

ENGLISH TRAVELLERS IN THE GRAIANS

(Concluded)

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THREE years after Brockedon's last recorded tour, J. D. Forbes (1809-68), at the end of his first long season in the Dauphiné and the region of Mont Blanc, crossed the Col della Nuova from Cogne to Pont Canavese, following the route recommended by Brockedon: 'I found the glacier part of it by no means difficult, and on the whole the pass resembled the Col de Traversette on Monte Viso; but on the Piedmontese side the descent is most precipitous.' Forbes found the scenery in the lower valley 'charming' and Pont itself 'beautifully situated.' But at Pont the landlady was drunk, 'and the inhabitants were disgusting,' so Forbes and his local guide went on to Cuorgne, where he found better quarters. By the time they arrived at Cuorgne, the guide was 'completely knocked up.' After a few days in Turin, visiting the *savants* of the University, Forbes made his way on foot over the Mont Cenis and the Col d'Iseran to the 'abominable' chalets of Tignes, and so down to Bourg St. Maurice and Chambéry.¹

Next year (1840), Forbes did not visit the Alps; but in 1841 he carried out a strenuous tour of the Dauphiné, in the company of his friend, the Rev. J. M. Heath (Tutor of Trinity College, Cambridge); and then, having a rendezvous with Agassiz at the Grimsel, hurried back from La Grave to St. Jean de Maurienne by the Col de l'Infernet (2690 m.). It was the third pass of this elevation that the travellers had crossed in little more than a week; the top of the col was deeply covered in fresh snow, and on the way down Mr. Heath 'nearly fainted from the effects of the alternations of temperature to which we had been exposed.'²

In spite of his brilliant work on the other parts of the Alps, Forbes added little to our knowledge of the Graians. His account of the Col de l'Infernet makes no mention of the Aiguilles d'Arves, though these remarkable peaks are only a few miles from the pass; the printed extracts from his diary of 1839 are lamentably meagre; and the original journals appear to have been lost. The first English traveller to add anything to the knowledge already gained by Brockedon was A. T. Malkin, who, in 1843, made his way up from Bourg St. Maurice to Val d'Isère, where he and his guide Paccard slept in a 'double-bedded dungeon.' On August 22, together with a local guide named Boch, they crossed the Col de la Galise to the chalets at Chiapili, and then (August 23) followed Brockedon's route over the Col de Nivolet to the Val Savaranche. On the way down from the Galise, Boch found the snow-filled Petit Coluret too steep to descend and led the party down

¹ *Life and Letters of James David Forbes*, 1873.

² J. D. Forbes: *Norway and its Glaciers*, etc., 1853.

among some 'horribly steep' rocks on the right. 'The descent of the Galise towards Piedmont! I thought I knew something of the matter, but this beats cock-fighting hollow.'³ Malkin's visit was too brief to enable him to clear up the complicated topography of this knotty district, but he was aware that the mountain which Brockedon had called the Mont Iseran was known to the peasants as the Galise.

The next English traveller to visit these regions was Charles Weld (1813-69), who had already spent several seasons in Switzerland and the Pyrenees when, on August 1, 1849, he set off with a friend for his tour of Auvergne, Piedmont and Savoy.⁴ Before leaving England, he had been advised by 'the veteran traveller of Alpine passes' to visit the hospice on the Mont Cenis, 'for the monks will give you a capital dinner, and an excellent bottle of wine.' But life on the Mont Cenis had changed since Brockedon's time, and when Weld and his friend arrived from Susa there were no monks to dispense hospitality to hungry travellers. Brockedon's old inn, *La Posta*, was still there, however, and 'our dinner was a long spell of animal enjoyment.' At Lanslebourg, Weld found a guide, Jacques Trag, 'whom I beg to introduce and cordially recommend to the reader.' Starting at 7 A.M., the party went up to Bonneval. At the inn there was rye bread, cheese and wine. 'The former was of stony hardness, and could only be cut with very great difficulty. A knife—called, in the language of the country, *taille à pan*—is made expressly for the purpose. . . . It is not customary to bake more than once a year.' The wine, however, was excellent: 'I verily believe that we transferred the entire contents of a pigskin into our bodies.'

The real work of the day now began: 'I think that, with the exception of the vertical face of the Cirque de Gavarnie, in the Pyrenees, I never ascended any mountain so steep as the Iseran.' The heat was very great, a rest was necessary every quarter of an hour, and towards the top, Weld's companion was affected by the rarity of the atmosphere. However, the party reached the col in three hours and, exhilarated by the splendid view from the summit, went down to La Val and Tignes, where they put up 'Chez Bock.' Dinner was a little primitive—'eggs, bread, cheese and wine'—but next morning the aubergiste was able to promise 'a capital déjeuner à la fourchette':

'See, sir,' he added, holding before me an animal freshly decapitated and skinned, which my defective comparative-anatomy education led me to conceive was a hare—'here is a magnificent fellow; see how fat he is'; and he poked his dirty fingers into the dingy yellow fat of the animal's sides. 'Ha!' I said, 'a very fat hare, I see.' 'A hare, sir!' replied M. Bock, starting aside at my profound ignorance: 'no, sir, a cat!—a tom-cat—and as fine a one as was ever seen.'

³ *A. J.* xv. 135. 'It is a curious thing,' says Malkin, 'that of the persons I know to have crossed this—one of the worst passes of the Alps—three, including Brockedon, should have done it lame of one arm.'

⁴ C. R. Weld: *Auvergne, Piedmont and Savoy*, 1850. Weld was Assistant Secretary and Librarian to the Royal Society, 1845-61, and published a *History of the Royal Society*, 1848.

Weld was compelled to confess that he had a decided antipathy to cat, and breakfast was another plain meal of bread, cheese and omelettes. At eight o'clock, turning their back on the Mont Iseran (which appeared like the apex of a sugar loaf), the travellers set off down the gorges of the Isère. The 'awful grandeur' of the scenery impressed them as it had impressed Brockedon. At Ste Foi, they admired 'the huge mountain of Chaffe-quarre—a pyramid of pure white, attaining the great elevation of 14,300 feet'; but later 'we must have been very tired, for we both agreed that we had never seen so stony a road as that from St. Foi to St. Maurice.'

They arrived at Bourg St. Maurice at six, and the Hôtel des Voyageurs, with its smart sign in golden characters, seemed a palace after the *gîte* at Tignes. 'We obtained two good beds, and a dinner of such meat as Christians generally eat.'

Although Weld spent only three days in the Maurienne and Tarentaise, he had a real feeling for the district and the people. He speaks of the Tignards as 'a fine race of people'; he recognises that the inns of remote villages that scarcely see one traveller in a year cannot be expected to provide the trout and partridges and *Vino d'Asti* of the Hôtel Royal at Lanslebourg; and he enjoys the peaks and glaciers and pastures for their own sake, and not as the scene of the destruction of Hannibal's elephants or of some heroic episode in the *Glorieuse Rentrée* of the Vaudois.

In John Ball, we meet a traveller of different outlook, annotating and comparing, and measuring the touristic resources of Ste Foi or Bonneval against those of Chamonix or Grindelwald. In 1853, he made a lightning tour through the Graians. On August 29 he crossed the Colle della Nuova from Ronco to Cogne. Then, after a digression to Zermatt and Arolla, he returned to Courmayeur, crossed the Little St. Bernard on September 17, and next day ascended the Croix de Foglietta (2818 m.) from La Thuile de Ste Foi: 'Game of all kinds is abundant here, and bears are not uncommon.'⁵ On the 19th, he crossed the Col de la Leisse and went down the Vallon de la Leisse ('one of the wildest in the Alps') to Entre deux Eaux, 'where eggs, bread and wine, and in case of need a bed, may be procured,' and so to Termignon and Lanslebourg ('the most shameless extortion is here practised'). Next day he went over to Susa by the Little Mont Cenis. Another English traveller (Coolidge thought it might have been A. P. Whately) crossed the Col de la Leisse in the opposite direction in 1854.⁶

Ball was still a traveller rather than a mountaineer; but already, with admirable appropriateness, the first ascents of these homely and graceful mountains were being made, not by foreigners, but by the natives of their own valleys. Bertrand Chaudant of Tignes had climbed the Grande Sassièrè (3746 m.) somewhere about 1810. The Sardinian engineers had climbed the Roche d'Ambin (3377 m.) in 1820. In

⁵ J. Ball: *A Guide to the Western Alps*, 1863, p. 113.

⁶ *The Times*, June 7, 1862.

1832, M. Casalegnon had climbed the Becca di Nona (3142 m.); and in the same year M. Albert reached the summit of the Ormelune (3283 m.). Ten years later, P. B. Chamonin made the first ascent of La Tersiva (3513 m.). All these may be dismissed as *montagnes à vaches*; though there is a difference between finding one's own way across an empty landscape to even the easiest of summits and following a beaten track from the hotel to the familiar *belle pointe de vue*. A more daring ascent was that of the Magnin brothers, two chamois hunters of St. Michel, who in 1839 reached the summit of the Central Aiguille d'Arves (3509 m.) and built a cairn.⁷ Mountaineering in the Graian and Cottian Alps had begun, but for a year or two the majority of English travellers were still content to ramble pleasantly along the mule tracks, pausing here and there to sharpen a pencil and hold up their sketching mirror to the more charming and more artistic scenes.

This was Weld's plan, and it was not unlike the plan of Mr. and Mrs. King when, in the course of their tour of the Italian valleys in 1855, they approached the Paradiso group from the east. Leaving Fort Bard on September 15, they passed up the Champorcher valley to the Fenêtre de Champorcher. Mr. King was ahead of the rest of his party, and paused for a few moments before going up to the actual col: 'While resting here I heard a rush overhead, and looking up, an immense *lammergeier* swept through the narrow cleft, his enormous outspread wings, which seemed to be ten or twelve feet wide, only a few yards above me.'⁸ From Cogne, on September 17, the party ascended the Col de Pousset and admired the glaciers of the Paradiso, the 'snowy mass' of the Punta Rossa, and the 'highest, inaccessible and wondrous peak' of the Grivola.

Mr. and Mrs. King were the last of the 'early travellers.' Turin and Susa were already linked by rail, and at night in Chambéry, under the flaring gas jets, one could hear English spoken by the gangs of navigators who were carrying the line up to Modane, and incidentally spreading our nineteenth century reputation for energy and drunkenness.⁹ Access to the mountains was becoming easier, and the ten years between 1857 and 1867 saw the conquest of all the main peaks of the district, and the displacement of the pedestrian tourist by the *alpiniste sérieux* or 'real A.C. man.' But again it was the local man who took the lead. In July 1857, the Sardinian surveyor Signor Antonio Tonini and his porter Ambrosini began their attack on the high summits of what is now the frontier chain. Whether they were the 'Sardinian engineers' who built the cairn on the Levanna Orientale is uncertain, but it is known that on July 30 they climbed Mont Collerin (Ball's Punta dell' Ouillarse, 3491 m.) and on the 31st the Ciamarella (3676 m.). In the same season Tonini reached the summit of the Croce

⁷ Apparently to annoy Coolidge, for no word of their ascent reached the ears of English travellers until Coolidge and Christian Almer had been duly startled by the cairn in 1874.

⁸ S. W. King: *Italian Valleys of the Pennine Alps*, 1858.

⁹ Bayle St. John: *Experiences in Savoy, Piedmont and Genoa*, 1856.

Rossa (3546 m.), and the subsidiary summit only 15 or 20 m. below the highest point of the Bessanese (3632 m.). More sensational climbs had been achieved in other parts of the Alps, for instance, Speer's ascent of the highest point of the Wetterhorn in 1845 and M. Ordinaire's feat of 1843, when he climbed Mont Blanc twice within a week; but considered as a sustained effort at high altitudes, this campaign of Tonini's in the Maurienne surpassed anything that had been done since Saussure, and stands in the great scientific tradition of Hugi and Durand.

The English, however, were soon to turn their attention to the Graians. At the beginning of July 1859, Mr. F. F. Tuckett, driven out of Zermatt by persistent bad weather, set out with Victor and Jean Tairraz on a tour of the Paradiso district. Tuckett began by climbing the Becca di Nona, then crossed the Colle della Nuova to Ronco and descended to Pont Canavese, where he met Matteo Trocano, who had been Brockedon's guide in 1833 and 1835.¹⁰ On July 6, Tuckett and the Tairraz brothers crossed the Col de Nivolet to the Val Savaranche, and next day, accompanied by two *gardes-chasse*, J. M. Chabot and F. A. Dayné, they made an attempt on the S. ridge of the Grivola, but were driven back after a bivouac at 12,000 ft.¹¹

Six weeks later, the attack was renewed, this time by John Ormsby and R. Bruce, together with Zachary Cachat of Chamonix and Jean Tairraz, and with Dayné and Chabot as local guides. Their starting point was Dégioz, in the Val Savaranche, their headquarters the Marmot's Hole :

After tumbling down a flight of steps you broke your shins over a number of tubs, containing goat's milk in various stages of decomposition. . . . To illuminate the whole . . . there was a kind of portable gallows, with a saucer hanging in chains, containing oil and wick—a contrivance that had a knack of toppling over into your coffee or gravy without the smallest notice, and giving an unexpected flavour and richness to the beverage. I don't know that I ever spent a merrier or a pleasanter evening.¹²

Next day (August 23) the party made the ascent by the couloirs of the S.W. face: 'I request the reader to think of a fire-escape . . . to imagine it about eight times as long and ten times as wide, and lined throughout with rotten bath-brick instead of canvas.' However, the party reached the summit ridge—'a gigantic fossil jaw-bone, with a few worn old tusks still sticking up out of it'—and admired the magnificent view over the still unclimbed Paradiso and the unexplored peaks of the Tarentaise. It happened that Dayné, who went back to set up a flag, was the only member of the party who actually touched the highest point.

The new travellers, of whom John Ormsby was one, and William Mathews another, were brisk young Englishmen, with a firm and

¹⁰ *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers*, II. ii. p. 277. Tuckett also met one 'Manchot' who was probably Brockedon's one-armed guide 'Muot.'

¹¹ *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers*, II. ii. p. 292. See also F. F. Tuckett: *A Pioneer in the High Alps*, pp. 45-55.

¹² *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers*, II. ii. pp. 324-325.

almost religious conviction that every mountain had one name, and only one name, and that no two mountains had the same name. It never occurred to them that the Chaffe-quarre, the Montagne de Peisey, the Planai or Planterei, and the Mont Thuria, might all be agreeable and equally valid local names for different aspects of the same mountain. 'Its proper name is the Mont Pourri,' said William Mathews with the magnificent dogmatism of our nineteenth century forebears. But that a mountain should have a name and no existence was worse still. For centuries, Mont Iseran had been the name of the pass leading over from the Val d'Isère to Bonneval. Cartographers spread the name across the whole *massif*; and in the early part of the nineteenth century travellers (not recognising that a 'Mont' was quite as likely to be a pass as a peak) began to assign the name to various neighbouring summits. The natives took no notice, but in the world of topography a theory grew up that there was a very high peak called Mont Iseran slightly to the east of the pass. At the beginning of the century, Corabœuf had measured the latitude, longitude and height of the Gran Paradiso with considerable accuracy; and he assumed that the name of the mountain he had measured was Mont Iseran. In 1845, the Sardinian surveyors included Corabœuf's Mont Iseran (4045 m. = 13,271 ft.) in their table of heights but 'corrected' its latitude and longitude to give a position just east of the Col de l'Iseran. The Sardinian map of 1853 duly included this synthetic peak.

The muddle was a fairly simple one, and the simple villagers were not deceived by the miracles of modern science. 'Il n'y a pas de pic de neige, Monsieur; c'est toujours un sentier à mulet,' said William Mathews' local guide when they crossed the pass on September 1, 1859; and, on looking east, Mathews could see nothing but a line of low cliffs and almost level glacier.¹³ Still, the weather was cloudy, and Mathews went down to Bonneval not wholly convinced.

At Tignes, *chez* Florentin Revial, he had eaten winter-dried mutton, rather like a piece of mahogany board, sliced into thin shreds with a very blunt knife; at Bonneval he was offered two objects resembling roasted cricket balls, which proved to be marmots' heads, and when split open with a knife and a geological hammer were found to contain nothing at all; and at Lans-le-Villard he remembered that, according to the post-Brockedon editions of Murray's *Handbook*, the inhabitants salt their donkeys for food. But in spite of these hazards, Mathews returned in 1860, this time with Michel Croz, and on August 3 they crossed the Col du Palet from Bozel to Tignes. Two days later they made the first traveller's ascent of the Grande Sassièrè, and from the summit they looked in vain for the mythical Mont Iseran. Next day, Mathews and Croz crossed the Col de la Leisse and the Col de la Vanoise to Pralognan; and on August 8, with Etienne Favre, they made the first ascent of the Grande Casse (3861 m.), following what is now the usual route up the Glacier des Grands Couloirs. According to Mathews' measurements, the angle of the upper slope was 45° in its

¹³ *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers*, II. ii. p. 353.

steepest part, and it cost Croz 1100 steps, 800 of which had to be cut with the axe. Next day Mathews and Favre suffered badly from snow blindness, and Mathews was content to walk over the Col d'Aussois (to the east of the Col de Chavière) to Modane.

Early next month, Messrs. J. J. Cowell and W. Dundas, with Michel Payot of Chamonix and Jean Tairraz, set out from a chalet above the Val Savaranche to make the first ascent of the Gran Paradiso (4061 m.). The mountain was, of course, a familiar sight to tourists who had visited the Cramont or climbed Mont Blanc; but the name 'Paradiso' was little known, and often those who saw the peak spoke of it as the Mont Iseran. The cowherd at the chalet told Cowell that he did not know of any name for the mountain, though his father and grandfather had occupied the chalet for 105 years.¹⁴ Cowell and his party reached the top without difficulty ('the mere ascent would be perfectly practicable for ladies'), but the weather was cold and cloudy, and Cowell therefore repeated the climb next day with Payot, when they had a clear view in all directions. Cowell was now determined to abolish the Mont Iseran once and for all; and in spite of bad weather he and Payot struggled over the Galise to La Val on the 6th, and next day (which was cloudy) they crossed the Col d'Iseran to Bonneval. At Bonneval they heard that a young Sardinian officer of engineers had been killed in a crevasse near the Lautaret on the previous Sunday. The story was true, though the date was wrong: the young engineer was Antonio Tonini, who perished on the Glacier d'Agnel on June 25, 1860.¹⁵

Cowell spent two days at Bonneval, waiting for the weather to improve, and while he was there, some English gentlemen came over from Forno, having crossed the Col Girard with two guides. Cowell hoped for the latest news of Garibaldi, but they had none, having spent the last few days in unfrequented regions. On the 10th, Cowell made the first ascent of the Western Levanna (3591 m.) with Payot and the innkeeper, Jean Culet: 'I had never been better rewarded for climbing than on that day,' he wrote.¹⁶ To the N., thirty or forty miles away, the long chain of the Pennine Alps, from Mont Blanc to Monte Rosa, was brilliantly visible; in the middle distance, the Paradiso and the Grivola were supreme; but near at hand, in the position of the mythical Mont Iseran ('13,271 ft.'), there was only a ridge lower than the Levanna itself. Nevertheless Cowell determined to examine the place in person:

I would have my revenge; I would go to the place; I would boil water there, and make disparaging observations upon it to the best of my ability.

Next day, the weather was as bad as ever, but on the 12th Cowell climbed the true Mont Iseran, the little peak to the E. of the Col

¹⁴ *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers*, II. ii. p. 414.

¹⁵ Perhaps, as often happens with Alpine accidents, the story had become distorted as it travelled; or perhaps the innkeeper (who was trying to dissuade Cowell from travelling on a Sunday) deliberately gave a convincing and convenient precision to a vague rumour.

¹⁶ *Vacation Tourists and Notes of Travel in 1860*, p. 259.

d'Iseran, and duly performed his scientific rites. The boiling point was 192.9° , the altitude a mere 10,880 ft. Mont Iseran was abolished, and the Paradiso reigned supreme as the highest mountain mass in Italy.

Next year William Mathews was again in the Graians, this time with F. W. Jacomb and J-B. Croz as well as Michel Croz. Starting from Cogne, Mathews and his party moved round to the Val Grisanche, crossed the hog's back of the Rutor by the Col du Château Blanc, and descended, after a good deal of step-cutting, to Ste Foi by the Sassièrè de Ste Foi glen,

one of the loveliest valleys in the Tarentaise, where pasture, rock and pine-forest are grouped together in exhaustless variety, and where the magnificent peak of the Mont Pourri, rising above the Val de Tignes, forms a noble background to each successive picture.¹⁷

From Ste Foi, the party mounted to the chalets of Marais, above Tignes, and next day, in an attempt to climb the Pourri, reached its subsidiary summit, the Dôme de la Sache (3611 m.). A night at Tignes (this time *chez* Constant Arnaud) was followed by a crossing of the Col de Rhême-Golette to the Val de Rhêmes. Later in the season, William Mathews and Michel Croz, breaking away from a conference of geologists at Modane, climbed the Aiguille de Polset (3538 m.) by way of the Col de Chavière.

Before parting from Michel Croz, Mathews advised him to try the Pourri from Peisey. Croz acted on these instructions, and on October 4 climbed the peak (3788 m.) 'par un trajet très difficile.' Mathews repeated the ascent in 1862, with T. G. Bonney and with the two Croz as guides. In the same year the Charbonel (3760 m.), 'the monarch of the Central Graians' as Coolidge called it, was climbed by J. and M. Personnaz and Boniface Fodéré, all of Bessans.

The giants of the region had now been climbed, but material for a few brief and triumphant seasons remained. In 1863, Nichols, Blanford and Rowsell climbed the Granta Parei and made their first attempt on the Bec de l'Invergnan. In 1864, Sedley Taylor and Hugh Montgomery made the first ascent of the Punta Rossa; Moore, Whymper and Horace Walker came rushing through the Maurienne on their way to and from the Dauphiné; T. G. Bonney and R. W. Taylor, travelling from Courmayeur to La Grave, found time to work out the topography of the Levanna district; and in the same season the Dent Parrachée and the Grande Motte fell to Blanford, Rowsell and Cuthbert. Next year, Blanford and Rowsell, with R. C. Nichols, climbed the Tsanteleina; in 1866 Nichols climbed the Albaron; and in 1867, when the Tour St. Pierre had fallen to Backhouse, Freshfield, Tucker and Carson, the Sommet de Bellecôte was the only major peak no traveller had attempted. On September 12, 1867, it was climbed by Nichols and Rowsell.

The highest points of the Bessanese and the Bec de l'Invergnan held out till 1873 and 1874, so did the Herbetet and the Roccia Viva; but the district was no longer unknown country, and even the inns were not

¹⁷ *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers*, II. ii. p. 389.

what they had been. 'It is clean and the food is good as far as it goes,' said Nichols in 1867 of M. Culet's inn at Bonneval, and he even found the Auberge de St. Roch at Tignes 'better and more reasonable' than previous travellers had done; though Blanford regretted the disappearance of the inn kept by Constant Arnaud and still considered that Florentin Revial thoroughly deserved the bad character Mathews had given him. Something of the old flavour remained: 'The soup was simply gruel flavoured with tallow,' said Blanford. Even in 1935, the traveller who arrived at Bessans in winter found, as Brockedon had done a century before, that the *salle à manger* was a cosy subterranean stable, and a traveller a rarity at that season. At Tignes and Val d'Isère, at Cogne and Ceresole, and even at Bonneval, there was modest comfort and a ready welcome; but the peaks and passes, though better known, were still among the least frequented of the Alps, and the friendly inns that Brockedon and Malkin knew at Lanslebourg and Bourg St. Maurice had not been smartened into 'sports hotels.' One could still walk down the road at dusk and wonder who had been the first English traveller to call at the Voyageurs, or to ask the way to Avérole.

Who indeed was the first English traveller to cross the Col d'Iseran? When precisely did Bertrand Chaudant (if that was indeed the herdsman's name) build his signal on the Grande Sassièrè? Who was the first Englishman to visit Pralognan? When was the Gran Paradiso first mentioned in English literature? How many English travellers had visited the Rochemelon before John Ball in 1863? And which of Sir Augustus Foster's three sons were the two who crossed the Col Girard in 1836?

In the nature of things, these are questions that can be answered with acerbity more easily than with certainty. I have tried to answer some of them tentatively; and I have done so with every hope of subsequent correction and rebuke. It is sad that we no longer have Freshfield to help us with his light and learning, or Coolidge to shatter us with his learning and lightning. 'To Coolidge, a hatchet was not meant to be buried, it was meant for use,' said *The Times* obituary. Alas, in our own anaemic and degenerate day, I can scarcely expect Mlle Engel or Lieut.-Col. de Beer to set about me as 'an amazing interloper whose brilliant and unforgettable inaccuracy serves only to illuminate the murky depths of his own conceited ignorance'; but it may well be that someone has done a little spadework on the problems with which I have been concerned. Tucked away in the *Gentleman's Magazine* or in family records, there may be the answers—or provisional answers—to some of my questions. The early history of Chamonix and Zermatt we know, but we know little of early travellers in the high valleys of the Maurienne, the Tarentaise and the Paradiso districts. Some of us who have looked down on the Orco valley from the Levannas, or who remember Val d'Isère before the new hotels were built, and Bessans before the Germans destroyed it, would like to know a little more.