They provide clean beds, and the local fare is abundant, wholesome, and good. Sardines, eggs, soup, red trout, a savoury dish of mutton and potatoes, and fruit—cherries or wild strawberries—is an ordinary dinner. The wine of the island is seldom sour, and often delicious. Old wine of the district should be asked for. Prices, except in the towns, are absurdly cheap. François and I dined, wine included, from 1.25 to 3 francs a head.

Joanne's 'Corse,' now published separately, is by far the best guide-book. It is, as a whole, trustworthy, though not beyond criticism in detail. There are, for instance, serious inaccuracies on the important routes of Cap Corse and the Castagniccia, and the account of the mountain region is inadequate, while in the map carriage roads and mule-tracks are not accurately distinguished.

Murray's 'Corsica' was originally composed by a visitor, who took all scenery from the Greenwich diner's point of view, as a background to luxurious eating. The account of the island in his new (1880) 'Islands of the Mediterranean,' is much improved, accurate so far as it goes, and suggestive, but insufficient for the wants of a serious explorer.

Bädeker's note on the island, in his 'Northern Italy,' hardly calls for comment. It is of small use to the traveller, though it may serve tourists, whose object is not to see, but to 'do.'

---

## The Ecrins from the South.* By Henry Duhamel.

Of all the mountain valleys with which I am acquainted that of the Vénéon is by far the most thoroughly alpine in the grandeur of its scenery; and I think that those who have visited it will be inclined to agree with me. It is shut in on all sides, save that by which the torrent escapes, by an unrivalled barrier of rocky precipices and steeply descending glaciers. Around it rise all the highest summits of the Dauphiné Alps (with the single exception of the Pelvoux), and most of them have been conquered by travellers starting from this valley, which runs up like a wedge into the centre of the district. The inner slope of this horseshoe is far steeper and more rugged than the outer, and yet all these peaks have one after the other been climbed from this side.

* By permission of the author, this paper is adapted and translated from the original, which will appear in the 'Annuaire of the French Alpine Club.'



Digitized by Google

To the Meije (1877), Les Bans (1878), and the Olan (1880) achieved by friends, it fell to my lot last summer to add the Ecrins.

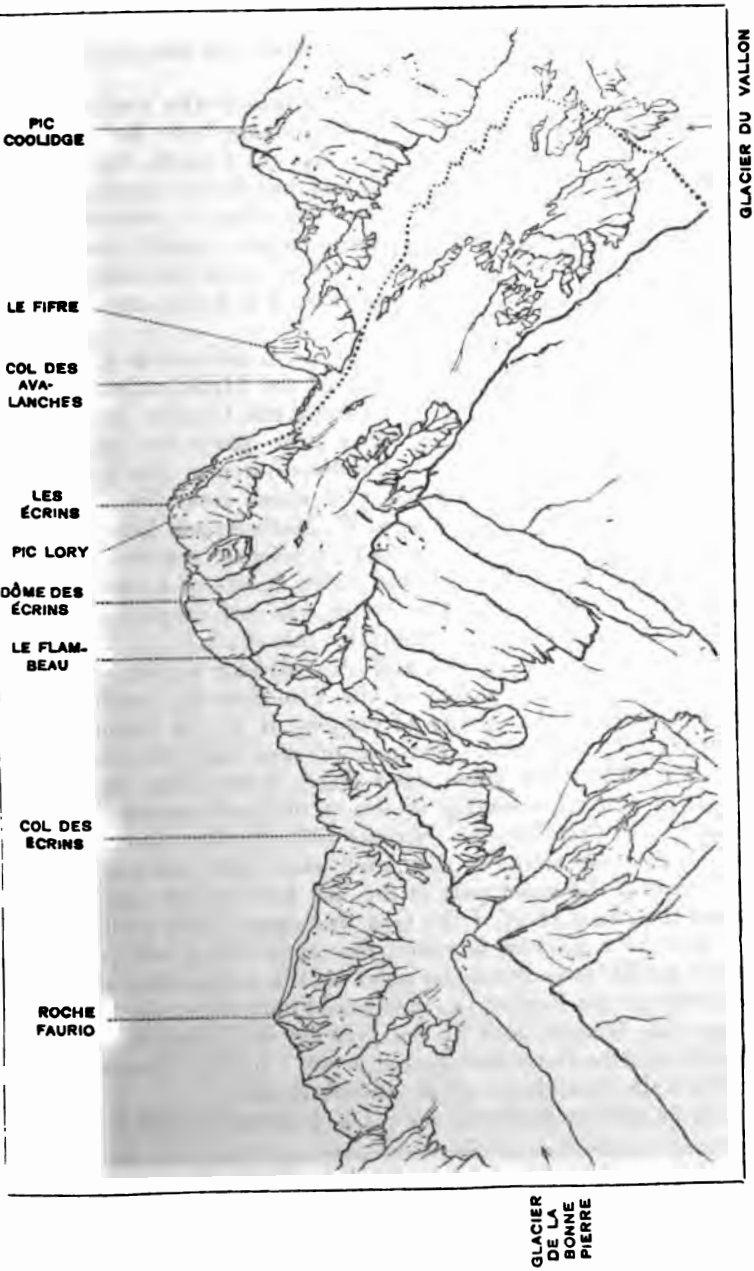
Mr. Whymper's book has familiarised all my readers with the appearance of the Ecrins—the monarch of the group—from the north, and many of us have also marvelled at the terrific precipices in which it soars above the Glacier de la Bonne Pierre on the west. Now, while to the north the peak had been conquered by the great ice slope or by the east and west arêtes, the great rock wall to the south, falling to the Glacier Noir, had hitherto remained unscaled. It was by means of this wall that I succeeded in reaching the summit.

The Ecrins, as everyone knows, rises above the village of La Bérarde, which is situated at the point where the streams from two valleys unite to form the Vénéon. It is not visible from the village itself, and even from the path down the valley towards Les Étages the highest peak is not perceived. Rising behind the sharp tooth of the Flambeau des Ecrins (3,600 mètres = 11,812 feet), we see a double pointed summit—the point to the left being the Dôme de Neige des Ecrins, or Pic de la Bérarde (3,980 mètres = 12,958 feet), and that to the right the Pic Lory (4,083 mètres = 13,396 feet).* The latter is the highest peak of the mountain which is in the department of the Isère (being on the ridge which forms the boundary between the two departments), the culminating point of the Ecrins (4,103 mètres = 13,462 feet) being a little further east, and wholly within the department of the Hautes Alpes.

Now, till the summer of 1880 the only route known up this splendid mountain was from the north by the great ice-slope (first taken by Mr. Coolidge in 1870), the very difficult ascent and descent by the east and west arêtes having been practically abandoned since the first ascent in 1864 by Messrs. Moore, H. Walker, and Whymper. The difficulties of this slope vary with the state of the snow and ice, and many parties from 1862 onwards have been driven back from the *bergschrund*, which cuts off the upper part of the peak from the Glacier de l'Encula. Some travellers have been fortunate enough to find the north face coated with hard snow in excellent condition; others have had to cut their way up a steep ice wall with infinite trouble and risk. The twelve or

* This summit has been so named by the Isère Section of the 'C. A. F.' as a mark of respect for its Honorary President, the distinguished geologist, M. Charles Lory, Member of the Institute of France, and Dean of the Faculty of Sciences of Grenoble.

Digitized by Google




THE ECRINS FROM THE WEST.

Digitized by Google

fourteen parties that have hitherto been successful in overcoming these obstacles will bear witness to the truth of my statements.

Now, since even in Dauphiné virgin peaks are becoming extremely rare, and adventurous climbers have had to resort to the discovery of new routes up old friends, the Ecrins could not hope to escape this doom; but its resistance, though brief, was glorious. There were two sides by which it had not been attacked—south-west and south—and it was after a single but formidable attack by each of these had failed that I had the luck of succeeding by means of a combination of the two slopes.

It was on July 21, 1877, that Mons. E. Boileau de Castelnau (a few days before his conquest of the Meije) attempted the ascent by the south-west face from the Glacier du Vallon. He succeeded in reaching by a very steep ice-couloir, exposed for several hours to showers of stones, the unclimbed Dôme de Neige* (the conquest of which from the north had been spurned in 1862 by Messrs. W. Mathews and Bonney, after a repulse on the highest peak†), prudently returning to La Bérarde by the Col des Ecrins. This failure of a party, which shortly after conquered the Meije, was not adapted to induce anyone to make a fresh attempt by this route.

Messrs. P. Guillemin and A. Salvador de Quatrefages, encouraged by their ascent of the Viso from the north a week before, formed the design of capping it by the ascent of the Ecrins from the south. Their attack was made on August 19, 1879.‡ The route taken was a direct ascent from the Glacier Noir in a north-westerly direction, obliquely across the great south face of the Ecrins. Serious difficulties were encountered, and they were forced to turn back when but a few mètres from the crest of the lower part of the east arête of the peak, not far from the sharp point of the Grande Sagne (Crête de l'Encula). It is to be remarked, however, that even if they had succeeded they would have attained a point on the arête *below* the *bergschrund* of the Ecrins, i.e. they would only have effected a pass from the Glacier Noir to the Glacier de l'Encula, a feat in which they had been anticipated in 1877 by Mr. Coolidge with his Col de l'Encula, or de la Grande Sagne.§

From various points of view I had satisfied myself that the

---

* 'Bulletin du C. A. F.,' 1877, 301.

† Bonney's 'Sketches in the High Alps of Dauphiné,' p. 20.

‡ 'Annuaire du C. A. F.,' vol. vi. pp. 32–40.

§ 'A. J.' vol. viii. p. 333.

Digitized by Google

chances of success in an attack on the Ecrins from the south were great enough to justify at least a preliminary exploration, and with this object my guides (the Gaspards) and I started from La Bérarde on the morning of August 25 last. The Vallon de la Pilatte, through which we mounted, though not enjoying so evil a reputation as the Vallon des Etançons (perhaps because it is less known), is being simply choked up year by year by huge blocks from the slopes on either hand, the only level spot being a small plain (the Carrelet) at its junction with the Combe du Chardon, about one hour from La Bérarde. It is covered with short turf and juniper bushes, and is a welcome break in the dreary scene of desolation around. Half an hour beyond we reach a small clump of pine trees clambering up the stony eastern slope of the valley. I have in my possession an autograph unpublished MS. of Villars, the celebrated Dauphiné botanist, who thus describes his excursion to this region in September 1786 :—' Un phénomène étonnant sont des bois de pin de Genève (Pinus Silvestris, L.), qu'on trouve à une demi-lieue au-dessus de la Bérarde autour d'un plateau appelé le Carrelet. Ce plateau est à moitié chemin du glacier [de la Pilatte or de la Condamine]; il y en a un en face, appelé le glacier du Chardon. Le confluent de l'eau de son torrent avec celle des autres glaciers du fond de la gorge ont formé ce plateau presque horizontal qui a un demi-quart de lieue quarrée. Il présente un gazon très lisse, au milieu duquel sont 10 à 12 masures, autant de traces d'anciennes granges, habitables probablement en été, quoique les gens du païs nous ayent dit bonnement qu'elles l'étoient avant le déluge seulement! Le baromètre s'y trouve à 22.6 l., th. 12°, ce qui donne environ 950 toises d'élévation au Carrelet sur le niveau de la mer. Les pins les plus élevés qui tracent une ligne à peu près horizontale autour du plateau sont à la hauteur de 1,164 toises sur le niveau de la mer, puisque le mercure s'y tient à 21.5 l., th. 12°; élévation prodigieuse, et dont il n'existe surement pas d'exemple dans la province.'* Not far from this clump of trees on the right bank of the torrent du Vallon the Isère section of the C. A. F. hopes to construct, in time for use during the coming summer, a roomy club hut, which will greatly shorten the way to the many peaks and passes at the head of the valley. It will

* English readers will recollect that Mr. Bonney has pointed out the Carrelet as the best site for a little Alpine inn, the view of the Ailefroide from here being very grand (' Sketches,' 33). According to the French map the height of the Carrelet is 1,946 mètres (=6,385 ft.).

Digitized by Google

correspond to the position of the Chatelleret in the Vallon des Etançons.

Crossing the torrent from the Glacier du Vallon, we followed the Col de la Temple route to the point where it bends away to the right across a rocky face, and made straight running for the Glacier du Vallon, keeping up which we reached the Col des Avalanches or Col du Vallon de la Bérarde* (3,548 mètres = 11,540 feet). During the latter part of the walk we had been in full view of the great south face of the Ecrins, close under which lies the col.

Two routes were now open to us. We might climb the south-west face and reach the ridge between the Dôme de Neige and the Pic Lory—that is, make a variation on M. B. de Castelnau's route. But the rocks seemed rotten and the risk of falling stones very great: besides, this route had been already attempted without success. The alternative was to climb the rocks immediately to the north of the col. In favour of this was the fact that the edges of the rock strata (or, as Gaspard said, 'leur coupe') were turned the right way: the snow at their base showed no marks of falling stones, and there were in the rock face several hollows well adapted to arrest them in their course. This rock wall or ridge is the southern buttress of the Pic Lory, and supports on its eastern flank an irregular mass of snow (christened Glacier des Ecrins, and corresponding in position to the Glacier Carré of the Meije), to gain which was our immediate object. The chief difficulty seemed to be a bit of smooth rock—the Rocher Blanc—which barred the way to the crest of this ridge.

It was after noon when we started from the col: three hours and a half later we were convinced that we had made out the way up the peak. It was too late, however, to make the attempt that day, so we hurried down but were benighted in the moraine of the Glacier du Vallon. The weather had been perfect all day, but it changed in the night and we were unwillingly forced to retreat to La Bérarde.

On the 27th, despite the weather, we set out to explore the Glaciers de la Temple and de la Coste Rouge, which are very badly laid down on the maps. Before reaching the Col de la Coste Rouge (which is exactly where the map has the figures 3,152 mètres) a gleam of sunshine raised a hope that we might make our attempt the next day, and young Gaspard was sent

* 'A. J.,' vol. viii. p. 335. *Cf.* 'The Alps in 1864,' by A. W. Moore, p. 43. Bourcet's old map calls the valley leading up to this valley the Vallon de la Pirade.

Digitized by Google

back to La Bérarde for provisions. His father and I went on to the col. I then resolved to try to follow the ridge towards the north to the Col de la Temple, which we succeeded in doing in three hours, chiefly by a narrow ledge in the rocks of the eastern side of the ridge. But the clouds had come down again, and when we met Pierre Gaspard in the little pine-wood dense mist enveloped us. Soon came the rain, and fresh snow fell very low on the surrounding slopes.

Our patience was sorely tried by the continuance of similar weather during the next few days. We were unwilling to leave La Bérarde, yet it is not easy to kill time there, especially when kept indoors. Finally, an improvement on September 2 induced us to bivouac in the little pine-wood, since I had no time to lose, being forced to be back at Grenoble on the 5th. We started at 5 A.M. on the 3rd, and, following the same route as on August 25 (save that, not fearing the stones from the Fifre and Pic Coolidge so early in the morning, we kept up the left side of the Glacier du Vallon instead of taking to the rocky ridge which cuts its lower portion into two), were once more on the Col des Avalanches at 7 A.M. After breakfasting comfortably, and leaving everything behind except a bit of bread in each man's pocket, we started at 8.15. Climbing up the great chimney, then crossing to a smaller one on the right, which we mounted for a few steps and then bore to the right, we reached with little difficulty, save some ice-glazed rocks, the only *mauvais pas* of the expedition—the Rocher Blanc. The rock here overhangs its base, and is very smooth, but the ledges are just wide enough to allow the bad bit to be turned, though each man has to shift for himself here, his companions being invisible. The Isère section proposes to place here next July a chain of 30 mètres to facilitate the ascent. Ten minutes more sufficed to reach the crest of the ridge (at 10.30 A.M.), forming the watershed between the two departments, and coming down from the Pic Lory. Then came a narrow snow gully, which falls to the Glacier Noir, 1,400 mètres (=c. 4,600 ft.) below, the most formidable precipice in the district. In this way the little Glacier des Ecrins was gained. Traversing it to the east, to the foot of a great streak or gully of snow, we climbed up this latter and then took to the rocks on the right. At 1.40 we reached the highest ridge of the Ecrins, scarcely 30 feet from the summit.

The wonderful view has been often described, and I shall therefore have compassion on my readers. The great quantity of newly-fallen snow would have made the ascent by the usual

Digitized by Google

route very dangerous, if not impracticable; and it is one proof of the superiority of our line of march that, notwithstanding this snow, we encountered but one serious obstacle—the Rocher Blanc. I do not think then that it is unreasonable to assume that this new route will become the favourite one up the mountain, especially when the hut has been built below. There does not seem to be any danger at all by this way, a striking contrast to the route from the north. Our success, after the storms of the preceding ten days, is an irresistible argument in favour of the southern route. After nearly an hour's halt on the summit, we regained the Rocher Blanc in two hours, and at 6.40 were satisfying our hunger with the provisions abandoned on the Col des Avalanches. Fifty minutes sufficed to get clear of the glacier, but the long descent in the dark over moraine and stones was very fatiguing, and right glad were we to find ourselves once more at La Bérarde at 10.30 P.M. The weather broke next day, and the storms resumed their course. We had been fortunate enough to hit on the least unfavourable day of the end of the Alpine season of 1880 for our expedition, which I hope will be often repeated by my colleagues.

---

## NOTE ON AN ALLEGED ASCENT OF CHIMBORAZO IN 1856.

*To the Editor of the Alpine Journal.*

Sir,—Before my departure for Ecuador in 1879, my attention was frequently directed by friends and others to a reputed ascent of Chimborazo by Messrs. Remy and Brenchley. I first noticed mention of it in the English translation of the 'Life of Humboldt' edited by Bruhns, published in 1873. In a note at p. 315 of vol. i., it is said Chimborazo has since (the time of Humboldt) been ascended 'by Jules Remy and Brenchley to the height of 21,457 feet, on November 3, 1856. The height of the mountain is, according to Humboldt, 21,460 feet.' To the casual reader this notice would make it appear that Messrs. Remy and Brenchley had arrived within three feet of the summit.

In the preface to the book by Mr. Brenchley entitled 'Jottings during the cruise of H.M.S. "Curaçoa,"' also published in 1873, it is stated at p. xiii. that they (that is to say, Messrs. Remy and Brenchley) 'went to Panama and Ecuador, and ascended Pichincha, down the crater of which Mr. Brenchley, having slipped in his descent, was carried to a formidable depth, from which, with the utmost difficulty, by sheer determination and strength, he finally succeeded in regaining the summit. The next excursion was up Chimborazo; after which they visited Peru,' etc.

It will be noticed that in neither of these extracts is it expressly

Digitized by Google