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**"HOW THE PROFESSOR,
THE EXPLORER AND THE MERE
MAN
CLIMBED A MOUNTAIN."**

By the MERE MAN.

IT was 2-30, and when the Mere Man got up and looked out of the window, the bright starlight gave no excuse for going to bed again, so he called the Explorer, who swore in Swahili, and the Professor, whose wife made herself responsible for his early appearance. Breakfast was a dreamy meal, the never-sleeping waitress serving in silence, whilst the guide got ready the rucksack and ropes. At 3*30, the guide led off, the rest following the uncertain glimmer of his lantern; all were gloomily silent, save the Professor, who talked of many things, which was excusable, and expected his questions to be answered, which was unpardonable. Soon the path was left, and grass slopes and fir woods after it. There was no hurry, for the great rock ridge above could not be climbed before daylight, and it was still half-an-hour to dawn. Lights in the little mountain inn below showed that another party was starting, later they were seen crossing a glacier pass to the next valley.

When the ridge was reached, the guide's rucksack was lightened, and then the first gleams of sunlight struck the great snow peaks opposite, first pink, then golden, and there was light to climb. Steep grass and rock alternated, followed by steeper grass, and a great rock gully that led to a massive wall above, topped by towers of yellow stone ; there seemed a way between the buttresses, and broken and rotten rock

gave hand and foot-holds. Nothing was solid, and all the ledges were covered with slatey screes, but it was easy going up to the towers. There the Explorer said the way was difficult, and he would go home ; so he was roped to the guide and the Mere Man, whilst the Professor roamed at large. There was always a road up, sometimes easy, sometimes hard, but always interesting so long as the rocks lasted, for it was a route unrecorded in "Conway" or " Ball," and unknown to any local guide.

At 8, more breakfast on a ledge, loved by the Chammois; to the north the ridge fell away almost sheer, supported by huge buttresses of dark rock; to the south easier slopes led to the glacier below, where the great ice-fall, with its splendid spires and pinnacles, cuts the ridge off from the higher snow-field.

The summit could be seen towering above—surely not an hour away—but what from below looked like a solid rock ridge was found, on minute and laborious inspection, to be a 3000 ft. slope of slippery, greasy screes, running up to the summit snow-cap. The Professor and the Mere Man floundered on ahead, leaving the guide with the Explorer, who now used English words of much intensity — his Swahili had failed him; and the guide was most anxious to learn English—perhaps he profited. At 12.30, the summit was reached, 7000 feet above the hotel. The return route arranged the night before led over easy snow slopes, up a second peak, a short hour's walk ; then down steeper snow to a col, whence a rapid descent could be made ; but 500 feet of clear ice glittering in the sun just above the col, and the thought of the necessary step-cutting, made another way preferable. There were three alternatives : to return by the ridge already climbed ; to cross a great snow basin, soft from the afternoon sun; or to force a passage through the ice-fall. Ridge and snow-field were safe, but very tedious and long; the ice-fall did not err on the side of safety, but it would save hours if practicable ; and it was taken. A way was seen that might go, and to reach it, 4000 feet of screes and snow slopes ran down

in almost unbroken line. It was a glorious descent ;—sliding and slipping through the screes, glissading over the snow, standing glissades on the higher harder slopes, sitting glissades when too soft to stand—with due regard to lower garments, for only two days before the guide had left the greater part of an antique pair of trousers far behind, much to his embarrassment, as there were ladies in the party.

The ice was soon reached, and for half-an-hour crevasses were dodged and ice walls climbed, but to no purpose ; every way forward was cut off by impassable chasms. Five hundred feet below another way seemed possible, and it could be reached by the lateral rocks ; it did not look a path to linger on, as the floor was made of ice fragments from above, when seracs glittered in wonderful, but frail, beauty. Steps were cut with speed, and there was no waiting until the area of fire was passed. One little serac gaily skipped past, but the others held, and the far moraine was reached. There was no more hurry, only a stroll down through the Alps and across tin-torrent to the little mountain inn, where tea waited, and after tea, soda water and syrup, for there was a great drought, and Mademoiselle Augusta laughed, and told the ladies who came in after that—" Messieurs had been very thirsty." In the cool of the evening the hotel was reached, and baths and dinner were very welcome after fifteen hours of walk and climb.