

AN ASCENT OF THE MATTERHORN BY THE FURGGEN RIDGE.¹

BY E. BENEDETTI.

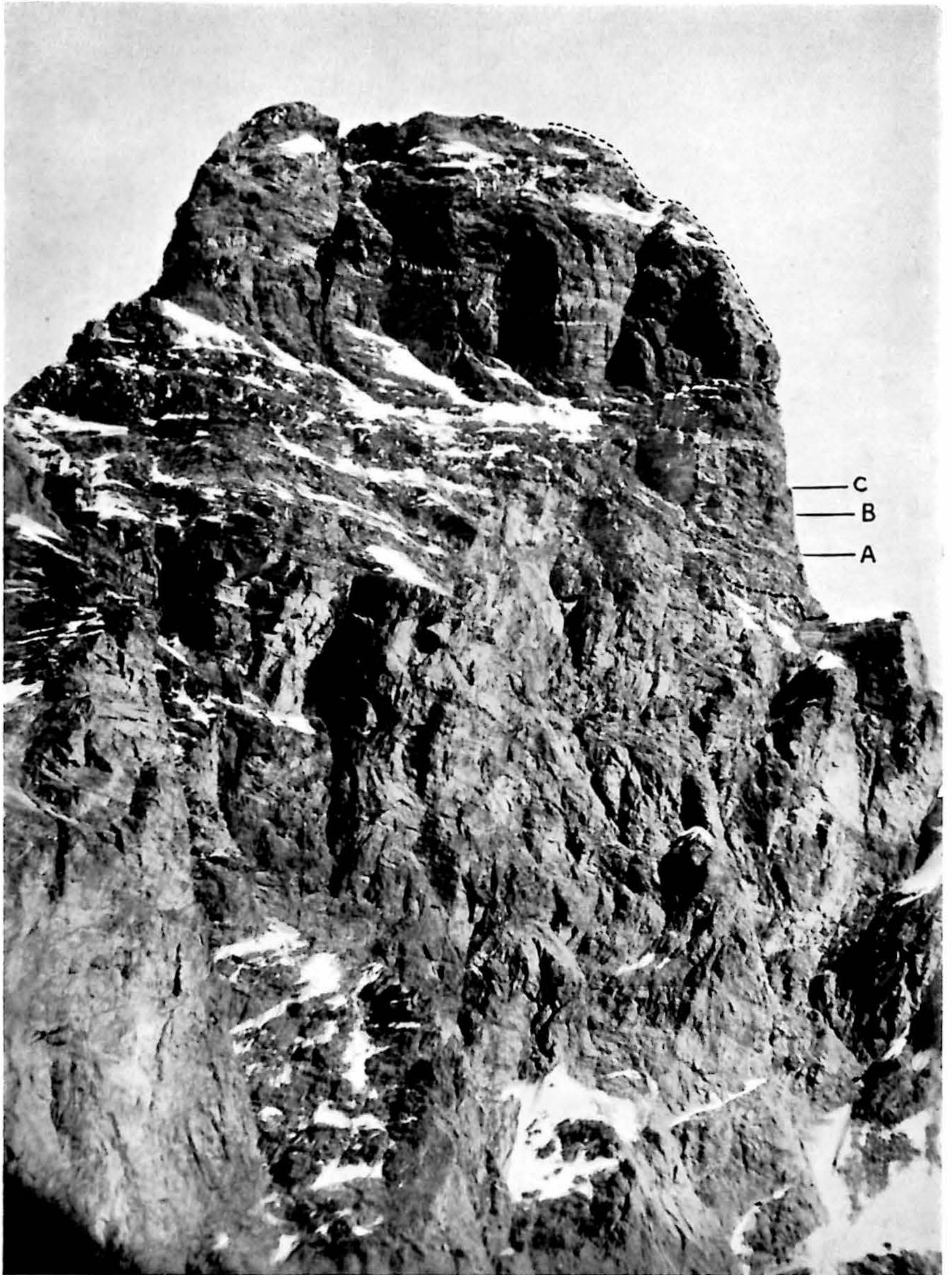
THE idea of ascending the Matterhorn by the Furggen ridge was first suggested to me by Louis Carrel (son of Jean Joseph) about the end of last March, at Gressoney, which we had left, full of hope, for the Gnifetti hut and to which we had had to return in haste a few hours later, covered with snow. The suggestion appeared to me, however, to be merely intended to soothe my bitter disappointment at the failure of the expedition. However, I continued to think about it and I mentioned it again to Carrel a few months later. In July, in the course of a hurried trip to Valtournanche to see my family, which had been there for some weeks, I made up my mind to make the attempt, settled on the end of August as a probable date, and selected Maurice Bich as my second companion.

In the middle of August the condition of the mountain had so deteriorated that I decided to leave Carrel free to make engagements with other people for some ascents in the Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa groups; this decision of mine was also partly due to the fact that, owing to bad weather the guides had been unable to effect, as intended, a reconnaissance of the Italian shoulder.

On August 30 I returned to Valtournanche, quite prepared to spend in idleness the few days I still had at my disposal. Carrel, having heard of my arrival, came up to the hotel and found me half asleep and incapable of coming to any decision. However, I definitely agreed to start on the morrow. We ordered our modest provisions at once, and that same evening Bich came up to Breuil. Carrel and I left Valtournanche on the morning of September 1 for the Théodule, *via* the Cimes Blanches, with the double object of retrieving Bich's long rope and of stretching my legs, which were suffering from twelve months' inertion. That same evening we joined Bich at the Lo Riondé Inn, and found it very difficult, in face of indirect questions, to keep secret our goal, which was known to very few, among whom my wife was not included.

The next morning, September 2, 1930, we left Lo Riondé

¹ We owe the translation to Mr. J. E. C. Eaton.—*Editor.*



Telephoto, U. Graneri.

Matterhorn, S. face, showing 1930 route.

at 3.30 to face our problem, which was utterly unknown to us ; but our keen desire overcame all anxiety, while our will power, strained to the utmost, made up for our lack of previous preparation. The beginning was none too happy : during our approach along the Matterhorn Glacier, our tiny lantern gave us much trouble and made us lose some precious time. We had, in fact, reckoned on beginning the ascent of the ridge by the first light of day, in order to avoid as far as possible the danger of falling stones, whereas we were unable to reach the Breuiljoch before 6 A.M. On the first rocks we found the remains of fixed ropes and we noticed ropes and pitons all the way up the ridge as far as the upper shoulder, which we reached, without excessive difficulty, at 10.30, having followed the route taken by Mummery, also by Rey's and Piacenza's parties.²

This part of the ridge was particularly dangerous on account of the number of falling stones, which at times passed close to us with terrifying hisses : one of them whistled just within a few centimetres of Carrel's head, and a second one, which had fortunately fallen from no great height, struck me on the right forearm. In order to cover this dangerous part in as short a time as possible, the Piacenza party had chosen to go unroped as far as the shoulder.

During our ascent, we perceived a party of two on their way from the Hörnli to the Gandegg across the Furggen Glacier ; another, about 10 o'clock, which was descending from the summit to the Solvay hut, halted on our hailing it. At the shoulder we stopped for about three quarters of an hour, out of danger from falling stones, but no one was hungry, in view of the greater difficulties before us : I threw my crust of bread to the choughs flying squawking above our heads, and intensifying the impression of void and height.

Soon after 11 A.M. Carrel started off for a reconnaissance from the shoulder ; he went along it for the rope's length of 45 m., but this was not sufficient to afford him any view beyond the overhanging spur jutting out of the face about 10 m. from the edge of the arête with which it is connected below by a narrow couloir full of ice. This ends in a sheer precipice of rocky slabs piled up vertically, like a balustrade. Carrel started again from the shoulder, and let himself down on to the face, reappearing soon after and divesting himself of his sack. Whilst making this first attempt,

² Probably also that followed by the Young-Ryan party.—*Editor.*

he had found means to change his shoes : the rope ones not gripping the rock sufficiently, he had been obliged to put on his mountain boots again, as it was impossible to get the better of the granite except by the friction of nails. Carrel, however, had discovered the secret of the route. He came down again, disappearing under the spur in the direction of the Italian shoulder ; from time to time I heard his voice and was able to guess the meaning of his words from Bich's movements. Moments of intense anxiety then followed. Our companion's voice no longer reached us, and the rope swung to and fro in the air. About fifteen minutes passed thus, of the kind to which the adjective ' eternal ' is most applicable, and then his voice, coming from above, freed me from a load of care. The overhang was conquered, conquered by a surprise attack ; circumvented, if you will, but still conquered.

From the little platform above and a little in front of us, Carrel, who was invisible, let down the end of the rope, in which he had tied some knots, swung it to and fro until Bich was able to catch hold of it, and, trusting himself to it, entirely swung himself out over the abyss like a pendulum. It was now my turn. I tied to the end of the knotted rope the sack which I had received from Carrel and which threatened to hamper me, but when it came to seizing the rope which was again let down to me from above, I felt a moment's hesitation. I did not feel equal to repeating Bich's acrobatic feat, and the wall which fell away, grim and precipitous for several hundred metres to the glacier below, certainly did not encourage me to imitate him. With great effort I managed to descend a few steps, keeping away to the left, till I succeeded in reaching the rope as it hung down vertically ; I then made my way upwards.

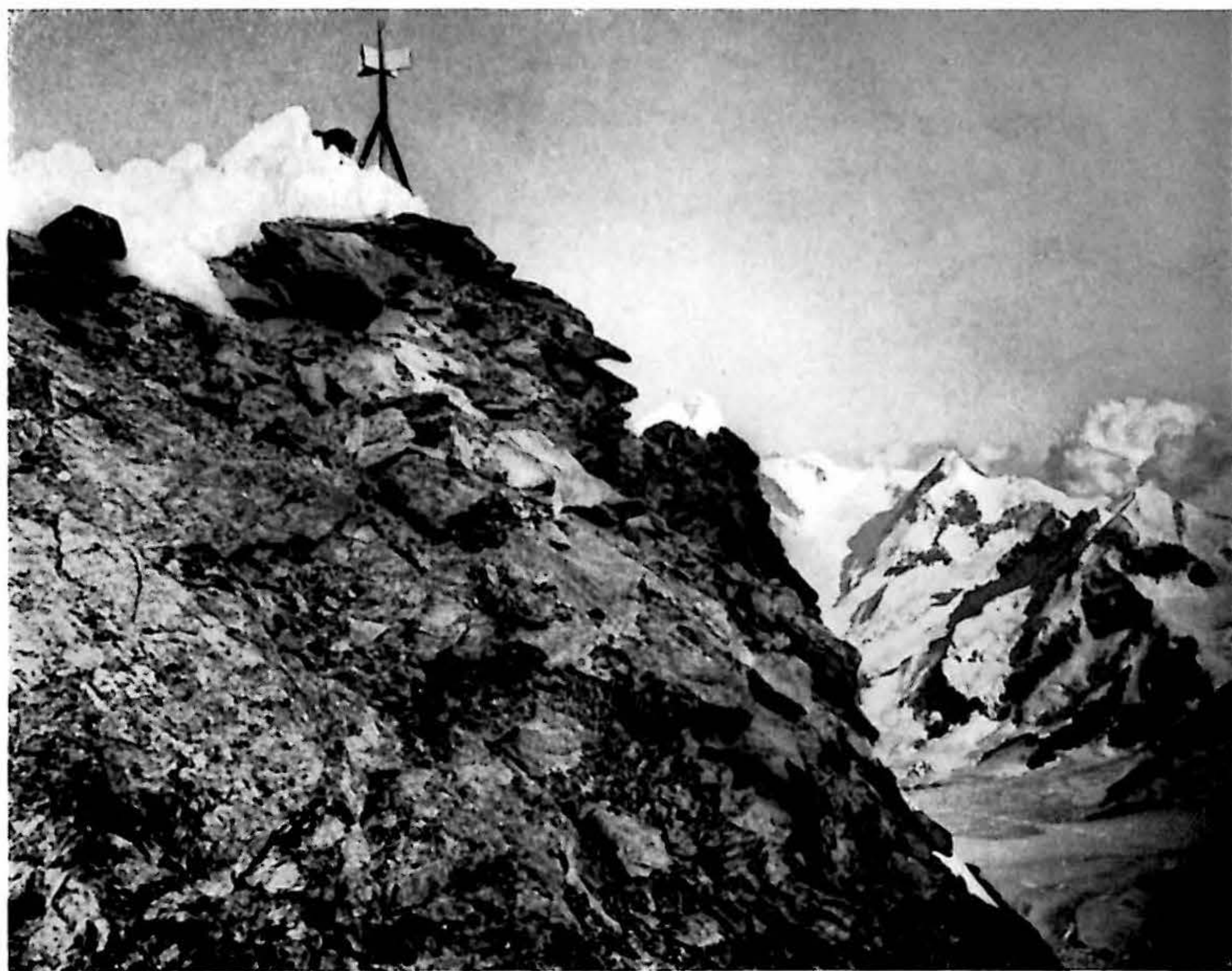
It was 12.15 when we all three met again around the piton driven in by the party that had preceded us nineteen years before. From this point we were able to see the little snow ridge on the summit, about 300 m. above us, and which more than once sent down icicles as we climbed the step. As soon as we had roped up again, we started once more towards the left, climbing diagonally, nearly always on slabs ; further on, Carrel wisely avoided a passage that looked inviting, because he considered it impracticable on account of *verglas*. Still further to the left and lower down we noticed from a distance a rope-ring secured round a final piton.

It was on this part of the route that a long distance conversation took place between Carrel and his father, who was descending to the Italian shoulder with the Rev. Dr. Reinhardt

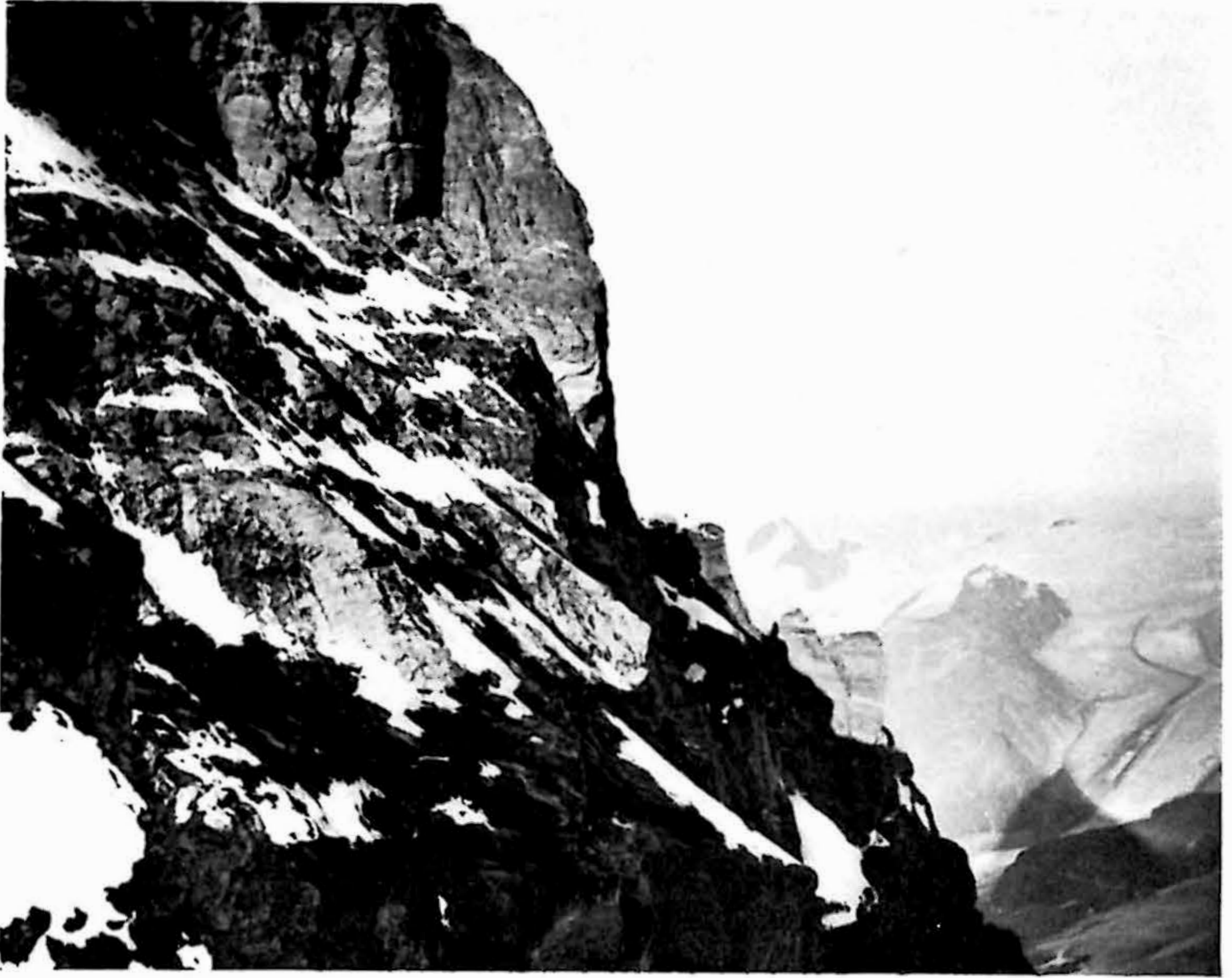


Photos, E. Benedetti.

S. face of "FURGGEN" Shoulder.



The two summits of Matterhorn with Monte Rosa in background.



Photo, E. Benedetti.

The "FURGGEN" Shoulder from the "Italian" Shoulder.



Photo, Wehrli.

Upper part of Matterhorn showing line of 1929
descent of FURGGENGRAT.

and César Pession. We began once more to climb almost vertically upwards, and it was then that we began to use our four pitons, which we were destined to drive into the rock seven times between this point and 'under the nose,' pulling them out again after use. This action of ours, which later laid us open to a charge of selfishness, however human and pardonable, was imposed upon us by sheer necessity. On the other hand, it seems to me that so many of the routes up the Matterhorn are sufficiently safeguarded by ropes, nails (pitons) and ladders, as to render it unnecessary to make even the difficult Furggen ridge easy, especially if we consider that we ought to leave untouched one route for those wishing to seek the intoxication of danger, for we must also realize that fixed aids to safety on mountains humiliate, not the peaks, but rather those who scale them by such means.

We now turned once more to the right, ascending by little chimneys, then we faced again to the left, thus overcoming another vertical step giving access to some slabs, which we traversed and thereby regained, at 13.30, the ridge under the 'nose.' Here we found the bottle with Mario Piacenza's card.³ We turned to the left, and, about 10 m. from the crest of the arête, climbed up a vertical crack for about 30 m., which led us back on to the ridge, above the 'nose.' All the way from the overhang of the shoulder to the 'nose' there is a variety of awkward or *very* awkward passages, as Bich and Carrel called them (for them the word 'difficult' is perhaps synonymous with 'impossible'), but these did not seem to me to present such difficulties as those we had met with between the shoulder and the face. From the ridge above the 'nose' Carrel noticed, in a couloir on the slope of the E. face, the remains of Rey's ladder at about the level of the 'nose.' We proceeded, after a short halt, still keeping to the ridge, towards the summit, which we reached at 15.30.

I was here at a loss how to utter my joy and gratitude, and I merely expressed my thanks by a long handshake with my companions, which made me aware how they also were trembling with emotion. At the trigonometrical signal on the Italian summit we found a Swiss guide who had come up the Z'mutt ridge with a lady; he knew Carrel and Bich and inquired why Maurice was in the centre of the party. No sooner had he learnt the reason than he replied 'impossible,' with an astonishment so genuine that we thought he was quite unable

³ For a photograph illustrating the 'Piacenza' line of attack, see *A.J.* 26, facing 151.—*Editor.*

to believe our account of the expedition. Nobody, however, should show surprise who has any idea of the ability of my two men, to whom all the merit of our success was due, and I cannot but congratulate myself on my very happy choice.

We made a long halt, enjoying the last rays of the sun. It was 7.30 P.M. when we unroped at the Luigi Amedeo hut, where we spent the night.

Next morning, shortly before 10, we were at Aimé Maquignaz's hotel at Breuil. Here I had the opportunity of inspecting my scratched hands and my flayed knees. I must, however, regret that none of these wounds left any permanent signs on my body as a reminder that body, as well as soul, had really made that ascent.

I had made arrangements to have the pleasure of meeting Guido Rey a few days later, and on hearing the report which Bich (who was with me) had made to him summarily, he was generous and kind enough to say that he considered ours as the first ascent by the Furggen ridge, inasmuch as we had followed a route on the face which was very close to the arête. But if we were to claim such an honour we should be sinning not only against modesty but should also be forgetting Rey's strict definition of the real Furggen arête and that great mountaineer's repudiation, on account of a failure over a few metres, of a victory with which the Alpine world had credited him. A Swiss newspaper of the period had called Rey a dangerous madman after his bold attempt. 'Abnormal' he must be, because some forms of honesty and of self-renunciation exist only in exceptional minds.

Notes on the Ascent.

At the end of the little chimney connecting the shoulders with the base of the overhang, there is a firm spur, nearly as high as a man, round which the rope can be hitched, so that it affords security both to anyone descending on to the face and to anyone who is handling the rope. The overhang offers so few handholds to the left of the climber, and so far from the crest, that they are practically useless; one is obliged to depend entirely on the knotted rope if one wishes to overcome the overhang by direct attack.

At the top of the overhang there is a level stretch of a few metres, on which one can move with comfort, and some ledges affording anchorage, so that one can help the next man. From this point progress is easy as far as the bottom of slab 'A'

(snow-covered in the photograph, but found dry by us), to get into which one has to climb over an exposed needle with a few and not very useful handholds, but not necessarily extremely difficult. It was here that the first piton became necessary. Nothing out of the way as far as the face of the couloir where we began our return to the ridge by a sharply curving line.

Then follows a little couloir, broken in half at 'B,' and immediately above 'C' a second needle, with large masses of rock in unstable equilibrium, which demand continued and vigilant care while climbing them, and careful tests before trusting oneself to them. On this part, only a couple of metres long, we fixed three pitons at very short distances from each other. Then again broken and unstable rock, as far as the slabs, convenient even though covered with débris, which lead to below the 'nose.'

At intervals the rock shows yellowish streaks which make one imagine one is in the presence of layers of sulphur, an impression strengthened by the odour they exhale. From below the 'nose,' a slight deviation towards the face is necessary, in order to enter the little chimney, clearly seen in the photograph, and which offers firm rock and good handholds. This enables one to regain the ridge, which leads easily to the summit. Very fatiguing is this last chimney, especially on account of its length.

As regards personal considerations, there is freedom from objective dangers and no falling stones,⁴ but in this matter we were perhaps favoured also by the weather.

[We desire to express our indebtedness to Signor Benedetti for his interesting account.—*Editor*, 'A.J.']

THE TRAVERSE OF THE GRANDES JORASSES.

BY MISS GERALDINE I. FITZ-GERALD.

THE party was composed of myself, with the guides Alfred Couttet and Anatole Bozon, of Chamonix. We left the cosy Cabane de Leschaux at 3.10 A.M. on August 31, 1930. The night was perfect. Overhead twinkled my old friends

⁴ Signor Benedetti is referring presumably to the ridge *above* the shoulder.—*Editor*.