CHAPTER IV.

THE MOUNTAINS OF BAGNES, WITH THE ASCENTS OF THE VÉLAN, COMBIN, AND GRAFFENEIRE, AND THE PASSAGE OF THE COL DU MONT ROUGE.

Excursion of 1854.—*The Vélan.*

THERE are very few parts of Switzerland which more richly reward the lovers of Alpine scenery, and which have been hitherto so utterly neglected, as the magnificent mountain ranges which enclose the savage defile of the Val de Bagnes. Six great glaciers pour their frozen streams into this valley, one of them famous as the cause of the melancholy inundation of 1818; and from the chain of the Combin, which forms its western barrier, and occupies the triangular space between the two branches of the Dranse, rises a great alp, a hundred feet higher than the Finsteraarhorn. Yet, not one in every hundred of the crowds of tourists, who flock every year to the St. Bernard Hospice, turns aside at Sembranchier into the Val de Bagnes, and of these, scarcely any one has explored the snow basin of Corbassière, or wandered over the ice-fields of Chermontane; while those writers who have made the passage of the Col de Fenêtre, have invariably described the "inaccessible precipices of the Combin," with the sort of hopeless feeling with which they might have spoken of the mountains of Sikkim or Nepaul.

It was in the year 1854 that I first became acquainted with this interesting district. I was travelling in company with my friend, Mr. W. L. Cabell, and one sultry August morning we were toiling along the road which leads from Martigny to the Great St. Bernard. Our guide, or rather porter, was one Gaspard Tissier of Martigny, a man who united a very serious impediment in his speech to that pure French pronunciation for which the Valaisans are so justly celebrated. As we were deploring the dreary monotony of the route, the snowy dome of the Vélan burst suddenly into sight, and shone gloriously in the sunlight at the head of the valley. The desire to ascend it occurred at once to each of us, but Gaspard asserted that it was altogether inaccessible, and scoffed at the idea of any one making so hopeless an attempt. We were, however, so charmed

with the appearance of the mountain, that after our arrival at the hospice, we had a long talk in the evening with some of the monks upon the subject. They told us that the ascent was a matter of no great difficulty, that no tourist had made it for many years, but that two chasseurs had been upon the summit a week or two before, and spoke enthusiastically of the extent and magnificence of the view. They strongly urged us to undertake the expedition. We came to no determination that evening, for the weather seemed uncertain; we were as yet unacquainted with the great ice world, and had never experienced that feeling of intense longing which seizes every Alpine traveller in the presence of a noble mountain.

The next morning gave promise of one of those peculiarly bright days that sometimes intervene between periods of bad or doubtful weather. We got up soon after four, looked out of our window, and immediately resolved to devote the day to the exploration of the Vélan; but a preliminary difficulty presented itself: mass began at five and lasted until half-past six, and until it was over nothing in the shape of breakfast was to be had. Being unacquainted with the commissariat resources of the route, we did not consider it wise to start on empty stomachs, and it was not until seven o'clock on the morning of Thursday the 17th of August, that we left the hospice for "La Cantine de Prou," the little inn where the char road from Martigny comes to an end, and where, following the directions of the monks, we hoped to find our guides. By great good fortune the chasseur landlord, André Dorsaz, was at home: he expatiated on the folly of commencing a "grande course" at so ridiculously late an hour, and strongly urged us to put it off to the following morning; but we were inflexible; the splendour of the day was almost maddening; the idea of passing it in the confinement of the valley was insupportable, and we longed to get upon some eminence and breathe in full freedom the delicious air; we were resolved to start at any rate, turn back when necessary, and run the risk of not being able to reach the summit. We engaged Pierre Nicholas Moret as second guide, exchanged the miserable alpenstocks we had brought from the Oberland for more serviceable weapons, and provided ourselves with a rope, an ice-hatchet, and suitable supply of provisions. Some time was consumed by these preparations, and it was not until nine o'clock, when we ought to have been on the top of the Vélan, that our party, consisting of Dorsaz, Moret, Gaspard, and ourselves, quitted the Cantine.

We retraced our steps towards the hospice for a short distance, then bore away to the left and ascended the grassy slopes which border the Plaine de Prou. A waste of rocky fragments had next to be crossed, and we then arrived at the Glacier de Prou, which being but slightly crevassed, offered little hindrance to our progress; but we were soon brought to a stand by a great cleft or *bergschrund*, which ran all round the upper part of the glacier, and guarded the mountain like a moat. At last, Dorsaz discovered a tolerably firm snow bridge, which we crossed to the foot of one of the many rocky buttresses which descend from the Vélan on this side. The rocks were firm but very steep, occasionally intercepted by slopes of frozen snow, requiring the use of the axe; these sometimes having an edge like a steep keel, which had to be climbed, one foot on one side and the other on the other. We worked away steadily for some time, and at last, at three o'clock, exactly six hours after we left the Cantine, we were standing upon the summit.

Great as were the expectations I had formed of the view from the Vélan, I confess I was totally unprepared for so magnificent a panorama. I have since traversed the High Alps in various directions, and ascended some of the loftiest summits, but I have never seen an Alpine view of such exquisite perfection. The effect it produced upon us was no doubt partly due to its being the first time we had enjoyed a really extensive mountain prospect, but much more to the extremely propitious atmospheric conditions under which we saw it. When a great elevation is reached in fine weather, the sky is generally of that intense black blue which is peculiar to the higher regions of the atmosphere, while masses of white clouds often hang upon the mountain sides, and seas of mist float over the glaciers, or come boiling up the valleys. Such a prospect has, indeed, a charm of its own, but under these influences the mountains are frequently much obscured, and the glare of the sunlight on the nearest snow is almost blinding. Our view from the Vélan was seen under exactly opposite conditions. Far away above our heads a thin veil of grey mist was stretched over the sky, dimming the sun sufficiently to relieve the eye-sight, without destroying the light and shade. As far as the eye could reach in any direction there was not the smallest fleck of vapour to break the beautiful outlines of the Great Alps.

We were, of course, far above the long subalpine ridge which divides the Val d'Entremont from the Val Ferret. We could con-

sequently see the whole range of Mont Blanc stretching in unapproached majesty from the Col de la Seigne to the Mont Catogne, with the snowy summit of the mountain itself, the wonderful obelisk of the Géant, and the great glaciers which fall into the Allée Blanche. Southward were the many untrodden summits of the Graian Alps, and a little to the right, in the dim distance, the far away peaks of Dauphiné. In the opposite direction could be traced the course of the Val d'Entremont, then the Rhone Valley below Martigny, terminated by the blue waters of the Lake of Geneva, and, further still, the long lines of Jura fading away gradually as they trended to the distant north. Not the least striking was the prospect eastward. We had reserved the Monte Rosa district for another year, but books and views had made us familiar with the forms of its principal peaks; and we now saw them face to face for the first time, and pointed them out to our guides, who knew the names of none of them. First were the glaciers of Breney and Chermontane, with the mountains which enclose them; then the Matterhorn, fully as impressive as from any other point of view; and from its base extended to the right a great snowy mass, which we took for Monte Rosa, but which, on consulting the outline I sketched of it, I now believe to have been the southern face of the Breithorn and the Lyskamm. I have no note of the Alps of the Oberland, but some of them must certainly have been visible.

In one direction only was there any interruption of the panorama. A little to east of north, a snow peak nearly 2,000 feet higher than our standing-place towered into the sky. Now there is nothing in the world so provoking to an Englishman who has climbed up a hill to get a view, as to find a summit of greater elevation just out of his reach. It struck us immediately that the view from this mountain would be more extensive than that from the Vélan in proportion to the greater height, and it would evidently be quite uninterrupted. The following conversation accordingly took place. "Dorsaz: what is that big mountain almost close to us?" "The Grand Combin, monsieur." "We must go up there at any cost." "That, monsieur, is quite impossible; many chasseurs have explored it, and they all say it is quite inaccessible." I was, however, very sceptical on this point, and resolved, if I ever should have the happiness of revisiting the Alps, that I would strain every nerve to plant my alpenstock upon its summit.

The height of the Vélan is 12,441 English feet,* and its summit consists of a rather extensive flattened dome of snow—a circumstance greatly in its favour, as standing on a knife edge, holding on to an alpenstock thrust into the snow, is not, except with persons of very peculiar temperament, conducive to the enjoyment of fine scenery.

We remained on the top just long enough to outline the principal mountains, and then, as every moment was of importance, began to think about returning. Dorsaz judged our morning's route too steep to go down by, so we made a long detour, and descended on to the glacier of Valsorey. We passed by the singular lake called the *Goille à Vassu*, described by Saussure (*Voyages dans les Alpes*, ch. xlv.), full of water in the winter, which escapes under the ice in the summer. It was then quite dry. We had no time to examine it, and taking to the glacier again, pushed on as fast as possible, but it was nine o'clock before we reached our night's resting-place at the village of St. Pierre. The next morning we returned to the hospice.

Without reckoning Gaspard's daily pay of five francs, our excursion had cost us exactly a pound apiece; ten francs for provisions, and a napoleon each for the guides; a moderate sum enough for a *grande course*. We were greatly pleased with our guides. I have seldom met with a man so active, courageous, and attentive as Dorsaz, and it was with the greatest regret that I heard, in 1857, that he had just before been carried off by fever.

The Vélan owes its excellence as a point of view to its comparatively isolated position, and to its central situation between the great masses of Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa. From nowhere else in Switzerland, excepting, perhaps, from the Cima di Jazi, can so fine a panorama be seen with so little expenditure of time and labour; and considering the crowds of tourists who daily pass close to it in the summer season, it is very surprising that it is not oftener ascended.

* The heights of the principal mountains described in this paper are taken from Ziegler, "Sammlung absoluter Höhen der Schweiz," p. 131, where they are given on the authority of Berchtold and Müller. I have in each case converted the height in metres into English feet. I took a barometer on my second excursion, but it met the usual fate of this instrument, and was broken before I had any opportunity of using it.

Excursion of 1856.—*The Grand Combin and the Col du Mont Rouge.*

In 1856 I visited Switzerland with my brother, Mr. C. E. Mathews. Our plan was to explore the Pennine Alps from Mont Blanc to Monte Rosa, ascending those two mountains, and zig-zaging along the intermediate chain. But the enterprise to which we looked forward with the greatest pleasure was the scaling of the Grand Combin, which we determined to effect if possible. As a modest introduction to the larger scheme, we were to commence our Alpine tour by an expedition which, with our friend M. Ph. de la Harpe of Lausanne, we had planned the preceding year,—the ascent of the Dent du Midi,—an excursion much less known than it deserves to be, and which I trust will ere long have full justice done to it by some member of the Alpine Club.

Early in the month of August, we hurried to Lausanne, and, joined by La Harpe, and a friend of his, Mr. John Taylor, proceeded to Monthey. We walked up the beautiful and luxuriant valley of Champéry to the village of the same name, and after resting a few minutes at the comfortable inn, went on to sleep at the châlets of Bonavaux, close to the base of the Dent. At a quarter before nine, on the morning of the 7th of August, we were seated on the extremity of the longest cusp of that great molar. Next to Mont Blanc, which is seen to surprising advantage from this point of view, the most conspicuous object was the Combin. A large telescope which Taylor had brought with him was immediately called into requisition, and we examined with the greatest care the face of the mountain which was opposite to us. It was of no great inclination, and ice-coated from top to bottom, but covered with such a multitude of gigantic masses of snow, flung together in such wild confusion, that it was impossible to detect any practicable route among the labyrinth of precipices and crevasses. The ascent would evidently be a matter of no ordinary difficulty.

We descended from the Dent into the Pissevache valley, where our two friends left us to return to Lausanne, and we went on to Chamouni. Here we sought out Auguste Balmat, who as chief guide that year had been unable to accept our invitation to accompany us, but who had retained for us the services of Auguste Simond, who was one of Mr. Wills's guides in his ascent of the

Wetterhorn. We had no reason to regret Balmat's selection; Simond soon endeared himself to us by his many admirable qualities; and it is to his zeal, energy, and courage, that we owe the success of many subsequent expeditions.

After having been beaten back by bad weather in an attempt to ascend Mont Blanc by the Aiguille de Goutè, we returned to Chamouni, and held council with Balmat upon the route we ought to take. He entered most heartily into our views: "Nothing," he said, "pleased him so much as 'les nouvelles ascensions;'" and an expedition to the Combin was of great interest, as it had long borne among the guides of Chamouni the reputation of being inaccessible. Our first idea had been to attack it from St. Pierre, and we proposed going thither by the Col du Géant, which we had a particular desire to cross. We found, however, that owing partly to the *règlements*, and partly to our having to pay double the market price for the necessary provisions, the passage of the Géant could not be effected by two persons at a less cost than £10,—a sum preposterously disproportionate to the difficulty of the excursion,—and that any attempt to cross the pass in a rational manner would entail fine and perhaps imprisonment upon Simond. While we were debating this point, whom should we see among a cluster of guides standing around the door of the chef's bureau, but Gaspard Tissier of Martigny. He told us that the year before a chasseur of Bagnes had succeeded in reaching the top of the Combin,—a statement which turned out to be untrue, but which determined us to abandon the Géant and hasten at once into the Val de Bagnes. An hour or two after, we quitted Chamouni; and it was not without heartfelt pleasure that I turned my back upon that den of thieves.

We took the route by the Tête Noire, slept at La Berberine, and crossed the Forclaz the following morning. When about an hour from Martigny we re-arranged our knapsacks, and retaining only a few things of absolute necessity, made the rest into a packet which we sent by Simond to Martigny, to be forwarded by post to Zermatt. We took a track to the right, and in a few minutes struck into the Val d'Entremont, just below Bouvernier. At mid-day we reached Chables, the chief town of the Val de Bagnes, whose church spire, massive stone bridge over the Dranse, and quiet cluster of houses and châlets, looked picturesque enough. We hastened to the inn which, fortunately for us, had just been built: the quarters

were rough, certainly, but everything was good of its kind, the charges very moderate, and the landlord, M. Pierre Perrodin, extremely attentive and obliging. Throughout the ten leagues from Sembranchier to Valpeline along this route, there is no other place of entertainment for man or beast.

We were informed, much to our surprise, that the Grand Combin was quite a feasible undertaking, but that it had only been ascended once, seventeen years before, when a gentleman from Berne reached the summit, accompanied by Benjamin Felley, a chasseur of Lourtier. The route lay along the glacier of Corbassière, and the excursion would take three days, it being necessary to sleep two nights in the châlets by the glacier side. One François Louis Felley, a superintendent of the workmen who are constantly engaged in cutting away the dangerous glacier of Gétroz, happened to be at the inn, and we gladly availed ourselves of his offer to go up to Lourtier, and bring his kinsman down that evening. The Felleys appeared to be very numerous in the Val de Bagnes, and Forbes's guide, whose name he writes Feilay, was doubtless one of the same clan. The morning had been magnificently fine, but in the afternoon we had the disappointment of seeing the sky covered by dull grey clouds. As we made a rule of never delaying excursions for merely threatening weather, we arranged that the following day (Sunday) we would walk quietly up to the châlets of Corbassière, distant about four hours, and that we would attack the Combin on the Monday morning. It was not long before Benjamin Felley arrived, a short, thin-faced, light-haired man, between fifty and sixty. We deputed Simond to settle the terms, and he engaged Benjamin as guide, and François Louis as porter, the former at six and the latter at five francs a day. Our next step was to settle the commissariat for the three days' march. We took six loaves of bread, a quantity of excellent cold chamois, a piece of cheese, chocolate, sugar, and ten bottles of sour white wine. Wine is always a heavy and troublesome thing to carry, but it is not easy to dispense with it, and I have always found a mixture of wine, snow, and sugar a very refreshing beverage at great altitudes. Simond was greatly dissatisfied that there was no vin rouge; "Le vin blanc," said he, "coupe toujours les jambes,"—a result which happily we did not experience. Our provisions cost us less than twenty francs. I subjoin the actual bill, for the especial edification of the *habitués* of

Chamouni; it is also interesting as a specimen of the orthography of the Val de Bagnes:—

Duvin boutelle 10	400
Vyende	600
Fromaje	140
Dupin	480
Chandele	30
Odevyeserise	30
Sucre	240
Chocola	60
	1980

Soon after six in the morning of Sunday, the 17th of August, our party of five quitted the little town by the narrow mule-track which leads up the Val de Bagnes. Crowds of people, all dressed in their best, were coming down the valley to mass, and we had no idea that it contained so large a population. Both men and women had an honest independent appearance, they were well-formed, and not ill-looking, and were free from those hideous deformities which are the curse of so many valleys in the Alps. Felley was stopped by many of the groups of villagers, questioned as to his destination, and hopes expressed that we might get safe back again. An hour's walk brought us to Lourtier, a cluster of poor châlets, where we stayed a short time, while Felley went home to get a hatchet and to bid farewell to his family. We were well provided with rope, having brought 100 feet of good sash cord from England.

Above Lourtier the Dranse thunders through a narrow gorge, by the side of which the track rises rapidly, and we had beautiful views of the Dent du Midi, and of a fine snow peak up the valley in the opposite direction. A little further on are the châlets of Granges Neuves, opposite to which the Corbassière torrent joins the Dranse; and further still, those of Plan Praz, where we left the main track and crossed the river by a foot bridge to the base of the Becca de Corbassière. Then commenced a steep climb up slopes of mingled crag and greensward, clothed with thick bushes of the mountain alder, and gay with green clusters of elegant ferns, and the beautiful blue flowers of the Alpine sow-thistle. Within a circuit of a few yards I counted eleven species of ferns, and the following year, at the same place, found a twelfth, gathering the finest specimens of *Woodsia ilvensis* that I have ever seen. The weather had

been threatening the whole morning, and so violent a storm of sleet and hail now burst upon us, that we were glad to crouch for shelter under the alder bushes, and it was more than an hour before we could resume our journey. We soon reached the châlets of Corbassière, on the comparatively level pastures on the eastern side of the glacier, and were rewarded by an Alpine view of more than usual magnificence.

Opposite to us rose a noble range of mountains, separated from our standing-place by the long and narrow ice-stream of Corbassière. The northern end, which rested on the Val de Bagnes, was protected by the massive outworks of the Becca de Séry; next to this were the curious rocky pinnacles of Les Avoulons and Les Follats; then followed a lofty dome of snow, and the chain was terminated on the south by a still higher mountain, crowned by a glittering snow peak of exquisite beauty. "Those," said Felley, "are the Petit and the Grand Combin." Far away up the glacier, half veiled in murky clouds, loomed another snowy mass, of which more presently. A little below the Petit Combin the glacier bed is very steep, and forms a sort of cliff. The glacier has retreated from the eastern side of this declivity, leaving it bare and polished, and plunges down the other, or western side, in an icy cataract.

The principal châlet was a stone hovel of about twelve feet by ten, two feet high at the sides, and eight feet in the centre, with a roof of rude stones, through which the rain oozed in a hundred dripping streamlets; the only furniture, a copper boiler, a copper kettle, a churn, a few milk-pails and wooden cups, and two one-legged milking stools. A wood fire was burning inside, the smoke of which had filled the hovel, and was vainly struggling to get out at the door, and a miserable grisly cowherd was standing by it, making cheese in the copper caldron. Outside the ground was soddened with wet, and trampled and defiled by cattle. It was impossible not to feel saddened by the only painful thought incident to Alpine travel, that in the midst of the greatest glories of nature, the life of man should be so wretched.

We found in the châlet two young men from Chables, who had heard of our project, and had attempted by starting very early to get on the Combin the first day, and deprive us of the legitimate honour of the ascent. They had got some way up the mountain when the storm came on, and drove them back to the châlet with signal discomfiture, and when we saw them they were drenched

from head to foot, and looked the very picture of misery and despair. Of course, we told them how greatly we regretted that the unpropitious weather had prevented the fulfilment of their amiable intentions, and how much we should be gratified if they would favour us with their company on the following morning. It appeared that Sunday was the only day on which they could make an excursion, and they hastened down to Chables almost immediately.

The rain having somewhat abated, we went to explore the glacier, the main features of which I shall now describe, to save recurring to the subject, although the examination was not completed until the next morning. Originating in an elevated snow basin of great dimensions, it pours its ice-stream down the long and narrow channel which lies between the range of Combin and the parallel rocky ridge of Corbassière, which separates it from the Val de Bagnes. The narrow portion is about five miles in length, and divided into an upper and a lower level by the cliff described above. There is no medial moraine, but a belt of large blocks edges the glacier on the Combin side. As we stood by the châlets we were surprised to see no corresponding moraine on the nearer side; but the ice for a considerable distance appeared strangely discoloured. This was the more curious, as where the ice came down the cliff, the Corbassière moraine appeared in its proper position. The cause of this was soon explained. Some little distance along the upper level there is a great ice-cave in the glacier side, the stream issuing from it dashes down the cliff, and re-enters the glacier by another cave below; the whole moraine is engulfed at the same place, and the blackening of the glacier is the result of its efforts to digest its stony meal. On the Corbassière side of the upper level there are two ancient moraines running for a long distance parallel to the modern one; the outer one of these is all grassed over, but broken through in many places by recent rock falls from the cliffs above. Several of the Swiss glaciers have peculiar tints, depending upon the nature of the rocks which are thrown down upon them. The Zmutt glacier, for example, has long been noted for its red colour. The glacier of Corbassière, though in a less degree than that of Fenêtre, has a general green appearance, caused by the numerous fragments of serpentine strewn upon its surface.

After a hearty meal of hot chocolate and bread-and-butter, we discussed the arrangements for the night. Sleeping in the châlet

was out of the question, but just beyond it was a large block whose under surface projected some distance over the ground without actually touching it, and thus formed a hole some six feet square by about two high. The herdsmen used it as a sleeping place: they had built a wall at a little distance in front, to keep out the wind, and covered the bottom with hay; they kindly gave it up to us, and we found it a very comfortable dormitory. We lay down and listened to the pleasant rushing of the torrent, and I, who was outside, could just see the pale peak of Combin shining among the solemn stars.

At half-past three we were aroused by Simond: "Il fait très-mauvais temps, messieurs," said he; "on ne peut partir." At this cheering announcement my brother started up, and brought his head into such violent collision with the stony roof of our chamber, that I feared he would have been disabled for the day. It was indeed a gloomy outlook; thick masses of clouds had settled upon the mountains, and we could scarcely see half across the glacier. At five o'clock Simond reappeared: he thought we had better start, but that if the weather did not mend by the time we reached the foot of the mountain we should inevitably have to return. We got under weigh soon after five, and walked by the glacier side to the foot of the cliff, distant about half a mile from the châlet, when it began to rain so violently that we were obliged to seek shelter in a small hovel which we fortunately found there, and which is the most advanced outpost of the pastures of Corbassière. After a delay of about an hour the weather cleared a little, we resumed our march, climbed up the cliff, and walked along the oldest moraine to a point nearly opposite the foot of the Combin.

We then struck right across the glacier, and began to mount the steep slopes of frozen snow which lie on its western side. As I was pressing heedlessly forward, I suddenly lost my footing, and began to slip down rapidly towards a great crevasse which yawned beneath. I happily succeeded in stopping myself just on the upper edge of it, but had I not done so, Simond would have saved me: he was a yard or two in front when I fell, but he dashed down the snow like lightning, and was at my side at the very moment that I stopped.

The usual *bergschrund* next presented itself: it was not very deep, but too wide to jump with safety, and no bridge could be discovered. A great discussion took place among the guides as to how it was to be crossed, and Felley suggested filling it up with

snow. At this Simond tied the end of the rope round his waist, and, taking a run, cleared the crevasse, and clutching the rocks on the other side, climbed up to a firm standing-place, and hauled the rest of the party across, one by one. Then came a steady pull of several hours up a rugged slope of steep rocks, which at last ended in a single point, and we had nothing before us but the snow peak itself. We sat down and rested for a few minutes, and debated the best method of continuing the attack. We were standing at the vertex of a great triangle of rock which forms the principal part of the eastern face of the mountain. Before us was a dazzling cone of frozen snow of extreme steepness, rising from far below on either side, and terminating in a very acute point some 200 feet above our heads. Two courses were open to us; either to cut steps directly up to the summit, or to go in a more horizontal direction, and take the shortest cut to the right-hand edge of the peak, which was much nearer to us than the other. We determined upon the latter plan, as it gave us the benefit of the chance that the snow might be less inclined beyond. Simond and Felley worked with the axe by turns, and when the line of steps was completed, we tied ourselves together and advanced cautiously towards the edge. When we arrived there, we found it to be a steep and very thin knife-edge; by the active use of our feet and alpenstocks we forced a passage through it, and, turning sharply to the left, cut another line of steps on the further side, and in a few minutes gained the summit.

It was just twelve o'clock. We drank off a bumper to the health of the Grand Combin, and shouted wildly with delight. This, then, was the inaccessible mountain, whose top we had reached in six hours of easy walking from Corbassière! A narrow snowy *arête* extended from the summit in a south-westerly direction, and at its extremity was a little patch of rocks, only a few feet lower than the peak itself. As this offered a much more convenient resting-place, we crossed over to it and began to reconnoitre our position. Heavy masses of black clouds floated around and below us, through which here and there only could we catch glimpses of the mountain world beyond. Straight across the Val de Bagnes were the dark crags of the Mont Pleureur, and far away northward was the well-known form of the Dent du Midi. Making every allowance for the cloudy weather, I was greatly disappointed with the point of view; for it was quite evident that, even if it were perfectly clear, our position

would not command that extensive panorama which we had anticipated. The Combin appeared to be situated between two vast snow basins; one on the side of the Val d'Entremont, and the other that of Corbassière. Suddenly the clouds in the latter direction drifted away, and disclosed to view a magnificent snow mountain at the very head of the Corbassière basin. There was no mistake about it; it was the one we had so minutely examined a few days before from the summit of the Dent du Midi. Studer's map was immediately brought out, and our position carefully studied. We were evidently standing at the point marked Petit Combin on the map, while the words Grand Combin occupied the place of the mountain we were looking at. We then formed ourselves into a Court of High Commission, and arraigned Felley on the capital charge of having brought us to the top of the Petit instead of the Grand Combin. He indignantly pleaded Not Guilty: "That dome of snow below us was the Petit Combin; as for that mountain yonder, that was quite another thing." "What was that, then?" "That was the Graffeneire;" a name previously unknown in Alpine travel. "But it was much higher than where we were." "Oh, yes, very much." "Very well, the Graffeneire was what we wanted to go up." Felley shook his head: "Sur cette montagne-là," said Louis Felley, "personne n'a jamais foulé le pied." I distrusted Felley, at first; but many subsequent inquiries convinced me that he had given the real nomenclature of the Val de Bagnes, and although it is different from that in use throughout the rest of Switzerland, I believe the Bagnes names to be correct, and shall therefore use them in the present paper.

The only instance in which the name Graffeneire occurs in Studer's map is in the words "P. de Graffeneire," which mark the position of a very curious semicircular opening in the ridge, pointed out to me by Felley as the "Passage de Graffeneire." The Graffeneire lies nearly north and south, being part of the same range as the ridge of Corbassière, and the "Passage" may be considered as the northern limit of the mountain. At the south-western end of the Graffeneire is a snow col, 1,000 or 1,500 feet lower than the "Passage," and which we supposed would lead either to Ollomont or Chermontane. A range of mountains, containing two peaks of considerable height, circles round from the Combin to this col, and completes the enclosure of the Corbassière basin on the western

side. A glance at Studer's otherwise admirable map will show how incorrectly it represents this region.

As we felt a strong desire to scale this peak, the same which had been pointed out to us from the Vélan as the Grand Combin, we examined the face of the Graffeneire very attentively. Nowhere else have I ever seen such amazing masses of broken snow; but it seemed that with care it would be possible to thread our way among them. Simond, however, declared it would be madness to attempt to go up on this side, on account of the danger of avalanches, and that if the ascent were to be made at all it must be on the other. We acquiesced reluctantly, and foolishly, too, as the event proved: indeed, so far as my experience goes, it is impossible to place the least reliance upon the opinion of even the best guide on the practicability of a mountain ascent, when formed from mere inspection from a distance, and not from actual trial.

We built a cairn on the rocks, and put a bottle in it containing an account of our expedition, which I fancy is likely to remain there undisturbed for many a long year. We then descended the mountain on its southern side: and after beating through a thick snow-storm, at last reached the *névé*. We were racing gaily along when I heard a sudden shout behind me, and looking round could see nothing of my brother but a head and a pair of arms. He had fallen into a hidden crevasse, which Felley and I had passed in safety, and was clinging on to the side of it. To seize his hand and pull him out was the work of a moment: he had a most providential escape, and described the sensation of his legs dangling in the cleft as something the reverse of agreeable. If we had been tied together, such an accident would not have been attended with the smallest danger; and we were very imprudent in crossing the *névé* without using the rope. At six o'clock we regained the châlet, in the midst of a heavy rain.

We employed the evening in discussing the plan of our future operations. The next point to make for was Chermontane. When there, we could examine the eastern face of the Graffeneire, explore the little-known Chermontane glacier, and try to get from it on to that of Arolla, by a pass which Forbes supposed to exist, and which we concluded must be at the spot marked Crête à Collon on Studer's map. Felley knew a short cut into the Val de Bagnes, which would save us the trouble of going back to Lourtier. But then we had only provisions left for another day, and what were we to do

for food when we got to Chermontane? Louis Felley at once solved this difficulty. He would start very early in the morning, go down to Chables, and bring some fresh supplies up the valley. As he might not be able to reach Chermontane, we agreed to bivouac the next night at the châlets of Vingt-huit, which lie about an hour lower down. Even then he would have a walk of some four-and-twenty miles.

At eight o'clock on the 19th we left the châlets, and mounted the steep pastures behind them up to the crest of the ridge. Felley first took us to a gap called the "Col des Morts," which overlooks a sheer precipice of many hundred feet, at the bottom of which we could just see the Pont de Mauvoisin, through a break in the thick mist. A little further is another opening, called the "Col des Pauvres," at the head of a steep and narrow gully leading down to the Val de Bagnes. We crossed the col and descended the gully very carefully, and then struck along the mountain to the right, in order to hit the bottom of the valley as high up as possible.

A little below the pastures of Torembec we gained the track, which keeps the left bank of the Dranse as far as the extremity of the Zessetta glacier. Here the river is crossed by a wooden bridge, and a few yards higher up on its eastern side are the châlets of Vingt-huit. My journal of this day's work is very meagre; a steady soaking rain commenced soon after we started, and continued all day without the least intermission. We were drenched to the skin, when at six o'clock we reached our resting-place for the night.

We took up our quarters in a large stone cow-house, which would have been a very comfortable lodging if the whole of one end had not fallen in. It was full of goats when we entered, which were expelled with much difficulty at the point of the alpenstock. All our extra clothing had gone to Zermatt, so that we had no change. We soon kindled a blazing pine-wood fire, and driving our alpenstocks into the wall a few feet above it, took off our principal articles of dress, and hung them up in the smoke to dry. We then twisted hay-bands round our feet, after the fashion of her majesty's soldiers in the Crimea. Simond went off to the nearest châlet, and soon returned with a berger, bringing a great copper vessel half full of milk, and one wooden bowl. The milk was soon boiling; we brewed some magnificent chocolate, and

ladled it out of the kettle with the bowl. We should have made a capital supper had we not been on half rations of bread, being obliged to keep enough for breakfast on the morrow, lest any accident should befall the porter. Our cow-house seemed to be a regular place of resort for the chasseurs of the neighbourhood; several came in during the evening, among them an old man, one of the most miserable specimens of humanity I have ever seen, who got his living by trapping marmots. We were warned by the berger not to lie in the old hay, which, he said, abounded in *mauvaises bêtes*, but to choose in preference a pile of new which had recently been brought in. But the new hay was so sodden with wet that this was out of the question; and utterly regardless of the unseen horrors, we flung ourselves down upon the ancient heap, and in a few minutes were sound asleep.

The next day the morning sun shot his bright beams into our sleeping-place; we rose up, stepped out of the building, and were greeted by a cloudless sky. Our porter had arrived at midnight, with a bag full of provisions, and a letter from the landlord at Chables, asking us to send him our names and addresses, to be inserted in the archives of his house in connection with the successful ascent of the Combin. I cannot refrain from giving this letter in full, as a specimen of the way in which the more intelligent natives of Bagnes deal with the French language. Here it is:—

"Messieu setous seque je cregnes de votre voyage le moves ten a presen que jay a pri que vous aves fes lensensyon du mon combin eureusemen je sui toutafes satisfes et je sui tres conten pour vous je vous prye de men voyes votre non et votre adresse par votre gide loui felay que jay toute confiyense.

"je vous salue votre serviteur

"Pierre Perrodin, à Bagnes."

We gave Benjamin Felley four days pay and dismissed him, as he was not acquainted with the neighbourhood of Chermontane. For knowledge of the district we had been in, we found him a good guide, but he was slow and fumbling, and constantly annoyed us on the march by turning round and stopping when he had anything to say. Louis Felley went with us to help to take the provisions to Chermontane: he had proved a most active assistant, and always ready and obliging when there was anything to do.

We left Vingt-huit at 5 A.M., and recrossing the Dranse by

another bridge a little higher up, followed the track along its western side. The first glacier that was passed was that of Breney, on the eastern side of the valley. This evidently has been retreating, and has left behind it an amazing pile of rubbish. Forbes was assured that in 1822 it had increased so much that it had crossed the Dranse, and risen to a great height on the other side. We next came to the Glacier of Mont Durand, which descends from the south of the Graffeneire, and extends right across the Dranse, which flows through an icy tunnel underneath. We crossed this glacier on to the pastures of Chermontane, and then came full in view of the magnificent ice-field of the same name, an almost unknown region, to the exploration of which we had determined to devote the day. The Graffeneire was not forgotten in the morning's walk. We had carefully scanned it from time to time, to see if there were any parts of its eastern face which offered the smallest prospect of success. But it rose sheer up in black precipices of frightful steepness, to a vast height above the valley, and was evidently hopeless in this direction. From the pastures of Chermontane we could see straight up to the Col de Fenêtre, guarded on the left by the dark cliffs of Mont Gélé, and on the right by the lower pyramid of Mont Avril. As the Mont Avril is separated from the Graffeneire only by the Glacier of Mont Durand, we saw that it would be an admirable point of view for studying that perplexing mountain; and thinking, too, that a fine day would be better spent on a mountain top than in a valley, we abandoned our intention of exploring the Chermontane glacier, and sending Felley to the châlets with the major part of the provisions, resolved to ascend Mont Avril. Leaving to our left the path leading to the Fenêtre, we took a slanting track up the mountain, and after toiling through the loose slates of which it is composed, reached the summit at noon.

I do not know the exact height of Mont Avril. The Col de Fenêtre is 9,200 feet, and the Avril must certainly be more than 1,000 feet higher. It is probably about 10,500 feet; some 500 or 600 feet lower than Mont Gélé. After all, for the thorough enjoyment of an Alpine view, there is nothing like a mountain of from 10,000 to 12,000 feet, provided it is sufficiently distant from overtopping peaks. The greater mountains are not dwarfed from it, the summit is gained without fatigue, and almost any length of time may be spent there. We found Mont Avril such a point of

view. Our first attention was, of course, directed to the Graffeneire, which rises on the opposite side of the Glacier of Mont Durand. The slaty beds of which the Avril is composed dip south-west, and crop out against the glacier, forming an escarpment of great depth and steepness. The other side of the glacier is bounded by the cliffs of the Tour de Boussine, a huge buttress of the Graffeneire, and which are fully as steep as those which rise from the Val de Bagnes. But what interested us the most was to observe, at the extreme south-western angle of the mountain, the identical col which we had seen from the Corbassière side, and which evidently formed a snow connection between the two glaciers. I felt quite certain that this col might be passed, if we could once get up the Glacier of Mont Durand, which is greatly crevassed in its middle part; and Simond gave it as his opinion that it was by the shoulder of the Graffeneire, which comes down to the col, that the ascent of the mountain might most easily be attempted.

The Combin was hidden by the Graffeneire, but westward was the great white dome of the Vélan; to the south lay the Val d'Aosta, and beyond it the many peaks and glaciers of the Montagnes de Cogne. Eastward, almost at our feet, were the shining ice-fields of Breney and Chermontane, looking like a single glacier clasping the Pic d'Otemma in its snowy arms. Just beyond the former, but much higher up, was a snow col, which appeared to lead across the ridge separating the Val de Bagnes from that of Hérémence, and which we judged rather higher than our standing-place. This was the Col du Mont Rouge. The ridge itself was crowned by the rocky summits of the Arolla, Rouinette, and Mont Pleureur, and in the far east was the Great Matterhorn, which, with its base hidden by a cloud, seemed a gigantic rock suspended in the sky.

When we had sufficiently enjoyed this splendid panorama, we ran rapidly down the mountain to the lake on the Italian side of the Fenêtre, and crossing the col, skirted the glacier to the châlets of Chermontane. This was a much more extensive establishment than any we had previously visited; nine bergers lived here, and there was a herd of 120 cows, besides a large number of goats and sheep. Our arrangements for the morrow were yet undetermined; we should have liked to have attempted the Graffeneire by the Glacier of Mont Durand, but this would have necessitated another day at Chermontane, and we should have had to send to Chables again for a further supply of provisions. We were anxious, too, to get

to Zermatt, which was new country to us. We found the bergers remarkably ignorant about the neighbouring passes; of the Crête à Collon they knew nothing, and the only information we could get from them was, that we might go by the Col de Crête Sèche to Biona, or by that of Mont Rouge to Hérémence. In these difficulties, we took their advice of sending down to Gétroz for Bernard Trolliet, "le premier chasseur de Bagnes," who, they assured us, knew the mountains well. If he could not be found, our plan was to go up towards the Crête à Collon, and if that appeared unpromising, to cross the Col de Crête Sèche. In the meantime, we strolled out to the glacier, but had only time to examine it in a very cursory manner. Unlike its neighbour of Breney, it was advancing and ploughing up the pasture before it. The principal medial moraine appeared to descend from the Truma des Boucs, and mark the boundary of the affluent from the Crête Sèche. We passed from the glacier to the pastures of Chanrion, where there are two small lakes, one lying against the ice, fed by the glacier water, and the other of spring water, a little distance from it. We bathed in the latter, and then sat down on the grass and studied the Graffeneire, which was visible from the passage to the col.

The derivation of the names of the Val de Bagnes would be an interesting subject for discussion. Simond always persisted in calling the mountain L'Agrafe Noire, a name more applicable on this side than the other. According to Forbes, Chanrion is *champ rond*, but I do not know if he has any authority for this derivation; the spot did not appear to have anything particularly round about it. To us came a whisper of pleasanter things, as we lay in the sweet afternoon sunshine, stretched upon the tender herbage, admiring the black cliffs of the Graffeneire, and idly gazing into the purple sky. These sweeps of smiling mountain pasture, decked with cream-coloured pyrolas, and azure stars of gentian, and hundreds of other beautiful Alpine flowers, were *les champs riants de la chère montagne.**

* The following is probably the true derivation of the word Chermontane, or Tzermontane, as it is written in old maps. The German prefix *Zer* denotes destruction, and Montagne, like Alp, always signifies in Switzerland a mountain pasture; so that Zermontagne, corrupted into Chermontane, has the same signification as the German Zermatten, and its French equivalent Champéry, viz., destroyed pasture, and, like them, bears record of some great avalanche of olden time. Several instances of mixed language may be found in the valleys of the

Evening drawing in, we returned to the châlets, having to go round by the glacier again, there being no other way of getting over the Dranse. When we arrived there, the cows had just come up to be milked; and the three milkmen, walking about with their one-legged stools strapped on behind them, had an irresistibly ludicrous effect, suggesting the appearance of the principal actor in the Devil's Walk.

Late at night Bernard Trolliet arrived. He undertook to take us in one day, by the Col du Mont Rouge, to Evolena, the point we wanted to make for. We might, if we chose, he said, go by the Col de Collon, but this would involve a two days' journey by way of Biona and Prarayen. As for the Glacier of Chermontane, the head of it was absolutely "barred;" he had once followed a chamois to the top of the Pic d'Otemma, and examined the Crête à Collon, and, we might take his word for it, we could not get across. We of course decided upon the Col du Mont Rouge, which was evidently a very fine pass; but I do not consider even Trolliet's opinion as absolutely decisive against the Crête à Collon, and I shall certainly attempt it if I ever again visit this locality. A place must be actually tried before it can be pronounced impossible; and, I am sure, no one who saw the Strahleck for the first time from the Aar glacier, would conceive it possible for any one to get up it.

We lay down in the hay at one end of the châlet, and tried in vain to sleep. Cheesemaking operations were protracted with great clatter until nearly midnight; and when at length the bergers retired to rest, they kept up an incessant conversation in the hideous vernacular of the valley, all talking at once, and as loud as possible. Simond expostulated without effect, and we thought with regret of our quiet retreat under the stone at Corbassière. At the first glimmer of early morning we made our escape from the châlet, breakfasted, and at half-past four we were again *en route*.

It was very annoying to have to quit Chermontane, leaving so much undone. We should have liked to explore the Glaciers of Mont Durand and Chermontane, to have attempted the Graffeneire from the col, to have ascended the Pic d'Otemma, and examined the Crête à Collon. I know scarcely any part of Switzerland from

Southern Valais. For example, a ceiling beam in the inn at Zinal, in the Val d'Anniviers, bears the curious inscription,

"JÉSUS, MARIE ET JOSEPH, LA SOSIETTEZ DES ZINAL,"

while a peak in the immediate vicinity is called "Lo Besso."

which so many interesting excursions might be made, but it will never be generally visited until some better accommodation is provided than that which exists at present. There is some talk of building an inn at the Pont de Mauvoisin; this will be a great improvement; but the greatest assistance to tourists would be a little inn, open during the summer, not far from Chermontane, a luxury which, I fear, is not likely to be afforded just at present.

We descended the valley again; and when we got to the Glacier of Mont Durand, instead of taking our previous track, struck down to the right, and so crossed to the eastern side of the Dranse. This glacier was exhibiting great activity. Not only had it crossed the river, but it was thrusting itself against the slopes of Chanrion, and ploughing up the pasture just in the same way as the Glacier of Chermontane. Having climbed up the rocks by the side of the Glacier of Breney, which is very steep and broken in its lower part, until we came to a place where it was less inclined, we took to the ice, and made for the opposite side. Great as was the evidence which the terminal moraine of this glacier had afforded of its retreat, it sank into utter insignificance compared with that now presented to us. Having crossed an ancient lateral moraine of very considerable dimensions, we came upon the present one, rapidly grassing on its outer slope, soon doubtless to be stranded like the other. Higher up, both were merged in a wide belt of rocks which had fallen from the Pic d'Otemma—an amazing waste of ruin. There are two medial moraines, of which the northern descends from the rocky promontory separating the Glacier of Breney proper from its tributary of Rouinette. This soon blends with the lateral moraine, and forms, on the northern side, an extent of desolation even greater than that on the other. These effects would naturally be produced by a glacier slowly but continuously shrinking. We noticed another remarkable peculiarity. The principal crevasses instead of being transverse, were longitudinal, and were so wide and numerous that we were upwards of an hour in effecting the traverse. This was evidently due to the bounding-walls exerting little pressure upon the ice, but leaving it free to expand laterally at the same time that it moved down its bed.

Having at last got safely across, we mounted the rocks before us, and after a fatiguing climb, reached the *névé* of the Glacier of Lirerouge, which nestles in a little hollow just under the Pic de Rouinette. Here we put on the rope; Trolliet went first, my

brother and I were in the middle, and Simond brought up the rear. It is with glaciers as with the troubles of life, some of the smallest are the most provoking. We found the *névé* of Lirerouge a perfect network of concealed crevasses. We could not make the circuit of the basin for fear of avalanches from the Rouinette, and so were obliged to go straight across it with great care. Notwithstanding incessant harpooning, about every five minutes Trolliet sank to his middle, but he always managed to struggle out without assistance, and went on again as if nothing particular had taken place. At length we reached the col which divides the *névé* of Lirerouge from that of Gétroz, and turned round to see the view, which is one of great magnificence. Just across the valley were the black masses and pinnacles of the Graffeneire, and, farther, to the left, the Monts Avril and Gélé were seen to great advantage. In the northern mid-distance was our old friend and constant companion the Dent du Midi. But it was impossible to face the Val de Bagnes for more than a few seconds. A south-west wind blew a perfect hurricane across the col, in occasional gusts of such violence, that there was nothing for it but to crouch down as low as possible, and hold on by our alpenstocks thrust into the snow. Our route now lay along a snow flat forming the upper part of the Gétroz glacier, and beneath a lofty ridge on the right terminated at either end by two high peaks; the nearer of these is the Pic de Rouinette, and the farther, the Mont Blanc de Cheilon. Opposite to these, at a little distance, is the Mont Pleureur. Travellers who are surprised that so insignificant a glacier as that of Gétroz should have produced such lamentable results, would, I think, form a different opinion if they traversed the snow-fields from which it flows.

Having crossed the *névé* of Gétroz, we arrived at a second col, just opposite the first, leading over to the Glacier of Hérémence. The snow was too crevassed to descend upon it at once, so we made a detour over the rocks, and got on the glacier a little lower down. We there found an asylum from the wind, which had hither to pursued us with unrelenting fury.

There is a strange confusion in the naming of this glacier. Forbes, Studer, and Escher call it respectively Lenaret, Durand, and Liapey. According to Trolliet, it was the Glacier de Hérémence, an appropriate name enough. Forbes thought that there might be a pass on to it from the Glacier of Chermontane. But this is most improbable, not to say impossible, as it is shut in on the

south by the Mont Blanc de Cheilon and the Pigne d'Arolla, and the two glaciers of Breney and Otemma intervene between these mountains and the Glacier of Chermontane. We walked on until we came to water; and, meeting with a very inviting glacier-table, applied it to the purposes of its more useful domestic namesake, spread our provisions upon it, and dined with an enjoyment which none but a mountaineer could in the least appreciate.

Had we pursued the glacier to its extremity, we should have descended into the Val de Hérémence, which was anything but what we wished to do. A mountain ridge, extending from Mont Blanc de Cheilon and the Pigne d'Arolla, bounds the glacier on its eastern side; and Trolliet pointed out a low place in it where he said our route lay. When we had arrived beneath it, we found a very narrow ledge of rock leading up to a little col. Trolliet said he could pass without difficulty; but it looked so ugly that we preferred keeping to the right, and crossing the ridge at a higher level, we got easily down to the other side. On Studer's map are the names Pas de Chèvre and Pas de Riedmatten near this spot. I believe the Pas de Chèvre is that which we crossed, and that the other is a more circuitous path somewhat lower down.

We now found ourselves at the head of a desolate valley communicating with the Combe d'Arolla, savage with piles of broken rock, and ghastly stems of scorched and withered pine. The path lay not far from the Glacier d'Otemma, which has shrunk and left behind it a stranded moraine. As we neared the Combe, the magnificent dome-shaped mass of the Mont Collon, with its black buttresses of rock too steep for the snow to cling to, burst upon our view. Below it lay the glacier of Arolla, on which I witnessed, for the first time, the phenomenon of the hyperbolic dirt bands; these were exhibited with the greatest distinctness, and extended up the glacier as far as we could see.

A short distance down the Combe we came to some châlets, and here, for the first time since we had been in Switzerland, our request for milk was emphatically refused. We could not understand it at first, but Simond soon ascertained the reason. We had come from Chermontane, where there was a malady among the cows, and the bergers feared that if we drank milk at the châlets their herd would immediately catch it. After much discussion they relented, and consented to supply us on condition of our sitting behind the châlets some distance off. A sharp walk of three hours brought us to

Haudères, where we arrived fourteen hours after quitting Chermontane; and learning that Pralong had a châlet here, where his father and daughters lived, and *took in* travellers, we determined to stop, and save the unnecessary trouble of going down to Evolena.

The Col du Mont Rouge is inferior in interest to very few of the great snow passes of the Alps. It is between 10,000 and 11,000 feet high, probably nearer the latter, and is the only means at present known of passing in one day from the Val d'Erin to Chermontane; five glaciers are crossed, and several others skirted, on the route. We imagined that we were the first travellers, or at least the first Englishmen, who had passed it; but this is not the case. It was crossed, in 1855, by Messrs. Kennedy, Ainslie, and Stevenson, on the way to their memorable ascent of Mont Blanc. They took the col in the opposite direction, sleeping at the châlets we had stopped at on the Montagne d'Arolla, and walking straight on to Valpelline, which they reached in twenty-one hours, including three of rest and detention from bad weather. Pralong was their guide across the pass, and he turned back at the Glacier of Breney. Kennedy considered the view of the Graffeneire, which came suddenly upon them when they gained the col, as one of the most striking he had seen among the Alps.

We gave Trolliet fifteen francs for two days' pay and a "bonne main," and Simond's pay and a moderate sum for provisions made a total of about thirty francs, so that fifteen francs apiece was the cost of a col of the same order as the Géant or the Erin. Trolliet had led the way with singular spirit and sagacity, and had completely vindicated his title of "le premier chasseur de Bagnes."

We found the Eringers very different people from those of Bagnes. Indeed, the feelings with which they regarded travellers savoured strongly of Chamouni, and there it is possible to get what you are obliged to pay for. Les filles Pralong were exceedingly obstinate and untractable; Simond had to cook our supper himself, and had the utmost difficulty in dragging the necessary ingredients from the stores of the house. A guide for the Erin was the next desideratum. Pralong *grand père*, an ancient gentleman, verging on eighty and bent almost double, was importunate to be engaged, telling us he was "très-robuste." This was simply ridiculous, and the only man Simon could find who knew the pass was one Follinnier, M. le Président, as he was called. He modestly demanded forty francs for the excursion, but finally con-

sented to take thirty, on condition of being allowed to return when we got to the gazon. When we had the next day reached the base of the Wand Fluh, scarcely half across the glacier, Follinnier pointed to a piece of bare rock, exclaiming, "Voilà, monsieur, le gazon," and demanded payment and dismissal. I think it my duty to gibbet him here, as a warning to future travellers.

At seven o'clock on the Friday evening we arrived at Zermatt, and directed our steps to the comfortable "Hôtel du Mont Rose," where we were fortunate enough to find our knapsacks. We had had a most interesting excursion: for four consecutive nights we had slept in our clothes, and for nearly a week had not seen a trace of tourists or civilization. The clean beds and good table d'hôte of the hotel were none the less welcome. Notwithstanding the use of veil and spectacles, the constant glare of the snow had made my eyes very weak and painful, but my brother did not experience the smallest inconvenience.

Excursion of 1857.—*The Graffeneire.*

The campaign of 1857 was undertaken in the company of my cousin, Mr. B. St. John Mathews, and had for its principal object the siege of the Finsteraarhorn. We had written to Auguste Simond to meet us at Grindelwald, and he brought with him his cousin, Jean Baptiste Croz, who being several years younger than Simond was even his superior in energy and muscular power, although less practised in all those little offices of personal attention which render the best guides of Chamouni such useful and agreeable travelling companions. Messrs. Kennedy, Hardy, and Ellis joined us in Switzerland, and the attack of the united party, which is described in another part of this volume, was crowned with the most complete success. We were imprisoned by rain and snow at the Æggischorn for three days before starting upon the expedition, and the day after our return we were fairly driven down into the Rhone valley by a relapse of miserable weather. Hardy and Ellis went on to Zermatt; and Kennedy, St. John, and I descended the valley to Sion, where I expected to receive letters.

We spent Sunday the 16th of August in the salon of the Hôtel de la Poste, in the melancholy capital of the Valais, cheered by the enlivening sound of the heavy rain pattering against the window panes. We had written long letters home, brought our journals up

point, we borrowed from the berger a copper kettle and some wooden bowls, and tied them on the mule's back along with a large bundle of firewood. We then filled two pails about half full of milk, and slung them on to our alpenstocks, and carrying them two and two, the party resumed its march. Passing our camping-place of the preceding year, we arrived at five o'clock at the hovel at the base of the cliff, where we had sheltered from the storm, which was to be our resting-place for the night. The range of Combin and the upper glacier were covered with dark clouds, which augured ill for the morrow. We unloaded and picketed the mule, and were soon seated round a good fire, enjoying an excellent supper. When the milk was boiled and the bowls filled, Simond suddenly produced several iron spoons: I remonstrated against such a luxury, and he replied, "You remember, sir, last year, that at Chermontane there were no bowls, and at Corbassière there were no spoons, and I determined to be provided this time."

The following day, Wednesday, the 19th of August, was ushered in by a beautifully cloudless morning. As our passage of the col was somewhat doubtful, I directed the muleteer to take the provisions we did not want to carry with us, and *cache* them at the châlets below, making quite sure that if we were obliged to return the same way, we could reach those châlets in the evening; the mule and the other things were then to go to Chables.

We started at three, ascended the cliff by lantern light, and walked along the old moraine, having the Graffeneire full in view, which presently lighted up, and crimsoned by the morning sun, looked magnificent indeed. I was now able, for the first time, to study the actual summit of the mountain: it consisted of two peaks, very near together, and of nearly equal height. Instead of crossing the glacier towards the Grand Combin, as we had done the year before, we kept under the rocks on the left, walking along a belt of piled and tottering fragments, with quantities of fresh snow filling the interstices. These piled rocks are troublesome enough to walk over when there is no snow, but when it is uncertain whether you are about to set your foot on a firm surface, or to be let in up to the hip, they are extremely trying. We were not sorry to leave them, but the moment we stepped upon the glacier we sank in above the ankles; it was covered with a coating of soft snow at least twelve inches thick. I now saw the task that lay before us, but determined to proceed notwithstanding; and having frequently to make long

detours to get round the crevasses, we toiled manfully through the snow to a point at the base of the mountain about an hour on this side of the col.

We arrived at this point at twenty minutes past nine, having been upwards of six hours in performing what the chasseurs had accomplished on the first ascent in less than half the time. I called a halt and a second breakfast, and we lay down in the snow and rested half an hour. Here Bruchey, the younger guide, who had previously told me that he was "chasseur de chamois, par passion," said that he was very sorry, but that he really could not go on; he had shown signs of distress for some time, and was fairly exhausted by the arduous labour of the last six hours. I told him to lie where he was for the present, and when he was sufficiently recovered, to go up to the col, and see if we could descend on the other side; as for us, we would go on, and endeavour to make the ascent without his assistance.

The snow on the mountain was even worse than that on the glacier; its surface was frozen into a crust which was not strong enough to bear the weight of the body, but which at every step resisted for a few seconds, then broke and let the foot suddenly in; it was so deep that frequently when the slope was steeper than usual, my knee was beneath the level of the snow in front. In such circumstances the foremost man has the hardest work, those who follow and step in the holes which he has trodden having a comparatively easy task. When there is a large party, although the progress is slow, the fatigue is greatly diminished by each man taking the lead in succession; but we were only three, and Felley had come up rather against his will, and was not good for much. The lion's share of the work accordingly fell to Simond. I suppose he led for about half the time, and that Felley and I divided the other half between us. We had less difficulty in threading the crevasses than I had anticipated. We passed under many lofty walls of snow, shining with green light, and although we crossed the broken remnants of numerous avalanches, we were not even alarmed by a single fall. At last we got entangled in a network of wide fissures from which we could find no outlet. I then began to consider whether I was right in dragging these two men through all this toil merely for my own gratification. Felley I knew would be glad of any excuse for retreat, so I turned round to Simond:— "Do you think," I said to him, "that it is really worth while for us

to go on? It is very hard work, it is getting very late, and after all we may not be able to reach the summit. I place myself entirely in your hands, and if you decide to turn back, I have no objection." His reply was decisive and characteristic, and deserves to be recorded. "Non, monsieur! Il faut continuer, il faut aller toujours doucement, il ne faut jamais désespérer d'une ascension." "En avant donc," responded I, and in a short time we were clear of our difficulty, and by proceeding very quietly we at length succeeded in reaching the crest of the mountain, at the top of the precipices of the Val de Bagnes. Nothing now remained but the two peaks, which lie in a line nearly north and south, with a little col between them. We were at the base of the northern, the one the chasseurs had ascended, and not knowing which was the higher, immediately attacked it. It was rather steep, but Simond's energy appeared to increase as we neared the summit. He went first and kicked great foot-holes in the snow, I followed immediately, and we were soon seated on the top of it, where there was about space enough to hold the three.

The brilliant promise of the morning had not been fulfilled. The clouds had begun to gather about nine o'clock, and got lower and thicker almost every minute. When we were on the summit, not a single peak was visible beyond the Val de Bagnes, and only at intervals there came glimpses of the glaciers of Breney and Chermontane, and the green lakes of Chanrion shining like emeralds five thousand feet below. Westward, we looked down upon a boundless sea of white rolling cloud, whose billows broke against a solitary snowy height. From time to time we had seen this mountain during the ascent, and I had as often said to Simond, "Look, there is the Vélan; how little progress we are making, as we have not yet left it below us." It was the summit of Mont Blanc! In one direction only was the prospect clear. We could see the whole length of the glacier of Corbassière, with its bounding ranges, the Grand Combin itself scarcely distinguishable among the neighbouring peaks. Opposite to the Graffeneire, the rocky boundary of the glacier appeared broken into three bays; we could see straight up the southern of these, and as the peaks were much lower at its extremity, I thought it possible that a passage might exist to St. Pierre.

Disappointing as the prospect was, our position on the summit ...ven more unsatisfactory. The southern peak raised its

highest point some twenty feet above the one on which we stood. It could evidently be climbed without much difficulty; was there time to do it? The only watch of the party was in Bruchey's pocket, down below, so that we could not tell the time, but we judged it to be nearly three. The ascent had therefore cost us at least eleven hours of actual walking, and there were only five hours of daylight left. I reluctantly decided in the negative, and commenced a rapid descent, leaving the *Aller höchste Spitze* of the Graffeneire as a future reward to some enterprising mountaineer. It was five before we reached the base of the mountain, and rejoined Bruchey. He had been to the col, he said, and it was impossible to descend upon the other side. I was unable to gather from him the precise nature of the difficulty, and am uncharitable enough to believe that it was in spirit only that he visited the col. However this may have been, we could not have got there before six, and it would have been madness to have entered upon an unknown glacier at so late an hour. We therefore turned our faces in the opposite direction, and marched towards Corbassière as quickly as the snow would permit. We had judged rightly in hastening down, for as we descended the glacier we were attacked by a heavy storm of rain and drifting snow.

Night closed upon us before we reached the cliff, and we had to grope our way down it by the aid of a lantern, containing only a twisted taper inside it, which was continually going out. At the base of the cliff the taper utterly succumbed, and I thought we never should have found the châlet. We entered it at last at a quarter past nine, after a course of eighteen hours and a quarter, fifteen of which had been actual walking through deep snow. As we had sent everything away in the morning, even the ordinary châlet luxuries were wanting to our supper,—no chocolate or blazing fire, nothing but bread and meat and water, and a hay bed; but we slept soundly on it notwithstanding. We descended to the lower châlet early the next morning, and breakfasted on our *cached* provisions; Felley and Bruchey left us at Lourtier, and Simond and I reached Chables at ten o'clock.

The total cost of the expedition was nearly five pounds; rather a large sum, but if I had had a companion, it would have been no more expensive for the two. Excepting a sunburnt face and parched lips, I was none the worse for it; but Simond was very unwell; he had contracted an illness which, I grieve to say, lasted

several weeks, and which I fear was caused in a great measure by the arduous exertions he had made to land me safely on the summit of the mountain.

The height of the Graffeneire is 14,134 feet;* if the snow were in good order, I see no reason why the ascent should not be made in seven hours from the châlets, and in that case Chables might easily be reached the second night. The view from the summit in fine weather must be one of the most remarkable in the Alps. The northern extremity of the Corbassière glacier has now been pretty well explored, and the attention of mountaineers should be directed to the passes which may lead on to it from the south and west. Attempts should be made to reach it from Chermontane by the glacier of Mont Durand, from Valpelline by the ravine extending above the châlets of By, and also from St. Pierre. When those avenues have been fully examined, the topography of the district will be completely known.

I stayed four hours at Chables and then went to Orsières, where I was detained sorely against my will the whole of the next day, in an unsuccessful attempt to find a guide who knew the Col du Tour. Failing in this, I took a pleasant mountain track along the valley lying between the main chain and the Mont Catogne, crossed the Forclaz and the Col de Balme, parted reluctantly from Simond, and hurried on to St. Gervais. I rejoined my cousin the very evening he had come down from Mont Blanc, where he had found the snow even worse, and the day's work longer, than it had been on the Graffeneire; but his party being larger, the individual labour was less painful, and they had successfully reached the summit. I had hoped to stay at St. Gervais and follow his example, but another relapse of rainy weather drove us away; we quitted the Alps in despair, went by way of Sixt to Geneva, and in a few hours we were in England.

Croz left us at Servoz and returned to Chamouni, where he was fined by that liberal and enlightened community. He had committed the high crime and misdemeanour of ascending Mont Blanc from St. Gervais, contrary to a regulation which had recently been

* Ziegler under "Combin II. höchster Gipfel." King, in his recent work—"The Italian Valleys of the Pennine Alps," page 84, gives the height of the Grand Combin (*i.e.* the Graffeneire) as 13,300, and of the Vélan as 10,470 feet. These must be intended for French feet, but he does not say so. Even with this allowance the Vélan is much too low; its height in French feet is 11,674.

made, and of the existence of which he was not aware. It is difficult to imagine to what lengths these good people will ultimately proceed. They were formerly contented with closing their own route to travellers of ordinary means, they now claim a monopoly of the whole mountain, and will, doubtless, soon extend their regulations to every excursion in the Alps. English travellers, especially those led by love of science or adventure to the higher Alps, have been everything to Chamouni, and have spent their money in the valley with a lavish hand; and yet the petty authorities who rule the commune are neglecting nothing to disgust and exasperate those to whom they owe so much. The system, too, is bitterly detested by the better guides, to whom it is as unjust and oppressive as it is offensive and insulting to their employers.

So ended my last Swiss journey. To those who feel wearied—as who does not at times—with the ceaseless mill-work of England in the nineteenth century, there is no medicine so soothing both to mind and body as Alpine travel, affording as it does interesting observation and healthy enjoyment for the present, and pleasant memories for the time to come. Very many happy days have I spent among the "Peaks and Passes and Glaciers" of the Alps, but I look back upon none of them with feelings of such great satisfaction as upon those in which I wandered among the unknown fastnesses of the "Montagnes de Bagnes."

W. Mathews, Jun.

Note by the Editor.

Since the foregoing pages were in type, I have been favoured with an interesting letter from M. Gottlieb Studer, the well-known explorer of the Alps, whose valuable map of the southern valleys of the Canton Valais is now in the hands of every traveller.

M. Studer informs me that during the last year, 1858, he revisited the range of Mont Combin, and accomplished the ascent of the Graffeneire from the side of the Val de Bagnes, but, like his predecessor, Mr. Mathews, he was not favoured with fine weather. Returning to the valley of Corbassière, M. Studer effected the passage from thence into the Val d'Entremont,

descending to Alève on the road of the St. Bernard by the "Montagnes des Cœurs" and the Mont Boveyre.

In this excursion M. Studer, like Mr. Mathews, ascertained that the nomenclature of the peaks of this group which is adopted in the Val de Bagnes differs materially from that admitted in his own, and all other existing maps, and he proposes the following changes, in order to reconcile the discrepancies thus caused.

1. He proposes to retain for the highest peak of the group the name Grand Combin, by which it is universally known to all previous writers, and through the adjoining districts of Switzerland and Piedmont; admitting, however, as a synonym, the local name of the Val de Bagnes—La Graffeneire.

2. The peak named on his own map "Petit Combin," which in the Val de Bagnes and in the foregoing narrative is called "Grand Combin," he proposes, in order to avoid further confusion, to call the "Combin de Corbassière."

3. The Petit Combin, called also in the Val d'Entremont "Dent du Midi," occupies the position indicated in the same map by the name "Les Follats," and the latter name belongs properly to a portion of the range between this and Les Avoulons.

4. M. Studer had placed the name "P. de Graffeneire" in a position that indicated a col, rather than a peak, and Mr. Mathews naturally supposed that the initial letter was intended for the "*Passage*" pointed out to him by his guide. M. Studer, however, informs me that the words on his map were intended to designate a peak, which should bear the name "Becca de la Liaz."

5. The Montagne des Cœurs, called on the map "Cœur Signal," and there placed on the south side of the Glacier de Mont Boveyre, is on the north side of that glacier, immediately above Alève.

6. The point between Liddes and Lourtier, marked upon the map "B. d'Evasie," should be Becca de Jazie.

7. The Glacier de Valsorey descends from the north side of the Vélan, stretching farther down than the Gouille de la Vassue, which lies in the angle formed by the junction of the glaciers of Valsorey and Tzeudei.

Most of these corrections will be found to have been anticipated by Mr. Mathews in the map annexed to this volume, the only difference being in regard to the names to be given to the two highest peaks. Mr. Mathews, who has been the foremost and most successful explorer of a region hitherto strangely neglected, and whose opinion is entitled to the greatest weight, considers that the names given in the Val de Bagnes should be adhered to, and that future writers ought to conform to them. I must observe, however, that, apart from his authority, the case rests between the people of Bagnes and the entire rest of the world; and on that issue I think it scarcely reasonable that a few illiterate peasants should prevail. In regard to the

highest peak, there is nothing unusual or very inconvenient in our admitting side by side the names Grand Combin and Graffeneire; and I can see no better way of avoiding mistakes as to the second peak than by calling it, with M. Studer, Combin de Corbassière, it being well understood by those travellers who may approach it from the side of Bagnes that it is there called Grand Combin.

There is room for doubt as to the true height of this latter peak. Mr. Mathews supposes it to be no more than 12,041 English feet, that being the height given in Ziegler's Catalogue for the Petit Combin. M. Studer, on the contrary, believes that this is the point intended in that work by the second or lower peak of the Combin, and said to be 4,180 metres, or 13,714 English feet, in height. The question must for the present remain unsettled, but there is strong reason to believe that this last supposition is incorrect.