

## EASTER SATURDAY.

R. T. SOUTHALL.

---

It all depends what you mean by *steep* . . . .

On Good Friday the whole party went up the Laaxerstöckli. When we were all back at the Nagiens Hut, I heard comments such as : "It's all very well, these steep traverses, but I hardly know how to stop!" and : "I'm going up the Vorab again to-morrow—that's easier!" I couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. "What about Piz Segnes?" I said loudly to Fredy Nydegger. "It's the obvious choice for to-morrow." Piz Segnes is a fine peak of 10,177 feet on the Grisons-Glarus border, a worthy prize for skiers. Fredy said it was a good idea, and added that it was supposed to be rather steep. "Who's coming with us?" The silence gave us the answer. Well (I thought) Fredy and I will fairly gallop up and down—no waiting for the slow ones on those steep slopes. Just the two of us. Fine!

It was a lovely day, vivid and clear, when we left the Hut at 6 a.m. We carried our skis up to the wooden post that marks a narrow gap in the cliffs where the high alp drops abruptly to the valley. We put on our skis and moved to the edge to have a look at the way down to the Segnes Hut far below. Across on the other side of the valley was the beginning of a hanging valley holding the Segnes Glacier, up which we must go ; but I didn't feel happy as I looked at what lay between. How I wished I could fly! Never have I wished it more. I couldn't turn back—that was more than conscience would allow, after the remarks I had made yesterday about the Laaxerstöckli. But I hesitated. Not only was the slope down very steep, but so was the one up into the hanging valley. Worse still, the snow was glass-hard. While I was still pondering my fate, Fredy—a man of few words—glided over the edge and was gone.

When scared one finds it difficult to do the correct thing. In this case I should have leaned well away from the slope. Instead I slipped almost at once, tripped, and immediately went down in a tangle which in some mysterious way immobilised me on the slope. Encouraged from below, I managed to regain an erect position, expecting every moment to shoot down to the valley bottom. However, I took a firm grip of myself and for a while got on better, traversing backwards and forwards with a kick-turn

at the end of each traverse. Then the slope steepened. Rock slabs restricted the ski-ing area and only side-slipping was possible. Seventy-five feet from the bottom I slipped again and went hurtling down upon Fredy, directly below. He tried to stop me and I cannoned into his legs. Much to my surprise he didn't fall over, and the rebound sent me bouncing away out of his reach. There was nothing more to stop me, and I flew on downwards at a considerable speed until the slope evened out at the bottom and I stopped. It took me some time to realise that I was unhurt. When I was quite sure of this I stood up, feeling a certain disappointment at having fallen so far without a scratch.

We put on skins and began the ascent. The slope was even steeper and icier than the one we had descended. It was impossible to get the points of the ski-sticks in, and the steel edges of the skis made no impression whatever. Fredy said it was impossible to traverse—we must go straight up. This meant leaning far forward and relying on the skins. I cannot speak for the skins, but the strain on myself, as we climbed slowly and painfully, was considerable. Every foot forward was one more added to the long slide backwards when one lost control. Across the top of the snow-slopes above ran a long rocky rib. I wondered whether I would reach it before my leg-muscles collapsed altogether.

We reached the rib at last. To me it was like the lifebelt thrown to a drowning man—just before he goes down for the third time. We took off our skis and scrambled over the rocks into the upper valley. Here matters were easier. Again using skins, we crossed a big flat area called the Segnes-Sura, a bog in summer, to where the slopes steepened on to the Segnes Glacier. This glacier runs down between Piz Atlas and Piz Segnes on the west and Piz Dolf on the east. The two former peaks send down tremendous cliffs to the glacier and the views were most impressive. Our summit, a crest of glittering ice, lay above these cliffs, and I wondered how we were to get to it.

I wondered even more when we reached the saddle between Piz Segnes and Piz Dolf. The way upward was obvious, and yet that funnel-like slope between two great rock walls looked steeper than anything we had seen so far. Also, it was surmounted by a cornice—not a big one, it is true, but still a cornice. Fredy didn't look at it for long. He turned his skis and started zig-zagging up inside the funnel. There was nothing to do but follow, so I put my skis in his tracks and moved upward.

At every kick-turn I thought I should topple over backwards—either that, or the snow would give way beneath my one

delicately-placed ski. But neither disaster occurred, and I reached the point where Fredy had turned the cornice-edge, at the left-hand side of the funnel's rim. The slope fell very steeply from the edge. Gingerly I put skis round it. There seemed to be nothing at all on the other side. I looked down at the cornice edge running away at an alarming angle below me, and thought unhappily of the long fall if I slipped or the edge broke. Very slowly I see-sawed round with only a few inches of my skis on the snow and the ends waving nakedly in mid-air. The snow held. At last I was round. I heaved a sigh of relief—but this was premature. The steep slope beyond was exposed to the freezing wind, and was ice-hard. I saw Fredy well up to the left, sitting on some rocks and waiting patiently. From what I had seen from below, I knew that the icy slope ended in those ugly cliffs dropping to the Segnes Glacier. A slip now was something not even to be thought about. To say that I was careful would be an understatement. I got across somehow and collapsed at Fredy's side. When he announced that we should leave our skis here I could hardly believe my ears.

Beyond the rocks a steep and narrow arête led to the splendidly-corniced summit. We kicked steps and reached the top at 11. All around was a wonderful view. In a great sweep to the south rose hundreds of peaks, from which we could pick out the distant Berninas and even the rugged giants of the Valais. Most exciting of all was to look straight down at Elm in the Serfntal seven thousand feet below.

Time flew and we began to feel cold. Fredy suggested going back for our skis so that we could ski along the north ridge of Piz Segnes to Piz Sardonna. Fortunately it wasn't difficult to persuade him that it would be rather tiring to fetch the skis; we went on foot. Much of the ridge had been blown clear of snow, but there were drifts in which we floundered helplessly. Hard work indeed—but safe, quite safe. From this second summit, 10,020 feet, we looked right down into the Calfeisental to the east, another deep and impressive valley which reaches to the Rhine at Bad Ragaz.

We spent two hours on the tops before going back to rejoin the skis. This was not a meeting to which I was looking forward. However, sun and a south wind had by now considerably altered conditions, and where there had been ice the snow was soft and sometimes sticky. Having waxed our skis well at the saddle, we had a wonderful downhill run of over two miles; and on the steep slopes near the Segnes Hut I found it hard to recall the arduous of the morning.

Next day Fredy and I traversed the peaks on the Crap St. Gion ridge, a delightful day and not difficult. When Fredy said it had been a pleasant expedition—steep, but much pleasanter than yesterday, I smiled. It all depends what you mean by *steep*. . . .

---

Memories, they are half the fun of mountaineering. The peaks you have climbed are no longer inanimate, they are a part of youth. You gaze at them through the clouds of the past and with beating heart and tautened muscles you tread once more their delectable summits.

—F. S. Smythe.