CHAPTER VIII.

ASCENT OF THE FLETSCHHORN AND THE ALLELEINHORN.

THE great Pennine chain of the Alps, its numerous northern spurs, and the intermediate valleys, were till lately but little visited by travellers, in comparison with other mountainous regions of Switzerland: indeed, before the scientific expeditions of Professor Forbes, nearly the whole of this range of mountains may be said to have been a *terra incognita* to Englishmen, and known to few, besides the actual inhabitants, among the Swiss themselves.

The two largest of the northern offshoots from the principal chain, enclosing between them the long valley of St. Nicholas (somewhat in the form of a horse-shoe), and containing some of the loftiest summits in Europe, have in the last few years been extensively explored by the more adventurous in the crowd of tourists who now flock annually to Zermatt.

A little further to the east is another parallel range, at first sight appearing on the map as one of these spurs, but in reality forming part of the chain dividing Switzerland from Italy which takes a bend to the northward, not far from the head of the Saas valley, and maintains nearly the same direction as far as the Pass of the Simplon, where it resumes its north-easterly course until it finally unites with the great central chain of Switzerland near the Pass of the Furca.

The valley of Saas—far more interesting in itself than that of St. Nicholas, though partially eclipsed by the unrivalled splendour of Zermatt—has lately attracted a considerable number of visitors, but it seems rarely to have occurred to any one to penetrate into the heart of the last-mentioned chain, which forms its eastern boundary. Studer's map shows us no less than five passes over this range, all glacier routes probably of great interest, only two of which—the Rothplatt glacier, and a depression of the Portiengrat —have, I believe, been crossed by English travellers; and though it is inferior in general elevation to its immediate neighbour on the west, it contains many high peaks, foremost amongst which are the Weissmies (the highest point of the chain), and, further to the north, the Fletschhorn, no doubt familiar in appearance, if not by name, to those who have crossed the Simplon Pass in fine weather.

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This latter peak is a conspicuous and beautiful object in the view from the new hotel on the Æggischhorn, where it first attracted my attention, on a bright morning towards the end of August, 1856. I had just been foiled in an attempt to ascend the Finsteraarhorn, dense mists and a furious wind having obliged me to return when about a thousand feet below the summit; and this too after waiting several days with more or less patience for a favourable change in the weather.

I was thoroughly tired of the Æggischhorn; I had no settled plan; and moreover I was alone and unhampered by appointments of definite date—great stumbling-blocks to travellers!—the majestic appearance of the distant Fletschhorn excited my ambition, while its apparently isolated position (as seen from the north) seemed to give rich promise of a splendid panorama; the ascent, if practicable, would in some measure atone for my recent failure; and certainly two previous visits had not exhausted the wonders of the most wonderful district in Switzerland. I slept at Viesch that night, and met there a Chamouni guide who had crossed the Col du Géant with me in 1854; he had no personal recollection of me at first, but became duly affectionate when a reference to his recommendation book had established my identity.

Next day (Saturday the 23rd of August) I proceeded to Saas, and of course applied immediately to the célebrated Curé Imseng for information about the Fletschhorn; he entered heartily into the scheme, and promised to accompany me on the Monday, if he could find a clerical substitute to undertake his parochial duties during his absence. This was satisfactorily arranged on the following day.

Three Englishmen who were at the hotel agreed to join in the expedition, and in the afternoon we all went a short distance up the western side of the valley to a point from which we could reconnoitre the mountain with telescopes. It lies too far in the background to be visible from the village itself, and we now learnt for the first time that there were two peaks, both entitled to the name of Fletschhorn, though the more southerly point is also known on the eastern side of the chain as the Laquinhorn; Studer's map gives it the latter name, while the more general ones of Keller and Leuthold ignore the existence of a second peak. The northern point, whose massive white shoulders, crowned by a pyramid of rock, presented so striking an outline in the view from the Æggischhorn, seemed, as far as we could judge, not impracticable, but sug-

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gested considerable glacier difficulties, the true nature of which is seldom discernible at a distance. The Laquinhorn, a serrated ridge, was apparently accessible by means of a long steep buttress of rock, leading almost uninterruptedly from the western base of the peak to its highest point, and forming a wall of separation between two glaciers which ultimately unite at its lower extremity. This spinal column (so to speak) is distinctly marked on the annexed map, which is taken from Studer's.

We had now to decide which of these summits we should attempt to reach. The higher of the two was of course to be preferred, but which *was* the higher? Opinions were divided; the point was discussed; and we separated into hostile parties, warmly supporting the rival claims of the respective favourites; but, after all, the most practised eye cannot judge with any accuracy of the comparative heights of two contiguous peaks, when viewed in highly foreshortened perspective from the base of the range. And here the curé could not help us; he had obtained from engineers engaged in the survey of the district, the heights of many of the surrounding mountains, amongst others that of the Laquinhorn (13,206 English feet above the level of the sea), but the northern point, or Fletschhorn proper, had not, he believed, been measured. He did know, however, that two years previously, a Swiss professor had succeeded in reaching the top of the northern peak from the Simplon side, while there was no tradition of a human foot having ever trodden the summit of the Laquinhorn. This was admitted as a paramount claim for the southern peak, and the two factions finally coalesced, both anxious to believe that our new Jungfrau possessed the collateral advantage of being taller than her now less interesting sister.

Franz Andenmatten, the landlord of the Monte Rosa hotel at Saas, was to be our principal guide, a merry, good-tempered fellow, and a first-rate mountaineer, and it was left to his discretion to select three others. In case of serious difficulty it would be well to have a guide for each traveller, and with so large a party the *impedimenta* were pretty sure to be considerable.

Provisions packed, and all arrangements made, we set off about five o'clock for the Trift Alp, where we were to sleep, and so reduce our next day's work by a full hour. The curé preferred a shorter night in his own bed, and accordingly remained at Saas, promising to call us at two A.M.

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Instead of the two or three log tenements that usually form the cheese-making establishment of an Alp, we were surprised to find a cluster of châlets almost worthy the title of village, with a due proportion of the fair sex too, a great rarity in châlet life. Unprecedented luxury here awaited us! Unlimited "niedl" (cream), which Devonshire might have owned with pride, and which one of my companions so highly appreciated, that I am sorry to say he felt very squeamish in the early morning; a large hay-châlet for a bedroom, all to ourselves, clean, and without subterranean cows; and (Capuan effeminacy!) a mattress and bed-clothes for each. Think of that, ye ardent spirits, who face without flinching the horrors of a "Sand Alp," and don't get up the Tödi after all! Who ever heard of anything more luxurious than clean hay in a châlet! For my part I felt half-ashamed of myself. Bedsteads too were there, to complete the unwonted splendour of our dormitory, though, as they were not furnished with sacking or other means of suspending the mattresses, which had to be raised on a complicated system of logs and bundles of hay to bring them up to the proper level, the utility of these last articles of furniture was perhaps questionable.

We passed a merry evening: the make-shift seats and supper-table, the rough *patois* of the natives, and the misunderstandings it occasioned between us and the "Senner,"* all inclined us to mirth; the guides too contributed not a little to the general amusement by their quaint songs of native growth, after each of which they burst into a roar of laughter at their own performance; and not till they were quite hoarse did we retire to our sleeping apartment, where a candle, stuck into some extempore socket was now added to our list of superfluous luxuries.

My companions were half-undressed, and I was finishing a cigar outside, when I became aware of suppressed whisperings and titterings in the immediate neighbourhood, sounds which, on further investigation, proved to emanate from a juvenile group of the female population collected at the corner of the next hut, and apparently watching with great interest the mysterious process of going to bed, as practised by the English nation generally. After a little complimentary "chaff," and one or two songs from them very fairly sung, and containing invariably some reference to a "schätzli" (sweetheart), I joined the rest of the party, undressed, and, being the last, according to the good old rule, put out the

* The man in charge of the cows, and the "sennhütte," or châlet.

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light. No sooner had I stepped into bed than a crash ensued, and I suddenly found myself half-buried under a chaotic heap of disorganised bed-clothes, the bolster occupying the post of honour on the top of my head. The treacherous fabric had given way at the foot of the bed, owing, no doubt, to the substratum of logs having been arranged in some position of unstable equilibrium. A momentary silence of astonishment was followed by peals of laughter from my more fortunate companions, till two guides, attracted by the noise, made their appearance with a lanthorn, and commenced the work of restoration, which was soon completed in a more solid and trustworthy form, not, however, without sundry incursions of the fair sex, whose curiosity was proof against my extreme *déshabille*. The situation, as revealed by the sudden light of the lanthorn, was, no doubt, supremely ludicrous, but was not precisely the kind of spectacle for the contemplation of female friends, and they were repelled accordingly. It did not occur to me at the time, but I have my suspicions that those innocent damsels were privy to the catastrophe, and had of malice prepense unsettled the foundations of my couch. I may be wronging them; but, at least, this hypothesis furnishes some explanation for their otherwise inexplicable appearance on the occasion.

Notwithstanding the luxurious preparations for our repose, the incessant jangling of the cow-bells outside disturbed us considerably; indeed, one unreasonable cow, intent on the herbage in the immediate vicinity, accompanied her meal with a continuous thumping of her horns against the wall of the hut, in addition to a perpetually recurring fantasia on the bell. Our sleep being thus comparatively light, the cheery summons of the curé at two A.M. was quickly responded to, and by three o'clock we were off. The sky was quite clear, but the moon, being in its last quarter, gave but a feeble light, and we were obliged to have recourse to lanthorns. This did very well so long as our course lay up a series of grassy slopes, where it was all plain sailing, only varied by an occasional stumble against a hillock, but as we approached rough ground, where so uncertain a light is very embarrassing, the curé thought it advisable to call a halt, till the faint indications of dawn, just beginning to be perceptible, should ripen into daylight, and in about half an hour we made a fresh start.

The wide expanse of pasture gradually narrowed to a small valley full of the large blocks of stone which from time to time roll down

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from above, and this again dwindled to the limits of an insignificant gully, near the head of which we turned abruptly to the right, and, as the sun rose, we were toiling half way up a long steep slope covered with débris from the lateral moraine of the glacier, which flows down from the northern Fletschhorn. At this moment, the view of the Mischabel range was very striking, as the numerous peaks were successively tinged with the first rosy light of sunrise, while a chilly gloom still reigned at the foot of the enormous precipice which overhangs the Fée glacier. This magnificent amphitheatre of giant peaks, embracing the Alleleinhorn, Alphubel, the three Mischabelhörner (or Saasgrat), the Kleine Mischabel, and the Balferinhorn, cannot be seen to advantage from the valley, nor even from the village of Fée, where the view, though exceedingly grand, is too near for a comprehensive *coup d'œil.* It is not necessary to mount very far; but no one, unless he climb to a moderate height on the eastern side of the valley, can form any adequate idea of this imposing group. The Trifthorn, a point crowning a spur of the Weissmies, would, if accessible, be a very favourable position for the full enjoyment of this remarkable view.

We were now beginning to perceive the true relative heights of the Mischabelhörner, about which I had had a controversy with the curé the day before, as we were discussing an attempted ascent of the "Dom" made in the previous year, the success of which, though alleged by those engaged in it, was doubted at Saas, on account of thick mists, which must have rendered it difficult for them to ascertain the position which they attained. The curé had confidently pointed out the most northerly of the three peaks as the Dom, whilst I, relying on the maps, supported the claim of the middle point, but with great deference to his undoubted topographical knowledge of this district. The higher we rose, the higher rose the middle peak, till, long before we reached the top of the mountain, he acknowledged the question of pre-eminence to be definitively settled in favour of my claimant.

A tough scramble up the moraine itself, which was unusually high, brought us to a level basin of the glacier of no great width, crossing which without difficulty, we found ourselves at the base of the great peak, and at the beginning of that long ridge of rocks which was to be our course, almost without interruption, to the summit.

At our first meal, a small tin of butter, which I had insisted on taking with us, was attacked with avidity on all sides, and my

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amour-propre was gratified by hearing the curé, who had rather pooh-pooh-ed the notion, declare that, though it was the first time he had tasted "anken" (butter) on a mountain excursion, it certainly should not be the last. The idea had been suggested to me on the Furca, by a waitress of discerning mind and great administrative talent in the commissariat department, on the occasion of a recent ascent of the Galenstock, where it had proved so desirable a condiment that I determined thenceforth always to take a supply with me on similar expeditions. If tightly packed in a glass tumbler, or any other vessel, with a paper cover, it may be carried for hours in a knapsack without melting,* or if the surface should be a little affected by the heat, a handful of snow, or cold water (if any is to be had), will soon restore it to its former solidity. As a preventive of thirst, it is invaluable on the upper glaciers and high rocks, where no water can be found; and even where water is abundant its merits will be readily appreciated by any old traveller who knows that drinking frequently during a long ascent is a pernicious habit, more easily denounced than resisted.

I mention this, because butter is rarely thought of as an item in the provision list, and is decidedly preferable in every way to its usual substitute, cheese.

With the rocks our work began in earnest, and for nearly four hours we were engaged in one continuous scramble up this long ridge, which, though it looked so regular from below, proved rather to resemble a series of miniature fortresses, each of which had to be scaled in turn. Not that we encountered any serious difficulty: once, indeed, we were compelled to leave the rocks (where a little water, trickling over them the day before, had frozen in the night, and left a thin coating of smooth ice, too treacherous to confide in), and to cut steps up a slope of hard ice at the side, but that is much too common a feature in mountain excursions to be looked upon as a difficulty. Of course we came provided with a rope and an axe, paraphernalia prospectively necessary for an expedition in the higher Alpine regions, but only in this one instance did we use the axe, and the rope was, I believe, not once called into requisition. It was, in fact, laborious climbing, and nothing more.

* A simpler and equally effective expedient is to scoop a piece out of each lump of bread, partly filling the hollow with butter, and covering this with the outside of the piece cut out.—(EDITOR.)

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Some recreation in the midst of this hard work was afforded in one spot on the brink of an almost sheer descent, by dislodging huge fragments of rock, which bounded away in a series of tremendous leaps, and ran steeple-chases on the glacier below, the favourite occasionally going plump into a crevasse, and relinquishing the contest, amid shouts of derision from the spectators.

The active old curé seemed proof against fatigue, and devoted himself most energetically to the assistance of two of my companions who had not much experience in the high Alps, and made rather slow progress in consequence. Andenmatten and I outstripped them considerably towards the end of the ascent, and owing to his delicate forbearance in suggesting that I should go before him for the last few yards, I was the first to plant foot on the hitherto untrodden summit.

It was just ten o'clock, and the mists which so often follow a bright morning had already gathered along the top of the range between the Gemmi and the Lake of Geneva; but all this we had seen to great advantage an hour earlier. The Bernese Alps stood out in unclouded splendour, all the familiar peaks collected in one vast group; with the aid of my small telescope I even thought I could distinguish the hotel on the Æggischhorn, where I had suffered such monotonous imprisonment. Monte Rosa of course appeared in conspicuous majesty to the south, its several summits all visible, though very obliquely seen from this point of view; and over the depression between the Alphubel and the Alleleinhorn, I could plainly distinguish the top of the Breithorn, which I had ascended the year before. All to the right of this, as far as the craggy heights above St. Nicholas, lay hidden behind the great range of Mischabel. The Weissmies, our immediate neighbour, was a magnificent object, a huge snowy dome surmounting an immense area of glacier, seamed in every direction with crevasses of enormous size. But no part of the view could compare in interest with the Mischabel group. So stupendous a mass in comparatively close proximity concealed of course a great portion of the complete panorama, and allowed only partial glimpses of the great southern chain, extending to Mont Blanc; but the splendid picture presented by that immense snow-sprinkled precipice, supporting the rugged peaks of the Saasgrat and the smooth white crest of the Alphubel, merging below into the gentler incline of the Fée glacier, and

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relieved again by the verdure of the valley, richly compensated for the loss of all that it screened from view.*

Alas! for the Italian landscape we had promised ourselves. All, save a corner of the Lago Maggiore, and a smaller and more distant lake whose name we could not determine, was hidden by the envious mists which capped each peak, in obedience to some stern atmospheric law, apparently bent on baffling the inquisitive tourist. Rarely may one hope to see Italy from any summit of this district. The most cloudless sky on the Swiss side offers no guarantee for the clearness of the view on the other; and our case, it seems, was to be no exception to the general rule. Towards the Tyrol also extended a sea of cloud, out of which the higher peaks rose at intervals, the most conspicuous being probably those of the Bernina range, and the Ortler Spitz, though of course in so shrouded a view their relative positions and general features were not appreciable.

There was no doubt now about the inferior height of the northern Fletschhorn; there it lay unmistakeably beneath us, and we were proudly conscious of having made a judicious selection.

The summit on which we stood was inconveniently small for a party of nine. We were on the culminating point of a sharp ridge, much sharper than we could have imagined from below; immediately underneath on the eastern side was a sheer precipice of great depth, overlooking the Bodmer glacier; to the north a vast chasm, separating us from the Fletschhorn proper; to the south the ragged edge of the saddle, almost equally precipitous on either side; and to the west our sole retreat, the long and much reviled ridge by which we had come, and which now looked less steep and unfriendly in comparison with all around us. From the moment of our arrival we had been exposed to a fierce cutting wind, which, with the thermometer below the freezing point, interfered considerably with our enjoyment of the scenery, and in about three quarters of an hour reduced our mental faculties to the exclusive appreciation of creature comforts. We crouched into various nooks and crevices, each endeavouring to improvise shelter behind a rock not half as big as himself, while the curé, more wisely perhaps, retreated to a snug corner some yards below the summit; and cold meat and

* The little village of Fée, in the foreground, really some hundreds of feet above Saas, appeared to lie actually in the valley, the difference of level being scarcely perceptible from a high point so directly above it.

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red wine of the Valais were then discussed with the keen relish imparted by mountain air and a low temperature. We heard afterwards that the heat in the valley had been unusually great all day. Under more favourable circumstances we could have remained another hour with pleasure; but frozen toes sometimes prove a stronger argument than the sublimities of nature. At half-past eleven we could stand it no longer, and started for the valley.

The descent of that long rugged staircase of rock occupied little less time than the ascent, and seemed far more tedious, now that the stimulus of an unattained goal no longer urged us forward. The constant tension of the same muscles affected the knees most painfully, and doubled the apparent distance of the green slopes we longed for; a good "glissade" down a steep reach of snow would have been a most welcome relief.

I was better off, however, than my companions, who were a little affected by giddiness, and voted scrambling down precipitous crags more nervous work than climbing up, with the further difference that whereas, in the one case there always remains the option of turning back, in the other the alternative can scarcely be said to present itself. The curé, with three of the guides, adhered faithfully to his charge, assisting them with great care over any awkward places; but the progress was slow, much too slow to suit Andenmatten, who is one of the most active mountaineers I have met with, and perfectly at home on difficult rocks. Seeing that I was rather more *au fait* at this work than the others, he constituted himself my special guide, and we soon found ourselves far in front.

The rest of the party were often completely hidden from us by the broken nature of the ridge, and it was curious to watch them as they reappeared (unexpectedly diminutive), in a straggling line, now standing out in clear relief against the blue sky, now scarcely distinguishable against the dark rocks, the curé generally in front, conspicuous by his peculiar garb, picking out the best route with experienced eye. Nothing enables one so fully to appreciate the vast proportions of these mountain regions as the sudden appearance of human beings at a point apparently quite close, but in reality distant enough to reduce the figures to half the expected size. Without some such familiar objects in the scene, it is difficult, even with the aid of long experience, to judge distances with any degree of accuracy, where all around is on so enormous a scale,

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especially in the clear atmosphere which usually prevails in the High Alps during fine weather.

We waited at intervals for the others, but as the distance between us seemed nevertheless to increase rather than diminish, our patience gradually evaporated, and, on reaching the glacier, we pushed on at a rapid pace towards Saas. With three guides and the curé (a host in himself), and all the provisions into the bargain, my companions of course had no reason to complain of my desertion; and as I was staying at the new hotel, while they were quartered at the old "Monte Rosa," we should naturally have separated at the foot of the mountain.

My female friends of the Trift Alp had all vanished,—gone to the valley, I believe, for the rest of the week,—so that I had no opportunity of taking them to task for any share they might have had in the catastrophe of the preceding evening. I left Andenmatten packing up the mattresses, &c., and lamenting his pipe, which had been mislaid at one of our halting-places; and, in about half an hour more, at 4·15 P.M., I arrived at Saas, revelling in the prospective enjoyment of a cold foot-bath and a hot dinner.

In the evening I joined the rest of the party to discuss the events of the day and settle pecuniary matters. All items of expense, including the remuneration of the guides, were fixed by the curé, and proved extremely moderate.

The time occupied by the expedition was, no doubt, unnecessarily long. The ascent might very well be made in one day from Saas, and is really but little shortened by passing the night at the châlets of the Trift Alp; but I think the chance of an Italian view would be much increased by an early arrival on the summit, and, on this score, an hour more or less might be an important consideration. The northern Fletschhorn is rather more distant, and the time required for its ascent would depend much on the condition of the snow, and the extent of the glacier crevasses.

A more interesting expedition, perhaps, than either of these would be the ascent of the Weissmies, which probably commands much the same view as the Laquinhorn, but is several hundred feet higher, and covered, on the northern side at least, with splendid snow-fields. A Swiss tourist, indignant that all enterprise should be monopolised by the English, and determined to do something for the honour of his country, once succeeded in reaching the summit, but I could not hear of any other ascent having been made.

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The curé announced his intention of writing an account of our expedition for publication in a Zurich paper, with which he occasionally corresponds, and promised that a copy should be forwarded to each of us according to the addresses which we respectively left with him for the purpose. No copy ever reached me—whether through postal default, oblivion on the curé's part, or non-publication of the narrative, will remain a mystery, I suppose, till I again pay a visit to Saas.

On the 27th I started in the afternoon, with Andenmatten and one Imseng (possibly a relative of the curé) as guides, to cross the Allelein Pass into the valley of St. Nicholas, expecting to meet some friends at Zermatt.

Andenmatten had previously confided to me an earnest desire on his part to achieve the ascent of the Alleleinhorn, a point of the Mischabel range, conspicuous from the door of his own hotel, and one which, if the traditions of the valley could be relied on, had never been scaled by man. From a previous reconnaissance, he felt confident that the south side of the peak presented no insuperable difficulties, and I agreed to make the experiment, if time would admit of such a digression.

Our resting-place for the night was the new hotel near the head of the Mattmark See,* a convenient starting-point for several of the greater excursions, and a spot where the want of a habitable refuge had long been felt. The house was only just opened, and the walls streamed with moisture; but it was, nevertheless, a great improvement on the miserable châlet where travellers have occasionally passed the night before crossing this chain to the valley of St. Nicholas. The year before I had crossed the Adler Pass (or Col Imseng, as Mr. Wills† calls it), starting from Saas at two in the morning, in preference to encountering the discomforts of this shepherd's hut; but, before reaching Zermatt, I felt that the three hours' march up the valley was a very impolitic addition to the day's work.

* This lake has been formed by the advance of the Allelein glacier, which has pushed its way across the valley, and some distance up the eastern side, thus opposing a natural dam to the stream of the Visp. The drainage is effected by means of a passage which the stream has worked for itself underneath the ice. A similar lake probably existed at no remote period a little higher up the valley, just above the Schwarzberg glacier, which then stretched across to the eastern side, and there deposited the immense block of green slate which attracts the notice of every traveller.

† "Wanderings among the High Alps."

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A "Fremdenbuch" was already in existence, and contained about a dozen names. One traveller had expatiated indignantly on the inconvenience of the proposed title, "Hôtel du Mont Rose," and not without reason, Saas, Zermatt, and Macugnaga, having long ago rendered sufficient homage in that respect to the queen of the Alps. I suggested to Andenmatten the more distinctive title of "Gasthof zum Strahlhorn," or, if our attempt should prove successful, "Gasthof zum Alleleinhorn;" but whether any such amendment has been since adopted, I cannot say.

As there was not a soul in the house besides ourselves, I entertained no very sanguine hopes of a good supper, but was agreeably surprised by the extent and variety of the culinary resources displayed by Andenmatten. He and Imseng were both shareholders in the undertaking, and no doubt anxious to win a good reputation for the new establishment at its début in public life. Andenmatten officiated as *chef de cuisine*, and Imseng served the banquet with dignity, and a wonderful solemnity of countenance, as if deeply impressed with the gravity of the occasion. It was amusing to see how his face lighted up when I expressed astonishment at the abundance and good quality of the viands, while, at the same time, he would assume a deprecatory air, and remark, with affected humility, "Ach! Herr, Sie müssen Geduld haben" (Ah! sir, you must have patience—*scilicet*, with our humble efforts). The excellence of the supper was, I believe, partly due to the fact that a sheep had been killed some days before for another party of travellers, so that I enjoyed the rare luxury of tender mutton, and was spared the usual infliction of freshly-slaughtered stringy meat.

There had been a few scudding showers of rain as we passed up the valley, and at bed-time no little anxiety was felt about the probable weather on the morrow. Some treacherous-looking clouds were still floating about in the early morning, but the general appearance was tolerably favourable, and, hoping for the best, we started soon after four o'clock with the first grey light of dawn.

After crossing the valley, here of considerable width, and interchanging salutations with the shepherd who on our approach emerged from the châlet, half asleep and very dirty, we followed a narrow sheep-path, which at first led in a zigzag course up the steep pastures on the face of the hill, and then winding along the brink of a deep ravine with very precipitous sides, brought us in little more than two hours to the great basin of the Allelein glacier—a

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wide waste of snow encircled by the lofty peaks of the Strahlhorn, Rympfischhorn, and Alleleinhorn.

The clouds had been gradually dispersing, though a few still clung tenaciously to the pinnacles of the eastern range, and a fresh breeze from the north-west, which greeted us on our arrival at the edge of the glacier, was accepted as the guarantee of a fine day. Here we halted for a few minutes, and then striking directly across the glacier, followed its northern edge at the foot of the long precipitous wall which stretches eastward from the peak of the Alleleinhorn, forming one extremity of the semicircular Mischabel range. The crevassed state of the glacier, in its central portion, rendered it impossible to adopt a more direct course. We tied ourselves together, as in duty bound, but the precaution was almost superfluous, the snow being so hard at this early hour (half-past six) that the nails of our boots scarcely left an impression on the surface. It grew softer of course as the sun rose higher, but not to an inconvenient degree, and in fact was just deep enough to afford us a firm footing on the last steep slope, where we might otherwise have been obliged to cut steps. Under such favourable circumstances we made rapid progress, and reached the summit of the pass at half-past eight. When Mr. Wills crossed this pass with the curé, they were compelled, on account of deep fresh-fallen snow which concealed the crevasses, to skirt the glacier on the other side, at the base of the Strahlhorn—a course which involved much extra ascent and descent, and occupied nearly five hours, though the actual distance is scarcely greater than that of the route which we followed.

The view from the summit of the pass, though grand, was rather contracted towards the west, the Mischabel range on one side, and the rocky spur called the Rympfischwäng on the other, allowing only a small portion to be seen of that splendid series of peaks ranging from 12,000 to 15,000 feet in height, which pour their vast ice-streams into the head of the Nicolai Thal. The most striking summits were, however, included, viz. the gigantic pyramid of the Matterhorn, the most wonderful object in Switzerland, and the exquisitely sharp peak of the Weisshorn, 14,813 feet above the sea, according to Berchtold. Close to us on the south rose the craggy peak of the Rympfischhorn, which we scrutinised with critical eye, and finally pronounced inaccessible; to the left of it appeared the beautiful white slope of the Strahlhorn, and between

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them an old friend, the Col of the Adler, some 500 feet higher than our own position. East of this again were the still cloud-capped summits in the neighbourhood of the Monte Moro, and beneath us that great glacier basin over which our route had lain.

The provision knapsack now became an object of great interest. Andenmatten merely snatched a few mouthfuls, and leaving Imseng and myself to enjoy a more leisurely repast, started off alone to explore the way, and ascertain whether the ascent were practicable. In about twenty minutes we heard a shout from above, inarticulate to my ears, but partially intelligible to Imseng, who interpreted it as a favourable report; and having hastily repacked the provisions, we followed the track of our pioneer, leaving everything behind except one indispensable bottle of wine. Our course lay up a long steep incline of snow, wide at the bottom, but narrowing gradually to a ridge, which fell away abruptly on the right, and sloped less steeply on the left towards a hollow ice-ravine, full of very dangerous-looking crevasses. The snow was here rather hard, as it lay on the western face of the mountain, and had not yet felt the influence of the sun's rays; consequently the footsteps which Andenmatten had made, chiefly by kicking as far as possible through the crust, without using the axe, were scarcely secure; but by occasionally digging out a good step with the points of our alpenstocks, we managed to avoid any serious slip, and reaching the top of the snow ridge in about three quarters of an hour, found ourselves on a narrow saddle near the extremity of the southern spur of the Alleleinhorn. Here a faint shout reached our ears, and looking up we discovered Andenmatten standing on an apparently inaccessible pinnacle of rock, and gesticulating signals to proceed.

This seemed to be no easy task. The rocks rose abruptly before us in a fantastic pile of enormous blocks, the lowest of which—its smooth surface slanting over towards the above-mentioned ravine, while an almost sheer precipice precluded all chance of passing round it to the right—presented a formidable barrier to our progress. It was the only possible route, however, and we clambered carefully over it, availing ourselves of the slight inequalities in the rock, as footholds, and then crept for some distance along narrow ledges on the eastern face, towards the bend of the spur, where the upper rocks became gradually less precipitous. This was giddy work, though the footing was not really insecure; beneath us the slope grew rapidly steeper, and at the distance of a few yards curved completely over,

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conveying the startling impression that the loose rocks which our feet occasionally dislodged, and which slid out of sight in a moment, probably took but one leap on to the Allelein glacier, many hundreds of feet below. A morbid inclination too, which I could not resist, to gaze into the awful depth, and imagine the sensation of falling, set all my nerves in vibration, and impelled me sometimes to clutch convulsively at the rocks above for support. At one moment I sat down, fairly overcome with dizziness, and told Imseng to recall Andenmatten if possible. He went forward some distance, and a shouting communication took place between them; but luckily Andenmatten was not one of those guides who are only too glad to avail themselves of any pretext to turn back; he was evidently remonstrating at the notion of a retreat. Meanwhile my spasm of nervousness passed away, and having inserted the precious bottle of wine into one pocket of my shooting-jacket, and into the other a flask of some horrible spirituous compound belonging to the guides (both of which Imseng had left with me when he started in pursuit of Andenmatten), I scrambled on, though somewhat embarrassed by the left hand bottle, which bumped with suicidal pertinacity against the upper side of the precipice. The worst, however, was passed; the wall of rock gradually receded, and the ascent became more practicable. In half an hour more we joined Andenmatten, who was waiting for us on the top of the ridge, and from here there remained only a gentle slope of snow to the summit, which we reached soon after eleven o'clock.

Andenmatten's pet object was now attained. He cheered and "jodelled" enthusiastically, exclaiming at intervals, "Der Herr Pfarrer sucht uns gewiss mit dem Spiegel"* (I'm sure the curé is looking out for us with his telescope); and seeing a quantity of loose rocks lying on one side of the peak where there was no snow, he called on us to assist him in building a "steinmann" (cairn), as a memorial of the ascent, and a palpable refutation of any doubts that might be thrown by envious tongues on our achievement.

Having raised it to the height of about four feet, we wedged in a long upright stone for a finish, and were then glad to take shelter behind it, for the north-west wind, which had chased away the clouds for us in the early morning, had now become our bitterest enemy. It was piercingly cold, and despite the invigorating contents of the bottle, which had passed unscathed through all the perils of

* Spiegel, "mirror," a word often used in Switzerland for telescope.

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the ascent, we could scarcely remain half an hour for the enjoyment of the view, though one of the finest perhaps to be found in the Alps.

We were now far above the Rympfischwäng, and from Monte Rosa to the Weisshorn, except a very small portion still intercepted by the Rympfischhorn, the whole of that magnificent semicircle of peaks and glaciers lay glittering before us under a cloudless sky. First came the actual chain of Monte Rosa; the massive white Lys Kamm and Zwillinge, the precipitous face of the Breithorn, and the small black point of the Petit Mont Cervin, descending in regular order to the snowy plain of the Matterjoch or Col de St. Théodule. Over this, at the distance of fifty miles, rose the majestic mass of Mont Blanc; a little further to the south-east, the needle-like point of Mont Iséran, and the glistening snow-field of Ruitor, marked the line of the Graian Alps on the confines of Savoy, and behind these appeared a group of still more distant peaks, including perhaps even Mont Pelvoux in Dauphiné. Next in order was the Matterhorn, towering still 1,400 feet above us, and more imposing than ever; to the right of it the Zmutt glacier and the Col d'Erin, beyond which the eye wandered over a series of lofty summits in the Pennine Chain to the Grand Combin, a conspicuous feature in the background; and to the right of this again was a rugged wilderness of snow and rock, including the Rothhorn and Gabelhörner, and stretching northward to the culminating point of the Weisshorn. Here the distant view was intercepted by the great snow hump of the Alphubel, and the still loftier summits of the Mischabel, a continuous chain of precipices, sweeping round the head of the Fée glacier, which lay in a semicircular basin several thousand feet beneath us; and emerging at the extremity of this amphitheatre, the highest peaks of the Bernese Oberland formed the northern boundary of the panorama.

The village of Saas was of course plainly visible at our feet, and with my telescope I could trace our path up the long steep ridge of the Laquinhorn; but towards Italy and the Tyrol the view was entirely obscured by the masses of cloud which had settled obstinately on all the mountain tops in that direction.

As soon as the wine was finished, I wrote our names and the date of the expedition, as well as my stiffened fingers would allow, on a scrap of paper, which was stuffed into the empty bottle, and thus securely deposited for the benefit of posterity in a niche of our

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pyramid; and we then commenced the descent, which proved much less formidable than I anticipated. I have often noticed the same fact in similar situations; one is apt to suppose that what is difficult to ascend must be still more awkward to descend, but it seldom proves so; partly, perhaps, from the difficulties being known, and partly because no doubt can arise as to the necessity for surmounting them; but, on this occasion, I think some virtue must be ascribed to the red Valais wine, which had infused a little extra courage before starting. The worst bit of all was the large smooth rock which had been our first difficulty during the ascent; great care was requisite to avoid slipping, and being launched down a steep gully which terminated in a network of crevasses far below. The long incline of snow was now soft enough; we sank a foot deep at every step, and I much regretted the absence of a pair of gaiters which I had obtained with some difficulty at Saas, and had foolishly left on the col, thinking they would be useless in the ascent of the peak. It was one o'clock when we reached the spot where the knapsacks had been left; we had still a long way before us, and, after a hasty meal, started at a rapid pace towards the valley of St. Nicholas. My boots were already full of half-melted snow; nevertheless, I put on the gaiters, thus shutting the stable door after the horse was stolen, according to the old proverb, which the guides highly appreciated when translated to them, but I found them very serviceable on the long reaches of deep wet snow which we had to traverse before finally leaving the glacier. I noticed, as Mr. Wills did, that the Saas men much preferred the rocks to the crevassed glacier, a predilection in which I did not at all sympathise, though, being always in a minority, I felt obliged to submit. Neither rocks nor crevasses, however, delayed us much, and we reached the village of Täsch before five o'clock. Here we parted with Andenmatten, who was anxious to return as quickly as possible to Saas, and intended to proceed as far as St. Nicholas the same evening. He is undoubtedly one of the best guides to be found in Switzerland; a cheerful companion, and the most active mountaineer I ever saw, ready to carry any weight, and to embark *con amore* in any new and difficult enterprise. I have heard my opinion corroborated by a friend who has since crossed with him the eastern range from Saas to Zwischbergen.

I offered to dispense with Imseng's services also, but he insisted

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on carrying my knapsack to Zermatt, where we arrived about six o'clock, in time for a comfortable toilette before the general supper.

I think Mr. Wills must have unintentionally exaggerated the height of the Allelein Pass, which he estimates at more than 13,000 feet. I do not know what altitudes may have been taken of the Mischabel group, but assuming the height of the Dom to be 15,000 feet, one could hardly assign a greater elevation than 13,500 feet to the Alleleinhorn, and the pass must be at least 1,500 feet lower; it can scarcely be above 12,000 feet. The Strahlhorn is nearly of the same height as the Alleleinhorn, and much more accessible; when the snow is in a favourable condition, I believe it can be ascended in about an hour from the Adler Pass, and in some respects the view is probably finer. Monte Rosa and its great glaciers, the snowy regions of the Weissthor and Cima di Jazi, and the lesser glaciers towards the Monte Moro, would be seen to greater advantage, no doubt; but I think the Rympfischhorn, which is 200 or 300 feet higher, would obstruct much of the view in the direction of the Weisshorn, and the grand precipices of the Mischabel would be almost wholly excluded from the panorama. At all events, it behoves me not to depreciate my peculiar *protégé*, the Alleleinhorn, the successful ascent of which has afforded me many a pleasant reminiscence, and has caused the 28th of August, 1856, to be marked with a white stone in my calendar.

E. L. AMES.

NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

Owing to a confusion as to names, it is not easy to understand the heights given in Ziegler's Catalogue for the range east of Saas. He makes the Laquinhorn a synonym for the Weissmies, which is said to be but thirteen metres, or forty-three English feet, higher than the southern Fletschhorn, or true Laquinhorn, ascended by Mr. Ames. This, according to the same authority, is 108 metres, or 354 feet, higher than the northern peak. I had been previously disposed to come to the conclusion expressed by Mr. Ames, who has had so favourable an opportunity of forming a judgment, that the Weissmies is considerably higher than the Laquinhorn. It is high time to introduce this neglected giant of the Alps, who is entitled to take rank somewhere near the Jungfrau, to the notice of Alpine travellers. Observa-

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tions with a barometer and even with boiling water, if carefully executed, would help to determine the height of a mountain which deserves more attention than it has hitherto received.

The heights of the peaks and passes between the Mischabel Hörner and the Weiss Thor seem to have been somewhat overrated by recent travellers, but there is a little uncertainty about the measures executed by Berchtold, and this is not likely to be removed until the completion of the Swiss Federal Map. In Ziegler's Catalogue the height of the Alleleinhorn is given at 4,060 metres, or 13,320 English feet. If this be correct, the height of the Allelein Pass must be less than 12,000 feet. The same authority makes the Strahlhorn 354 feet higher than the Rympfischhorn, and 708 feet higher than the Alleleinhorn, but I am disposed to agree with Mr. Ames and several other recent explorers in giving the first place to the Rympfischhorn.

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