

Passage two – The Wall of the Ogre

- 1 The most **gripping** story I have read is of man's attempts to conquer the Eigerwand, 'The Wall of the Ogre' that mile-high precipice beside the Jungfrau. Each year they try. Each year they die.
- 2 The great wall is mostly vertical, sometimes overhanging. It is covered with a thin layer of ice, and there is no shelter from the stones that fall as the sun begins to melt the ice in the morning. At no point is there a **ledge** sufficiently wide to lie upon, and the climber must spend the nights tied to the icy rock.
- 3 Typical of the attempts on the Wall was that of four young men a few months ago: Rainer and Angerer, from Austria; Kurz and Hinterstoisser, from Bavaria, all young men with long records of dangerous climbs. They started their climb two hours after midnight one July morning, and when the telescopes in the valley picked them out at midday they were going strongly like surefooted ants on the face of the Wall. So confident were they at this early stage that one of them took photographs. One of these shows Angerer leaning out into **space** supported only by his rope.
- 4 Then they came to a full stop. Above them the Wall was impossible. By moving perilously downwards across a sheer rock face they could reach the beginning of a new line of ascent. They knew, all four, that if once they got across, they could never get back. It would be the top of the Wall or nothing. They decided to cross.
- 5 It took them an hour to cross the 50-yard space. Then they set off upward again. As evening fell, the weather turned against them. Lightning flashed around them, thunder echoed from the Wall, and its face was streaming with rain and snow and stones. All night they stayed on the precipice, their clothes frozen around them, **their four lives hanging on a half-inch rope**. Perhaps from time to time, from sheer fatigue, they dozed on their awful **perch**. I shudder as I think what must be the feelings of a man who wakes up to find himself half frozen, suspended over space.
- 6 Next morning the sun thawed them and they climbed on, but clouds hid them from the watchers in the valley. They passed another night hanging on the Wall. Sometime next day they held a conference, while clinging to their tiny footholds. The Wall did not, they decided, despite the impossible passage they had crossed, to try to come down again.
- 7 Then someone in the valley remembered that the Jungfrau Railway, tunnelling through the solid rock of the Eiger comes close to the face of the Wall and that a window looks out. Four guides roped themselves together, climbed -out of this window, and began chipping their way, step by step and handhold by handhold, across the icy slope towards the trapped climbers.
- 8 They were roped together, one above the other, when Hinterstoisser, at the top, fell. As he fell, the rope whipped itself around the neck of Angerer and throttled him to death where he stood. Hinterstoisser's body pulled itself loose from the rope, and on its dreadful journey down crashed into Rainer and so injured him that in a few minutes he died. Kurz alone was left alive, **roped to his two dead comrades**.
- 9 He hung against the cliff, beaten, **exhausted**, with one arm frozen and useless, dinging with the other to his last faint hopes of life. The guides came nearer, within shouting distance. Weakly he told them that he could not live through another night.
- 10 Then the storm came on again. He was still alive. They came within little more than ten yards beneath him. They shouted to him to cut away the body of Angerer, which at last he managed to do, the body nearly crashing against them as it fell. Then for three hours Kurz struggled to knot a rope together and lower it to the guides, and on this they sent him up a rope sling.
- 11 The lowering could only be done by Kurz himself. Slowly, painfully, he came down. One of the guides secured a firm foothold and another climbed on his shoulders. With his axe he could almost touch Kurz's boots. For Kurz, only a foot or two now separated life and death. It was at this point that the rope jammed. Kurz pulled feebly at it, but it would not clear. His body, and now his spirit, was exhausted. Releasing his axe, he let go of his hold and swung out into the air, hanging twenty feet away from the cliff. And there he died.