



MONT PELVOUX FROM ABOVE LA BESSÉE.

5. THE ASCENT OF MONT PELVOUX.

BY EDWARD WHYMPER.

“Des hautes montagnes, couronnées par des glaciers où se sont entassées, à des profondeurs immenses, les neiges presque éternelles qui dominent des pics de rocs nus et décharnés, s'élançant comme pour atteindre les cieux; tous les aspects, toutes les expositions et les températures; tout ce qu'il y a de plus varié et de plus monotone, de plus curieux et de plus intéressant, de plus imposant et de plus simple, de plus riche et de plus pauvre, de plus riant et de plus triste, de plus beau et de plus horrible: voilà le département des Hautes Alpes.”

LADOUCKETTE.

WE are approaching so fast that millennial period when all countries will be exactly alike, and national manners and customs will be reckoned with the things of the past, that the tourist has already some difficulty to find near home a district in which he may enjoy a thorough change of scene with a thorough change of habits. But

though this has been a continual source of complaint, certain comparatively accessible districts have been almost overlooked, and prominently among these is that large portion of the ancient province of Dauphiné, comprising the whole of the department of the Hautes Alpes, and the southern half of that of the Isère. Some few travellers from time to time have endeavoured to draw attention towards it, but it remains at the present hour not much better known than the interior of Africa.

The most *blasé* man cannot complain in Dauphiné of want of novelty, for among the people he will find customs not to be met with in any other part of Europe; and in the mountains, scenes equal in beauty and grandeur to any in the Alps. It is, in fact, a perfect mine, full of treasure, and offers a noble field for the exploration of travellers — or tourists like myself, whose time and means will not permit them to indulge in more extensive rambles.

Before commencing my narrative of the ascent of Mont Pelvoux, it will be as well to refer the reader to the map, while I give a brief description of the general features of this district.

Rising within the rude parallelogram bounded by the towns of Bourg d'Oysans, Briançon, Embrun, and Gap, is a vast group of mountains broken up into detached masses. The highest of these is a great ridge bearing nearly north-east and south-west. It commences in the south with a tooth of pyramidal form and great height, with wall-like sides, on which the snow cannot rest, more narrow and wedge-like than the Eiger, and precipitous as the Matterhorn — 'tis the *Montagne Sans Nom*, the highest in Dauphiné. The ridge sinks, but again rises, and this time in the form of a huge sugar-loaf, with the top cut off, hollowed out and filled with snow. Round the edge, and at nearly equal distances, stand five peaks of different heights; these

form the Mont Pelvoux. To the north of this, the Glacier Noir comes sweeping round, and beyond it the graceful Montagnes des Agneaux appear, glittering with snow and ice. More to the west the Montagne d'Oursine rises in all its splintered grandeur, and last, but in situation the finest of all, is the Aiguille du Midi de la Grave. These are the principal summits, most of which are more than 13,000 feet in height.

From this group, a perfect forest of valleys radiate in all directions, which vie with each other in singularity of character and dissimilarity of climate. Some, the light of the sun can never reach, they are so deep and gorgelike. They are chill and oppressive in their solitude; and at times the traveller is surprised to find great beds of snow under the shadow of their cliffs. In others, the very antipodes may be found, in temperature more like the plains of Italy than Alpine France. This great range of climate has a marked effect on the flora of these valleys; sterility and nakedness reign in some—stones take the place of trees—débris and mud replace plants and flowers; in others, in the space of a few miles, one passes vines, apple and pear-trees, the birch, alder, walnut, ash, larch, and pine, alternating with fields of rye, barley, oats, beans, and potatoes. All of these valleys are short, and most of them deep and narrow, so that good views of the great mountains are rarely to be had from low elevations. There are few mountains, I suppose, in the world, so isolated, and yet so shut in and difficult to be seen, as the Pelvoux. It is true, valleys lead up to it in several directions, but they are vagrant and capricious; you advance a few miles along one, and find it turns sharply to the right—a few miles more, and back it goes at nearly right angles to the left. Thus, no long perspectives are to be seen with one's mountain closing the view, and

indeed I know of but two points — La Bessée and Mont Dauphin — from which the Pelvoux may be seen from a less elevation than 4000 feet. Added to this, the season in Dauphiné is very short. The inhabitants universally testify that it is seldom fine enough for excursions in the high mountains before the last week in July, or after the middle of August. Taking all this into consideration, it is not surprising that this group of mountains is so little known, or that so few travellers have described it.

The chief authority for the geography of this district is M. Elie de Beaumont, Ingénieur-en-chef des Mines, who, in his “Faits pour servir à l’Histoire des Montagnes de l’Oisans,” has given a full description of this group of mountains, but he is frequently incorrect.* For instance, after stating that the Mont Pelvoux was not entirely inaccessible (as the French engineers employed on the survey for their great map had reached the summit to which the name of the Grand Pelvoux properly belongs †, and saw from it, at the distance of 3000 mètres towards the north-west — that is to say, in the direction of La Bérarde — another more elevated peak, which summit is called the Pointe des Arcines, or des Ecrins, and ought, in reality, to be considered as part of the “massif” of Pelvoux, and as forming of it the culminating point), he goes on to say, on page 362, that “one of the points from whence I have had the best view of the arrangement of these mountains, is from the valley of the Durance, in the neighbourhood of Guilestre.” Guilestre is two miles from Mont Dauphin. “I annex a sketch of their appearance from this side. The Grand Pelvoux, marked *a*, seems formed of a great shell of gneiss,

* It should be observed that he says he follows General Bourcet’s map, which is enough to account for some errors.

† This is an error; the engineers’ peak is *behind* the Grand Pelvoux.

which springs from under the nummulite of which the bottom of the valley of Val Louise consists, and which,



rising towards the north, attains a greater height than all the *montagnes voisines*." From this quotation one might suppose that he here refers to the highest point of the group, and consequently to his Pointe des Arcines; but the word "voisines" can be interpreted so very differently that one would be left in uncertainty, if he did not say, a few pages further on, "When we look at the group now occupying us . . . we see a mountain *e* between Entraigues and La Bérarde, remarkable for its sharp angles and its square forms. . . . It looks like a great Gothic cathedral, slightly inclined in the direction of its length." This mountain I recognise at once, by his description as well as from his outline, as that which is shown on the left of the Pelvoux, as seen from La Bessée, in the engraving at the head of this paper.* It will be observed that M. Beaumont properly speaks of this mountain as one apart from the Pelvoux. But this is done more distinctly when, on the next page, he says that the Pelvoux can be recognised perfectly from a distance with this mountain on the left. "From the Col Longet, one completely recognises the Grand Pelvoux, which looks white from the glaciers which cover it; on its right the Montagnes d'Oursine and on its left the granite mountain which looks like a Gothic church;" and on the following page he repeats the same statement.

* The point from which this sketch is taken is marked A on the map.

“They are also well seen from Mont Pilas (Loire), and from Mont Mezenc (Haute Loire), towering over all which surround them. From Pilas especially, an eye accustomed to their structure recognises their principal details with surprising exactness. Placed in a direction almost exactly opposite that of Guilestre and of Col Longet, one sees, for instance, to the right of the Pelvoux, the granite mountain marked *e*, &c.” This reiterated account of the mountain near the Pelvoux leaves no doubt but that M. Elie de Beaumont, when speaking of the Pelvoux, on p. 362, did imagine that the highest summit of the group as fixed by the engineers was that which he marked *a* in his sketch. The reader is requested to observe this, as I shall return to it presently.

After M. Elie de Beaumont, comes Professor Forbes. In his “Norway and its Glaciers,” he gives an account of the passage of the Col de Sais. He says, at pp. 377-8, “A gentle snow-slope led up to the summit of the pass. . . . There rose just opposite to us, and to a height of more than 3000 feet above us, the pyramidal summit of the Mont Pelvoux itself, which predominates over the whole.” Professor Forbes remarks also, that the Mont Pelvoux is the highest mountain between Mont Blanc and the Mediterranean, and that the Pointe des Arcines is its loftiest summit. From these two authors most of the current statements about Mont Pelvoux have, I believe, taken their rise, and it has become at last a settled idea, that this mountain is the highest in France.

Now, in fact, both of these gentlemen are in error. Elie de Beaumont is, first, in fixing the highest point of the group at *a* in his sketch, as in reality this point *a* is not so high as *e*; secondly, when he speaks of the granite peak marked *e* as a separate mountain, being unaware that it is the very mountain that he calls the Pointe des Arcines,

as it is the one which the engineers saw at the distance of 3000 mètres, and to which they assigned 4105 mètres in height; and, thirdly, in giving the name *Pointe des Arcines* to this mountain, for, as he elsewhere says, that is the name of the highest peak of Pelvoux, while he himself repeatedly states that this mountain *e* is separate and distinct.

In like manner, Professor Forbes is mistaken when speaking of the view from the *Col de Sais*. For the mountain to which he refers is not the *Mont Pelvoux* at all, but is that which *Elie de Beaumont* marked *e*, is that which may be seen on the left of my engraving, and of which there is also an illustration in *Mr. Bonney's* paper, at p. 209 in this volume.

The reader will learn presently my foundation for asserting that the granite mountain marked *e* is that to which the engineers referred, and enough to show that this virgin peak, which on the side of *La Bessée* is called the *Montagne Sans Nom*, and on the side of *Bérarde* known as *l'Aléfroide* (a most inappropriate name, causing it to be confounded with the *châlets* hereafter mentioned), offers to the Alpestrian who shall ascend it, the distinction of having conquered the loftiest mountain *in France*.

So far as I have been able to learn, attempts to ascend the *Mont Pelvoux* have not been numerous. The first on record is that of the party of French engineers headed by *Captain* (now *General*) *Durand*, who made it to take some observations for the great French map. They mounted from the side of the *Val Sapenière*, got to the top of the second peak in height and remained somewhere on it, lodged in a tent, for several days, at a height of 3933 mètres. They took numerous porters to carry wood for fires, and erected a large cairn of stones on the summit, which has caused this peak to take the name of *Pic de la Pyramide*.

In 1859, M. Senon essayed to reach the highest summit, but only got to the edge of the plateau of snow, at the point from which the small glacier commences to stream; he was, I believe, compelled to return by bad weather. And, in the middle of August, 1860, Messrs. Bonney and William Mathews tried it from the same side, but were likewise defeated by the weather. They passed two nights under a fallen rock which bears the imposing name of "Cabane des Bergers de Provence," but is only a boulder with a hole under it, and on the third day they were tempted upwards by an appearance of fine weather. It again changed when they got up to 10,430 feet; clouds surrounded the party, and their local guide refused to advance, so they were reluctantly compelled to return, and shortly afterwards left the district.

I started for this unknown region early in July 1861, and, with knapsack on back and ice-axe in hand, landed at Havre, where my appearance on the quay created a slight sensation. "*Sacre!*" muttered a bloated gendarme, nudging his comrade, "*voici un grand militaire.*" "*Ah, oui!*" replied he, thinking himself wiser than his neighbour, "*un sapeur sans doute.*" Here I got my mountain gear passed the custom-house, and sent it direct to La Bessée, whilst I started to make a complete circuit of the French coast. Four weeks later, at Nismes, I found myself completely collapsed by the heat, which was 94° in the shade, and thought it was more prudent to break than to continue my programme; so I took the night train to Grenoble.

I arrived at Grenoble early in the morning, and found that all the places in the courier to Briançon were, as usual, engaged two days beforehand; but this was of little consequence, as I got a place in the diligence to Bourg d'Oysans. Here I found my friend Macdonald, and learnt

that he was going to try the Pelvoux in about ten days. As I was at that moment *en route* for the mountain, I informed him of my intention, and we agreed to meet at La Bessée on the 3rd of August. In five minutes more I was perched in the banquette, and had another dreary night on the road: we took nearly eight hours to accomplish less than thirty miles.

At five minutes to 5 I started from Bourg d'Oysans and got into Briançon at 6; deducting stoppages, it was ten hours' walking. The annexed facts may be useful to travellers:—

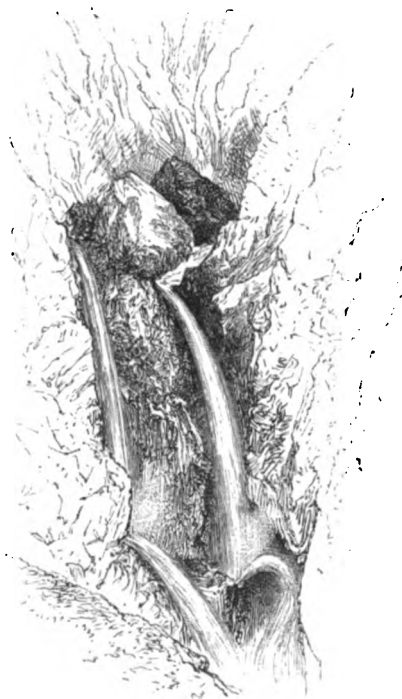
Bourg d'Oysans to Freénet . .	11 kilomètres .	Auberge.
„ Le Dauphin 14½	„	. Auberge very bad.
„ La Grave . 28½	„	. Auberge, chez Juge, sleeping quarters pretty good.
„ Top of Col 38	„	. Bread and wine can be got.
„ Monétier .	„	. Several auberges.
„ Briançon . 61½	„	. Hôtel de l'Ours.

The road is very good, with the exception of the first mile descending towards Briançon, which is still unfinished.

The points of view on the Lautaret road are many in number. The gorge of Les Infernets is magnificent in the extreme; and when that and the village of Le Dauphin are passed, the first glacier comes into view, tailing over the mountain side on the right, and, until the summit of the col is passed, every gap in the mountains shows a glittering glacier or soaring peak. High above the road, about two kilomètres below La Grave, there is on the left a fine cascade, which resembles the defunct Pelerins at Chamounix. The vignette on the next page is from a sketch made on the spot.

A short distance above La Grave, on the right, there is a glorious view of some fine snowy mountains up a short valley; I inquired their name of some natives, but they all differed hopelessly—I suppose, however, they

must be the *Montagnes des Agneaux*. But the finest view of the pass is seen after crossing the col, near *Monétier*. *Monte Viso* appears at the end of the vista, shooting into the sky, and, although thirty-six miles away, is a magnificent object; in the middle distance, but still ten miles off, is *Briançon* with its interminable forts, and in the foreground, sloping down to the *Guisane*, and rising high up the neighbouring slopes, are fertile fields of corn, studded with villages and numerous church spires.



CASCADE NEAR LA GRAVE.

The next day I walked over to *La Bessée* and sought *Jean Reynaud*, the worthy *agent voyer* of the district, whose acquaintance I had formed in the previous autumn. He

had received the packet in which were the necessaries for our expedition, and nothing prevented our starting at once but the absence of Macdonald and the want of a bâton. Reynaud suggested a visit to the post-master, who possessed a bâton of local celebrity. Down we went, but the bureau was closed; we hallooed through the slits, but no answer. At last this official was discovered endeavouring (and with very fair success) to make himself intoxicated. He was just able to ejaculate, "*La France, c'est la première nation du monde,*" a phrase used by a Frenchman when in a state that a Briton begins to shout, "We won't go home till morning" — national glory being uppermost in the thoughts of the one, and home in those of the other. The bâton was produced, but when I saw it my heart sank within me. Imagine a branch of a young oak, about five feet long and three inches thick, gnarled, and twisted in several directions, terminated by a point more like the end of Goliath's spear than a rational bâton — it was, in fact, ten inches long. "*Monsieur,*" said the *chef de bureau*, as he presented it, "*la France, c'est la première nation du monde, par ses*" — he stuck. "*Bâtons?*" I suggested. "*Oui, oui, Monsieur, par ses bâtons, par ses — ses,*" and here he couldn't get on at all. But as I looked at this young limb, I thought of my own, and asked if there really was not a lighter weapon in the village. Reynaud, who knew everything about everybody, said there was not; so there was no help for it, and off we went, leaving the official staggering in the road, muttering, "*La France, c'est la première nation du monde.*"

The morning of the 3rd of August dawned, but no Macdonald appeared, so we were obliged to start without him. We left La Bessée at twenty minutes to 11, the

party consisting of Jean Reynaud, myself, and a porter — Jean Casimir Giraud, *dit* Petits Clous, the shoemaker of the place. An hour and a half's smart walking took us to La Ville de Val Louise, our hearts being gladdened on the way by the glorious peaks of Pelvoux shining out without a cloud around them. We entered La Ville, where we provisioned ourselves. Reynaud kindly volunteered to look after the commissariat, and I found to my annoyance, when we were about to start, that I had given tacit consent to a young wine-cask being carried with us, which was a great nuisance from the commencement. One man tried to carry it, and then another, but it was excessively awkward to handle; so at last it was slung on one of our bâtons, and carried between two, which gave our party the appearance of a mechanical diagram to illustrate the uses of levers.

At "La Ville" the Val Louise splits into two branches, the Val d'Entraigues on the left, and the Vallon d'Alfred on the right; our route was up the latter, and we moved steadily forwards to the village of La Pisse, where I was told lived Pierre Sémiond, who was reputed to know more about the Pelvoux than any other man. He looked an honest fellow, but unfortunately he could not come, and recommended his brother instead. I asked to see him, and an aged creature appeared, whose furrowed and wrinkled face hardly seemed to announce the man we wanted; but having no choice, we were obliged to engage him, and we again set forth.

The mountain could not be seen at La Ville, owing to a high ridge which intervened; we were now moving along the foot of this to get to the châteaux of Alfred, or, as they are sometimes called, Aléfroide, where the actual mountain commences. From La Pisse and upwards, the view of it was very grand. The whole height of that peak, which in

these valleys goes under the name of the "Grand Pelvoux," was seen at one glance from its summit to the base, at least 7500 feet of apparently perpendicular cliffs. Walnut and other trees in great variety gave shadow to our path, and fresh vigour to our limbs, while below, in a sublime gorge, thundered the torrent, whose waters took their rise from the snows we hoped to tread on the morrow.

From this point the subordinate but more proximate peaks appear considerably higher than the loftier ones behind. The Pic des Arcines is just seen on the left hand of the engraving on the next page*, but the Pic de la Pyramide is quite hidden.

The châlets of Alefred are a cluster of miserable wooden huts at the foot of the Grand Pelvoux, and are close to the junction of the streams which descend from the glacier de Sapanière on the left, and the glaciers Blanc and Noir on the right. We only rested a minute to purchase some butter and milk, but Sémond picked up a disreputable-looking lad (who, I fancy, called him "father") to assist to carry, push, haul, and otherwise move the wine-cask.

Our route now turned sharply to the left, and all were thankful that the day was drawing to a close, so that we had the shadows from the mountains. A more frightful and desolate valley it is impossible to imagine: miles and miles of boulders, débris, stones, sand, and even mud; — few trees, and they placed so high as to be almost out of sight; — no vegetation; not a soul inhabits it, no birds are in the air, no fish in its waters; the mountain is too steep for the chamois, the slopes too inhospitable for the marmot, the whole too repulsive for the eagle; not a living thing did we see in this sterile and savage valley for four days, barring some few poor goats which had been driven there against their will.

* The point from which the sketch was taken is marked B on the map.



MONT PELVOUX, FROM THE VALLON D'ALFRED.

It was truly a scene in keeping with the diabolical deed perpetrated here about four hundred years ago—the murder of the Vaudois of Val Louise in the caverns which were now in sight, though high above us.* Their story is very sad. For more than three hundred years they had inhabited these retired valleys in tranquil obscurity; they were peaceful and industrious—troubadours sang their praises†—and, had they been but known, they would have been beloved by all, save those to whom innocence is nauseous, and goodness ever hateful.

The Archbishop of Embrun endeavoured, but with little success, to get them within the pale of his church; his efforts were aided by many others, who, commencing by imprisonments and tortures, at last adopted the more natural method of burning them by hundreds at the stake. The wretched inhabitants fled at last to the caverns in this valley, where, having collected sufficient provisions for two years, they took up their abode. But intolerance is ever painstaking, and their retreat was soon discovered. Historians differ as to the mode of attack, but they agree as to the final result,—they were relentlessly exterminated without distinction of age or sex. More than 3000 persons, it is said, perished in this frightful massacre; the growth of three hundred and fifty years was destroyed at one blow, and the valley was completely depopulated. Louis XII. caused it to be re peopled, and after three hundred and fifty years have once more passed away, behold the result,—a race of monkeys. Of one thing I am certain,—they must have been taken by surprise when

* They are marked C on the map.

† "Que non volia maudir ne jura ne mentir,
N'occir ne avoutrar, ne prenre de altrui
Ne s'avengear deli suo ennemi,
Loz dison qu'es vaudes et loz feson morir."

attacked, or else there was treachery. The position of the caverns is such, that a handful of resolute men could defy an army. Steep slopes and precipitous rocks lead up to them for several hundred feet, while above, it is all inaccessible cliff.

There is but little water in this valley, and when you get any it is usually muddy and bad; but we arrived at a splendid little spring about half an hour after we passed the Baume. The situation of this is worth noticing; it is about forty yards higher up the valley, and nearer the Pelvoux than the outermost of a small patch of pines: it is very small, but the quality of the water is excellent. It is marked D on the map. We rested a little and hastened upwards, till we nearly arrived at the foot of the Sape-nière glacier, when Sémiond said we must turn to the right up the slopes. This we did, and clambered for half an hour through scattered pines and fallen boulders, when evening began to close in so rapidly that it was time to look for a resting-place. There was no difficulty in getting one, for all round was a chaotic assemblage of rocks. We selected the under side of one, which was more than fifty feet long by twenty high, cleared it of rubbish, and set about collecting wood for a fire, which was soon blazing right merrily.

That camp-fire is a pleasant reminiscence. The wine-cask had got through all its troubles;—was tapped, and the Frenchmen pretended to derive some consolation from its execrable contents. Reynaud ever and anon chanted some scrap of French song, and each contributed his share of joke, story, and verse; the weather was perfect, and our prospects for the morrow were good. My companions' joy culminated when I threw a packet of red fire into the flames: it hissed and bubbled for a moment or two, and then broke out into a grand flare. The effect of the

momentary light was magnificent ; all around, the mountains were illuminated for a second, and then relapsed into their solemn gloom. One by one our party dropped off to sleep, and at last I got into my blanket-bag ; it was hardly necessary, for although we were at a height of at least 7000 feet, the minimum temperature was above 40° Fahrenheit.

We roused at three, but did not start till half-past four. Giraud had been engaged as far as this rock only, but as he pressed anxiously to be allowed to go on as a volunteer, we allowed him to accompany us. We mounted the slopes quickly, and in a few minutes got above the trees, then had a couple of hours' clambering over bits of precipitous rock and banks of débris, and at a quarter to 7 got to the narrow glacier, Clos de l'Homme, which streams from the plateau and nearly reaches the Glacier de Sapeinière. We had been working as much as possible to the right, in hopes that we should not have to cross it, but were continually driven back, till at last we found it was absolutely necessary. Old Sémioud had a strong objection to the ice, and made explorations on his own account to endeavour to avoid it, but Reynaud and I preferred crossing it, and Giraud stuck to us. It was exceedingly narrow—in fact, one could throw a stone across it. At the point we wished to cross, it overlapped the rock, and was easily mounted on the side, but in the centre swelled into a steep dome, up which we were obliged to cut. The inclination was, perhaps, as much as 40°, and the slope not more than ninety feet in length. I commenced a few steps, but Giraud stepped forward, and said he should like to try his hand. When once he got the axe he would not give it up, and here as well as afterwards, when it was necessary to cross the couloirs which abound on the higher part of the mountain, he did all the work, and did

it admirably. Chop, chop, chop, and one step was cut (two blows down and one sideways always sufficed), and in an incredibly short time he was at the top of the dome ready to pull us up. While he was at work an absurd accident, but which might have proved serious, happened to me. I was standing at the foot of the steep incline already mentioned, but was so immediately under Giraud that I had the benefit of his shower of ice-chips. I, therefore, moved my position, and, in doing so, somehow managed to slip, and commenced sliding straight in the direction of a large crevasse. Fortunately a deep step we had cut was within reach of one arm;— I caught at it, and brought myself to anchor, but remained at full length on the slope without the power of getting on my feet. I held on for a few seconds, when Reynaud threw me the end of the rope and pulled me up.

When we were at length across, old Sémiond, of course, came after us. We zigzagged up some snow-slopes, and then commenced the interminable array of buttresses which are the great peculiarity of the Pelvoux. They were in many parts very steep, but, on the whole, afforded good hold, and no climbing should be called difficult that does that. The outline on page 249 will give a better idea of them than any description. They abounded in gullies, sometimes of great length and depth—70° was no uncommon inclination. They were frequently very rotten, and would have been difficult for a single man to pass— with two they are sufficiently awkward: if you are top man, you find yourself being continually abused by the man beneath for the half-hundredweights of stones you send down on his head; and if you are the lower man, you find that there are pleasanter things in the world than being harpooned by your friend's bâton, or having his heavy-nailed boots leave their impression on your fingers.

But, after all, climbing without these incidents would be very slow—they help to break the monotony.

We went up chimneys and gullies by the hour together, and always seemed to be coming to something, although we never got to it. If the reader will look at the outline sketch, he will understand our position. We stand at the foot of a great buttress, about 200 feet high, and look up. It does not go to a point as in the diagram, because we cannot see the top, although we feel convinced that, behind the edge of the fringe of pinnacles we do see, there is a top, and that that is the edge of the plateau we so much desire to attain. Up we mount and reach the pinnacles, but lo! another set is seen, and another, and yet more, till at last we reach the top to find that it is only a buttress, and that we have to descend forty or fifty feet before we can commence to mount again. When this operation had been performed a few dozen times, it began to be wearisome, especially as we were thoroughly in the dark as to our whereabouts. Sémiond, however, encouraged us, said he knew we were on the right route, and away we went once more.

The unavoidable risk we ran from falling stones when we followed each other, had now driven us to act in the most independent manner—each selected the route which was in his eyes the best; so, by-and-by, I found myself alone with Giraud, having completely lost sight of the others. A shout from above presently announced they had met an obstacle; a bit of cliff went straight up which could not be climbed, and it seemed necessary to descend 200 feet to get on to another arête. In a few minutes we came to it, a perpendicular wall of no great height, but quite impracticable. A small cascade came bounding over the top from the end of a long couloir, and had worn itself a route down the face. Giraud was for descending to join

the others who had gone away to the right; but I did not like the loss of time, so stopped to consider. On the cliff there was not hold for a cat, but up the cascade there seemed a chance. By getting on that knob I calculated that a long stretch would bring that ledge just within reach; then, by leaning across on my bâton, I should just get to that bit in the middle. "Giraud," said I, breaking off in my calculation, "suppose we go up the cascade." He looked at me with a comical air, to see if I was joking, then at the cascade, then back at me, saying, "*Il n'est pas possible, Monsieur Edward.*" "Giraud, my boy, if I go up, will you follow?" He scratched his head, gave one more look, and stared vacantly into the sky. "Jean Casimir Giraud, will you come up after me?" "Y — e — s." So I buttoned my jacket, turned up the collar, looked to my knapsack, commenced the climbing, and succeeded in getting up. Giraud hesitated, and looked up with an expression of blank astonishment; but he kept his word and joined me on the top. This manœuvre was of double service; we saved half an hour, and had all the advantages of a shower-bath without the trouble of stopping.

It was now nearly midday, and we seemed no nearer the summit of the Pelvoux than when we started. The buttresses commenced again, and the gullies were varied by steep couloirs of hard snow. At last we all joined together and held a council. "Sémiond, my antique friend, do you know where we are now?" "Oh, yes, perfectly, to a yard and a half." "Well, then, how much are we below this plateau?" He affirmed we were not half an hour from the edge of the snow. "Very good; let us proceed." Half an hour passed, and then another, but we were still in the same state—pinnacles, buttresses, and couloirs in profusion, but no plateau. So I called him again, for I had

noticed he had been staring about latterly as if in doubt. I repeated the question, "How far below are we now?" Well, he thought it might be half an hour more. "But you said that just now; are you sure we are going right?" "Yes; he believed we were." Believed! that wouldn't do. "Are you sure we are going right for the Pic des Arcines?" "Pic des Arcines!" he ejaculated in astonishment, as if he had heard the word for the first time, "Pic des Arcines; no! but for the pyramide, the celebrated pyramide he had helped the great Capitaine Durand, &c."

Here was a fix, — we had been talking about it to him for a whole day, and now he coolly confessed he knew nothing about it. I turned to Reynaud, who seemed thunderstruck. "What did he suggest?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Well," said I, after explaining my mind to Sémiond, pretty freely, "the sooner we turn back the better, for I have no wish to see your pyramide."

We halted for an hour, enjoyed the prospect as well as we were able, and then commenced the descent. I know it took us nearly seven hours to come down to our rock; but I paid no heed to the distance, and do not remember anything about it. When we got down, we made a discovery — a blue silk veil lay by our fireside. As these articles are not indigenous, there was to my mind but one solution — Macdonald had arrived; but where was he, and why had he gone? We soon packed our baggage, and tramped in the dusk through the stony desert to Alefred, where we arrived about half-past nine. "Where is the Englishman?" was my first question. He was gone to sleep at La Ville. "What was he like?" — I found that I was not mistaken.

We passed that night in a hay-loft, and slept soundly in spite of our woes; and in the morning, after settling with Sémiond, who professed himself *très content*, I posted

down in advance of the others to catch Macdonald. I had already determined on my plan of operation, which was to get him to join me, return, and be independent of all guides, simply taking the best man I could get as a porter. I set my heart on Giraud, for he was a right good fellow, with no pretence, although in every respect up to the work; but I was disappointed—he was obliged to go to Briançon.

My walk soon became exciting. No end of peasants inquired the result of our expedition, and common civility obliged me to stop. But I was afraid of losing my man, for I had been told he would wait only till 10 o'clock, and that time was close at hand. At last I dashed over the bridge,—time from Alefred an hour and a quarter,—but a cantonnier stopped me, saying that *Monsieur l'Anglais* had just started for La Bessée. I rushed after him, turned angle after angle of the road, but could not see him; at last, as I came round a corner, he was also just turning another, going very fast. I shouted with the voice I learnt in Switzerland, and, luckily, he heard me. We returned, re-provisioned ourselves at La Ville, and the same evening saw us passing our first rock *en route* for another. Our party consisted of Reynaud, Sémiond, an apprentice of Giraud's, and our two selves. I have said we determined to take no guide, but on passing La Pisse old Sémiond turned out and offered his services. He went well in spite of his years and disregard of truth. "Why not take him?" said Macdonald. So we offered him a fifth of his previous pay, and in a few seconds he closed with the offer, but this time came in an inferior position: we were to lead, he to follow.

Our second follower was a remarkable youth of twenty-seven years. Want of space forbids any detailed account of his pranks; how he drank Reynaud's wine, smoked our

cigars, and quietly secreted the provisions when we were nearly starving. For coolness he beat any person I have met. Discovery of his proceedings did not at all flurry him, and he finished up by getting several items on his own account added to our bill, which, not a little to his disgust, we disallowed.

This night we fixed our camp high above the tree line*, and indulged ourselves in the healthy employment of carrying all our fuel up to it. The present rock was not so comfortable as the first, and before we could settle, we were obliged to turn out a large mass which was in our way. It was very obstinate, but moved at length; slowly and gently at first, but faster and faster it went, at last taking great bounds in the air, striking a stream of fire at every touch, which shone brightly out as it entered the gloomy valley below, and long after it was out of sight, we heard it jumping downwards and then settle with a subdued crash on the glacier beneath. As we turned back from this curious sight, Reynaud asked if we had ever seen a torrent on fire. I thought he was joking, but he was in sober earnest. "Every spring," said he, "when the snows begin to melt, many rocks are brought down by the streams, and this is particularly the case in that most turbulent of French rivers, the Durance. At the point where it comes through that narrow gorge at La Bessée, I have seen it frequently so choked with boulders, that no water whatever could be seen, but only rocks rolling over and over, grinding each other into powder, and being dashed into fragments, while the sparks and flashes which they emitted gave it quite the appearance of being on fire."

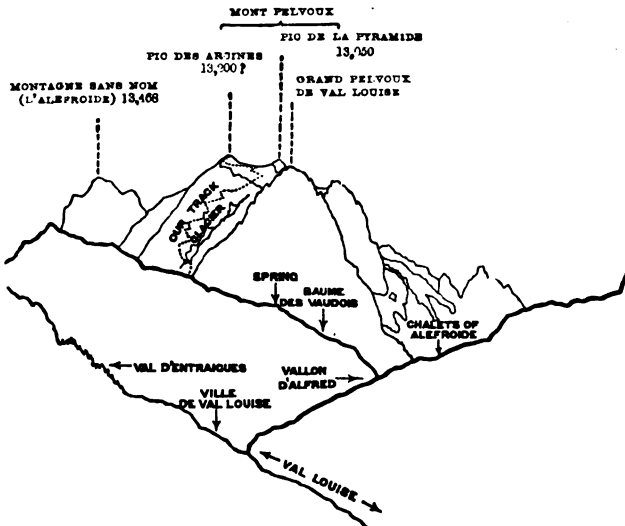
We had another merry evening with nothing to mar it.

* Our rock is marked E on the map.

The weather was perfection, and all Alpine men will imagine, better than I can describe, the treat we had at sunset and sunrise. Macdonald related his experiences over the *café noir*. "I arrived," he said, "at La Ville, shortly after you had left, and, hastening up to La Pisse, learnt that you were going to sleep in a cavern on the mountain side. The thoughts of losing even a chance of an ascent were maddening, so I procured a man to carry my luggage, and started up the valley. I was in bad training, and as tired and sleepy as nothing but thirty consecutive hours in a diligence can make one, so I was not sorry we were obliged to slacken our pace in consequence of the roughness of the ground. We stumbled wearily upwards, till at nine o'clock my guide announced that he thought we were near our destination, but being pitch-dark he would not proceed, as he knew not whether we were above or below the cavern. I was much too tired to dispute his resolution; we therefore chose a big rock as a resting-place, crawled under its lee, and divided our provisions. I soon fell asleep, but rose at the first sign of daybreak. The guide stood at my side, and pointed out the cavern for which we had searched, not twenty yards below; but of course nobody had slept there, and he confessed he knew nothing about you. I asked him if there were no other in which you might have slept. Yes, there was one *tout là bas* and close to the glacier; so off we went on the chance of finding you. But long before we got to it, I discerned your party making its way along a rocky arête 2000 feet above us, and at a great distance. It was perfectly useless to try to overtake you, so I lay down and watched you with a heavy heart until you turned the corner of a buttress and vanished out of sight."

We lay backwards in luxurious repose, looking at the spangled sky with its ten thousand brilliant lights, smoking

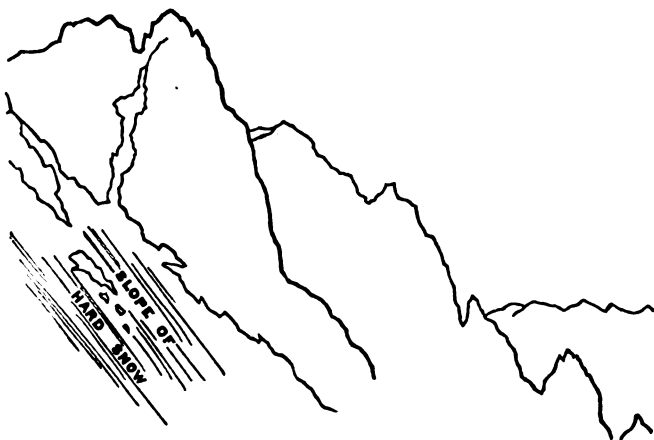
our pipes, and talking over the prospects of the coming day. Nought broke the solemn stillness of the night but the heavy breathing of our already sound asleep comrades. Nothing: it was a silence to be felt. We were alone. Alone? Hark, what is that dull booming sound above us? Is that nothing? There it is again, plainer — on it comes, nearer, clearer — what a fearful crash! — 'tis a crag escaped from the heights above. We jump to our feet. Down it comes with awful fury; what power can withstand its violence? Dancing, leaping, flying, dashing against others, roaring as it descends. Ah, it has passed! No; there it is again, and we hold our breath as, with resistless power and explosions like artillery, it darts past, with an avalanche of shattered fragments trailing in its rear! 'Tis gone, and we breathe more freely as we hear the finale on the glacier below. It was an awful moment, and we felt it.



We retired at last, but I was too excited to sleep, and at a quarter past 4 every man once more shouldered his

pack and started up. This time we agreed to keep more to the right, and see if it were not possible to get to the plateau without losing any time by crossing the glacier. To describe our route would be to repeat what has been said before. We mounted steadily upwards for an hour and a half, sometimes walking, but more frequently climbing, when we found, after all, that it was necessary to cross the glacier. The part on which we struck came down a very steep slope and was much crevassed. But the word crevassed hardly expresses the writhed and twisted look it presented; it was a mass of séracs of most formidable appearance. We found, however, more difficulty in getting on than across it; but, thanks to the rope, we passed it somehow, and the interminable buttresses began again. Hour after hour we pounded upwards, frequently at fault and obliged to descend, but the progress was sure and steady. The ridge behind us had long ago sunk, and we looked over it, and all others, till our eyes rested nearly forty miles away on the majestic Viso. Hour after hour passed, and monotony was the order of the day: when 12 o'clock came we lunched, and contemplated the scene with satisfaction; all the summits in sight, with the single exception of the Viso, had given in, and we looked over an immense expanse—a perfect sea of peaks and snow-fields. Still the pinnacles rose above us, and opinions were freely uttered that we should see no summit of Pelvoux that day. Old Sémond had become a perfect bore to all; whenever one rested for a moment to look about, he would say with a complacent chuckle, "*N'ayez pas peur, suivez-moi.*" We came at last to a very bad piece, rotten and steep, and no hold. Here Reynaud and Macdonald confessed themselves tired, and talked of going to sleep. A way was discovered out of the difficulty, and I took the opportunity to make an outline of a neighbouring buttress, while sitting

on the top of another. While so employed, some one called out, "Look at the Viso," and we saw that we almost looked over it. We worked away with redoubled energy, hauling one, shoving another, till at length we caught sight of the head of the glacier as it streamed out of the plateau. This gave us fresh hopes; we were not deceived; and with a simultaneous shout we greeted the appearance of our long-



A BUTTRESS OF MONT PELVOUX.

wished-for snows. A large bergschrund separated us from them; but a bridge was found. We tied ourselves in line and moved safely over it. Directly we got across to the top of the snow, there rose before us a fine snow-capped peak. Old Sémiond cried: "The pyramide! I see the pyramide!" "Where, Sémiond, where?" "There, Monsieur, on the top of that peak."

And there, sure enough, was the very cairn he had helped to erect thirty years before. But where was the Pic des Arcines we were to see? — it was nowhere visible, but only an immense expanse of snow bordered by three lower peaks. Somewhat sadly we moved towards the pyra-

mid, sighing that there was no other to conquer, but hardly had we gone two hundred paces, before there rose a superb white cone on the left, which had been hidden before by a slope of snow. At the same moment Macdonald and I shouted, "The Pic des Arcines!" and inquired in a breath of Sémiond, if he knew whether that peak had been ascended by any one. As for him he knew nothing, except that the peak before us was called the pyramid, from the cairn he had, &c. &c.; and that it had not been ascended since. "All right, then, face about;" and we immediately turned at right angles for the cone, the porter making faint struggles for his beloved pyramide. Our progress was in the sixth of a mile stopped by the edge of the ridge connecting the two peaks, and being in the centre of a curve we perceived that it curled over in a lovely volute, on which we were now standing. We involuntarily retreated. The porter, who was last in the line, took the opportunity to untie himself, and refused to come on; said we were running dangerous risks; and talked vaguely of crevasses. Such childish folly we opposed, tied him up again, and proceeded. The snow was very soft; we were always knee-deep, and as with my knapsack I was the heaviest, I was frequently floundering helplessly up to my middle; but a simultaneous jerk before and behind always released me. By this time we had arrived at the foot of the final peak. The left-hand arête seemed easier than that on which we stood, so we curved round to get there. Some rocks peeped out 150 feet below the summit, and up these we crawled, leaving our porter behind, as he said he was afraid. I could not resist the temptation, as we went off, to turn and beckon him onwards, saying, "*N'ayez pas peur, suivez-moi*;" but he did not answer to the appeal, and never went to the top. The rocks led to a short arête of ice — our plateau on one side and a precipice nearly vertical

on the other. We cut up the arête, and at a quarter to 2, three happy individuals stood shaking hands on the loftiest summit of the conquered Pelvoux — the true Pic des Arcines.

The day still continued everything that could be desired, and far and near countless peaks burst into sight without a cloud to hide them. The mighty Mont Blanc, full seventy miles away, first caught our eyes, and then, still farther off, the Monte Rosa group, while, rolling away to the east, one unknown range after another succeeded in unveiled splendour, fainter and fainter in tone, but still perfectly defined, till at last the eye was unable to distinguish sky from mountain, and they died away in the far-off horizon. Monte Viso rose grandly up, but it was only forty miles away, and we looked clean over it to a hazy mass we knew must be the plains of Piedmont. Southwards a blue mist seemed to indicate the existence of the distant Mediterranean; to the west we looked over to the mountains of Auvergne. Such was the panorama, a view extending in nearly every direction for more than one hundred miles. It was with some difficulty we wrenched our eyes from the more distant objects to contemplate the nearer. Mont Dauphin was very conspicuous; but though I knew its situation I looked a long time for La Bessée. Besides these, not a human habitation can be seen; all is rock, snow, and ice, and large as we knew were the snow-fields of Dauphiné, we were surprised to find they very far surpassed our most ardent imagination. Nearly in a line between us and the Viso, was a splendid group of mountains, of whose existence I was unaware. They are immediately to the south of Chat. Queyras, are not laid down on any map, neither do I think they have been mentioned by any author. They are decidedly loftier than the Viso, and their highest summits (for there are several) pro-

bably attain to nearly 13,000 feet. More south an unknown peak was even higher, while close to us we were astonished to discover that the mountain to which Elie de Beaumont frequently refers seemed even higher than the peak on which we stood. At least this was my opinion, and I formed a minority, as Macdonald thought it not so high, and Reynaud much about the same. As I had not read Elie de Beaumont's book at that time, I deferred to the majority. But after reading it I think it is evident, for two good reasons, that this mountain is that to which the French engineers assigned 4105 mètres:—first, our peak was not nearly so much as 450 feet above that of the pyramid—it might, perhaps, be 150 to 200; secondly, our peak was not at the distance of 3000 mètres from the pyramid, but was probably 800 yards. The great black mountain complied, however, with these conditions, as it was certainly three or four times our distance, and also appeared to me to rise at least 200 feet above us. But, for all this, we unquestionably reached the highest point of Pelvoux, and in saying this we are not at variance with Elie de Beaumont, who, as I have shown, refers to the black mountain as one separate and distinct. The testimony of our eyes was quite sufficient to show this, for, after a few steps had gently curved away, they shot down into a tremendous abyss, of which we could not see the bottom, whose depth we guessed at least 2500 feet. After our eyes left the snow on which we stood, they rested on nothing until this mighty wall-sided mountain was seen rising on the other side, black as night, too steep for snow, with arêtes like knife-edges, and a summit sharp as a needle. We were in complete ignorance of its whereabouts, for none of us had been on the other side; we imagined that La Bérarde was in the abyss at our feet, but it was in reality beyond the mountain.

We left the summit at last, and descended to the rocks and to our porter. I melted some snow, and found that, with the air at 9.75° Centigrade, it boiled at 87.75° Cent. ; and after we had fed, and smoked our cigars (lighted, be it remarked, from a common match), we found that it was 10 minutes past 3 o'clock, and high time to be off. We dashed, waded, and tumbled through the snow, and in twenty-five minutes began the long descent of the rocks. We had taken eight hours to come up them, but now it was getting on to 4 o'clock, and as it would be dark at 8 o'clock, it was evident that there was no time to be lost, and we pushed on to the utmost. Nothing remarkable occurred going down; we kept rather closer to the glacier, and crossed at the same point as in the morning. Getting *off* it was like getting *on* it, rather awkward. Old Sémioud had got over, so had Reynaud; Macdonald came next, but as he made a long stretch to get on to a higher mass, he slipped, and in a moment would have been in the bowels of a crevasse had he not been tied. Thanks to the rope, he was safely landed.

By the time we had crossed, it was rapidly becoming dark, but I still hoped that we should get to our rock in safety. Macdonald was not so sanguine, and he was right; for at last we found ourselves quite at fault, and wandered helplessly up and down for nearly an hour, while Reynaud and the porter indulged in a little mutual abuse. But the dreary fact was now quite apparent, that, as we could not get down, we must stay where we were.

A more detestable locality for a night out of doors, it is difficult to imagine. There were no large rocks nor shelter of any kind; it was too steep to promenade, and perfectly exposed to the chilling wind which began to rise. Loose rubbly stones covered the ground, and had to be removed before we could sit with any comfort. This was an ad-

vantage, though we hardly thought so at the time, as it gave us some employment, and after an hour's active exercise of that interesting kind, I obtained a small strip of about nine feet long, on which I could walk. Reynaud was at first furious, and soundly abused the porter, whose opinion as to the route had been followed rather than that of our friend, but at last settled down to a deep dramatic despair, and wrung his hands with frantic gesture, as he exclaimed, "*Oh malheur, malheur! Oh misérables!*" We were certainly in a predicament; we were at least 10,500 feet high, and if it commenced to rain or snow, as the gathering clouds and rising wind seemed to threaten, we might be in a sore plight; but fortunately matters did not get so bad as that. We were hungry, having eaten little since 3 A.M., and a torrent we heard close at hand, but could not discover, aggravated our thirst. Sémioud endeavoured to get some water from it; and it will give an idea of the difficulty of moving, when I say, that although he got to it, and it was not a hundred feet off, he was wholly unable to return, and we had to solace him by shouting at intervals through the night.

Thunder commenced to growl and lightning play among the peaks above, and the wind, which had brought the temperature down to nearly 32° Fahrenheit, began to chill us to the bones. We examined our resources. They were six and a half cigars, two boxes of Vesuvians, one third of a pint of brandy-and-water, and half a pint of spirits of wine; rather scant for three fellows who had to get through seven hours before daylight. I lighted my spirit lamp, and mixing the remaining spirits of wine, brandy, and some snow together, heated them by it. It made a strong liquor, but we only wished for more of it. When that was done, Macdonald endeavoured to dry his socks by the lamp, and then the three lay down under my

plaid to pretend to sleep. And it was a pretence! Reynaud's woes were aggravated by toothache; Macdonald somehow managed to close his eyes. After lying still, but badly cramped up, for two hours, I couldn't stand it any longer, and promenaded my limited platform for the rest of the night, varying my walk by dancing, like a bear on hot plates, to keep my feet alive, and smoked the cigars the others would not touch. Never before, nor since, have I found a weed so grateful.

The longest night must end, and ours did at last. Sémioud came and shook us up at early dawn. I believe I was getting very fast into a state of torpor, walking up and down mechanically, without the slightest notion of what was going on; the others were dozing. We got down to our rock in an hour and a quarter, and found the lad not a little surprised at our absence, though he had by no means broken his heart over us. He said he had made a gigantic fire to light us down, and shouted with all his might; we neither saw one nor heard the other. I am told we looked a ghastly crew, and no wonder; it was our fourth night out.

We feasted at our cave, and performed some very necessary ablutions. The exceedingly neat and cleanly persons of the natives are infested by certain agile creatures whose rapidity of motion is only equalled by their numbers and voracity. It is positively dangerous to approach too near them, and one has to study the wind, so as to get on their weather side. In spite of all precautions, my unfortunate companion and myself were being rapidly devoured alive, and it was to save the remainder of our wretched carcasses that we performed as above; not that we expected more than a temporary lull in our tortures. The interiors of the inns are like the exterior of the natives, swarming with this section of animated creation. It is said that once, when these tormentors were filled with a

unanimous desire, an unsuspecting traveller was dragged bodily from his bed! This needs confirmation. One word more, and I have done with this vile subject. We returned from our ablutions, and found the Frenchmen engaged in conversation. "Ah!" said a certain aged individual, "as to fleas, I don't pretend to be different to any one else — *I have them.*" This will give the reader a notion of what he may expect in Dauphiné. I verily believe he spoke the truth.

We got down to La Ville in good time, and luxuriated there for several days; but at last it was necessary to part, and I walked southwards to the Viso, while Macdonald went to Briançon.

It will be seen that the ascent of Mont Pelvoux is of a rather monotonous character. From the point where we crossed the narrow glacier to the time we stepped on the plateau of snow, it was one long stretch of more than six hours' continuous climbing, without any break whatever. We came down very fast, and did not rest for a minute; and yet that piece took us four hours.

To those who ascend mountains for views I confidently recommend the Mont Pelvoux; a glance at the map will show that, with the single exception of the Viso, whose position is unrivalled, it is better situated than any other mountain of considerable height for viewing the whole chain of the Alps. Our view included the whole, and extended from the Graians to the Tyrol.

But there is, apart from this, a hearty satisfaction to be felt in making an ascent, which is payment enough in itself. "What is the use of going up mountains?" is a question which is often put. To such I would say: go up a good-sized mountain, and you will know; and perchance it may be, that it will cause you, as it does me now, to look back with pleasure on the past, and forward with hope to the future.