

THE ROTHTHAL FACE OF THE JUNGFRAU.

BY J. P. FARRAR.

THE *causa causans* of this paper is my friend the Rev. T. H. Philpott. In the course of our—to me—very interesting correspondence over 'Hornby and Philpott' ('A.J.' xxx. 230 *seq.*), I became quite fascinated with the history of this face of the Jungfrau, of which the Silberhorn may be said to form part.

The name of my friend, M. Paul Montandon, ought to appear as joint author of this paper, for without his untiring assistance it must have fallen far short of its present relative completeness.

To him in particular I am indebted for all the illustrations.

Just as the historically interesting side of the Matterhorn is the Val Tournanche face, so this Roththal face of the Jungfrau claims the pride of place, inasmuch as it was also the first to be attacked by the chamois-hunters living at its foot. The parallel can be carried farther, for it was another face of the Matterhorn which first yielded a route to the summit, and it was not until over fifty years after the Jungfrau had been ascended that the secret of this Roththal face of the mountain was unravelled.

It is generally accepted that the Jungfrau fell, on the very first attempt, to the travellers Joh. Rud. and Hieronymus Meyer, with the Vallaisan guides, Joseph Bortis and Alois Volker, who in 1811 made the ascent from the S. or Aletsch side.

But years before this the indefatigable hunters of Lauterbrunnen had been busy spying out the weak places in the great wall dominating their home. Doubtless the wild and unproductive nature of their native valley made these Lauterbrunnen men into keen hunters, while the wider and more fertile basin of Grindelwald offered an easier means of livelihood to its inhabitants; so that we need not be surprised that—as I showed in my paper on Lauener ('A.J.' xxx. 280)—there were famous mountaineers like the Laueners and the Bischoffs in Lauterbrunnen at a time when no man in Grindelwald was known to fame.

In the same paper I mentioned ('A.J.' xxx. 284) an attempt on this Roththal face of the Jungfrau by two Lauterbrunnen men—Peter Bischoff and Christen Lauener—who immediately at the entrance of the Roththal 'bore to the left up the rocks, by which also a few years earlier two Englishmen hoped to ascend the Jungfrau.'

Now in a periodical, 'Miszellen für die Neueste Weltkunde,' of August 27, 1808, there is an account—of which my constant coadjutor our Hon. Member Dr. H. Dübi has been good enough to have made a typed copy for the Club Library—of a passage of the Tschingel Glacier from the Lauterbrunnen Valley into the savage Gasteren Thal, made in July 1808 by a certain L. with nine companions. Among them were two men who had accompanied Herr Rud. Meyer, who, so L. states, crossed the pass in 1790.

When high up on the glacier 'opposite to us rose the majestic Jungfrau, on which the chamois-hunters show us clearly the slab up to which they had so far got ; but they did not consider it at all impossible to ascend their summit if provided with the needful to spend a night in the high glacier regions.'

In what year this attempt on the Jungfrau was made is not stated ; but as Bischoff was only born in 1777 it cannot refer to the attempt made by him and Lauener ; in any case, it was not later than 1808. It may refer to the attempt by the two enterprising Englishmen mentioned by Hugi ('A.J.' xxx. 284), and the description seems to refer to some route on the rock face between the Rothbrett and the great splayed buttress up which the now usual route to the Hochfirn lies.

In my Lauener article I mentioned the attempts by two Englishmen, Mr. Yeats Brown and Mr. Frederick Slade, in 1828, as well as Hugi's journey into the Roththal in 1829.

There is, then, a great gap in the history of this face ; but in 1860 we find M.M. Gosset and v. Hallwyl set out to attempt it, with the guide Johann Bischoff of Lauterbrunnen, by a route on which, he asserted, his father (the already mentioned Peter, at that time aged eighty-three) had once, out hunting, attained a great height, enabling him to conclude that the ascent could be completed.

Weather beat them ; but on June 25, 1863, v. Fellenberg arrives in Lauterbrunnen with the same intention, and sends for Ulrich Lauener, 'this athletic six-foot figure, this northern giant with blue eyes and golden beard, the darling of all heaven-storming Englishmen,' under whom Bischoff willingly agrees to serve.

They slept at the Stufensteinalp. The weather next day only allowed them to reconnoitre, but they reached by a somewhat roundabout way the Strählplatten, as the inclined water- or ice-polished slabs at the foot of the Rothbrett are called. Proceeding straight upwards (line 3 in photograph), Lauener climbed with great skill the first cliff, eighty feet high, pretty

much in the line of the waterfall which is seen in the photograph as falling over it, and pulled up his companions after him. They proceeded some way farther, seeing nothing to stop them except perhaps the final steep rocks just under the main Rothbrettgrat.

Bad weather drove them down to Lauterbrunnen, when on the afternoon of the 27th who should turn up but 'a young, fair man whom, from the glacier-tackle he carried, I at once recognised as an English Clubman, followed by a thick-set sunburnt man with black hair and fiery black eyes, armed to the teeth with glacier-tackle.' It was Charles Edward Mathews and Melchior Anderegg, '*der berühmte Meiringer.*'

Two A.M. on June 29 saw the combined party, under a full moon in a cloudless sky, sally out from the Stufensteinalp. By six the Strählplatten were reached—the cliff overcome by the same manoeuvres as before, 'Anderegg managing to swing himself up the slabby rocks with great speed,' and the little snowfield above it gained by 8.30.

Melchior then went ahead by himself, while the others followed, roped. They bore rather to the right, but, just under the lowest gap in the Rothbrettgrat, turned to the left, when Melchior led up a difficult slab inclined 40° and 40 feet high. This took a quarter of an hour, and in ten minutes more they were on the arête and looked down to the Wengernalp.

It was 11.10. Melchior declared farther progress impossible owing to a vertical step in the arête which could not be turned, as on the one side was a terribly steep slope of névé and on the other impassable rocks.

They planted a flag, left a bottle with their names at the point gained, and, leaving the arête at 12.15, were back at the Stufensteinalp at five.

It fell to Melchior the following year to revenge his defeat: not, indeed, by scaling this face, but by turning it by means of the great couloir leading to the Roththalsattel.

The tale has been well told by R. S. Macdonald in 'A.J.' ii. 161–168. Eight years later great imprudence in the same couloir cost the life of Bischoff, one of Melchior's companions of 1863.

Dr. Dübi, an indefatigable explorer of this face, with Christian and Peter Lauener, made a safer variation of this route in 1873 by climbing the rocks of the west bank of the couloir, which was crossed high up ('S.A.C.J.' ix. 129–131).

In 1881 the same climber, with the guides Peter Lauener and Fritz Fuchs, attacked the great splayed buttress, up which the

now usual route lies. He first gained the so-called inner or S.W. arête of the buttress, by which the ascent is now always made; but in uncertainty, lest they might be cut off higher up,¹ the party traversed horizontally so as to gain the so-called outer or W. arête forming the S. bank of the Silberlautobel.

He thus made the first route—a safe one even if not quite direct—from the Roththal to the summit of the Jungfrau—completing the work started in the early part of the century ('S.A.C.J.' xvii. 278–286).

The exact line of Dr. Dübi's route was so little understood—he has now been good enough to indicate it on one of the illustrations to this paper—and the reputation for difficulty and danger of this Roththal face was such that when in the autumn of 1885 it was reported that an *easy* route up it had been discovered by a Lauterbrunnen hotel-keeper, whose previous experience was limited to mountains like the Schilthorn, with four local guides, incredulity was rampant.

The route lies up the so-called inner arête of the great buttress direct to the Hochfirn, and can be followed without difficulty.

There remained now only the completion of the Fellenberg-Mathews route of 1863. It was not until September 24, 1887 (or twenty-four years later), that Sir H. Seymour King, with the—I will not say better—guides Ambros Supersax and Louis Zurbrücken, gained at 9 A.M. the same gap in the Rothbrettgrat, where they found the bottle, and added their own names. Supersax, by a bold traverse on the N. side, managed to turn the vertical step which had defeated the Fellenberg-Mathews party of 1863, and, going strong, the party reached the Silberlücke at 4 P.M., and were finally forced to bivouac just above the Roththalsattel. The tale has been well told in 'A.J.' xiv. 31–37, and note, p. 98.

A further possible route on this face is the ascent to the Silberlücke, but it would have to be made up the Silberlautobel,² as the wide couloir leading to the Silberlücke is called. This is swept by ice from the hanging glacier seen at its head, and would not be followed by a mountaineer. There may be

¹ The great rock at the junction of these S.W. and W. arêtes, as Dr. Dübi correctly surmised, gave the leader, Hans v. Allmen, of the party of 1885 much trouble before he succeeded in climbing it.

² In the Siegfried map the name Silberlauri is quite incorrectly applied to a tongue of the Roththalgletscher.

another route lying between the regular route and the Roththal-sattel couloir. I do not know—and it is fairly certain to be dangerous from stonefall.

Finally, there is one more expedition to record—the *reversal* of Sir H. Seymour King's route of 1887—by a very strong Swiss guideless party, MM. A. Mottet, Franz Müller, and O. Tschanz, on August 14, 1910. A short note of this appears in 'S.A.C.J.' xlv. 284; but M. Auguste Mottet, a Captain in the Federal Service and at the present time in the foremost rank of Swiss mountaineers,³ while his two companions are also first-rate men, has had the kindness to give to M. Montandon for the JOURNAL further particulars, which the latter has been good enough to translate into English :

'The party left the summit of the Jungfrau at 6.30 A.M. on August 14, 1910. There were 12 to 16 inches of fresh snow and bad conditions till far down. Above the Silberlücke they "abseiled" once. Lücke, 8.30 to 9. Up to the summit of Silberhorn good going. Top of Silberhorn, 11 A.M. They now turned downwards towards the Rothbrettgrat. First, there was some hard and very steep névé, then came ice—even steeper, but allowing good step-cutting, as it could be done in an oblique direction, this being a broad flank. Afterwards the route narrows to an arête—first of ice, but not steep, then by and by of very friable rock. No gendarmes. This rock arête is $\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ metres broad, and consists of small cubes. However, it is possible to descend upright. At 3 P.M. the party reached the famous place where the Rothbrettgrat,⁴ coming to an end near the summit of the Rothbrett, overhangs, forming a practically vertical pitch. Ambros Supersax, the leader of Sir Seymour King's 1887 party ("A.J." xiv. 31-38) circumvented it by a traverse on the north. The wall down to the gap is $8\frac{1}{2}$ metres high, and there appears no possibility of climbing it direct. On the north flank of the arête, however, there is along the face a good "band" or ledge, 12 to 16 inches broad, the approach to which only requires some determination. From this ledge the climb up to the arête does not look very difficult. The arête above the overhang is about 5 metres wide and nearly level. Two of M. Mottet's party were let down

³ He has done, without professional assistance, such expeditions as the Z'Mutt-Matterhorn, the Viereselsgrat-Dent Blanche, the Breithorn from the Schmadrijoch, and the very difficult Engelhörner climbs.

⁴ See note on the illustrations.

over the pitch, and the last man, with some difficulty, found then a crack—somewhat above the edge—into which a *piton* could be driven. It held fast—at least in the direction required—allowing him to let himself down with *Kletterschluss*.

‘At the foot of this memorable and historic spot, in the gap, they found—as did also Sir Seymour—an old-fashioned big bottle with a large aperture, left by E. von Fellenberg, C. E. Mathews, Melchior Anderegg, Ulrich Lauener, and Johann Bischoff, on June 28, 1868, on their attempt to force this ridge (“S.A.C. Jahrbuch,” i. 315–335). The names were still intact, and the 1910 party added theirs.⁵

‘They now left the top of the Rothbrett, and had to find a way down to the Strahlplatten (*vide* full-page illustration).⁶ First they turned to their left over slabs, which is one of the most difficult places of the whole tour. It is mentioned by Fellenberg (“Jahrbuch,” i. 331), as well as by Sir Seymour King (“A.J.” xiv. 32), and it seems, therefore, that there is no other way to get off the Rothbrettgrat. Here an eagle—no doubt the one whose nest at the foot of the Schwarz Mönch cliffs is so well seen from Mürren—sailed over them, coming quite near, seemingly, with a fond hope of throwing them down and making a feast of them. It is perhaps the first time that tourists experience this particular danger.

‘At times there may be snow on this “Platte.” Endless zigzags then brought them down to the lower ledges, there being as a rule only one place where it was possible to descend, and much time being lost in searching. As a last difficulty a waterfall had to be negotiated (mentioned by Fellenberg, “Jahrbuch,” i. 324), and at 8 p.m. they at last reached the Strahlplatten at the foot of the Rothbrett wall, where they passed the night in their oiled-silk sleeping-bags. From the top of the Rothbrett they wore *Kletterschuhe* and found this a great advantage. On this part of the descent there was very little snow. Early in the morning there will be less water, but perhaps more ice. As for difficulty, there is little difference going up or coming down here, but in the latter case the orientation is much less easy, requiring more time.

‘Sir Seymour King’s times were 10½ hours from the Strahlplatten to the top of Silberhorn, two of which were taken up

⁵ Thus the names have been there for forty-seven years (cf. *A.J.*, xiv. 38). It is earnestly to be hoped that no climber will interfere with this historic relic.

⁶ The line marked is actually that of their descent.

by the overhang. The Swiss party required 9 hours for coming down. It will, no doubt, always be a difficult and very arduous expedition.'

It will be seen that there is practically only one route up this great Roththal wall which can be called fairly easy. Had not the reputed inaccessibility or extreme difficulty of this face deterred climbers from visiting the neighbourhood it cannot be doubted that, given the opportunity, one or other of the brilliant guides, which in days gone by Lauterbrunnen produced, would have not let over seventy years pass before the now regular route was discovered.

The illustrations will, I hope, clear up to my readers—as they have done to me—the intricate topography of this, whether from an historical or a mountaineering standpoint, very interesting and doubtless least-known side of the great Oberland mountain.

My note on the picture of the 'Silberhorn from the N.,' in 'A.J.' xxx. 244, requires modification. I used the term Schwarz Mönch in the wider significance of old days ('S.A.C.J.' i. 332, and the earlier editions of the Federal map), when it covered the whole of the rock mass forming the great outpost buttress in which the N. arête of the Jungfrau ends.

M. Montandon is good enough to remind me—as is indeed set out at length in 'The Bernese Oberland,' vol. i. part i. (new edition, 1909)—that the name Schwarz Mönch properly belongs to a great black rock-tooth which stands out on the W. face of the cliff facing Mürren, the name Stellifuh being applied to the mass itself culminating in the summit forming the apex of the cliff projected against the triangular rocky face of the Rothbrett.⁷

It will be seen that Sir H. Seymour King's route by the Rothbrett arête gained that arête high up, much on a level with the apex of the Rothbrett. The arête has never been followed from its foot at the left-hand (as you face) corner of the triangular Rothbrett itself—if indeed that route is possible.

⁷ The Stellifuh and Schwarz Mönch are well seen in the panorama from the Männlichen accompanying. *S.A.C.J.* x.



Photo Paul Montandon.

THE ROTHTHAL FACE OF THE JUNGFRAU.

FROM THE SPITZHORN, 2,214 m.

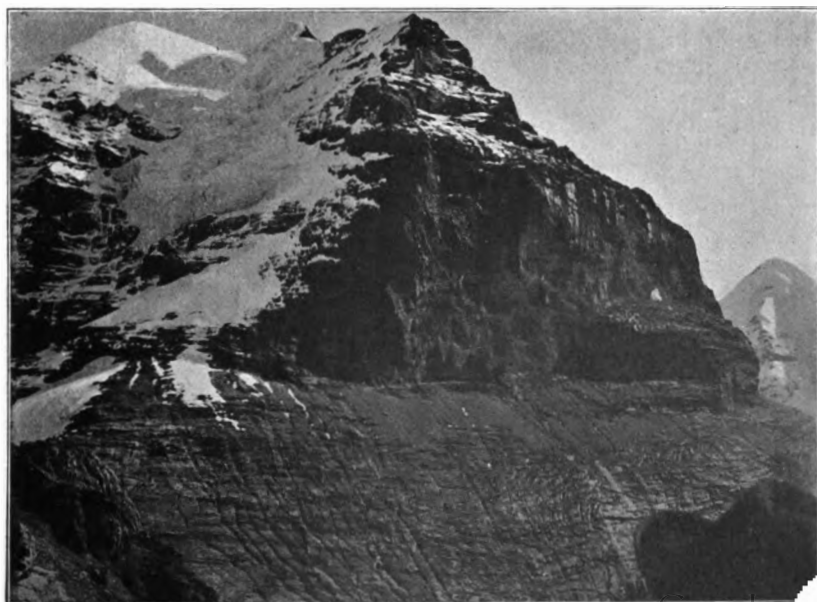


Photo F. Beck.



Photo Wehrli, A. G.

THE ROTHTHAL FACE OF THE JUNGFRAU.

FROM OBER-STEINBERG.

A Note on the Illustrations.

THE explanation of the figures on the full-page illustration, taken from Ober Steinberg, is as follows :

1—1 is the great triangular face of the Rothbrett.

2—2 are the water- or ice-worn slabs, called the Strählplatten.

3. The line marked is that of the descent of M. Mottet's party in 1910, and it may be taken generally to indicate the Fellenberg-Mathews and the Sir H. S. King line of ascent in 1863 and 1887 respectively.

It should be noted that the photograph is taken from low down and thus gives to the whole face a much less steep appearance than it in fact has.

4—4 is the Silberlawitobel.

5—5 is Dr. Dübi's line of ascent by the so-called *outer* arête, to the foot of which he traversed from the lower (6) on the so-called inner arête.

6—6 is the regular line of ascent, the arête being reached at the lower (6) from the other side.

7 is the Rothbrettgrat, reached at the point shown, which was then followed over the false Silberhorn to the true Silberhorn which lies off the main arête.

8 is the Silberlücke, which has only been reached from the other side.

9 is the summit of the Jungfrau, the snow-cap just below it bearing the name Hochfirn.

10 is the great couloir leading to the Roththalsattel.

11 is the Lauinthor.

M. Montandon's photograph of this face, taken from the Spitzhorn 2214 m. N. of the Ober Steinberg, is an admirable picture of the ensemble of the great face from the Stellifuh to the Lauinthor.

The remarkable picture of the Rothbrett, with the white summit of the Silberhorn on its left and the slabby Strählplatten immediately below it, is from a photograph taken from the Stellifuh, 2718 m., by M. F. Beck of Thoune, to whom my best thanks are tendered.

It was at the foot of this face that Messrs. Hornby and Philpott bivouacked in 1865. They rounded the foot of its left-hand edge next morning and hurriedly crossed under the overhanging glacier so as to gain the arête on the extreme left, of which only the upper part is visible in the picture.