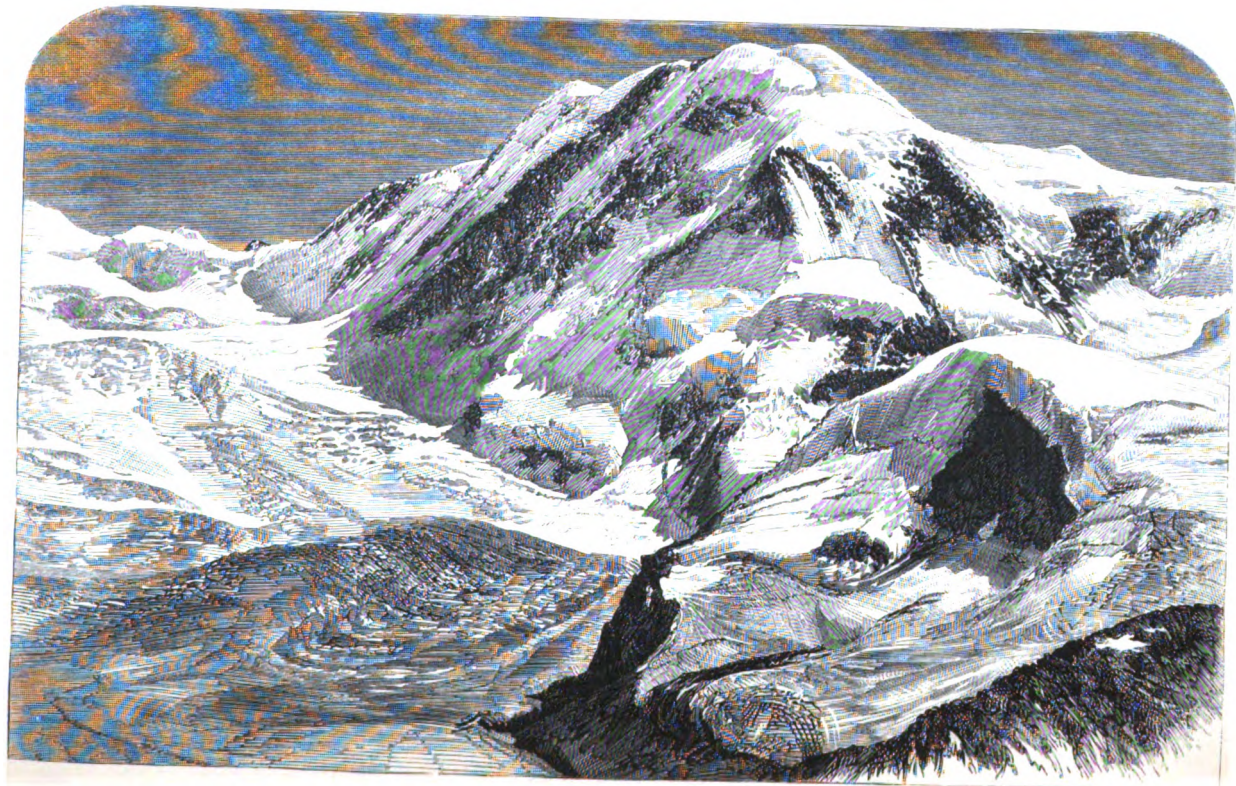




THE LYSKAMM, FROM THE GORNERGRAT.

3. THE ASCENT OF THE LYSKAMM.

BY JOHN FREDERICK HARDY, B.D.

"I SAY, old fellow, we're all going up Monte Rosa to-morrow: won't you join us? We shall have capital fun."

"What! is that Hardy? Oh, yes, do come, there's a good fellow."

With these and similar kind invitations was I greeted as I emerged from Seiler's hotel at Zermatt on a pleasant morning in August, 1861, to join the crowd of loungers who were enjoying the warm sun, and snuffing up the pure mountain air that, defiant of dirty châteaux and still dirtier inhabitants, rolled down into the little village. Before I had time to answer, a voice, afterwards discovered to be J. A. Hudson's, was heard to mention the Lyskamm, upon which hint I spake.

"Ah, the Lyskamm! that's the thing: leave Monte Rosa, and go in for the Lyskamm; anybody can do Monte Rosa, now the route's so well known; but the Lyskamm's quite another affair."

"Yes, indeed, I expect it is. Why, Stephen couldn't do it."

"He was only stopped by the bad state of the snow."

"Well, Tuckett failed too."

"He was turned back by a fog."

"So may we be."

"Certainly we may, also we mayn't; and in the present state of the weather the latter's the more likely of the two."

The end of the discussion was that Professor Ramsay, Dr. Sibson, T. Rennison, J. A. Hudson, and W. E. Hall, agreed to join with me in seeking a highway up the Lyskamm, while Galton and Gray remained faithful to their original intention of climbing the Rosy mountain. My five friends pressed upon me the leadership and management of the expedition; and my first act of sovereignty was the very agreeable one of receiving the homage of two new subjects. C. H. Pilkington and R. Stephenson, with whom I had crossed the Alphubel, and spent several pleasant days in the neighbourhood of Zermatt, but who had threatened to leave for England that very afternoon, came to ask me if I would take two more. "Yes, to be sure," I replied, "if you're the two." And having thus raised the party to eight, I set to work at once to seek the best guides.

Jean Pierre Cachat, of Chamounix, and Franz Lochmatter, of Macugnaga, were soon engaged. The latter introduced a companion, Karl Herr, of whom he gave so good an account* that I gladly put him on my list; still I was without any local guide save Stephen Taugwald, who was engaged to Dr. Sibson; and though Stephen is a very decent fellow, he's not made of the sort of stuff for a leader.

"But why has not Monsieur engaged Pierre Perren?" inquired Cachat.

* Lochmatter and Herr had been engaged about a week before I met them to bring an Italian gentleman over the Weiss Thor. When they were in the very worst part of the passage they were overtaken by a violent thunder-storm. The Italian lost all heart, threw himself on the ground, declared he could go no further; but begged his guides to leave him and save themselves. They tried reasoning with him in vain; and finding it utterly impossible to induce him to move, agreed to carry him by turns on their backs. This feat they successfully accomplished, and brought him safely down into the valley. Hearing this account from Lochmatter, I felt quite certain that Herr was a man to suit us. He fully came up to my expectations.

"*Il n'est pas ici.*"

"*Mais, oui, Monsieur, il est ici,*" replied a voice which there was no contradicting, for it was Perren's own; and amid a shout of laughter he pushed his way through the little crowd, and brought his jolly, ugly, honest, intelligent face in front of mine. He had returned unexpectedly to Zermatt in consequence of the illness of the gentleman with whom he had been travelling, and was thus enabled to place his services at our disposal.

We had now, in my opinion, force enough; and as the guides insisted on my naming the terms of our engagement, I offered to give them forty francs apiece in any case, but fifty if we reached the summit, which arrangement, perhaps somewhat too liberal for any but first-class men, they gladly accepted. Joseph Marie Perren, a brother of my friend, was then engaged to act as porter for twenty francs; forty eggs were ordered to be boiled hard, and a few loaves to be set aside; for meat, cheese, and wine, we knew we could depend on the inn at the Riffelberg.

In the cool of the evening we strolled slowly up the slopes on which this tiny auberge stands; and having ordered dinner and beds, of which latter article we actually obtained seven, while the eighth man had a mattress on the floor, we sent for the guides to discuss the hour of starting. We English were all for midnight; but the natives insisted that the moon would not give us sufficient light to traverse the glacier, and that there was no advantage in starting till two hours later. A lengthy debate ended in a compromise: 30 minutes A.M. was to be the time. A light repast, followed by a cigar and a *petit verre*, insured us three hours of sound sleep.

A few minutes after twelve I awoke, looked at my watch by the moonlight; and after that short struggle between inclination and duty, which the best regulated mind

endures when its proprietor is snugly ensconced between the blankets, I jumped out of bed, and proceeded to rouse the rest. One or two I found already stirring; but the majority, guides and *cuisinière* included, still slept the sleep of the just, which, according to Alphonse Karr, is but that of the man "*qui a bien dîné.*" About 12.40 we got our breakfast, at which Galton and Gray assisted. They had slept in *bags* on the hill-side, by way of preparing for the ascent of Monte Rosa. Galton is an old campaigner; but from the chilling effect produced on Gray, I should say it was about the worst preparative he could have selected.

Another Monte Rosa party made their appearance towards the end of our meal, one of whom amused us mightily by complaining bitterly of the noise made by our arrival on the preceding evening. In order to secure his full measure of sleep he had gone to bed at 5 P.M., under the singular delusion that when that fact was known, all the business of the house would be conducted in a whisper. Poor little fellow! he had been soon undeceived.

What with one delay and another it was 1.40 A.M. before we actually started; so that, after all, the guides gained their point within twenty minutes. The moon was brilliant and all but full; but, being somewhat low in the sky, she invested us with tremendously long shadows; and as including our Monte Rosa friends, we were nineteen in all, and were for the most part walking in single file, the effect was decidedly spectral.

There was nothing novel in the early part of our route. We reached the Gorner glacier at 2.40 A.M., and ran rapidly over its surface till the moon sank behind the Breithorn, when we found the deep shade rather troublesome. However, we arrived at the Auf der Platte at 4.15

without any mishap, except the temporary disappearance of a porter, who had wandered from the main body. Here we made a *cache* of some of our provisions, bade *bon voyage* to Gray and Galton, and started on what was to us an unknown land, or rather sea,—the great Monte Rosa glacier,—which, pouring down its frozen billows from the Lys Col, separates the snow-covered cliffs of the Lyskamm from the naked precipices of the mountain whence it derives its name.

By this time day was rapidly approaching, and Ramsay called our attention to the colour-effects behind us, which were among the most beautiful I have ever seen. The whole of the western sky was, in its lowest band, deep purple, which passed gradually into the richest crimson, and that again through orange into pale yellow, which mysteriously blended with the pure blue overhead. In the midst of this glare of colour stood up the Matterhorn, grim, ghastly, inexorable. The rocks of the Breithorn, on the contrary, and the snowy peaks of the Zwillinge, assumed a bright green, complementary to the prevailing crimson tone, the green of the rocks being much darker than that of the snow, and in some places changing very strangely into what may be termed a re-complementary red. This transient vision immediately preceded the rising of the sun, and disappeared as his earliest rays smote the mountain-tops.

At 5 A.M. we divided ourselves into the two parties, which had been previously arranged by lot, as we were far too numerous for one rope. The first subdivision fell in in the following order,—Perren, Hardy, Lochmatter, Ramsay, Stephenson, Hudson, Herr. The second consisted of Cachat, Rennison, Sibson, Taugwald, Hall, Pilkington, and young Perren. Then it was discovered that there was a supernumerary porter, name and ability alike unknown,

who had been pressed into our service in the morning, and for whom no arrangement had been made. Neither party were very anxious for his company; but at last he was tied to the tail of No. 1.

And now the work began in real earnest. The snow was in delightful condition; but the glacier was cut up by innumerable crevasses into the most superb seracs, and we had to thread our way as through a labyrinth. Backwards and forwards, now right, now left, we doubled like a Cambridgeshire hare; or rather as we wriggled in and out, with the head of our long party going perhaps south, and the tail north or east or west, we must have looked at a distance like a gigantic snake winding along among the everlasting snows. In general No. 2 followed quietly in the footsteps of No. 1, but once they had the audacity to select their own route,—a breach of discipline which could not be overlooked, especially as they had obviously taken the best line of country, and were actually in advance of us. With a few severe words, received, I fear, with derisive cheers, we passed again to the front, and gave them no second opportunity of repassing us.

The inclination of the glacier varied through almost every conceivable angle, from 1° to 360° ; but the snow was so crisp and pleasant that we had scarcely a step to cut. We had originally intended to follow the usual route to the Lys Col, and then bear away to the right till we reached the lower end of the Lyskamm arête; but about 7.30 Perren pointed out to me a rather stiffish snow-slope, lying to our immediate right, by which we might *possibly* reach the desired point at once, and thus save, at the very least, an hour's fatigue. Still the slope was steep, and we knew nothing of what crevasses or bergschrunds we might find higher up. Was it wise to leave the certain slow for the uncertain quick? While Perren and I were discussing

this weighty question, Cachat came up and suggested the very same route. This was enough for me; I acknowledged the omen, and decided for the short cut. Some of the party looked a little astonished when told where we were going, but they set gallantly to the work without a moment's hesitation. Away we all floundered through the snow, which was not quite as hard as we could have wished; but by judicious zigzagging, and by adopting that "*haustum longum, haustum fortem, et haustum omnes simul*," which Lord Dufferin so forcibly recommends, we gained the top of our slope and the base of the arête in less than an hour.

We had taken a slight breakfast while among the seracs, but we now settled down to the substantial meal of the day. The knapsacks were unpacked, eggs, meat, bread, and cheese devoured with avidity, and washed down by a delicious beverage invented by one of our party, and henceforth to be known as the *Sibson mixture*,—red country wine and Swiss champagne combined in equal proportions.

Breakfast finished, I addressed my followers, and very nearly excited a mutiny by suggesting that, if any one doubted his power of *last*, he had better remain on this plateau, as there could be no turning back on the arête. I am proud to say that my suggestion was received with the contempt it deserved. In fact, such strong language was used with regard to all laggards, that I am inclined to think that even the supernumerary porter, had he understood English, would have felt it his duty to proceed further. As it was, we left him alone in his glory, smoking the pipe of idleness. Unless his meditations were of a more exciting character than I suppose, he must have been rather cold before we returned to him.

At nine o'clock, after a short *reconnaissance*, Perren started ahead and went up the arête in magnificent style,

kicking and cutting steps with a skill and rapidity which I have seldom seen equalled, stopping only now and then to shout down to us a hoarse query as to the state of the snow above him, lest he should unwarily tread upon an overhanging cornice; and on receiving a satisfactory answer, turning to his work again with a wild halloo. The first subdivision followed close behind, Lochmatter, who had taken Perren's place in the rope, improving the steps as we advanced. No. 2 had split into sections in order to obtain greater freedom of action, but we all kept pretty closely together, each man looking to his predecessor's heels, and rising steadily step by step.

The arête proved very irregular in its construction. Generally the two side slopes swept upwards at high angles, and terminated in a very sharp and narrow ridge. When this was the case, we walked just below the edge on the right hand, resting our alpenstocks on the ridge, and commanding a full view of both slopes, down which the dislodged snow fell rapidly. Sometimes this edge widened out, and we walked along it, as on the top of a wall. At one such place we took the angles with a clinometer, and found the angle of ascent to be 36° , while on each side the snow trended away at 52° . Sometimes we came to a great gap, and had to descend some twenty or thirty feet to rise again; for we dared not take a line sufficiently low to avoid these breaks. Occasionally, but very rarely, the rock was laid bare; in general it was well covered with snow. This in parts was very dry and slithery*, and

* I have been in the habit of using the word *slithery* for many a long year, but I am not sure that it is to be found in any dictionary, or will be generally intelligible. In very dry weather, with the wind in the north or east, it frequently happens that, as the day warms, the snow does not so much melt as to form itself into a dry powder, losing almost entirely its power of cohesion. In this state it is said to be slithery. Mr. Editor tells me that slithery is only a corruption of sliddery, which, according to him, is a good English word.

once or twice during the ascent I felt a little nervous about our return, when the sun should have gained more power. I was afraid lest the cohesive power of the surface snow should be almost entirely destroyed, and that we should be compelled to cut deep into the frozen portion beneath during our descent. This I knew to be necessarily a long and tedious process, and likely to be somewhat trying to the nerves of the less experienced members of the party. I had not, however, reckoned as much as I might have done on the service to be rendered us by our invaluable ally *Regelation*. From the size of our party each step got so thoroughly well kicked and trodden down, that they became perfectly hard and durable, and with but few exceptions were as serviceable in the descent as in the ascent.

After about an hour and a half's hard climbing we reached a small plateau, from which the summit itself was visible; and though we saw that there was still serious work before us, we felt certain of victory, and indulged in a preliminary dance of triumph.

And now onward for the final assault. The slope becomes steeper and narrower; happily there is little wind, but the air is perceptibly keener; the snow is harder and harder; kicking will do but little now; the axe is in constant requisition. Hark! what is that Perren says about the *Gipfel*?

"*Herr Hardy, wollen Sie der Erste seyn, der seinen Fuss auf den Gipfel setzt?*" — "He wants to know if you'd like to be the first to set foot on the top."

"Oh, by all means,—*Ja gewiss, Peter.*"

And so in another minute (at 11.40 A.M.), Peter stands aside, and I find myself at the top of all, 14,889 feet above the level of the sea. On come the rest of the conspirators, crowding eagerly on to the tiny plateau, which

will barely hold us all at the same time. There is universal shaking of hands, and patting of backs, and noisy congratulation. As for Perren he is wild with joy, and shrieks and chuckles, and seizing both my hands dances round me; then he puts his arm round my shoulder, and pats and fondles me, as though he were caressing a young horse, that he had tried and not found wanting.

At last something like order is restored, and Herr strikes up a German hymn, which rings out clear and pleasantly in the calm air, till, at a hint from Perren, he changes into "God save the Queen," and out burst fourteen voices, if not in perfect harmony, at least in perfect goodwill; and as we sing with uncovered heads, the noble old anthem fills our English hearts with happy thoughts of home and fatherland, and of the bright eyes that will sparkle, and the warm hearts that will rejoice, at our success.

It was my good fortune last summer to obtain an almost uninterrupted view from every col and summit that I reached; and the Lyskamm was no exception to this general rule. Close opposite to us sprang up the Höchste Spitze of Monte Rosa, only topping us by some 350 feet, and surrounded by its lesser pinnacles, many of which lay far beneath us. Farther away, the gracefully curving Mischabel Hörner, the Dom, and Täschhorn, caught the delighted eye, and led it onward, till it rested on the massive mountains of the great Oberland range, which filled up all the northern horizon. In the west rose the Matterhorn, but no longer in majestic isolation. The Breithorn, the Dent d'Erron, the Dent Blanche, and the Weisshorn, stood up to dispute his empire, and to form as noble a group of peaks as ever gladdened the heart of a mountaineer. Far away in the south-west, their

great distance clearly marked by the peculiar golden colour of their snows, gleamed the domes and the aiguilles of Mont Blanc; while in the south, the dark purple hills of Italy, here and there flecked by snow, and sometimes rising to the rank of mountains, as in the case of the Grivola, the Grand Paradis, and the Viso, seemed to repeat themselves, ridge behind ridge, in infinite succession. Towards the Grisons and the Tyrol hung a few fleecy clouds, but not of sufficient density to obscure the glories of the Bernina and the Orteler, nor of the steep cliffs that tower above the Splügen and Bernhardin passes.

For somewhat more than half an hour we feasted our eyes with this magnificent panorama, till some one complaining that he felt cold, there was a general cry for more of the Sibson mixture. Perren, who knew the difficulties that were yet to come, was for drinking no more till we were fairly off the arête; but his prudent counsels were laughed to scorn by the others, who declared it would be a *sottise* to bring wine to the top of a mountain, and then carry it down untasted. After all two bottles among fourteen were not likely to affect our steadiness very materially; and the slight stimulant would probably do more good than harm. At all events the mixture was taken as before; and then at half an hour after noon commenced the really anxious part of the expedition, — the descent of the arête.

Retaining Perren and Herr to form the first and last links of the leading party, I sent Lochmatter to assist Cachat in the conduct of the second detachment, and left the third in charge of Taugwald and Joseph Perren.

Slowly and steadily, carefully trying each step before trusting to it, — sometimes, when the slope allowed, walking boldly forwards with alpenstocks thrown well back, — at

others, turning face to the snow, and letting ourselves down, hand under hand, while we looked through our legs for the foot-holes, — now and again one or another of us slipping away, but held safely up by the rope and the steady anchorage of his comrade's alpenstocks — here and there the steps of our ascent, all melted and useless, and our progress broken into a series of short halts, while the axe was doing its work, — with all our faculties, mental as well as bodily, in full tension, — with no words uttered but the occasional "*arrêtez*" or "*en avant*," — still downwards, downwards for nearly two hours.

Now, however, we see a black spot in the plateau we have been slowly approaching ; the black spot moves, — it shouts, — it is the supernumerary porter ; a few minutes more of caution, and we are receiving his congratulations, and, what is more interesting to us, making another dive into the contents of the knapsacks.

It is all plain sailing now ; we may laugh, and talk, and sing as we please ; the business is over, the Lyskamm is conquered, without an accident, and without a break-down, by a larger party than ever before attempted a new ascent. We found the snow soft and yielding on the slope leading down to the Monte Rosa glacier ; and as we zigzagged downwards in our old steps, the foremost men got pretty heavily besprinkled by the masses which were dislodged by their followers. This, however, only gave rise to a little vigorous chaff, and we were soon doubling again amongst the seracs, and fighting our way in the half-melted snow to the Auf der Platte, which we gained at 4.35 P.M.

And now we are once more among vestiges of civilisation. Fragments of egg-shells, chicken bones, and broken bottles, tell of the numerous picnics that have been celebrated here.

“By the bye, Perren, we have a *cache* here ourselves.”

“*Ja, Herr*, we have four bottles of wine here.”

“Out with it then, by all means: here’s the corkscrew.”

What is this sudden horror that comes over his face? Has he fallen unexpectedly upon the traces of some terrible or inhuman crime? It is but too true,—robbery of the most aggravated character,—our *cache* has been discovered, and one of our cherished bottles has been feloniously emptied!

‘Oh, villain! wheresoe’er thou be,
That drained’st our flask of purple wine,
Deem not that greedy act of thine
Shall always ‘scape the penalty.’

So sang the poet of our party; but poetical justice is not always done, and up to the present moment the aforesaid villain has escaped detection. Perhaps the bard alluded to the remorseful stings of conscience, perhaps to the retributive acidity of the grape.

We finished the three bottles that had been left to us; and crossing the Gorner glacier, with no worse misfortune than an occasional shoeful of water, we reached the Riffel Inn at seven. Here we paid our guides the fifty francs apiece which we had promised, giving Perren an extra *douceur* of ten francs, which he had well earned by his careful leadership throughout.

We decided on pushing on to Zermatt at once; and although one or two of the party lost their way in the woods, we were all comfortably reunited at dinner soon after nine o’clock. The news of our success had preceded us, for we had been seen, when on the summit, by some Englishmen who were on the opposite ridges of Monte Rosa. The hearty welcome of Seiler, who, according to his wont, insisted upon treating us to his best wine, and the warm congratulations of our English friends, espe-

cially of the ladies (who, God bless them for the dear inconsistent creatures they are! always entreat you not to run into danger, and always are intensely delighted when they think you have disobeyed them), brought a most agreeable day to a most agreeable conclusion.