

CHAPTER XI.

THE GRAIAN ALPS.

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1. THE HUNTING-GROUNDS OF VICTOR EMMANUEL.

BY F. F. TUCKETT, F.R.G.S.

IT had been wild weather amongst the mountains around Zermatt, snow lay far down amid the pines clothing the lower slopes of the Riffel, and M. Bétemps of the *Bureau Topographique* and I, the sole occupants of the Hotel du Mont Cervin, were glad to draw our chairs to the fire as we chatted after our Sunday's dinner. "*Monsieur, il faut attendre jusqu'à ce que la neige ait eu le temps de s'endurcir,*" was Victor's invariable answer to all suggestions of mountaineering, and a recent experience on Monte Rosa of seven hours' uphill wallowing in snow, as incoherent as flour, only too completely justified the dictum. Inaction became, however, oppressive, and the morning of the 27th June, 1859, proving unexpectedly fine, a move over the St. Théodule to Aosta, including an attack *en passant* on the Breithorn, was at once decided on.

The little hut on the col was half full of snow and ice, and of course as yet unoccupied; but the air was still and the weather beautiful, and the joint efforts of Victor, Peter Taugwalder, and myself, soon sufficed to put it in tenantable repair. The hours flew rapidly by, and of all my Alpine recollections few are pleasanter than that of the day of quiet enjoyment spent in this lofty eyrie.

We were astir soon after one the next morning,

quitted the hut at 2 A.M., and at 4.45 stood on the summit of the Breithorn.

Victor had previously ascended this mountain with Mr. E. Bradshaw Smith; but I believe that none of the Zermatt guides had done so previous to my expedition. The credit of having effected the *first* ascent on record is, however, due to our distinguished countryman, Sir John Herschel, who has informed me that he gained the summit by way of the St. Théodule in 1821. De Saussure only reached the lower and nearer summit of the Petit Mont Cervin, which he calls the "*Cime brune du Breithorn*." A gorgeous sunrise was flooding the sea of peaks around with purple light, and throwing the mountain's huge shadow right across the Val d'Aoste, and away past the Rutor to the Little St. Bernard. The colouring was indeed too gorgeous to bode well for the prospects of the day, and after a stay of half an hour we descended to the hut, bade Peter good-bye, and proceeded southwards towards Breuil. A white, angry-looking mist was already driving up the valley, and the wind in fitful gusts moaned dismally as we reached the shelter of the little inn. We had not long been housed, when drenching rain, and the growls of the thunder amongst the cliffs of the Matterhorn, made me congratulate myself that so comfortable a homestead had replaced the wretched huts which were the only refuge on my first visit in 1855, and the miseries of which have been so vividly described by Brockedon.

The morning of the 29th was hopelessly wet, the weather was evidently quite "*gâté*," and waiting would be useless; so, bidding adieu to two unlucky countrymen, who had arrived late the previous night and were bent on reaching Zermatt, we faced the storm and started for Aosta, arriving towards afternoon in a very drenched condition.

Thursday, the 30th, was devoted to pleasant calls on the chanoine Carrel and other friends.

I had long wished to make the acquaintance of this gentleman, distinguished alike for his scientific attainments, his courtesy to all who seek his society or advice, and the fine enthusiasm for his beloved Alps, which renders him so congenial a companion to younger mountaineers. This is not the place to dilate upon individual character, but I cannot forbear expressing my grateful sense of the many kindnesses received both then and since at his hands.

To know M. Carrel, and not to ascend the Becca di Nona, his own particular pet, would be a contradiction in terms too absurd to be thought of; and carried away by his ardour, as well as by the intrinsic fascination of a climb, I at once decided to modify my proposed route, ascend the Becca on the morrow, and, retracing my steps as far as the Alp of Combôè, proceed thence over the Col d'Arbole to Cogne. On mentioning my intentions to Jean Tairraz, the landlord, he gladly consented to accompany Victor and me for a week's ramble amongst the eastern Graians, as the season had scarcely commenced, and his presence as *maître d'hôtel* was not required.

The Graian Alps are confined within the following limits:—On the north and east their boundary is defined by the entire course of the Val d'Aoste, from the Col de la Seigne at its head to Ivrea, where the mountains gradually subside into the great plain of the Po. A slightly undulating line drawn nearly due west from Ivrea to Cuorgne, twenty miles north of Turin, thence up the Val di Locana to Ceresole, at the northern foot of the Levanna, across the ridge to the south of the Col de Galèse, and so down the valley of the Arc as far as St. Jean de Maurienne, would mark out the

southern boundary. And lastly, the course of the Arc to its junction with the Isère, and that of the latter river from this point to its northern source, at the foot of the Col de la Seigne, indicate pretty accurately its western limits. The *massif* of mountains, whose position I have thus endeavoured to define, falls naturally into three subordinate groups.

1. The Central Graians, between the upper Val d'Aoste and the Val de Tignes, extending from the Col de la Seigne to the Col de Galèse, or north-west foot of the Levanna; thus forming a portion of the main chain of Alps which divides France from Italy.

2. The Tarentaise or Western Graians, between the Isère, the Arc, and the Val de Tignes, which are entirely French.

3. The Aostan or Eastern Graians, or Montagnes de Cogne, between Val d'Aoste and Val d'Orca or di Locana, and eastward of the Val Savaranche, which are entirely Italian.

The third and most easterly subdivision groups itself round a central mass, of which the Grand Paradis (13,300 feet) and the Grivola (13,005 feet) are the culminating points, and is intersected by valleys running generally in a northerly and southerly direction. Beginning from the west, we have first the Val Savaranche, connected at its head by the pass of the Nivolet with the Val di Locana, and bounded on the east by the lofty summits of the Grivola, Becca di Montandeni, and Grand Paradis. Next comes the Val de Cogne, debouching like the Vals de Rhêmes and Savaranche at Villeneuve, running at first south towards the Grivola, then sweeping round to the east of that mountain, and south of Mont Emilius and the Becca di Nona, and connected at its head with the lower part of the Aosta Valley by the Col de la

Fenêtre de Cogne, and Val de Champorcher, and southwards with that of Locana by two or three passes and the Val Soana. My explorations in 1859 were confined to the Becca di Nona, the Col d'Arbole, the Val de Cogne, Col de l'Arietta, Val Soana, Val Locana or d'Orca, Col de la Croix de Nivolet, the Val Savaranche, the Grivola, and the col of the same name.

The *droits de chasse* of the entire district have been acquired by the king either by purchase or parliamentary grant. In each valley, posts are set up with the inscription, "*défense de chasse*," and two *gardes-chasse*, or keepers, are stationed at each of the *chefs-lieux* of Cogne, Campiglia, Ceresole, and Valsavaranche, under the command of a corporal at the first-named place, in order to enforce strict preservation of the game. The special interest attaching to this region, in the eyes of a sportsman and naturalist, is that the noble Steinbock or Bouquetin (*Capra Ibex*), which has been gradually extirpated in almost every other of its European habitats, is still to be met with here. During the week spent in beating up their haunts it was not my good fortune to see one, but in the summer of 1861, in the course of an ascent of the Grand Paradis, I was more successful, as we came suddenly upon one which had ventured down upon the moraine of the Glacier de Montcorvé, and did not perceive us till we were within twenty or thirty feet of him.

At the time of my visit, the only information accessible to me on the subject of what was commonly called "the Cogne country" was contained in the works of Mr. King and Mrs. Cole, the notes of M. Carrel to his "*Alpes Pennines vus dans un jour*," Murray's Handbook for Switzerland and Savoy, and a casual notice in Professor Forbes' "Travels in the Alps." More recently another lady writer, Mrs. Freshfield, has touched on the district in question in

"Alpine Byways," one of the pleasantest records of Alpine travel that has yet appeared, whilst an interesting paper on its western portion was contributed by Mr. Cowell to the first series of "Vacation Tourists," and each year is adding to the number of explorers in search of unhackneyed routes and fresh sensations.

I was up at 2 A.M. on Friday, the 1st of July, and after despatching as hearty a breakfast as was compatible with a somewhat recent supper, started at 3.30 for the Becca di Nona. The morning was cool and cloudless, a star or two twinkled in the sky, but dawn was advancing with rapid strides, and already the snowy mass of the Ruitor at the head of the valley had caught the pale yellow light, and stood out in high relief against the dull grey background of sky. As the blush spread to lower summits, and gradually kindled the valley into life, the song of nightingales burst forth in responsive harmony, and the verdure of the dew-bespangled meadows and vineyards completed a picture of peaceful beauty, such as Milton might have conceived when he sang—

"Sweet is the breath of Morn ; her rising sweet,
With charm of earliest birds ; pleasant the sun,
When first on this delightful land he spreads
His orient beams on herb, tree, fruit, and flower,
Glistening with dew ; fragrant the fertile earth
After soft showers."

Casting many a backward glance at the sleeping city, Victor, Jean, and I wound leisurely up the path to the village of Charvensod. Passing this, we left to our right the usual mule-track which leads to Combôe *viâ* the Hermitage of St. Grat, Chamolé, and the Col de Fenêtre, and made straight for Les Pouces at the north-east foot of the Signal Sismonda. At every step the view behind grew more lovely and extensive, the mountain summits glittered

in the morning light, and soon after 5, just as Monte Rosa peered above the nearer ranges of the Vals d'Ayas and de Lys, we emerged into brilliant sunshine. The temptation to make frequent halts, in order more thoroughly to drink in all the beauties of the scene, was irresistible, however much to be combated.

Our path now turned eastwards round a spur of the Signal, which here cuts off the view of the upper portion of the Val d'Aoste and of the city itself, but in exchange a scene of surpassing loveliness now opens out in the opposite direction. At the head of a valley, along whose western side the track passes, the beautiful cascade of the Dard leaps into a little amphitheatre of green, in exquisite contrast with the frowning crags of the Becca di Nona, which rises in rugged grandeur on the opposite side, whilst, turning to the north-east, the picture is completed by the noble form of the Matterhorn. Following a water-course, fed by the stream of the Dard, we crossed to the right bank, and striking up through little islets of verdure and beds of rhododendrons, reached the cascade at 6.55 A.M., from which spot the Grand Combin, or Graffeneire, is a conspicuous object. A zigzag path leads up the slopes to the east of the fall, and so past the Châlet de Pontaille, and over a grassy ridge or col to the Alp of Combôé. This group of châteaux, charmingly situated in an upland valley, belongs to the Chapter of Aosta; and, not content with constructing a path from them to the summit of the Becca, M. Carrel has recently erected a little mountain inn, where provisions will be kept during the summer, and three or four beds may be obtained by those who wish to gain the summit of the mountain at an early hour.

A description of the ascent of the Becca di Nona would be superfluous after the detailed account in M. Carrel's '*Alpes Pennines*,' and the pleasant pages which the

authoress of "Alpine Byways" devotes to this excursion. At every turn of the path fresh points of interest are disclosed. First Mont Blanc and his aiguilles rise majestically above the ridge to the south of the Signal Sismonda; farther to the left the Grivola, Grand Paradis, and Mont Emilius, rear their heads in succession above the nearer range; and finally, on gaining the summit, the entire chain of the Pennine Alps is disclosed to view. The one great drawback to this panorama is the break to the east and south, caused by the mass of Mont Emilius and the series of summits between it and the Grand Paradis, which effectually cut off all view of the lowlands. The union of mountain and plain, each giving the added charm of contrast to the other, is thus lost, and the scene assumes a character of sternness, which is only partially dispelled by the peep into the smiling Val d'Aoste, nearly 9000 feet below, or the nearer verdure of Combôé.

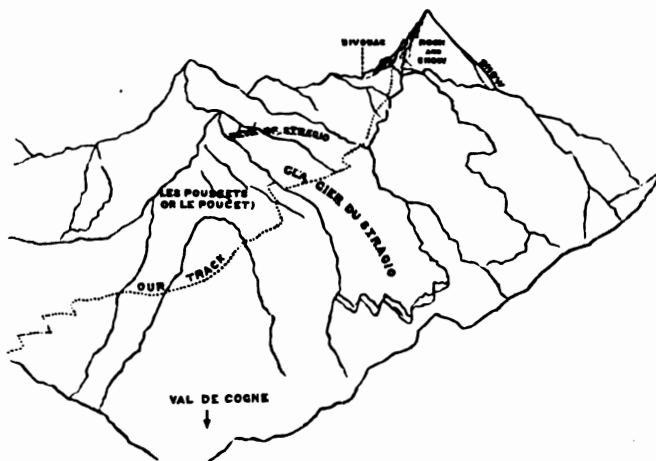
Our halts had been so numerous, that it was 11 A.M. before we reached the summit. Two hours were spent here in the greatest enjoyment; but at length, having secured a barometric observation, which gives a height of 10,403 feet (10,384 according to Carrel), we began to think of resuming our progress. Before, however, quitting the subject of the Becca, I may just mention that an Alpine Club minimum thermometer, No. 306, was placed in the cairn on the summit by Mr. Malkin in July 1860, and carefully examined on the 27th June, 1861, by M. Carrel. He informs me that it registered a minimum temperature of -27° Centigrade (or -16.6° Fahr.), a result of some interest, as at the time this was probably the first record of the lowest winter temperature of so elevated an European station.

Our object being to reach Cogné, instead of returning to Combôé, we merely descended as far as the point named the

Gros Cez, and then quitting the path, struck off to the left, for the ridge which shuts in the Combôé Alp on the south-east, and forms the north-west limit of the higher pastures of Arbole. These were reached at 2.30 P.M., after a roughish scramble; and a question now arose as to the direction to be followed. We had no map with us, and this was a *terra incognita* to my companions as well as myself. We were still far from our destination, the afternoon was going apace, and it was not desirable to follow a wrong lead. The valley sweeps round to the left, running up in an easterly direction towards Mont Emilius; and the point to be decided was, whether we should follow it to its head, and then strike across the ridge to the south, or attempt the passage by a promising-looking gap more directly in front, and nearly due south of our actual position. An inspection of the compass settled the point in favour of the latter course, and the event proved that we were right.

Traversing heaps of rocky débris, and passing two small lakes close together, we found ourselves at 3.45 P.M. at the base of the snow-slopes leading to the supposed col. Whilst ascending these, we were much interested and amused by the gambols of three chamois,—one of them a noble *bouc*,—who perched themselves on a precipitous and splintered crag to the west of the gap, and performed a series of acrobatic tricks of the most surprising nature, till, frightened at our approach, they disappeared behind the ridge. At 4.25 P.M. the summit of the Col d'Arbole was reached, and a view of unexpected sublimity burst upon us. Immediately beneath, slopes of débris led down to an upland pasture, and beyond lay the great chasm of the Cogne valley, backed by the noble forms of the Grivola and Grand Paradis. After securing a hasty sketch, and a barometer observation, which gives a height of 9160 feet (Favre makes it 9341), we pushed on down the “*clappey*”

as rapidly as its extreme ruggedness would permit, and traversing a beautiful alp, reached the Croix d'Arpisson and the adjoining châteaux. Their situation is exquisite. Standing on the brow of an extremely precipitous descent, the little village of Epinel, in the Val de Cogne, is seen at a vast depth, surrounded by rich meadows and much ploughed land; whilst immediately in front the mass of the Grivola towers up majestically, presenting an appearance which in beauty and grandeur reminded me strongly of the Jungfrau as seen from Mürren, and com-



THE GRIVOLA FROM COL D'ARBOLLE.

paring by no means disadvantageously with the Queen of the Oberland. A little further on we came to the pine-woods, and zigzagging down by a steep but well-made path, disclosing at every turn lovely peeps through the vistas of larches, the sound of cow-bells suddenly fell upon our ear. Jean, with a mischievous look, now suggested, that as travellers were almost unknown in these parts, we might, especially by putting on our linen masks, create quite a sensation. Victor, more cautious, hinted that the natives might be frightened into fits; but Jean was determined to

have his joke, so the hideous disguise was donned, and we soon found ourselves confronting an aged crone and her three equally lovely granddaughters, whose wooden expressions were only redeemed from utter commonplace by a superabundance of the most ferocious hair. Alas! for Jean. They were sublimely phlegmatic; not a muscle of their faces moved; they were not even inquisitive, much less terrified; and when Jean demanded milk in a husky voice, and requested to be informed whether we could sleep on the summit of the Grivola, winding up with a handsome bid for the ugliest daughter, with no more exciting result, the laugh was so clearly against us that the masks were at once laid aside. One of the sisterhood pointed out a path leading to the level of the valley, at a point considerably higher than Epinel, which would enable us to avoid a steep descent as well as save time,—a matter of some importance, as it was already 7 o'clock. A pleasant walk of three-quarters of an hour brought us to the village of Crétaz, and at 8 we reached Cogne.

I had been prepared to expect a savage and narrow valley, and its beauty, extent, and richness quite took me by surprise. Fine broad meadows surround the village, and though the Grivola itself is invisible, the Glaciers of Grancron and Monei, and the chain of the Grand Paradis and Tour de St. Pierre, to the south, form a most noble background; whilst, in the opposite direction, Mont Blanc is visible above the gorge, into which the valley narrows lower down.

I found M. le Curé just outside the little inn or cabaret, and whilst Victor and Jean attended to the commissariat, I discussed with him my proposed attack on the Grivola. Though the weather had now become thoroughly fine, the storms of the previous week had clothed the loftier

peaks with a deep coating of fresh snow, and after some discussion I came to the conclusion that it would be better to devote the next few days to a general exploration of the district, and afterwards attempt the Grivola, rather than proceed at once to the assault, which might be defeated by the danger of dislodging avalanches.

After a supper very decently served, I asked, not without fear and trembling, to see my room, and was conducted out of doors and to the first floor of the singular building, whose upper story was occupied by Dr. Argentier. Though the "*appartement*" could hardly be said to be "*garni*," there was really nothing to complain of but a deficiency of washing appliances.

This curious old tower bears on its front the date 1374. Its construction is usually attributed to certain mediæval worthies, who were known as the Seigneurs de Cogne, and appear to have been stirring people in their day, to judge from a ballad of the Eringerthal, composed in 1475, after the defeat of the Duke of Savoy.*

How they were connected with Chillon is unknown to me, and I gladly leave the question in the hands of the

* Quoted by Fröbel in his "*Reise in die weniger bekannten Thäler auf der Nordseite der Penninischen Alpen*" (Berlin, 1840). It is in the peculiar *patois* of the valley, and I append a translation of the verse referred to:—

' Juantin Peter de Rarogne
Ire évêche dedans Chion,
Les verts comtes de Cogne
Vignéent dou Zathé de Zillon,
Po ché faire la guerra
Su le évoé et suc terra."

" John Peter of Rarogne
Bishop was at Sion,
When there came green counts of Cogne
From the castle Chillon,
Bringing war and slaughter
On the land and on the water."

antiquaries ; — content to know that they were at any rate excellent architects, whose handywork has stood the test of five centuries, and still affords substantial shelter.

The mean of two barometric observations gives, by comparison with Aosta, a height of 4998 English feet for the *salle* of the inn at Cogne.

Rising at 5 on the morning of the 2nd, I was delighted to find the weather everything that could be desired. I had determined to cross the Col de l'Arietta to Ponte in the Val di Locana or d'Orca, and as the distance was considerable, had hoped to effect an early start. Jean was already acquainted with the pass, having traversed it many years previously during an expedition in these parts, for the purpose of obtaining live bouquets for the late Earl Derby; and his description of its beauty not a little influenced my decision. He succeeded in procuring nearly a dozen young ones, and transported them in safety to Chamounix, where, however, they all sickened and died before he could make arrangements for their transmission to England. The preparation of provisions, a call on Dr. Argentier, and other preliminaries, occupied so much time that it was 8 A.M. before we were off. The Doctor most kindly insisted on accompanying me as far as the head of the valley, and as we quitted the village the Curé also joined us. At Lillu, or Lilaz, where there is a magnificent view of Mont Blanc, I bade them good bye, and turning to the left, pushed on up the eastern arm of the valley.

It is not my intention to dwell minutely on the features of this day's work, as a condensed, yet complete and truthful, description of the route will be found in Murray's Handbook; and so I will merely say that our course as far as the châteaux of Chavannes lay in the direction of the Fenêtre de Cogne, which leads to Champorcher, and

thence to the lower part of the Val d'Aoste at Fort Bard. We reached these *châlets* about 11 A.M., having walked at a very leisurely pace; and finding that the "Brousse" had just been prepared, we ensconced ourselves in the shade, each with his brimming bowl, and feasted on its contents and the beauty of the view, to which the bold peak of the Grivola gave the principal charm. In this state of lazy enjoyment we contrived to consume an hour, on the principle that, having made a bad start to begin with, it was useless to be in a hurry, and moderate recklessness of consequences was therefore justifiable. A little beyond the *châlets* we quitted the path to Champorcher, and striking off to the right, climbed for some distance up a ridge of rock, and then took to a rather steeply inclined and snow-clad glacier descending from the Col de l'Arietta, or della Nuova, as it is sometimes called. There was no sort of difficulty, and at 2 P.M. we stood upon the ridge. During the ascent, as well as from the col itself, Mont Blanc was a grandly conspicuous object, whilst, on gaining the summit, the view to the south was one of extreme beauty and interest. The Val Soana lay spread out like a map at a vast depth beneath, its bounding mountains basking in the soft blue tones of an Italian atmosphere, whilst beyond, the plain of the Po was distinctly visible through the golden haze. It was difficult at first to identify Turin itself, but I soon caught the dome of the church on the Superga, distant forty miles, and, with it for a guide, other familiar objects gradually developed themselves. It is worth while to mount, as I did, a summit to the west of the pass, which, being some hundred feet higher, increases the range of vision, bringing into view portions of the Monte Rosa group, the Grand Combin, Mont Emilius, the Grivola, and the Grand Paradis.

Before quitting the col I set up my barometer and secured an observation, the resultant height of which is 9,435 feet, or 221 feet lower than that stated in Durheim's "Hypsometrie," on the authority of Favre.

It was hard work to quit our station; but we had already spent an hour and a half on the summit, and our hopes of reaching Ponte that night were becoming fainter and fainter. The descent was commenced about 3.30 P.M., and keeping away constantly to the left, or south-east (a clue which it will be well for future comers to bear in mind), we reached the level of the Val Soana at 5.15 P.M. The scenery was exquisitely beautiful, and at the same time full of grandeur. Behind us rose the ridge we had been traversing, which, seen from below, presented a very forbidding and Gemmi-like appearance; and to the west, above a fine amphitheatre or *cul de sac* in which the valley terminates, the noble peaks of the Punta di Lavina towered up from a base of snow and glacier. Coming upon some châteaux, we halted to procure milk, and then pushed rapidly down the valley towards Campiglia, from which this branch of the Val Soana is named. Happening to look round we noticed a *garde-chasse*, armed with a rifle slung over his shoulder, coming along at a great rate, and evidently in pursuit of the three suspicious-looking strangers. Slackening our pace, we allowed him to overtake us, and I was greatly amused at the furtive glances he cast at my innocent barometer, which he had evidently taken for a gun of some new construction. Without saying anything, I soon took an opportunity of removing the leather case and setting up the instrument; the doubt in his mind thus removed, he became very communicative, and volunteered to accompany us as far as Campiglia, his head-quarters. We arrived at this wretched-looking but picturesquely situated spot a little before 7 P.M., the

valley in deep shade, and darkness coming on apace. To make matters worse, the path was one of those excruciating *pavés* in which the natives of the Italian valleys seem to take such delight, but which are instruments of torture to the pedestrian, especially when, with snow-soaked boots, he has to stumble down them after nightfall.

Quitting Campiglia at 7.15 P.M., we passed the entrance to a valley coming in from the north-east, from the head of which three passes lead to Champorcher, traversed the little village of Valprato, and at 8.15 P.M. reached Ronco. By this time it was quite dark at the bottom of the narrow valley; and as Ponte was still three hours' distance, we decided to remain where we were for the night, although an inspection of the inn was terribly confirmatory of the statement in Murray, that "hunger and fatigue alone can make it endurable." Patience and contentment will, however, accomplish even greater wonders; and whilst nothing can honestly be said in praise of either board or lodging, I had no great cause to complain, though an entomological night on crackling maize-stalks in an old lumber-room made me nothing loth to turn out between 3 and 4 the next morning.

After a light breakfast, we started at 4.30 A.M. for Ponte. The air at this early hour was deliciously fresh and invigorating; for a long time the mountains to the east screened us from the sun, and even when it rose above them, the luxuriant chestnut woods through which our path lay, prevented our being unpleasantly affected by the heat. Fresh beauties were disclosed at every turn, and I recollect few walks of equal length combining more varied charms.

Soon after quitting Ronco, the hamlet of Boschi is seen at the entrance of the Val di Forzo, which runs up in a north-west direction, parallel to the Val di Campiglia, and communicates at its head with the Cogne valley, between

Lillu and Chavannes, by the pass of the Col de Bardonney between the Tour du Grand St. Pierre, and the Punta Lavina. This would probably furnish a more direct means of communication between Cogné and Ponte than the Col de l'Arietta. It is one of many passes traversing the ridge north of the Val d'Orca, all of which are probably easy, but as yet almost unknown to our mountaineers. The following are the names of some of them, beginning at the east foot of the Tour du Grand St. Pierre:—Col de Bardonney, Bocchetta di Rancio, Bocchetta della Scaletta, Col de l'Arietta, Boccie della Balma, Col di Larizza, and Col de S. Anna, Champorcher, or Reale.

Ingria is the next village of any size, and here the Val Soana assumes a ravine-like character, which it retains to its termination. Nothing can be more picturesque than the approach to Ponte, which is seen some time before the Val d'Orca is reached, the path descending to the bottom of the valley, and passing through a gorge of singular wildness and beauty, along which the bright and sparkling stream foams and dashes in joyous haste. A little further on the extensive cotton-mill established by the Baron du Port was passed, and we entered the town itself. As we traversed the narrow streets, thronged with crowds of workpeople, citizens, and peasantry, in Sunday costume, we attracted no little attention, and evidently puzzled a group of *gens-d'armes*, who could make nothing of our mountaineering equipment, axes, batons, and barometer.

Not having Murray with me, I enquired the name of the best inn, and was at once conducted to the Valentino, a house of very respectable appearance, which by no means belied its promising exterior. It was only a little after seven, but the weather had now become extremely warm, and even at this early hour the heat was oppressive.

Pushing aside a gay-coloured curtain which did duty for a door, we entered a cool and darkened room or *salle*, from which another door led into a back-court or garden, furnished with a gigantic arbour of trellis-work. After our experience at Ronco, and even Cogne, the change was an agreeable one, and we congratulated ourselves on having met with such excellent quarters for our Sunday's rest.

A nicely prepared *déjeuner à la fourchette* was soon served, and we feasted on fresh trout, cotelettes, fruit, and excellent bread.

As I expected, it was not long before we received a visit from two of the *gens-d'armes*. The rarity of a traveller, and the fact that everyone had been recently on the *qui vive* in consequence of the neighbourhood of the Austrian army of invasion, were quite sufficient to render the appearance of three strangers a suspicious circumstance, in the eyes of at least the minor authorities. A little explanation, however, a few compliments, and a judiciously administered glass of wine, satisfied our visitors that we were neither the Emperor of Austria nor any of his myrmidons, and they politely withdrew.

Taking up one of those wretched little paper plaisters that furnish, or used to furnish, Italians with their political *pabulum*, my eye caught the details of a bulletin announcing the victory of Solferino on the 25th of June, just one week previously; but, so far as I could judge, the intelligence seemed to excite but little interest, the predominant feeling being that, though it might be all very well to beat the Austrians, there would be a heavy reckoning to pay, both in blood and money. Besides, the mere fact of a victory affected the rural population less tangibly than the absence of their able-bodied men, just as the hay wanted getting in on the upland slopes, and summer, with its varied occupations, was come.

We spent the hottest hours of the day under the pleasant shade of the spacious arbour, but quiet was out of the question, as after 10 A.M. people kept streaming in and seating themselves at tables, with their *cruches* of wine, laughed, gesticulated, and vociferated as only Italians can.

I had noticed that I was the special subject of observation to a group in a neighbouring corner, and presently an old man came forward, and asked me very politely if it were true that I was an Englishman. On receiving an affirmative answer, he expressed much pleasure, and begged to be allowed to fetch his son, who had travelled with a "Signor Inglese" in these parts, and knew "*tutt' il paese com' un libro*." I of course assented, as I was in want of information, and he soon returned with his son, a *chasseur par passion*, and named Matteo Trucano. To my surprise I learned that he had accompanied Mr. Brockedon, of whom he spoke in the warmest terms. Of course, like every foreigner who has had the honour of meeting "*le célèbre M. Jones, Sir Smith, or Brown Squire de Londres*," he imagined that I must be intimate with his former employer, and I fear I fell greatly in his estimation, when forced to confess that, though Mr. Brockedon's name was well-known to me, and a large number of my countrymen, through his pen and pencil, I had never had the pleasure of his personal acquaintance. He was, however, extremely civil; and proved a pleasant companion, giving me much valuable information.

Finding, as usual, that inaction made us only more sensible of the heat, and wishing to see something of the neighbourhood, we ventured forth into the blaze between 3 and 4 P.M., and strolled towards the meadows on the river bank, for the sake of the current of cooler air borne along by the water. Even here the sun beat down upon us unmercifully, and whenever we were tempted to stretch

ourselves on the grass beneath the trees, a fearful plague of flies drove us from our resting-place, and compelled us to seek peace in constant movement. Sauntering up the valley we next mounted a precipitous knoll, commanding a beautiful view, including the tower of an old ruined castle on a twin eminence. The cotton-mill or "*Fabbrica*" is nearer to the entrance of the Val Soana, and gives employment to a large number of hands. A good road, traversed by a diligence in six hours, connects Ponte with Turin viâ Cuorgne.

We found our appetites seriously *démoralisés* by the heat and repose; but, nevertheless, a light Italian dinner, nicely prepared by our active hostess, was not unacceptable about 7 P.M. The evening was lovely, and I sat about in the garden as the gloom deepened, listening to the subdued roar of the torrent and watching the fire-flies as they flashed amongst the vines. If early rising has its advantages and charms, it has also its duties; first amongst which is an early retirement to rest, and though I longed to linger, I betook myself between 9 and 10 to my clean-looking, pleasant chamber, opening into a balcony above the main street, after ordering breakfast to be ready a little before 4 A.M.

I was astir soon after 3 A.M., but on coming down found no one about but Victor and Jean. Our host and his wife were still fast asleep, and it was consequently nearly 5 before we succeeded in procuring anything to eat. The delay was annoying, as we had a hot and shadeless walk before us up the valley to Ceresole, and though the distance was comparatively trifling (six to seven hours), we had hoped, by accomplishing the first part of it before the sun gained much power, to be able to rest during the hottest hours of the day, and proceed leisurely in the cool of the evening. A difficulty in obtaining the bill, followed by a

dispute over some of its items, still further detained us, and it was not till 5.30 A.M. that we effected a start.

Already the power of the sun's rays was making itself felt, and our progress along the broad and well-made, but shadeless and dusty road, was somewhat toilsome. Even as early as 4 A.M. the temperature in the shade had been 73°, and at noon it rose to 93°. Comforting ourselves with the reflection that this state of things would tell with tremendous effect upon the recently fallen snow, and thus clear the way for our meditated assault upon the Grivola, we kept steadily on, and in two hours reached the little town of Locana.

Above this place the valley gradually becomes wilder, and about midway between it and L'Illa, fine, rugged, and serrated peaks rise in front, and the road traverses enormous and picturesquely grouped masses of rock, covered with a fine growth of chestnuts. Here too "*roches moutonnées*," the handywork of ancient glaciers, abound, extending from the level of the valley to a height of 600 or 800 feet on the mountain sides. Passing L'Illa, a little beyond which the road ceases, we soon reached a solitary house, called Val Pra, and seeing something resembling an inn sign, turned aside to seek shelter from the sun, which was getting almost unbearable.

The place was dirty, and its resources limited; but a civil man bade us welcome, and though at first astonished at our preferring the shade of his orchard to the shelter of his den, seemed disposed to do his best to make us comfortable.

At length the heat moderated, and we proceeded on our way at 5 P.M. Noasca, whose wretchedness has provoked the couplet,

"Noasca, Noasca,
Poco pane, lunga tasca,"

was reached in an hour, and just beyond it we came upon one of the finest cascades I ever saw, succeeded by another scarcely inferior. Here, too, the mountains rise proudly, and the main valley bends round to the south-west, whilst at no great distance from one another three small lateral ones run up northwards, towards the Grand Paradis. From their heads, passes lead, I believe, east of the Paradis into the Cogne valley, by the Glacier de Monei, and south of it into the Valsavaranche, by that of Montcorvé. Both of these must offer fine glacier scenery.

Keeping to the Val Locana, and turning to the left, we threaded our way through a complete chaos of rocky fragments, some of them of enormous dimensions, piled on one another in the wildest confusion. Before us, through a sort of rocky col or gap, some fine snowy summits now came into view, which proved to be a portion of the Levanna. Towards this gap, and by the side of the torrent, the path winds upwards, sometimes passing under natural arches formed by the masses of débris and sometimes cut in the live rock. This spot is called the Scala, or Scalare, di Ceresole, and from its summit, which we reached a little after 7 P.M., a magnificent view is obtained of the broad and smiling valley of Ceresole, backed by noble, but unfamiliar, mountain forms. The sudden transition from the gloomy gorge, and the deafening roar of the torrent, which, at a distance of only a few feet, leaps down in a series of rapids, to the lovely and peaceful scene before us, was very striking. By contrast we appeared to emerge into broad daylight, but, in fact, the sunset glow had already faded from the mountain tops, "the shades of night were falling fast," and a young moon hung over the triple head of the Becca a tre Corni, as the Levanna is here called. The character of rugged wildness which had distinguished the valley since we

quitted L'Illa and Val Pra now gave place to softer features; fine pinewoods clothed the mountain sides, and rich meadows gave to the little plain an air of thrift and civilisation.

A still greater surprise awaited me on our arrival at the little inn, twenty minutes below the village of Ceresole, about 7.40 P.M. If the valley had changed for the better, so had the people; and instead of some wretched place which we had been prepared to meet with, we were most agreeably surprised to find a roomy, clean, and comfortable-looking dwelling, with more of the Swiss than the Italian character about it, and all the appliances of a good mountain inn. We learned that the landlord was a brother of him of the Valentino at Ponte; that the house was frequented by Turinese, who came, sometimes to the number of thirty or forty, to enjoy the pure mountain air and drink the waters of a neighbouring mineral spring, and that when the King came hither for the chase he made it his head-quarters. The landlord informed me that he had just received a letter from the King, requesting him to have everything in readiness for the shooting season, as since the victory of Solferino had been won, he hoped to get some sport in August; and, should endeavour to persuade the Emperor to accompany him and try his hand at a Bouquetin. Some papers just received from Turin served to pass away the time, and at 10 P.M. I retired to my comfortable double-bedded chamber, and, in the King's own bed, slept, not as at the lower level of Val Pra,

“Hushed with buzzing night-flies to my slumber;”

but as the Ré galantuomo himself would probably at the moment have gladly been able to do.

On rousing the next morning the same cloudless weather greeted me, and I resolved to devote the day to the

leisurely enjoyment of this charming spot, and *desipere in loco* to my heart's content. A delicious bathe, and a visit to a mineral spring in the vicinity, served to pass away the morning; and I had much pleasant chat with one of the royal "Gardes-chasse" stationed here. He informed me that he and his comrades received fifty francs per month, besides being found in clothes. The penalty for killing a Bouquetin is 600 francs fine, and nine years at the galleys. To this the keepers themselves are liable; but as their office is much coveted for its high pay, and they might be subjected to false accusations with a view to obtaining their situations, it is provided that whilst the testimony of one of them shall be sufficient to criminate others, that of two peasants shall be required to inculcate them. In August, 1861, there appeared in the "Times" a ridiculously exaggerated account of the extraordinary feats of speed and endurance performed by the King during his shooting expeditions; but, after careful enquiries on the spot, I am convinced that, though his majesty is undoubtedly a keen sportsman, and possibly not a bad shot, he would be the first to smile at such absurdities as the following. "The horn is wound, the hunt is up, and away he rides as fast as the nimblest mountain nag can carry him, and then takes to his legs, and *the race is between him and the swiftest quadrupeds*, over crags and along gullies *common men shudder only to look at!* He came back to Turin a few days ago in great glee, telling his friends that he had given chase to a Bouquetin for two whole days, had parted company with his aides-de-camp, his guides, his huntsmen, every man in his suite; he had followed the coy mountain goat, he had pressed closer and closer, he had driven it higher and higher up; *he had knocked it up (!)—blown all the wind out of its panting body (!)—*and had at last brought it back triumphant, the

prize of that untamed strength which has no match in these regions." (!!!) At any rate, in the course of all his *chasses* in this particular district, four Bouquetins only had fallen to his rifle. When shooting, he is, of course, accompanied by a number of chasseurs, who beat the mountains for game. The "Garde-chasse" informed me that the hours at which Bouquetins are most frequently to be seen are before six in the morning and after 4 P.M., as during the heat of the day they retire to the shade of the rocks.

For the information of future travellers, I will here mention that several passes besides the two alluded to, when speaking of Noasca, connect the upper part of the Val di Locana or d' Orca with the neighbouring valleys. To the north, the Col de la Croix de Nivolet, which I proposed to cross on the 6th, leads into the Valsavaranche. In a westerly direction the Col de Galèse and Passo della Vacca communicate with the upper portion of the Val de Tignes, whilst southwards, to the west of the Levanna, the Col del Carro, said to be 10,000 feet in height, connects Ceresole with Bonneval, in the valley of the Arc, and at its eastern foot the Col del Piccola gives ready access to the Val Forno.

Enquiring as to the accessibility of the Levanna from this side, I was referred for information to a man standing close by, one Joseph Aubert by name, but also passing under the soubriquet of "Manchot." He was said to be the best guide in the district, and I suspect he may be the individual referred to in Murray, under the name of Giuseppe Bruscha, surnamed "Muot." Be this as it may, he declared that he had ascended the mountain some years previously with an officer of the *État-Major* Sarde, or some similar official, and though the direction he pointed out did not appear promising, the idea was so

tempting that I returned to the inn almost resolved to devote the morrow to this expedition. While dinner was preparing, however, I had some further talk with the "Garde-chasse" and one or two men who were lounging about the door, and learned from them that my new acquaintance had never been to the summit of the Levanna at all, but merely happened to be traversing a snow-field about 800 feet below it when the Piedmontese gentleman and another chasseur effected the ascent. Sending for the "real Simon Pure," whose name I found was Giacomo Giannino, he informed me that he had indeed ascended the mountain fifteen or sixteen years before; but as, on being cross-examined, and put to the test, he appeared quite unable to point out the route, and, after a careful examination through the telescope the chances of success in this direction appeared to be very doubtful, I decided on giving up the attempt.

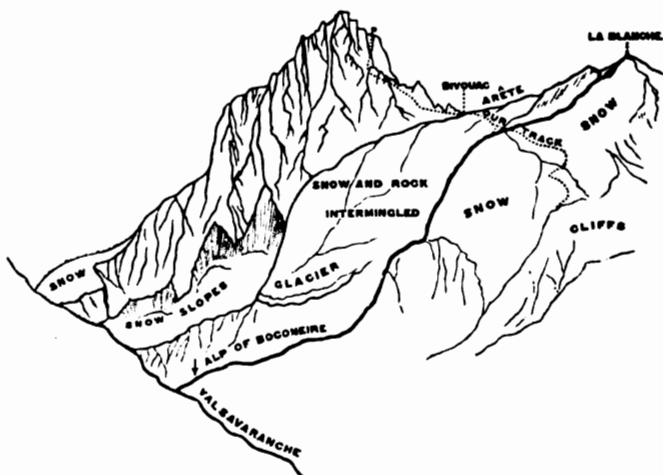
We quitted the inn soon after 2 A.M., on Wednesday the 6th, with a native of Ceresole, one Giacomo Riva, who was about to visit Aosta on business. Hearing of our intention to cross the Nivolet, he volunteered his company, which was at once accepted, as he knew the track well, and, though no difficulties were likely to be encountered, time might be saved by local knowledge. It was still dark as we walked up the valley, and a warm wind blowing up it made us fear a change of weather. After passing Villa, where the syndic Pietro Quindo will, according to our companion, receive travellers and supply wine, it had become quite light, but the portion of the valley we were now traversing is less interesting than the immediate neighbourhood of Ceresole, and there was little inducement to linger. Between four and five the last village, a miserable place, was passed, the Col de Galèse appeared in front, and we descried the lateral valley on our right, up

which lay our course to the Col de la Croix de Nivolet. It seemed to us that it would be perfectly easy to ascend the ormer pass, and then gain the Nivolet without redescending materially, by following the slopes of the mountain (the Punta di Galisia) which divides them, and that the detour would not occasion a delay of more than two, or possibly three hours. As, however, we were ignorant of the country, we did not like to risk this additional expenditure of time, and therefore kept to our original track.

At 6.30 A.M. we reached a little green plateau, not very far from the summit of the pass, and opposite the grand precipices of the mountain which appears to correspond with the Punta di Galisia of the Sardinian map. In the direction of the Col de Galèse, and at a considerable depth below us, the châteaux of Serue and two wild tarns were seen. The chasseurs had informed us that the great cliffs to the west were a favourite resort of Bouquetins, and we long and anxiously scanned them through my telescope, in the hope of discovering a troop. Not one, however, made its appearance, and as a storm seemed to be brewing in the Val d'Orca, and there had been frequent flashes of lightning earlier in the morning, we gave up the search, and at 7 A.M. proceeded on our way.

A singular path up a rocky aiguille, where no one would have expected to find a pass, led to the summit, which we gained at 7.30 A.M. On some neighbouring patches of snow we came upon fresh Bouquetin tracks, but unfortunately the animals themselves had disappeared. The height of the col is 8624 feet, according to a barometric observation, and the view singularly wild. In the direction of the Valsavaranche the sky was cloudless, and a fresh northerly breeze gave hopes of a continuance of the fine weather, which had now become a matter of course rather than of anxious speculation.

Soon after quitting the summit we saw before us two lakes partially covered with snow, from which the col itself was quite free, and almost immediately afterwards the noble form of the Grivola came in sight. Its appearance on this side is quite different from that which it presents as seen from the valleys of Cogne and Aosta, no snow being visible on its black and frowning crags, which towered up in savage grandeur to a lancet-shaped point, of which the accompanying illustration from an outline



THE GRIVOLA FROM BELOW THE COL DE NIVOLET.

made on the spot will convey a tolerably faithful idea. With such a feature the view cannot be called dull; but the immediate scenery was decidedly tame, reminding me of the tedious descent from the Furka to Hospenthal and Andermatt, on the St. Gotthard. Lower down we came upon a marshy plain intersected by a number of winding streams fed by the melting of the snow, and the lakes already alluded to, and which had several times to be

forded. This was succeeded by a ridge of rocks forming a low barrier across the valley, and presenting some of the finest illustrations of former glacier action that I have ever met with. The polished and striated surfaces are most extensive, reaching to a great height on the flanks of the range to the east, whilst the '*blocs perchés*,' surpassed anything I have seen elsewhere. They might have been reckoned by hundreds, and were of all sizes from that of an egg to boulders weighing five tons. Many rested on steep slopes of highly-polished rock, where the slightest impulse would have sufficed to set them in motion, but I need hardly say we were not such Vandals as to put their instability to a test which, to gratify an idle curiosity or to furnish a moment's senseless amusement, would have effaced the interesting and instructive record of past physical changes. To the fact that this district is comparatively little known, their preservation is probably mainly due, and long may they be spared the invasion of the name-cutting, souvenir-collecting tribe.

After traversing for nearly twenty minutes this wonderful scene of ancient glacier exploits, the edge of an abrupt descent was reached, and suddenly a grand view of many peaks streaming with glaciers, and forming the continuation of the chain of the Grivola, was disclosed on our right. Of these the Grand Paradis, nearly opposite the point on which we stood, was the most conspicuous, the graceful forms of the Cima di Charforon, La Cocagna, and the Becca di Merlet, completing the group which formed the east and south boundary of the more easterly of the two arms into which the Valsavaranche divides at Pont.

The charm of surprise, and the exquisite beauty of the scene, were so seductive that I was strongly tempted to change the point of attack, and attempt the Paradis

instead of the Grivola. But my holidays were now drawing to a close, to accomplish both was impossible in the time I had to dispose of, and so, considering that the Grivola had all along been my special object, and was undoubtedly the harder nut of the two to crack, I resolved to abide by my original determination. The reprieve of the beautiful Paradis was, however, but a short one, and if I was guiltless of placing the first desecrating foot on the King of the Graians, I had the satisfaction of knowing that its subjugation was effected by a friend whose narrative of the ascent appears in this volume. In 1861 I had the pleasure of following with Bennen and Perrin in the footsteps of Mr. Cowell and his companions, but will not here allude to the expedition further than to say that I deposited on a rock a little below the summit (and close to the bottle which now contains the names of Messrs. Cowell and Dundas, as well as my own, and those of our respective guides), a minimum thermometer, to which I would direct the attention of future comers. From two boiling point observations made at the same time, the height comes out 13,300 feet, or only 300 feet higher than the Grivola.

A cross stood near us, from which this spot derives its name of the Croix d'Aroletta. Its height, according to a sympiesometer reading taken in 1861, is 7,451 feet. On that occasion I made a curious discovery in the shape of twenty or thirty desiccated frogs' heads arranged in lines like the squares of a chessboard, on a flat stone, by the side of the path, and close to the cross. How, when, why, and whence they came there, remains a mystery which I offer for those interested in such obscure speculations. The little village, or cluster of châteaux, called Pont, is seen at a depth of 1000 feet below, the descent to it being accomplished by a rough but well-engineered

path, which zigzags down the cliff like an expurgated edition of the Gemmi, with the objectionable parts omitted.

It was not yet noon when, after descending the rocks and traversing slopes abounding with more "*roches moutonnées*" and "*blocs perchés*," we reached Pont, situated at a height of about 6400 feet, just where the two branches of the upper part of the Valsavaranche unite. Proceeding about a quarter of an hour further to the alp of Jean Pierre Jocale, a particular friend of J. Tairraz, we found that he was absent, but received a warm welcome from his younger brother, who was in charge of the establishment, which consisted of fifty-three cows, forty-one of them Jocale's own property. Liberal supplies of "*Brousse*" were at once served out, and, stretched upon the grass before the chalet, we spent nearly three hours in pleasant chat and idleness. On the occasion of my second visit to this valley in 1861, I passed the night here, previous to the ascent of the Grand Paradis, which rises behind and to the east of it, and was then also entertained with an amount of hearty, disinterested kindness, of which I cannot speak too gratefully. The height, as deduced from the mean of two sympiesometer observations, comes out at 6131 feet.

At 2.45 P.M. we wished our kind entertainer good-bye, and started once more for Bien, Jocale's head-quarters, a little above Valsavaranche, the *chef-lieu*. Traversing one or two reaches of the valley, we arrived, after a walk of three quarters of an hour, at a spot where the richly pine-clad sides close in, leaving just room for the river and the path. Crossing to the east bank by a wooden bridge, we descended the wild but beautiful gorge, the gap in front being filled by the mountains on the further side of the Val d'Aosta, whilst to the right, the Grivola, and to the left,

a fantastically rugged chain of aiguilles, pierced the deep blue sky. Rich forests clothed the western slopes, and the valley before us lay basking in the warm sunlight, whilst our route was still in delightful shade.

At 4.15 p.m. Jean Pierre's house at Bien was reached, and though he was absent repairing a bridge further down the valley, Jean Tairraz's well-known face was a ready passport to his mother and sister, who made us welcome, and pressed us to take refreshments. Whilst waiting Jocale's arrival, I sent for the two Gardes-chasse, Fidèle Ambroise Dayné and Jean Michel Chabot, in order to talk over with them the question of the Grivola. They were absent at the time, but we were assured that directly they returned they should be sent to us; and so there was nothing to be done but to make ourselves as comfortable, and enjoy ourselves as thoroughly, as we could. This was no difficult task. I had some old newspapers to read up, and the hours flew rapidly and joyously by, till an exquisite sunset, tinging the light fleecy clouds which floated before a gentle northerly breeze, closed a day of unsurpassable loveliness.

At last Jean Pierre made his appearance, and a glance at his sensible, but jovial and hearty face, at once confirmed the pleasant impressions that had been steadily forming round his name. "*Aha! voilà Jean Tairraz, et deux autres Messieurs! Bon! bon! Plaisir de vous voir. Mangez et buvez, je vous en prie! Allez donc, la sœur, apportez du vin! Et la petite, Jean, va t'elle bien? Tant mieux! Bon! bon!*" poured from his lips in rapid succession, as he rattled on, good humour oozing out at every pore; and "*la sœur*" had a busy time of it for some minutes. Supper over, he conducted us to a clean and comfortable "*Grange*" at the back of the house, where

hay, pillows, and *couvertures* had been deposited.* Chabot now arrived, but it being too late to discuss plans, we put him off till the morning, arranging that he and Dayné should make their appearance at 6 A.M., and accompany us in an expedition to the Grivola.

* There is now a homely but decent little inn, the Hotel de Nirolé (Nivolet) at Valsavaranche, a short distance below Bien, presided over by one Victor Blanc, who, as well as his brother Jacques the Syndic, (the latter owns the Alp of Boconeire, immediately east of Valsavaranche, and just beneath the cliffs of the Grivola,) is an excellent fellow. The resources of the house are indeed limited; but meat, cheese, bread, first-rate wine, and at any rate one clean bed, may be depended on. I passed a night and part of two days here in 1861, and retain a very pleasant recollection of my stay.