THE LAC D'ANTERNE AND THE CHAINE DES FYS.

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On some Excursions in the neighbourhood of Sixt.

By Alfred Wills, President of the Alpine Club. Read at the meeting of the Club, February 6, 1865.

I TRUST that an audience consisting of members of the Alpine Club will be so thoroughly imbued with a passion for nature and an appreciation of her charms, whether exhibited on the grandest scale or shown in more modest proportions, that it needs no apology on my part for asking you for one evening to turn from those scenes, so fascinating for sublimity and adventure, presented by the great ranges of the highest Alps, and listen for a few minutes to the praises of mountains, none of which can boast much above 10,000 feet of elevation. My long acquaintance with the valley of Sixt, ripened into a warm affection by the intercourse of five consecutive autumns passed amongst its exquisite recesses, has given me a familiarity with its beauties which, far from breeding contempt, makes me love them better and think more highly of them every additional hour I spend amongst them; and it is hardly presumptuous to say that I have discovered some new ways and scenes that would, I think, but for me, have long remained unknown to Alpine men, and that of some others, not absolutely unknown, I am able to speak with better knowledge than most of my friends; and I am anxious, having, as I think, the command of some comparatively hidden treasures, to add to the pleasures of others by showing them where to find what I have myself so keenly enjoyed.

I will begin, as the scenes not unnaturally present themselves to my mind, with those nearest home. Many of my friends

know—more by degrees I hope will know—that the Eagle's Nest is situated on the extremity of a promontory of land thrust out like an enormous earthfall from the northern face of the Buet. It stands just above the junction of two mountain streams which come bounding down right and left till they meet at its base and fling their united waters in an impetuous torrent along the valley leading, some five or six miles off, to Sixt. The two tributaries and their confluent thus divide the circle of which my house is the centre into three nearly equal segments; the one on my right, as I look down the valley, comprehending the Graignier de la Commune de Sixt; the one on the left, including the Pointe de Salles, the Chaine des Fys, and the range of the Anterne, from the Col d'Anterne to the Col de Léchaud; and the segment then behind my back filled up by the massive system of the Buet himself. He presents on this side a most fascinating but most frowning aspect. At the back of my house rises a steep and well-wooded slope of verdure, broad at the base, just beyond the Châlets des Fonds, narrowing at the top to a mere ridge, where two people cannot stand together, and whence further progress up the crags of the Buet is impossible. Between this grassy slope, called by the pleasant name of Belface, and the eastern extremity of the Graignier stretches one of the grandest amphitheatres of rock and precipice that I have ever seen. It reminds one of the views one is familiar with of the 'cirques' of the Pyrenees. It is not only grand, but ever-varying in its aspect. I have scarcely ever looked at it when it did not present some aspect I had not observed before. When the morning sun comes bursting over its eastern shoulder, part is buried in impenetrable shadow, and hides itself from accurate observation; part, lighted up with the full incidence of the slanting rays, borrows almost equal secrecy from them, and like the celebrated picture of Queen Elizabeth, in which she insisted upon being painted without a shadow on her royal face, looks as if every portion enjoyed an equal prominence; while yet another part, caught sideways by the golden beams, discloses the true character of its formation, and shows how wonderfully it is riven by gully, watercourse, and ravine. When midday comes and the sun's light pours full into the great semicircle, you would say it was a flat wall—infinitely shaded in colouring, but still flat—from one end to the other: every trace of the deep gorges and indentations you saw in the morning is gone, and it is not till the level rays of evening strike upon promontory and hollow, and the broken cliffs cast their heavy shadows into their attendant ravines, that you get any adequate conception of the real structure. Should little wreaths

of mist now come forth, as they will sometimes, wooed from their hiding-places by the cool of evening, and dancing upwards as if they would tempt the fading light back again, the effect is truly magical. One distance stands revealed behind another in endless succession. Tower, pillar, pinnacle, and spire of rock detach themselves from one another and from the walls and battlements behind as if a new creation was in course. Strange forms of fantastic shape appear on every hand—conspicuous among them the majestic outlines of a huge lion and lioness—'Le Lion et la Lionne,'—in stern and solemn repose. Over all the loveliest cloak of half-transparent vapour casts its graceful folds, at once defining, softening, and beautifying the forms it displays and drapes.

This lower range of precipices varies perhaps from 1,500 to 3,000 feet in height; above them comes a ring of still more broken grass slopes and shale banks; above them another equally formidable range of precipices, crowned by the snows of the Buet. Some of the ravines and gullies which furrow the lower wall of crags—most of them, in fact—I know to be impassable. But there are two, side by side, nearly parallel with one another, and almost immediately above the Eagle's Nest, that give a wild and scrambling access to the glaciers of Lebaud and the summit of the Buet, and that, so far as my inquiries have reached, are utterly unknown to any but two or three of the chamois hunters of the valley. They are not to be courted every day in the year, nor every hour in the day. They are so steep that when frozen hard they are, like a portion of the Sagéroux, positively dangerous; and they lie so immediately beneath many a spot where threatening stones are only held in check by the iron hand of frost, that after a fresh fall of snow it is not safe to expose oneself within their narrow walls while the sun is beating on the frozen banks and cliffs above. But when time and weather suit, they afford a perfectly new and most interesting access to the heights above, and avoid the long détour either by the Col de Léchaud or the pasturages of the Beaux Prés. They are approached by climbing about two-thirds of the height of Belface, where a withered tree, standing by itself on the very edge of the slope, nearly marks the commencement of a feebly defined goat and sheep track leading almost to the entrance of the nearer gully.

There is another gorge still wilder and more wonderful, though not so difficult as these, by which access is gained from the base of the first series of precipices to the grass-covered slopes above them. No person taking a glance at the amphitheatre could fail to be struck with a remarkable appearance near the

extremity opposite to the two ravines I have just mentioned. Two broad horizontal bands of glistening white rock crop out along the dark surface of the formation which generally prevails, looking, but for their size, as if they had been artificially placed there. Just to the left of these is a deep indentation in the rock, which seems as if it might afford approach to the higher regions. So it may sometimes, but since I have known it there has always been half-way up it a great block of smooth stone wedged in between the two sides of the ravine, and impossible to surmount without the aid of a long ladder. By following up the watercourse, however, that has its origin in this hollow, you are led by its base—where a graceful waving waterfall, scarcely less high than the Staubbach, and often quite as beautiful, dances down from the cliffs above. But to the left of this fall, when you reach it, you find opening upon you a wild and narrow gorge between a perpendicular wall of crag on the right and one little less than perpendicular on the left, of the existence of which no trace is disclosed from any other place. It is almost like a chimney, and in places is steep enough to call for the use of hands as well as feet in climbing it. Now and then it is actually overhung by the cliffs on the right, and it is perpetually narrowing, till at the top the walls on either hand are not above a dozen or fifteen feet apart. It takes some twenty minutes of rough climbing, where every stone you dislodge creates an avalanche, to reach the top, where a narrow knife-edge causeway some ten feet long separates the gully by which you have ascended from a steeper but less chimney-like gorge on the other side, and connects the main bulk of the mountain with a sort of outwork—a very tower or citadel of rock, large enough at the top for three or four persons to stand upon it, but falling off, on every side but that by which you have gained the stronghold, in vertical precipices from five to eight hundred feet deep, and crowned by no inappropriate standard—a solitary pine of ancient growth, stricken in years or tempest-withered, raising its white stem and lichen-covered branches in audacious defiance of the elements whose attack it courts.

I had been weeks at the Eagle's Nest before I found out this romantic ravine—the gorge of La Guivra as it is termed—and I have come upon few spots which have given me a more lasting impression of the wonderful vagaries of mountain formations. I knew that by such a passage as this the peasants went to the higher pastures, but even when at the top of the gorge I could not see my way onward. The causeway I have spoken of does not lead to the base of the grass-slopes above, but abuts against a rudé wall of broken crag, some fifteen feet high, much

'THE EAGLE'S NEST' FROM THE SIXT PATH.

more difficult to climb than at first sight it appeared to be; for the rock was not solid, great pieces projected wherever one made the trial, and thrust the centre of gravity so far out as to make it very uncertain whether one could hold on or not. Nor was it a pleasant place in which to fall, for at the very top of the gorge is an unprotected opening to a precipitous channel by which you might descend with extreme velocity to the stream a thousand feet below, and the slope beneath the wall of crag is so steep that a very little impetus would be sufficient to send you thither. It reminded me of the opening by the way-side which gave Christian and Hopeful an admonitory glimpse of the regions they were bent on avoiding. However, there I was, with my brother-in-law, a lad of sixteen then; we had started early for a day's wandering, and it would not do to go back—though once we were very near doing so, for the more I tried the wall of crag the less I liked it, either for myself or for him whose life and limbs I had to answer for. After trying for above a quarter of an hour I managed to scramble up and let down a bit of rope to help my companion, and then we got on easily enough. It is no bad illustration of the saving of time and trouble which a good guide often affords, that we were all the while within twenty or thirty feet of a track by which the same ascent may be made without either difficulty or danger—the common route of the peasants who go to cut hay above; but though I often went up La Guivra again, I never found it out till it was shown me at last by one of the initiated: and I have stood on the watch-tower with many an accomplished mountaineer since then, and have told him there was a way up, and I never saw anyone who could divine where it was—so slight are the ledges by which you pass, and so deceptive the aspect of the dark slate-coloured rock of which they consist.

Once on the grassy banks above La Guivra, the course is clear for a considerable distance. You may ascend the Buet by a wild and sometimes dangerous ravine, leading straight to the foot of the final glacier; but if you go there, as I have done, when the soil is frozen hard, you will have many weary steps to hack in the iron-bound grit before you can make your passage good; and you may get, as I got, some very severe blows from the falling stones and ice to which you may be exposed. I should doubt much if the soil of the ravine is ever fairly unfrozen after the middle of September. The glacier, too, is steeper than a slight acquaintance with the Buet would allow anyone to suppose; and we cut many a score of steps before we reached the flatter part near the summit.

Leaving the Buet on your right, you may take the grand

but almost unknown passage of the Tinneverges du Buet, leading to the Val Barberine, and so to Martigny, or you may scramble to the top of the Graignier. In either case you gain first the base of the upper wall of crags; if going to the Buet, or across the Col, you hug them for a considerable distance. If you wish to ascend the Graignier, you must seek a second chimney, something like La Guivra, but wilder and narrower still. Several seam the mountain-side, but I am told one only is accessible. When I went up it, it was choked here and there by huge boulders wedged in between smooth slabs of rock. At the base of one of them we had to build up a cairn eight or nine feet high before we could get a chance of surmounting it. At the top of the mountain is a long low wall of fantastic limestone blocks, and passing through a gap like a gateway, not three feet wide, you are on the other side. It is a grand scene—Mont Blanc at your back, Western Switzerland in front, and a perfect forest of jagged and splintered cliff and precipice on every side. You may descend into the valley of the Lower Giffre not far from the Fer à Cheval, but it is no easy descent. On this side, as may be very clearly seen from Sixt, the top of the mountain is a sort of terrace perched on a singularly perpendicular wall of rock; and we were long before we could find our way from one bank of débris to the next. I believe there is but one place where you can effect the passage—and here I was obliged, after scrambling down somehow, to get my companion to plant his feet on my shoulders while I lowered him down; and after this, there was quite enough of difficulty to make one feel that the crags of the secondary Alps are not always to be despised by even practised mountaineers.

From lack of time, I must dismiss in a very few words two or three excursions I am anxious to commend to much more notice than they have yet received. One is to the Pointe de Salles, the northern promontory of the Chaine des Fys—the mountain which presents so imposing an aspect from every part of the valley of the Haut Giffre between Les Tines and the Châlets des Fonds. It is approached from the châlets of Salles, which are high up in a romantic valley lying some two hours' walk above the cascade of the Pleureuse. I had conceived, from guide-books and the like, no idea of the exquisite beauty of this valley after passing the Pleureuse. It is full of splendid cascades, of beautiful little green plateaux by the side of a brawling torrent, set off by mountain-sides and walls of rock distinguished by a richness of colouring that reminds one of Richardson's best bits of Scottish moorland scenery. It is flanked by precipices of unusual height and grandeur, and

presents a singular succession of pictures which, from a certain mixture of grandeur and loveliness that seems to belong to the district, make an indelible impression on the memory. Nor are wanting most interesting traces of past geological history in the records left by glacier systems now extinct. From the châlets of Salles you turn to the left, and, mounting over steep pasturages broken by shaggy cliffs, reach at length a vast wilderness of uncovered limestone rock, something in the nature of the Desert of Plattey, though on a smaller scale; and crossing this, with more labour and difficulty than a broken glacier would present, find yourself suddenly and unexpectedly at the summit of the Pointe de Salles. Could you arrive there in a London fog, one step more would precipitate you at least 2,000 feet—probably a good deal more. Towards the Eagle's Nest the mountain shows one of the most absolute precipices in the Alps. I dislodged a large stone at the edge. I heard it strike once, about ten feet below. I listened and listened and listened, but heard no more — and supposed I had missed the expected sound, when all at once came, faintly borne up on the air, the report of its next contact with the rock—a 'whooff,' so distant and so softened that it made us shudder to think of the void so close beneath our feet. Towards Sixt also the scene is sufficiently remarkable. The prolongation of the range, on a level below the formidable precipices I have alluded to, presents the sharpest knife-edge I have ever seen in mountain formation.

The general view from the Pointe de Salles, however, is not equal to that from the Buet, nor to that from the Pic de Tinneverges, and Mr. Ball's guide-book is in error in describing the Buet as lower than the range of Les Fys. From the actual Pointe de Salles the summit of the Buet rises at an elevation of 5½° from the horizontal line; and though other parts of the chain are a few hundred feet higher, they are still clearly below the level of the Buet. There was till lately a possible ascent of the Pointe de Salles almost straight up one of its steepest faces —that towards the Eagle's Nest. A huge couloir, in which the snow is very long and late in melting, leads high up towards the very summit. From the top of it, however, no higher ground can be reached save by a perilous track, across the face of the precipice facing towards Sixt, to a point where the ridge might be gained. It was hardly better than a chamois-track, and was, in fact, used by them as well as by their foes. But, two years since, a great 'éboulement' came from above, and in places swept away the only practicable means of passage, and this approach is now cut off.

An expedition of no pretensions, but which I recommend to everyone, as combining within a short space more of exquisite beauty both of detail and of general prospect than almost any other that I know, is from Samöens to the knoll above the Giétà, called the Croix des Portes. A portion of it forms the regular path from Samöens to the Lac de Gers, but is little known. The view from the Croix des Portes reminds me, on a smaller scale, of that from the Gumihorn near Interlaken. You look up and down four or five several valleys; and I shall be surprised indeed if, when once known, it does not become a most popular excursion. You can descend to Sixt by a path which is also a perfect marvel of concentrated beauty.

But I must now call attention to an expedition known, I believe, only to Mr. Milman and myself, and to three or four of the natives of the valley—the ascent of the Pic de Tinneverges. No one who has walked up the valley of the Lower Giffre as far as the Fer à Cheval, can fail to have been struck with the imposing appearance of this mountain, which appears to rise in two stories, so to speak, straight from the valley beneath to its utmost height, presenting to the view as formidable a set of precipices as are to be met with in most mountains of far greater elevation. I have ascended it from both sides, and on each occasion thought my excursion one of the most interesting and one of the most singular I had ever taken. The first time, when we effected the maiden ascent of the peak, I started at a quarter to four o'clock on the morning of the 6th October 1863, in company with my guide and major-domo, Claude Gurlie of Vallon, an ancient and successful chamois-hunter who has had to answer in his day for the fate of some six hundred and odd chamois. We reached in about an hour and a half the foot of the precipices facing towards Sixt; and here the way at once assumes a character which attracts the attention and rouses the interest. You make for the foot of a lofty waterfall called the Méridienne—I suppose because of its southern aspect; though it is said (not, as I believe, truly) to burst forth with fresh vigour at midday. It is difficult to see, till you are actually there, how further progress is to be won; but you find in the slate-like rock by the side of the fall little ledges, like steps, no broader than a common doorstep and much steeper, by which you ascend for a considerable distance. To these succeed green slopes of grass, but on so sharp a declivity that, when we climbed them, all crisp and smooth with the hoar-frost, I believe it would have been impossible to mount without imminent risk but for the aid of crampons.

By half-past six we had gained the summit of these slopes

and stood close beneath the second range of precipices, rearing themselves some 2,000 feet above our heads. We now turned to the right, and for an hour picked our way over a mass of débris resting on a sharp incline, which forms a kind of lean-to from the upper ledge of the lower wall to the base of the upper wall. We were thus enabled to turn the fortress, which it was hopeless to scale, and found ourselves at the entrance of a long valley running up for miles by the side of the upper system of the Tinneverges, and clothed with rich herbage. The access from the side of Sixt is, even for sheep and goats, so bad that the commune has leased it (I believe for centuries) to the contiguous commune of the Valais; and the cattle, which at certain seasons are to be found there in considerable numbers, all come over from Val Orsine. This long valley consists of two portions, on different levels, and separated by another wall, which is scaled by a set of steps hardly less steep than those by which the journey began. And here you see how very curious a mountain the Tinneverges is. The summit, which from everywhere below looked just above the Fer à Cheval and the Méridienne, you now find lies miles back; and up to it leads a series of gradually-heightening peaks of the quaintest formation—shaggy, broken, precipitous, to all appearance inaccessible, built up terrace after terrace and wall after wall, separated by narrow bands of sloping shale-banks or ledges arranged one above another like flights of steps, well-known to the chamois or to the hunter, but crowned generally at the top by a low, rounded, roughly circular tower of rock, just like the keep of an ancient castle. These wild heights are favourite haunts of the chamois; and, on my first ascent, I was witness to an exciting incident of the chase, and learned something of the rude and lawless men who come poaching from the Valais on the hunting-grounds of their neighbours.

As we were climbing a steep bank of grass, Gurlie called my attention to a black mark against the sky-line at the top of a deep ravine, which seams the mountain-side from top to bottom of the upper range of rocks, and pronounced that it was a remarkably fine chamois. Presently the animal began to stir, and we soon saw from his movements that he was in a great state of excitement and uneasiness; for he dashed down the gully towards us, leaping a score of feet at a time, and then stood and looked, and rushed wildly up again to the top, whence we could fancy we saw him look over the other side, as if to find a way of escape in that direction. No man but ourselves was in sight, but we concluded that a hunter was on his track, visible to the chamois

though not to us. Gurlie, who knew the locality, said that there was no way of escape for the poor beast save along a passage which was probably commanded by the rifle of the sportsman. Presently we saw a rough ill-looking fellow, on a little higher level than ourselves, striding swiftly towards the foot of the ravine, taking no notice of us, though we called out a 'good morning' to him. We were not many paces from him when I said to Gurlie, who was a little behind me, 'There goes a gentleman who has no *permis de chasse*.' I noticed an odd expression of something like alarm on Gurlie's face; and he ran up hastily to me, and begged me not to speak of a *permis de chasse* again within earshot of such people as these, adding that it was most fortunate that this man had been too busy to heed us. I laughed, but Gurlie assured me he was very serious; and that the man who had just passed us would probably think no more of putting a bullet through me, if he suspected that I had anything to do with his natural enemies the *gardes de chasse*, than of firing upon the four-footed game he was after. I was still incredulous, when Gurlie told me that he was not talking the language of exaggeration, but spoke with a full knowledge of the class of people in question. He said that when we should be on the ridge of the mountain he would point out to me a little group of châlets on the other side of the valley, the name of which I do not now remember, where he once arrived in time, and only just in time, to save the life of a neighbour of his who had fallen in with a party of these marauders, and had unluckily incurred the suspicion of being connected with the authorities of the commune. Gurlie himself, during a long course of hunting life, had never shown any jealousy of the intruders from the Valais, and had been neighbourly and friendly to them whenever he had met them; and hence he was equally well known and trusted by them. He and his comrade had agreed to meet at the village, then deserted for the season, towards nightfall, to pass the night there, and start early in the morning on a hunting expedition of their own. His friend had reached the rendezvous first, and found it preoccupied by a party from the Valais. He was a stranger to them, and they surrounded and questioned him, and somehow took it into their heads that he belonged to the *garde champêtre*, that he had come to spy them out, and would bring his colleagues upon them. It was in vain he protested he was but a simple hunter like themselves. They would not listen to anything he said, but bound him, cast him into a hovel with one of their number to stand sentry over him, and assured him that he should never return to tell their enemies where to find them. Fortunately

he had not been long in captivity before Gurlie arrived and inquired for his companion, whom he found in a very doleful state. The Valaisans told Gurlie he had come just in time, for that their only doubt had been whether they should shoot or hang his friend, as they had been convinced he was one of the 'garde,' and they wished to read a lesson to these officials. Gurlie said that, knowing the men as he did, he entertained no doubt that they would have put their project in execution, had he not made his appearance and answered for the harmlessness of the unfortunate captive. He told me his friend had had enough of hunting for that time, and was very glad to get home again as soon as he could the next day. 'He cannot hear the incident alluded to even now,' he added, 'without turning pale. I will mention it to him some day in your presence, and you will see.'

We did not go far before we heard two reports of a rifle in quick succession, but the place from which they came was hidden from us by the nature of the ground, and we proceeded on our upward way. Hours afterwards, when we had been on the top of the mountain, and were just beginning to descend again, we were startled by a scuttering of feet and a scattering of loose stones very near us, and three beautiful chamois came galloping at full speed up to within some thirty or forty yards of where we were standing. When they caught sight of us they stopped short; for a second they were perfectly still, and stared us full in the face; then they turned sharp to the right, and dashed madly down places that it made one shudder to see even a chamois take to. In an incredibly short time they were on the snow-banks beneath the Col de Tinneverges, hundreds of feet below, where they separated, one making for the ridge of the Pic de Tinneverges and the glaciers of Mont Ruan, the other for the Col and the glaciers of the Cheval Blanc beyond it. One, we thought, went slightly less easily than the rest; we learned a few minutes later that the poor thing had had one of its legs broken, and was performing the astonishing leaps we had seen with only three legs. Gurlie told me that the chamois, when one of its legs is disabled by a shot, is often for a few moments almost stupefied by the pain and shock, but that in a minute or two it seems to gather together all its energy and strength, and with only three legs to trust to will generally keep up with its unwounded comrades. In a little while we fell in with our friend of the morning and his partner in the chase—our more immediate acquaintance laden with the carcase of a magnificent buck chamois, the one we had watched in his distress in the early part of the day. We sat down and smoked

the pipe of peace with our friends, and learned from them that they had also wounded the poor brute we had just seen, but without arresting its course. I took a good look at the man against whom Gurlie had cautioned me, and certainly, if his looks did not greatly belie him, he might well be capable of the lawless violence Gurlie had advised me not to excite; the impression he produced was not rendered more pleasant by the fact that he spoke a rough and strange patois, in which he growled out sentences that appeared to be as unintelligible to Gurlie as they were to myself. The other man was of much less evil aspect, and he and Gurlie soon began to compare notes; something was said which seemed to awaken a train of recollection in our poaching friend's mind, for he looked Gurlie hard in the face and asked what his name was. Gurlie told his name, adding that he was better known as Bel Humeur; whereupon the poacher set up a shout of admiring recognition, and exclaimed, 'Are you the man that told me ten years ago on the Col de Léchaud the easiest way down to Chamouni with a chamois I had killed, and who, before my eyes, killed two *albines* (white partridges) one after the other with the rifle? Aha! Bel Humeur, that *was* a shot, my good comrade—I never saw the like before or since. Your hand, Bel Humeur.' And we were soon over head and ears in a sea of hunting anecdotes, parting eventually with a full conviction on my mind that our law-breaking acquaintance entertained much too genuine a respect for my conductor to be likely to fire upon us this time at all events.

But I have wandered from the spot where first we saw the noble beast that has led me astray. Mounting sometimes easily, sometimes laboriously, towards the head of the valley, when about an hour's walk from the col in which it culminates, we struck off to the left and made for the base of the first line of rock-wall that rose above us: and now sometimes climbing up couloirs of extreme steepness, sometimes walking along the edges of the precipices they intersected, we arrived at length, nearly at midday, at the foot of the last section of the mountain, a huge hump or clumsy half-dome, now covered deep in loose and yielding shale and débris, now naked and exposed, with the successive layers slanting downwards, and affording when coated, as many of them were, with a sheet of ice from the drainings of the snow-banks above, a most precarious and unpleasant footing. An hour's climb brought us, at a quarter to one, to the actual summit, and disclosed to us a vast extent of glacier, of whose real size I never had the slightest idea from below, lying 1,000 or 1,500 feet beneath us at the foot of a

vertical or nearly vertical wall of rock. I thought it would be possible to follow the ridge of the mountain backwards till it faded into the glacier of Mont Ruan, and descend by that glacier to the head of the Fond de la Combe; but snow and mist surprised us almost before we had time to take in the view, and it was already afternoon, and the 6th of October, and we were reluctantly compelled to admit that prudence counselled a return by the way we already knew. We made the best of our road, but though we had a carriage waiting for us at the entrance of La Combe, did not reach Sixt till after eight o'clock.

I have purposely omitted to describe the view from the summit, because there is an inevitable monotony in such attempts; but I ought to add that it is one of the most interesting panoramas to be found among the Alps. Towards the north and north-east it is inferior to that from the Buet, as it lies much closer to the loftier Dent du Midi and to the ranges of Chablais and Faucigny; but to the east of the grand chain of Mont Blanc you have by far the best view of the groups and peaks between the Monte Rosa district and Mont Blanc that I have yet seen. The Grand Combin and the neighbouring summits stand out grandly, well separated from the Aiguille du Tour and the eastern portion of the chain of Mont Blanc.

But there is a way of ascent to the Tinneverges yet much finer than that I have briefly sketched; it was explored for the first time last autumn by Mr. Milman and myself, on the 24th of September. We slept, and in some comfort, at the châlets of Vojalaz; and starting thence at half-past four, reached the top of the Sagéroux pass at six. We then struck across to the right and made for the glaciers of Mont Ruan. I will not weary you by describing our progress, but will content myself with saying that, except for the absence of any element of serious difficulty in the shape of séracs and crevasses, we had samples of almost every variety of alpine incident before we reached the top. Now there was a steep face of rock to climb, half coated with ice and offering but a precarious footing; now a couloir leading from a lower to an upper glacier filled with ice, up which we had to hack our way; now a deep bed of névé to traverse, with a crust to break, and a soft and powdered snow beneath; now a formidable curtain of ice to scale, with a precipice at its base that made us all glad to have constant recourse to the ice-axe and choose safety rather than speed; now a grand walk along the ridge itself, with a view of surpassing grandeur on the one hand and a prospect of enchanting loveliness on the other. We reached the top soon after midday, and spent an hour

there, descending by the way by which I had climbed the year before, reaching Sixt at half-past six, and the Eagle's Nest at half-past eight. To both Mr. Milman and myself the expedition appeared to offer a singular variety of scenery and incident, and to deserve a place amongst our most cherished recollections.

Let me add one word upon an expedition perfectly well known, but still very rarely taken, as far as I know—to the Lac Cornu and the Aiguilles Rouges. There is no place I have ever seen where the traces of extinct glacier action are on so extensive a scale or so well marked, or where they impress their own wild and desolate character so indelibly on the landscape, as in the neighbourhood of the Lac Cornu. It is a scene completely *sui generis*; it is easy of access; it may be combined in one excursion from Chamouni or Sixt with the ascent of the Aiguilles Rouges—an ascent, as far as I know, scarcely ever made, but commanding a prospect as much finer than that from the Brévent as the view from the Brévent is finer than that from the Planpraz.

Nor would it be grateful for me to forbear my tribute of acknowledgment to the admirable taste and skill shown by the French authorities in the construction of the new mule-path from Sixt to Chamouni, across the Brévent. It is carried, where I was not particularly anxious that it should be carried, past the Eagle's Nest; but when I was asked what I considered the best route, I was obliged in my conscience to say I thought that line far more desirable on many substantial accounts, as well as more beautiful than the old track by the Pleureuse. And the authorities have taken the same view as myself, for they have carried their new road by the side of Les Fonds to the châlets of Grasses Chèvres, thence to the Col d'Anterne, down to the Dioza, through Möed, and by the châlets of Arlevaz over the summit of the Brévent. I believe that it will not be possible to find amongst the Alps an excursion of a single day combining so many and such varied attractions as this passage. Not only has the greatest care been bestowed on the choice of the route considered simply as a means of transit, but all the best points of view have been seized with a judgment and an appreciation of nature which excites one's high admiration. It will probably take several seasons for the newly-cut earth to settle down and become consolidated; but the work has been done rapidly, and adds another proof to the many already given by Monsieur Ferrand, the prefect of Haute Savoie, of his anxiety to promote the comfort and convenience of travellers, and the substantial welfare of his prefecture.