

3. ASCENT OF THE GRIVOLA.

By J. ORMSBY.

THE tourist who has descended the Val d'Aosta from Courmayeur may recollect having caught, just beyond the little town of Villeneuve, a glimpse of a sharp snow-peak that glistened for a moment through a cleft high up in the mountains on his right, looking all the more dazzlingly white for the black rocks above which it towered, and then disappeared behind the southern wall of the valley, and was seen no more. If he asked its name, he was told that it was called the Pic de Grivola, and this was all that, until quite recently, most travellers ever saw or heard of the mountain, which is the subject of the present paper. Within the last two or three years, however, the hordes of northern pleasure-seekers,—those peaceful Goths, who lay waste inn-larders, and sorely oppress mountain mules,—have invaded many a region, where solid leather portmantaus and Balmoral boots had never penetrated before. Among the new territories thus annexed to Tourland, the Cogne district seems likely to become one of the most popular. Its attractions have been already dwelt on in two very pleasant books of Alpine travel,—Mr. King's "Italian Valleys of the Alps," and "A Lady's Tour round Monte Rosa;" and the increase in the number of its visitors each summer shows that these attractions have not been over-rated. One of the chief ornaments of this district is the Pic de Grivola; and most of the tourists who visit Cogne



THE GRIVOLA, FROM THE S.W.

make the excursion to the Mont Pousset, the main object of which is to obtain that striking view of the peak which has been so well described and drawn by Mr. King. It is to be hoped, therefore, that a few words about the mountain itself may not be without interest to some of the readers of the present volume.

It was, to the best of my recollection, in a very fitting birthplace for the project of an Alpine expedition that the idea of ascending the Grivola first occurred to us. One day in August 1859, Mr. Bruce and I, together with Zachary Cachat of Chamounix,—a name that will be associated with the memory of many a pleasant excursion in the mind of many a mountain traveller,—were sitting in the ruins of De Saussure's cabin on the Col du Géant, looking out over that grand sea of peaks and glaciers that stretches away to the south and east of Mont Blanc, when Cachat pointed to something far off among the clouds, that were racing furiously over the distant mountains, and said it was the Pic de Grivola. I cannot say positively that it was the peak he saw, or that we saw what he was pointing to, for at that time the view in that direction happened to be very indistinct; but the remark had the effect of setting us talking about the Grivola,—what an extraordinary mountain it was in structure and appearance,—what grand climbing its sides ought to afford,—and, above all, what a noble view there must be from its summit. We were then in that enterprising frame of mind which one always experiences after a successful *grande course* and a satisfactory adjustment of the contents of the provision knapsack; and Zachary Cachat, as every one who has travelled with him knows, is not the man to check enthusiasm or throw cold water on any scheme if he has reason to believe "*les messieurs*" mean going. Consequently, by the time the other guides, who had slipped away on a crystal hunt, had

rejoined us, it was a settled thing that a portion of our intended sojourn in the Cogne district should be devoted to an exploration of the Pic de Grivola.

It is now, I trust, rather too late in the day for a defence of what may seem to be perfectly objectless mountain climbing. I think it is pretty generally admitted that, if a man happen to have a weakness in that direction, he may be permitted to indulge in it without being compelled to say that he is labouring in the cause of science, or—what is the most transparent excuse of all—that his incentive is the healthfulness of the pursuit. If pretexts of this sort be required, I fear we were inexcusable. We had no intention whatever of giving a helping hand to science,—partly, no doubt, from an incapacity to do so in any way; and I feel quite sure, the notion of improving our health by the expedition never once entered our minds. We were simply stimulated by the prospect of a delightful excursion, of glorious mountain scenery, and, what it would be hypocrisy to deny, by that peculiar fascination belonging to a mountain that has the reputation of being inaccessible. Whether the facts of an expedition undertaken in this spirit are worth recounting or not, is another matter. But, at any rate, the possessor of those facts, if he thinks there is any one who cares to know them, has no right to take shelter behind the old apology of “Story, God bless you! I have none to tell, sir.” The needy knife-grinder’s story is, very likely, not the most instructive, but such as it is, the Friend of Humanity was ready to listen to it; for which reason I have always considered the kicking the former ultimately received an exquisite piece of poetical justice.

Even had we been inclined to let our purpose cool, there was no wavering about the resolved Zachary. That very night at Courmayeur he made inquiries about the Grivola

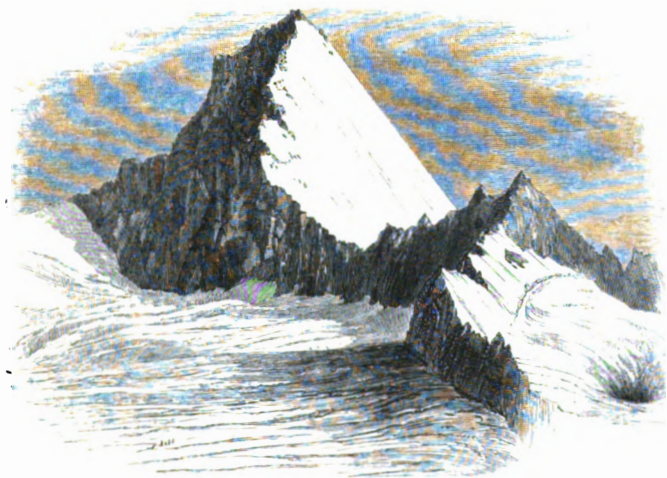
that had the effect of evoking that apocryphal chamois-hunter, who always turns up in the spirit on such occasions. Has any one ever set about a new excursion in the Alps without hearing of this chamois-hunter, who has been up every inaccessible peak, and has crossed every impassable col, but whose name and dwelling-place, strange to say, nobody can ever tell? No doubt rumours of his achievements tantalised Dr. Pacard and De Saussure when they were casting longing eyes upon the summit of Mont Blanc; and when that mountain was crowned, as we know it was, long ago, we may be sure he was the individual deputed by the neighbouring peaks to adjust "the diadem of snow." For all we know, when Hannibal was making preparations for that *grande course* which has established him as the first of Alpine travellers, he waited day after day for the appearance of that chamois-hunter, in the faint hope of being able to save his vinegar for the cucumbers of Italy.

Had we known a little more of this daring Spirit of the Alps, it would perhaps have discouraged us to learn that he had not actually been up the Grivola. He had merely found out a way. However, we accepted it as a good omen, and went on our way to Aosta rejoicing. At Aosta we got some intelligence rather more to the point. The chamois-hunter, of course, we found out to be a myth. But then we also found out that a real attempt had been made about six weeks before by Mr. Tuckett, and that our worthy host, Jean Tairraz, of the Hôtel du Mont Blanc, had been of the party. It did not require much pressing to induce that zealous mountaineer to join us. Like an ancient war-horse, he snuffed the battle afar off, and threw himself into our consultations and preparations with an earnestness that showed that the Chamounix guide was not yet merged in the Aosta landlord. He had been beaten off before, it was true, but still he did not despair.

It was well worth trying again, and in fact he had hopes, provided always we carefully avoided the route which Mr. Tuckett and he had taken. This settled the question. So without further delay we had our boots freshly nailed, bought a coil of rope that would have moored the Great Eastern, and victualled ourselves for forty-eight hours. I suppose there is something infectious about this sort of work, for a friend of ours who had reached Aosta a few minutes before our arrival, seeing what was going forward, was stimulated to volunteer for the enterprise. This addition to our party raised the question whether another guide might not be desirable; so we went to inspect one who was on view in the courtyard, and who, we were told, was "*magnifique sur les rochers*." He may have been magnificent upon the rocks, but as we saw him in the valley, he was, not to mince matters, decidedly ill-looking. It may be a weakness, but I own to an objection against a guide with a hang-dog countenance, and to a belief that one worth his salt upon the mountains will be always found to be a jolly honest-looking fellow. Of the gentleman to whom we were introduced, as one has no right to judge by appearances, I shall merely say, that if I had a number of napoleons about me, and he were aware of the fact, I should prefer not to travel in his company on a lonely road. On these, no doubt illiberal, grounds I opposed his election; and as he, fortunately, demanded a preposterous sum for his services, I was enabled to convince the company that he was not the man for us. This was lucky, as we subsequently fell in with a couple of *gardes-chasse*, who knew the mountains probably a great deal better than the magnificent cragsman, and were unquestionably much pleasanter fellows.

As the neighbourhood of Cogne is not so well known as those of Chamounix and Zermatt, I may as well devote

a few words to the topography of our expedition. The Pic de Grivola is the culminating point of the ridge which separates the Val de Cogne from the Val Savaranche. These two valleys branch off from the south side of the Val d'Aosta nearly opposite the town of Villeneuve, about two hours above Aosta. Owing to the narrowness of the valleys, and the height and steepness of the walls which bound them, there are only two points,—one in the Val d'Aosta, the other in the Val de Cogne, from which even a glimpse of the Pic itself can be obtained without two or three hours' climbing. Seen from some commanding height in the neighbourhood, it may be roughly described



THE GRIVOLA FROM THE EAST.

as a pyramid, the sides of which face pretty nearly the four points of the compass. Those which face northwards and eastwards are snow-slopes of a length and steepness, I fancy, unequalled in the Alps. The southern and western sides are, as is almost universally the case, of bare precipitous rock,—the southern being almost perfectly

perpendicular from its crown to the glacier at its foot, while on the other, or western*, the rocks slope outwards somewhat near the bottom of the peak. The most natural and obvious route to the top of the mountain is by the arête between these two; and I have no doubt that would have been the one selected by us, had we not been aware that Mr. Tuckett had tried it and found it impracticable.

Our plan being to attempt the western face of the Grivola, we of course made for the Val Savaranche, which lies on that side of the peak, and settled ourselves for the night in the little village of Gioux, or Dégieux, just at its foot. In the article of beds we were uncommonly well off, thanks to the kindness of the curé. For refreshment purposes we availed ourselves of the auberge of the village, which was in point of fact a cellar, and rejoiced in the very appropriate sign of the "Marmot's Hole." The marmot himself was a remarkable man, who, for purposes of extortion, simulated idiocy. I remember, when we came to settle his little account, he made a demand worthy of the Trois Rois at Bâle, enforcing the same with a grin and gibber worthy of Bedlam. We, however, disallowed his claim to insanity, and insisted on treating him as a rational being by giving him exactly one third of what he asked. This line of conduct made him, I think, respect and even like us. Poor fellow! he shook hands with us at parting in a way that showed he was impressed by our acuteness in seeing through his design, and touched by our recognition of his intellect. The great fact of his life seemed to be that a potentate, whom he called the Roi de Sarse, had once used the house. Of this recollection he never tired. We used to hear him muttering it to himself in corners. While we were making our supper, he stood over us and treated us to it at intervals. If he was sent to fetch any-

* See the cut on preceding page.

thing, he would come back after having gone half-way to the door, make the communication confidentially, and then vanish. If there be any truth in the story, I can only say I trust his majesty liked his accommodation. After tumbling down a flight of steps you broke your shins over a number of tubs, containing goat's milk in various stages of decomposition. You then crossed a quagmire in the centre of the room, and so got on to some high land on the other side, where you might sit down, if you could find anything to sit upon. I believe some one discovered a three-legged stool, but I never saw it: however, there were empty tubs, and things of that sort, which did very well. To illuminate the whole—for, like that in the groves of Blarney, this was “a cave where no daylight enters,”—there was a kind of portable gallows, with a saucer hanging in chains, containing oil and wick,—a contrivance that had a knack of toppling over into your coffee or grog without the slightest notice, and giving an unexpected flavour and richness to the beverage. I don't know that I ever spent a merrier or a pleasanter evening. There was but one drop of bitter in our cup, counting the lamp oil as nothing. It was the fleas. Without any inordinate vanity, I may say that I am a judge of fleas. I have given them my attention under various circumstances and in various countries. Not to speak of an intimacy with the ordinary flea of the diligence, founded on having travelled many a league in his company, I have spent nights with hardy mountain-fleas in Swiss châteaux, with desperate *freischütz*, *wildjäger* fleas in the Tyrol, with bold contrabandist fleas in the Spanish Pyrenees, with Arab fleas, restless and lawless, children of the desert, dwellers in tents. But none of these ever impressed me so much as the natives of the Val Savaranche. Equal to any of the others in ferocity and physical vigour, they surpass them all in instinct. They

even give evidence of a kind of mutual dependence and organisation of labour, which suggests something like a dawning civilisation,—so systematic and well-sustained are their attacks. In the Marmot's Hole we were knee-deep in them. They crept up our trowsers and down our necks until we were saturated with them. They lay in wait for us in dark corners, and sprang upon us suddenly. They clung to us viciously, and bit us at supper and bit us at breakfast. They bit us sitting and bit us walking. On the mountain side, on the glacier, nay, even on the top of the Grivola, unaffected by the rarefaction of the air, unimpressed by the magnificence of the view, there they were, biting away as if they had not broken their fast for twenty-four hours. I know it sounds like effeminacy to complain of any of the hardships one undergoes on an expedition of this kind, and I hold that the man who cannot endure hunger and thirst, cold and heat, to have his nose blistered and his toes frost-bitten, has no business in the high Alps. But you must draw the line somewhere, and I draw it at fleas. They, I maintain, are a grievance at which one may lawfully murmur. Ye Gentlemen of England, who live at home at ease, how little do you think upon the danger of the fleas! But if you knew what it was, after a sleepless night, and with mind as well as body in a state of furious irritation, to start for a walk of fifteen hours, during, perhaps, eight of which your personal safety depends on your equanimity and coolness, you might, I think, agree with me in ranking this little animal with the crevasses and avalanches and other perils which beset the path of the mountaineer.

Next morning, by 4 o'clock, we were under way and climbing up the steep side of the Val Savaranche, at a spot where a glacier stream descends from the Grivola. We made, as is always the case at starting on these moun-

tain excursions, an exceedingly solemn, not to say morose, party. I suppose it is that at 4 o'clock A.M. the mind is especially disposed to take a material view of things, and cannot realise the fact that it is out for a day's pleasure. Indeed, the appearance of things in general does not tend to support such a theory. A cold blue-black sky overhead, winking in mockery at you with all its stars; cold packs of fog filling up the valleys below; cold shapes of mountains with uncomfortably sharp outlines,—the rocky ones looking black and cheerless, the snowy ones miserably blue, as if even *their* noses were pinched by the cold; add to this a half suspicion which you try to drive away, but which will come again and again, that you are doing a very absurd thing, and that if you were not a fool you would be in bed and asleep, like the happy old folks at home, and the rest of the rational world. Sensations of this sort do not produce an exhilarating effect on the animal spirits; and it says a great deal for the attractions of mountaineering that they have never yet, so far as I am aware, turned back an excursionist, or made him a bit the less ready to suffer them over and over again whenever an opportunity offers. There was one honourable exception in our case, and that was Jean Tairraz. Brought out by circumstances, as useful men always are, he applied himself to enliven the procession, which was crawling upwards as silently as if we had been mutes attending our own funerals, and kept up a running fire of jokes appropriate to the occasion, interspersed with anecdotes of his experiences in London. This spirited conduct on his part, joined with active exercise, soon thawed us, and before long we were proceeding with an animation and noise that sent the marmots whistling to their holes in sheer dismay.

In about three hours from our start we had left the last blade of grass behind us, and were worming our way up

the bed of the stream before mentioned, which was at this time of the morning a mere vein of water, trickling feebly under a skin of ice,—very different from the roaring torrent, twenty feet wide, we found on our descent in the afternoon. Up this we went, scrambling, slipping, stumbling, among ice-clad boulders and polished blocks of serpentine, until at last, turning the corner of what seemed to be a high gravel bank, we found ourselves on a moraine, with the western glacier sloping upwards from our feet, and the final peak of the Grivola rising like a wall out of the snow-field at the further side. The first sensation on seeing your work cut out for you is very curious, and one is very apt, under the excitement of the moment, to undervalue the difficulty. I remember, when it was proposed that we should halt here and breakfast, making a motion in favour of pushing on without losing any more time, and postponing breakfast till we got to the top, or at least somewhere near it,—a suggestion which I am happy to say was treated with the contempt it deserved. Indeed, a very short examination of the face of the mountain showed us that it was impossible to do anything just yet. The rocks at the foot, though they sloped upwards from the glacier at no great angle, were very smooth, and steep enough to be by no means easy at the best of times; but now, being on the shady side of the mountain, they were coated with the ice of the night to such an extent as to make them absolutely unassailable. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to wait till the sun came round. And then followed that little episode which every true mountaineer will hold in grateful recollection. Even if there were no glorious scenes, no wonderful sights to reward the climber, I *do* think an expedition among the mountains would be worth making for the sake of that “good, honest, wholesome, hungry breakfast,” as old Izaak Walton would call it, which one enjoys

on the moraine of the glacier, or in some crevice among the crags; when the sourest of bread has an exquisite flavour, and the thinnest of wine tastes like nectar; when hard-boiled eggs disappear as if the wizard of the north were dealing with them; and the tough, wiry, fatless mutton of the Alps goes down as if it had been reared on Dartmoor.

"On the Alps,
It is reported, thou didst eat strange flesh;"

but ah! what an appetite you had to eat it with!

After breakfast we proceeded to make a more deliberate survey of the mountain, and to arrange the plan of attack. On our right was a snow-ridge, ending in the jagged arête, on which Mr. Tuckett spent the night when making his very plucky attempt of the 7th of July. On the left was another arête, uniting with the ridge which separates the two valleys. Between these two rose the peak itself, terminating in a square top, which seemed from where we stood to be about an inch broad. The peculiar arrangement of the rocks, which we afterwards found to be composed of mica schist, gave it a strange striped appearance, the strata showing in strongly-defined bands of alternate red and grey, with a slight dip to the north. From top to bottom it seemed to be furrowed with couloirs, up some one of which we proposed to ascend. After a little it became evident that our choice lay between two, and we resolved ourselves into a committee of the whole party to decide on their respective merits, which proved to be so nicely balanced that it was agreed to give a casting vote to Cachat. Invested with this responsibility, he withdrew in company with telescope, and put himself in immediate communication with mountain. Every one knows a picture representing the late Napoleon Bonaparte standing on a rock at St. Helena, with a spy-glass to his eye. If

we subtract the tails of the coat, and throw in a toothache, from which the poor fellow was suffering, owing to the intense cold, this print will give a very exact idea of Zachary as he stood on the moraine, examining every crevice and scrutinising every square inch of rock over which it might be necessary to go. At last we saw him shut up the glass with an air of "*conclusum est contra Grivolum,*" and then we all felt the thing was as good as done. But not just yet; for the sun was in by no means so great a hurry as we were to get to the top of the mountain, and until he shone upon it there was no use in moving. So for a weary hour up and down that wretched moraine we trotted, indulging in all sorts of gymnastics to keep up the circulation. A more intense cold I don't remember ever feeling. I believe not one of us would have ventured to make an affidavit, founded on sensation, that he had a nose, though a blue projection to that effect was painfully conspicuous on the countenance of each of us. And then, to aggravate our misery, there were the peaks on the opposite side of the valley looking rosy and warm and comfortable in the rays of the morning sun. While matters were in this state, an incident occurred which helped to while away the time. Ambroise, one of the *gardes-chasse* before mentioned, who had been examining the rocks with his telescope (an awful instrument about four feet long and made of pasteboard), suddenly jumped up with a shout of "*bouc, bouc!*" and there on the arête to our right stood a bouquetin in the flesh. For a minute or two we had a good view of him, and I recollect being particularly struck with his great depth of carcase, and his action, which had all the long sweeping stride of the stag, and nothing whatever of the jerky goat-like gait of the chamois. It was mortifying, but I do not think he condescended even to look at us, but dis-

appeared sulkily on the other side of the ridge,—I have no doubt cursing in his heart the maniacs whose noise had made him get up before his regular time.

As the bouquetin went down the sun came up, and almost instantaneously the whole face of the mountain was changed. The thermometer stood too low for poetry, otherwise it must have reminded some one of the "Sleeping Palace," when, all over the side of the mountain, little streams woke up at the kiss of the sunbeams, and began to trickle jovially over the rocks; and the glacier torrent at our feet stretched himself in his bed and took to the business of the day, murmuring and grumbling among the boulders, and, in fact, all the long-pent stream of life dashed downward in a cataract. We, too, shook ourselves, and "renewed our strife" with the Grivola.

A few minutes brought us across the glacier and over the snow; and then commenced the struggle with the rocks. For a while it was all plain sailing. The rocks, though uncomfortably smooth and slippery, were sufficiently shelving to make our work easy enough. Presently, however, they began to change their character, becoming more and more treacherous, while the slope increased in steepness at every step. For about two hours we worked our way slowly but steadily upwards, now scrambling on hands and knees along the back of some projecting buttress of rock, now crawling up some couloir in that attitude which the serpent has been condemned to adopt, at every step sending down showers of stones, with constant shouts of "Look out," or "*Gardez vos yeux*" (Anglo-French for "mind your eye"). At last we reached a spot where something like the battlement of a ruined castle, broken by embrasures, ran across the mountain from side to side. Creeping through one of the breaches in this wall, we found ourselves on a little platform, with the

crown of the peak rising straight up some hundred feet above our heads, and in front of us a long narrow couloir, which, as far as we could see, seemed to run right up to the top. Ambroise, who was leading, made a dash at this with his favourite war cry of "*Nous montons, nous montons.*" I, being next, followed suit, and in about two seconds had attained, for the first time in my life, to a perfect knowledge of what is meant by the expression, hanging on by the eyelids. The sides and bottom of the couloir were worn almost quite smooth by, no doubt, frequent discharges of stones from above; and what little projections there were, being crumbling mica schist, yielded to the hand, foot, or alpenstock with the utmost alacrity, so as to make progression more peculiar than pleasant.

Nothing is harder, in describing a place of this sort, than to avoid making it seem worse than it really was. The simple facts, when put into words, have very often a certain flavour of the terrible about them which does not belong to them in nature. For instance, a spot where a single false step would dash you to atoms has an ugly sound; and yet scenery has been enjoyed, dinners have been eaten, and pipes smoked, in perfect comfort in such situations; for why should that single false step be made? Thus, without any great departure from the simple truth, this couloir might be made out to be something rather ticklish; indeed, as my companion afterwards observed, with the aid of a little word-painting it would be possible to describe it so as to make any one's hair stand on end. I prefer a more homely style of description, and for that reason I request the reader to think of a fire-escape, as it stands ready for action in the street; to imagine it about eight times as long and ten times as wide, and lined throughout with rotten bath-brick instead of canvas; and

he will have a very fair notion of the sort of thing the *cheminée* was, up which we had now to clamber. As to danger, of course it was not the kind of place where it would have been advisable for any one to lose his head or his feet or his presence of mind; and very likely, as seen from below, our attitudes, consisting mainly of legs like a Manx halfpenny, would have impressed a spectator with a notion of our insecurity: nor is a glacier a thousand feet below you a pleasant object, when seen topsy-turvy between your own knees. But the fact is, the work was a great deal too hard to allow us to think much about the appearance of things. For my own part, I must confess to one sensation, which for a moment gave me "a turn"—to use a slang expression. Once, on looking up to see what progress we were making, I perceived an extraordinary appearance in the sky over head. It seemed as if the whole air had suddenly become phosphorescent, or was filled with sparks dancing and wheeling about in a bewildering manner. I had read so many horrible stories about the strange effects of rarefied air upon the human subject at high altitudes that I began to feel rather nervous. What if this apparition should be a premonitory symptom! Here was a nice place to be taken with apoplexy or catalepsy or bleeding at the ears, or any other of those awful seizures we, at least, *read of*. As soon as I had a hand to spare, I rubbed my eyes to try and dispel the illusion, and in so doing discovered the cause of it. As may be supposed, we kicked up a tremendous dust in our ascent. This dust was mainly composed of minute glittering scales of mica, which from their extreme lightness remained suspended in the air, and gave it this luminous appearance. In fact, from the same cause our coats and wide-awake hats were quite shiny for days afterwards. After Ambroise and I had made a little progress, we found the others

were not following; and, absurdly fancying that they were going up some other way, we pushed on, determined not to be left behind. At length, as we paused for breath, there came a sound from below as of persons using unparliamentary language, and requesting to be informed whether or not we wanted to murder them. The state of the case was this:—our friend, who had joined us at Aosta, found himself seized with giddiness, upon hearing which the second *garde-chasse*, with undisguised glee, volunteered to stay and keep him company,—a duty which he performed by lying down and going to sleep the moment they were left alone. The others, seeing the work they had before them, put the rope into requisition and got into harness. All this was done on a little platform to one side of the entrance to the couloir in which we were, so that we knew nothing of it, and from the noise of the wind roaring down the gully could not at first hear the shouts they sent after us. Good reason, too, they had to shout, for at every step we dislodged lumps of rock which, after a mad bound or two, shot out of the mouth of the couloir like thirteen-inch shells from a mortar, whizzing past the noses of the party on the platform round the corner, and going down with a crash on the glacier below. Of course, as soon as matters were explained, we held on tight until they joined us, and then crawled up in company. There was one more difficulty in store for us. The top of the *cheminée* was blocked up by a mass of rock, with a face so perfectly smooth that it seemed likely to prove an effectual stoppage. However, Cachat being, as I have reason to believe he is, gifted with suckers, like a fly's, to all his extremities, and with a power of walking up anything, managed, after a series of contortions, more like swimming than anything else, to lay himself out on the top of it, and, with such an imitation of a

sailor's "Yeo heave ho" as could be expected from a Chamounix man, he landed us, one by one, at his feet, much as a small boy lands gudgeon out of the Serpentine. In this ignominious way we got over the last difficulty of our ascent of the Grivola. For, after a short scramble of a few yards, we were all sitting on a knife-edge of rock, with one leg hanging over Cogne, and the other dangling over the Val Savaranche.

The spot we had reached was about the middle of the square top we had seen from below, which now turned out to be a ridge some fifty yards from end to end, and so sharp that we could, and indeed, to be at all comfortable, were obliged, to sit astride upon it. Out of this there cropped up three or four spikes of rock about nine or ten feet in height, so that, in point of fact, the top looked very like a gigantic fossil jaw-bone, with a few worn old tusks still sticking up out of it. By right, and according to all the recognised rules of mountaineering, we ought to have explored this ridge from end to end, ascertained which of these spikes was the true *summum culmen* of the Grivola, and, in case of doubt, mounted them all, before giving a loose rein, as we shamefully did, to mere sensual indulgence in scenery and refreshment. The fact is, our sense of enjoyment was at the time too lively for a due observance of the niceties of Alpine climbing. We had done all that we wanted to do. We had had a noble excursion; we had settled the question about the mountain; and we had reached what was the top for all practical purposes: for the notion of any one enjoying himself on the point of one of those pinnacles was preposterous. On the whole, it seemed to strike every one as a childish proceeding to waste the precious minutes in scrambling about the ridge for the sole purpose of elevating ourselves a bare dozen feet higher, as if we had come up simply for the

sake of saying we had come up; and this when the day was already far spent, and some of the most glorious scenery in the world was waiting for us, not to speak of our friend, who was also waiting for us, half fried, half frozen, on the rocks below.* I ought, I own, to speak of our anxiety for the picturesque with some qualification, for I remember the first thing we did on reaching the top was—with shame and sorrow I confess it—not to utter any appropriate note of admiration, nor to give vent to any poetic sentiment befitting the occasion, nor yet to grasp each other's hands, awed into silence by the majesty of the scene,—a ceremony which, I believe, in practice is but rarely performed;—it was simply to raise a lusty chorus, the burden of which was “something to drink.” Alas! it was discovered we had brought up only one wretched bottle of red wine; indeed I may say of red-hot wine, for, having been slung on a guide's back for a couple of hours, it had had the full benefit of a strong sun, and was in a fine wholesome state for being swallowed by persons in our over-heated condition. One bottle of wine among five thirsty men does not last long, so we were soon at liberty to study the panorama before us. To describe this in a

* I now believe it was much more childish not to do the thing completely when we were about it. As we were descending, the *garde-chasse* above mentioned said, it would never do to come down without leaving a flag (in sober language, a bit of calico on a stick) in testimony of our ascent. The proposition was too innocent to be objected to; but when we found he was making for a part of the ridge where we had never been, it struck us both as not being an altogether honest proceeding, and we proposed returning for the purpose of giving due effect to the solemnity by the presence of the whole party. Cachat, however, pooh-poo'd the idea; and as his word was always law with us on these expeditions, the matter was let drop. Our standard-bearer, therefore, claims the honour of having been the only man who reached the actual *point culminant* of the Grivola,—an honour to which, I think, he is fully entitled, and to which, speaking for Self and Co., I am sure he is quite welcome. I merely mention these facts as a hint for future mountain explorers who set any value on a literal fulfilment of their undertaking.

way that would convey anything beyond an idea of confused grandeur to any one who does not know the Alps would be impossible. Those who are familiar with the leading features of the great Pennine chain, will be able to imagine some of its glories when they see the position of the Grivola on the map. Placed as we were, we had to the north an uninterrupted view of the whole range, sweeping round in a magnificent curve from Mont Blanc on the left to Monte Rosa on the right. From the height at which we were, the eye could penetrate the mysteries of the great snow-deserts from which the glittering peaks and domes before us rose, and from which countless glaciers streamed down into the valleys beneath. Even Mont Blanc, though still nearly 3,000 feet above us seemed to stand almost face to face with us. From no other point of view that I know of can the claims of the two great rival mountains of the Alps be so fairly examined as from here. Seen from such an elevation as this, it is not because of his extra 500 feet of altitude that Mont Blanc is the monarch of mountains: his diadem is not "a diadem of snow;" it is an iron circlet of black precipices, above which his tall white brow towers royally, and he looks, "ay, every inch a king."

The next most striking object, perhaps, was that noble group of peaks formed by the sharp spear of the Dent Blanche, the graceful Weisshorn, and the grand old Matterhorn, with a long thin pennon of fleecy cloud flying at the maintop, like a flag of defiance,—a challenge of "Wha dare meddle wi' me?" To the west we had in full view the great snow-fields and glaciers of the Rutor, and the district of the Tarentaise, bristling with unexplored peaks. Southwards and eastwards a thin blue haze hung over the distant plains of Italy, shutting out from our view Turin and most likely the Mediterranean; but to this loss we were, to

some extent, reconciled, by having the more time to contemplate the noble mass of the Grand Paradis, then an untrodden mountain, but since ascended by Mr. Cowell. By no means the least striking part of the panorama was that which met the eye on glancing downwards. So abruptly does the peak drop from crown to base on its south side, that, as we sat astride on our rough mountain horse, we seemed almost to ride in mid air; and after our own boots, the next object the eye fell on was the glacier a thousand feet below. A gleam of green far down among the rocks showed where the valley of Cogne lay, and beyond this rose the Becca di Nona, which looks so lordly from Aosta, but from our elevation of 13,000 feet was dwarfed into a mole-hill.

It was not exactly a place to sleep in — though admirably adapted for lazy dreaming — and at last we had to go. Our unfortunate but unavoidable delay on the moraine had made us much later than we had expected to be. For the satisfaction of future mountain climbers, it may be mentioned that the ugly couloir was found quite easy, the fact being, I suspect, that we knew we had come up it, and that we must positively go down it. We rejoined our friends below, lowered ourselves over the rocks, glissaded or tumbled, according to taste, over the snow, unearthed our *cache* of provisions on the moraine, dined, and finally reached the Marmot's at about 7. Here we indulged in a bath in the trough attached to the village pump, — at least, in as much of a bath as was consistent with propriety, — for the bulk of the population turned out to witness the operation, evidently regarding it as a religious rite of some sort, — a quotidian baptism, — or else a thanksgiving for not having broken our necks. Then to supper, and then to bed; and may the present reader sleep as sound to-night as did the present writer on that 23rd of August, 1859!