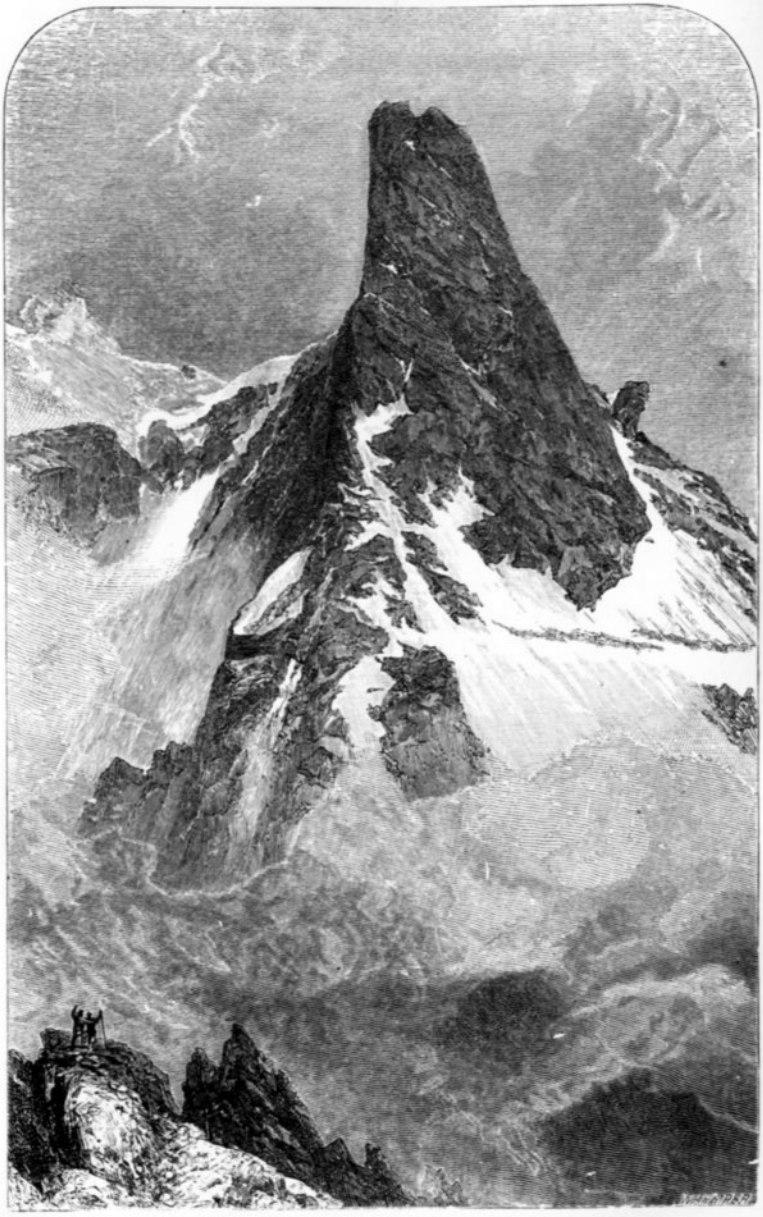

THE AIGUILLE DU GÉANT FROM THE NORTH-WEST.

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Round Mont Blanc. By Leslie Stephen. A Paper read before the Alpine Club, December 12, 1871.

SOME time ago I ventured to write an article, called the 'Regrets of a Mountaineer.' In it I endeavoured to express the sentiments which might naturally occur to a man who, having once been bitten by the mania of mountain-climbing, and having indeed suffered from a somewhat virulent type of the disease, had been suddenly cut off from indulgence in his favourite pursuits. Following the precedent of dramatic performances, I bade a solemn farewell to the mountains, and—still according to that precedent—I have to confess that the farewell was perhaps a little premature. That which ought to have been was not, in fact, my positively last appearance in the character of an assailant of the High Alps. Should the announcement be made in the spirit of a penitent, or of a sinner returning to the true fold? Must I speak like a dipsomaniac who has, after a temporary course of teetotalism, once more fallen a victim to the charms of brandy-and-water, or like a deserter begging for re-admission to the army from which he has prematurely withdrawn himself? Members of the Alpine Club will, of course, be inclined to take the latter view of the question; and I must regard them as receiving the present confession. Perhaps, however, I might make some defence to those who would regard my conduct in a severer light. Good resolutions, I might urge, are made by all sensible men chiefly for the pleasure of breaking them. Or rather, to define the precise state of the case more accurately, I may perhaps put it thus: the advantage of resolving to break off a vicious habit is that you no longer practise it when it is disagreeable; though you

need by no means feel bound to refrain when it is only liable to the objection that it is immoral. My position, at any rate in regard to mountaineering, is, that I no longer indulge in it as, to say the truth, I once used to indulge in it, even when in the depths of my private consciousness I felt it to be rather a bore; I have cast off that fanaticism which made me regard it as a solemn duty to spend all available moments of leisure in measuring myself against some previously inaccessible peak. I regard mountain climbing as a weakness instead of a duty, and therefore I only climb when I thoroughly enjoy it; and this is a state of mind which, if not rising to the highest moral strain, has, at any rate, many undeniable comforts.

So much by way of preface to a paper which might perhaps most fitly be entitled the 'Relapses of a Mountaineer.' And yet I must add that the relapses have not been of a grave character. Indeed, I have so little to communicate to the Club that, but for the barrenness of these latter days upon which fate has cast us, I should scarcely venture to consider that I have the raw materials of a presentable narrative. Such crumbs of remainder biscuit as I have managed to gather may, however, be palatable to appetites doomed to a very scanty diet; and I will venture to chronicle with some minuteness the incidents which produced my recent lapses from the paths of virtue. And, first, let me endeavour to set forth the numerous temptations by which I was surrounded.

I was spending a month at the lovely village of St. Gervais. Though the Chamouni diligences call daily at the baths, few cockneys stop at that repulsive establishment, and still fewer climb the 600 feet which are necessary to reach one of the most beautiful centres of Alpine scenery. The excellent Hôtel du Mont Blanc, in which we took up our quarters, was almost free from the visits of our dear fellow-countrymen, and I was reduced to solitary rambles. St. Gervais can boast of an almost infinite variety of *courses*, great and small, rising by exquisite gradations from the Mont Joli up to the monarch himself. In almost all these walks, I need hardly say, the view of Mont Blanc is the culminating point of the interest. I saw him from many points of view, and meditated much on their respective merits. Mont Blanc is a noble object, when looking across the valley of Montjoie from the Mont Joli; or when lying in one of the little hollows amongst the great beds of rhododendrons that cover the undulating summit of the Prarion; or, still more, for the explorers of a less hackneyed district, from any of the summits that rise above the great limestone wall which stretches from the Aiguille de

Varens to the cliffs above the Col d'Anterne. I climbed that wall at two points; and I will in passing notice, for the benefit of the lovers of scenery, that one of the most perfect of Alpine walks may be taken by climbing the path which leads to the pass of the Portetta. A very good path lies beneath the western half of the limestone range of cliffs which enclose the Plane de Joux. Just where the forest ceases, a number of streams suddenly burst in full vigour from beneath huge boulders covered by a dense growth of underwood. From that point, or a little higher, Mont Blanc appears, filling up the whole space between the horns of the great crescent of limestone cliffs. After climbing a path not unlike that of the Gemmi, the traveller reaches the edge of that singular stone-glacier—as it appears—called the Desert de Platei; and from thence he may either climb the Aiguille de Varens, which lies at some distance from the edge of the plateau; or, if his time be too short, he may easily ascend the point known as the Aiguille de Platei. From any high point in this neighbourhood the view of Mont Blanc is necessarily superb. I was not sufficiently favoured by the weather to enjoy it in perfection; but from what I saw and inferred, I came to a conclusion rather opposed to the ordinary doctrines about Mont Blanc. If anyone were asked what is the best single view of the Mont Blanc range, he would probably reply by naming one of the well-known belvederes, the Buet, the Brévent, the Mont Joli, or, if he prefers the southern view of the mountain, the Cramont, or it may be, the Ruitor. Now, in endeavouring to settle this question, two or three principles may be laid down. It must, in the first place, be admitted that a view of the panoramic kind ought to include as many points of the range as possible, compatibly with a due picturesque effect. The Mont Joli, for example, must be pronounced a failure, in so far as it affords a very imperfect view of the north-eastern portion of the chain. Secondly, the point of view should be so high and at such a distance as to involve the least possible distortion of the fair proportions of the mountain. The Brévent, for example, and the Mont Chétif near Courmayeur, are perhaps rather too low and too immediately beneath the monarch to enable the spectator to do him justice. And thirdly, it is certainly desirable, if possible, that the whole height of the mountain should be visible, without any intervening range to break the effect of his imposing grandeur. The Buet and the Cramont fail conspicuously in this respect; and I imagine that they owe part of their reputation to fashion, and (in the latter case) to the influence of Saussure. Guides are an unimaginative

race, and when a point of view has once obtained a reputation, it is hard to overthrow it. No other reason can be given why the range of the Aiguille de Varens should never have obtained the reputation which is its undoubted due. Admitting the grandeur of the view from the Buet, it is impossible to rate it above, or, in my opinion, on an equality with, that obtained from the cliffs divided only by the deep ravine of the Arve from the majestic snow-fields of the great mountain.

And yet, admirable as is the view from any part of that remarkable plateau, I discovered — and my apology for making these remarks is, that I appear to have been the first person who has made, or at any rate published, the discovery —that there is yet another point of view which combines in the highest degree all the essentials that I have enumerated, and which has yet never been visited by a traveller. If I am right in this assertion, it is a curious proof of how much is overlooked, even in the most familiar portions of the Alps; and I think that the reasons I can allege will at any rate raise some *primâ facie* presumption in my favour. Indeed, I regard the matter as almost capable of mathematical demonstration. If anybody will glance at the map of the Mont Blanc range, he will see that, in order to obtain a view of all the chief summits, the spectator must be placed in or near a line drawn from Mont Blanc through the Aiguille du Gouté. Otherwise, the central dome will cut off either the western or eastern end of the chain. We must look for a summit of between (say) 9,000 and 11,000 feet somewhere sufficiently near to this axis. It must be at a distance of, at least, ten or twelve miles from the object, and there must be no intervening range, but, if possible, a level plain in the foreground. It is impossible to state these propositions without at once perceiving that we are describing the celebrated view from Sallenches, as it would be seen by a spectator from a balloon raised some 8,000 feet above the town. The view from Sallenches is, in fact, unique, and the only objection to it is that Mont Blanc is too much foreshortened, owing to his great height above the spectator. The question then occurs whether there is no peak which will serve the purpose of the hypothetical balloon; and I answer by saying that there is such a peak, and that its name is the Mont Fleuri. Looking, in fact, from St. Gervais, the great wall of limestone precipice which forms a background to Sallenches is crowned by a lion-like mass of rock, on which I had frequently looked with curiosity before I made its closer acquaintance. Nobody except chamois-hunters had

made the ascent, though it was said to be free from all serious difficulty; and I had the pleasure of ascertaining, by personal observation, that the view of Mont Blanc is all that I have described. Nearly every summit in the chain, from the Col de Balme to the Col de Bonhomme, is visible; the whole 14,000 feet of ascent from Sallenches to the summit is revealed, and made more striking by its contrast with the level intervening plain of the Arve valley; whilst the height and distance of the Mont Fleuri is just sufficient to show the huge mass in its fair proportions, whilst preserving the distinctness of detail. The height, I may observe, is not known to me; but, as the mountain is palpably higher than the Aiguille de Varens, I should put it at between 9,000 and 10,000 feet. And now I am ready to maintain against all comers that, although tourists have been seeking the best point of view for seeing Mont Blanc for at least three generations, nobody except a few chamois-hunters has ever seen that particular aspect of the monarch of mountains which is demonstrably the best.

Nobody? it will be asked; not even yourself? and I am compelled reluctantly to repeat, nobody! And thereby hangs a tale, which shall be told as briefly as possible, though it is strictly relevant to the main purpose of this paper. The studied ambiguity of a certain sentence in my last paragraph may not have been noticed; but though I satisfied myself by 'personal observation' of the surpassing merits of the view in question, I am constrained to add that my observation was taken from a point some distance below the summit. My friend (Mr. J. Birkbeck, jun.) and I took a guide one fine morning from St. Gervais, and walked by moonlight to Sallenches, and thence up the beautiful glen of Cordon to a lofty alp immediately under the Mont Fleuri. It would be hard to find a more exquisite spot than that from which we saw the sunrise, and it is easily accessible, even by those whose delight is in the legs of a mule. A brilliant lawn, studded by groups of beech trees, a mighty wall of cliff rising behind with a really fine waterfall spouting in Staubbach fashion from a ledge midway, and a grand view of Mont Blanc and his attendant aiguilles in the distance, put us in the best possible spirits. But our guide—whom, because it is not his name, I will call Russell—was labouring under a singular disease. Its symptoms were a burning thirst, a certain squeamishness like that which the vulgar call 'hot coppers,' and a decided incapacity for steady pounding up hill. He attributed it partly to an undue consumption of milk at the châlets—which, how-

ever probable in itself, scarcely accounted for its coming on a couple of hours before we reached them—and partly to a bullet-wound in his arm, which had been received some months before as he was following the fortunes of Garibaldi. At any rate, it delayed us very much in our ascent, and perhaps had something to do with his decision, when we were very near the top, that the fresh snow made the last rocks too dangerous to be attacked. It is my invariable rule, however, not to press a man to proceed to what he considers to be dangerous, whatever the causes of his nervousness, and I do not regret that I observed it in this instance. Yet if I had had a little more experience of Mr. Russell's character, I should perhaps have been less ready to listen to his appeals for a retreat. For on a subsequent occasion the same singular disorder manifested itself on a start for the Aiguille de Miage, and he became not a little sulky when I positively refused to allow him to treat it by doses of brandy at a tavern. On that occasion also we were forced to retreat from the Aiguille de Miage (and I must add that I think our retreat was no more than prudent) by the state of the snow; and I found that from some cause or other his nerves had been so shattered that from a daring mountaineer, as I am told he had once been, he had sunk to be one of the least satisfactory companions I have ever had for the passage of very moderately difficult rocks. I cannot give his real name; but let travellers at St. Gervais be careful as to their guides.

Before leaving the Mont Fleuri, I must observe that though there appears to be no difficulty in climbing it, some local knowledge would be useful. The last part of the ascent lies through a very deep couloir, which descends into a wild hollow on the southern, or it may be the south-western, side of the arête which the traveller follows so far as it is practicable, in starting from the valley of Cordon. But the discovery of the route may fairly be left to the ingenuity of experienced mountaineers. I will only remark that the experiences thus described ended by sharpening my appetite for the mountains. The constant views of Mont Blanc from various heights and in various directions disturbed my peace of mind; and the irritation produced by useless guides made me long for an expedition more after the old fashion. I groaned at the ineffectual nibblings at second-rate peaks, and I longed inexpressibly to be once more assaulting with an Anderegg or a Lauener one of the true race of giants that looked so invitingly near. Other circumstances speedily heightened my zeal. We had transferred ourselves to the pleasant little inn kept by Couttet (dit *Baguette*)

at Chamouni. It is an oasis in the midst of a desert of cockneyism. Looking towards the great mountain, and having at your back the huge caravansaries which bring New York and Piccadilly to the Alps, you may fancy yourself at Zermatt or the Aeggischhorn. There my growing desire to climb was strengthened by the presence of sundry members of the Alpine Club. The enthusiasm of the younger was contagious; and my own contemporaries, who have more or less retired from the field of action, who groaned at grass slopes, poured maledictions upon zigzags, and appeared to find the Alpine air sufficiently stimulating to their appetites without the aid of rough exercise; even those respectable veterans, I say, could still tell stories of youthful prowess, and solaced their postprandial hours not more by tobacco and other gentle aids to digestion than by eloquent exhortations to their friends to be up and doing. If I—was the substance of most of these harangues—measured no more round the waist than you, my energy would know no bounds, and the lurking scepticism evoked by such protestations was unable to quench the effect of the eloquence by which they were enforced. Moreover, those pleasant tobacco parliaments were joined by an honorary member of our club, who is in danger of becoming one of the recognised attractions to Chamouni. M. Loppé, who may be described as court painter to the monarch of mountains, has, as my readers know, or ought to know, opened a gallery of Alpine paintings at Chamouni, and there spends most of the summer. He is always ready to give the friendliest advice to the tourists who have the good fortune to make his acquaintance; and was the object of incessant, and I fear rather wearisome, appeals from everyone who wanted anything done. Ladies taking a mule to the Glacier des Bossons, and travellers on the look-out for a hitherto untrodden peak, trespassed with equal recklessness and equal impunity upon his good-nature. To him I owed a very pleasant walk, which may be indicated to mountaineers, as not yet sufficiently known. Leaving Chamouni in the morning, we ascended the Glacier du Tour, crossed the Col du Tour, thence passed to the Fenêtre de Saléna, and crossed by the Col de Chardonnet to the Glacier d'Argentière, returning to Chamouni at night. It is difficult to design a walk which, with an equally small expenditure of fatigue, shall show so much of the very grandest snow-scenery. My appetite for climbing was naturally sharpened; but the final impetus was yet to be given. M. Loppé informed me that there were still two or three untrodden peaks on the Mont Blanc range, and of these the most seductive, because offering the greatest chances of

success, was the Mont Mallet. Whilst shaking under this temptation, there appeared another and a most unanswerable cause for action, in the person of my old friend Melchior Anderegg. He came fresh from ascents of the Matterhorn, and I know not what other peaks, in company with Messrs. Mathews and Morshead. I had engaged him for a week, more for the sake of old acquaintance than with a design for work, and destined him chiefly to the occupation of carrying a certain young lady of eight months old to such heights as were appropriate to her time of life. But the combination of circumstances just enumerated was too powerful for me. Mont Blanc had been appealing to me for weeks with eloquent silence; M. Loppé, not only by his pictorial and verbal exhortations, but by his guidance on the glacier expedition I have noticed, made my mouth water for higher things. The youthful enthusiasts who said 'Come,' and the decayed veterans who said with equal emphasis 'Go,' urged me in the same direction; the weather was perfect, the snow in first-rate order; a new mountain was waiting for the first comer, and here was Melchior Anderegg promising to compensate me by his unsurpassable skill for the annoyances suffered from inferior guides. If Adam had been able to produce equally good reasons for eating the apple, his justification, to human eyes at least, would have been amply sufficient; and what was I that I should be better than my remote progenitor? If that precedent be somewhat doubtful, we live at any rate in days when the rulers of our country have laboured to erase the word 'irrevocable' from the political dictionary as actively as the Alpine Club to get rid of another objectionable epithet. Is this a time for being over-scrupulous as to pledges or consistency? Leaving my good resolutions to pave any place that may be in want of such materials, I agreed once more to gird up my loins and start in search of glory.

What was the precise task before us requires a few words of explanation. The tourist who climbs the giddy heights of the Montanvert sees before him, apparently closing the valley of the Mer de Glace, a mass of mountains upon which the unsophisticated taste of an earlier race of peasants conferred the name Mont Mallet—*mallet* being the patois for *mauvais*. The great block conspicuous from Chamouni itself, and including Mont Blanc, was called the Mont Maudit. In a free translation they might, I presume, be called Mount Hell and Mount Purgatory. By degrees the name of Mont Maudit has been confined to one peak in the higher mass; and by a similar process Mont Mallet has become the name of a single summit, and indeed has almost disappeared from popular usage; for the Mont Mallet, so called

in the official map, is more generally known as the Aiguille Noire (though this name again is affixed in Mr. Reilly's map to a subordinate summit). If the Dent du Géant be regarded as a canine tooth in a monstrous jaw, from which all the incisors have been extracted, the jaw itself will be represented by a wild ridge sweeping round the head of the glacier, and the opposite canine tooth will be the Mont Mallet. It is of nearly equal height with the Géant, and may also be regarded as the highest point in the wild range called *les Périades*. A huge glacier descends from the northern side of this range, and joins the Glacier de Léchaud some distance above its confluence with the Glacier du Taléfre on the opposite bank. Few travellers have ever ascended this (apparently) nameless glacier; and the completeness with which, in spite of its vast dimensions, it is withdrawn from the observation of tourists, few of whom would even suspect its existence, is a striking proof of the immense extent of the Mont Blanc snow-fields. A few crystal-hunters had rambled among the Périades, and Mr. Wills had climbed the glacier in his attempt to cross the Col des Grandes Jorasses. A short inspection and the testimony of M. Loppé convinced us that the most promising route was to ascend this glacier and to reach, if possible, a col lying, as it were, at the back of the Mont Mallet, and forming the watershed between the French and Italian valley, and thence to attack our mountain from the east, i.e. from the side opposite to that visible from the Montanvert. And this led to a remarkable incident, which I commend to the consideration of the Alpine Club. My friend Mr. Wallroth had joined forces with me, and proposed to bring with him a very eminent Chamouni guide, with whom he had attempted just before to ascend the Aiguille Blaitière. They had been repulsed by showers of stones in a couloir of such unprepossessing aspect that the bare attempt to ascend it became a standing joke with our party. The guide—he shall be nameless—has a high character for courage and skill, and we were not a little amazed when he came to Mr. Wallroth with a story of a venerable father who had begged him not to attempt the glacier of the Mont Mallet. This venerable person declared, on what grounds it did not appear, that it was the most frightfully dangerous of all Alpine glaciers; it was a nightmare of a glacier; a collection of all horrible crevasses, seracs swept by avalanches, falling stones, and I know not what else, defying the skill of the bravest of guides. This hypothetical father—for I confess to classing him in my own mind with Mrs. Harris—was impregnable to argument; and the guide, taking refuge under the touching veil of filial piety, turned a deaf ear to our

remonstrances. Nor was this all. After we had good reason to know by personal experience that the glacier was a glacier of the most domestic and pacific character, a glacier so mild that, as somebody said of a small earthquake, 'you might stroke it'; a glacier which we traversed from top to bottom at a jog-trot, and which barely deserved the ceremony of a rope; after we could make our affidavits to all this, the most fearful reports continued to circulate in Chamouni, and induced another guide to bring forward a venerable mother in the same character as his colleague's father. Other benevolent persons endeavoured to bring female influence to bear upon the travellers themselves, by informing a lady that her husband was moving to almost certain destruction. Luckily the said lady possessed more strength of mind than had been expected, and the final result was simply to intensify our desire for success. Different opinions were expressed as to the secret of this singular reluctance of some of the best men in Chamouni even to look at a glacier, whose supposed terrors a single look would have sufficiently dissipated. Those who like it may believe in an epidemic terror affecting the venerable relations of our guides. M. Loppé inclined to the opinion that the nerves of the Chamouniards had been shaken by the accidents of the previous year. My own belief is that it was simply a case of jealousy, and that the objection was not so much to a glacier as to a Swiss guide.

It may be right to mention that, since returning, I have referred to Mr. Milman's interesting account of his expedition to the Col des Grandes Jorasses, and I there find that one at least of the guides who refused to accompany us had been with Mr. Milman on that occasion. This being so, it would appear that the fiction about the difficult glacier was even less excusable than one would have supposed, for the guide knew from personal experience that the glacier was perfectly practicable. It is true that Wills and Milman found, as I infer from their narrative, far greater difficulties than we encountered; and it appears to be generally the case that the high snow-fields were this year unusually easy, in consequence, it would seem, of the quantity of snow which fell during the previous winter. Still it is utterly impossible to justify a good guide for shrinking from the danger, if danger it can be called, of finding a passage through a series of seracs which would not at the worst be more troublesome than those of the Col du Géant. On the whole, therefore, I think that this fact tends to strengthen the theory that jealousy of a foreign guide was at the bottom of the reluctance exhibited.

On the night of Friday, September 1, we slept at the Mon-

tanvert, and I prided myself not a little on the obstinacy with which I had resisted an insane proposal to sleep in the hut at the Pierre de Béranger. It is my opinion—and I state it in defiance of the zealots who love to torture themselves at lairs combining cold bad air and general discomfort in the highest degree—that no policy is worse than that of gaining an hour in the morning at the expense of a bad night. Indeed, as a rule, nothing is gained; because it is generally possible to reach the said lairs over the easier ground below by the time at which it would in any case be possible to start for the more difficult climb above. But, right or wrong, I have done with sleeping in anything but beds, always excepting fresh hay. A mountain which involves a night on the rocks is a mountain which my sense of duty to my family imperatively forbids me to undertake. When we started from the Montanvert at one o'clock, by the light of a waning moon, I was in a thoroughly peaceful frame of mind. Quiet slumber had come to me in a decently good bed, and its calming influence still rested over me as I moved in a half doze along the well-known track up the Mer de Glace. The night was one of those questionable ones in which the mountains seem as if they had been painted against the sky in moist colours which had 'run'; they were surrounded by a faint misty halo, which blurred their sharp outlines; light clouds drew an occasional veil across the moon, and even when it shone out the rays were feeble and uncertain. I ought, I suppose, to have been annoyed by the prospect of indifferent weather, and perhaps in more enthusiastic days I might have been restless; as it was, I seemed to be continuing a peaceful dream; the moon was nothing but a dim night-light; the clouds were muslin curtains swaying sleepily in front of her; the little party silently plodding in front of me were such figures as one watches in a half-dream, moving monotonously yet never seeming to advance; and the huge glacier itself lay ice-bound in a slumber almost death-like, except that the booming sound of a distant moulin suggested that the monster was peacefully snoring. Brilliant moonshine on the mountains is crisp, frosty, and stimulating; but in such a night as this Nature has that watery, tremulous, and rather shambling aspect, which she sometimes wears to a gentleman lurching homewards under London gaslights just before dawn; only here the change was without and not within us; the moon herself, not our little party, was in the state so vividly described by the poet as 'na' that fou',' but 'just a drappie in her ee'; and the stern voice of the mountains was for once sentimental, not to say maudlin. Gradually daylight straggled down to us, but through ever-increasing masses of cloud. Far over head, a faint flush

upon the loftiest vapours showed that the sun was rising, but the lower strata only grew more black and angry as the lights and shadows became more pronounced. The Aiguille Verte, in particular, was shrouded in vast masses of gloomy vapour, which clung throughout the day to his grim cliffs; another body of cloud, of even more threatening aspect, was suspended in mid-air across the Mer de Glace. So dismal was the prospect, that after our first meal in a crevasse I threw out a suggestion that we were only wasting our time by perseverance. Luckily, a sterner sense of duty prevailed, and we toiled up the glacier till, about eight o'clock, we were seated on its highest plateau. Close above us, as we knew, rose the final rock-tower of the Mont Mallet, and we also knew vaguely that the col of which I have spoken was in our immediate neighbourhood. But we were now in the position of men who, having climbed a long ladder, find that they are only knocking their heads against the ceiling—a ceiling composed, in our case, of the dense masses which were hanging in that painfully uniform formation 'the under-roof of doleful grey,' so well known to luckless mountaineers, and cutting off the heads of all the peaks at a height of about 11,000 feet. There was nothing to be done but to eat and then to smoke, and then to discuss the length of time during which we were bound in honour to wait. A few shifts in the gathering vapours permitted occasional glimpses upwards, and forbade us entirely to despair. Suddenly, the keen-eyed Wallroth exclaimed 'Chamois!' and pointed upwards towards the rocks of the Mallet. There, in fact, through a gap in the clouds, appeared a chamois, prancing down towards us, and giving his shrill whistle of alarm. The vapours instantly drifted back again, and Melchior was ready with an ingenious theory. We, he said, had frightened the chamois upwards; the animal had tried the rocks, and finding them impassable, was coming downwards and reconnoitring the enemy. The inference was that the rocks which had repelled a chamois would probably be impracticable for us. Having uttered this gloomy opinion with an air of considerable satisfaction, Melchior sat down, and cheerfully observed that he had foreseen, from the time we started, that we should be stopped by the weather. Rather annoyed at this application of the 'I told you so' formula, I was just about to retort, when the wind took the words out of my mouth. Puffing aside the vapour-curtain, it revealed a lovely little glacier rising at a gentle slope towards the col which we had marked from below as the stepping-stone to the summit. We sprang hastily to our feet, and pushed

forwards. Climbing an easy snow-slope, and cutting a few steps, we found ourselves well on the glacier, and scarcely a hundred feet lower than the col. Ten minutes more, and we should have won the day. The cup, so despairingly regarded, was suddenly presented to our lips; two steps more, and it was as suddenly dashed away; for the glacier was rent from side to side by a monster crevasse; and a wall of ice varying in height from (at a guess) twenty to a hundred feet fairly blocked all further progress. Without a ladder all direct assault was hopeless, and the fearfully steep cliffs of ice by which the glacier was bounded on both sides seemed to make it impossible to turn the obstacle. Melchior was furious, and tried to force a way up a very nasty mixture of smooth rock and ice on our left. He hacked away vigorously for a time, and finally announced to me his opinion that an ascent was possible, but that the descent would be dangerous. It was, in fact, one of those places where it was impossible to make satisfactory progress in consequence of the underlying rock; and, of course, the danger would be increased when we could not see to place our feet. In other words, it was not a place for one who had long ago forsworn dangerous expeditions. Accordingly, I gave the word for retreat with a complacency which rather disgusted my more sanguine friends; but the comfort with which one can consult safety rather than glory is the great advantage of a *blasé* state of mind. For Melchior it was a bitter fate: to be beaten by a second-rate peak; to be beaten when at the very verge of success; and to be beaten in accordance with the predictions of Chamouni was a triple vexation. More than once he returned to the assault, but only to find it worse than before; and indeed the precautions which even he had to use in returning were such as forcibly to suggest the impropriety of an attack by less experienced performers. We retired at length sulkily and grimly, and discussing the possibility of some other route; when suddenly, as we reached once more the scene of our last meal, another puff of wind revealed the rocks on which we had seen the chamois. As seen from the Glacier de Lêchaud, this face of the Mont Mallet has somewhat the appearance of a small model of the Matterhorn, and it scarcely required Melchior's ingenious argument from the chamois to convince us of the hopelessness of its rocks. But now, to our surprise and delight, it became at once evident that, as in so many other cases, the rocks looked worse from below than above, and, in short, that there was a fair prospect of climbing them with ease. The hour, however, was late, and the weather doubtful, and a night on the glacier would have been a probable result

of an attempt to finish our mountain off-hand. We returned to Chamouni by about 3.30, and reported the result of our operations. M. Loppé, to our great pleasure, agreed to accompany us in another attack; and here occurred the second difficulty about guides, to which I have referred above. A jovial porter, one Alexandre Tournier agreed to join us; and after attending a concert at Chamouni on Sunday evening, started at 11 P.M., and reached the Montanvert a little before 1, just in time to join us. He walked all day pluckily and cheerfully, and I commend him to future travellers. The moon still favoured us, and the night was clearer and frostier, and far more promising. The deep rosy hue of a few lofty clouds at sunrise induced the weatherwise to prophesy bad weather for the next day—a prophecy which was of course utterly wrong—but for the present our prospects were good. We reached the foot of the rocks an hour earlier than before, after much chaff about the supposed horrors of the glacier, and immediately addressed ourselves to the climb. It will be a sufficient indication of our route to any one who may care to follow our steps, that if the face of the Mont Mallet be compared to the north-east face of the Matterhorn—and I have already noticed the faint resemblance—our route would correspond to a climb by the Hörnli arête till near the summit; when we crossed diagonally the face analogous to that visible from the Riffel, and then, almost immediately below the summit, crossed still another face, and thus found ourselves on a ridge analogous to the Breuil arête. The rocks were rotten, but nowhere seriously difficult; and part of the lowest arête was composed of ice, which delayed us by the necessity of step-cutting. This might perhaps have been avoided, but it is useless to give indications which cannot be made plain without much detail, and which would be superfluous to anyone standing with a good guide at the foot of the rocks. I will only say that the spiral motion which we adopted at the top was caused by the fact that the highest pinnacle is apparently inaccessible from the arête, which would have led us straight to its base. When we had crossed the first face of rock, Melchior had detached himself from the line, and went on to examine the route. It was long before he returned; though avalanches of stones testified to the fact that he was clambering somewhere amongst the disintegrated rocks of the summit. When at length he reappeared, he was more excited than usual. 'It will be very difficult,' he announced, 'but go we must.' Wallroth enthusiastically seconded the remark, whilst I showed my philosophic spirit by announcing that I would not risk my valuable neck for two

Mont Mallets. A short climb, however, revealed the true nature of the case, and proved that Melchior's words required interpretation. There was difficulty, it is true, but there was no danger, and the difficulty concerned Melchior far more than anybody else. The ridge on which we stood was interrupted by a huge rock, 'literally overhanging,' viciously smooth, and about fifteen feet in height. Melchior paid to it the unusual respect of taking off his coat, which he solemnly deposited on the rocks. Then he somehow fastened himself to the opposing rock, and helped by a shove from Cachat's axe, executed a singular caper in mid-air, which placed him in the right line of ascent; and finally, by a dexterous wriggle, reached the summit of the cliff. It was my fate to follow; and though expecting to need assistance, I expected also to do something towards raising my own weight. Never was expectation more signally falsified. In a second I was as helpless a bundle as ever was hoisted on board ship by ropes and pulleys. My companions, I rejoiced to see, were equally incapable; and the means by which my old friend had surmounted the force of gravity remained to me, as to them, an inexplicable mystery. This difficulty once surmounted, a couple of steps placed us on the top of the mountain in a state of more than usual excitement and satisfaction. We shook hands heartily, indulged in frantic howls, scrupulously ascended the very highest fragment of stone, and then, whilst the guides erected a cairn, I lighted the inevitable pipe and proceeded to contemplate the view. Light clouds hid the more distant ranges, and revealed only one glimpse of Mont Blanc; his proportions are perhaps more magnificent from this than from any other side, and we saw them to the highest advantage above the great snow-fields which feed the Glacier du Géant. The point of view is indeed one of singular merit, as giving perhaps the most complete panorama of all the mighty ice-streams which combine to form the Mer de Glace. So much may be readily understood by the maps; but one special object absorbed most of our attention, and I will venture to say that, in its way, it is one of the most striking in the Alps. From our feet a terrible precipice plunged down abruptly to the wild Glacier du Tacul; whilst just across the head of the glacier rose the astonishing pinnacle of the Dent du Géant.* Some mountaineers had been prowling round its base with a view to an assault; and their verdict, as reported to me by Christian Lauener, was to the effect that an ascent might be

* The illustration, as it is hardly necessary to say, represents a different side of the Dent du Géant from that which is visible from the Mont Mallet.

possible with the help of rockets and a sufficient allowance of rope. How that may be I know not; but the first thought that occurred to all of us as we looked at our tremendous neighbour was 'Nobody will ever get up that peak by fair means.' Of course it is impossible to say, after the Mont Cenis tunnel, what may not be within the resources of the engineer's art; but without stooping to some of those artifices which the mountaineer regards with the horror aroused in regard to other pursuits by the epithet 'unsportsmanlike,' no one, I venture to say with unusual confidence, will ever climb the Dent du Géant. Seen from the Montanvert, it looks precipitous enough; but one may cherish the belief that it is approachable from the rear. The view from the Mont Mallet at once dispels that pleasing illusion. At the time it reminded me of one of those quaint flint implements which suggests to us that our remote ancestors were not altogether unacquainted with the miseries of shaving. Take the sharpest of those flakes, which served the purposes of a razor or a knife, magnify it till it is some 200 feet in height, and then place it almost vertically but, if anything, rather leaning over towards the Italian side, and you have some notion of the Dent du Géant as seen from the Mont Mallet. The Aiguille Dru may, for aught I know, be climbed; the Charmoz and the Aiguille Blaitière are perhaps accessible; but if anybody, by fair climbing, ever reaches the summit of the Dent du Géant, I can only say that my ideas of the capacities of human nature will be materially enlarged. I have not, it is true, examined the peak from all possible points of view, and some mysterious couloir may have escaped me; but I feel little hesitation in asserting that 'inaccessible' ought still to remain in the dictionary till that strange obelisk has mouldered away to its base.

It is time, however, to turn to our descent; and yet I have little to say except that the range of Périades presents a dozen or two of minor pinnacles, each of them as inaccessible as the Dent du Géant, though not of such colossal proportions. With a passing glance at their grotesque shapes, we rapidly descended the glacier; and finally, if my memory serves me rightly, reachd Chamouni, drenched to the skin by a thunderstorm, about 7 P.M. The zeal which formerly induced me to make a note of the precise time, 'including halts,' occupied in the expedition, has disappeared; but I seem to recollect that the ascent took about ten hours. Probably, it might be done rather more quickly, if anybody cares to repeat it; and the walk has many merits to those who wish really to appreciate the grandeur of the noble glacier system which we traversed.

And here my task must cease. I should wish, indeed, if so humble a performance were still regarded as worth description, to recount our subsequent ascent of Mont Blanc—to utter withering sarcasms against that Chamouni porter who calmly collapsed about half-an-hour beyond the Grands Mulets, and left Melchior to take care of two gentlemen alone—of the grand race which took place between a party which ascended by the Bosse and the rival party which followed the old route—of the cutting wind which threatened frost-bites, and made a stay on the summit impossible—and of many other exciting incidents which will never, I fear, find their way into print. They will be cherished not less affectionately by those who enjoyed them; for after all it is a great fact, and one which has of late years been too much forgotten, that there are few more charming expeditions in the Alps than the ascent of Mont Blanc in fine weather; and few, it may be added, more dangerous when the weather is bad. But on these matters I do not presume to speak at length. It is enough to say that, having once lapsed from the paths of virtue, I found the flowery track of vice so agreeable, that I never withdrew more sadly from the glorious Alps, or watched more fondly the last glimpses of cliff and glacier, as we entered the gorge below Sallenches, on our return to London fog. If I have had no thrilling incidents to recount, I feel a kind of senile affection for that child of my old age, if I may so call him, the Mont Mallet, and hope that he may not be found altogether unworthy of the attention of more industrious members of the Alpine Club.

The Weisshorn from the North. By J. H. Kitson.

AS I only date my existence as a mountaineer from the time when the last great peaks had succumbed to my more fortunate predecessors, I have had nothing left to achieve but the addition of new faces to old mountains.

I had long looked with eyes of eager admiration upon the Weisshorn, in my opinion the most beautiful of all Alpine peaks; but it was not until August 1871 that I had an opportunity of seriously trying the mountain, although in 1866 Almer and I had looked up its southern arête from the Schallen Joch to find a way to the summit. That arête is so steep and broken, that, if possible at all, it would be necessary to sleep among the rocks close to the Schallen Joch, and have a long summer day for the expedition. Melchior had decided against the