Bietschhorn.

By HANS LAUPER.

I. *The South Face.*

THE Bietschhorn, 3953 m., is, to my mind, the finest peak in the extensive group of mountains separating the Loetschental from the valley of the Rhône. Ever since I first saw its sharp-pointed pyramid I have felt a very strong attraction, which has only increased since it has become my good fortune to climb the mountain by all its different ridges.

The finest climb which the Bietschhorn provides leads over the *S., or Bietschtal, face.* This climb has, to my knowledge, only been accomplished four times. The S. face, nearly 1000 m. high, is furrowed by two conspicuous couloirs. But these couloirs are interrupted by several perpendicular steps, and not infrequently these black cliffs are covered by a sort of frozen waterfall. The right hand or *E. couloir*, in its upper part merely a steep narrow gully lined with ice, lies close to the S.E. arête, the ridge connecting the Bietschhorn to the Thieregghorn. Up this couloir Professor Schulz, with Alexander Burgener, made their attempt in 1883.[1]

The *W. couloir* is a broad, snow-filled gully, descending straight from the summit to the little glacier at the S. foot of the Bietschhorn, but is cut off by precipitous rocks at its lower end, barring direct access to the S. face. The rock-ridge or buttress between the two couloirs is again broken up by a number of minor couloirs; the gutters and ribs between these gullies are adorned by a good many huge fangs or rock towers. Thus the Bietschhorn S. face presents an extraordinary appearance, wild and unassailable, which I cannot compare to any other mountain face I know.

On July 2, 1922, my friend Willy Richardet and I ascended the rough slabs of the '*Im Rämi*' with the intention of climbing the Bietschhorn by its southern or Bietschtal face. The weather was fine, but the day before we had arrived very late at the Jaegisand, 1837 m. (*Siegfried*), at the head of the Bietschtal and had bivouacked there *en pleine étoile.* Our sleep had been short, the ascent of the desolate *cirque* of the Rämi had been tiresome and had already cost us 4 hrs. So

[1] *Cf.* S.A.C. *Jahrbuch*, xix. pp. 3–23.

Photo, P. Montandon.

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when at last we reached the little glacier at the S. foot of the Bietschhorn, it was with a feeling that we were not as fresh as we might have wished to be in view of the great wall looming above us.

Captain Farrar's account (' A.J.' **18,** 474–478), written with the accuracy to which he has accustomed us, and an examination which I had made from the Thieregghorn, had taught me that the key of the ascent was the broad snow-filled W. couloir. This had to be attained by a series of traverses.

Therefore, after a short rest, we crossed the little glacier toward the E., where a convenient ledge leads up from the surface of the glacier to the crest of the main S.E. ridge. At 7.5 A.M. we took to the rocks. Shortly before reaching the crest of the ridge we turned off to the left, N.W., along some ledges and easy rocks, ascending only slightly ; then rounding a corner and *descending* a short wall we reached the lower end of the E. couloir. Before continuing, we allowed ourselves a last survey of the face, now in full view. It looked very savage with all its huge teeth and towers, which in the clear light of the morning sun contrasted strikingly with the deep-cut gullies and couloirs furrowing the face in every direction. The work ahead promised to be severe. But as we entered the E. couloir which at its lower end is rather broad, and then coated with hard snow, the mood to climb came on us ; the tedious walk up the Rämi was forgotten at once. Skirting the E. bank of the couloir we ascended for two or three rope-lengths, then, as quickly as possible, cut steps across the broad channel to a sharp snow-crest and at once, slightly *descending*, traversed another gully to a well-defined snow-saddle, situated at the lower end of the rocky buttress separating the E. from the W. couloir. Just W. of our saddle there was a big tower sticking out of the face, pierced by a hole, like the eye of a needle, through which we could see the snow-filled W. couloir.

From this saddle (point ' 1 ' on sketch) we attacked the next rocky steps direct. Bearing a little to the left, W., we gained the gap above the tower with the window, then turned back toward the right, E., and scrambled up over convenient ledges and easy steps, thus reaching the left bank of a couloir cut off above by a black cliff with a frozen waterfall (point ' 2 ' of sketch).[2] The next abrupt step was climbed just to the left, W., of the frozen waterfall, Richardet now in front and leading

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[2] This is the first of the two waterfalls mentioned in Captain Farrar's account (*A.J.* **18,** 477), and the couloir is Captain Farrar's couloir No. 3.

in brilliant style. First we climbed straight up, then rounding a rather awkward corner attained the couloir again above the black cliff. Keeping always on its left bank, we mounted to the foot of another steep wall. Here Captain Farrar, whose route we had now followed for some time, took a left-handed course, thus gaining the broad W. couloir. The buttress is not very broad at this height, and, as we wanted to cast a glance into the E. couloir, we crossed the head of our couloir, cutting a few steps and landed thus in a conspicuous snow-saddle or balcony on the top of one of the eastern pillars of the buttress (point '3' of the sketch). The view into the very narrow and steep E. couloir, at this point more of an ice-clad chimney than a couloir, was most impressive. We could very well imagine the difficulties encountered by Professor Schulz in 1883, when he and Alexander Burgener tried to force their way up through that funnel. The first party to make the ascent of the Bietschhorn by the southern face, Drs. E. and O. Zsigmondy, L. Purtscheller, and Professor Schulz, on September 2, 1884, had arrived on the same saddle when stone-fall forced them to make a hasty exit out of the E. couloir. The same happened to the third party, Professor Dr. H. Lorenz and Eduard Wagner, August 24, 1901, who followed very closely the line of ascent of the first party.

The point on which we now stood is about the level of the S.E. shoulder, *i.e.* 3520 m. As we knew that a good deal of work still lay ahead of us, we did not linger too long, but soon retreated in our steps to the rock wall. A deep chimney led upwards. Bearing slightly to the left, W., over firm but steep rocks, we made good headway, till climbing a very steep crag we at last got on to another saddle or gap, this time on the western crest of the rocky buttress separating the E. from the W. couloir (point 'F' of the sketch). In other words, we found ourselves on the E. bank of the great W. couloir, the upper bay of which lay right before us, blocked above by the characteristic black cliff with the 'frozen waterfall' (*cf.* 'A.J.' **18,** 477). Here we allowed ourselves a rest from 11.40 A.M. to 12 o'clock, then we crossed upwards over the steep E. bank of the W. couloir, following a ribbon of good firm snow which brought us to the floor of the couloir (point 'E' of the sketch). The snow was in very good condition, and soon after leaving the notch on which we had rested, we stood beneath the black cliff (point '4' of the sketch).

We knew that our predecessors had circumvented this cliff by bearing far out and to the E., Captain Farrar going as far as the main S.E. arête. We preferred to attack the obstacle

direct. Richardet, once more in the lead, cut steps up through the floor of the gully of the frozen waterfall for some 30 ft. Then we were able to bear to our right on to slabby rocks which we climbed until we could traverse back into the couloir. Immediately above the waterfall we re-entered the W. couloir, now quite narrow, crossed the couloir where it forks about 30 yds. above the waterfall, and ascended the rocks between the fork. Then a few steps to our right brought us on to the last bit of the main S.E. ridge, overlooking the Baltschiederfirn, which we followed right up to the summit. At 2.21 P.M. we shook hands on the top of the Bietschhorn. We thought that we were justified in feeling quite glad at our success in unravelling this intricate S. face of the Bietschhorn.

After a rest of half an hour we began the descent by the W. arête. There was much snow on it, and at this time of the day it was of course soft. As a matter of fact the conditions on the W. arête were so bad that a party, starting from the Bietschhorn hut on the Schafberg, had given it up and retreated when half-way up the mountain. But taking every precaution we attained the hut without mishap, $3\frac{3}{4}$ hrs. after leaving the summit. But even here we were not able to enjoy a well-earned rest! At midnight we were off again, as I had to catch the first train at Goppenstein in order to be back in town in time.

Captain Farrar, in his very detailed account in 'A.J.' **18,** 474–478, comments on the first ascent of the S. face by Herren Emil and Otto Zsigmondy, Ludwig Purtscheller, and Professor K. Schulz in 1884, and describes the line of ascent which he took when making, with Daniel Maquignaz, the second ascent, September 15, 1893. The route of the first party was also followed by the third, Professor Dr. H. Lorenz, A.A.C.Z., and Eduard Wagner, A.A.C.Z., in 1901. Professor Lorenz was kind enough to give me a detailed account of his ascent and to mark his line on a photograph. Through my dear friend, Monsieur P. Montandon (to whom all young Swiss mountaineers [3] seem to turn for advice and never in vain), I was furnished with two photographs on which Captain Farrar had marked for him the line of his (Farrar's) ascent. From a close study of all those accounts, and a comparison with the lines marked on the different photographs, I think that I am now able to understand the different routes taken by each one of the four parties.

After gaining the lower end of the E. couloir, the *first* and the *third* parties ascended the E. couloir until it becomes quite

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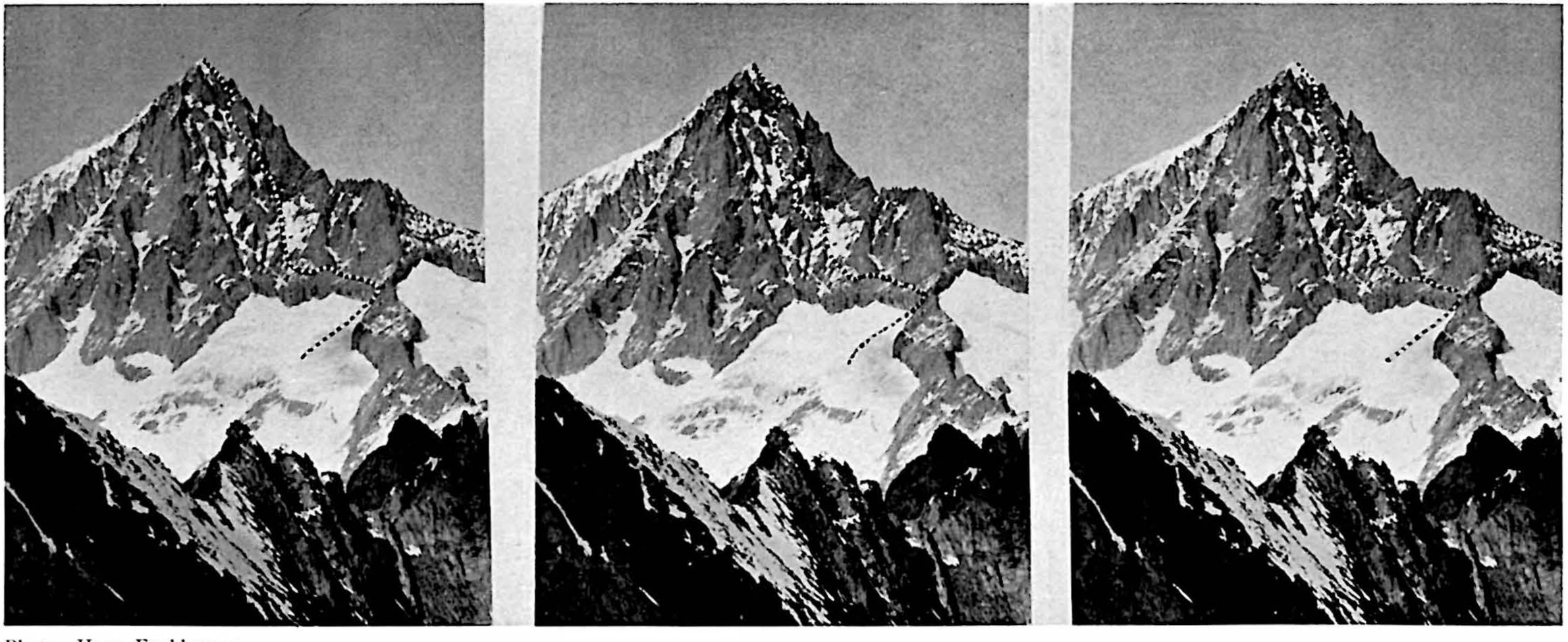
[3] *And* the JOURNAL.—*Editor.*

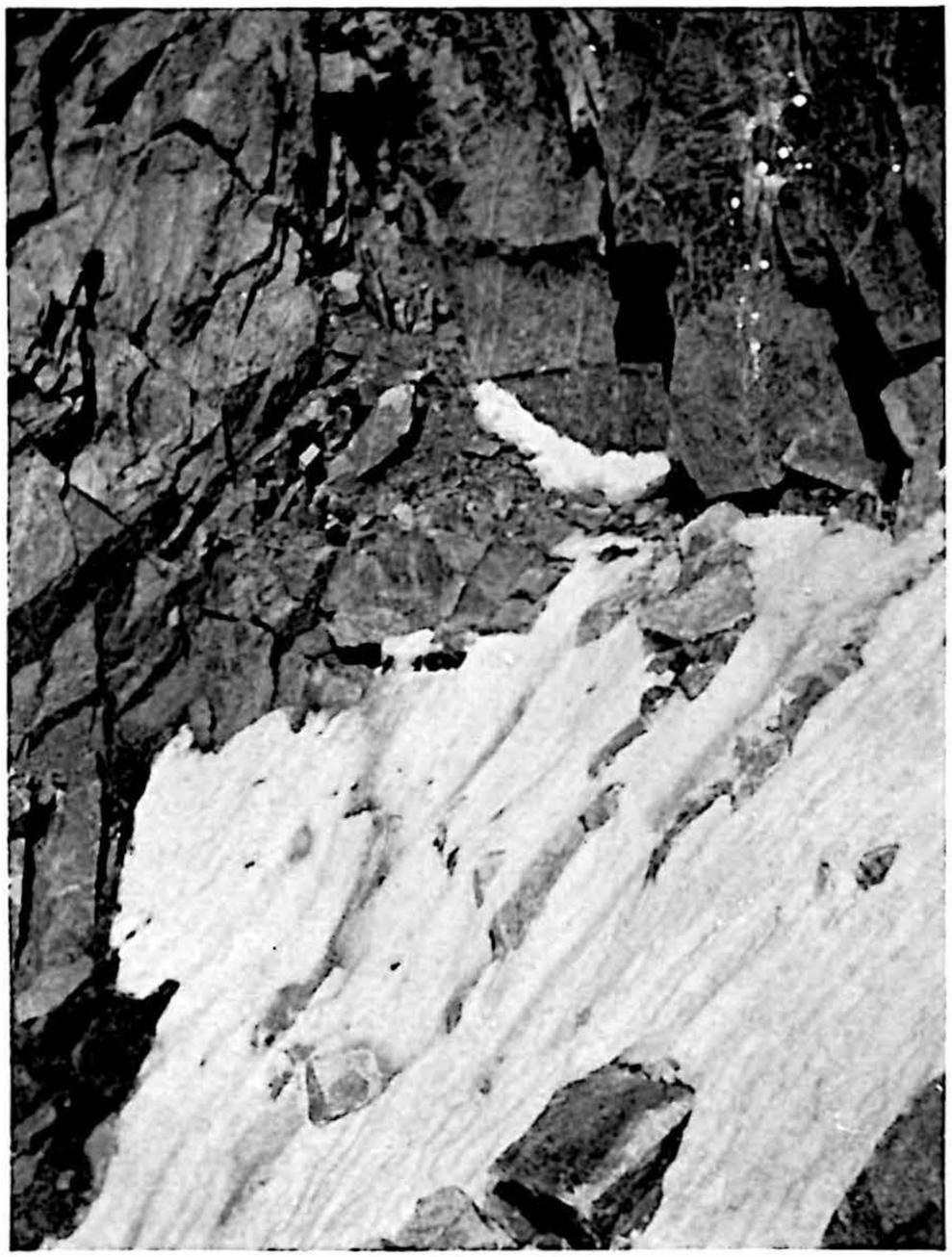


Photo, Herr Fankhauser.

Route of 1884 and 1901 Parties.

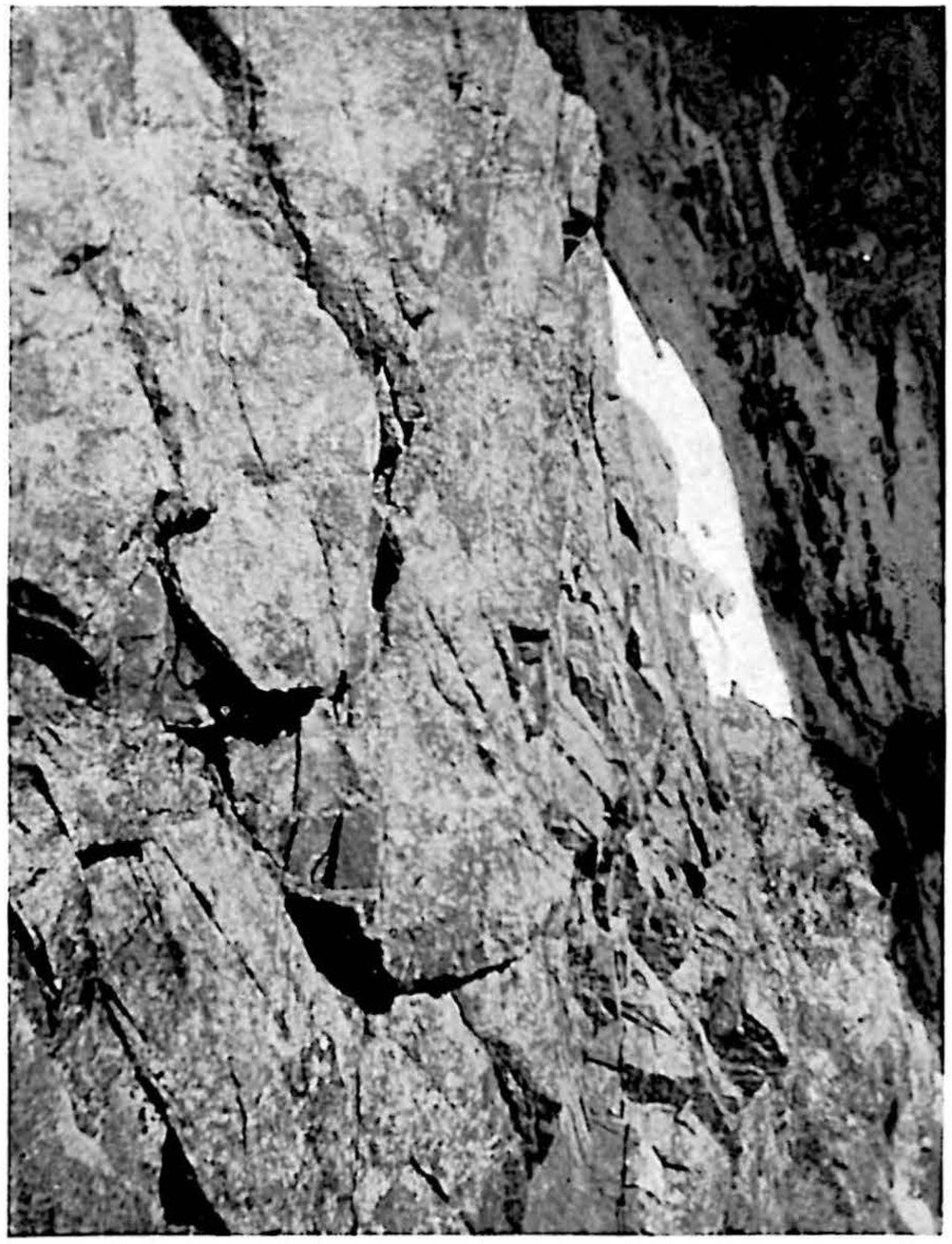
Route of 1893 Party.

Route of 1922 Party.



Photo, H. Lorenz.

Looking W. from P. 3 on Sketch, the scene of 1884 "mishap."



Looking down from P. 3 into the E. Couloir.

narrow and very steep. At this point both these parties were forced by stone-fall to leave this couloir and to force the difficult rocks W. of this couloir in order to reach the snow-saddle marked '3' on the sketch. This point was also gained by our party, but we crossed the part of the E. couloir and ascended the buttress between the W. and E. couloirs by a series of traverses. The *second* party, Captain Farrar, with Daniel Maquignaz, followed the E. couloir a little higher up than we did, but not as much as did the Austrians. Then he also climbed to the crest of the buttress, thus reaching the left or western bank of this buttress below a black cliff with a waterfall (point '2' on the sketch). From this point, and up to near point '3,' his and our line of ascent are about identical. But while curiosity drove us over to point '3,' the snow-saddle mentioned above, Captain Farrar turned to the left, W., and descended from the western bank of the buttress down into the big W. couloir, which he followed up to the second black cliff with a frozen waterfall. From point '3,' the snow-saddle on the eastern bank of the buttress, the routes of the *first*, *third*, and *fourth* parties nearly coincide until the great W. couloir is gained (point 'E' on the sketch). In the upper bay of this W. couloir all routes converge for a short time. Then Captain Farrar took to the rocks of the S.E. ridge, in fact he got up to its very crest and thence crossed to the W., ascending slightly until he could gain the W. couloir above the black cliff (point '4' on the sketch). The Austrians, that is the *first* and *third* parties, turned this cliff also by climbing the W. slope of the main S.E. ridge. But they did not go as far as Captain Farrar did. The *fourth* party, Richardet and I, attacked the frozen waterfall direct, turning its upper portion only and keeping very close to the waterfall. Above this black cliff with the waterfall *all* parties seem to have taken the same route up to the summit.

While the *first* and the *third* parties suffered on different occasions from stone-fall chiefly because they followed the E. couloir or kept too close to it, neither Captain Farrar's nor our party met with any such experiences. Captain Farrar in a letter to me expressed the opinion that his route was less exposed to possible stone-fall than ours. I, of course, do not want to contradict an authority like him, but I am still inclined to think that our route, especially under the favourable conditions prevailing when we climbed the S. face, is as safe as any face climb can be. Previous to our climb I had spent the better half of an afternoon on the top of the Thieregghorn, which provides an excellent view of the S. face of the

Drawn by O. Fahrni.

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Bietschhorn. On that day both the E. as well as the W. couloirs were raked by stone avalanches, while on the buttress between the couloirs I did not observe a single stone to fall.

The S. face of the Bietschhorn provides extraordinary climbing. But anyone who wants to climb it ought to have a clear conception of the structure of this face, for once one has left the lower bay of the E. couloir it is difficult to keep one's bearings, as the many towers and teeth and the different couloirs and gullies are most bewildering so far as orientation is concerned. In addition, the climb should not be tried except on a calm day, as wind is apt to loosen stones. The rocks ought to be dry, and there should be enough snow to line the surface of the couloirs.

(To be continued.)

Bietschhorn—S. Face. (Explanation of sketch.[4])

G = little glacier at the S. foot of Bietschhorn.
G—A = line of ascent followed by all parties.
A = lower end of E. couloir.
A—B = E. couloir.
C—D—E = W. couloir.
E = upper part of W. couloir.
A—2– – D – – E Captain Farrar-Daniel Maquignaz route, 1893, marked with + + + +.
A—3—E route of I. party (Zsigmondy-Purtscheller-Schulz, 1884) and III. party (Professor Lorenz-Ed. Wagner, 1901).
A—1—2—3—E—H route of IV. party (Lauper-Richardet, 1922).
F = snow-saddle on E. bank of the W. couloir from where the I., III., and IV. parties entered the W. couloir.
1. Snow-saddle E. of tower pierced by a window.
2. Left bank of the couloir (No. 3 in Captain Farrar's account, 'A.J.' **18,** 477), which is blocked by a black cliff with a frozen waterfall. This waterfall is just right and a little above of 2.
3. Snow-saddle reached by the I. and III. parties immediately after leaving the narrow gully of the E. couloir (A—B).
4. Second or upper black cliff with a frozen waterfall, blocking the W. couloir (C—D—E). The route of the I. and II. parties lies between that of the II. (marked with + + +) on the right and that of the IV. party (marked – – – –) on the left of the sketch.

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[4] By Herr O. Fahrni, to whom we are much indebted.—*Editor.*