

## A SOLITARY ALPINE SCRAMBLE.

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OUR party were holidaying in Switzerland and were spending a few nights at a small hotel seldom visited by the ordinary British tourist. The hotel, situated at a height of 6,000 feet, was at the end of a lake not unlike our own Loch Muick, only the surrounding hills rose to a height of about 9,000 feet and had snow-covered summits. Looking along the lake from the hotel windows, one might easily have mistaken the view for a spring scene in the Scottish Highlands, as the hills rose only some 3,000 feet above the lake level. In the opposite direction one looked across a valley about 2,600 feet deep to precipitous snow-clad peaks of a more rugged nature. My friends were keen on climbing two hills at the far end of the lake and, possibly, of continuing along the ridge to other tops, but the writer, thinking this was to be too strenuous, decided on a solitary ascent of a peak which took his fancy, half-way along the left side of the lake. This peak, as seen from the hotel, presented a precipitous face crowned with snow cornices along the summit. To the right of the summit, an interesting looking ridge led down, at first steeply and then at a lesser angle, to the lake. To the left, the summit ridge led to a col joining it to the next peak of the range and, according to the map, there was a track, *via* this col, to the summit (8,760 feet).

Starting away on a fine, clear morning, the writer followed a good path for the first mile or so along the edge of the lake. An inferior track then branched off to the left and was followed, close by a small mountain torrent, to a lakelet some 600 feet up the hill-side.

Round the left side of this lake the track vanished in snow slopes below the steep face of the mountain, and a halt was made to consider the best route. Evidently the

map route to the col, although snow-covered, should present no serious difficulty, but an ascent by the right-hand ridge and descent by the map route might give some interesting scrambling and would enable a traverse of the peak to be made. The ridge was carefully examined through the binoculars and, finally, this route was decided on. A way was chosen so as to reach the crest of the ridge just at the foot of the steep part. A shallow turf gully led up to this point and no difficulty was encountered till within 50 feet of its top. Here the gully was interrupted by outcrops of very rotten rock, and some delay was caused before these were safely passed and the crest of the ridge attained. It seemed encouraging, at the time, to come across a large, flowering "butter-ball" in a small patch of grass.

The ridge was now seen to be narrow and precipitous on each side and, as the weather was changing to mist and rain, some anxiety was felt as to what lay between this point and the summit. After some easy scrambling, the crest of the ridge was blocked by an overhanging mass of rock some 10 feet high. To the right appeared impracticable; to the left the vertical rock of the side of the ridge rose higher the farther one advanced along a steep slope of grass and rock. The only route seemed to be close to the obstruction and on the left side of the ridge, where a vertical climb of some 10 feet would land one once more on the crest. Not much of a difficulty, perhaps, as the holds appeared to be good, though small, but enough to cause a solitary climber to consider the probable consequences of a slip, with no one to check it. Untrained limbs were now beginning to tire with the scrambling and it was evidently time for food and a smoke. If in a difficulty while climbing, it is wonderful what a different outlook there can be after partaking of these stimulants. Seated with back to the obstructing rock for shelter from the drizzle, I considered the position. The wet mist was silently creeping round; there were unknown difficulties in front and an objectionable

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Selo H.P. Film, Zeiss G1 yellow filter, 1/250 sec., f16, 3 P.M. September. Cloud-capped Pfaffen Hüt from Rotegg, Titlis (9,000 feet), against the sun.



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THE PARSON'S HAT

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retreat; one thing seemed quite clear—that this climbing business can be a much overrated game. (“It’s grinding toil at vast expense. Why do men climb at all?”—ED.) At one moment the silence was broken by the distant crash of falling rock. Considered opinion was that the summit was not far away, that there would be little difficulty in descending by the route marked on the map, and that the present obstruction might be the worst on the ridge. Probably the Swiss lunch, although not appetizing, had the right amount of vitamins. At any rate, once the rucksack was packed and a sling for the ice-axe extemporized out of a boot-lace, the bad step was safely tackled and the crest of the ridge once more attained. From here, what could be seen of the ridge did not look too promising, but the doubtful-looking parts, when approached, presented no real difficulty and, presently, the summit cairn appeared, just visible through the mist, across a hundred yards of easy rock and snow. The sudden rise of the spiritual barometer at this moment made one realize clearly the previous anxiety felt as to the outcome of the scramble. There was still a route to be found, in mist, down snow-covered slopes intersected with precipices, but this caused no depression and another meal was taken in a leisurely way near the summit in the hope of the mist clearing. There was also a possibility of meeting climbing friends here, and many hails were sent out in their presumed direction but only the echoes replied.

Hopes of either the mist clearing or the friends appearing were given up, and the descent to the col was commenced. This was mainly over large boulders, many of them loose, and required care. From the col, breaks in the mist enabled a route to be picked out down the snow slopes, and some good glissading was obtained. Farther down the track was reached and, in due course, the hotel, just as the rain turned into a downpour that was to continue for the rest of the evening.