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IN THE LAND OF BEARS.

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AN easily accessible region of dolomites, with some eight or ten peaks of more than 10,000 ft., which rewarded a fairly industrious search with 'no information,' a promise of good inns in their close neighbourhood, a warm testimonial from Mr. Freshfield in the 'Alpine Journal' and the 'Italian Alps,' and a complete ignorance of the district—these were the temptations which induced Mr. Prothero and myself to turn, in September 1893, to the Lower Engadine. There was even a spice of adventure in entering one of the most westerly resorts of bears in Central Europe.

The region we proposed to investigate lies on both sides of the Ofen Pass, a little known but excellent carriage road leading eastwards from Zernetz to the Münsterthal and the Stelvio road. North of the pass lies a roughly triangular block of mountains, bounded by the Engadine and the Scarlthal. To the south is the district of Livigno, where the natural intricacy of the valleys is singularly complicated by that of the political frontier of Italy and Switzerland, which shows a fine disregard of watersheds, and gives to Italy one of her two bits of territory on the hither side of the main chain. The region contains no less than twenty peaks running into the magic five figures, but they appear to be all well-nigh exhausted by the effort, and none of them can beat the 10,427 ft. of Piz Pisoc. But little peaks can give good climbing enough, especially if they are made of dolomite, and we had thus reason to hope for the best.

After a walk or two among the Silvretta peaks, three

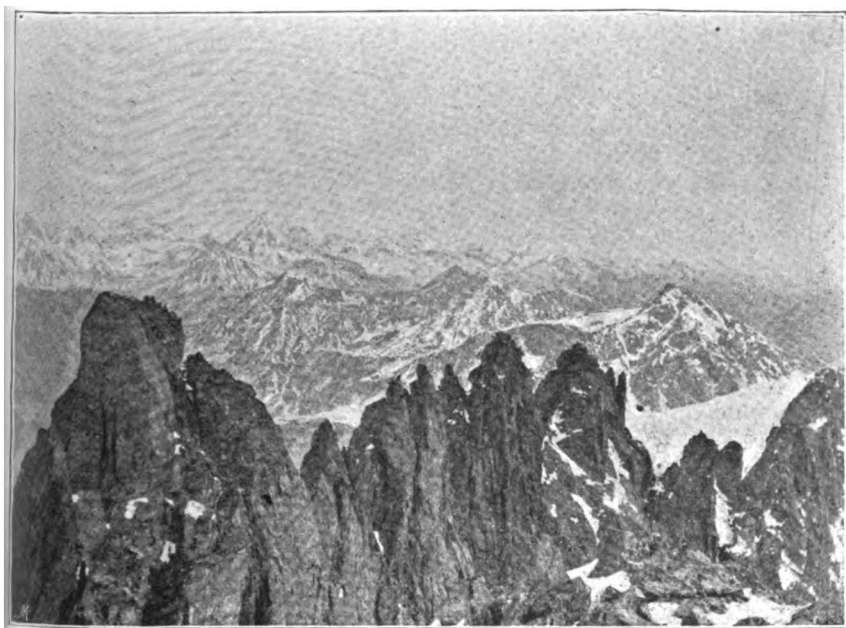
days of rain at Davos, and a superb and cloudless panorama from the Schwarzhorn—where, by the way, we had the satisfaction of showing the leading guide of Davos the summit of the Matterhorn, which he had always believed to be invisible hence—we found ourselves on September 5 at Dürrenboden, in a quaint but friendly little inn, where host



CROSSING A BERGSCHRUND.

and guides sang together to the accompaniment of the zither, and made us feel that we were far away from the familiar Valais and the Pennine Alps. Next day we crossed Piz Vadret to Zernetz. Mounting by the usual route on the N.W. side, over the Vallorgia glacier, we made what was probably a new variation in the descent on the S.E. The

correct route on this face starts, apparently, from the north side of the summit. We, however, from pure ignorance, began by going a little way down the south arête. Here we found the head of a steep couloir, crossed it northwards by a rather awkward ledge, and after descending a short distance and traversing back to the south side found ourselves forced to get into the next couloir by a practically vertical chimney some 40 feet high. We went down one by one with the rope, Guler coming last with a loop over a



VIEW TO N. FROM SUMMIT OF PIZ VADRET; PIZ LINARD, ETC.

handy rock. The whole descent from the peak to the glacier was probably not more than 300 or 400 feet, but it took us two hours, including various attempts to force passages at other points. The porter whom we had taken thus far with us volunteered the statement that he had never done anything like it in his life before. It was certainly the best bit of climbing that we got during our trip. The illustration on page 225 shows the summit of Piz Vadret on the right and our chimney immediately below the gap in the ridge. The couloir is not seen.

And here I must say a word in praise of Leonhard Guler, of Klosters. We engaged him for the whole expedition on the recommendation of friends, and had no reason to complain of our choice. Of all the guides with whom I have travelled he is the best companion. Not only was he always willing, ready, and thoughtful, not needing so much as a hint to look after all the petty details by which a guide can do so much to make things pleasant, in the valleys as well as on the hills; not only is he a good and safe climber, with an eye for a mountain; but he is an exceptionally intelligent, instructed, and agreeable companion, as sharp-sighted for a flower as for a chamois—which is saying a good deal—a collector of old furniture and old books—the former by profession—and, what is more, a shrewd observer of men, with a store of anecdotes and stories which he is well able to tell. He is, in short, of an altogether superior class to the guide that one has to deal with in Western Switzerland.

From Zernetz we drove, on Thursday, the 7th, to the little inn at Ofen, two hours up the Spöl valley. We found the Wirthshaus zum Ofen (marked on the Siegfried map by its Ladin name, Il Fuorn) comfortable beyond our expectation. An addition was built a few years ago, which has converted the old rough semi-Italian cantine into as good a mountain inn as heart can desire—clean, bright, and roomy. We shared it with only one other guest, a gentleman of Luzern, who was chamois-hunting, a keen sportsman, an enthusiastic fruit-grower, and a pleasant companion. On one night only was there any one but ourselves sleeping in the house.

We found that we were in a sporting country, to which mountaineering was unknown. The talk was all of chamois and bears, which had this summer reappeared in the district after an absence of several years; one had killed and eaten a calf not far from our inn, and a story was going the round of a hunter of Samaden who had found himself face to face with Bruin, and had been so startled that he omitted to fire. But whether the neighbouring peaks had been climbed no one knew or cared. The only point on which the natives all agreed was, that Piz Plavna was still virgin, in spite of the fact that it has a place in the Schuls tariff, and that Tschudi tells of the side by which the ascent is made. And we seemed carried back into prehistoric times, when Guler told us of a native who had cross-questioned him as to our motives in coming, and laughed to scorn the idea that it

was for amusement. 'If they are not hunting,' he said, 'depend on it they are looking for mines.'

Next day we made the first ascent of Piz Laschadurella (10,020 ft.), at the head of Val Ftur, just behind the hotel. I cannot honestly say that it presented any attraction but



PIZ VADRET, S.E. FACE

that of virginity. It was, indeed, so easy that even to mention it is almost 'like hitting of a gal.' I can only say in self-defence that we gave it every chance, as the last thousand feet or more were climbed in thick cloud and rain. The top is remarkable, in our experience, only for being very muddy, though in a brief break of the clouds

we saw just enough to show that in good weather the view must be a fine one. A little way to the east lies a nameless peak, only four metres lower, which is, I believe, still unclimbed, and looks as if it might present considerable difficulties.

The next day, Saturday, September 9, was no more promising than the Friday; but, as it was clearly no use sitting still at home, we set off for the Pizzo dell' Acqua (10,259 ft.), with all the tops cloud-covered and stray showers driving up from the west. In the improbable event of any one wishing to follow us into the Val dell' Acqua he may be glad to hear that you take the Livigno path for about an hour, until a very plain track branches off to the right, and leads you to a bridge over the Spöl. Then the way is clear. As we went on the weather improved a little, and during breakfast we got a sight of our peak. There is a fair-sized glacier in the valley, some two miles long, but three-quarters of the length are entirely concealed by a huge moraine. Fortunately it is not very steep, and gives fair going. There is not much to be said about the climbing, except that it is more varied than the Laschadurella, and that we had one short but rather steep wall of very treacherous rock just before reaching the eastern arête. The illustration shows the easy ledge by which we passed along below the arête.

We gained the top in snow and wind; our axes were humming with electricity, and we did not care to stay more than the five minutes necessary to heap up a few stones on the very sharp summit, which showed no signs of any previous decoration of the sort. We ate lower down amid all the signs of a coming storm, and were completely taken by surprise an hour later when the weather suddenly cleared up like magic, and gave us our first view of the mountains to the north and east. The next day, Sunday, was lovely. We gave Guler a day off, which, of course, he took advantage of to go after a fine buck chamois we had seen in the Val dell' Acqua. In the afternoon we started off for Livigno, leaving a message for him to follow us.

Of Livigno I need not speak, as Mr. Freshfield has already described it in his 'Italian Alps,' though, to judge from the Strangers' Book, he has not succeeded in inducing many Englishmen to visit it. After the beautiful walk through the romantic cliffs of the Spöl valley, with their genuine dolomite colouring, this fat upland valley seems rather tame. But it has a better inn than in Mr. Fresh-

field's time, and possesses one advantage of which he does not speak. In virtue of its position beyond the watershed, I suppose, it has no custom-house, and compounds for its taxes by a small yearly payment. It is a rare pleasure to find oneself in Italy without the risk of having to pay three times its value as duty on the tobacco in one's pouch.



SUMMIT AND N. FACE OF PIZZO DELL' ACQUA.

As Guler had not turned up by 8 o'clock next morning Prothero and I set off in search of Monte Foscagno (10,130 ft.), which was down on my list with 'no information.' From the shoulder above Trepalle we saw a peak in the required direction, and reached it by the rough but easy northern ridge in rather under 5 hrs. going from Livigno.

It was a superb point of view, but it was not the top of Monte Foscagno. That lay some little distance further on, and evidently out of reach at this late hour; it was, therefore, some consolation to see an unmistakable stone-man at the top of the highest of the two bold peaks of which it consists. The whole length of the Italian Val Viola lay at our feet, and we saw every peak for miles round, so far at least as the clouds, now fast gathering, allowed us; the Ortler remained obstinately veiled. But we gazed long at one of the most beautiful mountains in the Alps, the Cima dei Piazzzi; it has not been ascended from this, the N.W. side, and we sought in vain to trace a way through the maze of huge schrunds which split the great glaciers covering its flank. The very name of the mountain is unknown even so near as Davos; it is well seen from the Schwarzhorn, but passes as the Adamello or Presanella, according to the fancy of your guide. From our top a quick walk over débris took us down to the frequented Passo di Foscagno, and so in 3 hrs. to Livigno.

Our programme for the next day—far too ambitious, as it turned out—was to cross the Alpisella Pass to S. Giacomo di Fraele, ascend Piz Murtaröl—‘no information’ again—descend on the N.E. side to the Münster Alp, cross the Buffalora Pass to the Ofen road, and so back to the Ofen inn. We started late, and began ill by missing the Alpisella path, and losing valuable time in forcing a way up the bed of the stream. The path really lies high up, close under the cliffs of the Pizzo di Ferro. We got to S. Giacomo only at 10.15, and reluctantly decided that it was too late to go on to a peak which still lay more than 4,000 feet above us, and of the other side of which we knew nothing. There was nothing for it but to pass the night at S. Giacomo.

But the delay was well rewarded. That afternoon remains one of the pleasantest memories of the trip. S. Giacomo was, in fact, a complete surprise. Even Tschudi has nothing to say about it, and from the map it would seem to be no more than a hut in a bare upland alp. What we found was an undulating plain, lying exactly on the main watershed, with a view down the Val Brüna to the north, and to the south down the windings of the Val di Fraele, closed by the mass of the Cristallo and the Ortler. Two side valleys open into this plain, and break up the chains to the west. There is a peculiar charm of contrast in these mountains, for on the one side there are the fantastic dolomite crags

of the Pizzo di Ferro and the Monte Cornacchia, stained with all colours from dead grey to glowing orange and red; on the other, to the south, is the slate range of the Cime di Plator, built up of great smooth 'Blatten' in nearly vertical faces. The plain is well wooded and strewn with huts; springs burst from it at every point, and turn the infant Adda, hardly a mile from its source, into a respectable river; while among the woods, and hidden from the road under the cliffs of the Cornacchia, lies a lovely little lake, with a bottom of the purest white marble sand. At the highest point of the plateau, and just on the watershed, stands the little church of S. Giacomo (6,407 ft.), and by its side a Casa Cantoniera, rough in appearance, but provided with at least two clean beds, abundant and good food, and Veltliner at a franc the litre. It is an idyllic spot; further west or north it would by this time have been plentifully provided with big hotels and all the outfit of a 'Luftkurort.' No doubt this will all come in good, or bad, time.

Guler, as landlord of the 'bewirthschaftet' Club hut by the Silvretta glacier, was sorely tempted by finding here a man with a donkey to sell for the sum of 120 francs. He wanted one to help in carrying provisions from Klosters to the hut, and he said that at home he might go all the year round without another chance of buying one; for, strange to say, it seems that the use of beasts of burden is unknown in the Prättigau. Of mules he spoke as though he knew them by name only; he had been warned against their 'launisch' character, but had no personal acquaintance with them. And certainly I saw no evidence of such use while I was at Klosters. He ultimately decided not to buy the animal, however, on the ground that it was the end of the season, and that the donkey would only spend the winter in eating its head off to no purpose.

The kitchen of the little inn was filled at night with a company of Bergamasque shepherds on the way back to Italy with their flocks, and a picturesque sight they were as they sat and ate their polenta. But what interested us at least as much was that there turned up, in the company of an Italian from Sondrio on a hunting expedition, Krapacher, of Bormio, the one man, it would seem, who really knows the district. He told us that more than one ascent had been made of Piz Murtaröl, or Monte Cassina, as he called it. It is a pity, by the way, that the Swiss map has not taken this name in place of Murtaröl, which, in one form or another, is far too common round here. In a distance of

a few miles there are, besides Murtaröl, a Piz Murter, a Piz Murtarus, and a Piz Murtera, and it is, of course, not a far cry to Piz Morteratsch. The name comes, I suppose, from Morta Terra, and its frequency is due to the stretches of 'dead land,' waste slopes of barren limestone débris, which are so painfully frequent in the district.

He, too, it was who had built the stone-man which we had seen on the top of Monte Foscagno, and had made the first ascent of the Cassa di Ferro, as he named the highest peak of the Dosso di Ferro to the north of us. On all these expeditions he had accompanied Signor Cederna, of Milan, who had evidently been all round the frontier on a 'mopping-up' tour. But the real blow was when he said that he had been with the same gentleman to the top of the Pizzo dell'Acqua. A careful cross-examination only confirmed the truth of his statement, and left us but the poor consolation of having found a new route, as he had climbed the peak from the Passo del Diavel, the opposite side from ours. He told us that there remained but one virgin peak in the Livigno district, the Piz Salient. I must add that I have not been able to trace any record, in either the 'Bollettino' or the 'Rivista,' of these expeditions, with the exception of the ascent of the Cassa di Ferro.

Though the bloom had thus been taken off the Murtaröl it was clear that nothing could deprive it of the privilege of being one of the very finest points for a panorama in all the district, as it is the highest point of the range of Piz Umbrail, and overlooks everything from the Ortler and Bernina groups in the east and south, to Pisoc, Linard, and Kesch in the north and west. The summit was veiled in cloud when we started, but things looked better as we rose by slopes clothed with edelweiss, the most profuse and luxuriant that I remember to have seen. These were succeeded by the usual wearisome débris, and also, alas! just as we got to the top, by the usual cloud, so that we never saw our panorama after all. In the descent we made a great error, trusting to Krapacher's advice. We traversed under the rocks of the N.W. arête by the abominable débris on their south side, and thus, in a wearisome hour of walking, gained a little col from which we could descend, still over débris, to the Münster Alp to the north. We afterwards saw that we could have saved some time and much labour by coming straight down the left bank of the westernmost of the two steep glaciers which cover the northern face. From the Münster Alp some 3 hrs. over the grassy Buffalora Pass

and the Ofen road took us back to the now familiar Ofen inn.

Next day we devoted to idleness ; it was, therefore, very fine. We sent off Guler to examine the approaches to Piz Tavrü (10,394 ft.), over which we proposed to cross to Scarl. He came back saying that he was sorry he had not bought that donkey at S. Giacomo, as we might have used it to ride to the top. Unluckily I had been somewhat out of sorts for the last few days, and when the time came I did not feel equal to starting ; so I had to let Prothero go alone. He had a little climbing, which would at least have been too much for that donkey, and a splendid view ; the peak was evidently virgin. But he came to the conclusion that a direct descent from the top on the north side, though perhaps possible, would be decidedly dangerous. When we saw this face afterwards it was clear that his conclusion was right. There was no way of descending but by couloirs, apparently of ice and well swept with stones.

In his absence I felt sufficiently recovered to spend the afternoon in going up the Munt la Schera (8,494 ft.), opposite the hotel, the local Rigi, and well worth a visit, though even here it is hard to avoid the universal slopes of loose débris. But the view in all directions is a fine one, and repays the labour.

Next day (Saturday) we crossed to Scarl by the pass immediately to the south-east of the Tavrü. It is perfectly straightforward and easy ; but it cannot be said to be free from danger, for it is well known that the Val Nügliä is haunted by a ghost, 'the witch without a nose.' She was, it appears, an official of the convent at Münster, and for faithlessness to her vows is condemned to wander about this desolate valley in this unattractive guise. From what Guler told us it would seem that the traveller has only too good reason to be thankful that all the valleys in the neighbourhood of Münster are not peopled with ghosts in a similar state of noselessness. But perhaps this is only scandal. At all events we escaped her terrors or her attractions, though we thought we saw her turned into a rock and looking down her haunts from near our pass. Future travellers, besides being on their guard against her, must also take good heed to avoid another allurement in this valley—to wit, a well-marked path which starts behind the Buffalora cantine, and seems to lead up the right bank of the stream. It has probably been made by the malice of the witch, for they will find that it leads them only into trouble. By crossing the

bridge and a little meadow beyond it, however, they will find a path on the left bank which is all they can desire.

We found Scarl in a state of picturesque animation and excitement; the cows had left the 'alps,' and their owners had come to receive their allotment of cheese and butter, the result of the summer's work. Of the two inns we chose the 'Edelweiss,' after some hesitation; whether we were right or not I do not know. It is primitive, and our rooms and beds certainly did not justify the charges of a first-class hotel, which were made not only to us, but to Guler. Next morning we walked down to Schuls in pelting rain, which continued steadily all day; on the Monday we took the diligence back to Davos and the rail to Klosters, where we succeeded in somewhat appeasing our thirst for a good climb by an ascent of the Gross Litzner, reaching the top, as usual, in cloud and snow.

It will be seen that this dolomite region produced a good many disappointments. The record of first ascents in the district seems to have been very carelessly kept, or to have been kept in some unusual place; and we were convinced that many peaks with 'no information' were by no means virgin. Under this head must come Piz Minger (10,195 ft.), and probably Piz Zuort (10,243 ft.), just above Scarl. We came across a Schuls man who had been up the former this summer, and had found some cards of previous visitors on the top. There are, however, still one or two ascents to be made, which I expect would turn out to be new. The Pizzo del Diavel (10,079 ft.), on the north side of the Val dell'Acqua, is one of these; the southern point of Piz Pisoc (10,299 ft.), a quite independent peak, is another. Piz Foraz (10,152 ft.) is doubtful.

A more serious disappointment was in the climbing itself, which certainly showed us nothing qualified to keep up the reputation of dolomite. Every point we reached was easy on one or two sides, though generally difficult, perhaps impossible, on the others. The rocks, where we got on to them, were treacherous, but uninteresting, and everywhere the way lay unavoidably, for a greater or less distance, over repulsive slopes of débris at the highest possible angle, which at least doubled the labour, while their crying barrenness was somewhat depressing. It was a real relief, from time to time, on the edge of the district, to set foot for a while on good honest gneiss. I regret to have to add that the contrast was such as to lead Prothero to speak of the limestone as the 'g nasty.'

Another disappointment was the weather. There is a curious tradition in some places to the effect that the weather in September is generally settled, especially if you have a good break with a snowfall just at the end of August. In this hope we patiently endured two days of hopeless rain at Davos, and the deep snow which they left behind on the tops. But we were deceived; the weather, to the last, was as capricious as I have ever known it. No one can have less respect than I for local weather-wisdom; but I must say that, in this case, it was rightly in opposition to the received opinion. Guler said that September was, on the whole, a bad month, and the previous September one of the worst he had known. In Scarl we found that it was actually proverbial for uncertainty. The landlady there quoted a saying—

Im September
Hat's kein Kalender.

The rhyme is not so rigid but that one might insert the names of various other months, and thereby expand the truth of the adage.

And yet, in spite of all this, our recollection of the whole trip is most pleasant. There is a charm about these unspoiled districts, their simple inns, never crowded, always friendly, and always comfortable, their sociable and courteous company, the beauties of streams and cliffs, of colour and form, which more than compensates for gymnastic deficiencies. But it is better to say nothing which might be so unfortunate as to teach more than a small rill from the stream of tourists to see for themselves.



L. GULER.