

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE HIGH LEVEL GLACIER ROUTE FROM CHAMOUNIX TO ZERMATT.



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## 1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

BY FREDERICK WILLIAM JACOMB.

ROUTINE may be exported as well as retained for home consumption. Even in the Alps its spirit is not extinct, and a philosophy, of which the sum is—

“Fain would I climb, but that I fear to fall;  
Then it were better not to climb at all”—

still appears to be the influence which directs the great tourist tide, that, every travelling season, ebbs and flows between those centres of Alpine attraction,—Zermatt and Chamounix.

North of the Pennine chain, by Visp and the Rhone Valley to Martigny, and thence over the Tête Noire or Col de Balme, or, south of the chain, by the pass of St. Théodule to Châtillon, Aosta, and Courmayeur, and forwards over the Cols de la Seigne and du Bonhomme, have been the regulation routes to Chamounix. More enterprising spirits, indeed, gave a higher flavour to the tour by crossing direct from Courmayeur to Chamounix over the Col du Géant; but, in the large majority of cases, the St. Bernard was apparently considered, even by pedestrians, the most exciting alternative. And so the ruts of custom grew deeper every year, and the stream wore a more permanent channel, to keep within which was considered the correct thing.

Nearly twenty years ago, however, our own distinguished

countryman, Professor Forbes, accompanied by the well-known Swiss geologist, Professor B. Studer, had drawn attention to portions of the magnificent scenery lying between these hackneyed tracks. The vivid description of his passage from the Val des Bagnes to Aosta by the Col de Fenêtre; from the Eringer Thal to Aosta by the Col de Collon, and to Zermatt by the Col d'Erin; and, more recently, from du Tour to Orsières by the Col de Saléna, have become "household words" to many tourists.

Thanks principally to him, and not a little also to the map of M. G. Studer, the travelling public gradually adopted, at least, the extreme portions of the improved route; and the Col d'Erin at one end, with the Géant or the Saléna at the other, were not unfrequently crossed by the more adventurous traveller. The Col de Collon yet, however, continued in undeserved neglect, and the vast remainder of the intermediate terrain was not even explored.

Within the last few years, however, a bolder spirit has animated our mountaineers, and, in the increased light thus thrown upon Alpine topography, the district in question has largely shared. Pioneers in this great work were the Messrs. Mathews, by their ascents of the Vélán, Combin, Mont Avril and Graffeneire, and investigation of the Val des Bagnes and its neighbourhood; and Mr. Dodson, by his adding, in the shape of the Col du Tour, a "various reading" to the Saléna.

Still, few travellers passing from Zermatt to Chamounix, or *vice versa*, ever thought of including more than one of these first-class passes, and three-fourths of the line of country, comprising many virgin peaks and glaciers, remained comparatively unknown.

During the seasons of 1860 and 1861, however, an entirely new route has been opened out, not only connect-

ing the two centres in almost a direct line, but offering the additional advantage of exploring some of the most noble glaciers and snow-fields to be met with in the Alps.

On referring to the map, it will be observed that this route consists of four new passes, each occupying a day, and of an intermediate link, for which part of a day is sufficient, if it be not added to either the first or second pass.

The first is from Chamounix, by Mr. Winkworth's new Col d'Argentière, ascending by the glacier of that name from the Col de Balme, and thence descending upon Orsières or St. Pierre. The second day is from St. Pierre to Chermontane up the Glacier du Sonadon, passing close under the south end of the Graffeneire, crossing the new Col du Sonadon, and down the Glacier du Mont Durand. The third day is from Chermontane to Prerayen by the Glacier of Chermontane and Mr. Tuckett's new Col de la Reusse de l'Arolla, with the alternative of reaching the Châlet d'Otemma, from the same starting-point, by the Glacier de Pièce and Messrs Buxton and Cowell's new Col de Chermontane. The fourth and last day is, either from the Châlet d'Otemma past the Dent des Bouquetins, to the Col de la Valpelline, considered by Messrs. Buxton and Cowell as practicable; or else, from Prerayen, at the head of the Valpelline, by the new Col of that name to Zermatt, passing along the Zardezan glacier, by the south of the Tête Blanche, and thence down the Zmutt. Thus the new "High Level" route is complete, and a *grand course* of inexhaustible interest, traversing, as it does, almost throughout its entire length, a series of the most magnificent glaciers and snow-fields.

The intermediate link referred to is in passing from the châlet of La Neuva in the Val de Ferret to Orsières or St. Pierre, inasmuch as crossing from Chamounix to La

Neuva will generally be found to give the traveller a sufficiently ample day's work, without adding to it a walk to St. Pierre or Orsières. If, however, instead of going round by Orsières, a passage be made from La Neuva direct to St. Pierre, across the intervening ridge, it might be possible to include it either in the excursion to La Neuva, or in the following day's employment on the Col du Sonadon. Neither that Col, the Valpelline, nor the Reusse de l'Arolla (or its alternative, the Chermontane) occupy more than an easy day, and the mountaineer would probably be sufficiently fresh to add the link to either the Sonadon or Argentière, and so confine the entire route to an expedition of four days.