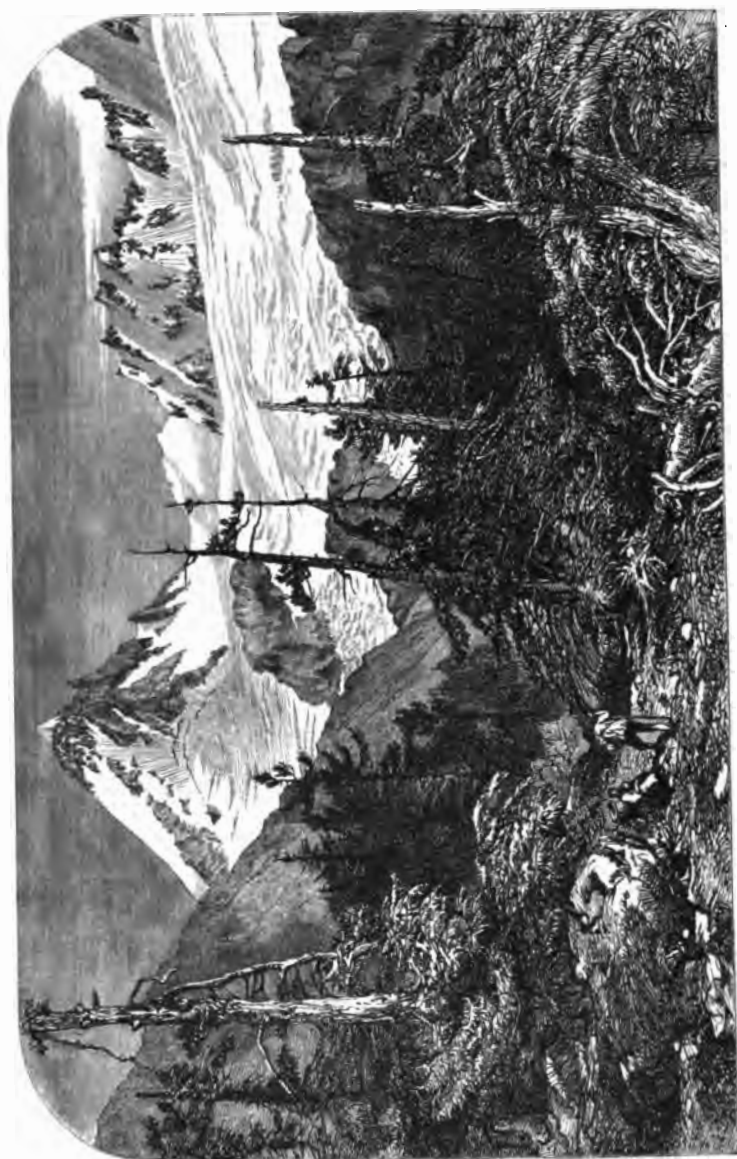




THE DEER PARKS FROM THE VALLEY

THE  
ALPINE JOURNAL.

---

MARCH 1864.

---

ASCENT OF THE DENT D'HERENS. By W. E. HALL, M.A.  
Read before the Alpine Club, February 2, 1864.

WITH the controversy that there has been about the Matterhorn, it has always seemed to me somewhat strange that it was not long ago thought worth while to reconnoitre its arête from a point so near at hand, and so commanding, as the peak of the Dent d'Hérens. Perhaps the repellent look of the long stony ribs which front the Val Tournanche, and the wild jaggedness of its eastern ridge, may have suggested the imagination of difficulties on every side of the latter mountain as great as those which surround the Matterhorn itself. Or, perhaps, as most men saw it from Breuil, and saw it therefore from a side on which it appears positively insignificant, they have failed to realise its actual merits, and so may have treated it with very undeserved contempt. That this contempt should have outlasted the frequent passage of the Col de la Valpelline is not a little puzzling. From the Stockje, the Dent d'Hérens challenges comparison in mass and grandeur with its great neighbour; and from the top of the Col, the purity of its simple pyramidal form makes an even profounder impression on the mind. True, last year attention seems at length to have been directed to it, and even before I left England various rumours had floated about which made Messrs. Grove, Macdonald, Woodmass, and myself somewhat nervous as we trudged into Zermatt late one night in August. A glance at the visitors' book assured us that none of the rivals whom we had reason to fear were on the spot, and the inquiries of Melchior Anderegg and of

Perren failed to discover evil reports as to anything already done. So we slept the sleep of contentment that night, and inasmuch as circumstances prevented us from leaving straightway certain other nights as well, blissfully ignorant that at the very time Mr. Whympster was at Prerayen upon the very same errand as ourselves. At last, on the 10th of August we started with the happy addition to our staff of guides of Jean Pierre Cachat, a quiet plucky civil fellow, and skilful guide withal, of whose good qualities some of us had already had pleasant experience, but who, I fancy, is not by any means so widely known as he ought to be. So far as Prerayen we were to be accompanied besides by one of the brethren of the Club, and by a postulant for Alpine fame, who turned out to be one of the most amusing companions that any of us had ever the good fortune to meet upon a glacier. He was the very ideal of the competitive examinee. His young face was eloquent of long hours spent in painful grind, his meek expression told of that grind having been undisturbed by the rude manners of boys, and his whole physique seemed to register a protest against the cruelty of exercise. It was after terrible mental struggles that he brought himself to face the dangers of the Valpelline, and he left Zermatt in the morning with a steadfast assurance of disaster and of death, which lent an air of pathetic humour to his conversation when he rose or fell to the level of speech. So long as we were in the pine woods through which the path winds up the valley of Zmutt, satisfaction at his unexpected safety filled him with a calm which needed no expression by words; the open expanse of the glacier, hardly cut by a single crevasse, roused him to a melancholy jocoseness; then the jocoseness disappeared, and a nervous fluency of inquiry took its place, over the rocks of the Stockje; but when the fatal rope—so dreadful in its associations—was placed around him, his tongue began to refuse its office; and at last, by the time that we were running down the slopes on the other side, he was clutching convulsively at the arms of Perren and of his porter, who held him up on either hand, while his helpless legs, dangling loosely between, jogged erratic scores in the soft snow. Most men would have been satisfied with having accomplished so much, and would have returned to the habits of common mortals when they reached the lower glacier; but the excellent education of our friend had taught him the disadvantages of an anticlimax, and with creditable ingenuity he contrived to reserve his great effort for the last possible moment. Half way down the Zardezan glacier rain began to pour with a vigour which made us run for the

nearest chalet by the shortest way, and the shortest way led over a tolerably steep-sided edge at the point where we left the ice. Cachat, mindful of our frail companion, soon turned the edge into a broad and gently inclined staircase, while Perren chipped himself a notch or two by the side to be ready to hold up the failing limbs when they should finally give way, and to prevent them from rubbing themselves through the dozen feet down which they must have glided. The precaution was not in vain. One trembling uncertain step, and a smothered cry, and the rest of the ice journey was performed under Perren's left arm; the head drooping like that of a half-broken doll in front, and the feet vaguely stuck out behind as though at the end of sawdust-stuffed legs. A minute or two afterwards our faces were all separated from the world by the bottoms of niedl bowls, when the hysteric voice of some one was heard to sob, through the cadence of Perren's heavy feet, 'Oh, Perren has saved my life! saved my life! tell him how grateful I am—what can I give him?' 'Saved your life—bosh! But he has shown you how to get along to-day,—give him a couple of francs.' 'Oh! but he has saved my life. I have given him a napoleon already, but I must give him something more, a great deal more, for he has saved my life.' I am afraid that even niedl was forgotten, and five faces, white tipped on the nose, white barred on the lips, and with a round white mark upon the cheeks and chin emerged from the bowls and poured a concentrated fire of unfeeling chaff upon him who had just escaped from the jaws of death, which lasted till our attention was diverted by a much more serious affair. We had originally intended to sleep at the chalets of Gorgie, both because the cows were there, and to be nearer to our work in the morning. But Cachat had used the minutes which we had spent in gluttony and in laughing to the better purpose of examining the place where we should have to lie. He had found it a mass of dogs, men, sheepskins, and hay, all equally alive, and came out to say that very objectionable animals would be our bedfellows. Our assurances that we had all been devoured again and again by fleas, and that we yet lived, only produced a graver look, and the information that something worse than fleas was there. Well, their slower allies were unpleasant, no doubt, but they could be borne. 'Mais, messieurs, c'est quelque chose de pire encore. Il y a force poux là!' None of us, I think, are extraordinarily nice, but this was beyond our capacity to stomach; and we fled incontinently, leaving Perren to follow with the key of the lower chalet. Soon after we arrived he joined us with all his usual merry twinkle gone from his eyes,

and told us that the key could not be found, that if it were found it would not be entrusted to us, and that no one could be spared from the milking to come with it until some fifty more cows had been milked. Round and round the windowless chalet we wandered, looking for a loose stone in the roof above, for a loose board in the floor below, and trying to force the door from time to time by way of keeping ourselves warm in the chilly damp evening; and then we went through the same round all over again, not out of any hope that we could force our way into so well fortified a place, but out of sheer inability from want of temper to stand still with our hands in our pockets, and look at the impassive intractable block of stones. At last, just as the evening was closing in, the owner of the chalets, and of all the cows and the goats in the upper valley, came down to look for the key. He was a kind of Sheik of the Alps, black bearded, patriarchal in appearance, dignified in his manners, haughty in the possession of his many flocks and herds, and without doubt as great a scoundrel as the noblest thief among his Eastern brethren. Although he treated us with an air of fine superiority he could stoop to cheat and to lie marvellously well, and all the dignity of his manner could not prevent us from believing to the bottom of our hearts that he was capable of robbery or of murder, or of any crime which might happen to take his fancy. Perhaps, however, we may have been prejudiced by his failure to discover the key; certainly our tempers were ruffled at the time, and the impatience which had taken the place of dull despair when he appeared found vent in curses characteristic of the utterers. Melchior never speaks, but he looked anathemas; Perren is only master of that dissyllable which in its various intonations, serves the Swiss for every shade of endearment and of abuse, but he enriched the language that night with several fresh intonations; Cachat, as befits the more lively Savoyard, had more words, and used them freely; and we four drew upon our knowledge of English, French, German, and Italian for every expletive that our memory could command. And while we talked our superb Sheik merely looked imperturbable, and then answered that he was there for our convenience, not for his, and that any paltry sum that we could give him was a matter of pure indifference to a man of his fortune, so if we were not civil he would simply walk home again. Then when Perren had discovered a larger log wherewith to batter the door than those which had been used before, he quietly remarked that the log was splintery, and so might hurt our hands, but that the staple which covered the lock went six inches into the wall above and below, and

therefore that it was quite useless to hammer away at the door, which was strong enough to resist an attack of four and twenty hours long. It had been made strong lately on purpose to prevent travellers by the Col de Collon or the Valpelline from getting in without coming to him. By this time it was pitch dark, but we still hung about the place feeling the kind of attraction that an impossibility always exercises, when Perren, letting his hands wander aimlessly in a chink of the wall, touched a bit of metal. With a cry of joy he dragged out the lost key, and in five minutes we were asleep in a mass of sweet-smelling hay, without, odd as it may seem, a single free rover in all its broad expanse.

In the morning we rose at the due time, and had stumbled along in the dark as far as the upper chalets, when an event occurred which put an end for that day to all thought of getting up the Dent d'Hérens. Everybody knows that at the commencement of an expedition, it is impossible to keep an Alpine party together. Drowsy men cling lovingly to the freedom of laziness; and nowhere are the temptations to laziness more irresistible than on upland pastures in the uncertain gloaming when every path seems easier than that which is trodden at the moment. Straggling is, as it were, a malady which every expedition must calculate on suffering from, just as every child suffers from the measles; but it is very seldom that either disease is fatal. Ours was one of the more serious cases. The hill side near the chalets of Gorgie is hummocky with ice-ground rock, and in the dim light of early morning nothing is more easy than to lose oneself for a time; but there is a little green marshy bottom which it is impossible to avoid crossing, and when we found that Grove who was behind had chosen a line of his own, we felt sure of his re-joining us there. We clustered in the open flat to wait for him, and at that instant the Sheik crept stealthily towards us from behind a rock in the direction where Grove had been last seen, then sharply altered his course, and went off at a brisk pace up the mountain side. For the moment we thought nothing of this; when however time went by, when twenty minutes were gone, and there were no signs of our missing friend, these mysterious movements began to assume significance in our eyes, and we remembered that poor Grove had not been the least energetic among us on the evening before. Half an hour passed, and the necessity for action was evident. We spread out in every direction; even Melchior for the first—I believe it will be the only—time in his life parted from his 'Herr,' and allowed Macdonald to wander one way in search,

while he went himself in another. We shouted, but no answer came, save the hard echoes from the rocks around. We went to where he was last seen; his traces were plain for a while, then they abruptly stopped. We went along the side of the glacier to see where the body had been thrown over the cliffs. Some optimist even went on the glacier, to see if he had gone on under the impression that we were in front; but we of course felt no surprise on hearing that he was not to be found there. No! there was but one sad conclusion open to us; he had been murdered, and we had seen the murderer escape. No wonder the Sheik sneaked round the rock, no wonder he hurried away when he saw us. We called him murderer then, and we call him by no other name to the present day. The only question was, where could the body be? We had clustered together again—it was now six o'clock—to discuss this question, when the form of Grove walked down the same hill side up which the murderer had gone. By degrees we convinced ourselves that the form had substance, and an abusive tongue withal, for it actually had the impudence to ask us what we had been doing, wasting the early morning; and when explanations were made on either side, it seemed that he had contrived in some unintelligible way to pass us without seeing or being seen; that bearing in mind the undoubted fact that the higher he rose, the nearer he would be to the level of the top of the Dent d'Hérens, he had overlooked, in a manner marvellous for a man of so perspicacious an intellect, the equally undoubted fact that it mattered somewhat which way he went; and so had walked in a precisely opposite direction to that which he should have followed, till finding that no one was coming after him he looked round, saw far beneath the optimist on the glacier, and comprehending at length that we were nearly where he left us, retraced his steps to Gorgie. Thus was the Sheik proved not to be guilty of the murder of Grove, but we had decided that he was a murderer, and we still hold him to be so, none the less for his accidental innocence of a particular crime.

When the effervescence of our joy at the recovery of Grove had subsided a little, we turned discouraged faces towards Pre-rayen, pleased to see mists rushing past the mountain tops, and delighted with a shower which drove us ill-temperedly before it down the valley. The weather was decidedly not what one would choose to have for a first-class expedition; and perhaps for another reason it was lucky that we had not been able to persevere. Macdonald had hurt himself rather severely the day before, and he walked with an amount of pain which made us

glad of a rest for his sake, and which I am afraid must have a little dulled the pleasure of the actual ascent. How we spent the next eighteen hours no one I believe well knows. We grovelled in the hay, and I presume we slept, for no one of the party ventures to affirm that he has remembrance of anything until we were all shaken into life by Melchior about a quarter to two next morning. For once, the guides were as anxious as ourselves to be off; and accordingly, after unusually few delays, we filed out into the darkness exactly at half-past two. Until some time after the way to the Col de la Valpelline is abandoned the route is of the most uninteresting kind. Rocks arranged in straight monotonous slopes confine the Glacier de Zardezan, none of the higher summits are visible, and the splendours of the early tints are lost before any ray of sunlight can strike the minor peaks which protrude themselves in virtue of their insignificance. When the main stream is left, the case is even worse for a time. We took to the coarse moist moraine which bounds the last eastern tributary but one of the Zardezan, and while labouring for an hour over the stones, loose in spite of the night's frost which had given them an icy coat, our eyes could only choose to look upon a little glacier flowing down by our left, which disgorges the dirt upon which we walked, or upon some mean cliffs which, though not above two or three hundred feet high, shut out every further object from view. By and by however, we mounted diagonally across the glacier to where some noble sérac-forms began to appear over the rounded crest, and soon found ourselves engaged in their intricacies. From this moment almost every step was varied, and each stage of the ascent was more interesting than that which had gone before. At 7.35 we emerged upon the névé, and saw an immense plateau before us, rising in undulations to the base of the actual peak of the Dent d'Hérens, bounded in front by the jagged ridge which looks so remarkable alike from Prerayen and from Breuil, and stretching far away to the south at the same level to the foot of the Château des Dames. It was then that we first began to understand the form of our mountain and to settle our method of attack. The ground-plan of the Dent d'Hérens is a peculiar one. From the depression between it and the Matterhorn an arête of rock broken into fantastic shapes runs due west to the summit, near which it throws off an arête of like character to the south; and then, after continuing for a while, turns into a kind of plateau tilted on end, which I cannot better describe than by saying that it is as if the space between two steep-sided arêtes, diverging from a common centre, and again meeting below, were to be filled up with ice. It is this slope which,

when looked at from the top of the Col de la Valpelline, seems to be inclined at a very moderate angle, and in curling over to the south to prove the mountain to be a cone, shaven off abruptly on the northern face, but elsewhere rising gradually to a somewhat square coronal of rock, which would be thought in turn to support a dome of snow. In truth, the apparent cone is cut on the south also by precipices, the angle of ascent is much sharper than it appears to be, and a blue glitter on its surface, ugly to our eyes, told us that nearly bare ice composed the whole of the slope. It was a question, therefore, whether we should take advantage of a dip close to our left, where the southern wall drops temptingly so as almost to lose itself in the névé in which we stood, or whether we would make for a point some two-thirds of the distance between us and the coronal of rocks by struggling up the steep crags which, mingled with ice, form the wall in its higher parts. An animated debate resulted in Melchior's authoritative decision being happily given for the latter route; and probably no other track will ever be chosen with success, for there can be no doubt that the slope is too long to allow of steps being cut the whole way up, and there is little likelihood that any great depth of snow can ever rest upon so steep an incline, with a western aspect, terminated at either edge by abrupt walls, and so placed that the northern and southern winds must alternately sweep with draughty strength full across its surface. I am the more willing to speak positively, that our opinion is sanctioned by its agreement with that of Mr. Whympster, who had attempted the ascent a few days before by the more obvious but less practicable way. He had been deprived of the advantage of that view along the inclined plateau by which we had been guided; because, having struck the upper snow fields immediately above the chalets of Gorgie, he was pushed by huge crevasses more and more towards the flank of Mont Albert, and had at last to descend somewhat to reach the dip which even to us was so tempting, and which from his position must have seemed the only natural route. He had not long committed himself however to the ice-slope when he discovered its impossibility, and, in the hope of finding a better state of things, cut his way over to the opposite edge which overhangs the Tiefenmatten glacier. There he found the same characteristics, the same impossibility; and I think therefore that except under circumstances which would be so exceptional that they can hardly be looked for, the way which we chose must be assumed to be the only one.

Whatever variation may be discovered by the genius of future travellers, we plodded in perfect contentment over our snow

fields, zig-zagging quickly at the last into a kind of cirque made by the junction of the southern and western arêtes. Here we found the Bergschrund, which I feel obliged to mention, not because there was anything unusual about it, but because, as I have already committed one grievous sin of omission by leaving out the description of breakfast, I cannot dare immediately afterwards to violate another sacred conventionalism in Alpine story. Then followed an ice slope, up which Melchior, who had led hitherto, and who, it may save trouble at once to say, led the whole of the day, hewed steps of the shape and size of Glastonbury chairs, so that by force of my eighteen hours' habit, I began to have some thoughts of settling myself into one for a snooze. Before however I had well made up my mind, our muscles were called into much more varied play by the rocks which followed, and our intellects were being strained to find something with which the abomination of their rottenness could be compared. For my own part I came to the conclusion that large slices of wedding cake, piled together without very strict regard to order, and with the gaps between bridged with almond paste, might represent pretty fairly the state both of rocks and ice. In spite of the giving way of the cake, of the necessity of cutting steps in the paste, and of many flounders into treacherous crusts and joinings, we reached a corner where between warping and pushing, and hauling, we all got upon the ice slope at 10.35. A few yards over this satisfied Melchior that it was by no means to be taken to unless the rocks at the side became absolutely impracticable, so we returned to them, and worked along at their junction with the ice, the hardness of which tempered the softness of the cake to our great comfort. Presently the hardness of the ice extended itself to the rocks, and we were beginning to congratulate each other noisily about the progress which we were making when the fact obtruded itself upon our notice that ice and rocks may have other qualities in common than mere hardness. A series of slabs reared themselves before us, which Macdonald, who should be an authority upon the question, declared must have been brought over from the Matterhorn, and which were as hatefully smooth as any that I can remember to have seen. These passed, we wound easily enough round the coronal that I have already mentioned to a chimney, from the head of which we supposed that a run over snow would bring us in a few minutes to the summit. But as Melchior hoisted himself out of its mouth we augured ill from his silence, and when a moment later we all stood together by his side, we looked at each other's faces for hope,

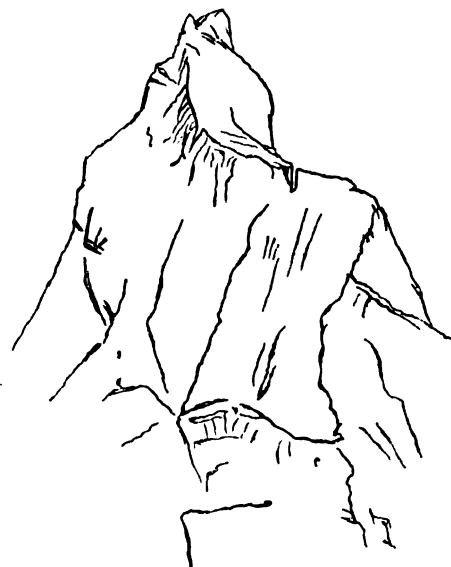
and found nothing but despair. Straight east from us mounted an arête composed of loose stones, piled together in such exact equilibrium that they were able to support each other, although the ridge was broader at the top than it was a few feet below. It was already past mid-day, and the lowest guess put an hour between ourselves and the commencement of an excessively narrow arête, which might be snow, or might be ice, and which trailed itself in gentle curves beyond, but for how far it was impossible to see. The surprise was especially bitter to me, for I had been tired all day, and during the last hour or so had been so exhausted that I felt much more exertion to be absolutely impossible. For me, unless I wished to compromise the chances of the whole party, there was nothing but to stop where I was, so I got down the chimney, piled up a few stones to prevent myself from sliding over the precipice if I should fall asleep, and put my head into a hole, where it could rest in shade upon a cool pillow of ice, and where my mouth could suck icicles *in situ* as I rolled from side to side. I had not sucked away more than two, and having mastered all the details of the Combin was debating whether it would not be well to reserve Cogne and the range of Mont Blanc for my amusement some hours later, when a stone bounded past me, and the rattle of nearing voices stirred my wonder and drew me from my hole. It was absurd to imagine that the rest of the party could be descending with success so soon, and it was equally absurd to suppose that they could be celebrating failure with joyous shouting and with laughter. My bewilderment did not last long. In another instant Macdonald, somewhat monkey and more avalanche, had leapt to my side, and contrived rather inarticulately to explain that the arête was a huge humbug, that the first curl of the snow was the highest point, that they had touched the summit at 12.30, that Woodmass had immediately danced the Highland fling, expressing his joy by the means most appropriate to the place, and that everybody was very drunk with delight, which last assertion was by far the most obviously correct part of his discourse. He went on to declare that I positively must go up in turn, and Grove and Woodmass, like a couple of good fellows as they are, professed themselves perfectly contented to wait till I came down again; so in a few minutes more I was crawling along the ridge. Humbug it undoubtedly was in some respects, for we had been egregiously duped, Melchior and all, as to its length, its difficulty, and the time necessary for its passage; but in another respect I confess that it was a most unequivocal monster—a very *lusus naturæ*. It was a cockscomb of rocks, efflorescent to a breadth of eighteen inches or two feet at the top,

but curving in, so that six or seven feet below it was socketed in a mere line on the real arête, and it seemed as if it ought to sway with every gust of air. In looking down the eye dropped fifteen feet or so before it caught the outward spring of the mountain; and though as a matter of fact I believe the ridge was firm enough, except at one or two points, I never was on a place which gave less notion of stability, or which appeared more alarming while actually so easy to walk upon. A few minutes brought me to the scene of the Highland fling, and while I blessed the activity which had trampled so convenient a stage from which to contemplate the view, I marvelled at the acrobatic tendencies which could display themselves in so eccentric a spot. I have never since been able to repress a longing to see Woodmass repeat his dance on the end of a balanced pole.

There are very few mouths in which a description of scenery, and especially of Alpine scenery, does not degenerate into a catalogue or a rhapsody, and as I have little wish to perpetrate either one or the other, I feel that it will be wise merely to say generally that our common opinion placed the view from the crest of the Dent d'Hérens above that from any other mountain-top known to us. It had the quality of picturesqueness, so rare in the great panoramic wastes which circle most summits. To the south and east the secondary ranges, which make it so hard to see the Dent d'Hérens, except from great heights, interposed themselves between us and the distance in such a way as almost to give the effect of a foreground; though the long flat line of the horizon, broken only by Mont Blanc and the Combin out of all the uncounted peaks, prevented the view from becoming a picture. To the north, however, this essential vice of summit prospects was barred by a framework composed on the one side of the vast crags of the Matterhorn, which reached up into the sky from close by us on the east, and on the other by the massive pyramid of the Dent Blanche, which helped to sink the Oberland, itself too elevated to allow the rising of the far-off country beyond. One thing surprised us much. It was the exquisite beauty of the Dent Blanche, which was even nobler in its general form, and was bounded by lines of even more subtle grace than is the Weisshorn when seen from the *Æggischhorn*. From where we were it looked without exception the grandest mountain in the Alps. But our chief attention was of course directed to the Matterhorn. The whole length of its arête lay exposed before us, and better still, we were face to face with those last rocks, about which there has been so much doubt and so much

dispute. We all of us had a deep respect for the mountain before, and I am sure that our respect was not weakened by what we saw then. From the last notch in the arête, where the final peak begins to rise, the ridge widens out into an inclined plane of slabby rock, which merges after a while in steep cliffs, apparently of almost polished surface, destitute of any trace of arête formation, and rounding laterally over the whole western front up to a point a short way below the summit, where they become more broken, and terminate in two crests, which would seem to run side by side from west to east, that to the south being slightly the higher of the two. Their probable junction at the eastern end of the summit ridge would account for the impossibility which there is of perceiving their independent existence from any other place than the one from which we observed it. From the notch to the top we estimated to be about eight hundred feet, of which the last six hundred were, in the opinion of the guides no less than of ourselves, absolutely impracticable, so far as it was possible to judge at a distance of two miles and a half. I believe it to be agreed that rocks, when viewed from far off, always appear to be more difficult than they are in fact, especially when they are seen in full face; but to whatever extent our conclusions

are open to doubt for this reason, it is scarcely possible that they can be materially wrong in so far as they depend upon—and they depend almost exclusively upon—our observation of the two great general facts of smoothness of the rock texture, and of roundness unbroken by couloirs in the form of the precipice. It is very easy to understand what amount of difficulty would be presented in the finest weather, by cliffs of such length, possessing such characteristics, at such an elevation.



THE FINAL PEAK OF THE MATTERHORN, SKETCHED  
FROM THE SUMMIT OF THE DENT D'HÉRENS.

I am loth to abandon the summit without saying a few words about our mountain itself. Quite apart from the natural predilection which one may be allowed to entertain for one's own pet wild beast, for the animal which has licked no other hand than one's own, I must confess to a fondness for the Dent d'Hérens, which I think is fully justified by its character. Height must always count for something in the thoughts of a mountaineer, and it is worth while to remember that though the Dent d'Hérens may be overtopped by many of its close neighbours, yet that it is higher than the peaks of Dauphiné or the Bernina, that the eye wanders from its crest over the heads of the Graians, and that the Finsteraarhorn and Aletschhorn alone surpass it of all the mountains of the Oberland. Something of attractiveness is added by nobility of form, and to any one who has seen it from the Col de la Valpelline, or from the Stockje, I need hardly speak of its beauty, or its massiveness, or its individuality. To the Valpelline itself it is what the Matterhorn is to the Val Tournanche, or Monte Rosa to the Val Anzasca, the great lonely peak which bars the end of the valley, the one object which the traveller cannot choose but look at, and which fixes itself in the mind as the distinctive thing which separates the Valpelline from the score of other valleys through which he passes. Then I must have greatly failed in my description if I have not let it be understood that the ascent is no mere trudge, but that it is full of variety and of interest, in fact that it is a very pretty scramble. In a year or two some enterprising Swiss will no doubt have seized upon the head of the Valpelline, and an hotel will afford better accommodation than can be got at present to the many travellers who pass by Prerayen. Then I think we may expect to see the Dent d'Hérens take its place among the half-dozen high mountains which, for various reasons, are ascended by tourists who want to make a few typical excursions, without committing themselves to successive seasons in the Alps.

My separate ascent occupied about half an hour. As soon as I rejoined the rest, we began to retrace our steps, and at 7.15, walked into the chalet of Prerayen. The ascent was over: and here, I suppose, in strictness, its history ought also to end. But there are miseries on which the mind cannot but dwell, though the bitterness of recollection may outweigh the pleasure which we derive from the remembrance of pain, and among such miseries are those from which we suffered on the evening of the 12th of August. I should hesitate to meet the ridicule of men whose dinner hour never passes without a meal, but the Alpine Club knows what it is to be hungry, and

in indulging my selfishness of memory, I am sure I shall not find myself quite without the sympathy of others.

In laying in our stock of provisions at Zermatt we had calculated upon making the ascent the day after crossing the Col de la Valpelline, and we had trusted somewhat to the deceptive assurances of one who, I grieve to say, calls himself my friend, that bread and wine, and who knows what luxuries besides, were to be bought from the great Sheik of Prerayen. When we were disappointed in our first expectation, we tried to realise our second, but a few grudging quarts of milk were all that could be wrung from the reluctant murderer, and while we slept in order to economise our food, Melchior and Perren journeyed down the valley to search for meat and for wine, that we might live and not die. But they found it a dry and inhospitable land; from Bionnaz came nothing, and Oyace yielded but one small rancid sausage, two bottles of wine, and a loaf of black bread. The last may be excluded from the list. We tried to chop it with an ice axe, and it hopped about the chalet like a marble; we boiled it for four long hours, while we glared greedily at the pot, and at the end a quarter of an inch of the outside was turned into gluey slime, and within it was as hard as ever. No fragment of that loaf was ever mastered by guides or by travellers. All the way up the Dent d'Hérens, a strict parsimony was observed in the meting out of shares, and the lowest rocks in coming down have a painful association as the spot where at three o'clock our last morsels were eaten. From thenceforth—nothing. As we neared the highest chalets, the absence of cows from the pasture, and the thick smoke curling from the roof told us that the milking was over and that the villanous cheese-pots were full. So we walked to our own chalet of Prerayen, and sat down, and put out before us the slimy black loaf, and five nutmegs, and one ounce of tea; and we were wondering what we could do with them, when a cry was heard that fresh travellers were coming from Chermontane, and a great load lifted itself from off our hearts. Soon they entered; a voluble Frenchman with long boots, a linen coat, and a picturesque hat; a nasal Yankee, with the usual inquisitiveness of his race about others, and with very unusual reserve about himself. With what eagerness we sprang forward to greet them; how affectionately Melchior and Perren helped the guides to disencumber themselves of the knapsacks. The travellers in turn were charmed to see us. No pleasure in fact, could be greater; they had expected to find a nice little hotel; it was disappointing to be obliged to put up with a dirty chalet; and besides, to be frank, they had only one sausage left among

them. No doubt we would recognise the solidarity which exists between mountaineers; we would show that generosity for which the English are so renowned—we would permit them to share our provisions. We pointed to our loaf and to our nutmegs, and told them with grim politeness how delighted we should be if they would do us the honour of sharing our supper. Instantly their expansiveness was turned into dryness. The Frenchman could not deprive us of any part of a meal already so slender, and hastily went away under pretence of washing his hands in the trough outside, evidently afraid lest we should so press his acceptance of our hospitality as to compel him to exchange the solid advantages of his sausage for the more refined luxury of our spice. All the evening they sat moodily apart, silent alike to each other and to us; and at night they rolled themselves up in the remotest corner of the hay, as though our inability to gratify their appetite had been to them a ground of personal offence. They went to Zermatt next day, and though they were far from being an agreeable pair the heart bleeds to think of their privations as they emptily, wearily, laboured over the long slopes of the Col de la Valpelline.

Our miseries had a quicker end. In the morning we sent on the guides to the fatherly old curé of Bionnaz, to beg for the largest breakfast that his housekeeper could cook, and about nine o'clock we were ushered into his dark little parlour, light to us with the brightness of delicious expectation. Let us drop the curtain here. There are scenes too tender to bear the roughness of translation into words.

---

ASCENT OF EL VIEJO, an Extinct Volcano in Central America. BY CHARLES EDEN.

THE old Spanish city of Leon, in Nicaragua, lies crumbling into ruins on a fertile plain between the volcanic chain of the Maribios and the Pacific, some five-and-twenty leagues from Managua, the present seat of the Nicaraguan Government. The town is not in ruins, in the full meaning of the term; that is to say, some 40,000 inhabitants live there, in dwellings old and new, and the place is still the head-quarters of the Bishop of Nicaragua; but the soul of the city is buried under the mouldering masonry of its ancient palaces, now haunted by the scorpion and the snake, while the tumbled fragments of what once has been 'speak, plain as whisper in the ear,' of grandeur long gone by for ever.

It was from this town that, in the early part of the year 1860,