The Ascent of Mont Colon. By G. E. Foster. Read before the Alpine Club, April 9, 1871.

THAT an account of an expedition begun in 1866 and finished in 1867 should appear at this late date may seem to require some explanation. The only one, however, which I can supply is, that the requests of the Editor of the 'Alpine Journal' are, like royal commands, to be obeyed without question, though wondered at.

In the summer of 1866 Hans Baumann and I left Zinal for Evolena by the Col du Grand Cornier, a pass made for the first time two years before. Our knowledge of it was confined to the brief particulars given by its discoverers in the 'Journal,' and these certainly did not lead me to expect that it would turn out, as it did, one of the most difficult pieces of ice work I had met with or have since experienced. Had it been otherwise, I should not have undertaken to act as porter throughout the day; and on our arrival at Evolena I readily fell into Baumann's suggestion, that as our programme involved stopping at châlets for the next few nights, we should be accompanied by a porter of the usual description. The man engaged in this capacity afforded us, unintentionally, abundance of amusement; and here, parenthetically, I may protest against the abuse so often poured forth on this class. Apart from my private objection to making myself a beast of burden, many of my most amusing recollections centre around my porters. Thus this very fellow last summer, after walking half-an-hour with Moore and myself, objected to the weight of his load; and his appearance, when we at once shouldered it ourselves and packed him off, is a thing to be remembered. On another occasion with Walker on the Weishorn our porter afforded us laughter for a week, by bolting at a particularly nasty place, exclaiming: 'Zu aller Ewigkeit will ich nicht darunter gehen,' though, as we lost much time and got into no little danger in consequence, we did not appreciate the joke at the moment.

To return to the Mont Colon. I hope I shall not be accused of exaggeration if I say that it has a certain likeness to a decapitated Matterhorn. With its triangular shape, and the long ridge running down from it, dividing the Glacier d'Arolla from the watershed of the Otemma Glacier, resembling the Breuil ridge of the Matterhorn, there are at least many mountains more dissimilar. But in the Mont Colon the cottage-like summit of the Matterhorn is replaced by a level table-land of much less elevation, but still attaining the respectable height

of 11,957 feet. In Mr. Ball's Guide, the height of the Mont Colon is given as 12,624 feet; but this is a mistake, those figures being applicable to the neighbouring but perfectly distinct summit, further south, called L'Evêque in the large edition of the Carte Dufour in course of publication. This peak is just visible from Arolla, a slender cone of snow, but notwithstanding its superior height is completely dwarfed by the massive proportions of its neighbour the Mont Colon proper. As in the similar case of the Wetterhorn and Mittelhorn, the lower peak is very much the most difficult of access, and the most attractive to a mountaineer. The glacier on the lofty plain which forms the actual summit of the Mont Colon overhangs the northern face of the mountain towards the Pigne d'Arolla so as to render it inaccessible, while the eastern cliffs above the Glacier d'Arolla are so steep and forbidding that we concluded that the western or Otemma face, which we could not see, must be the one to attack.

This conclusion Baumann and I came to as the result of a survey made on the afternoon of August 3, 1866, accompanied by the porter before-mentioned, who was shod in a wonderful-looking pair of Wellington boots, of which he was vastly proud. To effect this survey we had mounted some way along the route of the Col de Colon, and the cloudy weather made it a very imperfect one. In descending we halted at the foot of the ice-fall of the Vuibez Glacier to examine whether its reputed impassability was borne out by facts, or whether we could force a way up it, and so save ourselves a long détour. The ice-fall is divided into two by a ridge of rocks, and we thought that, though the Colon side was impassable below and the other a mere pile of threatening séracs above, we might combine the two with safety early in the morning if the rocks could be passed. I may here mention that as Baumann could only talk German and our porter only French, the latter was entirely ignorant of our plans—a fact to which I believe we owed the honour of his company the next morning.

I am glad to say the hotel at Arolla is now better than it was at the time of which I am writing, but it was with most unfeigned delight I abandoned its flea-infested couches and found myself *en route* at 3.30 next day, though the weather looked most unpromising for a '*grande course*.' At the foot of the Vuibez Glacier we had to halt for half-an-hour while a storm of sleet passed over. The first half of the ice-fall nearest to the Pigne d'Arolla presented little difficulty, but in order to cross to the other side we had to pass along a crack

in a very steep and smooth precipice of rock. This proceeding called forth from our porter most vehement remonstrances, which were frequently repeated at intervals of the day's work, but met with little attention, as they were quite unintelligible to Baumann, and I did not think them worth translating.

This difficulty past, the ascent to the Glacier d'Otemma was easy, but there the fog was so dense that the mountain was invisible, and we saw little more of it that day. Going back as our porter suggested would have been too humiliating, so we marched on parallel to the face of the mountain, seeking in vain for any promising couloir, and ignorant of a bergschrund, along whose covered brink we walked until Baumann's sudden and complete disappearance in it, with a jerk so violent as to bring me to my knees, unpleasantly awakened us to its existence. To get our porter to venture near it so as to cut the snow away and allow me to pull Baumann up was no easy task, but at length it was done, and crossing the schrund we approached a couloir which led up to the long arête before mentioned.

The top of the couloir was lost in mist, but we so soon reached it, at the same time topping the ridge, that I knew we must have left the main mass of the mountain behind us, and prepared myself for a prolonged struggle with the bitter cold wind if it should be necessary to follow the arête to the summit. Turning to the left we clambered on, only knowing that the general direction must be right, until, while Baumann was seeking a way up a tower of rock, I chanced to look round, half laughing, to answer some remark of the porter—whose blue face, chattering teeth, and constant invocations to his favourite saints showed that both mind and body were in an uncomfortable condition—and saw, three or four hundred feet below, through a break in the mist, a steep tributary glacier running down into the Glacier d'Arolla from the ridge we were on, with a snowy chimney descending on to it, which lay between our position and the main mass of the mountain, as I conceived, thus offering a comparatively sheltered route. Baumann, too, caught sight of it before it was enveloped in mist again, and the next minute reported from the top of the tower that the arête was no longer practicable, and that it would be better to try and get into the couloir. This suggestion being in German, was lost on our porter, whose face of delight at our retreat soon changed into one of blank consternation, as he realised the work before us.

The rocks were very steep, and in the mist it was impossible to pick our way, so with a 'Sei achtsam!' Baumann went straight

down. The work during the next half-hour was as nasty as could be desired by the most adventurous member of the Club. Unable to see far before us, the mist always exaggerating the danger, and the wretched brittle rocks slippery with ice and constantly giving way when least expected, our descent was a kind of purgatory, so that even Baumann expressed his delight when we at last reached the couloir we were aiming at. The snow was hard, and constantly swept by falling stones, so we crossed to the further side, and then recommenced our ascent. The rocks were crumbling and difficult, and when at length we came to a stop before a most inaccessible-looking place, our grumbling porter broke out, 'Oh mon Dieu! if we go up there we shall never come down again.' For once I translated this to Baumann, and his cheerful reply, 'Well then we shall get down somewhere else,' did not seem to give the unhappy man much comfort. With a great effort and a vigorous shove from me, the leader got up; and I only hope that he had not as much trouble to haul me up as I had afterwards with our frightened porter, whose arms and legs seemed for the moment perfectly useless.

After this the work became comparatively easy—for all things are comparative—and but for the wind and sleet would have been really enjoyable. Now I am not like some of my friends to whom even a moderate breeze is detestable. I think next to the enjoyment of climbing a stiff arête in still weather, comes the enjoyment of climbing one in a good healthy breeze. The wind surging wildly against the crags adds excitement, and gives a pleasant, though possibly deceitful, sense of power as each obstacle is overcome in spite of it. Still, as the dowager duchess said when asked to invite an aldermanic knight, 'one must draw the line somewhere,' and I draw it at sleet; in truth, climbing in bitter cold wind accompanied by stinging showers of sleet is to me the acme of misery. On this occasion wind and sleet outdid themselves, and smote my smarting face until I scarcely knew whether it was blood or water that trickled down my beard and froze there. The porter of course availed himself of this state of things to urge a retreat with fresh energy, but all in vain. The couloir alongside which we were climbing thinned out, and we were again on the arête. Having through the mist caught a glimpse of the flat glacier top of the mountain, with a thrill of coming victory we pressed on, in the full conviction that another quarter of an hour would see the work accomplished. Suddenly Baumann stopped short, and, on joining him, I saw with the bitterest disappointment that between us and our peak was a

chasm, scarce twenty feet across, through which the wind and mist were pouring with a fury that utterly prevented our seeing its depth. Twice did Baumann vainly try to descend into it, the second time losing his footing altogether on the slippery rocks, and only recovering it with some difficulty by the help of the rope. We were fairly, or unfairly, beaten, though so near victory that the summit was not more than thirty feet above our heads, and did not seem so much. Delay in such a temperature was out of the question, so merely piling up a stone man, we turned in despair.

Facilis descensus Averni. The remark is not new, but may serve to explain the fact that, somehow or other, we got down easier than we had got up. It seemed only a short time before we reached the spot which had called forth from our porter the pathetic remonstrance quoted above. Here, after spying about a bit, Baumann went first, so as to point out the proper places for his followers' feet. Next I lowered the porter down, and then for the first time found myself in the position of descending a really nasty place without assistance. I am not ashamed to confess that I did not like it, and if any of my readers fancy themselves in a climbing point of view, I can only advise them to put themselves in a similar position, and if they do not learn modesty they must be incurable. The natural instinct to stay where one is does not help much, and, on this occasion, having got down half way—I cannot exactly say how—my frozen fingers and wandering toes declined to hold on any longer; so, giving Baumann warning that I was coming down with a run, and that he had better catch me, I straightway let go, and, much to my relief and his own, found that he was able to obey my instructions. As soon as I had recovered my legs we resumed our way, he skirting the side of the couloir until it became less steep, and Baumann thought we might safely take to it if we descended backwards. By no advice or exhortation could our porter be induced to adopt so unusual a system of progression. The natural consequence was that as the snow was really hard and steep, after a few steps his heels flew up, and he fell into my arms in anything but the usual attitude chosen for that performance. Luckily, he did not knock me out of the steps, and, moved by some rather powerful polyglot expletives discharged at him by us both simultaneously, consented thenceforth to imitate our manner of descent. In this he was more successful, saving that, as I guided his feet into the steps, he availed himself of each recurring opportunity of jamming his Wellington boots on my fingers, a performance which when prolonged beyond a

certain length of time became aggravating. Fortunately the snow soon grew softer, and gave us a rapid glissade to the bottom, and as I surveyed his helpless descent head first my feelings were assuaged. A little dodging among the crevasses of the secondary glacier brought us to the moraine of the Glacier d'Arolla, where we halted for a meal and to take off the rope. Slowly and sadly we wound our way down after these operations were completed, gazing at the misty crags we had just left, till I suddenly found myself up to the neck in a concealed crevasse. A vigorous struggle with the help of Baumann's hand got me out of this, perhaps the most real danger I encountered during the day, and, aided by another glissade, we landed safely on the lower glacier, and soon after reached our inn at 5.30 P.M.

The next day, which was fine, we crossed the Col de Colon with a special view of examining the rocks more closely, as Baumann thought he had discovered a way among them. The following year found us again at Zermatt, with the intention of trying this route. Having had enough of Arolla porters, I engaged Johann Krönig as second guide, and resolved to cross the Col du Mont Brule to Arolla. On starting at about 3.30 we learnt that a German with a cohort of guides and porters had started two hours before us for the same pass. Previous experience had taught me that Arolla, with all its merits, possessed but one bed that was tolerably free from fleas, and my desire to occupy this, combined with the instinctive wish to overtake any forerunners, led us on at such a pace that we reached the summit of the pass with the German, and running down the other side arrived at Arolla in ten and a half hours from Zermatt. But a Nemesis was at hand, for on rising the next morning at 2.30 I found Baumann confined to his bed with decidedly feverish symptoms, whether the result of our too rapid pace or not I cannot say. Luckily our German friend proved to be a medical man, and consented, good Samaritan that he was, to see Baumann, and though his prescription was merely as much tea as could be poured down his throat, I found him towards evening so much better as to be likely to be fit for work again next day. The amusements to be indulged in at Arolla are not of a very varied kind, and not liking to go far away, I had hard work to kill time. I studied the three or four pages of writing composing the *livre des voyageurs* until I was sick of it, sketched and smoked till I was tired, then, as a last resource, washed certain of my clothes, which seemed to require it, and was only saved from an intolerable fit of the blues by the hope that it was the last day I

should have to pass in such miserable fashion. It was accordingly with no little relief that at 3.45 on the morning of July 31st I found myself again starting for the Mont Colon, the weather this time being all that could be wished. We proceeded along the ordinary Col de Colon route until above the ice-fall of the glacier and a little beyond the western arête of the mountain, and then struck boldly up the face. Of the work that ensued I will only say, that, though really difficult, and often sufficiently so to render considerable détours necessary, there was nothing sensational, and that after about three hours' hard climbing we struck the arête just where the rocks gave way to a short but very steep ridge of snow, which led us to the table-land forming the summit of the mountain. Several points, or rather mounds, of this are of nearly equal height, but the highest lies a little south of the arête we had climbed, and the stone man we built on it is visible from Arolla. For nearly two hours we sat on the rocks basking in the warm sunshine of a brilliant windless day—the most perfect contrast possible to our previous year's experience. The view in all directions, especially of the Oberland range, struck me as peculiarly fine, but one is apt to be prejudiced under such circumstances. When at length we unwillingly moved, Baumann started to inspect the ridge by which we had so nearly attained the summit the previous year, as he thought the descent by it would be easier than by the way we had come, if the cleft should turn out practicable when examined in fine weather. Alas! never had the elements played mountaineers a scurvier trick than they had us on our first essay. The cleft which, wrapped in impenetrable mist, and its sides coated with ice, had seemed so insurmountable an obstacle, now revealed itself as a gap some fifty feet deep and twenty wide, which ten minutes brisk but far from dangerous climbing sufficed to cross, and we stood again by our old stone man, doubtful whether to be vexed or amused that we should have been so easily beaten. The descent along the now familiar way was quickly, or apparently quickly, accomplished. The 'mauvais pas' almost ceased to merit the name, for, sustained by Baumann with the rope above, and with Kronig to point out the best direction below, I scrambled down with no great difficulty. The nonchalance with which Baumann descended last without aid further lowered my self-conceit, which nothing but the fact that Kronig had declined to descend the place unroped kept alive at all.

The remainder of our way to Arolla was without incident, but on arriving there at about 4.0 P.M. I was astonished to

find a small group of tourists, now gazing through a telescope at our stone man, now admiring the work of a young artist, whose delight was extreme at the coincidence that the peak should have had its portrait taken, as he flattered himself, for the first time, on the day on which it was first ascended.

MOUNTAINEERING ON THE PACIFIC.

THE following account of an ascent of Mount Baker, by a member of the Club, Mr. Coleman, the author of 'Scenes from the Snowfields,' is condensed from a very interesting article originally published in 'Harper's Monthly Magazine':—

In these times of volcanic activity, when from all quarters we have accounts of the heaving and rending of the earth's surface, and the whole Pacific slope is agitated with the throes of earthquake, some account of the first ascent of Mount Baker, which has been active within the memory of man, may not be uninteresting. At a time, too, when the Alpine Club finds its occupation gone, the opening out of a new field for exploration deserves attention.

Mount Baker is the most northerly of those great cones which dot the Cascade range, and is only fourteen miles south of the great boundary line cut through the forests which divide the American and English possessions. It forms the most striking feature in the attractive scenery around the Fuca Straits and the Puget Sound. Amidst numerous groups of islands (the Western Cyclades) and pine-clad heights, like another 'Snowy Olympus,' it towers above—the silent sentinel of a solitary land.

The mountain may be approached on the south-eastern side by the Skadgett River, taking Utsalady, on Puget Sound, as the starting point; on the western side by the river Lummi, which flows into Bellingham Bay, taking Seahome as the starting-point; and on the northern side by a trail from Fraser River, taking Fort Hope as the starting-point. For the third attempt the approach by the Lummi was chosen. General M'Kenny, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Washington Territory, kindly placed four trustworthy Indians at my command. To the official sanction thus given, and the fitness of our dusky companions for their duties, we were indebted for our security in ascending the river. We cannot forget the expertness displayed in many difficulties by Squock and Talum. Though a Flat-head, Squock is very handsome, and, with his swarthy face and long thin limbs, resembles an Arab.

Sure of such good company, I determined to start from Victoria on August 4th, 1868. Travelling is very enjoyable in these inland waters. The bottom of the canoe is spread with small branches and twigs, and then covered with matting of native manufacture. Blankets are then placed against the thwarts and form a soft cushion, against which one can recline and be as comfortable as in a first-class railway carriage. When camping on shore at night, the mats are spread out on the beach, and (with one's blankets) make a soft bed. Gliding along in our canoe,