

favour, as compared with carrying the same weight in the old fashion, and coincides fully with the experience I can myself adduce. It may, however, be worth while to point out the special advantages to the climber of carrying his load, if he must have one, in this manner. Being supported partly by the shoulders, and partly by the strong bone on which it rests, the weight of the pack is distributed over the body, and very little pressure is felt on any one point. Being also placed close to the centre of gravity of the whole body and prevented from swinging loosely, it tends rather to preserve than to endanger the balance; whereas a knapsack carried on the shoulders materially disturbs the natural conditions of equilibrium, and often prevents the wearer from recovering himself when he has slipped or otherwise been thrown partially off his balance. It is not at all in the way in climbing, as a side-slung bag often must be, and though in descending rocks it may sometimes be inconvenient, yet it will be no worse than a knapsack in this respect, if as bad. Most important of all, it leaves the arms entirely free, instead of their being cramped by the knapsack straps under the armpits and by the pressure on the shoulder-blades—a condition of supreme importance to mountaineers, who often need to make their poles serve them as about the equivalent for two extra legs.

I am perfectly aware that this device is not new, as the principle of it was suggested years ago for the army by Sir Thomas Troubridge, though it did not in fact occur to my own mind independently; and I know also that one man's experience does not always accord with another's. But I have never yet heard a serious objection raised against this mode of carrying, if one is obliged to be a beast of burden at all; and I hope therefore that I shall not seem too zealous in urging its merits. Neither this nor any other plan is perfect, and I shall be very glad if criticism, however hostile, from mountaineers superior to myself, elicits some better method on a matter which is of vital importance not only to pedestrians, but also, as seriously affecting the army, to the whole nation.

THE COL DE PIERRE JOSEPH. By C. G. HEATHCOTE, M.A.

EVEN in the most deplorable weather some few amiable enthusiasts will generally be found at Chamouni in the month of August. At such times despair finds comfort in the wild prophecies of the natives, and the sceptic becomes tem-

porarily credulous as to the influence of a change of moon or the magic of a specified day. No amount of self-deception, however, would have induced me to stay at Chamouni during a week of uninterrupted rain in the valley and snow on the heights, but for the fact that my letters were at Zermatt, and the luxuries of warmth and sunshine were probably not to be had nearer than the Italian lakes. Meanwhile as the mountains were not to be seen out of doors we were compelled to find a substitute in Mons. Bardin's model, a careful inspection of which is mountaineering made easy and cheap. If the eastern part of the chain had been as far advanced towards completion as Mont Blanc itself, I should perhaps have been spared the expedition I am going to describe, and should certainly have saved myself from a grievous error.

At length, whether it was the change of moon, or whether the long-expected day had arrived which was to inaugurate an uninterrupted era of fine weather, there came a fine afternoon, which I spent with a party of friends on the moraine of the Tacul. As we basked there in the unaccustomed sunshine Michel Balmat spoke of a col—a new col; one at least that had been attained but never traversed, and growing eloquent over his subject he prophesied for it the most brilliant future. The Col du Géant was becoming monotonous, but this col would supersede the Col du Géant, and would be a highway trodden by the feet of innumerable travellers, a connecting link of the highest importance between the France and the Italy of the future. The explanation of all this enthusiasm was, that only a short time before, Balmat and Michel Ambroise Ducroz had reached the col with Messrs. Reilly and C. E. Mathews, but had been prevented by the weather from descending on the Italian side, and they were very much alarmed lest the honours of the first passage should be snatched from them by some more fortunate aspirant, especially as they had reason to believe that they were not the only persons in the neighbourhood who had designs upon one of the last remaining passes in that part of the chain. As I looked again and again at the delicate curve, its fresh snows glittering against the deep blue sky purified and intensified by the storms of the previous week, the Col de Pierre Joseph became the most attractive object in that very attractive panorama; and I determined to make at least an attempt on it at the first convenient opportunity. Accordingly on the 20th of August my friend Marindin and myself, with our two guides and a porter, left Courmayeur, having shrouded our designs under a decent veil of mystery, so decent indeed and

so mysterious as to defeat its own object, and to give rise to a general idea that we were going to attempt something very terrible indeed, that we should certainly fail, and that we should be back again at Courmayeur the following evening. As we left the village we received and declined a courteous invitation to inspect the cemetery, with a view, I suppose, to the selection of a satisfactory place of interment in the event of a disaster. The weather at starting was in that imperfect state of development that we are familiar with in the heroines of novels, having a boundless capacity for good or evil as circumstances might direct. The heroine in this case turned out in after-life very vicious, and very treacherous also, in that a gleam of her better nature induced us to leave the chalets of Gruetta at five the next morning. We had, however, enjoyed the advantage of inspecting a large cheese-making establishment, and of collecting some statistics on the subject which I only withhold because of their extreme improbability.

We were all profoundly ignorant of the locality, so ignorant indeed as to mistake the Glacier de Mont Dolent for the Glacier de Triolet. Inasmuch as after about seven hours' wading in very deep and treacherous snow we considered it prudent to return before reaching the summit, as we were on the wrong glacier and walking in a wrong direction, and as, even if we had persevered, and had not been killed, we should have descended on the Argentière, it is not necessary to describe our track minutely. Suffice it to say, that if, as I believe is the case, the French side of the Col Dolent is more difficult and dangerous than the ground we travelled over that day, it must be very difficult and dangerous indeed. The weather would, however, have made success very improbable if not impossible, even if our plans had been grounded on the most intimate acquaintance with the place. One piece of information, and one only, I can give to any person whom business or pleasure may take to the Glacier de Mont Dolent, and that is, that he had better keep on the northern side till above the ice fall. After that the glacier is level for a considerable distance.

Strange to say, a hasty examination of the maps at Chamouni left me still in my old error. I therefore imagined that the only part of the pass still untraversed was the short distance that separated us from the ridge, and I was accordingly very anxious after the miserable failure I have related to complete the unfinished work. Circumstances kept me in idleness at Chamouni till the 26th, but on the

afternoon of that day I started with Ducroz and Balmat, procured a rug, a saucepan, and some firewood at the Montanvert, and went on to the Pierre à Berenger. The evening was fine, but it was almost dusk when we reached the glacier. The moon, which was full that night, rose immediately over the Col de Pierre Joseph, and the most unsentimental of men might be pardoned the extravagance of hailing her appearance on the exact spot which we hoped to traverse as an omen of success, to say nothing of the more material advantages which she presented to men struggling in the dark with the difficulties of the broken glacier opposite the Couvercle. To those who have been on a glacier under the unclouded splendour of a full moon, description would only outrage memory, while to others I should despair of conveying any impression which would be more than a travestie of its glories. Long I sat outside the little cave in the Pierre à Berenger, contemplating the wonderful scene around me, and endeavouring to persuade myself that Balmat had been correct in asserting that the warm south wind which had blown on our faces as we ascended the glacier below was not the precursor of rain. With reference to the cave itself I may remark that the furthest end of it is admirably contrived for the reception of a baby's cradle, and that anyone who may not happen to be of less than Pygmean stature had better select the bed nearest the door.

We started at half-past four, and descended to the Glacier de Léchaud. Following it to the upper end, where it receives three considerable affluents, we turned to the left up its eastern branch which descends directly from a col between the Aiguille de l'Eboulement and the Aiguille de Léchaud. The slopes were steep, and, except where the tracks of recent avalanches facilitated our progress, exceedingly soft and insecure, so that as soon as possible we took to the rocks which proved, however, very little if at all easier, though certainly considerably safer. These rocks are a ridge descending from the Aiguille de l'Eboulement, and beyond them is a snow slope extending to the Aiguille de Talèfre. I suggested that we should take that course, believing that it leads to the col which looks so tempting from the Tacul. The guides, however, were agreed in preferring the rocks, basing their preference as I understood on their previous experience, so that I suppose that the snow was less easy than it appeared to be. Under a projecting rock we found an old tattered rug, left there perhaps by the original Pierre Joseph, or forming possibly his habitual covering for the night when he revisits the scene of his now forgotten crimes or misfortunes. A solution of the mystery may possibly be

suggested by the abundance of excellent crystals which we found close to the spot. We reached the summit of the Aiguille at eleven. I have mentioned two cols both leading from the Glacier de Léchaud to the Glacier de Triolet, and of course either of them would be better entitled to the name of a pass than a route which lies over the summit of a mountain ; but I am inclined to think that the depression to the north is accessible only from one side, while that to the south looked utterly impracticable from both. The guides descended to a promontory just below the summit, with a view to the descent, while I was engaged in a fruitless attempt to discover a way up the Col des Jorasses. I soon gave it up as an insoluble mystery, as it presents the appearance of a table-cloth not quite reaching to the ground, and after hazarding a conjecture to the effect that the Aiguille de Léchaud was accessible, and would command a fine view, I gave a last look at the Jorasses, the Géant, Mont Blanc, and the Aiguille Verte, and rejoined my companions.

Of the next four or five hours I have but little to say. For steepness, for sharpness, for rottenness, and for monotony, the rocks above the Glacier de Triolet may perhaps challenge competition with any in Switzerland ; and when I add to these conditions a heavy snowstorm, it will probably be evident that our position was not an enviable one ; and when at last after the descent of a very awkward *cheminée* terminating in the narrowest of ledges and the most unpleasant of corners, Ducroz turned to me with a radiant expression upon his face, and the pious expression 'Dieu merci ! nous sommes dehors,' I felt no inclination to criticise either the matter or the manner of his ejaculation. How Balmat, who came last, got down, I have not the smallest idea, as I was engaged out of sight in endeavouring to prevent myself, the knapsacks, the provisions, and the wine from slipping over a precipice. The rest was comparatively easy, and I was at last relieved from the apprehension that, after all, we should be obliged to retrace our steps and descend the snow slopes on the other side, an apprehension which was the more disagreeable as I felt pretty certain that the descent of those snow slopes would in the existing state of the weather, and so late in the day, be almost if not quite impossible. If from our halting place on the glacier I had been able to see anything of our line of descent, I might have been able to decide whether the couloirs on either side of us would have been preferable. By this time, however, it was raining in torrents, so that it is impossible for me to say whether any better route may exist. That no route

which may be found practicable can well be worse, I think I may venture to predict. At 7.15 we floundered over the glacier torrent into the Val Ferrex, and in thick darkness reached Courmayeur, where Bertolini provided me with his best frockcoat and his warmest welcome. At the entrance into Courmayeur the gendarme whose business it is to guard against the entrance of cholera in all its forms stopped us and suggested fumigation—as if my guides, who never allow their lips to be guiltless of a pipe except under the direst necessity, could be more thoroughly fumigated than they were already. Balmat evaded the difficulty by a ‘*suppressio veri*,’ which came so very near an ‘*expressio falsi*’ as hardly to be distinguishable from it, while Ducroz and I, who though we disdained to lie ourselves, were not too proud to profit by the misrepresentations of another, stalked on in a dignified silence.

Of the pass itself I may perhaps be permitted to add a few words. It is one that can never become popular. I will not venture to assert that it cannot be done under seventeen hours’ hard walking; but I do think that it will always be a very long business. The view is undoubtedly a fine one; but it comprises no distant panorama, and though the weather unfortunately prevented me from seeing much of the Glacier de Triolet, I think it questionable whether there is very much to see. In short on a calm retrospect of the expedition, and a comparison between its results and the trouble taken to secure success, without expressing an opinion upon the wisdom of such undertakings, I will venture upon a prediction that it will be a very long while before the brilliant anticipations of Balmat will be realised, and the Col de Pierre Joseph rival the Col du Géant even in the estimation of the Alpine Club.

EXCURSIONS IN THE GRAIANS (No. 3).* ASCENT OF THE ALBARON. By R. C. NICHOLS, F.S.A.

THE morning was bright and fine as I walked down to Aosta on the 23rd of August, 1866. After a fortnight of bad weather in Switzerland I began to hope that a change for the better had taken place. My guide, J. V. Favret, had met me at Martigny, and I had pushed on across the St. Bernard to St. Rémy the evening before, in order to arrive early at Aosta and to have time to make my arrangements to

* Two previous expeditions are narrated in Vol. II. of the *Alpine Journal*.