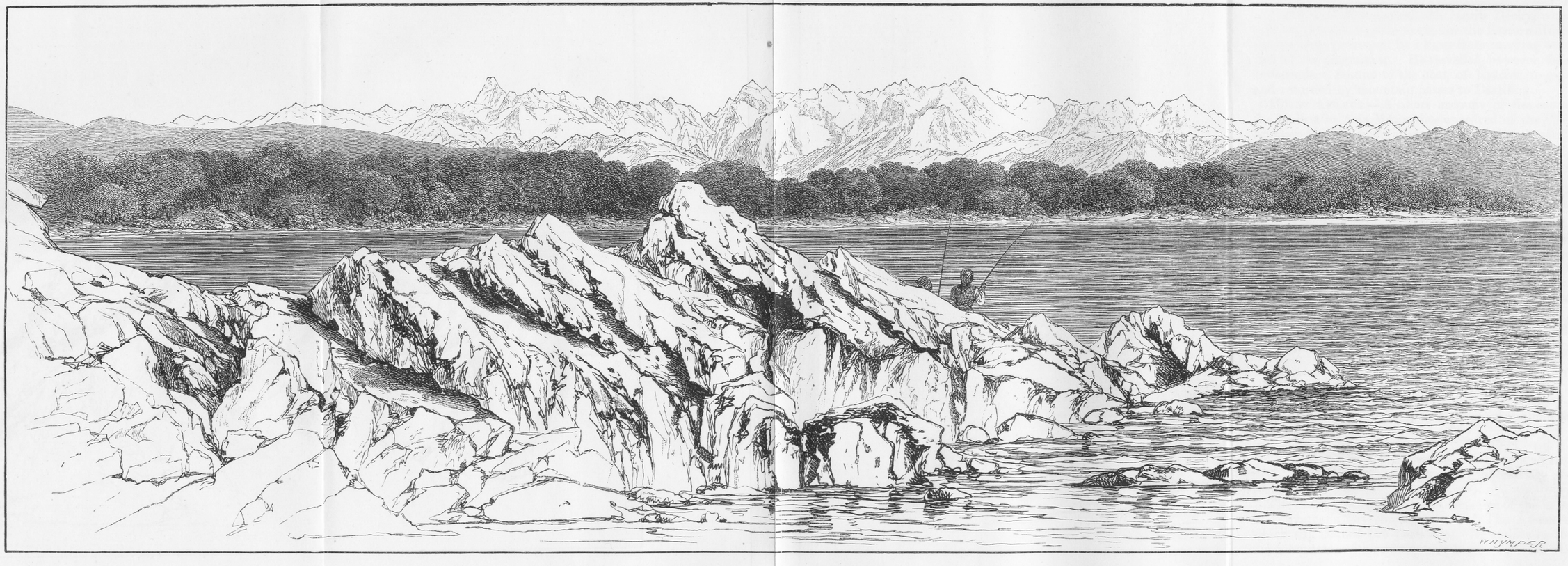

THE MARITIME ALPS, FROM THE ÎLE ST. HONORAT.

From a Drawing by A. Croft.

THE

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The Maritime Alps. By the Editor.

2. *The Seaward Valleys in Spring.*

ΕΡΜ. Ἰδοὺ δή, ἐπάνειμι αὖθις· εὖ ἔχει· πάντα ὁρῶ· ἀνάβαινε ἤδη καὶ σύ.

ΧΑΡ. Ὄρεξον, ὦ Ἑρμῆ, τὴν χεῖρα· οὐ γὰρ ἐπὶ μικρὰν με ταύτην τὴν μηχανὴν ἀναβιβάζεις.

ΕΡΜ. Εἴ γε καὶ ἰδεῖν ἐθέλεις, ὦ Χάρων, ἅπαντα· οὐκ ἔνι δὲ ἄμφω, καὶ ἀσφαλῆ καὶ φιλοθεάμονα εἶναι. Ἀλλ' ἔχου μου τῆς δεξιᾶς, καὶ φείδου μὴ κατὰ τοῦ ὀλισθηροῦ πατεῖν. Εἶγε, ἀνελήλυθας καὶ σύ· καὶ ἐπείπερ δικόρυμβος ὁ Παρνασσός ἐστι, μίαν ἑκάτερος ἄκραν ἐπιλαβόμενοι καθεζώμεθα. Σὺ δέ μοι ἤδη ἐν κύκλῳ περιβλέπων ἐπισκόπει ἅπαντα.

ΧΑΡ. Ὁρῶ γῆν πολλήν, καὶ λίμνην τινὰ μεγάλην περιῤῥέουσαν, καὶ ὄρη, καὶ ποταμοὺς μείους τοῦ Κωκυτοῦ καὶ τοῦ Πυριφλεγέθοντος, καὶ ἀνθρώπους πάνυ σμικρούς, καὶ τινας φωλεοὺς αὐτῶν.

ΕΡΜ. Πόλεις ἐκεῖναί εἰσιν, οὓς φωλεοὺς εἶναι νομίζεις.

LUCIAN.

DAY by day, in the clear winter sunshine, I had seen from the hills round Cannes the snowy chain. The sojourners by the sea give it a glance now and then, and know it all as the 'Col di Tenda.' But to penetrate into its recesses no more occurs to them than a visit to Chamonix did to English travellers at Geneva in the seventeenth century. Even if sound in lungs and limb, they have, however, some good excuse for their indifference. For it is not until mid-May, when the sun-fearing English have flown homewards, that spring reaches the Alpine valleys. It is one thing to go in search of 'the Alps in Winter,' when your home is in a wet fog; another, when you are basking on the warm shores of Provence. I at least had no sufficient enthusiasm.

But the months slipped past, and I was still at Cannes. A change had come over the spirit of the landscape; the brown hill terraces were brown no longer, but bright with young green corn, which gave a new tone to the olive groves. There was less delicate and strange colour in the atmosphere; but, in exchange, an infinite variety of blossom and verdure in every field and copse. An exquisite cloak of young leafage

had fallen across the plain of the Siagne; among the crags of the Estérels the heaths and cistuses were in full bloom; even between the stones of their pathways tall asphodels were springing up. April—the May of the North—had come upon us.

In the Pyrenees I had once reached in April a peak of 11,000 feet. There seemed every reason to hope that a visit to the snowy chain would be rewarded by equal success, and a glimpse of the well-loved lands and heights which lay beyond it, Italy and Monte Rosa. At any rate, an excursion to San Martino Lantosca would show me two of the principal valleys of the Maritime Alps—those of the Vésubia and Tinéa—and enable me, I hoped, to identify the three principal peaks seen from the coast.

The Vésubia joins the Var some fifteen miles from the sea. But no wheel-track penetrates its last gorge. The high road from Nice to San Martino Lantosca follows a narrow glen for some miles, until near the high village of Levenzo it crosses a shoulder of the hills, and finds a way down into the Vésubia valley. I preferred a path of my own finding which promised wider landscapes.*

Heavy rain had fallen for the previous twenty-four hours; but the morning of the 6th of April (1877) was cloudless. Land and sea swam in blue quivering sunshine. The country was in its fullest spring outburst. The rose-hedges were throwing out their thousands of pink and white many-petalled blossoms. The quaint fringed blooms of the mesembryanthemum—spots of pale yellow or deep pink, such as Mantegna scatters over his bowers—hung in festoons down the roadside walls. The last purple and scarlet anemones were making way for the first poppies and gladioluses among the growing wheat. Here and there a crumpled little brown leaf on the low dusty vine-roots showed that the warm sun was stirring their juices. The stiff crooked branches of the fig-trees, which had stood for four months bare and gaunt, were now each tipped by an emerald

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* In this district the 'Alpine Guide' requires, even on the high roads, considerable correction to bring it up to date. For instance, the détour by Levenzo is enormous for a traveller going up the Tinéa valley. A direct carriage-road along the banks of the Var and Tinéa leads from the Var station to San Salvatore, and will be carried on to Isola. The new road now completed to San Martino Lantosca has altered all the distances in the Vésubia valley. See Murray's 'Switzerland and Piedmont, 1879,' and Joanne's 'Provence—Corse—Alpes Maritimes,' 1877.

bud; one or two of the topmost buds were already unfurling into broad leaves. Through the tangle of young growths and flowers the Mediterranean shone, a vast breadth of blue, varied with vivid rainbow hues where the Var, swollen by the recent rains, poured its earth-laden flood into the waves. Above the sea horizon the Corsican mountains rose out of the waters, which, by hiding their base, give the snowy crests a strange and ghostly beauty.

The road led through the orange and olive gardens of the Nice basin, and then climbed the western spurs of Mont Chauve. Along these it continued in a high terrace, from which the eye ranged over the backs of the hills to the Iles de Lérins and the Estérels. The most prominent feature in the wide and noble prospect was the rock of St. Jeannet, a huge red buttress of the range which stretches from the Var to the Siagne. The new road ended at Aspromonte, a cluster of houses packed together on a mountain spur, high out of all danger from plundering pirates or Saracens. From this point I trusted to find my way by some foot-track to Levenzo.

Among the branching paths above the village, I stopped a peasant to ask the way. I expected some sort of answer in the Provençal dialect. To my delight, the reply came in good Italian. When I used a few words of the southern tongue, the man's face brightened, and he offered at once to turn back, and put me in the right path. Such an act of simple courtesy is taken as a matter of course among Italian hills. In southern France I had not met with one such all the winter long.

The Provençal peasant has a character of his own. He is very estimable, but far from amiable. He seemed to me above all things suspicious, argumentative, tenacious of his rights; hence by no means inclined to allow trespassers on his little domain. As every vineyard has its pathway, and there are no gates or stiles to distinguish public from private paths, this tenacity naturally has often a chance of exhibiting itself. Near Cannes one is not surprised that trespassers should become tiresome, particularly when they appropriate the sweet crop of the violet-beds. But I have frequently been turned back near remote country villages, where a foreigner is not seen once a year. I have had, while walking along the high road with a handful of wild anemones, to submit to a violent harangue on the invasion of the rights of market-women involved in my self-plucked nosegay. It does not add to the pleasantness of the Provençal that his dialect is unintelligible to strangers, and that he takes advantage of his separate speech to evade as far as possible—unless intelligence seems to his own

advantage, in which case he brightens up wonderfully—questions addressed to him in French.*

It would be, of course, most unfair to take the Provençal and the middle-class Parisian as specimens of French manners, and my experience of the provinces is hardly adequate to generalise upon with confidence. Yet I cannot help believing that it is the Italians who possess, as a *nation*, beyond all their neighbours, the secret of manners. French manners, good as they generally are, seem to me acquired; Italian, inbred: the one to be based on a calculation that, among neighbours, politeness pays in the long run; the other, the outcome of natural sympathy. It is perhaps a proof of this distinction, that the Frenchman is quick to ridicule the stranger within his gates, while, as an old author puts it, 'if the strangeness of the habit draws the Italian's eye to it, yet he will never draw in his mouth to laugh at it.' †

Let us return, however, to a subject less delicate than national character.

Beyond Aspromonte I followed a rough track, keeping close to the crest of the hills overlooking the Var, until a mile or two short of Levenzo it fell into the high road from Nice. The village itself occupies a hill-top to the left of the saddle from

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* My impressions are confirmed by the report of a French Academician, printed in Mons. Lenthéric's excellent book on 'La Provence Maritime,' pp. 363–4. The traveller, Mons. Millin, expresses himself far more vehemently than I have done, but he wrote in 1807.

† I am aware that I here put myself in opposition to high authority. Voltaire laid down a dictum, which Mr. Matthew Arnold, in his persuasive positive way, has lately endorsed, that 'the gift of the age of Louis Quatorze to the world was the spirit of society,' 'a high standard of social life and manners.'

Let us see what opinions our ancestors held on the subject before or about the time this revelation was being made at Versailles. Lassels, who took young men the grand tour about 1660, tells them to go to learn how to deport themselves of 'that nation which has civilised the whole world and taught men manhood,' adding, 'the Italians have spread abroad their manners over all Europe, which owes to them its civility as well as its religion.' Against the 'fantastical, giddy breeding of France' his pupils are expressly warned. In Pepys' 'Diary' we have a specimen of the breeding objected to in 'Little Pelham Humphreys, lately returned from France an absolute Monsieur full of form and confidence and vanity, and disparaging everything and everybody's skill but his own.'

These Englishmen of the seventeenth century evidently believed good manners a somewhat older invention than they have been held by Voltaire and Mr. Arnold.

which the road descends into the gorge of the Vésubia. From a neighbouring brow the eye looks down over a broad cultivated basin to Rocchetta di San Martino, perched fortress-like on a crag beside the Var. Beyond the river rises, in most picturesque confusion, a tumbled mass of woody conical hills, with villages planted high on their slopes or brows.

I spent the afternoon and night at a decent wayside inn, and in the first sharp freshness of the morning pursued my journey to the snows. A few hundred yards beyond the house the road crosses a saddle, and the Vésubia comes into sight flowing at the bottom of a bare brown gorge. The road turns sharply to the right and descends along artificial terraces cut in the face of a steep ruinous hill-side, deeply furrowed by water action. After heavy rains it must be exposed to dangerous earth-falls. The landscape was at first arid. Soon, however, a white village, embowered in olives, came into sight on the opposite hill. At the angle, where the road bent back into a deep recess and began to ascend, the scenery became most romantic. Cypresses mingled with the olives, and huge chestnuts spread their bare arms against the blue sky, while the ground between their roots was coloured by a quiet carpet of violets and primroses.

From this point the road winds upwards to the picturesquely scattered houses of Duranus. Behind them it passes along the face of a sheer precipice. A stone thrown from the parapet would fall into the Vésubia 1,200 feet below. This terrible cliff—one of the most abrupt on any Alpine road—is known as 'Le Saut des Français.' In the spring of 1800, before Marengo, the Austrian general Melas drove Suchet and the armies of the Republic in headlong rout from the passes of the Maritime Alps and across the Var. Coming over the hills from the Col di Tenda, the Austrians here fell upon a French detachment, and many of the defeated soldiery were driven over the precipice. Such is the account given by local tradition and embodied in the name. But the military authorities referred to by Alison supply no further details as to the combat.

Beyond 'Le Saut des Français' the road for some miles slowly descends to rejoin the river. The predominance of the olive still gives a southern character to the scenery, and the flora is rather Mediterranean than Alpine, though rocks tower boldly overhead, and a sharp snow-peak, or the rugged comb of Mont Clapier, alternately closes the valley. La Riviera, a group of houses with a church, comes in as a most effective addition to the landscape. Beyond it, road and river,

now close companions, force the passage of a narrow defile where the first tints of spring were showing on the branches, and the underwood was already green.

The form of the basin below Lantosca suggests an ancient lakebed. The barrier of rock which closes its upper end exhibits a very curious specimen of water action: the Vésubia has worn through it a deep narrow cleft, which has been enlarged artificially to enable the road also to profit by it. The old village of Lantosca lies on the top of the bluff commanding the upper valley. The inns are by the road side, and are mere taverns.

For the next four miles the valley is wide and open, and, although the snows of Mont Clapier are in sight, tame compared to the lower gorges. In summer the scenery is doubtless rich and smiling: now, the fruit-trees, forerunners of the spring, sprinkled their fair blossom upon the face of a landscape as bare and brown as that of Piero della Francesca's 'Nativity' in the National Gallery. A few olives still gave sober variety to the slopes, hardily maintaining their ground where pines would have been more in keeping with the rocks and snow.

Between Roccabigliera and San Martino di Lantosca, some six miles, the valley rises steeply, and is too narrow to admit of cultivation. The baths of Berthemont, a summer resort, lie some hundred feet above the road on the right, in the opening of a side glen. On the opposite sunless mountain side, a pine forest climbed up into the snow. Venanson, 'the hunters' meet,' is the name of the high-perched hamlet which looks down on the last bend of the valley.

Amongst gaunt chestnut trunks and brown meadows, sprinkled with thousands of pale stunted crocuses, and set in a frame of pine woods, dark against the winter snows, San Martino, the Courmayeur of the Maritime Alps, came suddenly into sight. The little town, a mass of richly coloured stone walls and roofs capped by two church towers, stands on a promontory between two brawling Alpine torrents. I call it *town*, for the first thing that strikes the traveller is, that San Martino was a walled place. Who were the enemies who forced every dweller in the Maritime Alps to live as in a fortress, like an Ossete chief, or a modern Syrian peasant on the confines of the desert? On the coast it is easy to picture the sudden descent of pirates, and the flight of the scared villagers to their hill-top. But what inducement can have led marauders to penetrate these mountain fastnesses? The Saracens, we are told, infested at one time all the Alpine passes, and made the journey to Rome a real 'Pilgrim's Progress,' so far as danger was concerned;

but any precise information as to the doings of the invaders in these mountains is difficult to find. It is true that the Maritime Alps were from early times the scene of desperate fighting, whenever the French attempted to penetrate into Italy. But a mountain hamlet can hardly have found it worth while to fortify itself against passing armies.

At San Martino, as in more famous towns, the ancient walls are giving way before modern needs. The place aspires to become a sort of 'succursale' to Nice as a summer resort. Half a dozen 'chalets' (in the Parisian, not the Swiss sense) spot the fields about the village. A public promenade is being constructed as a termination to the new road, which has at last reached the gates. There is a very fair inn and pension (Hôtel des Alpes), which throughout the summer months offers moderate comforts at fair prices. There is also a liliputian chapel, which, I was told, had been built by an Englishman for English service.

The highest peaks of the neighbouring range are not visible from the village, and the landscape makes no pretence to grandeur. But it is perfectly Alpine, and in summer the abundance of water, the pines, and fresh meadows must be very welcome to visitors from the sun-scorched coast.

The new road winds outside the old walls to a little piazza at the upper end of the village, one side of which is occupied by a townhall, and the other by the Hôtel des Alpes. The old High Street, a narrow lane impassable for carriages, stubbornly refuses to be modernised further than by the admission of an 'English pharmacy,' and a telegraph office.

The master of the hotel and his wife had just arrived, and although their house was not yet prepared for the season, they made me very comfortable. The local guide was soon found. Of course he pronounced all ascents impossible, owing to the amount of snow on the mountains. According to my habit in such cases, I refrained from argument, and contented myself with intimating my desire to test practically how high it was possible to go with safety. From the hills near Cannes a symmetrical pyramid appears to rise in the centre of the chain, answering in position to the Cima di Mercantoura of maps. When, however, I inquired about that summit by name, the local guide at once assured me that the Cima di Mercantoura of the country was an insignificant eminence near the Col di Cerieja, and that the view-point in the direction I spoke of was the Cima della Rovina. This summit it was agreed accordingly we should attempt.

A cloudless morning encouraged our start for the snows.

Half an hour above San Martino the valley bends abruptly to the east, and the Italian frontier is crossed. The boundary line is here most erratic; the heads of several glens on the Nice side of the chain having been retained by Italy, probably to protect the late King's chamois' preserves round Valdieri from poachers. A sudden ascent beside a pretty waterfall leads to some chalets.* Near these we left the track to the Col di Cerieja, and mounted a steep path which led into an upland basin, at the foot of a rugged granite crest, very conspicuous from the valley. Before we left the pines we had come to the snow; fortunately it was crisp and hard. Long slopes led up to a higher basin, where the only colour was in the lichen-tinted granite crags, which shone golden in the pure morning sunshine.

Our peak rose precipitously to the east of the gap at the head of the glen. We climbed snow slopes to the shoulder between it and the bold crest, which now showed as a continuation of its southern ridge. We followed this till it became precipitous, and then traversed the south-eastern face overlooking the head-waters of the Vésubia. Had not the snow been in perfect order there might have been some risk of starting an avalanche. Probably, had I been alone, or with François Devouassoud, I should have stuck to the ridge, at the risk of some stiff rock climbing.

It is perhaps worth while to point out here, what has struck me more than once, that in mountaineering at unusual seasons a local guide's advice may often be disregarded with advantage. He has a natural tendency to follow the ordinary summer route, while a climber to whom all routes are equal chooses that which is safest under existing conditions, and thinks little of some extra difficulty. As a rule, only such mountains as can be ascended by their ridges are safe in spring; and, on the ridges and the summit itself, snow cornices must be avoided with the greatest vigilance.

Climbing steep slopes, here and there broken by rocks, we drew near at last to the ridge of the Alps, the white sky-line which all through the winter had girded my horizon. Looking back, I saw all the familiar foregrounds below me: the low curving headland of Antibes, the mounds of the Estérels, the wide bay of Saint Tropez, the southern cape of France, the grey sea plain, over which the wind was driving white cloud-flocks. In front, a hard black rock rose in our faces.

As we scrambled upwards, an object of jewel-like bright-

* A chalet inn has been opened since my visit near this spot.

ness shone out over the rock and on the edge of the sky. In another moment a glittering line fringed the new horizon. There was no mistake as to the nature of those clearly defined indentures on the distant heaven. Monte Rosa was in advance, backed by all her court; the stately Dent Blanche draped in spotless white; the Matterhorn, black and rough. Then came a crowd of lesser peaks of Arolla; and, closing the procession, the royal bulk of the Grand Combin, with the Velan in waiting on him.

One more step and the wide sudden prospect was complete. At our feet lay the mountain hamlet of Entraques. A short space further, Cuneo, with its river and churches and bridges and railway train, was seen like a toy town; and beyond it, stretching away to the base of the Pennine Alps, the broad plains of Piedmont shone in the morning sunshine.

My guide was disposed to leave unclimbed the few feet between us and the top, but when he saw I meant to go on he made no difficulty. A steep but safe ridge led us to the wave of snow which formed the summit. In one sense the panorama was not altogether satisfactory. We were surrounded by half a dozen loftier summits. Towards the Cima del Gelas the view was clear. But to the north rose the bulky Rocca dell' Argentera, the loftiest of the Maritime Alps, with two satellites, the Cima di Nasta and Cima di Culatta, both exceeding us in height. These peaks all belong to a great northern spur. On the main chain where that spur joined it, and between us and the Passo di Cerieja, rose another peak, also surpassing us by a few feet, the Cima Balma dei Ghilié of the Piedmontese map.

These neighbouring and higher summits cut off Mont Blanc, Monte Viso, and a part of the range I particularly wished to see, that about the 'Rocca Malivern.' Inland France was a wild waste of snow. Mont Clapier and its neighbours showed as bold rocky teeth. The sea coast was visible for many miles, but Corsica was obscured by the mists which floated above the waters.

The descent was speedily accomplished, for the night's frost had done its work well, and wading was put off to the last hour. During our return the local guide told me various stories as to his ascents of Mont Clapier and the Cima del Gelas, and also of the Monte della Stella, by his account the only difficult climb in the neighbourhood. He had never been to the Laghi delle Meraviglie, and could give me no account of the inscribed rocks there to be seen. I have before me a pamphlet by Mr. Moggridge, who, with a German companion, visited the spot, and

copied many of the rude designs, locally known as the 'Meraviglie.' They are found at a height of 7,800 feet, on rocks smoothed by glacier action, at the head of a glen which opens into the Roya valley at San Dalmazzo di Tenda. Mr. Moggridge mentions with more respect than it deserves an absurd theory which attributes them to Hannibal's soldiers! Among the designs are many drawings of horns of animals, of rude stone implements and arrowheads; in one only of those reproduced is there any attempt to copy the human form.*

There are two ways from San Martino to the Tinéa valley: the shortest by Val di Blore; the longest, but in summer the most interesting, by the Val de Molières. Fearing a heavy snow-wade, I chose the former. A steep zigzag path among rocks and box bushes climbs the hill directly opposite San Martino. From the top we had a good view of the glen leading up to the Col di Finestre, now deep in snow in its upper portion. The hospice is deserted, and the pass entirely closed from December to May. The hillside south of the crest of our little pass was covered with larches. The ground beneath them was still white with snow, but on the branches yellow buds were already swelling. As the morning sun streamed on them, the outline of each tree shone as if tipped with ghostly flame.

From the pass there is no distant view, and high limestone crags on the right shut out the main chain. Below, in the centre of a bare basin, lies the hamlet of San Dalmazzo. On nearer approach it is seen to have been once walled; at least, the houses had been so disposed that their outer walls formed a continuous rampart. An arched gateway protected each entrance. The church bears signs of high antiquity and has a well-proportioned porch and campanile. There was originally a crypt and a triple apse. The red colour of the slates used gives a pleasant warm tone to the otherwise shapeless buildings. The village, like many others in this part of the Alps, is badly

* Others have been more recently copied in a paper I have not seen—'Bulletin de la Société des Sciences à Cannes,' vol. ii. pp. 72–87, 'Étude sur les Sculptures préhistoriques du Val d'Enfer, près les Lacs des Merveilles, de M. E. Blanc, accompagnée d'une planche.' M. Burnat, however, who has examined the drawings on the spot, expresses serious doubts as to the claims of at any rate a large proportion of them to any high antiquity. Some of them are 'unfit for publication.' He himself found an idle shepherd in the act of adding to these 'prehistoric remains.' Mons. Lenthéric, in his 'Provence Maritime,' describes the neighbourhood of Nice as singularly rich in prehistoric remains. He ascribes them to a Keltic race (probably the barbarians inhabiting the last chains of the Alps mentioned by Strabo), who were driven up into the mountains by Phœnician colonists.

supplied with water, depending on one spring, which is considered unwholesome by strangers, owing only, however, so far as I could make out, to its extreme coldness.

The path descends slowly to the villages of Val di Blore, which lie in a more sheltered and fertile situation. Chestnuts now appeared, and steep banks yellow with primroses led me down to a torrent. The direct track to the mouth of the glen is being turned into a carriage road. We followed a mule-path along the slopes in order to reach San Salvatore, which lies some miles above the junction of the torrent of Val di Blore and the Tinéa. The vines here were planted in trenches and protected from winter frost, a novelty to me in alpine agriculture. Presently we came to Rimplas, a hamlet perched on a steep-sided brow jutting out between the two valleys. The Tinéa flows at least 2,000 feet below in a deep gorge. Beyond it the hills rise steeply towards the broad-shouldered Mont Mounier; their lower spurs are worn away by water, and broken into deep glens and hollows. Some of the villages occupy the most extraordinary situations. A house on the opposite hill overhung a precipice of 1,200 feet. Any children who live there must be kept hobbled, or they could scarcely survive infancy. Another considerable hamlet, higher up in the hills, was glued like a swallows' nest against a rocky slope, which, seen from opposite, looked wall-like.

The nature of the hillsides makes the access to the lower valley difficult. In the precipitous clay slopes water-action has wrought, and is constantly enlarging, a deep bay. No nervous person would care to ride along the path which circles round it.

This spot had been some time before the scene of an absurd incident. A new préfet of Nice made up his mind to visit his subjects in the mountains. Finding that he was to pass their way, the municipality of Rimplas—if this is the title by which the fathers of the hamlet are properly designated—determined to do him every honour. They assembled at the entrance of the village, and, as the préfet's cavalcade drew near, greeted it with a 'feu de joie' from all the available fire-arms in the place. Unfortunately, the préfet was at the moment at the narrowest point of the path, where it is a mere groove on the face of a crumbling precipice. Unfortunately, also, the spirited mule he rode, not having taken part in the campaign of 1870, was unprepared for such an explosion. Its rider, therefore, suddenly found himself imitating, much against his will, the attitude of Napoleon crossing the Alps, as represented in the most authentic engravings. The préfet, feeling unequal to such rivalry, rapidly slipped off on the inside, and

made his entry on foot, to the dismay of the assembled villagers, whose hopes of governmental favour were thus suddenly brought down to zero.

Deeper and deeper we descended, till at last we were on a level with the tower of San Salvatore, a poor collection of drinking shops and hovels beside the muddy torrent, which is here hemmed in by steep hills. The gorge continues for eight miles more, then near Isola the valley widens out and becomes a broad bleak Alpine basin. Isola, however, is said to be picturesque, and it is at this point that a judicious explorer will enter the valley of the Tinéa from the north.

I had a long drive of 36 kilomètres to S. Martino del Var before me. My driver had been the conductor of the post-cart, and consequently had a large acquaintance along the road. Indeed he was the most socially disposed person I ever met with. His conversations with every passer-by began with a shout delivered 300 yards before we met, and ended in another sent back to a like distance after we had passed. Between times my ears would have been glad of some repose, but our animal called for incessant exhortations. It stopped not only at every public-house, but at corners whence paths turned off to a wine-shop in the distance. My driver plausibly explained that the horse had belonged for some time to the collector of 'contributions indirectes' and could not shake off the idea that he was out tax-gathering.

The scenery of the Tinéa on the whole disappointed me. From its depth and narrowness its channel might be expected to claim a high place among Alpine gorges. But owing to the extremely friable character of the soil the hillsides want character, and the vegetation, compared to the southern gorges of the Lombard Alps, is sparse. The defile, however, in which the Var and Tinéa meet is equal in savageness to the gorge of Göschenen, which it much resembles. At the junction the road from Puget-Théniers, a remote country town which obtained three years ago a passing prominence as the refuge of the Foreign Minister of France in his search for a seat, comes in on the right. For the next two or three miles the scenery is extremely romantic. On the right, a noble wood of stone-pines clothes the brow on which stands the hamlet of Bonson, and the road passes through groves of chestnut, which shelter the houses of La Ciaudan. A short distance further the Vésubia issues from the mountains on the left, and the road to Roquesteron crosses the stony bed of the Var by a long bridge.

A little further the road reaches a modern suburb of S.

Martino del Var—untidy houses scattered round a village green. The old village still clings to its safe but inconvenient rock of refuge. I had intended to sleep here, and walk round next day by the hill road through St. Jeannet, a village formerly famous for its witches, but now only remarkable from the great red rock-castle, a buttress of the hills of Coursegoules, which towers above it, and is a landmark from Nice to Cannes. But the inn at S. Martino looked insufferably dirty, and the weather had broken. No vehicle could be obtained, but I had yet time to walk thirteen miles in the gloaming to the station of Le Var, where I could count on the late 'gamblers' train' to take me back to the luxuries of Cannes.

The road was flat and straight, the night soon fell, and with the darkness came heavy rain. When the endurance, however, is not too prolonged, and there is a certainty of comfort at the end, there is some pleasure in despising darkness and rain, and a bad heel. Despite all these hindrances, I finished my thirteen miles in very good time.

My half-hour of waiting at the dreary little station was enlivened by a 'screaming farce.' An old farmer of Vence played the leading character, ably supported by the whole strength of the P. L. and M. Company; that is to say, by the station-master and two porters. The farmer had gone to sleep and been carried past his station, and was now called on to pay his fare back to it, some six sous, before returning. In vain the Parisian station-master appealed to rules, showered illustrations—supposing one took a ticket from Paris to Fontainebleau and went on to Marseilles, could one expect to make the journey there and back for nothing? The old fellow triumphantly retorted: He had never been to, or come from, either place; and stamping his stick on the floor demanded confirmation from the bystanders in the broadest Provençal. The station-master prayed him at least to talk French. Temper was lost on both sides. The porters looked threatening, and a gendarme was spoken of. Suddenly there was a scream and a roar. While everyone was engaged with the old gentleman the train had arrived. The station-master lost his head, and called everything and everybody sacred; the porters flung open doors; the public rushed in a general 'sauve qui peut' into the utter darkness of the platform. We are off! Not yet; the train pulls up short, and the old fellow is bundled into the last carriage by the two porters. I saw him again on the platform at Antibes, having been a second time carried past his station; and I believe he may still be found travelling up and down the line, refusing to pay his fare, vexing the souls of 'Messieurs les

chefs de gare;' and supplying to strangers a characteristic type of the southern farmer.

As the train slowly carried me homewards, I endeavoured to pass the time by turning over in my mind what I had seen during the previous days. I set myself to frame an indepen dent opinion on a topic lately much discussed, the relative charm of the Alps in winter and summer.

I felt I had just added to my previous experiences fresh material for a judgment. For in early spring the high valleys are still wintry. But for a crowd of crocus blossoms scattered over the brown earth, and a golden tinge on the larch branches, I had observed no signs of returning life, and could easily have fancied myself in midwinter, as I had seen it before in other parts of the Alpine chain.

I do not despise the peculiar attractions of the wintry half of the year. Then the region of silent sublimity is extended so as to include the lower hills and passes. If the life of herds and flowers is gone, life in some of its less agreeable forms is also banished. The excursionist has disappeared, the horn-blower is silent. The muddy Swiss torrents are converted into clear trout streams; the supercilious, or truculent, Swiss landlord into an obsequious host. Wherever water trickles in summer, the frost fairies play their fantastic pranks. Every cascade is turned into a shining obelisk, every dripping crag is draped with bold ice fringes, even the branches of the pines and the bushes along the roadside are tricked out in strange liveries. Winter has other charms which painters best appre-ciate. The low sun and the morning mists give colour and tone to mountain slopes which in the glare and glitter of an unclouded August look harsh and dull. The blue sky keeps all day long a quivering mottled softness, as in a reflection. The pine-clad hollows are steeped in strange impalpable colours, and even the dullest crags succeed in having, to borrow the phrase of a distinguished critic, their gem-like moments. There is no longer the painful sense of a complete absence of atmo-sphere, dwarfing mighty mountains to mere rocks, which we have all of us felt from time to time in the Alps in summer.

But is all this compensation for the beauties that are lost? As usual, there is a good deal to be said on the other side.

The summer sun is a necessary test of true greatness. In winter every range of 6,000 or 8,000 feet apes the eternal snows. Mountains which carry their ermine through August we recognise as true sovereigns. But snow spread far and wide loses its divinity. It ceases to be mysterious, and be-comes commonplace. In winter the foreground, wherever the

earth can still be seen, is made up chiefly of parched grass, bare branches, and dusky stumps. The pine-forest alone remains the same; and even this is changed, for the violent opposition of the dazzling snows turns it into a black shadow. In early summer the Alpine meadows, a few weeks before a patchwork of brown and white, like an immense drying ground, are covered ankle-deep in flowers—forget-me-nots, large daisies, purple orchids—which grow so thickly that the green blades of grass scarcely show between their blossoms. The glaciers look down through the budding branches of the chestnuts, or the brown unfolding leaves of the walnut on fields where the maize is already high, and the vine tendrils are leaping lightly from branch to branch. The snows no longer shine one white bank above another, but as a silver line over ranges chequered with blue and pink clouds of the great gentian and the Alpine rhododendron. The sense of fitness, which enjoys 'everything in its proper place,' and all things at their best, is satisfied. Even the everlasting snows are recognised as no abode of desolation. In the lowlands snow is at best a sheet drawn over nature's sleep. But in its summer home it is an agent of life. Mr. Tennyson, I venture to think, expressed a questionable, if a general, feeling when he linked Death with the Silver Horns. The really dead mountains are not the streaming Alps, but those of the farther South, which stand gaunt and parched, with no shining robe to hide their hollow ribs, no gifts to offer the valleys at their feet.

'The Alps in Winter' will always attract their summer friends by the force of novelty. Whether or not the attraction proves permanent will probably depend on the frame of mind in which they are approached. Optimistic theologians and students of natural history, who believe in the goodness of creation, or feel a simple delight in observing nature in activity, can hardly care to contemplate her for long when wrapped in a deathlike trance, however beautiful may be her winding-sheet. Kingsley, who united both characters, had this feeling so strongly that he did not appreciate snow-mountains at any time. On the other hand, all who feel deeply the darkness of the world admire and find sympathy in an aspect of nature which seems to reflect their own mood of stern and patient endurance.

For myself, I confess to having made another season my favourite. I am ready to maintain against all comers the claims of 'the Alps in October.' How many of us who think we know the Alps have seen the Italian valleys, or the Vale of Sallenches, in their full autumn splendour? If there is anyone

in the Alpine Club who has not been at the Riffel when every rock glitters with new-fallen snow, and the pastures exchange the crude green of midsummer for a rich harmonious brown hue,* when the larch trees are so many golden spires amongst the evergreen pines, and the bilberry bushes make a red carpet at their feet, when in the sharp chill of sunset every peak down to the little Riffelhorn creates a cloud phantom of itself which, after a hundred fantastic changes, melts away, as suddenly as it was born, into the starlit night—that man has yet to see Zermatt at its best.

From the fact that not a single Alpine Clubman was there on the 2nd of October, 1878, I am inclined to think that this hint may be worth giving; and I should be glad to persuade one or two to remain another year to enjoy the glories which nature seems to keep back till the last unworthy tourist has gone home to the pale damp skies of his native Germany or England.

3. *The Baths of Valdieri in Autumn.*

'Ein reiner Schnee
Liegt auf der Höh';
Doch eilen wir nach oben.'—GOETHE.

In fair weather the railroad journey from Turin to Cuneo, under the shadow of the great range, is one of the most delightful in Europe. The rich vineyards and campanili of the plain form a shifting foreground, while against the sky towers, solitary and sublime, the noble pyramid of Monte Viso, fulfilling beyond all other Alpine peaks our childhood's ideal of a mountain. When the evening vapours gather and girdle its shoulders, leaving the majestic summit still clear, the most matter-of-fact mountaineer can hardly gaze without awe at so marvellous an apparition; and the idea of scaling such a pillar of the heavens may seem for a moment, even to him, a presumptuous dream. But, for the time, we must pass by without making our pilgrimage to San Chiaffredo, and allow our train, slowly drawing near the centre of the great bay in the hills which opens out before us, to carry us on to the station of Cuneo.

The town is placed on a low, steep-sided brow above the junction of two streams. Separated by five miles of level ground from the base of the Alps, its buildings gain no picturesque advantage from the accidents of the ground. There

* The ground colour of the finest Central Asian rugs. Is it not probable that it is there borrowed from the autumn hues of the great mountain pasturages over which the rug-makers wander?

is no upper town, as at Bergamo or Biella, to climb to for a wider view over the plain. A straight High-street runs from end to end of the town, lined with deep arcades resting on mediæval columns, some of which have finely carved capitals. It is connected on either side by short lanes with shady terraces, formerly ramparts, which command a wide outlook over Alp or Apennine.

It is the juxtaposition and contrast of these two famous ranges that gives its character to Cuneo. The mountains seen from the southern rampart are chestnut-clad, smooth-browed Apennines. Turn round, and true Alps are before us—Monte Viso pierces the sky; while behind it, distant but still imposing, shine the snowy masses of the Grand Paradis and Monte Rosa. The three peaks, bold tawny rocks, which look down the central street, are thoroughly Alpine. One of them is the highest of the Maritime Alps, the Rocca dell'Argentera; its companions are the Cima della Culatta and Cima della Nasta. The junction of the two ranges lies east of the Col di Tenda. Beyond it the hills soon become soft and southern.*

Apart from its mountains and its picturesque High-street, Cuneo is not remarkable, unless for the profusion of its markets. Nowhere have I seen a more magnificent display of fruit and vegetables, and the dinner set before me and my fellow-guests at the Barra di Ferro, an excellent inn, bore striking witness to the abundance of the land.

But in my outward journey in 1878 I saw nothing of the beauties of the Piedmontese plain, or of Cuneo. Driven out of Dauphiné by a snowstorm on September 25, I found Turin dark and chilly. The plain looked autumnal, damp and wretched. I seemed to have fallen under an evil dream. Italy, it appeared, had gone north. Chestnuts and campanili were involved in a grey pall of seething Scotch mist. The sky and landscape were utterly incongruous. Snow in May sometimes produces at home a contrast of the same nature, only less violent.

François Devouassoud and I arrived shivering under plaids at the village of Valdieri. We had intended to walk on to the Baths, some ten miles higher up the glen of the Gesso. But when we got to the junction of the roads, the weather looked

* M. Burnat, a Swiss botanist, who has systematically explored this region, fixes the E. limit of the Maritime Alps at the Col di S. Bernardo, considerably E. of the Col di Tenda. It seems to me that, from a simply orographical point of view, the natural boundary between the two ranges would be the lowest pass between the headwaters of the Roja and the Tanaro, a few miles E. of San Dalmazzo di Tenda. But the Col di S. Bernardo seems the deeper gap.

so hopeless that we hesitated to push on into the mountains to the deserted Baths. We were content to reach Entraques before the clouds burst on us. The inn, at the further end of the long straggling village, was most unpromising externally, but provided a clean bed and splendid trout.

The roar of many waterspouts had lulled me to sleep, and the same sound greeted my ears on awaking. About 7.30 A.M., however, the clouds suddenly broke, and in half an hour every vapour had passed from the sky, and the surrounding ranges stood out sheeted deeply in new snow, which touched the upper limit of the chestnut forests.

We determined to start at once to explore the neighbourhood of the Rocca dell' Argentera, to which, from our present position, the Val della Rovina formed the natural approach. This glen runs up to the main chain, and is parallel to that in which the baths are situated. The spur which separates them is in its whole length high and rugged, and culminates in the Rocca dell'Argentera.

Even on a cloudless morning Entraques did not impress us favourably. The basin in which it is situated is bare, and the mountains in view are without character. A rough cart-road brought us before long to the point where we had to leave the track of the Col di Finestre. Some men we met told us that the pass was closed by the fresh snow.

At the mouth of the Val della Rovina are some farmhouses in a grove of chestnuts. Above this we found nothing but a few rough shepherds' cabins. It is a continuous ascent of two hours through commonplace scenery to the lake. Royal paths are visible on the steep mountain sides on the left, leading to out-of-the-way spots, where the chamois could be most easily driven.

The Lago della Rovina is a charming mountain tarn, perhaps two-thirds of a mile long. Its transparent waters are hemmed in by wooded cliffs, and the valley beyond it is closed by a high barrier. The bottom is very deep and singularly smooth, except where a mass of boulders has fallen into it.

The ascent of the barrier is made by a good path, the commencement of a royal mule-road connecting the lake and the Baths of Valdieri. The rocks are clothed with ferns, and even the lateness of the season and my want of botanical knowledge could not conceal the uncommon richness of the flora, for which this neighbourhood is celebrated. From the top of the barrier we had to descend to rejoin the stream, which has made, or found, a lower gap in it. The rocks beside the path bore very marked traces of glacier polishing, particularly on the crest of the barrier. But this crest stretched across the glen with a

boldly undulating outline, and a great boss protruded where the ice might have been expected to plane down most heavily. I never saw a place which seemed to bear witness more strongly to the capacity for polishing, and the incapacity for removing serious obstacles, of glacier ice. The whole district appears singularly rich in remains of glacier action; although the present glaciers are very few and small. Mont Clapier alone bears any considerable amount of ice. The quantity of new snow made it impossible to say for certain whether any glacier still remained in the hollows of the range before us, beneath the Cima Balma dei Ghilié. The ice had certainly shrunk far back from the comparatively recent redans of rubbish which stretched across the mouth of each sheltered recess.

Behind the barrier we had climbed lay a lake basin, now drained; above this again another tarn. Deep tarns are characteristic of this granite chain. It is perhaps owing to my inadequate reading; but I have never seen it explained by the advocates of Sir J. Ramsay's theory of the excavation by ice of the beds of mountain lakes, why the work should have been carried out with so much more vigour where the rocks are, as in the case of granite, hardest!

We now had the watershed before us, with a possible direct pass over a rough gap east of my old friend the Cima della Rovina to San Martino Lantosca, a king's path leading left over a by-pass to the track of the Col di Finestre; and another path, right to the Baths of Valdieri. South of this was the portion of the range we were most interested in. Above a steep wall of rocks a long, but fairly gentle, slope rose to a ridge seeming to contain for some distance no prominent peak; after it had sunk slightly to a broad gap, it suddenly sprang up in a bold tower and pyramid. The pyramid, slightly lower and furthest from the gap, bore a big stone-man. The tower had none. This tower we settled, without much doubt, must be the Rocca dell' Argentera.*

Under ordinary circumstances we should, though it was past midday, have attacked it at once. But the enormous quantity of new snow deterred us, and we made up our minds to be content for the day with crossing the Passo della Lourousa to the Baths. The ascent was dull and laborious, and from the top there was little to be seen except the snows of Mont Clapier, with a singularly sharp rock-peak in their midst. On the way down there were fine views of the ridge to our left, which now

* It was the Cima della Nasta; the pyramid, the Cima della Culatta. The real Argentera lies too far back to be visible.

took the form of a double-pronged tooth seamed by a snow gully of singular steepness, and flanked by a huge rock castle.* When we got out of the deep wet snow, which held us for an hour and a half on the crest, we were able to look about and recognise in the huge block opposite us the Rocca del Mat. It is a curious mountain, excessively precipitous, but too flat and formless about the top to be picturesque. A venturesome little king's path corkscrews to a certain height up its cliffs, and then stops suddenly, as if it had found its task more than it had bargained for. As in every descent, there is a sort of landing-place, with a chalet, before the final plunge. This is effected by a good cart-road constructed with the most exasperating skill, so as to retain a gentle gradient throughout. The hillside being for the most part too rough and steep for short cuts, we had to follow the zigzags of the road, and to walk several miles to reach a building we might almost have thrown a stone upon.

The Baths of Valdieri are one of the most famous and fashionable resorts of Piedmontese society. When Turin was a capital and Victor Emmanuel was young, it was here that king and court took their villeggiatura. Here, before he had discovered the superior capabilities of the Graians, was the royal sportsman's chief hunting-ground. Here his gallantry found abundant flowers with which to 'bunch' the beauties of his court. But in those days the king lived in his camp, and the bath-house was a comparatively humble affair. In 1857 a company took the place in hand, and built one of those huge barracks which satisfy modern Italian taste, which inherits from Rome a love of size for its own sake. Several so-called chalets—detached houses, something between a Swiss cottage and a suburban Turinese villa—have been built near it. The Rocca del Mat opposite is an imposing object, but the situation is too confined for beauty. The immediate environs, however, are pretty, as the deep gorge is clothed in fine beech-woods. The two glens which meet opposite the bath-house afford agreeable strolls. In the western glen, the Vallasco, is a large shooting box of the late king; and above it lie several clear tarns, the limit of the bathers' excursions. Another excuse for a stroll is a large boulder known as the Tomb of Merlin. It is connected in legend with a mysterious individual, a pseudo-Merlin, who is said to have retired from the court of Gian Galeazzo to this solitude.

* These two prongs are the Stella and Argentera (summit No. 1) of Mr. Coolidge. See p. 340.

As we came up to them the Baths looked dull and deserted. But we were little prepared to find how desolate they were.

François soon hunted out the 'custode' in an adjoining cottage. He was not in any sense a promising person. His manners were dull, and he could not do more for us than unlock a bed-room. The whole staff had fled; the cellar was locked; the cows had gone down to the valley; there was no bread, nothing but potatoes, and no butter to eat them with. After an interminable absence François returned with the potatoes and a rug to supply the want of bed-clothes. The latter unfortunately proved to contain a starved insect population. The custode's wife was reported worse than her husband, and unable even to boil water. It was hard to starve amid the symbols of plenty. The superscriptions 'cucina,' 'ristorazione,' 'caffè,' painted in capital letters over the doors of the corridor seemed to mock our hunger.

The next morning was as fine as the heart of a mountaineer could desire. We had determined to approach our peak by the Val dell'Argentera, a glen joining the Valletta a mile or two above the baths.

A royal hunting path led us up the first steep slope to a level platform. The range before us consisted of a rugged block on the north, with several jagged peaks separated by very steep snow gullies stretching south from it. One royal road led to the foot of the block on our left, another up to the right. Having in our minds the view obtained from the head of the Val della Rovina, and being also misled by the Piedmontese map, we believed one of the peaks to the right must be the Rocca dell'Argentera, and took the right-hand path. It would, I believe, have been at any ordinary time possible, though perhaps not easy, to climb the face of the block on our left. But, as we afterwards ascertained, these rocks were rendered wholly impracticable by the recent snowfall, which had melted sufficiently to cover them with a glaze of ice. Those who had experience of London pavements last winter can imagine the dangers of stones in a similar condition laid at an angle of forty degrees and upwards. When the path ended we climbed on over steep broken boulders, amongst which weather-beaten pines struggled to a most unusual height, at least 8,000 feet. The golden lichen tints on the rocks overhead reminded me of those I had noticed a year before above San Martino.

When we got into the gully by which we proposed to gain the crest the work became severe. The snow was nowhere

good, and in places very steep and very soft. It was impossible to make any use of the glazed rocks on either side. We had to work on patiently, taking care not to send down an avalanche with ourselves on the top of it. At last we stepped up to the saddle, where an unwelcome surprise met us. We were only on the crest of a spur dividing two of the branches of the Valletta. Far away across the head of another deep hollow was our peak of yesterday. I made up my mind it could and must be reached, and then gave ten minutes to contemplation. There was one most delightful feature in the wild mountain view. A snowy dip of the main chain framed the bright blue sea. The pleasure and encouragement that glimpse gave us was immense.

We wanted some encouragement, for there was a bad two hours in front of us before we could hope to reach the saddle at the base of our peak. First, led by some considerate chamois, we scrambled down a gully. Then, at imminent risk to our limbs, we jumped about for some time on the points of boulders, all the interstices between which were filled up by new snow. Then we pounded up a long soft slope to a pass leading to the Val della Rovina. Here we had on our left a high shoulder, which hid what was behind it.

On our right rose the steep face of the Nasta. It is, no doubt, perfectly easy to climb when the rocks are bare. But the quantity of snow on them now was enormous. It choked all the convenient chimneys, and hid all the best handholds, so that one found oneself forced to climb along the projecting angles. We had gone but a short way when François pulled out the rope; and it was expedient. Going up pretty straight, not without some sharp scrambling, we reached in about an hour from the pass the summit, a narrow ridge beautifully mantled with piles of pure fresh snow.

Seated on its highest boulder, we feasted our eyes on a view of the most wonderful beauty. The main chain had altogether sunk, except where Mont Clapier on our left showed sharp rocks above broad snows. There was nothing to hide the beautiful coast-lands of France, from the double top of the Berceau above Mentone to—it was difficult to say what—westwards. Distance beyond distance, glowing in afternoon sunshine, and robed in the most delicate colours, stretched the familiar hills of Provence: Cheiron, Estérels, Montagnes des Maures. The Var shone in the lowlands; a pale smoke showed the train approaching Nice. Out at sea, the Corsican mountains hung midway between heaven and earth, no longer white with winter snows, but blue and purple, and canopied,

as at all times, by a luminous cloud suspended high above their crests.

The sudden change, from the fatigue and monotony of climbing and wading among rocks and snow to repose and this beautiful out-look over the land and sea, made the hour spent on the top a most ecstatic moment. Perhaps the fasting by which we had been prepared for it may have rendered the vision more intense, and its memory more vivid.

The gentle reader, however, need not be afraid lest my ecstasy should overflow into these pages. I have already, I fear, bitterly undeceived that too sanguine reviewer who recently thanked heaven that only one more great peak remained to be climbed; and, therefore, that only one more description of a view was possible. As if views only existed on great peaks, and were devoured by their first climbers! His patience shall not be tried any further; but he will, I think, hardly object to my quoting a few lines, which express with delicacy and grace the sources of part of the delight climbers feel on a mountain top; and may, coming from a standard author, have weight with those who think it bad taste to admire a panorama:—

'Distant objects please, because, in the first place, they imply an idea of space and magnitude, and because, not being obtruded too close upon the eye, we clothe them with the indistinct and airy colours of fancy. In looking at the misty mountain-tops that bound the horizon, the mind is, as it were, conscious of all the conceivable objects and interests that lie between; we imagine all sorts of adventures in the interim; strain our hopes and wishes to reach the air-drawn circle, or to "descry new land, rivers, and mountains," stretching far beyond it; our feelings, carried out of themselves, lose their grossness and their husk, are rarefied, expanded, melt into softness, and brighten into beauty, turning to ethereal mould, sky-tinctured. We drink the air before us, and borrow a more refined existence from objects that hover on the brink of nothing.'*

There was, however, one flaw in our happiness. A mile

* Hazlitt's Essays, 'Why Distant Objects Please.' Hazlitt, of course, is here speaking of distant views in general, not of mountain tops. Emerson, in his 'Monadnoc,' a poem frequently quoted by Professor Tyndall, but less known than it deserves to be to English mountain-lovers and haters, has expressed once for all the influence mountain-tops exercise on the minds of mountaineers—that is, on all right-feeling men. But, as Emerson adds—

'Tis the law of bush and stone,
Each can only take his own.

perhaps to the north a great rock rose several hundred feet above our heads. Hitherto it had been concealed by an intervening buttress. But there was no doubt that this was the true Argentera. We consoled ourselves with the reflection that our peak was maiden, and that the Argentera was said to have been more than once climbed.* But it cut off very provokingly the Pennine Alps east of Monte Rosa. Of the other parts of the chain, Dauphiné showed poorly, the Southern Graians finely.

As to our height, we appeared to be, perhaps, a few feet higher than the Rocca del Mat, but well above anything in the main chain nearer than the Cima di Gelas. And now we looked out eagerly for the mysterious western mountain of Cannes. Where it should have stood, at the head of the Vallasco, there was nothing but a cluster of third-rate rocks. No peak caught the eye but the majestic Monte Viso.

It was too soon time to descend. I confess with regret that we neglected to build a stone-man. If it pleases anyone in consequence to dispute our ascent, it may be done with impunity. It proved easy to clamber down the broken rocks on the southern face of the peak to the hollow between it and the Cima della Culatta, where a blue tarn lay dark among the new-fallen snow. This gave us another hour's tiresome work before we got down to the bare pasturages, where we found tracks leading down into the very head of the Valletta. Here are several groups of chalets, very unlike those of the northern Alps. The shepherd's cabin is a circular beehive-shaped hut roofed with turf. The sheep are penned in at night in a walled fold close at hand, and the principal employment of their custodians seems to be to collect and carry down manure.

We returned to the Baths in the gloaming, and, to obtain the food and rest which their inhospitable emptiness denied us, drove on at once to Valdieri village. We had not done all I had intended in the Maritime Alps, but I had satisfied myself as to the general character of their scenery. The upper glens are wild and stern, but seldom picturesque; the peaks are deficient in grandeur of outline, compared to those of equal height in the Eastern Alps. The views from them, however, are of surpassing beauty; and the valleys and gorges on the southern side are full of noble scenery. Perhaps starvation influenced our opinion of the Bagni di Valdieri, and the next climber who visits them will find the quarters more attractive. Let him remember that he will find there no

* See, however, Mr. Coolidge's notes, p. 340.

guides, but that fair ones may easily be procured from San Martino Lantosca.

Those who do not care for climbing I recommend to give a trial to the Certosa di Pesio, now a Pension, lying N. of the chain in the valley E. of that which leads to the Col di Tenda, and only some three hours' drive from Cuneo. San Dalmazzo di Tenda, S. of the pass, is also a well-known resort of the Nizzans.

TOPOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

The only authoritative Government survey of the central ridge of the portion of the Maritime Alps here described is at present the old Piedmontese map 1 : 50000, which is unfortunately full of errors. I can of course only point out such as fell under my own observation, trusting to the work of the Italian Staff, which is re-surveying the district in preparation for the new general map of Italy on a scale of 1 : 100000, the Valdieri sheet of which will probably be published in the course of the next year.

1. In the first place, the old map is responsible for raising, by the use of capital letters, to the rank of a summit of primary importance the Cima di Mercantoura. From it not only all general maps, but also the authors of the French Ordnance Map and of an official Carte générale du Département des Alpes Maritimes, 1865, have borrowed this name for one of the chief summits of the Maritime Alps. The height assigned to it in the Piedmontese map is 3,167 mètres, or 10,390 feet.

To Mr. Ball must be given the credit of having first discovered the false pretensions of the Cima di Mercantoura. He omitted it from the catalogue of the principal summits of the Maritime Alps both in the 'Alpine Guide' and the new 'Encyclopædia Britannica' (Article 'Alps'). But influenced, I suppose, by the little interest felt in England in this range, he confined himself to this negative form of correcting the common error. Map-makers at home and abroad (even his own map-maker, Mr. Weller) paid no attention to the hint, and the Cima di Mercantoura goes on to this day figuring as bravely as ever in the best atlases.

The first person on the Continent to call public attention to this strange error was M. Burnat in the 'Echo des Alpes' of 1878, in a note headed 'Une cime de moins dans les Alpes,' in which he pointed out positively the mistake made by chartographers.

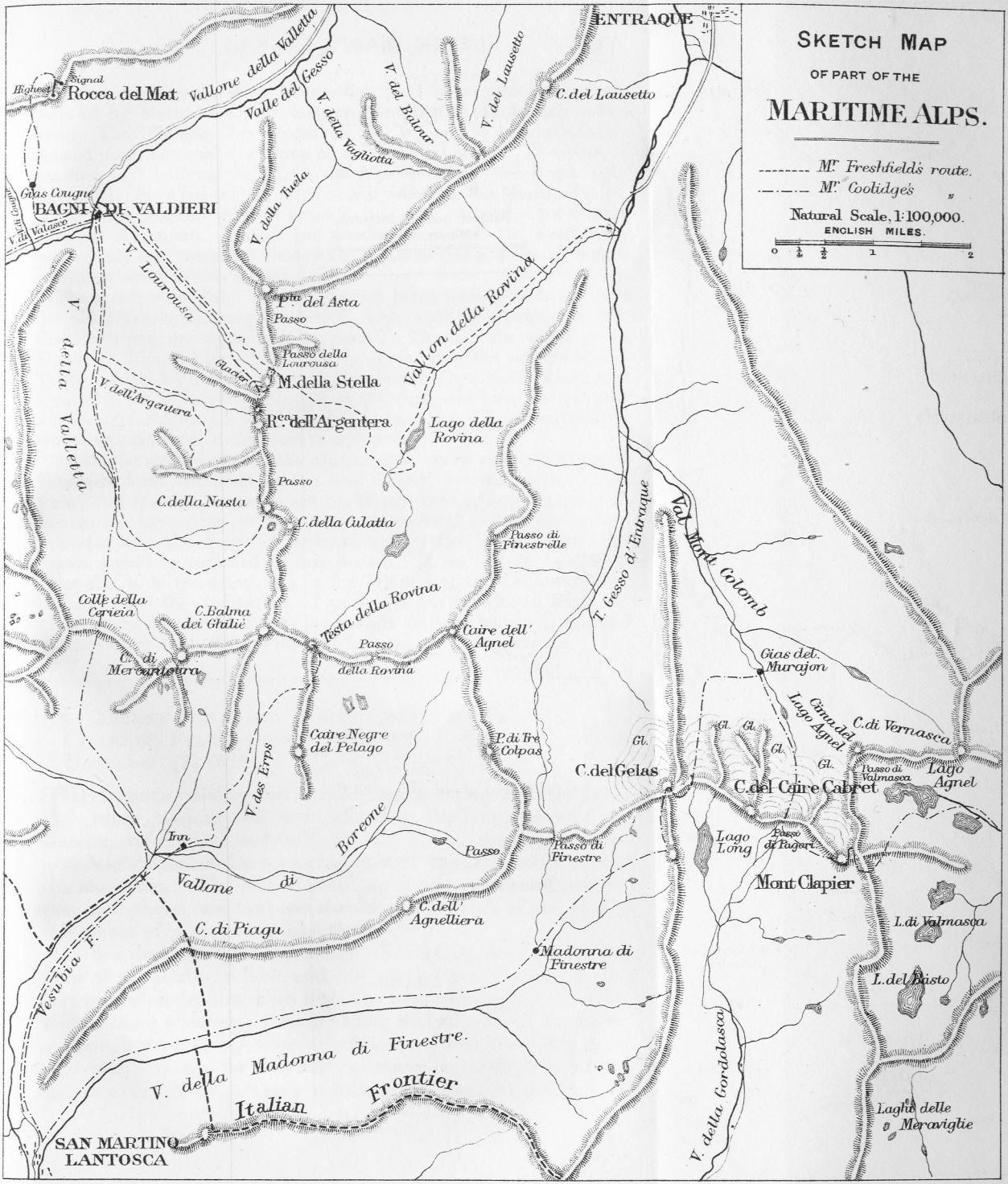
Travellers, however, who have studied the chain from the sea may reasonably object that they have seen a conspicuous peak in the exact position assigned by maps to the Mercantoura. I can remove their difficulty. This peak, well shown in the frontispiece, is a compound mountain; it is made up by the Rocca dell' Argentera and other crests of the N. spur, towering over the comparatively tame summits of the main chain. Having seen the Chapel of St. Antoine, near Cannes, from the Cima della Nasta I can vouch for the spur overlooking the watershed, and *vice versâ*.

TABLE OF HEIGHTS.

Peaks.	Mètres.	E. feet.	Authority.
Rocca del Mat	3,087	10,128	P. M., I. S.
Monte della Stella	3,271	10,732	S. Isaia.
Rocca dell' Argentera	3,290	10,795	I. S.
Cima della Nasta	3,090	10,138	Estimate based on comparison with peaks near at hand, D.W.F.
Cima della Culatta	3,080	10,103	
C. Balma dei Ghilié	2,999	9,840	P. M.
C. di Mercantoura	2,775	9,105	I. S.
C. della Rovina	2,985	9,794	Estimate, D. W. F.
C. del Gelas	3,135	10,287	I. S.
C. del Caire Cabret	3,004	9,847	I. S.
Mont Clapier	3,046	9,994	P. M., I. S.
Colle della Cerieja	2,564	8,412	Ball, Joanne.
Passo di Finestre	2,471	8,108	I. S.
Bagni di Valdieri	1,349	4,426	Ball, Joanne.
San Martino Lantosca	961	3,153	F. S.

NOTE.

P. M. = Piedmontese Map, 1 : 50000.
F. S. = French Survey, 1 : 80000.
I. S. = Italian Survey, 1 : 100000



F. Dangerfield, lith. London.

2. The S. spur, ending in the crags of the Pelago, is rightly shown as abutting against the Cima della Rovina. But the great N. spur does not abut against the same peak, but considerably farther W. against the Cima Balma dei Ghilié of the map.

3. The heads of the Valletta and Val dell' Argentera are most incorrectly laid down, and the bold spur separating them is completely ignored. This spur of a spur projects from the S. shoulder of the Rocca dell' Argentera.

4. A considerable tarn between the Nasta and Culatta is ignored.

In the matter of nomenclature I have, subject to future reconsideration, followed generally that of the Piedmontese map. My Balma dei Ghilié, Nasta, Culatta will be found on it. But as regards the highest peaks of the chain I accept the names settled in consultation between Signor Isaia and Mr. Coolidge at Valdieri last summer. The peak to the N. of the great couloir which falls to the Col della Lourousa is to be the Monte della Stella. The triple-topped mass to the S. is the Rocca dell' Argentera.

The 'Alpine Guide' is in error in speaking of the Cima del Gelas (Gelas = glacier or snowbed) as a summit of Mont Clapier. They are as much distinct mountains as the Lyskamm and Monte Rosa. But the details of the topography of this part of the range I must leave to Mr. Coolidge.

Of the three peaks conspicuous from the coast I have now identified two: the E. is Mont Clapier; that in the centre, the so-called Mercantoura, is really the Argentera. But as to the bold western summit, I have only proved that where it ought to exist, on the main chain at the head of the Valasco, there is no peak at all answering to it in form and prominence. Can it be Monte Viso seen over the comparatively low pass of the Col di Santa Anna (7,455 feet)? The supposition gained at first some apparent support from the fact (first pointed out to me by M. Burnat) that on one of the sheets (Var—Cap Roux) of the 'Carte Marine Officielle des Côtes de France, édition 1874,' is a panorama drawn from a point at sea 15 G. miles S. and 11° W. of the lighthouse of Antibes, in which Monte Viso is vaguely indicated on the horizon. I subsequently found on the next sheet (Cap de la Garoupe —Cap Martin) two more panoramas taken respectively from points 9 G. miles S. and 22° E. of the lighthouse of Antibes, and 8 G. miles S. and 21° E. of the lighthouse of Villafranca, in which the Maritime Alps are clearly but roughly drawn, and over them the words 'les Alpes, Monte Viso' are printed—in a vague way which gives no trace of any attempted identification of a single summit.

Whatever authority these indications might have had ha however, been destroyed by Mr. Coles, the Map Curator of the Geographical Society. He has kindly worked out for me the figures, and after paying due attention to the curvature of the earth and the effect of refraction, it appears that, from any of the points from which the French panoramas are drawn, a chain of the height of the Col di Santa Anna (which is the lowest point in the main chain) would suffice completely to hide Monte Viso. It follows, *à fortiori*, that to a spectator at the sea level on the coast Monte Viso must be invisible. The western peak seen from the Iles de Lérins cannot, therefore, be Monte Viso.

But my explorations have shown that there is no peak in the main chain of the Maritime Alps in this position capable of making such a show. The Tinibras lies too far to the W., and is besides not an isolated peak, but one of a group of nearly equal crags. The peak in question is, I believe, the Rocca del Mat seen, like the Rocca dell' Argentera, above the central ridge or watershed of the Maritime Alps. In the panorama here given it appears, it is true, somewhat too distant from the Argentera. But as bad weather prevented Mr. Croft from getting any one complete view, it is possible that the sketch is not absolutely exact in this respect.

The sketch map of the Valdieri district given here is reduced from the old Piedmontese map 1 : 50000, with such corrections as Mr. Coolidge's and my experience suggested. Through the courtesy of Signor G. Rimini I have been able to obtain from the officers of the Topographical Military Institute at Florence further rectifications and a valuable list of heights, although as the engineers have not yet personally explored the whole of the Argentera group, I have ventured in one or two details to differ from their present opinions.

It will be noticed that in the text, and the map as far as it goes, I have spelt local names within the new French frontier in the Italian form: San Martino Lantosca, not St. Martin Lantosque; Levenzo, not Levens. I have done so not from any political feeling, but on the principle that the limits of national speech, not the boundaries of States, should be regarded in this matter. If we talk of Levens we must also, to be consistent, talk in the Trentino of the Ledersee (Lago di Ledro) and the Judicarien. I prefer, however, Nice to Nizza because (as in the case of Trent) the town is too well known in England by the former name for any other to be used without affectation.

An Ascent of the Meije without Guides. By Charles Pilkington. Read before the Alpine Club December 17, 1879.

THE summer before last, whilst Gardiner, my brother Lawrence, and myself were climbing the long arête of the Rateau, we looked carefully at the Meije, wondered at the grandeur of its southern precipices, and the impossible look of the mountain. The idea of climbing it occurred to us, and we then and there said that *we* should never think of attempting the ascent of a mountain like that.

A few days after, when leaving the district, we had a good view of the northern face, and one of the party pointed out a sort of couloir leading high into the mountain, which certainly looked more promising than anything we had seen on the south. Although we had no time to explore it, and knew that there was small chance for us where so many had failed, it enabled us, as a first step towards reaching the summit, to shake off