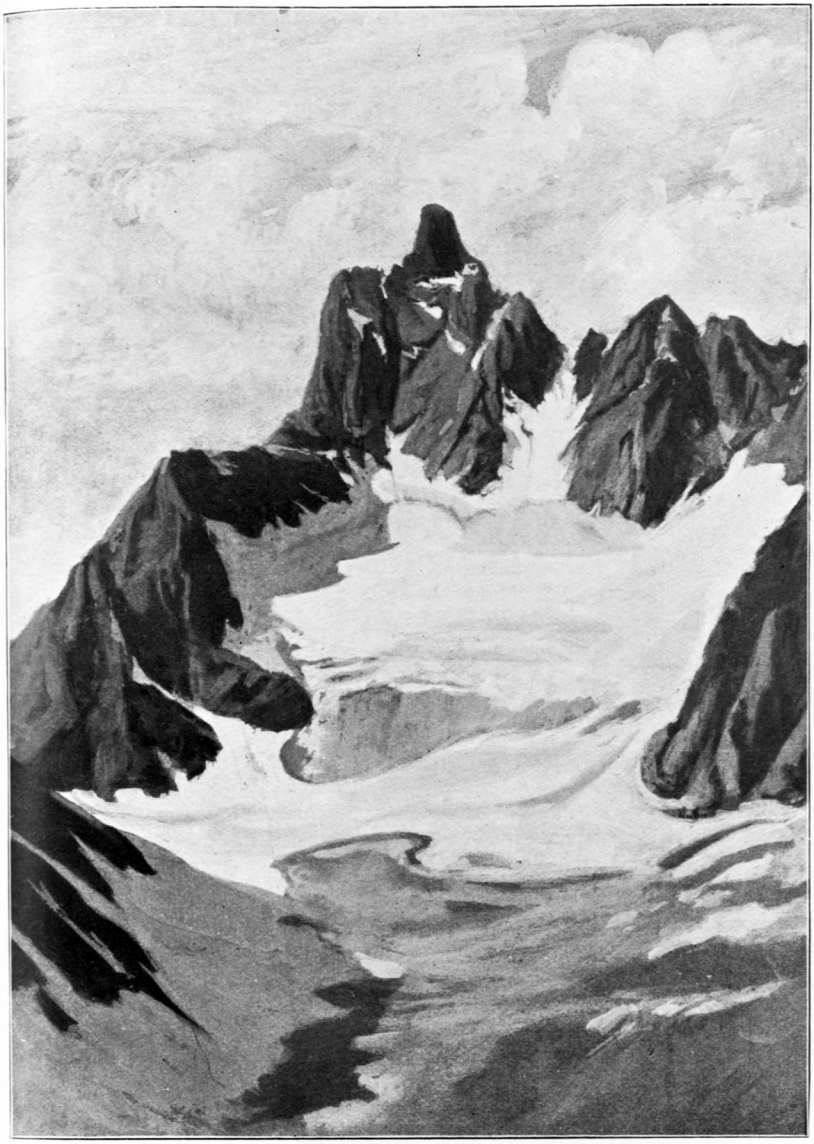

THE PUNTA DI CIAN FROM THE THÉODULE PASS.

He climbs, and the clear-seen goal
Is gone—ah! where?
Whispers a voice from the Infinite,
Climb! I am there!'

The Punta di Cian.

By the EDITOR.

WHEN in 1899 an opportunity of ascending Monte Rosa was offered to me, I embraced it with effusion, for my peaks had of late somewhat lacked height, though deficient neither in interest and difficulty, nor, altogether, in novelty. But on the mountain my feelings suffered a rude shock. Those great snow slopes, as to distance so enlightening, as to the nature of snow so didactic, as to mere exercise so satisfying, in actual traverse so exasperating, in retrospect so balm-giving, are crowned at last by ice and rock, which afford a delightful scramble—but—'but me no buts on such a noble summit,' you say. But truly, though the prospect pleases, the traces of man's presence are sordid in the extreme,

'The fragments, scraps, the bits, and greasy relics.'

Poor Troilus can hardly have been more wrathful when he used these words, than I was when the full significance of the phrase 'a popular summit' burst upon me. I was content to fly back to the simplicity of smaller peaks, and leave such great court beauties as Monte Rosa to be adored of the many. [Since then, however, I have been reconquered by her splendours, and may profess for her a 'tempered and mellow admiration.']

So it was that when I stood with my friend Tempest Anderson a day or two afterwards near the summit of the Théodule Pass, and regarded the grim ridge which runs southward from the Dent d'Hérens on the W. side of the Val Tournanche, my gaze rested with delight on the last obelisk of that many-needled wall. A white sisterhood of clouds came up one after another, as though they would fain embrace him, but there was little fervour in their movements; their thoughts must have been otherwhere. Thereupon, having learnt his name from Sylvain's cousin, I vowed to ascend him. I directed Anderson's attention to him. 'Is he not worth a photograph?' 'Distinctly; he is splendid! I think he deserves the trouble of fitting on the telephoto lense.' 'Oh, certainly.' Thus invariably speaks the man who does none of

the work yet hopes to reap the benefit of a delicate operation. 'By Jove, that is a fierce fellow. Just have a look before I photograph him.' I bury my head in the depths of the photographic bag, imagine that I see splendours untold, though all was gross darkness of the inner sepulchre, and exclaim, 'Magnificent!' 'Make haste,' I shout in an agony, 'the clouds will be upon him in another minute.' Then the telephoto lense does its work. 'He certainly is splendid,' was Anderson's last remark; and so we descended to Breuil.*

After lunch, on September 6th, Sylvain, whom we had been lucky enough to recover, and I started for the Chalets of Cignana, where we were to sleep. The excursion was charming. We reached, after an hour's walking, a fair height above the valley, and then enjoyed charming glimpses into its depths. As when, from the terrace of a lordly garden, the boast and glory of all the countryside, the owner points out his roses, his lilies, his shapely shrubs, and ancient cedars, and the guest to whom he talks so eagerly is impressed with the beauty and variety of the scene, so was I impressed as Sylvain expounded to me the Val Tournanche.

We passed several chalets, one of which was, in part, the property of Sylvain's family. He showed me where he had captured an eaglet in the previous spring. It was eminently a place where nerve was needed. Then our talk for a time was of bullocks. We even glanced at sheep and goats. I learnt the price of a good cow. I learnt also how they are pastured in the summer. When they arrive at the Alp the cows will sometimes fight for days for the supremacy. The cow that wins is, on the return from the Alp to the valley, crowned with bouquets of flowers. 'How interesting,' I cried. 'Such a cow is worth much money.' 'No doubt.' Then he added with a laugh, 'A common friend of ours (his nature, like his name, is frankness itself), whom you wot of, is anxious to possess such a cow.' I could well believe it, for that friend—it was pleasant to see Sylvain's genuine admiration for him—is himself so fearless that courage in man or animal always attracts him. With the village of Val Tournanche in sight we had a discussion on house-building, and on the remarkable increase in the number of summer visitors to the valley below us. This popularity has stimulated the erection of new houses to a very considerable extent.

We reached Cignana in about three hours, walking from

* Mr. McCormack's illustration is from a telephotograph by Dr. Tempest Anderson.

Breuil. It is quite a village of chalets (there is also a chapel), in a secluded basin, where about two hundred and fifty cows are kept. But even this secluded basin has its incidents. There, on that slope of Mount Rouss, Sylvain lost a friend who, when chamois-hunting, was carried down by an avalanche. In a ravine to the west, on the other side of the main stream, Jean Baptiste Pession, as good a mountaineer as you could wish to travel with, on his way back from the Dent d'Hérens injured his foot, and was carried by François and Sylvain to these chalets.

We met with true hospitality. Our bed was new hay. The barn was so full that we crept in with the greatest difficulty. The hay was so hot that I recollect wondering what would happen if it took fire while we were asleep. The next thing I remember is crawling out in the morning. A breakfast of bread and milk was awaiting us.

We started at 5 o'clock. The air was laden with the scent of cows; the road was well worn of their frequent feet; the lately-mown meadows had obviously been glutted with treasures from the byres that none but Virgil could celebrate in seemly wise. Even the very brook showed by his muddy waters that he imitated at a humble distance the Augean labours of the hero-deflected Alpheus. Thus in late summer do the practical and remunerative lord it over the basin of Cignana, which must be in spring a very fairyland of flower and fragrance.

To climb a stony ascent, traverse the moraine, ascend the Glacier di Cian, cross the bergschrund, and reach the col to the right (N.) of our peak took us from five till half-past eight. We had halted a quarter of an hour on the moraine, and spent about twenty minutes on the col. We then climbed to the summit, gained at ten minutes past nine, by steep slopes of snow and rock.*

The view was delightful. East, north, and west mighty mountains 'inspiration breathed around.' Southwards rose the Grivola and the Paradis, and made me feel what it was to absent me from felicity awhile: the very clouds that gathered slowly over the Val Savaranche looked almost reproachful, for I had neglected the Cogne peaks for two summers, though they are the very 'heart's desire,' as novelists have it, of the present writer.

* Close under the Colle di Cian *Ranunculus glacialis* was fading, and *Androsaces* were out of flower, while close to the actual col *Chrysanthemum alpinum* was in bloom.

I caught a glimpse—a single flash—of the Dora Baltea in the Aosta Valley. From the Torgnon basin rose the mellow music of countless cowbells mingled with the murmur of streams. The little Cian lake lay lovely as a sleeping nymph in a fold of the vale below, while two other watery meres—the Bananselmo and the Dragone—showed themselves to the N.E.—'Twin mirrors of Italian Heaven.'

If the spirit of the mountains could but confer the power of happily expressing those delightful impressions of beauty and majesty which reward the climber, I might try to create again for my readers the view from the Punta di Cian. Alas! it is impossible, but this I may say of it—it added the soft alluring charm of Italy (there is always something of Miranda about Italian Alps) to the splendour of the defiant Cervin and the massive grandeur of Monte Rosa; it blended in one consummate picture ice-cliff and snow-wreath, rock-tower and chasm, forest and pasture, and all the warm life of the Aosta Valley.

We found the cards of sixteen Italian parties, amongst them that of my friend, Sig. G. Bobba, and his companions, dated August 21, 1899. They seemed to have made several new routes on the peak; but all were true mountain lovers, and none of the sorry traces of inconsiderate visitors which too often offend the eye on a fashionable summit were here to be seen.

In descending we took the E. ridge for some distance, and then crossed at a level to the patch of ice which shows so distinctly in the view of the peak from the Théodule Pass. I, of course, was leader, and enjoyed myself accordingly. When we came to the ice, which was very steep, Sylvain wished to play 'forward,' instead of 'full back,' but I insisted on cutting the steps. You will smile when I say that there were but two or three, but as the ice was so steep it was necessary to be on the safe side. What satisfied me would have made a dwelling for a dwarfish hermit, or the lair of a minor wild beast.

Always gratifying as it is to lead, here was a peculiar gratification, for, while the look of the place was sufficiently exciting, the time required for this delightful indulgence in self-sufficiency was brief. And there was Sylvain anxious to ply his function of the axe waiting behind, and I could pause and regard him with benignity while he had to 'salute capacity' in me!

It was a position to be thoroughly enjoyed. Later, when we faced other little asperities of the mountain, and the axes

were handed down to me, I again sipped the gently stimulating cup which a niggard fortune offers all too seldom to the modest merit of the class called Amateurs.

After regaining our tracks and the Col we reached the glacier by a slight variation of our morning's route, dictated by the state of the snow, and eventually sat down to refresh ourselves by a stream, where the open-eyed innocency of countless gentians * would have charmed even such travellers as are ordinarily careless of mountain flowers.

While we were resting we heard shots; two chamois passed near us, and presently we discerned the hunter on a distant slope. Then we went on our way to Breuil—a delightful walk. Clusters of chalets, green meadows round the haybarns on the flanks of the great hills, brooks tumbling in waterfalls, the little lake of Lore, Val Tournanche itself, the new Church of Chenelle raised high on a sunlit shoulder above the glen which leads to the Grand Tournalin, villages the picture of peace—all these delighted, one after another, the wandering gaze; and the dull roar of the torrent floating up to us—a note of war—and the music of the cowbells—a note of peace—mingled together.

We found two or three big anemones (*Anemone sulphurea*) in flower, and perfect forests of stems crowned with ripe or rapidly ripening seed. *Scutellaria alpina*, *Gentiana ciliata*, and *Dryas octopetala* were in bloom in places, and close to Breuil *Linaria alpina* was more brilliant than I have ever seen it: the orange in it seemed almost aflame.

We reached the hotel at five minutes past six after one of the most enjoyable days I ever spent.

IN MEMORIAM.

WILLIAM MATHEWS.

Our Club has lost in William Mathews, who died on September 5, one of its original members and a former President. He was born September 10, 1828, at Hagley, in Worcestershire, at the house of his father, who was agent to Lord Lyttelton. In 1842, after about six years in a preparatory school at Hall Green, near Birmingham, where he made more progress in drawing than in arithmetic, he went to King's College School, London. He early became interested in natural science, and at the age of eleven was eagerly studying chemistry, but an explosion—a not unfrequent experience for

* My Note-book says: 'Gentians splendid, twenty blooms on a tuft.'