the next day we crossed Mont Blanc to Chamonix. The only facts worthy of note are that, owing to the crevasses, we found considerable difficulty in reaching the upper basin of the Glacier du Mont Blanc, and also in effecting a lodgment on the rocks. In the former process we were disturbed by a large flake of ice which fell after Brocherel had climbed over it and before we did. Fragments hit us, and we were fortunate in escaping any injury. We arrived at Chamonix in good time for tea and the inimitable raspberry tarts. Young was already



H. O. Jones, photo.

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MT. BLANC DE COURMAYEUR, FROM MT. BLANC.



H. O. Jones, photo.

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SUMMIT OF PICCO LUIGI AMEDEO.

there, having come over the Col du Géant ; Knubel in charge of the baggage effected the passage by means of the Col Ferret ; Croux had left us to fulfil another engagement.

Apparently the weather was still on its best behaviour, so it was agreed that we should all five proceed to a camp on the north side of Trélaporte and make a determined attack on the Mer de Glace face of the Grépon, the ascent of which had been an ambition and a study of Young's for many years. The history of previous attempts on this face is, as far as I know, brief. The late Mr. Mummery* chose it as his first line of attack on the peak, but only reached a point quite low on the face near a 'great red tower' which is conspicuous from below, from which it seemed possible with great difficulty to reach the Charmoz-Grépon Col or the gap between the Pic Balfour and the highest peak, both which points were known to be much more easily reached from the Nantillons side. The former route was subsequently followed by Mr. Ryan with Joseph and Franz Lochmatter, and this expedition was repeated by Mr. A. Stuart Jenkins with Jean Bournissen and Léon Tournier. Both parties reached the summit ridge above the top of the 'Mummery crack,' and in each case it was found necessary at one place to throw a rope in order to render further progress possible. Young visited the face twice, and other parties have also explored it.

This face turns out to be a splendid case in support of the theory, which one of our worthy vice-presidents maintains was originated by the late Alexander Burgener, that the only way to ascertain whether difficult rocks can be ascended or not is to go and rub your nose against them—in fact, that prospecting from a distance is useful only in the case of comparatively easy rocks, and close inspection is necessary in the case of difficult rocks.

Our camp was all that a camp should be, only that, owing to this exceptional year, there was no water near it, so ice had to be carried up from the glacier. There I spent the most comfortable night I have ever spent in a camp, which is saying a good deal. The next morning, August 19, under a perfectly clear starlit sky, we got off at 3.5, and by traversing round the promontory of the Trélaporte reached the glacier of that name at 4.15. We then moved up the glacier towards the most northerly of the three couloirs. (Mummery had tried first the middle one and then the most southerly.) Below the

* *My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus*, p. 121.

bergschrand at 5 A.M. we roped in the order Knubel, Brocherel, Young, myself, and Todhunter, which order remained the same throughout the ascent.

The formidable bergschrand, surmounted by 'a wall impregnable of beaming ice,' was turned by the rocks on its north side, which gave climbing that helped to tune our muscles to the pitch required for the day's work. The steep snow slope above the bergschrand was then traversed to the south and a lodgment on the rocks effected at 5.35. The route now bore upwards to the left, and, proceeding at as rapid a pace as I should ever care to have set for me on rocks, we passed near the 'great red tower' at 6.15; then followed the line of a lively little stream until much more serious work began at 6.55. We were now to the right of and somewhat below the end of an enormous stretch of yellow slabs that seemed to extend downwards from the summit ridge, and which are bounded by two ribs of rock, one extending downwards from the highest peak of the Grépon, and the other, which is less prominent, from a point on the ridge more to the north.

It became clear about this time that Knubel was not in his best form, and Young showed not only a remarkable knowledge of his psychological peculiarities but also extraordinary skill in nursing him back into the splendid form which he showed later in the day. A traverse to the right, followed by an easier traverse back to the left again, brought us to the edge of a deeply cut chimney, and here it seemed as if the expedition would come to an untimely end. Knubel proposed to go to the right, a line which, if followed, would inevitably force us on in that direction, with no hope of getting on to the rib leading up to the highest point by which it was proposed to ascend. The traverse to the left had to be made here or not at all. The situation was undoubtedly critical, and the success of the expedition hung in the balance for a time; but it was saved by Young, who quickly descended the chimney and called out that a traverse was possible from that point. Knubel came over and, after inspection, admitted that the traverse could be made with the aid of a fixed rope, but said it would be impossible to return. This objection was overruled by Young, who pointed out a ledge above the traverse from which the first man to return could be secured; that point conceded, a spare rope was fixed, and the traverse, which was difficult and remarkably free from holds, was executed. Easy rocks then led upwards to the crest of the rib which we desired to reach, where a convenient breakfasting-place, dominated by



From painting by E. T. Compton.

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GRÉPON, FROM THE COUVERCLE

the famous 'Crag on the Grépon' on the left, was found at 8.25. The pace had been fast, and so, after nearly five and a half hours, we all needed some rest and refreshment; these coupled with reminiscences of recent triumphs restored Knubel to his usually cheerful and optimistic mood, so that we felt assured of the success of the expedition if it was possible.

At 9 we were off once more, and from this time until the summit was reached at 2 the climbing was always difficult, usually exceedingly difficult, twice verging on the impossible, but it was undoubtedly superb. Chimney, slab and crack, always steep, sometimes even overhanging, followed one another in rapid and bewildering succession; often the slabs provided only a crack-hold for the hands and the foothold had to be obtained by friction on vertical slabs of rough protogine. It would be impossible to describe the route in detail, and fortunately such a description is unnecessary; there could be little difficulty in finding the route, as it keeps fairly directly up the rib towards the summit, and seemed to us to be practically the only feasible line of ascent.

A few of the passages however stand out in one's mind for one reason or another, and I will merely mention some of these, including the crux of the climb, which none of us is ever likely to forget. From the breakfast-place an ascent of about 60 feet brought us to a great triangular platform backed by a right-angled, vertical recess. This it was agreed ought to have a name; it was therefore dubbed '*la niche des amis*' and was selected by Knubel as a suitable place for a bivouac in case of a retreat—the last we heard of such an undesirable contingency. A very long stretch of difficult climbing, relieved only by two short easier bits, brought us to a small gap in the rib, from which the 'Crag' was seen close on our left and whence smooth slabs seemed to stretch directly up to the summit. This was about 10.30 A.M. From this point some slabs and steep cracks led to a horizontal terrace about a yard wide and about fifty yards long; a glance to the right revealed nothing but hopeless slabs; about 15 yards to the left an abnormally steep chimney led upwards for about 200 feet, and beyond that again there seemed no hope of ascending. A small cairn was placed at the foot of the chimney and we started up. About two-thirds of the way up the chimney narrowed and became overhanging. Here Knubel passed his sack down to Young, who, with admirable foresight, had left his own behind; then, facing the true right wall of the chimney, he surmounted the overhang with considerable difficulty and reached a stance. Brocherel

then ascended, but with a sack had to face the left wall, a method adopted by the rest of the party. Todhunter and I moved up to Young; while, though we could not see what was happening, it was obvious that serious work was going on above us. Here, as in several other difficult places, while I was still gasping for breath after severe exertion and preparing to take in Todhunter's rope, I was much astonished to find his gloved hands, delicately holding the coils of rope which he gathered in as he came up, suddenly appear between my heels. In answer to my expressions of surprise he would mildly respond that he thought it advisable to come along to save time and was taking no risks. After some time we gathered that Knubel had arrived somewhere or other, and that Young was expected to move up to Brocherel, who announced that he was safe and able to hold but not to give any further assistance.

At the first attempt Young found the sack so troublesome at the narrow, overhanging part of the chimney that he announced that he could not be expected to get up with such a handicap. This information, conveyed by Brocherel to Knubel in the form '*Josef! Monsieur Young ne monte pas,*' had such a stimulating effect that Brocherel was very soon using Young's head as a foothold for the next step. Later Young availed himself of my head for the same purpose; then he disappeared from sight, and later very considerably sent down the rope for us, an operation which was not by any means easy. It is impossible to convey any adequate impression of the next 30 feet. First there was the constricted part of the chimney slightly overhanging, which gave out on a slab provided with rudimentary holds; this in turn led to a hopeless overhang, which had to be turned by rounding a corner on the right, whence a steep slab, practically devoid of holds, led to a good stance and belay. Knubel's ascent of the last-mentioned slab, relying solely on an axe, with its point inserted into a minute crack as hand-hold, and merely on friction for the rest, is one of the most remarkable climbing feats I know of. It was perhaps fortunate for the morale of the party that he was out of sight when doing it.

A short, sharp struggle next brought us severally to a platform where we all met at noon and recovered after our recent violent exertions. The prevailing feeling of relief that the last passage had been successfully accomplished was followed by a feeling of annoyance and regret because the upper slab was so excessively difficult as to make it unsafe for anyone to lead who was not master of the 'ice-axe hold,' which, so far

as I know, is practised only by Franz Lochmatter and Knubel. At 12.30 we moved on again, the first obstacle being an exhilarating chimney of 120 feet; then steep slabs and cracks brought us to the cleft between the Pic Balfour and the highest point of the Grépon at 1.30. At one place, where the arm jammed in a crack was the only available hold, Young and I rejoiced to find that for once we, by virtue of our slightly greater bulk, were able to proceed with somewhat less difficulty than Todhunter.

At this time we were ignorant of the way in which a rope can be fixed to assist the leader in climbing the 'Dunod' chimney; and further we were particularly anxious to finish the climb by the Mer de Glace face. So leaving the gap by the detached leaf on the face, Knubel and Brocherel ascended to an uncomfortable position under the overhang of the final peak, where Brocherel anchored himself and gave Knubel such help as he could. The rest of us watched with breathless interest Knubel's violent struggle, again using his axe, this time with the handle inserted between two stones as hand-hold, which finally landed him on the summit. A spare rope was then fixed and we all forgathered on the summit at 2. The last pitch is that which had beaten all early attempts to climb the Grépon by the south-west ridge, and in Monsieur Dunod's last attempt Aug. Tairraz had failed to reach the summit by this route even with the assistance of a 36-foot ladder.* Knubel, who was supremely happy, was warmly congratulated by all on his magnificent feat.

I trust that it has been made sufficiently clear that this expedition is entirely due to Young and Knubel; my part in it was confined to the aforementioned provision of a foothold on one occasion and to giving as little trouble as possible. It has been decreed also that mine is to be a task of the humble chronicler.

After a well-earned rest we turned to the descent, which, taken in a leisurely manner, brought us to a welcome tea at the Plan des Aiguilles, and, with many a story by the way and many a halt to enjoy a glorious sunset, to a still more welcome dinner at Couttet's before 8.

This expedition stands alone in the experience of all the members of the party, not only for the long-continued severity of the climb, but also for the great technical difficulty of several passages. It is only the excellent firm, rough character of

* *C.A.F. Ann.* 1885, pp. 88 *et seq.*

the rock which makes some of these at all possible.* The Chamonix guides received the news of the ascent with the sullen silence of incredulity, which after our departure changed to active denial of our statements.

The weather now became bad for five days, during which Todhunter and Young both left the mountains. Later J. M. A. Thomson and I, with Knubel, traversed the Matterhorn twice in three days, which brought Knubel some small measure of consolation for the departure of his beloved patron; and so home. Thus ended the most memorable and most successful season I have ever had or indeed am ever likely to have in the Alps—a season in which weather, conditions, comrades, and luck were all that could be desired, a season which has provided pleasant memories to carry one through the years to come. It is surely not possible that two such can fall to the lot of mortal man.

THE COL DE LA BRENVA.†

BY CLAUDE WILSON.

AT 8.20 P.M. on July 28, 1904, Wicks, Bradby and I, accompanied by two porters, walked out of the courtyard of the Hôtel Royal at Courmayeur into the moonlight. The porters were to go with us as far as the usual bivouac, but a long day was in front of us three, for we hoped to cross by the

* During the discussion which followed the reading of this paper it was stated, by some members who had previously studied this face, that large stones had been seen to fall down it. Our experience showed the face to be so sound throughout that it is difficult to understand how stones could fall on such steep rocks, except during a thaw in the spring or after a heavy snowfall; the face is normally quite dry.

† This paper was written when the events which it records were fresh in the memory of the writer. It was put by in an unfinished state, and recently unearthed by Captain Farrar in the course of his investigations into the history of the various expeditions by the Brenva Face (*see ante* p. 171). From Captain Farrar's researches it would appear that, while Mt. Blanc has been ascended about a dozen times by this face, the expedition here recorded is probably the first and only passage of the Col de la Brenva, used as a route across the range.