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Over Mont Blanc, by the Brenva Route, without Guides.

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ON August 2 of last year, Mummery, Collie, and I made a way over the Mont Blanc range by a somewhat long, but new, route, which led up from the Argentière Glacier over to the Triolet Glacier. We then tramped down the long Val Ferret in a thunderstorm to Courmayeur.

The following day we felt well content to wait for the weather to mend. A calm and clear evening gave promise of better things, and as the amount of new snow that had fallen was small, we decided to start for the gîte on the Brenva rocks the following morning. We got away from Courmayeur at 7.30, taking the day to reach the island of rocks rising out of the Brenva Glacier.

Shortly after leaving the last of the forest growth, from which we took the wherewithal to make our bivouac fire, we came to a small ravine, which necessitated a descent of, perhaps, 200 ft. The porters assured us an immediate descent was the only way to cross it.

One of the many merits of guideless climbing is that you are always free to discard old routes and attempt new ways; freer in the morning than in the evening, for the man who attempts a new route late in the day is surely a fanatic for sleeping out. Most climbers also, I have noticed, object to waste an elevation already gained; so we decided to let the porters 'gang their ain gait,' while we followed a route which promised well, and took us on to a buttress of the

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cliff of the Mont de la Brenva. Along this we hoped to be able to traverse till we came to the usual route higher up the ravine. Our traverse carried us very satisfactorily up, in truth; but the only way of joining the porters with their precious burdens was by going down slippery grass ledges, making a longer descent than the porters had taken. We were then content to follow the usual track, taking our leisure as we slowly toiled up the rotten stone slopes which rise out of the Brenva Glacier. We reached the gîte at 3.10.

Collie and I looked after the details of the bivouac, while Mummery cut his way across some snow-slopes, which proved to be ice, to a point from which he could view the icefall, so as to pick out a way across for the morning. We hoped, by knowing this, to be able to get well on to the glacier before the day broke. From the rocks near our gîte we had the first front view of the Brenva face of Mont Blanc, and we picked out a route which we thought answered to the route described to us by Emile Rey. His route led up from the narrow ridge which buttresses the eastern face of Mont Blanc, and turning off to the left (here we must have misunderstood him), passes by what he called a 'petit vallon,' through the ice-cliffs which cap all this side of the mountain.

It is always a great satisfaction to have the time to discuss and settle the route for the morrow, which a lofty bivouac affords—to look out and plan new climbs, if not for the present season, for the seasons to come.

To me one of the great charms of mountaineering is the bivouac before a climb, high up among the glaciers, away from the valleys and their hôtels, hearing now and again the boom of an avalanche, and the crash of falling séracs, while the departing day lingers in the west, and the varying hues of the lowland valleys merge gradually into a deep purple. As we watched, the sun set, bringing out the unequalled beauty and strength of the Peuteret ridge, which rose at one end in jagged pinnacles, then soared with sweeping slopes to the summit peak.

As the streams and pools became frost-bound, we turned to the bivouac fire, which, if small in size, is not the less comforting, for its bright and flickering rays give a warmth which is as grateful now as the soup it has cooked. A small silk tent, weighing a pound and a half, was set up on a platform of unregenerate rock, which I offered to soften to the human form by covering with small gravel—an offer

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which I afterwards regretted was dismissed as an unnecessary luxury.

Our three blankets were sewn up into a bag, and laid inside the tent, and the two bulkier of the party got into it first, leaving the third to wedge in between. The bag was a tight fit for three; turning over had to be done to word of command. By covering the more prominent of the rocks with my mits, a certain absence of acute discomfort was obtained. By this means I had some unconscious intervals. Several times I was disturbed by the restlessness of my more boulder-stricken friends, who were wanting a roll over, so as to put another portion of their frames to ache on the rocks.

Shortly after 2 o'clock the porters lighted the fire, and after we had breakfasted we gave the porters the tent and blankets to take back to Courmayeur.

The rope was put on at 3.30, and we started, reaching the glacier in a few minutes. Mummery led the way down towards the lower part of the séracs, and while we were threading our way in and out the tangled maze of crevasses the day dawned, and we were able to see more distinctly the nature of our surroundings.

The ice at first lay in frozen billows, with their troughs crevassed, like waves disturbed by the turbulence of the icefall, a formation which I would compare to the troubled waters seen in the side and lower pools of a mountain stream.

We had long and wide crevasses to cross by snow bridges, formed in a similar manner, as the connecting splinters of partially wedge-split timber, bridges which, firm and solid now, would, even if they lasted through the heat of the day, be closed to a retreat till long after sundown. We wandered farther into this tumult of frozen ice, now deep in a hollow, now viewing from a frozen crest, not a way that was straight, but one that wandered here and there, blocked at times by an ice wall where the leader had to have a shoulder to stand on while he was cutting the upper steps, and where the last man walked up leaning outwards, so as not to break the steps, and pulling on a fixed spare rope, helped at the same time by the men above pulling his body-rope.

We were making for the lower Brenva snowfield, so as to reach the ridge which rises against and buttresses this face of Mont Blanc, and dams back the upper snowfield of the Brenva Glacier.

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On reaching the lower snowfield, here torn open by its meeting the more rapid flow of the icefall, we were forced by the run of the crevasses away to the left. After going for some distance over steep snow, up which it was barely possible to walk without cutting steps, we reached the foot of the buttress, close to where it 'abuts' on the mountain, and at the foot of the gully or angle so formed.

As we had risen from the icefall we had met the sunshine creeping down the mountain, and here the thin frozen crust of new snow began to get loose, and slid in small showers down the gully. While climbing up the rocks of the buttress we were for a short distance under fire from straggling pieces of snow crust, which, breaking away out of the gully, whizzed past us. As soon as we got out of range we halted for breakfast. It was then 8 o'clock. We were greatly pleased with the progress made, for Mummery's crossing of the icefall in 2 hrs. 20 min. had brought us well within the time we had allowed.

The buttress here runs out squarely, or at right angles to the wall of the mountain, then turns, and sloping gradually downwards, acts as a weir, over which the Upper Brenva Glacier falls.

We climbed up the rocks which, round and avalanche-rubbed, lay in broken terraces, pierced here and there by ice-filled gullies. By bearing a little to our right we arrived at the top of the rocks at a point where the buttress wall swung back to the right, and from the corner or promontory so formed the snow, sloping up towards what is known as the ice ridge, extended on the left to the mountain wall, and on the right lay back in line with the rocks. Along the line where these two slopes met a flat ridge of snow was formed, most of the way up which steps could be kicked. This ridge pointed due north, and we toiled up the slope till we reached the ice ridge or top of the buttress. We had now reached about 13,000 ft., and went gaily along the ridge for some distance until about 100 or 150 yards from the mountain wall, where the character of the ridge altered. The western or left-hand side was an unusually steep slope of ice, hardened by the wind, sun, and frost, while the leeward side was of soft, unstable snow, from which the cornices had broken off as soon as formed by the wind.

A vertical face of crumbly snow was left, into which the axe could be driven, but which gave no certain support to the foot. To walk on the top of this edge was a feat I had no intention of trying, while to have cut steps in the ice on

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the frozen side of the ridge when we saw the steep slopes immediately in our front, up which steps would have to be cut, was an undertaking suited only to the endurance of Thor himself, or to the hardihood shown by the proud owner of a new ice-axe when let loose on the Mer de Glace on an off day.

Over and up that ridge we went astride, following at this point the method of progression adopted by some of the early discoverers—a race of men who made expeditions opening out new ground in the Alps and Caucasus with a boldness and skill which stand to the modern race of climbers like the feats of the old Greek heroes did to the ancient world.

At 9.50 we reached the end of the ridge, and found a level snow drift, where we rested and refreshed for some 25 min. Here all the food that was thought to be superfluous was left out of the rücksack. The mountain wall now in front of us was a direct challenge to combat; not a sham combat, but one where every step had to be won by hard blows, and where irresolution or an error in judgment would be repaid by a pitiless repulse.

Nature here spread before us a scene of grandeur more stupendous than any in the Alps. Below on our right lay the steep rolling folds of the upper Brenva snowfield, on to which avalanches of new snow, made incoherent by the sun, crackled and rumbled down the slopes between the Col de la Brenva and Mont Maudit. On our left the mountain wall stretched away to the Mont Blanc de Courmayeur and the Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret, a slope of dazzling whiteness, seamed here and there by avalanche courses. High up above where we stood, and extending for over half the distance round, threatening cliffs of ice and névé stood ready, when unchained by the ordering of Nature, to crash down the 3,000 ft. of ice slope on to the Brenva Glacier. For the present the recent fall of snow covered those cliffs of ice as a blanket, protecting them from the sun's rays, and allowed us to traverse the slopes below without the slightest risk.

I have heard many a climber hold forth upon the merits and virtues of his particular ice-axe—about its perfect balance, the ease and cleanness with which it cuts a step in ice, and so on. Our axes varied in weight, length, and balance, and we all three were extremely proud of them. But all youthful emulation seemed to have evaporated with seven hours' steady going. Mummery had done his tale of

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work in leading through the ice-fall; Collie had found the way up the rocks; so far I had only kicked up the snow-slope, and had 500 ft. more to go. But as the other two had new ice-axes, I was quite willing to let them show what perfect ice-cutting tools they were. This, with much self-denial, however, they declined, and on I had to go again.

For a short distance the snow was in good enough condition to kick steps in; then it became thinner, with ice below, and steps had to be cut. For several hundred feet we went straight up from the ridge, along a somewhat indistinct projection or edge, having on our right the rock walls which fall away steeply to the upper snowfield which lies in the deep recess below the Col de la Brenva. When about two-thirds of the way up to the ice-cliffs, we bore off to the left, making for a depression or breach in the cliffs, up which we thought a feasible way to the Calotte lay, and which once surmounted, all our difficulties would be over.

With the exception of two short halts, we were cutting steps in hard ice from 10.30 to 2.15. The new snow that lay on it added to the labour, as it had to be scraped away to allow free play for the axe to cut into the ice below. The steps were cut deep and as far apart as we could stride; for getting up our peak was our aim, so the fewer steps we cut the more time we should have to surmount the difficulties ahead. It became after a time weary work cutting into the hard ice; and though there be great joy in swinging an axe, no man indulged in it more than his share.

We made one short halt on some rocks rising like an oasis out of the ice slope, and another in a small crevasse, where the man carrying the sack—warned by the fate of Æsop's camel—found a small piece of Yorkshire bacon to be a great incubus, and likely to break his back, so he took it out and left it in a crevasse.

As we obliquely approached the line of ice-cliffs we came to a promontory of ice overhanging on our left, and made for the corner or angle where it projected from the line of cliff. For 300 or 400 ft. these overhanging cliffs frowned upon and threatened us. Here the steps were strides indeed, and the axe was plied double speed, while a constant stream of ice chips rolled rustling down the slope below.

It had now got to be past two. We had arrived at the foot of the ice cap. We were in shadow, protected from the sun's rays by a great overhanging promontory, which higher up was continued as a ridge on the ice-cap. Alongside this ridge there was a corresponding depression, or 'val-

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lon,' at the bottom of which we stood. Here the ice-cliffs were not so high, and it was up them we hoped to find a practicable breach.

The ice slope we had crossed was child's play compared to the cliff in front of us, which lay back, or rather stood up, at an angle of from 60° to 75°. The ice as it had broken off from the cliffs had not left, fortunately, a straight cleaved but an irregular and lumpy surface—of blue ice, certainly, but firm and solid.

Collie and I believe this is the kind of place that Mummery loves to find, and that hereafter his wraith will be found constantly going up and down nearly perpendicular ice-cliffs and gullies, like unto Woden's huntsmen, who are known to sweep over the frozen plains of the north hunting the were-wolves. In such places Collie and I are content with giving Mummery all the moral support that the rope affords the leading man.

The unevenness in the ice-cliffs was of some assistance; but cutting steps was most laborious work, as handholds were required to preserve the balance when rising from step to step, and cutting with one hand while holding on with the other is a very slow method of progression. I found it very numbing work standing still, paying out the rope round my ice-axe, which I had jammed in a small ice-crack.

The leader may be cutting the ice what he is pleased to call small, but small is merely a comparative term on such occasions; and to the man standing in an ice step 50 or 60 ft. below, what is small in terms of lumps of ice is phenomenal as a hailstorm.

We had agreed that if the ice-cliff was not surmounted by 4 o'clock, retreat would be necessary, as sufficient daylight would not be left to allow of our crossing the top of the mountain. The shadows from the ice-cliffs on our left were lengthening, and at 4 o'clock Mummery was far from having reached the top of the cliff, the steepness of the slope continuing the same. Retreat was therefore decided on, and while swallowing the bitterness of apparent failure of the expedition we had placed above all others, we now recognised that we had chosen an extremely difficult line by which to storm these giant cliffs. In wrestling parlance, we had gripped intent on a throw with the giant; the throw we had attempted had been countered; and if we now loosened our hold, it was with the determination to grip him again on the morrow.

Back we had to go across the ice slopes we had come up;

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and while for a short way the distance apart of some of the steps required the cutting of an intermediate one, cutting down hill was a relief. Fortunately the staircase up had been cut deep, so an occasional small step between was all that was required, and that was soon cut. From the ice-ridge it had taken us 3¾ hrs. to reach the ice-cliffs; we returned in 1 hr. 25 mins.

As we went down the slopes and on to the ice-ridge we retrieved from the crevasse the now valuable piece of Yorkshire bacon and sundry crusts of bread left on the level snow-drift. To the student of political economy, I would submit, this is a remarkable instance of a sudden and unexpected rise in the value of a commodity apparently worthless. Most students would expect a commodity to rise in value the farther it was from the source of supply; but on this occasion the value fell, and it was only when returning towards the source of supply that it recovered and exceeded its former value. Whence we may infer neither the interpretation of economics nor of snow-slopes is to be acquired from the perusal of handbooks.

Back over the ice-ridge we straddled, and then down the now softened snow-slope, reaching the rocks we had climbed up early in the day. Here we stopped. Mummery suggested it was an eminently desirable place to spend the night, high enough up to give us a good start in the morning. Down below, at Courmayeur, there were the attractions of the table d'hôte and comfortable beds of Bertolini's hôtel.

One philosopher has said: 'Most of the luxuries and many 'of the so-called comforts of life are not only not indispens-'able, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind.' Now, as we were anxious to go for our peak again in the morning, we on this occasion determined to do without some of the so-called comforts of life, hoping by such self-denial that we should prove ourselves worthy of the elevation we were striving to attain.

If it was our intention to again try the ascent in the morning, there was very little choice as to where we should pass the night. To have reached our previous night's gîte on the island of rocks, now without the comfort of tent, blankets, and fire, we should have either to retrace our steps and cross the icefall, which could not have been done till the frost had hardened the snow bridges and stopped the ice avalanches, or we should have to descend the other side of the ice-ridge on to the upper snowfield, and cross above the

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icefall the Brenva Glacier from where the rocks could be reached; but though this route looked quite feasible and easy for the most part, the glacier near the rocks was badly crevassed, and we might have been much delayed before we got down to the gîte.

If we stopped where we were, on the other hand, our position in the morning would be distinctly better. We should start with the advantage of being 2,000 ft. higher up; we should have two or three hours more of the night to rest in, if you can be said to rest when you are anxiously waiting for the night to pass.

The sky had every appearance of settled weather; and though we had seen that a strong wind was drifting the snow along the slopes of the mountain top, there was, fortunately for us, little or no wind during the night.

We had sufficient food in the sack with what we had gathered up to make an evening and morning meal, and we found plenty of water dripping off the rocks, melted from the snow-slope above.

The place we had chosen for the night was sheltered on one side by an overhanging crag; and when we had scraped off the snow from a big stone on the terrace below, we found there was sufficient room for the three of us to sit, and we proceeded to make ourselves as comfortable as our circumstances would allow. We took off our boots and stowed them away carefully under the overhanging rock, and wrung the water out of our stockings, and then put them on again. Our legs were soaked above the knees by the ice chips and snow, so the empty provision bags and paper were tied round them as additional coverings, and we found them a great protection against the cold. The rock we were sitting on did not afford comfortable seats. We could not even sit in a row; we formed three faces of a square, the centre man with his back to the rock. We thought there would be less chance of our feet being frostbitten if we put them into the rücksack, which was a large size and windproof. Now, this gave a very comfortable position to the middle man, but was an extremely irksome one for each of the outside men. Mummery's feet would only just reach into the rücksack, and required a great deal of attention to keep them there; on the other side, when I swung round and put my feet into the sack, I had, to prevent myself sliding off the rock, to embrace Collie by the waist, or prop myself by an outstretched arm against the wall behind. We then put on the rope, and hitched the end round a splinter of rock

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standing close by. This we did to prevent any of us becoming permanently separated from our boots, a contingency which would probably happen if sleep-walking or slumber was indulged in.

We were comfortably—or, rather, resignedly—settled for the night before the sun had set. As it slowly moved down to and behind the Peuteret ridge, we realised, as one does on losing an old friend, that his absence would bring home to us, as nothing else could, the warmth of his presence.

As the light waned, the valleys and their intervening ridges grew more and more indistinct; the distant peaks and snowfields of the Grivola and Grand Paradis range became gradually fainter, and then faded away. Closer to, the snows of the Ruitor glimmered all the night through, and acted as a beacon for us to take our bearings from when we roused up and peered abroad from our lofty perch.

Immediately below, the lights in some chalets on Mont Chétif shone for a time; but folk living in chalets go to bed betimes, and we then had the night to ourselves. From time to time we noted how the stars marched slow across the western sky until blotted out by the Peuteret ridge, but it was like watching the hands of a clock: you cannot see them move; you are only supported by faith in saying you do so. During the evening one of the party fancied he saw an increase of light in the east, and caused a joy, in which even the most phlegmatic, because the most comfortable, member of our party joined. Naked truth, in the shape of a match, revealed that it still wanted twenty minutes to eleven. Nodding and dozing for a while, then waking up and beating one's limbs to increase the circulation, helped to slowly pass the midnight hours.

Though we all came from a land where the verdict of the majority is to be disputed not, but taken as law, it so happened that the details of provisioning the expedition had been carried out in defiance of the majority, and with some regard to contingencies. We had with us several candles, and also a small canister of tea. The latter we emptied, and then filled it with ice. This, by much patient holding over a two-candle-power flame, was slowly converted into water and boiled; then we made tea. We took it in turns to hold this kettle. My turn, however, only came once, as, after I had converted the ice into warm water, drowsiness overcame me, and the precious fluid was wasted on Collie's back.

I was not considered worthy of so honourable a post

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again, and was only allowed to drink the tea after the others had brewed it.

Fortified by the tea, we were able to wait for the dawn with more patience and considerably increased bodily comfort. The day broke at quarter to four, and we were then in a mood to fully sympathise with the reasonableness of the morning attitude of the Parsee.

The sun that morning was a laggard; over the east a low curtain of cloud blotted out his kindly rays. Anxiously we awaited his rising, not so much for our own bodily comfort as for the sake of our boots, which were frozen solid, and neither breathing into them nor burning paper or candles in them would soften them sufficiently to enable us to get them on. Collie satisfied himself of the combustibility of his laces and the seeming incombustibility of Alpine rope, of which he started to make what he called a bonfire, but only succeeded in charring the rope, an act of sacrilege for which later in the day the gods mercifully did not exact the full penalty, satisfied, I suppose, by the penance of our lonely and frigid vigil.

We had eaten the remaining crusts of bread and drunk more tea, calling it breakfast, before it was daylight, and had got ready to start; but start we could not without our boots. About 5 o'clock the sun at last gleamed on the slopes above, and in a short time we felt his rays, and basked in them while our boots were thawing. It was not till 6 o'clock that we roped up and got off.

Though my recollections of the night we had passed on those rocks have been toned down by the passing of time, I know I left the scene of our vigil without regret. There are some situations where man does not rise superior to his environment. One wise man has stated with modest pride, 'that life is a permanent possibility of sensation.' If I thought it was to be my lot to have the permanent possibility of similar sensations, I should consider prolonged immersion in the frozen lake of Dante's 'Inferno' as preferable to life itself.

The rope, I have noticed, after a night out is in sympathy with one's bodily feelings: it is stiff, full of kinks, and swollen by the encrusted ice to twice its size, giving it an appearance that is most depressing.

While we slowly plodded up the snow, so as to get on to the ice-ridge once more, the sun gradually thawed out our kinks and the kinks in the rope, and we were put into good heart; for we found the snow in better condition, and the

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day too was younger by three hours than it was when we had reached the same point the day before. The ice ridge, although improved compared to what it was the previous day, over part of it I again preferred to go astride. We then stopped for a few minutes to pick out a more promising way through the ice-cliff on to the upper snows. Straight above where we had turned off to cross obliquely the ice-slopes the day before, and 500 ft. higher up, a low ridge of rocks led straight up, until it was covered by the ice-cliffs; this ridge was the water-parting, or rather the ice-parting, of the gathering grounds of the upper and lower Brenva snowfields. To the right of the line of rocks the ice-cliffs towered over the rock wall, which falls away down to the upper snowfield. The cliffs here were crevassed at the edge. A crevasse is a breach to be made use of in default of a better line of assault. Besides, there was another advantage in this route: it involved much less step-cutting than one we saw much further to our left beyond where we had tried the day before.

Leaving the ice-ridge at 6.50, we had our old line of steps for several hundred feet; then we had to hew our way for over an hour up very steep slopes until we reached the rib of rocks. These afforded a pleasant change and some interesting scrambling.

On reaching the foot of the ice-cliffs, we bore away to the right, cutting steps along the base of them, here resting on the edge of the rock wall, until we reached a crevasse, which had been opened by one-half the lower side tumbling over the rocks, and by this opening we hoped to get out on to the top of the line of ice-cliff. Into this gap blocks of blue ice had fallen, making a very steep pitch or wall of about 25 ft. We tried it, did not like it, and thought we should do better elsewhere; so we traversed back to our left.

Two chinks in the ice-cliff we tried, but they gave no better line, the steepness of the slopes being most forbidding. Back we were then driven to the crevasse opening. There seemed to be no more feasible way. The thought of retreat was dismissed—'Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt.'

The pile of loosely tumbled ice blocks was frozen together, and covered in places by fresh snow. Though it was noon, we were in shadow, and our wet fingers froze to the ice when we touched it. A short distance off a cave ran far back into the ice-cliff, and while two of us stationed ourselves in it, the other man tried to get up the pile of frozen

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blocks. At the second attempt Collie, our featherweight, boldly overcame the difficulty by fixing the three ice-axes into the interstices of this curiously formed wall, and using them as handholds and footholds. Mummery and I, who had stood inside the cave paying out rope, now followed, climbing delicately.

After having girded ourselves up to climb this unstable-looking wall, it was with no small feeling of annoyance that we now saw there was an easy and perfectly safe way through a tunnel in the ice from the cave below—a practical joke on the part of Dame Nature which we thought to be at the time very unbecoming. We had passed the cliff or outer wall of circumvallation, and skirted over deep snow towards the right in the direction of the Col de la Brenva. In 20 min. we came to the inner wall, or last difficulty, formed by a fault in the slope of névé.

The wall of névé was for 20 ft. absolutely vertical, so Mummery began by cutting steps for about 14 ft. up, steadied by a shoulder from below; then he thrust first one axe, then another, into the névé as handhold and foothold, and slowly made a way up. Higher up, the slope still continued very steep, and Mummery groaned at the work in prospect. Collie and I, however, heartened him on, being, as spectators, more inclined to take a cheerful view of our prospects than he was, panting from his exertions. The snow chips began again to fall, and a short time afterwards, all the rope being paid out, Collie followed. Finally the rope was dangled down to me. I tied on and joined them. After cutting two or three score more steps, the angle became less steep, and we could walk up. It was then 1.30, and we had the final slope of the mountain in view; so we of one accord sat down and looked at it, and very far up it looked. Then we examined the map, and found 400 mètres had to be ascended, and we all groaned. Slowly we plodded on, halting frequently; but on reaching the Petits Mulets, we were exposed to a furious wind, driving the snow crust into our faces, numbing our hands and feet. Along the ridge our halts were indeed shortened, but we took them oftener. At 3.18 we stood on the top. In what condition we reached it 'twere best not told; reach it we did. That final slope had been a weary task.

On pulling up the rope behind him, Mummery was momentarily much horrified, though surprised at the ease with which it had come up, to find that Collie was no longer attached.

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So absorbed was Collie in mentally recording the effect of low pressure on the human body, that he preferred to come up without the encumbrance entailed by the physical support of the rope.

The violent wind by which we were assailed on the summit made it a most undesirable place to linger on. During the few minutes we were there it was not so much the distant range of the horizon that impressed us as the feeling of elevation over all the surrounding peaks. When looking at Mont Blanc from any of the neighbouring aiguilles, one does not realise the same idea of its commanding height.

Leaving the top at 3.32, we struggled against the storm of wind and driven snow which was surging up from the Allée Blanche. We turned off to the Vallot hut, where we sheltered for a few minutes. Plunging down the caravan track with our backs to the wind, our joy was unconfined, and life soon assumed a rosier aspect. At 5.45 we reached the Grands Mulets, that haven of aspiring souls, then filled to overflowing by some dozen, and their guides. Here we partook of omelettes, which the geographer of our party assured us were the best omelettes in 'Switzerland!' and nothing would induce him to move and go down with us to Chamonix. Reluctantly we left him ordering more omelettes. Mummery and I now felt that as we had attained the greatest elevation possible to man in the Alps, most of the luxuries and the comforts of life were, not only indispensable, but the natural reward for efforts so prolonged. We crossed the lower glacier, hurrying before the advancing night; followed the path with wondrous skill to beyond the Pierre Pointue; and then became entangled in the forest growth. Here we ran into manifold dangers, to avoid which the modern handbooks to mountaineering are no sure help. Following a stream as a guide, we had to descend declivities where the branches of bushes were our only holds, and the first man had not that enjoyment of pride of place that the old saw of 'first through a wood and last through a 'river' had led him to expect. We reached Chamonix at 9.45, and, though we grieved for our absent friend, his fate was not an unhappy one, consoled as he was by the communion with aspiring souls, and compensated by that self-sufficing joy afforded by the assimilation of omelettes.

I think no apology is due to readers of the Journal for writing an account of an ascent which was described in the Journal twenty-nine years ago; it is a route which is very seldom done, and one that is wholly exceptional for the

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From Photographs by Mr. Alfred G. Topham

THE VALPELLINE-VALTOURNANCHE RANGE FROM THE DENT DES BOUQUETINS.

(I.)

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grandeur and beauty of the ice scenery, and the sustained interest which the climbing affords.

'Is it so small a thing
To have enjoyed the sun;
To have lived light in the spring;
To have "climbed," to have thought, to have done;
To have advanced true friends, and beaten down baffling foes?'

THE VALPELLINE-VALTOURNANCHE RANGE.

By ALFRED G. TOPHAM.

This range has received a great deal of attention during the last few years, which is not surprising, as a glance at the map will show that it is perhaps the most important and extensive of the lateral ridges of the main Pennine chain descending towards the S. East of this range, and even under the massif of Monte Rosa, the offshoots are quite insignificant in height; and there is no buttress like this to the W. Although the two valleys are so easily gained from Zermatt few have left the beaten track to explore even the peaks above Breuil. Some members of the Italian Alpine Club have been doing excellent work in this district, and many new ascents have been made, both of peaks marked on the Italian Government map and also of unmarked ones. It is in the interest of the latter that I have been requested to write this monograph.

The range starts from the Dent d'Hérens, at first in a southerly direction, dividing the Valpelline from the Valtournanche, and afterwards making the southern boundary of the Valpelline. Seen from Breuil, the peaks from the Murailles to the Château des Dames appear in almost indistinguishable proximity to one another; but on the Valpelline side they are easily distinguished, and snow-fields lie high up on their sides. In dealing with this range I have in most cases only briefly mentioned the unimportant spurs which are thrown off by the main chain.

For assistance in the district S.W. of Mont Redessau I have to thank Signor Felice Mondini (C. A. I., Sezione Ligure), who kindly sent me the advance proofs of his excellent monograph entitled 'Un Angolo Dimenticato delle Pennine. La Valle di St. Barthélemy,' which has just appeared in the 'Bollettino del Club Alpino Italiano' for 1894. Directions will be found in it for all the ascents and passages round the Val St. Barthélemy, and a map of that valley, which corrects the many inaccuracies of the Government map.

The panorama which accompanies this paper was taken by me, in 1889, from the Dent des Bouquetins. Other photographs of this district are Sella's 101 from Matterhorn, 119 from Tiefenmattenjoch, 265 from Ruinette, 417 from Château des Dames, and 194 of Donkin's series. The references are to the Italian Government map (I.), Adams-Reilly's map (A.-R.), and the Sardinian map (S.). Heights are given according to the I. map. Sometimes the altitudes are given

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