

7. THE COL DE LA REUSE DE L'AROLLA FROM CHERMONTANE TO PRERAYEN,* WITH NOTES ON THE VALPELLINE.

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THOSE who are bewailing the all but universal invasion of the railroad with its attendant evils—tourists, long bills, and formality—will be prepared duly to appreciate every still undisturbed nook and corner; and for this, if for no other reason, I feel that I may claim some attention for the little known and utterly unspoilt Valpelline.

Seen by the passing traveller as he descends the southern slopes of the St. Bernard, close to Aosta, and only removed by a few leagues, rocky and snowy ones, it is true, from Zermatt, Evolena, the Val de Bagnes, or the Val Tournanche, the Valpelline yet enjoys a singular immunity from tourists, owing partly to the one wretchedly bad road by which alone it is approachable from the south, and partly to a reputation for savageness and inhospitality, not perhaps wholly undeserved, as far as the commissariat is concerned. Even under this head, however, there is the notable exception of milk, cheese, and honey, whilst nowhere have I met with a heartier welcome or more genuine kindness. The accounts of the district hitherto published are pretty much confined to the interesting descriptions in Professor Forbes' "Travels in the Alps"

* This excursion, similarly to the one narrated by Mr. Hardy, was made from East to West.—ED.

(1st edition, page 272, *et seq.*), and Chapters VII. and VIII. of the Rev. S. W. King's "Italian Valleys of the Pennine Alps," to which I must refer those who are desirous of detailed information, my object being merely to offer a few notes on *châlet* life, with a brief description of one of the links in the recently-forged chain of passes connecting Zermatt with Chamounix. Prerayen at the head of the valley, and not Aosta, must thus be our point of departure.

Placed though the *châlets* of Prerayen are, at a height of between 6000 and 7000 feet*, and apparently in a *cul de sac*, several interesting passes radiate from them as a centre. Commencing from the S., the Pas de Revornea, of which I know nothing, connects them with the Val St. Barthélemy, and more to the E. the Col du Mont Cornière leads in six hours into the Val Tournanche. Next, at the head of the valley, we have the magnificent Col de la Valpelline (11,700 feet) establishing a communication with Zermatt in twelve hours, whilst a slight deviation to the N. will take the traveller, in about the same time, to Evolena, either by the Col des Bouquetins (11,214 feet) between the peak of the same name and the Tête Blanche, or by the Col de la Valpelline and over the ridge (11,900?) E. of the Tête Blanche, in either case descending by the Ferpêcle Glacier. Directly N. lies the Col de Collon (10,269 feet), a grand pass also leading, in ten or eleven hours, into the Eringenthal, and lastly, just to the W. of it, the Reuse de l'Arolla (10,500 feet?), of which more presently, completes the lines of communication by opening up a direct route in six to eight hours to the Val de Bagnes. In addition to all these passes centering at Prerayen itself, there are two others leading into the Val St. Barthélemy, the Passage de Montagnaja

* 6588, Forbes; 6752, Joanne; 6648, Tuckett.

opposite the hamlet of Puillay, and the Col de Vesoney*, from Oyace, and yet two more into the Val de Bagnes, the Crête Sèche (9475 feet) from Biona and the Col de Fenêtre (9141 feet), from Valpelline. Few valleys, therefore, can boast more varied means of ingress or egress.

Let no one who has heard the statement of Professor Forbes, that the establishment at Prerayen formerly belonged to the Jesuits of Aosta, picture to himself a sort of Piedmontese Grande Chartreuse, but let him bring with him contentment, a good appetite, and fine weather, and I venture to engage that he will not be disappointed, especially if he include in the expedition one of the three or four first-class passes just enumerated. Here I first graduated in the great mysteries of milk and its transmutations, and if, as was my case, the traveller is compelled, by stormy weather, to spend a day or two in the neighbourhood, he may here study in perfection the economy of châlet life.

My acquaintance with the Valpelline in general, and Prerayen in particular, dates from 1856. Quitting Aosta on the afternoon of June 14th, we had reached Biona the same evening, making a pleasant call in passing on my friends M. and Mme. Ansermin of Aosta, who have a summer residence at Valpelline. The curé of Biona kindly provided quarters for my companion, Mr. J. H. Fox, and myself, as well as for our guide, Victor Tairraz, whose previous expedition with Professors Forbes and Studer, had familiarised him with the district. The next day was Sunday, and as rain was falling in torrents we gladly accepted our host's invitation to remain till the afternoon. Having engaged a fine-looking, strong, honest fellow, one Ambroise Barrailler, as porter, we strolled up to the châteaux before dark, with the intention of crossing the Col de

* King's "Italian Valleys of the Pennine Alps," pp. 184-196.

Collon the following day. The 16th, however, proved hopelessly stormy, rain streamed down in bucketsful, and fresh snow lay on the adjacent summits at a very low level. Appearances were little, if at all, better on the 17th; but once or twice in the course of the day the clouds showed some signs of lifting, and we took advantage of the lull to reconnoitre the Zardezan Glacier with reference to the practicability of effecting a passage to Zermatt in that direction. The flying scud, however, defeated our object, the upper portion of the glacier being only distinguishable at intervals. At last things took a turn, and on the morning of the 18th we effected a start, but even then were doomed to be caught in a blinding snow-storm on gaining the crest of the Col de Collon—not the pleasantest place for such companionship—and were involved in no little perplexity before getting clear of the Arolla Glacier.

In two days' stay, there was, of course, plenty of time to spare. After sundry efforts to indulge in the noble sport of shooting at marmots with a rusty old gun, the lock of which had long ceased to be on speaking terms with the barrel, a bold attempt to extemporise cricket, for which the only existing materials were an axe and a supply of pine logs, and the successful construction of a draught-board out of a piece of blotting-paper, with blocks of black bread, and squares of cheese for the men, we were finally reduced to the systematic study of the all-pervading, all-absorbing milk.

To those who are not familiar with the process of Alpine cheese-making, a few notes jotted down upon the spot may not be unacceptable, and the more so as I hope to direct attention to one preparation which seems to have very generally escaped notice, and thus claim the honour due to him who enriches the world with a dish. The

châlets and the surrounding alp of Prerayen were purchased by the then proprietor for 28,000 francs. He let them out to the actual occupier at a rental of 1200 francs, and had only to keep the buildings in habitable condition and supply the larger utensils. Our host, the tenant, received about 3800 francs for the cheese, butter, and milk, and after paying all expenses, including the hire for three months of a large proportion of the cows, the salary of his assistants, and a certain fixed sum to himself, the amount of which I could not ascertain, netted ordinarily about 200 francs "*bénéfice*."

And now, let me conduct my readers along the pleasant path of daily routine, a true *via lactea*, which it was our privilege to follow during our temporary detention. At 6 A.M., and again about the same hour in the afternoon, the herd was driven into the long shed, at right angles to the main building, and soon that pleasantest of sounds, the musical patter of the milky jets in the frothing pails, fell on the ear in tinkling cadence. Then one after another the lads would issue forth with their brimming vessels, and making for the châlet, pour the contents into the "*marmite*," a large copper vessel or cauldron, holding from twenty to fifty gallons, according to the size of the establishment, and hung upon a sort of movable wooden crane, which can be swung round over the fire, or moved aside as required. Pail follows pail in rapid succession, till the whole produce is collected, and into it is then put a mixture ("*la caille*") composed of "*petit lait*" (the residue after the cheese has been removed) and rennet to curdle it. It is next churned with a stick furnished *en fricandeau*, with a series of projections like the spikes popularly supposed to be appropriate to giant Maul's club, and a separation of the "first curds" or "*caillet*" is the result.

By this time the mixture has begun to lose its natural heat, and is therefore put for a short time over a moderate fire, till it has again acquired rather more than its original temperature. The warmth of the fire coagulates the curds into a mass which is finally extracted by dipping a large cloth beneath it, and after wringing out the contained milk, the white, flabby, rather uninteresting-looking cheese is consigned to a press for further condensing and left to take care of itself. The residue in the cauldron is "*petit lait, première qualité,*" and it is with this that we are principally concerned since here are the materials for the compound whose merits I wish to introduce to a larger circle of connoisseurs. More fuel is added and a lively fire maintained. Active ebullition soon takes place, and the "*petit lait*" which had previously assumed a slightly yellow tinge, becomes extremely white on the surface. At this stage a moderate quantity of fresh milk is added which has the effect of still further increasing the extreme purity of the seething mass as it bubbles and swells up. The surface is then skimmed off and under the names, varying with the locality, of "*brousse,*" "*brosse,*" "*la fleur,*" or "*les fleurettes,*" is eaten by the herdsmen. I may be prejudiced, but let those who are strangers to this exquisite preparation test its merits for themselves, and if they do not own that it is the most refined embodiment of cow, a perfect liquid pastoral or spiritualised bucolic, then do I greatly fear that there is no such thing left as simple unvitiated taste. Richer than milk, yet lighter than cream, I may perhaps best compare it to the crumb of bread that has been soaked for some time in hot milk in a covered vessel, and I know of nothing more delicious than a brimming wooden bowl of it fresh from the *marmite*, and with pieces of bread shred into it. But we must not forget that we have still to trace the further

transformations of the contents of the cauldron. The next step is to pour into it a sour liquid (composed of “*le second petit lait*,” in which some beans tied up in a piece of sacking have been placed, together with certain herbs, such as sorrel, cress, &c.), adding a small quantity of water. This produces “*séracs*” and the “*second petit lait*,” a watery liquid usually given to the cows. If the “*séracs*” are poor, and the “*second petit lait*” consequently richer, or rather, less “*maigre*,” than usual, a very dry and inferior cheese, a sort of china clay “made easy,” is extracted from the latter, just as the original cheese was from the “*premier petit lait*.” If butter is to be made, the cream is removed and churned, and the remaining skimmed milk converted into an inferior species of cheese, “*brousse*,” and “*séracs*,” by a similar process to that already described. “*Séracs*” are not to be despised when quite fresh, though inferior in richness and delicacy to “*brousse*.”

Our stay at Prerayen also familiarised us with the use of polenta, the flavour of marmot (anything but a despicable dish, by the bye), and the mysteries of the game of “*morra*,” which our hosts incessantly resorted to for amusement; and when I state that after two days and three nights’ board and lodging for four persons (the former indeed helped out by certain supplies obtained from Biona), with the free use of the premises, the old Berger, on being presented with a good plain English knife, value fifteenpence, absolutely refused all further compensation, and only after an obstinate resistance at length accepted ten francs, it will at least be conceded that we might have made a less profitable investment both of time and money.

With such reminiscences of Prerayen I had looked forward with pleasure to revisiting it at some future time,

and Mr. Jacomb having in 1860 effected a passage thence to Zermatt, by the Glaciers of Zardezan and Zmutt, I took advantage of a fine day in 1861, and reversing his route, crossed the Col de la Valpelline from E. to W., and at 2 P.M. on the 25th of June, after about twelve hours' walk, found myself once more in my old quarters at Prerayen, in company with Messrs. C. H. and W. F. Fox, the well-known J. J. Bennen of Laax, and cheery, steady, Peter Perrn of Zermatt. Halting first at the upper châteaux where we had taken up our quarters in 1856, we found them as yet unoccupied; but cows were visible lower down the valley, and thus all uncertainty as to the alp being tenanted was at once agreeably dispelled. Another quarter of an hour and we were in the midst of all the sounds, sights, and smells of pastoral life, and received from the head herdsman (not my friend of former times) a hearty welcome, and permission to make ourselves at home. We at once installed ourselves on a grassy knoll, where, discarding boots, and spreading out our wet socks to dry, we revelled in the warm sunshine and refreshing breeze. The next hour passed in a series of introductions unsolicited on our part, to almost every member of the dairy establishment, numbering upwards of a hundred cows and calves, and nearly as many goats, who insisted upon becoming personally acquainted with us and our belongings. Thus, in friendly though mute greetings, free libations of delicious milk, discussion of plans, and the examination of maps and instruments, time flew rapidly by, and my companions, delighted with this their first experience of genuine châlet life, helped me to do nothing with the most persevering assiduity.

It had been our intention to cross the Col de Collon, partially to descend the Glacier d'Arolla on the northern side of the pass, and then, striking off to the left up the

Vuibez Glacier, force a passage over the so-called Crête à Collon, and gain the head of the Val de Bagnes by the Glacier of Chermontane or Otemma. An inspection of Studer's map, however, showed a small glacier called the Reuse de l'Arolla, (*Reuse* having probably the same signification as *Ruise* or glacier) coming down a little to the S. W. of Mount Collon, and occupying in fact the N. W. angle of the Combe d'Oren, just at the point where, turning to the eastwards, it runs up towards the Col de Collon. To those going northward from Prerayen the Reuse de l'Arolla ought therefore to be visible immediately in front at the head of the Combe, but so faint was Studer's indication that I confess I felt some doubt whether it was a glacier at all. The question was of importance, as, if a passage could be effected in this quarter to the upper portion of either the Chermontane or Vuibez Glacier, the long détour by the Col de Collon would be avoided. Accordingly between 5 and 6 P.M. we started, on a tour of observation, for the Combe d'Oren, and it was with that thrill of pleasure which the genuine explorer must always feel at the solution of some knotty topographical question, that, as we topped the steep ascent from the châteaux, the accuracy of the map was at once established. There was the glacier with an apparent col at its head, and though the torn and riven mass of ice appeared to descend too precipitously at its lower extremity to admit of an attack in front, the rocks on its left or eastern bank seemed to offer the means of gaining the more level plateau above.*

* Professor Forbes ("Travels in the Alps," 1st edit. p. 278) describing his departure for the Col de Collon, has clearly seized on the topographical relations of this district. He says, "We passed some wretched shepherds' huts, and following an impetuous stream, we came to the foot of a glacier descending on our left, which has blockaded the valley with its prodigious moraine, and left a marshy flat above. This passed, we kept to our right

Well satisfied with the result of our stroll, we returned to the châteaux, where we found no less a person than the Syndic of Valpelline, just starting with a mule for the lower part of the valley. Here was another piece of good fortune, as we should otherwise have had to engage some one to carry our knapsacks to Valpelline and deposit them at M. Ansermin's; but our new friend willingly undertook the commission for a "consideration" by no means proportional to his local dignity. Having been astir since midnight, prudence counselled an early retreat to the hayloft; but the *brousse* was irresistible, and though not yet prepared, would certainly be ready in "*un petit quart d'heure*." This "*quart d'heure*" proved a good hour, but we were not to be balked of our feast, and so it was not till nine o'clock that we wished our friends good night, and provided with a bucket of milk, a tin case of ground coffee, and a supply of firewood, proceeded to our night-quarters at the upper châtlet. Some further time was spent in arranging everything for an early start in the morning, but at length about 9.30 we all turned in upon our hay, and slept as best we could. One hour, however, gained in the morning, is worth two later in the day, and at 1.45 A.M. of the 26th we were again stirring. The moon shone brilliantly, and everything boded well, as far as weather was concerned. We at once set to work to prepare breakfast, and I shall not soon forget the lighting of the fire, preparatory to

hand, having in front of us another great glacier which descends from the Col de Collon, and *more to the left a great and steep glacier which appears to descend from the group of mountains connected with the origin of the Glacier de Chermontane.*" This last is the Reuse de l'Arolla of Studer's map, which I may here remark gives a better idea of the terrain than the recently published sheet (Blatt 22) of the great Federal Survey, owing probably to the fact that lying S. of the Swiss frontier, the engineers bestowed less care on it.

brewing some hot tea and coffee, which are always such an excellent preliminary to an early start. The wood would not catch, and, to make matters worse, just as I had coaxed a baby flame into being, one of the party in an excess of zeal and enthusiasm heaped upon the poor struggling innocent a mass of dry hay, whereupon the spirit of the flame summoned the spirit of smoke, and the little kitchen was soon filled with dense and pungent fumes. All but Bennen and I fled, and at length even he was compelled to beat a retreat as his eyes are naturally rather weak. I stuck to my post, however, with streaming eyes, and sooty face, and was at length rewarded by complete success. A bucket of hot milk and coffee was soon disposed of; and with the inner man much comforted, we started for Chermontane, in glorious moonlight, at three o'clock, just as the first faint indications of daylight were stealing over the loftier summits.

As our progress for the first hour or two was devoid of incident, and the way was along the usual path leading up the Combe d'Oren to the Col de Collon, I will not dwell upon it here. Suffice it to say that about half-past four we found ourselves at the foot of the steep moraine bounding the lower part of the Reuse de l'Arolla on the E., and proceeding straight up it parallel to, and at a short distance only from, the ice, soon reached the base of the ridge of rocks over which we hoped to gain the upper plateau of the glacier. These presented no difficulty, but there was just enough of excitement in the scramble to warm us, and render a halt on the summit at 5.45 A.M. a very pleasant arrangement. The provision-sack was opened, and in brilliant sunshine, beneath a cloudless sky, and with appetites sharpened by exercise and the frosty morning air, we established ourselves beside a sparkling runnel of delicious water, and feasted right royally.

Soon after six we were once more under weigh, and in a few minutes entered upon the upper plateau of the glacier. The snow was in excellent order, frozen hard; our progress was rapid, and after three quarters of an hour of gentle ascent we stood at the foot of a second rocky ridge, rather precipitous though of no great height, which alone separated us from the col. The climb was a sharp one for a few minutes, and a good deal of loosely attached snow, which gave way when trodden on, was just sufficiently troublesome to add to the interest. We encountered, however, no serious obstacle, and at seven o'clock stood upon the summit of the Reuse de l'Arolla.

Before us, to the N., opened out a very extensive and most magnificent glacier basin, from which we were separated by a steepish snow wall, traversed by an ugly-looking bergschrund. Almost immediately in front was a peak which appeared to correspond with the Pigno de l'Arolla (12,471 feet), whilst right and left a gap of great width occurred in the eastern and western boundaries of the basin. We could not clearly identify the Mont Collon (S.W. peak 12,264; N. peak 11,956 feet), but it must have been at no great distance to our right in a north-easterly direction, though probably concealed by an intervening ridge. It was quite clear that our course would lie round to the left, through the western gap already alluded to, and beyond which, relying on Studer, I expected to find the "Crête à Collon." Guided by the same authority, backed in this instance by general report, my first hasty but natural conclusion was, that we were looking on the upper plateau or névé of the Vuibez Glacier, which doubtless discharged itself through the eastern gap, and was bounded to the W. by the "Crête" itself. A more attentive examination, however, showed that the glacier intersecting and fed by the basin, con-

tinued to rise to the E., clearly pointing to the conclusion that it must discharge itself in an opposite or westerly direction. But in this case, what was the nature of the mysterious Crête à Collon? It could not be a ridge, or it would bar the downward progress of the ice, but it might possibly be an impassable cataract of séracs, bordered by rocks so precipitous that descent would be impossible. A very short time would, however, solve the question, and if forced to beat a retreat, we had plenty of daylight before us; so doubts were at once dismissed, eggs, bread, and honey produced, and a mountain sympiesometer by Casella set up for an observation. There is an evident error in the reading of this instrument, but availing myself of a correction obtained on the previous day, I have reason to believe that the height of the Col is not less than 10,500 feet.

At 7.50 A.M., all carefully roped together, we commenced the descent; but having cut our way to the upper edge of the bergschrund, it appeared to be impracticable, at least at the point we had reached, and we had therefore to work our way along it for some distance to the right. A snow-bridge was, however, discovered, the passage was easily effected, and we were soon running rapidly down the lateral glacier, which descends from the ridge we had quitted and joins at right angles the trunk stream, whose eastern and western branches we were opening up at every step. At length we stood at the edge of the main glacier, here covered with snow, and in a moment all our doubts were dispelled, as the broad expanse of the Otemma or Chermontane Glacier was seen stretching away E. and W. for many a mile before us. In the former direction, it rose for perhaps a mile to what was clearly also the summit-level or ice-shed of the Vuibez Glacier, as has since been proved by Sir T. Fowell Buxton's party.

To the W. an immense ice-stream, innocent of any such abomination as the Crête, sloped gently but grandly downwards, the noble mass of the Grand Combin rising above the northern boundary of its lower extremity. This was indeed a pleasant surprise. The "Crête" had long been a bugbear, and it was with no little satisfaction that I was able to establish its mythical character. It may perhaps be asked what could have led to the report of its existence, and the following are the only suggestions I can offer.— It will be seen, both by Studer's and the more recent Federal map, that the course of the Otemma or Chermontane Glacier is a curve whose convexity is turned to the S., the direction changing from S.W. in the upper portion, to nearly N.W. towards the lower extremity. Now, to a person looking up it from the head of the Val de Bagnes, the rocky ridge which forms the western boundary of the Col de la Reuse de l'Arolla, and juts out at right angles towards the trunk glacier, appears to extend across the latter, and certainly does look very precipitous and forbidding; just as from the pathway to the Flégère the mass of the Tacul and the Grandes Jorasses appears to bar further progress up the Mer de Glace, till, on attaining a greater elevation, the western gap is disclosed, through which the affluent of the Géant descends. The information which my friend Mr. Mathews received from Bernard Trolliet*, if not absolutely devoid of foundation, must either have referred to one of the lateral summits,

* "As for the Glacier de 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. I do not consider Trolliet's opinion as absolutely decisive against the Crête à Collon, and I shall certainly attempt it if ever I again visit this locality. A place must be actually tried before it can be pronounced impassable." (See "Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers," 1st series, 1st edit. p. 104.)

such as that just alluded to, or may have been only intended to apply to the descent of the Glacier de Vuibez on the other side, which the Buxtons and Cowell found so formidable, that they took to the rocks in preference, and got down into the Eringerthal further to the N. by the Glaciers of Pièce and Cijorénove (the Otemma of Studer's map).

I know few more magnificent ice-streams than this of the Chermontane, fed by numerous lateral tributaries and bounded by noble summits, of which the principal are the Pic d'Otemma (11,513 feet) and Pigno de l'Arolla (12,471 feet), on the N., and the Trumma de Boucs (11,149 feet), and Mont Gelé (11,539 feet) on the S., whilst to the W., across the head of the Val de Bagnes, rise the Grand Combin (14,164 feet), and Mont Avril (10,961 feet), faced in the opposite direction by the Mont Collon (12,264 and 11,956 feet). Its breadth averages three-quarters of a mile, and its length, according to the Federal map, and judging from the time it took us to descend its gently-inclined and uniform surface, cannot be less than six miles. Our progress was necessarily slow, as the snow which lay deeply on the upper and central portions was, even at this early hour, thoroughly softened and saturated with moisture, and the intense heat of the sun's rays produced a drowsy sensation difficult to shake off. Bennen, who had been unable to sleep much in the hayloft, was once or twice so overcome as to lose all consciousness and flounder about in the most ludicrous manner, but a few sniffs of aromatic vinegar soon roused him again, and he joined heartily in the laugh against himself. At 9.50 A.M., having reached a bare patch of ice, we halted for lunch, after which Bennen and Perrn indulged in a nap, whilst we made notes and looked about. Up to this time the day had been brilliant, but now various unmistakable

movements amongst masses of cloud that sailed up from the S. and W., showed that a change was impending, so rousing our sleeping companions, we proceeded on our way a little before eleven. Nothing worthy of note occurred till we reached the brow of the ice-cascade at the lower extremity of the glacier, where it became a question which side we should select for the descent. We finally decided on the right or N. bank; and quitting the ice at the S.W. foot of the Pic d'Otemma, scrambled down the rocks to the lower and level portion of the glacier, which we crossed diagonally to the foot of the Col de Fenêtre. For those who intend to descend the Val de Bagnes, this is undoubtedly the best course, but if the Fenêtre de Chermontane be the traveller's aim, let him keep down the S. side where the ice is least crevassed, and join the route from the Col de Crête Sèche, rather to the N.W. of the Trumma de Boucs, and beneath the slopes of Mont Gelé. We were not previously aware of this, and lost at least half an hour in forcing a passage through some ugly séracs, and then down the rocks on the N. side.

It was 7.50 A.M. when we quitted the Col, and the level of the valley at the foot of the Col de Fenêtre was reached at 12.35 P.M., but more than an hour had been devoted to our halt, and nearly another was consumed in crossing the bergschrund, and reconnoitring the ice-fall, which would reduce the actual walking-time to rather less than three hours.

It had been our intention to take up our quarters in the highest available châteaux of the Val des Bagnes, and attempt in the morning the passage of the Glacier de Durand, which has since been effected by the Rev. J. F. Hardy; but, as already stated, the weather had belied the promise of the morning, clouds were hurrying up the valley, and the Grand Combin, shrouding its head in mists, disclosed

ony black, frowning precipices, looming like some gigantic fortification through the momentarily increasing obscurity. Rain soon began to fall; it was only too evident that we were going to have dirty weather, and there was every appearance of a disturbance of some days' duration. Under such circumstances, the head of the Val de Bagnes, to which the cattle had not yet mounted, was not perhaps the most agreeable spot that could be selected, especially when, by way of contrast, at only a few hours' distance, the comfortable Hôtel du Mont Blanc at Aosta, looked irresistibly tempting. A short consultation was held, and Southward Ho! was the unanimous vote.

After ascending the lower slopes of the Col de Fenêtre, we halted at 1.45 P.M. to dine; but thick driving rain coming on, we broke up our encampment, and at 2.30 again pushed forward, reaching the crest of the pass (9141 feet) at 3, and the châteaux of Ollomont on the southern side at 4.15. By this time we were in rather a dripping condition, the rain came down in streams, and peal after peal of thunder rattled amongst the hills. One of my companions proposed that we should halt here for the night, but the place was so draughty and crowded, and we were so wet, with no means of changing, whilst dry clothes awaited us at Valpelline, that he most good-humouredly gave in when I urged that we should probably meet with some sort of conveyance to take us down to Aosta, and at any rate were quite sure of a hospitable reception from Mme. Ansermin, if we could get no further that night. So, after a sort of stirrup-cup, or rather parting bowl, of *brousse*, and a chat over the fire, we sallied forth to do battle with the storm.

Every little stream, ordinarily meek and retiring, was now swollen with rage and bursting its banks with pride; cascades leaped down from every rock, little plots of

meadow became bogs, and the rain appeared at times to descend in sheets. Still on we went, running the gauntlet of streams, bogs, and water, there being nothing for it but to proceed. At length, as we reached the lower level of the beautiful valley, there were signs of a lift in the thick, murky pall that hung over us, and by the time we reached Valpelline, at 6.30, the rain had ceased entirely.

We soon found our knapsacks, and ferreted out a cart with one mule in which the owner offered to convey us to Aosta,— vehicle, beast, and road permitting. Meanwhile, we took advantage of the time occupied in harnessing, to call on Madame Ansermin. Of course she was the same kind, motherly, hospitable lady, whom all who have the pleasure of her acquaintance must at once recall on the mention of her name, and all sorts of hearty offers of help in any and every way were at once pressed upon us. We, however, declined to accept the proffered quarters for the night, greatly to Madame's vexation; but at length compromised matters by saying we would gladly be allowed the use of a room to change our wet clothes in, and then come and have a glass of wine with her. Well! as we liked; if we would not do as she wished and stay the night, we should have our own way, but we must try to come back and see her again. On reappearing in our clean outfit, a huge light sponge-cake, as large as a tea-tray, was set before us, together with wine, honey, cheese, and bread in abundance, and we were literally crammed with eatables and drinkables, our kind hostess standing by and filling up every pause in eating or drinking with a fresh slice or "*encore une goutte seulement.*" At length, but not without great difficulty, we tore ourselves away, and at eight entered our nondescript rattletrap. I was sorry to find that its size was so limited as to render it doubtful whether Bennen and Perrn could get seats; but as we were not

likely to exceed a foot-pace, they gallantly insisted on walking, and were rewarded by having much the best of it.

Of our ride my descriptive powers are utterly inadequate to give the faintest idea. The mule was slow, the cart small and springless, the road little better than a track, and all three of us feeling desperately sleepy after two short nights. C., who sat at the tail, soon began to doze, and for some time his ludicrous contortions kept W. and me in such a perpetual state of laughter that, as long as daylight lasted, we managed to keep awake. During the first half hour, he lost his hat three times; and to prevent his following it in person, we had to buckle him up to the seat with a leather strap. At length our turn came, and after many ineffectual struggles, I found myself flat on the bottom of our vehicle with my knees up to my chin, whilst W.'s head and body had disappeared somewhere in the region of the mule's tail, his legs only still bearing mine company. At this stage I became utterly oblivious; and when I next roused, discovered to my surprise that I was alone. I learnt afterwards that the tremendous jolting had proved too much for my companions, and that they had accordingly proceeded on foot, basely leaving me to my fate, and speculating as to what my condition would be if I ever should happen to turn up at Aosta. A little after eleven, however, I made my appearance; and never was change more welcome than when I stepped from the instrument of torture and sat down to some hot coffee and *gressins* in the *salle-à-manger* of my old friend, Jean Tairraz.