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THE CIMA DI VEZZANA AND CIMON DELLA PALA,
FROM A SKETCH BY J. GILBERT.

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THE CIMA DELLA VEZZANA. By C. C. TUCKER.
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ON a fine afternoon in September 1872 I left Botzen with my friend Freshfield and his wife. Our destination was Paneveggio, the base from which we hoped to effect the ascent of the Cima della Vezzana, the second of the Primiero peaks, and the third in height of all Alpine dolomites.

At Predazzo we quitted the main road which leads up the Val Fassa, and entered the side-valley at the head of which lay, as we were informed by a huge signpost, the 'Forest of Paneveggio.' There is no title which seems to me to be bestowed on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle—the principle, that is, of calling a locality a wood, because there is not any wood there—so much as this same title of forest. The vegetation of the Forest of Dean is, I believe, chiefly represented in its coal-measures; the Forest of Exmoor has to be traced downwards into its bogs; while of all the four hundred square miles of Dartmoor Forest there is nought to be found but the mysterious little thicket of oaks, draped with lichen, and infested with snakes, known to the inhabitants of that wild tableland as Whisht-man's Wood. These and other instances had rendered me sceptical on the subject of forests marked on signposts, and I was consequently ready to lay any odds against the Forest of Paneveggio.

A few miles east of Predazzo the road we were following quitted the line of the torrent descending from Vål Travignolo, and began to work its way up the bare hill-side on the northern slope of the valley. The ascent was slow and tiresome. The horses were weak or lazy, and our prospect of reaching Paneveggio in time to prepare for an early start next day seemed doubtful. The top of the ascent, marked by a little chapel and a pastoral hamlet, was reached at length, and we found ourselves landed on a rolling pasture, stretching to the base of a bold

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spur, part of the northern range, which shut out from us all view of the upper basin of Val Travnolo.

The Cimon della Pala, and its substantial neighbour, the Cima della Vezzana, were not, however, so easily hidden, and before it fell dark we had ample opportunity of studying their strangely contrasted outlines. The Cimon della Pala has been compared to the Matterhorn, but we agreed that it lacked altogether the massiveness, combined with flowing outline, which lends the greater peak its steadfast dignity. Here the influences of nature seemed to be exchanged for the grim inspirations of the galvanic battery. It was a Matterhorn, but a Matterhorn stripped to the bone—the skeleton of a long-buried peak, that had started from its grave in some moment of supreme terror, and which spells were powerless to lay to rest. It is fair to add that this impression of purposeless wildness vanishes on a nearer approach to the peak, when a sense of its mass first balances and then prevails over the idea of disproportionate slenderness suggested by the more distant view.

It was, however, towards the more solid but almost equally lofty Vezzana that we chiefly directed our attention.

This fine peak had hitherto escaped conquest, at first, perhaps, owing to the superior attractions of its fascinating rival, and latterly by borrowing the mantle of invisibility, which the moist winds of the Adriatic are always ready to throw over these southern peaks when any Tuckett or member of the Club of sufficiently business-like aspect is discovered to be prowling in the neighbourhood. Arriving after dark, in ladies' company and in a carriage, with our rope and ice-axes stowed carefully under the seat, we flattered ourselves we should not arouse the suspicions of our victim till it would be too late to call cloud and storm to its rescue.

Night had fairly set in before we drove up to the door of Paneveggio. This old-fashioned but bustling hostelry was formerly one of those hospices or refuges not uncommon in these parts, and of which San Martino di Castrozza, only a few miles distant, and Campiglio, at the base of the Brenta Alta, are also examples. Some seem to have been of a directly religious origin; others to have been built by large landholders, for the use and protection of the peasants of these lonely districts in troublous times, or in case of sudden storms. Whatever their origin, they are all now secularised, and, until the last few years, were generally held by some well-to-do farmer, part of the conditions of whose occupation it was that accommodation and shelter should, as heretofore, be provided

for the traveller. As soon as possible after our arrival we revealed to the good people of the inn our wish to make an expedition in the direction of the Cima della Vezzana, and inquired for a hunter who would carry our provisions and make a trusty third on the rope. The man was very shortly produced. A stalwart fellow—resolute, black-bearded—his appearance was in his favour, as also his expressed willingness to go anywhere and do anything.

By 5 o'clock next morning we were off. Nothing could be more charming than the scenery into which we plunged a few minutes after leaving the inn. By the cool light of morning we confessed that the Forest of Paneveggio was no misnomer. Here were splendid pines putting to shame the degenerate growth of Swiss valleys, dewy glades, lit with masses of the autumnal crocus, on every side the freshness and the sound of clear and rushing streams, until at last we emerged on a green and level meadow, and found ourselves face to face with one of the noblest of dolomite ranges. In front rose the broad and sheer face of the Vezzana, 5,000 feet above the sward on which we stood. To the left a row of wild peaks yet unexplored, any one of which would attract attention if it stood alone. To the immediate right of the Vezzana the small but exquisitely pure glacier, up which, if anywhere, a way had to be found; while on the farther side rose the jagged wall of the Cimon della Pala, to the face of which there clung here and there snow-beds of amazing steepness. Behind us lay the dark sweep of the forest from which we had emerged, nearly touching with either horn the extremities of the great dolomite cliffs.

It was a tiresome bit of work to reach the glacier, the way to which lay over a long slope of loose gravel and terminal moraine, followed by a steep and slippery bank of ice. The glacier once attained, all seemed plain sailing, when, as luck would have it, we suddenly arrived at the edge of a crevasse. I do not think I exaggerate when I say that this chasm was at least 3 feet in depth and nearly 6 inches wide. At the sight of this tremendous obstacle our guide's face assumed an air of resolution. After sounding with his pole, he informed us that there was no '*terra solida*;' that life was to him '*Più che la moneta*;' and, in short, that he did not intend to accompany us farther. Here was a complication! A cloudless sky and a new peak shining overhead; a route marked out for us, and no obstacles in the way but our forlorn condition and a moderately steep snow-wall in front. The dilemma, if we ever felt one, was speedily solved. The recreant was en-

trusted with a note to explain his desertion, and was told that he might go about his business.

Our guide dismissed, we turned to scan our route with the seriousness of sudden responsibility. The *névé* of the Tra-vignolo glacier, pencilled here and there with the curving lines and light shadows that mark the concealed crevasse, sloped steeply upwards to a well-defined bergschrund, extending completely across the glacier from the cliffs of the Vezzana to those of the Cimon della Pala. Above the chasm the glacier ended in a snow-filled trough, which led straight up to the pass between the two peaks. The knapsack of provisions had been already transferred from the shoulders of the deserter to mine; the rope was put on speedily, but with an extra glance at the knots, and we turned our faces to the slope. It was steep, but we pressed steadily upwards, here and there sounding for a hidden crevasse, or zigzagging to the right or left to avoid an open one. It seemed possible to cross the bergschrund in two places, one about midway between the cliffs on either hand, the other close to the crags of the Cimon della Pala. The masses of snow that filled the chasm were, in both cases, printed with the tracks of chamois, and appeared to offer no serious obstacle to the passage of hobnailed boots. We selected the bridge nearest the Cimon della Pala, and a few minutes' work sufficed to place us on the upper side. A short traverse to the left was necessary to reach the most snowy part of the slope; and in the close proximity of the blue depths below the steps that I cut were very measures of capacity. So soon as the snow deepened we began to work upwards. The couloir was, like so many of its fellows, of a capricious character—at one time provided with a snow coating in which it was possible to kick steps, at another hard enough to stand a deal of cutting; while higher up the grey glisten of ice tried the temper of the axe not less than that of its owner.

The chief danger of the amateur in such a place arises from the temptation to shirk the labour of cutting a step where there seems to be just enough snow to support him without one. The temptation assails him in a double form; first, the vulgar desire to save himself trouble; secondly, and far more insidiously, in the suggestion that the men behind him are growing impatient of his slowness, and fancy that he is cutting steps where none are needed. The desire to appear brilliant is, indeed, *the* besetting sin of an amateur, and is the chief reason why he is so seldom what he aims at being. When he has learnt to disregard utterly the question so often put by the man at the tail-end of the rope, 'Is it necessary to cut so many

steps up there?' he has acquired at least one of the qualities which go to make up the good guide. I need hardly say that on this occasion no such question was asked, and that the occurrence by which the monotony of our expedition was presently broken was certainly not due to any unfair stress brought on the leading man by his companion.

An hour and a half's work had brought us within a few hundred feet of the head of the gulley, which was closed by a wall of ice, some ten or twelve feet in height, representing a section of the snow-field which lay on the top and farther side of the ridge. A direct escalade was impracticable, and we scanned the rocks on either hand for some mode of turning the obstacle that barred our passage. The rocks on the right appeared broken but unsound; the rocks on the left still preserved their cliff-like character, but close to their base there appeared above the snow a low-lying back of rock, which seemed to offer a less arduous route for the next fifty feet or so than was afforded by the snow-slope, here both steep and tough. Cutting a large step as my basis of operations, I leant far over the rock to find a projecting hand-hold wherewith to haul myself on to the main mass. I found it in the projecting edge of a dolomite slate, which seemed to form part of the native rock. It was *croda morte*, or decayed rock, nevertheless, and the instant I threw my weight upon it it came away. I staggered back, lost my balance, and the next moment found myself clear of the rock and shooting down the slope at a speed which, if maintained for thirty or forty seconds, would have taken me over or into the great crevasse we had crossed some hour and a half before.

At this point I think I hear a chorus, or rather (for they are not entirely in harmony with one another) a confused noise of critics, each ventilating his particular theory at my expense. Clear above all rises the voice of what I may be allowed to call the orthodox mountaineer: 'It would have served you right if you had gone into it. What business had you to try a new peak without guides?' Next comes the criticism of those who look with some leniency on 'private practice,' but who are for that very reason less tolerant towards any failure of skill in the amateur: 'I don't so much mind ascents being made now and then without guides, but then'—with severity—'they must be made by fellows who will not slip.' I am happy to be able to agree in a measure with both these classes of critics. I am willing to admit that most amateurs occasionally exhibit a lamentable want of skill, and that, in the case of arduous expeditions, where the strain on strength and nerves is

prolonged, the presence of the professional mountaineer is the best guarantee of safety and success. I must be allowed, nevertheless, to express my conviction that the habit of tying oneself between two natives of the Oberland or the Valley of Chamoni is, unless supplemented by independent practice, fatal to the acquisition of high mountaineering skill by the amateur, and certainly not the mode in which the great guides of those districts acquire theirs.

In the present case, however, the principle of guides or no guides was scarcely involved. The wisdom of taking a guide for a new ascent was not disputed either by Freshfield or myself. We had been disappointed in securing the services of the only guide in that district worth the name, and we had been deserted by the local hero in whom we hoped to find a substitute. It was only a question whether, on such desertion, we should abandon a fine expedition, or trust to any small skill we might have acquired to save us from a mishap, or, if one should occur, to save us from the consequences of it. My narrative up to this point has shown that, on the first head, our confidence was excessive; the rest of it will, I hope, prove that on the second it was not misplaced.

The position was not otherwise than a critical one, and had I been alone I might have felt tempted to drop my axe, turn on my back, and descend whither the slope might have chosen to carry me. A sense of duty to my companion, and perhaps also to myself, prevented me from yielding to this faint-hearted suggestion, and even before the rope tightened (there was about twenty feet between us) I had turned face to slope and had driven in my axe with all my force. This, for a moment, seemed to have but little effect on my pace, and I was still shooting down when the jerk came. Freshfield held admirably (he said afterwards that the rope seemed to tighten with a steadily increasing strain rather than with a violent tug), but the steps broke away beneath his feet, and, in spite of his efforts he was dragged down. But by his tenacity the first swift rush had been checked, and the break-power was enabled to exert its full force. In a few moments the drag of two ice-axes, both buried as deep as we could drive them, and scoring the slope with regular and continuous furrow, began to make itself felt; the pace grew slower and slower; and just as it seemed as though we were coming to an actual halt I found myself firm-planted in one of the roomiest steps we had cut during the ascent. So strong, indeed, was my position, that I almost wished Freshfield to glide past me in his turn, that I might show with what ease I could hold him.

He did not yield me that gratification. When I stopped he stopped, and so speedily that there was scarcely a foot of slack rope between us. The place at which we pulled up was within sixty feet of the rock from which I slipped. Freshfield, who had been standing somewhat below it, could not have been dragged more than forty. The only damage we had sustained in our descent was in our hands, parts of which had been literally flayed by the sharp edges of the hard snow-crust as we drove our axes home. They were bleeding violently, but we at once applied a hair of the dog that had bitten us, and with a snowball patted firm on either set of knuckles we slowly began to mount in our old tracks, and soon found ourselves again abreast of the treacherous slab of rock. I was not disposed to trust it a second time; and as the state of our hands made a long bout of step-cutting particularly undesirable, we crossed to the rocks on the other side of the couloir. These were steep and very rotten, but our distance from the pass was now trifling, and in a quarter of an hour we stepped on the saddle between the two peaks. Seen from above, the rocks we had climbed appeared very repulsive; but travellers crossing the pass the reverse way may take heart, as with a little care and steadiness they are quite manageable.

We now halted for a while, lunched, and held a council of war. The knapsack which I had carried, and which had shared my fall, contained bottles of wine and a fragile store of eggs. Not one of these, strange to relate, had been broken, and, with the exception of an occasional rueful look at our hands, we discussed our meal with cheerfulness. Plentiful cold cream was applied to our wounds, from which the sun and air was still farther excluded by gloves and handkerchiefs, and in the full blaze of an Italian day we resumed the ascent. It was indeed a scorching morning, but the heat was the only enemy we had to encounter. The alternate beds of snow and bluffs of rock that led towards the summit offered no particular difficulty, and by 11 o'clock we were scrambling along the topmost ridge, a rude wall of blocks that swayed and trembled on the brink of the huge precipices that close the head of the Val Travnigolo. We chose the most solid spot for our stone man, and, in spite of the growing soreness of our paws, built it fairly and well. The Cimon della Pala was the only peak in the neighbourhood that dared to claim supremacy over us, and even that superiority seemed to be wellnigh reduced to the height of Mr. Whitwell's stone men.

The near view obtained from dolomite peaks is often not very attractive. The rock-forms which, by their boldness and

strangeness, astound the traveller during the ascent, are little seen when he is above them all; and the great plateaux of bare rock with which a dolomite region abounds—too lofty for pasture and not high enough to carry permanent snow—produce a painful sense of barrenness and desolation not easily paralleled in the Alps, if even in Europe. In this instance, however, the element of grandeur was supplied by the noble form of the Pala, and the sternness of the Primiero plateau was more than compensated by the rich forests of Val Travnigolo. The bright blue lake of Alleghe, nestling in the embrace of the huge Civita, and the town of Primiero, just peeping round the base of the Cima della Rosetta, added unexpected gleams to the immediate landscape. If, however, some dolomites present a near view too bare and grey for the eye of a colourist, they almost, in every instance, supply a distant view, the hues of which in their richness and subtlety defy the resources of his palette. Not the poetic glories of the Euganean hills can vie with the glimpses of Italian plain and Adriatic shore gained from the loftiest summits of Titian's country. The peaks of Primiero do not fall behind the Antelao and the Pelmo in the splendour of their glowing distance; and it was only the consciousness that we had still much to do which finally withdrew our gaze from sunny dreamland to the immediate things of earth.

Half an hour saw us again on the top of the pass. Should we return to Paneveggio by the way we came, or complete the pass (the most formidable half of which was accomplished) by descending to the head of the Gares gorge? We soon settled that we had had a sufficient taste for one day of the quality of the slope by which we had mounted, and that it would be much more interesting to return to Paneveggio by making the complete circuit of the Pala, although such a course involved the passage of two additional cols and the crossing of long spaces of rough and fatiguing ground. A swift glissade brought us to the foot of the steep and shaly gullies that lead up to the Passo delle Cornelle. These accomplished, a stroll across the lofty plateau brought us to the base of the little Cima della Rosetta, which I had climbed in 1870. Its ascent does not require more than half an hour from the pass, and it is one of the most fascinating view-points possible. Then came a plunge into the most scorching heat I ever remember on a mountain-side. As we bore away to the right numberless barren ravines had to be crossed, into which the sun poured with merciless power, while the great dolomite cliffs above glowed like burnished copper in the fierce western blaze. The high road was reached

at last, but it was nearly sunset before we gained the ridge which divides the Val Travignolo from the Primiero valley. The descent to Paneveggio was simply delightful—first across broad green pastures and then through shadowy depths of forest. Ere long, a light September mist gathering, ‘put forth an arm and crept from pine to pine.’ Soon in fuller volume it rolled across the uplands, and by the time we entered the door of our inn at Paneveggio the grim heads of the Cimon della Pala and its brother-peak were completely wrapped in soft grey folds of vapour. The curtain had fallen, the play was over.

TWO ATTEMPTS ON THE AIGUILLE DU DRU. By C. T. DENT. Read before the Alpine Club on June 2, 1874.

I BELIEVE that I am doing an unparalleled thing—that I am going against all precedent. This paper contains but the history of two failures on one mountain. I have searched through back numbers of the ‘Journal’ to discover a similar history. Invariably, however, some passage was discovered recording success in the papers descriptive of maiden peaks and passes. Some paragraph always turned up detailing the sensations experienced on reaching the goal—that spot on the earth’s crust which was at once the summit of the peak or pass and of the writer’s temporary ambition. Cheerful people remark at times that one learns more from failure than from success. Possibly. Then the opinion that I formed when commencing the Latin Grammar is confirmed, which was, that learning is a very disagreeable thing indeed. My failures, as the heading of this paper has already notified, were on the Aiguille du Dru.

I had long ago been tempted by the appearance of the peak to test the possibility of its ascent. It seemed to me too prominent to be inaccessible. From its height, 12,517 feet only, it would doubtless not attract much attention were it not so advantageously placed. Frowning sternly right down on the Montanvert, it is, of course, a familiar object to everyone. It has, I take it, been photographed, portrayed in little distorted pictures on workboxes, trays, and the like; stared at through the binoculars of Cook’s tourists, and otherwise insulted, as often as any other mountain in the chain, Mont Blanc alone excepted. It is, doubtless, tempting to these Goths of artists. But it is too noble a peak; with the vast