It is a long way to Fiesch, which we only reached about 6, without pressing ourselves, and after a very enjoyable day. We were told that the Fiescher Glacier had not been descended for many years and had turned back more than one party, as indeed I can well believe might be the case in a less snowy year than 1913.

At the same time I can strongly recommend the expedition, especially for a strong party making an early return from the Finsteraarhorn or when the weather appeared too doubtful for a high ascent. The ice work will not disappoint the most exacting iceman.

J. P. FARRAR.

EARLY ATTEMPTS ON THE AIGUILLES DU GÉANT AND DU DRU.

BY E. R. WHITWELL.

AT a Guest Night at a Temple Dinner about a year since I had the pleasure of renewing my acquaintance with Sir Edward Davidson, and we talked about our early Alpine days (mine a good deal earlier than his, of course), and the subject of the Dent du Géant came up and my unsuccessful attempt on it in 1872.

The sequel to this was that two or three weeks ago the energetic Assistant Editor of the ALPINE JOURNAL, Captain Farrar, wrote to me asking if I would give an account of my attempted ascent on the Dent du Géant, pressing me to make it as full as I could, and I promised to put down my recollections of a very exciting time.

On looking through my memoranda, unfortunately nearly the whole of that relating to this mountain is lost, but there are parts of the climb still very vivid in my memory. Under these circumstances I suggested that I could add an account of an attempt on the Aiguille du Dru in 1874, and he was good enough to say that this, he knew, would be of interest to the readers of the JOURNAL. I am fortunate to find what was evidently the beginning of a paper containing a short history of my attempt, never finished, no doubt because I hoped at the time to be able to combine with the attempt an account of the completed ascent! This, unfortunately, did not come off, as I never had another fine day on which to try the mountain.

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Mr. Dent, in an account of two earlier attempts, apologises for what he describes as an 'unparalleled thing, and going against all precedent in the ALPINE JOURNAL, to describe two failures on one mountain.' How much more would he have condemned me for doing a much worse thing than that, seeing that I am not only giving particulars of attempts which failed, but also, what makes my case very much worse, describing them after the mountains had been already conquered!

I fear that this paper will be found very dull reading, because it is the numerous trivialities, when fresh in one's memory, that give the living touches to enliven what otherwise becomes a mere tedious record. Alas! the information is lacking of even the hours of starting and returning, and exciting details of when and for how long we stopped for meals, when we put on and took off the rope, which sometimes form a not inconsiderable portion in the description of an ascent!

Then there are notes which are really of interest which I cannot now give—the coming frequently to an *impasse* requiring change of route, often slight and sometimes considerable, which must occur on peaks of the character I am describing. The details of such as these might have put life into the dead bones which are all I have to give you!

The Aiguille du Géant.

As I have already said, nearly all my notes relating to my attempted ascent on the Aiguille du Géant in 1872 are lost, and what remain are of a very fragmentary character. They must, however, have been fairly full when written, as there are references to a plan, now, alas! extinct like other prehistoric remains.

At the time I made the attempt this Aiguille was attracting a good deal of attention as being the only mountain of 13,000 feet high not then ascended, so I naturally was anxious to try what I could do.

In the summer of 1872 I started from Mont Fréty with Ulrich and Christian Lauener and reached without difficulty the snow overlooking the Courmayeur Valley, and we walked round the S. side of the final tooth, which here overhangs considerably, until we looked down on the glacier on the E. side of the peak. We then saw that access from the snow on this side was not possible, as it merely abutted on to an absolutely perpendicular wall of rock which continued to a point greatly below us. I learn since that had we descended

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a bit on the E. side, sticking close to the wall of the peak, we should have reached without difficulty, as did M. Fontaine in 1900, the shoulder on the N. arête from which the climb up the N. face starts.[1]

Of course access over the overhanging part was equally impracticable, though we scrambled up perhaps 20 or 30 feet between a semi-detached spur and the peak itself.

The appearance from the S.W. angle seemed equally unpromising and we were descending disconsolately when I saw we could get on to the peak a good deal lower down, which might lead, at all events, a very long way toward the summit.

We were now on the N. or N.W. side of the mountain, and the first part presenting no special difficulties we soon reached a great height, when our progress was stopped by a bare slab of rock with a narrow, almost vertical crack in it, which proved to be, I think, one of the hardest pieces of climbing I have ever experienced. Ulrich went first and about 10 feet below I came next, and Christian followed me at about the same distance. We were so close together to prevent danger from loose stones, but no person could have given the least assistance to the other, as never for a moment could one be described as 'fest,' and when Ulrich had reached a kind of shoulder with his head and shoulders I was in such a difficult position that I did not see how I could move another yard upwards, as I knew I could not get the slightest assistance from him. The smooth rock ahead of us was plainly visible, but being 10 feet below Ulrich I could not see clearly what was immediately above him, his substantial form blocking the view! He said he could get a yard or two higher, but then it was 'finished,' as the cleft in which we were climbing lost its way in a smooth slab of rock of the final peak.

He said it was impossible to go further, and that we must go back now before we had an 'Unglück.' He judged that the point we had reached was within 100 to 150 feet from the top, but on these occasions I am aware that appearances are often deceptive. I imagine we were on the northern face in line between the two summits, as they were both plainly visible, the right one appearing slightly the higher of the two, although it is now found that the opposite is really the case.

The descent of this crack required extreme care, as may be imagined, but in my experience of rocks, if free from snow, you can always get down where you have gone up.

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[1] *Revue Alpine*, 1911, 3–19.

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On talking the matter over with Ulrich afterwards, he said that he thought that with a few iron stanchions driven into the rock the final peak could be readily ascended, but without that he did not believe an ascent was possible.

This appears to have been proved when the ascent was completed. Personally I should object very much to climb a mountain by artificial means of this character, and fail to see the object of doing so. Surely it would have done no harm to have left one virgin peak alone in her glory and unviolated by man! It would have at least afforded endless entertainment to mountaineers in the future and not destroyed the chance of ultimate victory without artificial aid. I am indeed informed that the N. face route is a clean straight climb, requiring no fixed ropes or any artifices, and that when the face is fairly clear of snow and ice the difficulties are by no means extraordinary.

Captain Farrar, who, led by Daniel Maquignaz, made an ascent by this route in 1904, tells me he asked him why he had not attempted this way instead of the S.W. route, which required so much engineering and is probably impossible otherwise, at least in its final bit. Daniel replied that his uncle and he felt certain the N. face would go, but the weather all the time they were at work was atrocious, and the face covered in ice. Moreover, the S.W. face was much quicker to get to, so that they determined to stick to that face until proved impossible, when with the earliest bettering of the weather they would transfer their energies to the N. face. Daniel was well aware of M. J. E. Charlet's attempts on the Géant in 1876,[2] when, without any companion, he climbed a long way up the left-hand arête of the N. face and left a bâton on the higher of the two square shoulders. This bâton, Captain Farrar says, was in position, very weathered, as late as 1904. and he is of opinion that if M. Charlet (subsequently M. Charlet-

[2] M. Charlet-Straton writes to Capt. Farrar under date Roche-sur-Foron, 6 Mars, 1916: 'Je suis monté depuis la Noire; arrivé à l'endroit où vous avez trouvé le bâton je ne pouvais pas aller plus loin tout seul à cause du verglas qu'il y avait dans les rochers. Je n'osais pas descendre par où j'étais monté. J'ai passé sur ma gauche entre l'Ai. du Géant et le Mont Mallet pour descendre au col du Géant. Le bâton que vous avez vu a été longtemps aperçu depuis le Montanvert. A côté du bâton il y avait une fente de rocher où j'ai mis plusieurs pointes en fer que j'avais emportées pour planter dans les fentes pour me servir pour la descente; le bâton était pour mettre un drapeau.'

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Straton), who, as his ascent three years later of the Petit Dru proved, was a rock-climber of the very front rank, had had a capable companion, there was nothing in the further ascent that would have stopped a man of his capacity and enterprise.

I see in 'A.J.' vi. 172 the late Mr. T. S. Kennedy speaks of finding very early in July 1872 at the base of the Dent du Géant a small cairn, erected the previous year by Mr. Whitwell and his guides the Laueners. I have, however, no recollection of erecting any cairn, and in fact our expedition must have been subsequent to Mr. Kennedy's.

The Aiguille du Dru.

The summer of 1874 was a very trying one to mountaineers, owing to the continual recurrence of fresh snow on the mountains, and it was after one of these fresh falls that on July 31 Christian Lauener and I left the Montanvert Hotel to inspect the Aiguille du Dru in order to ascertain the best direction to make an attempt when the weather should become more favourable.

We started at half past four, and after crossing the Mer de Glace, ascended the Glacier de Charpoua nearly to its source at the cliffs of the Aiguille Verte, and then turning to our left climbed on to the rocks of the Aiguille du Dru after about five hours' walking from the hotel.

There appeared to be only one place by which we could get from the glacier on to the rocks, and a very pretty scramble for a few feet did this afford us. Afterwards, for some distance, all was plain sailing, and we were congratulating ourselves on the ease with which we could walk over places which looked decidedly difficult from below, till we reached the ridge on the E. side of the Aiguille, from which we could look down on to what I suppose is the Glacier du Nant Blanc, and on our left was a high spur of the mountain, but whether it led up to the highest peak it was impossible to see. Until we had reached this point the rocks did not look so very difficult, as from below they had a broken appearance; but alas! when we were close to them we found they rose perpendicularly above us, and although the face was considerably broken the breaks were at such long intervals that climbing it was utterly out of the question. The height of this spur I should judge to be 80 to 100 feet above the ridge. With a long ladder much might be done, but some difficulty would be experienced in finding a secure resting-place for it.

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Nothing more was to be done that day, so, having ascertained that we could pass across the face to the W. side of the mountain with comparative ease, we retraced our steps to the Montanvert and Chamonix.

Wretched weather intervened between this and our next attempt on August 24, with the exception of one day which enabled us to make the first ascent of the Aiguille de Blaitière.

On August 23 Christian Lauener and I had slept in a tent on the moraine of the Glacier de Charpoua, at a point about 2 hours from the Montanvert, and found that we had gained very little by so doing, for owing to the darkness we were not able to start before nearly 5 o'clock. We left the porters with the tent, as we did not want our movements to be hampered by them, and we got on to the mountain at the same point as on the previous occasion, finding the scramble off the glacier more difficult than before, owing to the reduced quantity of snow.

Instead of going to the E. as on the previous occasion we now struck westward across the face, and after a climb of 4 hours from our sleeping-place reached a col on the ridge of the W. of the main peak. Here we found a ladder, and with its assistance and some difficult climbing we were able to reach a great height, getting on to a spur of the mountain from which we could see the general outline of the final peak. Unfortunately we were separated from this by an ice couloir some feet below us, which it was impossible to reach without a rope ladder of 40 to 50 feet long, or had our party consisted of three, or better four, instead of only two, and if we had had a spare rope we might have managed to have got down by the rope only, by leaving two behind, and had we been able to reach this couloir I think it highly probable we should have succeeded, though it is difficult to say whether the remaining rocks would have proved accessible or not. These Chamonix rocks have a provoking habit of looking comparatively easy till you reach them and of then proving utterly impracticable!

However, as we had neither spare rope nor rope ladder we could not try this question, and there was no time that day to retrace our steps and try another route. Subsequently the weather became so bad that we left Chamonix without another attempt that year.

I must add that this ice couloir, mentioned above, appeared to end in space, so that there seemed no means of getting on to it except in the direction we had tried, which I had little

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doubt would be the one by which the mountain could be ascended.

Four years later, in August of 1878, I found myself again in Chamonix, and I soon heard that Dent was at Chamonix on the same errand as myself, and had been there for some little time waiting for the weather.

I was staying with my wife and a friend at the Hôtel des Alpes while he was at the Hôtel Couttet, so we never met, and there was great rivalry, I believe, between the respective guides as to which of us should make the first ascent, as we were both confident of success, and I think partly false shyness on both our parts and also because of my not being alone prevented our becoming acquainted and joining forces.

When we arrived the weather was hopeless for high ascents, that is so frequently the case at Chamonix in my experience, but one evening gave promise of a good day on the morrow and I determined not to lose an opportunity, so started early, with Christian Lauener and porters carrying my tent and provisions, for a bivouac on the Glacier de Charpoua. After being there an hour or two or more we noticed that we were not going to be the sole inhabitants of the district, as Dent and his party arrived before dusk and encamped perhaps 1000 feet below us.

The following day was all but hopeless, but I made a start and got fairly on to the mountain when we were stopped by blinding snow and had to give up all thoughts of doing more that day. Dent never started at all, as he had had more experience than I had of what the mountain would be like in bad weather, but it was like his goodness of heart that he remained on the glacier until he saw that we had got safely off the mountain, for fear we might lose our way in the driving snow. He went back to England the next day, as the weather disheartened him, so I had no opportunity of thanking him, but he returned in September and then accomplished the climb successfully.

Here end the notes, which I put down much as they were written about forty years ago, and on comparing them with Mr. Dent's account of his successful ascent I think it is pretty clear that the general line we took was very much in the direction by which he succeeded later in the year.

I remained a few days longer without having the vestige of a chance of another try. I did not then realise that it would be my last days of climbing, as later I found I had neither time nor money to continue mountaineering in the summer as well as to hunt as much as I should like in the winter, so,

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alas! mountaineering had to give way. But I shall always look back on the days I spent climbing as amongst the happiest of my life, and I consider, as a sport, it comes only second to hunting; indeed it runs hunting pretty hard for first place. Nothing can equal the Majesty of the Mountains.

An Historical Document.

The Führerbuch of Ferdinand Imseng.

THE last number of the Journal was hardly delivered when, to my great interest, my friend Sir Alexander Kennedy placed in my hands a battered and discoloured old book, the Führerbuch of the great guide to whom, in writing the notice of Mr. Passingham, my thoughts so often turned.

There is a tragic interest in turning over the leaves of such a book. It is in a measure the life-history of the most meteoric and of one of the most brilliant of Alpine careers; of a man of better parentage and education than the ordinary guide, feeling no doubt within him, possibly also as a consequence of his mingled Teuton and Italian blood, the ambition, the courage, the mental as well as the physical ability to become a great leader of his fellows. We see him, in 1872, blaze out on the Alpine firmament when, at the age of twenty-seven, he succeeds in persuading Richard Pendlebury, at a chance meeting, to give him the opportunity to show what he is made of and to carry out the long-cherished plan of making the ascent of the Monte Rosa by its stupendous eastern face. Few of his contemporaries led during the succeeding ten years, which measured his career, a more strenuous Alpine life; not one can claim such monuments as the five great expeditions, three even to-day seldom repeated, of four of which he was the unquestioned initiator and leader, and of the fifth bore an equal share. His resting-place is the little churchyard in Macugnaga, but the lasting monument to his memory and fame is not the granite column under which he lies, but the unrivalled cirque of mountains overshadowing his valley, the pitiless walls of which he was the first to scale and where he was fated to meet his end.

But there is one great factor in Imseng that to my mind lifts him above all his fellows of that day. He was the first of the guides to grasp, possibly intuitively, the real lesson of the

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