CHAPTER XIII.

THE WILDSTRUBEL AND OLDENHORN.

HUNDREDS of tourists every summer travel through the Simmenthal on their way from Thun to the Lake of Geneva, and hundreds more traverse the valley of the Rhone between the Lake of Geneva and Leukerbad or Visp; but between these two main roads there lies a chain of mountains comprising every variety of beauty, and intersected by passes of the greatest interest, which, for want of information on the subject, may be said, so far as travellers are concerned, to "waste their sweetness on the desert air."

Running nearly south from the road between Thun and Château d'Oex are two valleys, the Ober Simmenthal and the Saanenthal, branching off at Zweisimmen and Saanen respectively. A short distance above Lenk, or An der Lenk, as it is sometimes called, the first of these is divided into two by the green slopes of the Laubhorn; that to the east leading to the foot of the Rätzli glacier and the Wildstrubel, and that to the west—the Iffigenthal—forming the line of the Rawyl Pass to Sion. The Saanenthal also divides at Gstaad into two branches, the eastern one leading to Lauenen at the foot of the Wildhorn, and the other passing by the village of Gsteig to the Sanetsch Pass, which crosses the main chain into the Valais. The mountains at the head of these valleys will form the subject of the present chapter.

The simplicity of manners which still prevails in the Ober Simmenthal, and the exquisite variety of mountain, wood, and valley which characterises it, realise that charming ideal of Switzerland which poets have pictured, but which the sojourners at Thun and Interlaken have long imagined to be extinct. Clean and comfortable quarters are to be found at An der Lenk in the Gasthof Zum Sternen, kept by Christian Matthie, one of the most honest and straightforward of men.

Here I had spent a couple of days in 1855 after crossing the Rawyl Pass, which I have attempted to describe in a former work; and I returned to the same spot on the 5th of September, 1857, having appointed it as a rendezvous with that experienced moun-

taineer, Mr. Bradshaw Smith, and intending, amongst other excursions, to attempt the ascent of the Wildstrubel. I was accompanied by my old guide, the trustworthy Zacharie Cachat, of Chamonix; but the morning after our arrival proved so rainy that we could do no more than take a quiet walk to the Sieben Brunnen in the afternoon. These so-called seven springs have lost their title to that name, having been of late years divided into a larger number of streams. They are situated at the extreme end of the valley, close under the rocks which support, at a great height above them, the Räzli glacier, and are reached in a charming walk of about an hour and a half from Lenk. I had visited them before, but it was only on this latter occasion that I was able to appreciate their peculiar character, by climbing above the rocks where they are first seen tumbling over in a row of small cascades. It now appeared that they issue from the heart of the mountain itself, instead of traversing its surface; and as the water is evidently glacier water, it must have come through some subterraneous channel from the vast heights of the glacier above.

The next day, though the weather was still threatening, as my friend had not yet arrived, Cachat and I went off alone to explore a way to the Wildstrubel. We again ascended the valley, and between the village of Oberried and the Sieben Brunnen we turned to the left, skirting the base of the Amertenhorn, which was close on our right, but afforded no possibility of ascending its precipitous sides. After walking nearly due east for an hour, we thought we could find a way up to the right, over the shoulder of the Amertenhorn, which stands out like an advanced guard of the Wildstrubel, from which it is separated by part of the Amerten glacier.*

We could observe overhead a series of long precipices of rock, one above the other, like a giant staircase, and, as these are dangerous and impassable, it is important, while using them as a landmark, to leave them to the eastward in ascending. Crossing the stream, we at once began to mount, and after a steep and rough scramble of about an hour, chiefly over rocks sprinkled with loose shale and stones, we at last turned the shoulder of the Amertenhorn, which is covered with loose slabs, here and there mixed with sufficient earth to support a few straggling ranunculuses. Full in front was, as we expected, the glorious mass of the Wildstrubel, only separated from us by the Amerten glacier.

* Leuthold's map gives an entirely wrong position to the Amertenhorn.

Angry clouds were gathering round, which soon peppered us with a shower of large hailstones, so, before venturing upon the glacier, we took the precaution of piling up one or two heaps of stones to guide us on our return, as we were ignorant of the localities. The whole mass of the Wildstrubel runs nearly north-east and south-west, and is divided into two separate portions, of which that to the east is the largest. The side of it on which we were consists of excessively steep rock, streaked with snow, and wholly inaccessible; while the western portion, which terminates in a sharp point, consists of hard snow and ice, and is so steep that it could be ascended only by cutting steps for the whole distance. Between the two, however, there is a ravine of snow and ice, running upwards almost to the summit of the mountain, and by this we resolved to attempt the ascent, though we knew that, as we had started very late, there would not be time to complete it on that day. We crossed a nearly level part of the glacier, and in about half an hour had ascended a considerable distance up the snow slopes, not having met with any crevasses presenting much difficulty. Here we saw that the remainder of the ascent would be very steep, and partly over a slope of smooth ice, with a long crevasse at the foot of it. We had neither rope nor axe, so we made up our minds that we had done enough for a reconnaissance or pioneering expedition; we felt that a way was found by which, in less than two hours, we might reach the summit from the point where we stood, and with this satisfaction we returned to Lenk, halting for luncheon on the highest rocks.

Two days later, on the 8th of September, having been joined by our anxiously-expected comrade, we started from Lenk about six o'clock in the morning, with a perfectly clear sky and every prospect of success. We had a good rope of our own, and borrowed a rather short-handled, but very strong axe from old Matthie; armed with which, and with plenty of determination, we told him he might look for us in the course of the day on the top of the Wildstrubel. Following our former track, we again arrived in three hours at the edge of the Amerten glacier, and breakfasted by the side of a pool of clear water. We then crossed the glacier in our old footmarks, and in half an hour more reached the furthest point of our former expedition.

The remainder of the ascent was, as I have said, very steep, and though we knew from a distant observation that there were many

formidable crevasses in the way, we could not tell their position when at the bottom of the slope. There would have been much loss of time in finding our way among these, if I had not provided against the difficulty by a precaution which seems worthy of notice and recommendation.

The upper part of the Wildstrubel is about eight miles in a straight line from Lenk, and the details of its surface are of course very indistinct to the naked eye at that distance, but I spent half an hour on the previous morning in carefully making a plan of them as seen through an excellent telescope which I always had with me. Some of the large crevasses stretched nearly the whole way across our intended route, but I was enabled to lay down a pretty accurate chart of their position, marking the points at which they might be crossed, and then laying down the line to be followed amongst their intricacies. When soft snow has to be traversed, the time lost in searching for a passage is of no great consequence; but when, as I knew was the case in this instance, great part of the way lies over steep hard ice, where steps must be cut with great labour, the loss of time caused by détours is a serious matter.

Directed by my telescopic chart of our course we bore away to the right, so as to turn the flank, as it were, of a huge crevasse, above which we again moved to the left, Cachat in the front cutting very deep steps, and sending the ice flying about in showers. The slope here was so steep that, when the fore part of the foot rested in the holes cut by the axe, our knees touched the ice above; and, as the vast crevasse showed its blue yawning depths immediately beneath us, great caution was necessary. This slow progress on the ice is cold work, and we were not sorry when, after a long half hour of it, we found matters mending a little. The worst was passed, and the incline soon became less steep, and more covered with snow. We crossed one very long and deep crevasse by the bridge, which was correctly laid down on my chart; and, following the line there indicated, we safely reached the western summit of the mountain in one hour and forty-five minutes from the bottom of the slope, the latter half of the way having been upon good firm snow.

This peak terminates in a sharp point of snow, where we rested about a quarter of an hour, in the full enjoyment of an enchanting view. Seeing, however, that the eastern summit was rather higher, we soon retraced our steps down to the saddle which divides the

two portions of the mountain, and in less than twenty minutes reached the highest part of the eastern division, which consists of a long undulating crest of snow, perfectly easy to walk upon, about 10,716 English feet above the sea.

From the Wildstrubel, the view to the south includes every mountain from Mont Blanc in the west, which, even at this distance, appears truly magnificent, to Monte Rosa, the Mischabel, and the Fletschhorn in the east. We saw part of the valley of the Rhone beneath us, clad in a deep purple haze, and turned with peculiar interest to the Val d'Erin and the Val d'Anniviers, terminating respectively in the glaciers of Ferpêcle and Zinal, over the whole length of which we could trace our former routes by the Col d'Erin and the Trift Pass. Right away from our feet stretched vast slopes of spotless snow to the south and east, forming themselves lower down into the Lämmeren glacier, the foot of which reaches nearly to the Daubensee, by the side of the Gemmi Pass. The thought at once occurred to me that, if the Wildstrubel could be ascended from the side of the Gemmi, it would be a splendid expedition to cross over its summit from thence into the Simmenthal, and I made a mental note of it in my list of *agenda* for a future season.

Turning to the north-east we found that the peak of the Jungfrau was hidden by the beautiful intervening crest of the Altels, but the Eiger showed its sharp pinnacle a little to the north. A little more north, and what a change from this bristling array of giants! The green Engstligen Thal, guarded at its extremity by the pyramidal Niesen, led our delighted eyes to the distant lake of Thun; and the still more smiling Simmenthal showed us in its centre a collection of white specks which we knew to be the quiet village whence we had started in the morning, and in which old Matthie would soon be expecting our return.

After basking in the sunshine for nearly an hour, and drinking to the health of absent friends, we went back to the saddle or neck of snow between the two summits, and looked down the slope by which we had ascended. Seen from above it appeared so frightfully steep that, remembering the nature of the ice, and knowing how much more difficult it is to descend than to ascend over such ground, we all resolved, after a short consultation, to return, if possible, by some other way. Once more we remounted the western summit, and made up our minds to descend to the Räzli

glacier. A great part of this side of the mountain consists of long steep slopes covered with loose débris of a very rough description, varied however with beds of snow, down which we had some famous glissades. The Räzli glacier was soon reached, from which, before touching the part where it is very much crevassed, we turned sharp round to the right over a rocky shoulder, and found ourselves in the desert space between the Wildstrubel and the Amertenhorn. This was what we had hoped for; we were soon again on the Amerten glacier, and in exactly an hour and a half from the summit reached the spot where we had breakfasted in the morning, and where we now proceeded to devour the contents of Cachat's knapsack, which had been left among the rocks. Thence we returned to Lenk by the now familiar route, and soon after six o'clock were welcomed by the loud and hearty congratulations of our delighted host. Great excitement was caused at Lenk by our expedition, and on the following morning we had a regular levée of the inhabitants, all wanting to look through my telescope at the route which we had taken, and giving vent to very amusing expressions of surprise.

Before saying farewell to the Wildstrubel, I must mention, that in the season of 1858 I had the great pleasure of fulfilling the wish formed in the previous year, and of crossing from the Gemmi to the Simmenthal over the summit of the mountain. Accompanied by Mr. Stephen, I went to the Schwarenbach Inn, which is well known as the lonely half-way house between Kandersteg and the Baths of Leuk. The special object of our search was Anderegg Melchior, a guide unsurpassed in activity, courage, and good humour: none better can be found among the Alps. We were fortunate enough to find him at home, and he showed the most genuine pleasure at meeting again. There is to me a peculiar charm about this Schwarenbach: throughout the day, even if there is nothing else to do, the occasional groups of travellers afford some society and plenty of amusement, including, as they do, specimens from all the nations under heaven; but, as sunset arrives, all are gone laughing and chattering, on foot or on horseback, down away to Kandersteg or Leukerbad, and the inhabitant of the quiet little Schwarenbach is left in profound stillness to contemplate the sublimity of nature. While darkness is already beginning to gather round the house, the lofty Rinderhorn in front is glowing in the last red light of the sun, and the spotless side of the snowy Altels, touched by the Great Magician's wand, is suddenly robed in exquisite carmine—a gor-

geous pyramid whose point seems soaring into the highest heaven. "Then comes the check, the change, the fall;" the cold pale shroud of night closes round the lustrous form, and, one by one, the stars peep forth to gaze upon the dying beauty.

Such was the evening of our arrival: we had the house all to ourselves, and on returning to it, after watching the sunset, we found the host ready to make all comfortable for the night; over our coffee, Melchior was invited to a council of war, in which we sketched the plan of about a fortnight's mountaineering. The campaign was opened by an ascent of the Altels next morning, the 11th of September, for though I had formerly reached the same summit, it was in weather the very reverse of that which we now enjoyed. My only reason for mentioning it on this occasion is the following. I took the exact bearings of the summit of Monte Rosa as compared with the Mischabel and Weisshorn, the latter of which is generally supposed to conceal it from the Pass of the Gemmi. Our expedition to the Altels being very easily concluded about noon, we strolled away to the Gemmi for the purpose of spending an hour or two in contemplating the beautiful view. There was not even the smallest vestige of a cloud, and we were enabled to clear up a long-established doubt by distinctly seeing the Nord End and Höchste Spitze of Monte Rosa between the Weisshorn and Mischabel. There was no doubt about it; though looking low down, and much smaller than those two mountains, in consequence of greater distance, the outline agreed exactly with what I had seen a few hours ago from the summit of the Altels, and by the aid of a telescope we could distinctly make out the rocks of the Höchste Spitze, with which we both had reason to be intimately acquainted. Much interested by this discovery, I communicated it to a stupid guide, named Wandfluh, who chanced to be passing with some travellers. No doubt he had always been in the habit of telling people that Monte Rosa is hidden by the Weisshorn, so he now refused to be *désillusioné*, and actually maintained that a small rocky tooth in the Mischabel range was the Petit Mont Cervin! It was useless to reason with an obstinate man, so we allowed him to depart, unconvinced by taunts or telescopes.

We next turned our thoughts to the Wildstrubel. Melchior said that he knew the Lämmeren glacier thoroughly, and that we should have no difficulty in reaching the summit by that route. His idea, however, of getting to the Simmenthal was by traversing

the lower part of the Wildstrubel glacier, and the Glacier de la Plaine Morte as far as the Rawyl route, and the Iffigenthal. On my telling him that I had made the ascent directly from the Amerten glacier, he was highly pleased at the opportunity of learning a new route. We slept again at the Schwarenbach Inn, and at five in the morning, after a very comfortable breakfast, we started with our faithful Melchior and a poor domestic of the inn, whom we took as much out of charity to him as to ourselves, to carry our knapsacks as far as the top of the mountain.

Turning our faces southwards, for about five minutes we followed the mule-road to Leukerbad, whence we then diverged slightly to the right, slowly ascending and keeping near the line of the old Gemmi road, whose former course may in many places be traced by the regularity of the slabs of stone which formed it. We soon found ourselves on the western side of the gloomy Daubensee, but at a considerable height above it. Turning away gradually to the right, we came in sight of the Lämmeren glacier, by which we were to ascend. We kept on the high ground to the right or north side of the glacier, the foot of which was considerably below us, resolving to take to the ice at a much higher level. Accordingly, we followed a sheep-path along the sloping side of the mountain, till we found ourselves, in two hours after leaving the house, at a point where it was perfectly easy to get upon the glacier, some of its roughest parts being already fairly beneath and behind us.

We were a little below where some fine pinnacles of ice marked one of the much-crevassed portions caused by a sudden increase in the slope of the bed of the glacier. We might have ascended still further by the rocks, so as not to touch the ice till above this rough part, but Melchior preferred travelling on the glacier, and we entirely agreed with him. For a while we had very few crevasses in our way, but when we came to the rise, we should have had great difficulty in advancing had we not found a most convenient ridge, like a huge continuous backbone, which led us in the right direction, through a perfect maze of troubles, without much loss of time. Once only, near the end of this part, Melchior had an opportunity of showing his powers on the ice. We suddenly found ourselves cut off from the front by a large crevasse, the further side of which was much higher than the nearer; it was only bridged by a thin connecting wall of ice, the top of which was sharp as a knife; but, rather than turn back, the gallant

Melchior very coolly prepared to cross this remarkably awkward bridge. With his axe, which was rather like a pick with only one arm, he chipped off the top of the ice, so as to make it two or three inches wide, and he continued this process, as he advanced sideways, in crab-like fashion. I could hardly believe he meant to cross, but presently he held out his hand to me, saying, "Ich bin fest;" I grasped his hand, and followed; but as there was a blue hole of unknown depth on each side, and as the edge we stood on was only wide enough to support the middle of the foot, I could not help thinking of what would happen if either of us lost his balance. Melchior's confidence, however, seemed complete, and inspired me with a belief, afterwards confirmed, that he could do anything on the ice.

Meanwhile the others had outflanked the difficulty by more prudently making a short détour to the right; a few paces further re-united us on a fine open plateau, apparently free from any difficult crevasses. The head of the Wildstrubel rose in great beauty from the further side of this plateau, and we moved straight towards it over such hard and firm-crusted snow that our feet hardly ever sank more than an inch during the next hour. The ascent for a long distance was very gradual, and leaving on our right a magnificent rocky peak, which Melchior asserted to be the Lämmerenhorn,* we came to a halt on the snow at the foot of the final slope, not much more than an hour after first entering upon the glacier.

It was now about time for the mountain breakfast, and while we were discussing that delightful meal, the movements of a noble chamois interested us greatly. We saw him like a mere speck at first running along a high ridge of snow on the Lämmerenhorn, till he was stopped by the edge of the precipices, over which we could see with the telescope that he was carefully examining the whole glacier below, as if on the look-out for a comrade. After standing motionless for some minutes, he advanced to a point nearer us, and continued his observations. Our presence was apparently unsatisfactory to him, for presently he left the snow and disappeared among the rocks, Melchior remarking that he was evidently an old hand at reconnoitring.

In about twenty minutes we moved on again, turning rather to

* Melchior said the map was wrong in placing the Lämmerenhorn at the south side of the glacier.

the left, as the incline appeared less steep in that direction; the snow, however, was from this part very soft, intersected by a few large crevasses, so that we progressed much more slowly than before; still there was no difficulty to encounter, and, turning again to the right, after a singularly easy ascent, we reached the highest point of the Wildstrubel, in four hours and twenty minutes after leaving the Schwarenbach.

The greatest satisfaction of this expedition was the certainty which we had thus discovered of being able to pass directly from the Gemmi to the Simmenthal. As we took the last step up the snow, all that lovely valley, with its green and sheltering mountains, burst in an instant upon our view; the former expedition made me secure of every step down the mountain, and with the telescope I could make out the windows of the comfortable little inn at Lenk. We descended to the valley by the Räzli and Amerten glaciers, instead of the precipitous slope over which I had ascended with Cachat in the previous year, and, taking plenty of time to enjoy the exquisite scenery, we arrived in Lenk about half-past four in the afternoon. The only particular incident in the course of the descent was that, among the rough stony district between the Wildstrubel and Amertenhorn, we saw three chamois, at about two hundred yards' distance; the place is so utterly unfrequented, that they seemed much less shy than usual, and even came towards us for a nearer inspection of their visitors. Stephen and I remained nearly hidden by a rock, whilst Melchior, with all the caution of an accomplished hunter, keeping a rock between them and himself, stalked up to them so close that, suddenly lifting his head, he threw a handful of stones at them, when scarcely more than ten yards from him; a pistol-shot might have killed any one of them.

I have since heard from Mr. Forster that the shepherds have contrived a path among the precipices, immediately above the Sieben Brunnen, up to a small pasture near a little lake called the Fluh See, by the side of the Räzli glacier; so that, in all probability, the Wildstrubel might be approached in that direction also, though at first sight it would appear a work of great difficulty.

Apologising for so long a digression, I return to my companions of 1857, Mr. Bradshaw Smith and Cachat. On the morning after our ascent of the Wildstrubel in that year, the 9th of September, we departed by the pass over the Trüttlisberg for Lauenen, accom-

panied by its agreeable and intelligent pastor, who had come over to spend a day at Lenk, and was returning to his own village. This route is not particularly interesting in itself, but our object in going to Lauenen was to attempt the ascent of the Wildhorn, which lies between the Rawyl and Sanetsch Passes. In this I have reason to believe we were mistaken; the Wildhorn would probably be more easily approached by the Rawyl Pass and the glacier, which extends from the very summit of the mountain to the neighbourhood of the pass.

At Lauenen we found rough but not uncomfortable quarters in a rustic inn, and at five o'clock next morning were ready for a start. The weather was decidedly bad, and likely to be worse rather than better. I happened to be rather unwell, and finding the clouds settling down into a steady rain, I made up my mind to return about two hours after starting, and left Bradshaw Smith with Cachat to continue the expedition, which I knew must end in failure. About six in the evening they returned wet through, and reported great difficulties, which were much increased by bad weather and falling snow. They thought that they had been within less than an hour of the summit, but could get no further. The weather remaining very unsettled, next day we determined to abandon the Wildhorn for the present, and push on to Villard, in the Canton Vaud, where my friend's family were staying in a mountain *pension*.

A pleasant walk of rather more than two hours brought us to Gsteig, at the foot of the Sanetsch Pass, whence, in nearly three hours more, we reached the head of the valley of Ormont-dessus, at Les Iles, having crossed the verdant and delightful Col de Pillon. Iles is a scattered little village, on both banks of a lively stream abounding in trout, situated among rich pastures of an emerald-green, and surrounded with well wooded grassy hills. The beauty of the view towards the head of the valley cannot be surpassed. The northern side of the Diablerets and Oldenhorn group forms a grand crescent of precipitous rocks of immense height, streaked with lofty cascades, and surmounted by snowy peaks and small overhanging glaciers. Towards their base, the mountains on the right and left slope down to the valley, covered with dense masses of noble pines, and the châlets scattered about the rich pastures of the foreground combine to form the most perfect scene that an artist could dream of.

After waiting nearly an hour at a very small inn, and getting

some execrable wine with our luncheon, we walked across the meadows in a south-west direction towards the pass of La Croix, the highest part of which is only about 2,000 feet above the valley. The line of ascent is almost entirely through pine forests, till near the top, when a fine open kind of down is reached, only dotted here and there with trees; but after a quarter of an hour's descent we again found ourselves on a forest path, which continued almost all the way to Villard, where we arrived late in the evening.

Here I stayed with my kind friends for nearly a week, making various excursions in the neighbourhood; and, anxious though I am to take my reader to the Oldenhorn, I really must say a few words about the Châlet de Villard, in the hope of inducing some quiet-loving traveller to pay a visit to this charming resting-place. It is half-way between the villages of Grion and Chesière, and about four hours' walk up hill from Bex. Rich green meadows come up to the very walls of the house, beyond which shady pine-woods in every direction offer a delicious retreat after a course of hard work among the great mountains. Close behind, on the north, is the Pointe de Chamossaire, the summit of which can be reached by the most leisurely walker in less than two hours, without once leaving the soft turf. Passing through Grion to the south, one may soon reach the magnificent ravine leading to the grand Moveran, and somewhat further rises the scarcely less beautiful Dent de Morcles. Full in front, to the west, is the triple-crested Dent du Midi, and the space between this and the Dent de Morcles is filled up by the distant group of Mont Blanc and his attendant aiguilles, shining far above the deep blue haze of the Rhone valley; every peak, from the Aiguille du Tour to the Monarch himself, being distinctly recognisable at the distance of from twenty-five to thirty miles. The house itself is comfortable, though not pretty; but, placed as it is in what appears a noble park of undulating ground, there is little left to be desired. The whole cost of living, and living well too, is only four and a half francs a-day, and in the neighbouring village of Grion it is even less than this.

The Châlet de Villard is kept by M. Roud, an old colonel in the Swiss army, who has made a large fortune by his vineyards of Yvorne, in the valley below. In the winter he lives at Ollen, and for the summer season opens his *pension* at Villard. His daughter, who by the bye is an heiress, usually presides in the country

house, the colonel himself only appearing at intervals, when he sometimes brings a friend up with him. One day he was accompanied by his great crony, the master of the Croix Blanche, at Aigle, and in a conversation with him, we gained a great deal of information about the vineyards and the system of grape-treatment for invalids. Some of these unfortunates are condemned to eat six pounds of delicious grapes a day, for the purpose of purifying the blood. From the same authority I found out the method of obtaining the veritable Vin du Glacier. The casks of wine are taken up, before the winter, to safe hiding-places among the rocks in the neighbourhood of a glacier: here they are left till the following spring; and during the severe frosts all the inferior parts of the wine freeze to the sides of the casks, the purest part remaining unfrozen in the middle. With the help of an axe the ice is broken, and the choicest wine obtained; but it is hardly necessary to observe that the greater portion of the Vin du Glacier which is supplied at the hotels has not gone through this expensive and delicate treatment. By way of a treat, M. Roud opened some choice Yvorne of the 1834 vintage, and for the first time I found how delicious a beverage might be made on the banks of the lake of Geneva. Mine host of the Croix Blanche had seen the world; he had served in the Anglo-Swiss legion, and, after some months spent in the camp of Dover, had been pushed on as far as Smyrna, when the Crimean war ended somewhat prematurely for many who, like him, were ambitious of military fame.

One of the amusements at the châlet is target-shooting with rifles, at which M. Roud is a great proficient: he keeps a small store of weapons, and is always happy to try his skill with a stranger. I spent nearly a week in this alpine Capua, where all was so beautiful that luxurious laziness nearly overcame the desire of going further, and where one is tempted to sing with the voluptuous Lotus-eater—

"Oh! rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more."

Fortunately, however, the "cacoëthes scandendi" returned, and we were enabled to have one more mountain expedition before the end of the season. Cachat, after nearly two months of distinguished services, had been dismissed to Chamonix; but my friend and I resolved to return to Gsteig, and make the ascent of the Oldenhorn. The *pension* was broken up for the winter, and the rest of its

inhabitants were escorted down to the valley by M. Roud, while we shouldered our knapsacks and recrossed the mountain to the foot of the Sanetsch.

The inn at Gsteig is decidedly dirty, and its landlord has a rough and somewhat disreputable appearance. We had no choice, however, and were consoled by a very tolerable supper of trout and roast mutton. A young man was found who said he could show us the way up the mountain; and we went to bed with the seeming certainty of a fine day on the morrow. We started at six o'clock, on the 20th of September, while everything around was crisp with the morning frost. For about three quarters of an hour we followed the route of the previous day, and then crossed the river near the châlets of Reusch, from which point we bent our steps southwards. A very narrow rough path led us rapidly upwards through the pine forest on the west side of a noble ravine, down which tumbled a fine stream in many a fall and rapid. Sheep, goats, and cattle seemed to have taken an extraordinary fancy to us, and their numbers continually increased, so that we could scarcely avoid being pushed off the path by beasts that insisted on poking their noses into our pockets in search of salt or other eatables. Our guide was accompanied by a friend who had asked permission to join us, and our united efforts, with vigorous blows of alpenstocks, were scarcely sufficient to rid us of the importunities of a procession nearly as large as that which followed Noah into the ark. The question was finally decided by our arriving at so narrow a track round the shoulder of a precipice, that the larger animals could not pass; and the sheep and goats, apparently out of politeness, remained behind with them.

Soon after this, a sharp turn to the right brought us out upon the pastures of the Olden Alp, after an hour and a half from Gsteig. Leaving the huts of the shepherds on our left, we ascended a long and steep *arête*, or ridge covered with grass, from the top of which we saw the summit of the Oldenhorn exactly in front of us, apparently so near that we imagined it would be gained in less than two hours. From this point we kept a nearly horizontal course along the side of a slope, covered with the loose broken rocks which are precipitated from the cliffs on the right. Keeping the same direction, we then crossed a small glacier, on the west side of which we began the ascent of the rocks.

This proved difficult work: not only was the general inclination

excessively steep, but a great part of the rocks resembled giant staircases of broad steps covered thinly with loose rubbish, and so tilted up with the slope towards us, that we were often obliged to use hands and knees in climbing from one to the other. At one of these places my companion lost his alpenstock, which flew down many hundred feet before its course was arrested in a cleft. Had it been a common one, we might perhaps have abandoned it to its fate, but the trusty friend of five summers was not to be deserted in its hour of need. One of our lads was bribed to go down for it, and after a delay of half an hour it was restored to its delighted owner.

The same kind of work lasted for some time longer, when we came to an awkward-looking narrow gully on our left, surmounted by precipitous rocks. Across this we must pass, but a long stride was necessary, and the opposite side was extremely steep, and nearly covered with a coating of snow which had been converted into ice. Finding that our guides were not worth much, I crossed first, and contrived to get a tolerable footing by picking holes with the point of my alpenstock, after which I was able to lean down and give the others a helping hand. A few more paces, and we came to a more gentle slope, from which rose the last summit of the mountain. This peak is exceedingly steep, but so covered with a thick deposit of loose shale and stones that the progress, though slow, was certain, and at half-past eleven, or in five hours and a half from Gsteig, we reached the highest point of the Oldenhorn, about 10,285 feet above the sea.

There was not a cloud in the whole sky, and not a puff of wind strong enough to blow out a lucifer-match; so we prepared for a long enjoyment of our elevated position. Basking in the sun, we examined by degrees the whole horizon with the telescope, and found no small pleasure in reviewing the scenes of so many adventures. A better point could not possibly be found for the purpose. The Oldenhorn is nearly equidistant from Monte Rosa and Mont Blanc, and commands a splendid view of both of them, together with all the intervening Pennine Alps. As usual, however, at great distances, Mont Blanc appeared a far grander object than his rival: the latter is so surrounded with gigantic mountains that Mont Blanc derives a great advantage from his solitary magnificence. With a good glass, the whole chain may be accurately studied from the point where we now reposed. All the southern valleys, with

their terminal glaciers, mountains, and passes, were laid out before us, as in a map: the Combin was particularly grand, and the Ferpêcle glacier, with the Col d'Erin most distinctly traceable through all its length. Looking in the opposite direction, we could see all the lovely scenery in which we had spent the past week spreading in verdure and freshness round the broad sheet of the lake of Geneva, and, sixty or seventy miles away, the lake of Neufchâtel, and the long undulating ranges of the Jura terminated the view.

Time flew rapidly while we were engaged in storing up in our minds the new geographical knowledge which one such day as this adds to the previous stock, and we made no attempt to leave the summit till we had spent two hours and a half upon it. And now came an important question. We had by no means enjoyed some of the scrambling work up the rocks, and resolved if possible to return by another route. While engaged upon so many distant objects, we had not forgotten to examine the Sansfleuron glacier at our feet, which extends in an easterly direction from the tops of the many-crested Diablerets to the neighbourhood of the Sanetsch Pass; and we thought that it would be very desirable to descend to this glacier and traverse it to its base, whence we might contrive to join the Sanetsch route to Gsteig.

The nearest part of the ice was, I imagine, about 700 or 800 feet below us, but we knew there would be no difficulty in descending to it down the shaly side of the summit; and on examining the nature of the crevasses through the telescope, they did not appear very formidable. Accordingly, we told our guides that we should go that way. They seemed utterly astonished, declaring it was impossible, and that the only man who had attempted it was lost in a crevasse. We were quite accustomed to this sort of nonsense, and I told them we had made up our minds, and should go by ourselves if they did not choose to accompany us. "Sie gehen allein?" was their exclamation, followed by the laughing, but decided answer, "Ja wohl, wir gehen allein!" While they indulged in a little useless blustering, we settled the matter by getting on our legs and preparing to start. They hesitated a few moments longer, and then followed us in a very sulky manner.

We soon descended over the loose stones, and came to a steep slope of hard snow which led down to a smooth part of the glacier. Selecting a place where we could see that there was no *bergschrund* at the bottom, we ventured on a glissade, which in an instant

landed us on the upper region of the Sansfleuron. The valiant men of Gsteig followed us in fear and trembling, and we derived no small amusement from the unusual task of showing the natives how to travel on a glacier. As the crevasses became larger than at first, they evidently disliked the work, but by a little proper management we got on famously. Presently, as we looked across the plateau of spotless snow on our right, we fancied that we saw a large party of men in the middle of it; nothing, however, could be much more improbable, and we soon discovered that the figures were those of a herd of chamois camping out on the snow, at about four or five hundred yards' distance. With the aid of the glass we could see all their movements. I counted thirteen, some standing and some lying down; they were evidently watching us, and twitching their heads and ears exactly like a group of deer. We were, I suppose, too far off to excite any violent apprehension, for they did not attempt to leave their places as we passed on our way.

I have no doubt that, by following the snow-field towards the west, it would be perfectly easy to reach the summits of the Diablerets; and, if time had allowed, we should have made the attempt; but in the latter half of September the days are short, and we were obliged to continue our course down the glacier, keeping rather to its northern side, and thinking what a fine day's sport the chamois would have afforded to a hunter.

As we advanced, the crevasses became larger and larger, but were of such a nature that there was seldom any great difficulty in finding practicable ice-bridges, when they were too wide for a bold jump. We found great amusement in showing our guide and his friend how to test the security of these places, and the obstinacy produced by their ignorance gradually gave way to genial good humour, as they found themselves becoming familiarised with a new system of progression. About half an hour after seeing the large herd of chamois, I saw a dark brown spot with a white streak in the middle, which I instantly knew to be the head of another chamois, looking straight at us from the further side of the crevasse, which, being a few feet lower than where we stood, concealed the rest of his body. Without making the least sound, I drew the attention of my companions to it, and we advanced very cautiously. Presently the head rose, and away bounded a splendid beast, not more than forty yards from us; and he was followed almost immediately by his wife and child, and the whole family seemed so taken

by surprise that they knew not what to do. They circled round us in a gentle canter, and would have been almost certain victims even to a charge of swan-shot; but at last they made up their minds, and went off bounding away at full speed to the mountains on our left, which separated us from the Olden Alp. This was one more of many instances I have met with to prove what a quantity of sport may still be met with by those who will take the trouble of searching the most unfrequented glaciers of the High Alps; and I would confidently advise any one ambitious of such a pursuit to take a rifle, obtain the government licence, and hunt the mountains from the Wildstrubel to the Diablerets. At present, the only pass which is at all frequented in this neighbourhood is the Pas de Cheville, between Sion and Bex, but this does not anywhere touch the glaciers. Those who cross the Rawyl and Sanetsch Passes, and explore the mountains and glaciers right and left of them, will find new ground and new fields of excitement.

We selected our route so as to leave the most crevassed portion of the glacier on our right, and proceeded with tolerable ease down to the very foot of the ice, but here, as not unfrequently happens, we found the greatest difficulty in getting off the glacier. Everywhere the ice terminated abruptly in a steep curve, in many places cut up by deep blue crevasses, generally in the direction of the glacier. We had no axe, and were therefore prevented from cutting steps for the feet. At last I found a place where, by letting myself down into a crevasse, and clinging with my elbows to the ice on each side, while I made small resting-places for my feet with the point of my alpenstock, I succeeded in reaching *terra firma*, close to the side of a small lake formed by the melting of the glacier. The others followed by a slightly different course, and we soon stood together on a slope of turf just over the head of the Sanetsch Pass.

Our work was over, but not so our pleasure, and we paused once more to admire the wild sublimity of the scene around us. Turning from the beautiful Sansfleuron glacier which we had just left, our eyes were arrested by the prodigious precipices of the Sanetsch-horn, from which monstrous blocks had been precipitated in former catastrophes, and which threatened at the slightest shock to hurl down a supply sufficient to blockade the pass. On our right rose up singularly wild and fantastic precipices, leading to the Gelten glacier and the summit of the Wildhorn, and all around our feet was the

broad expanse of uneven turf, over which is the path from Gsteig to Sion.

With our faces towards the former place we followed a somewhat dubious track for about half an hour, for, where the ground affords a choice of route, the passers-by are pretty sure to give their successors a great variety of alternatives; but we soon came to where the path had been conducted down steep and regular zigzags by the side of the mountain-torrent. The ravine leading towards the Saanenthal is truly worthy of the pencil of Salvator Rosa: rocks hurled by the various forces of the elements obstruct the way in many places, and here and there we found the torrent nearly choked with the stems of giant pine-trees washed down by floods, over which, however, it went leaping and bounding with frantic energy towards the valley below. As we advanced, the sun set in perfect beauty; the orb itself had long been hidden by the intervening heights, but the Spitzhorn on our right, and the Sanetsch-horn a little behind us on the left, glowed with imperial purple. The shades of evening were dark in the valley, and the dew had already settled in large pearls on every blade of grass as we reached the inn at Gsteig, exactly twelve hours after leaving it in the morning, four of which had been occupied in the descent.

We spent another night at Gsteig, and on the following morning returned to Lenk, where we found our old friend Matthie very busily engaged in bringing down his goodly stock of fresh cheeses from the huts on the high pastures. The perfect cleanliness of his house was a pleasant contrast to the dirt of Gsteig, and we passed a very merry evening with the whole family. Unfortunately it was to be the last that we could spend together for some time to come. Early next morning Matthie drove me down in his car to Zweisimmen to meet the diligence for Thun, while my companion, hoping still for a continuance of the fine weather, took up his knapsack to walk southwards over the Rawyl.

THOMAS W. HINCHLIFF.