



THE TOUR DU GRAND ST. PIERRE
FROM THE COL DE DROSA.

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A WEEK IN THE GRAIANS IN 1867. By C. C. TUCKER.
Read before the Alpine Club, June 4, 1872.—(*Continued.*)

THE first half of our week in the Graians having been turned to good account, it remained to settle our plans for the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday—our imagination being limited by the necessity of reaching Cormayeur on the evening of the day last named. Two schemes were proposed, each of which found its supporters. The first, and perhaps the most generally-favoured suggestion, was to betake ourselves on the Thursday to the chalets of Le Poucet, and to ascend the Grivola on the Friday. The second was to cross the Col de Grancrou to Ceresole, and find our way back to the Val Savaranche by a new pass over a glacier marked in the map as the Glacier du Grand Tetre. There was much to be said for the first plan. There was a specious air of nobility about it which was attractive. We had Mr. Ball's authority for holding the Grivola to be the first object of the aspiring mountaineer in the district of Cogne, while the proposal appealed to the less exalted side of our nature by involving a walk on Thursday of three or four hours only, and thus making it possible to combine ultimate glory with the present delights of a long lie in bed.

On the other hand, it was urged with undeniable force that it was a shame to waste what promised to be a glorious day in a somewhat dull walk to a mere chalet, while a fine view from the Col de Grancrou was morally certain. An ascent of the Grivola, too, on Friday, would leave us no good expedition for the Saturday consistent with reaching Cormayeur on the same evening; a new pass was quite as exciting as an old peak, if not more so; after all, we need not start so very early for the Col de Grancrou, since Mr. Tuckett had started at 9 o'clock, and had succeeded in making his way across (the special pleader

forgot to add that he had also succeeded in being benighted, and did not reach Ceresole till the following morning). Lastly, it was urged, the path of duty ultimately coincided with that of pleasure, inasmuch as our rest-day would be spent at Ceresole, which there was reason to believe was a land flowing with milk and honey, and amply provided with that Asti Spumante which was denied to the severer climate or more ascetic habits of Cogne. An argument pushed to so fascinating a climax carried conviction with it; and at six o'clock on Thursday morning we turned our backs upon Cogne and its Grivola, and trudged steadily up the Combe de Valnontey. It was a charming walk of some two hours to the foot of the glacier; a perfect morning, meadows steeped in dew, groups of timber, with the pure fall of the Grancrou, and the massive shelves of snow and ice that lead up to the Grand Paradis gleaming through every interval.

The Col de Grancrou is a long, but certainly a worthy pass. The difficulties on the north side fall strictly within the limit of mountaineering science. An icefall, much addicted to sending down showers of falling stones; above, a labyrinth of crevasses requiring careful steering; and close to the very summit an icebank of exceeding hardness, defended, when we were there (and I suspect always), by a formidable bergschrund, are obstacles sufficient to try the patience and exercise the skill of a party led by good guides.

It took us nearly seven hours, not including halts, to reach the summit from Cogne. Time, however, might doubtless be gained by keeping well to the left (i.e. the true right of the glacier) all the way up. We had received a hint to this effect from Mr. Tuckett, and so long as we followed his instructions all went easily.

The difficulties on the other side of the pass are of quite a different order, and resolve themselves into a problem of path-finding. In order to reach Ceresole, which lies a good deal to the west of the Col, it is necessary to bear constantly from left to right, and to descend into Val d'Orco at a point far higher up the stream than would be reached by a direct descent. On the other hand, all the lateral ravines descending from the neighbourhood of the Col to the main valley trend from right to left. The consequence is, that the traveller making for Ceresole has to cross a series of spurs, and the walking becomes fatiguing enough. Our chief dilemma was at a place where a broad and easy way plunged down through a gorge to our left, and a toilsome-looking zigzag led up to a notch visible in the high and rocky spur that bounded our view on the right. We adopted the latter course, confident that a track so well made

(it was one of the king's paths) could lead us into no difficulty. We reckoned, however, without our host, for on reaching the gap the path abruptly came to an end at a sort of hunting-lair, leaving us disconsolate at the top of some awkward-looking rocks with the wished-for pastures visible far below. It was annoying, but too late to turn back; and the rocks, on inspection, looked possible, so we chanced it. Suffice it to say that we got down with less difficulty than we had expected, and were soon racing over the pastures beneath the eye of a fierce afternoon sun—Freshfield far ahead, followed by Carson at top speed, followed at a respectful distance by Backhouse, sorely grumbling, followed at a still more respectful distance by the guides and myself. The lower end of the Scalare, or ladder-gorge, down the steps of which the main stream of the Orco tumbles from its mountain-reservoir, was quickly entered. The shades of evening were already gathering in the deep-cut channel, when, at a more moderate pace, we again began to mount, and it was with surprised delight that when we reached the top of the ascent we found the sun still sending a slanting beam across the upper valley, rich with forest, and grandly ruled by the triple-crowned Levanna. In a few moments the ray had disappeared, and night had fairly set in before we actually reached our destination—the little *stabilimento* of Ceresole.

When we were within a few yards of the door, I saw a startling change come over the face of one of my companions, who had been till this moment in a state of supreme contentment at the success of our day, and the prospect of more than Egyptian fleshpots at the end of it. A few steps more, and the mystery was solved. Garlic is a plant to which I myself am not over partial; though, like everything else which I have met with, I can eat it when I am hungry. But with my friend it is otherwise. So exquisite is his sensitiveness to the most delicate approaches of this particular herb, and so apparent are his feelings on each such occasion in his face, that he had acquired among us the endearing title of 'the garlic barometer.' The storm-drum was not hoisted without a cause. Meat and bread, knives and plates, glasses—and, I believe, even the Asti Spumante of our aspirations—were all more or less tainted by the subtle perfume, and I fear my friend went well-nigh supperless to bed.

The few pale-faced invalids who were at the little mountain-station for the benefit of the waters looked upon us as simply incomprehensible, and made few advances towards us in consequence; but we found amusement enough in studying the

garrulous little waiter—the figure which, when I try to recall the distinctive features of Ceresole, presents itself to my mind's eye to the almost total exclusion of any other impression. Whether this worthy thought to practise the art of conversation when he had a chance, or was merely glad of an opportunity of blowing off at our expense the steam generated during months of silence, he treated us during our whole stay to torrents of Italian dashed with ingenious combinations of the four or five French words known to him, and in this fashion managed, I believe, to express nearly all he had to say—(a really remarkable achievement, and a comparatively easy task)—and about twenty times more than we were able to comprehend.

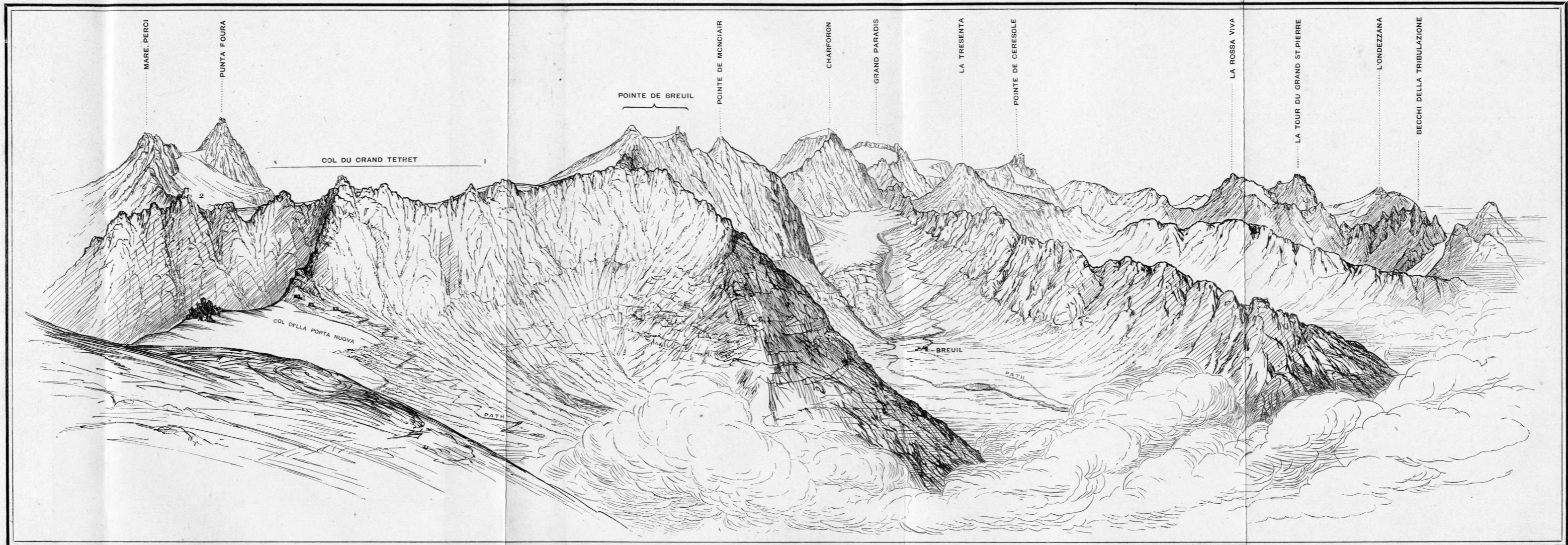
The whole of the next day was occupied by a stroll to the mineral spring to which Ceresole owes its being. We found the water slightly effervescing, deliciously cool, and acidulated—in short, better than mineral springs in general, and, as my friend remarked, wholly free from any vegetable taint when drunk in your own glass. The weather was again clear, but all day long there blew a furious gale of wind, bending the foliage of the valley, and whirling the snow from the horns of the Levanna. When we went to bed it was still roaring over the roof, and bursting against the windows, in a manner anything but suggestive of a happy day for the close of our Graian week. Meantime we congratulated ourselves that we had been all day in the valley, and not fighting with the mountaineer's most implacable foe among the wild ridges and couloirs of the Grivola.

We had laid severe injunctions on the little waiter to call us early. He dared not disobey, and rattled noisily at our doors at about two o'clock; but minded, if it were possible, to secure our custom for another day, he mingled his ministrations with a torrent of warnings against the tempest, which he affected to believe was still raging outside. In the midst of one's dreaming it was difficult to believe that his 'vento orribile,' his 'inutile di levarsi,' his 'impossibile di partire,' had no foundation in facts; and it was only when Freshfield assured himself by inspection that the storm-cloud was represented by bright starlight, and the hurricane by a faint and refreshing breeze of dawn, that we became conscious that our path of duty was the mountain-side, and that if we wished to make a new pass, and reach Cormayeur that evening, the sooner we entered upon it the better. One more shock awaited us before we left the inn. The waiter, unable to detain us, thought to speed the parting guest with a graceful compliment, and presented each of us with his ice-axe, neatly branded with the

word 'Ceresole'! Luckily, the hardness of the wood stood in the way of a satisfactory impression, but, even as it was, I fear the poor little man was somewhat chilled by the disapprobation which greeted his humble effort to please.

Our programme for the day requires a few words of explanation. From the peak of *La Tresenta*, lying south of the *Grand Paradis*, there runs west and south-west a bold line of summits, broken in more than one place by deep and well-defined depressions. These summits, according to the latest cartographic authorities, are the *Cima di Charforon*, *Pointe de Monciair*, *Pointe de Breuil*, *Mare Perci*, *Punta Fourà*, and, lastly, the *Pointe de Nivolet*, close to the comparatively low gap of the *Col de la Croix de Nivolet*, the limit on the west of the *Stabilimento of Ceresole* to the head of *Val Savaranche* would, we found, pass directly between the *Pointe de Breuil* on the east and the *Mare Perci* and *Punta Fourà* on the west, and would, if we calculated right, bisect the glacier of the *Grand Tetre* from end to end. And yet this pass, commanding splendid views as it must, and on the map far the shortest route to *Val d'Aosta*, had, till the year 1867, uniformly been rejected in favour of the lower, more circuitous, and in every way inferior *Col de la Croix de Nivolet*. Fortunately, mountaineers are proof against the superstition that the longest way round is the shortest way there; and we determined, if it were possible, to dethrone the *Col de la Croix de Nivolet* by a route more attractive to pedestrians, though not, perhaps, so well adapted to the less enterprising mule.

By three o'clock we were away and marching up the valley by the light of the fast-fading stars. Past the church of *Ceresole*, founded on a 'roche moutonnée,' and just at the spot where a brawling stream comes down the hill side on the right, we began the ascent. For some three hours the climb was severe, first along the course of the little torrent—where every stream-side flower was adorned by the night's frost with delicate filagree of crystals—and then away to the left to escape the temptation of a well-made and enticing path leading in the opposite direction. Soon we started a bouquetin, who had been taking advantage of the hours of darkness to crop the delicious herbage of the lower slopes forbidden to his tribe during the day. The *Levanna* increased in grandeur as we mounted; and a little after six, having made good progress, we sat down to enjoy the view, to breakfast, and discuss our further route. We had by this time entered a recess or shallow valley of smooth and water-worn rocks, interspersed



THE GRAND PARADIS GROUP FROM THE COCAGNA,

FROM A SKETCH BY A. ADAMS-REILLY.

with occasional patches of grass. Little tarns formed by the meltings of the snow-beds that lay here and there filled the hollows. A miniature glacier appeared on our left, and we agreed that we were not probably more than an hour distant from our Col, which could be none other than the obvious depression which lay straight ahead. There were, however, appearances which caused me a slight uneasiness. The rocks which bounded our valley on the left were indeed high and rugged enough to stand for the mass of the Punta Fourà and his fellows; but could the mild crest to our right, only a few hundred feet higher than the level at which we were, really be part of the main ridge, or the insignificant peak in which it culminates * really stand for the comparatively lofty mass of the Pointes de Breuil and Monciair? I had a horrid suspicion that our real way lay somewhere over the great wall of rock and couloir to our left; but in the meantime it was agreed to push on to our supposed Col, and settle the question of identity with fuller knowledge of the ground.

In $4\frac{1}{2}$ hrs. from the baths we found ourselves on the top. It is annoying to find on a wholly untrodden peak a substantial stone man. More humiliating still is the sensation, on proudly surmounting an original pass, of finding on the reverse side a broad and well-made path zigzagging up to one's very feet. Yet so it was. It was evident at a glance to every one of us that we were not on the north side of the chain at all, but looking down on a glen curving back to Val d'Orco, and that the secret of the Grand Tetre still lay untouched behind the rugged ridge to the left which had aroused my suspicions during the ascent.

Abraham Lincoln once, when asked his opinion of the earlier and unsuccessful siege operations of General Grant against Vicksburg, made use of a little apologue which will

* This peak, from which the panoramic sketch by Mr. Reilly is taken, is the highest point of a spur which diverges from the main chain in a SE. direction, and is called by Signor Baretto, in accordance with local usage, the Cocagna, in his paper entitled 'Studi sul Gruppo del Gran Paradiso,' in the 'Bullettino del Club Alpino Italiano,' vol. ii. This name is erroneously marked on the main chain in the Sardinian map, Mont Iséran sheet, nearly in the position occupied by the Pointe de Breuil, but is repeated somewhat smaller on the spur, and nearly in its true position, on the Cogne sheet of the map. The name of Cormaûn, which is also marked on the main chain in the same map, and belongs to a lower point of the same spur, is similarly repeated. The gap first reached by Mr. Tucker is now distinguished as the Col de la Porta Nuova.—R. C. NICHOLS.

serve to illustrate our present position. A certain garden suffered much from the depredations of a little pig, who used nightly to make his way into the cabbage-bed, in spite of the formidable worm-fence which had been erected to keep out intruders. Puzzled at the success of the pig, the owner of the garden made a closer search, when it was discovered that one of the logs forming the fence was hollow, and that the pig, entering from the outside by a hole at one end of the log, made his way into the cabbage-plot by a similar hole opening inside at the other. By a simple re-arrangement of the log, the owner brought both the holes to the outside of the fence, and watched the result. At his usual dinner-hour the little pig appeared, his tail absolutely curling with excitement at the prospect of the approaching meal, and entered his customary hole at the trot. His look of blank amazement when he emerged at the other end of the log and found himself still on the outside was left by the veteran rail-splitter to the imagination of his hearers. 'General Grant,' added he, 'is always running in like the little pig, but he always comes out on the same side.'

Emulating the perseverance which finally enabled the Federal commander to come out on the other side, we at once determined to repair our error while the day was still young. Our position with regard to the true watershed will be understood at a glance on reference to Mr. Reilly's admirable sketch. On our left and right as we faced the wall of rock were two slight depressions. We had a double inducement to select that on the right. It was to be reached by a rock-climb, while the other seemed to be defended by an ice couloir; it also dispensed us from returning on our tracks, always an odious necessity.* We accordingly descended a few feet into the glen, and crossed some broad banks of *débris* towards the base of the wall at the place where a funnel-shaped pile of snow seemed to indicate a gully. As we approached the spot, we were further encouraged by the sight of a couple of chamois, who took to the rocks just at the point selected by us. The climb proved stiff, although not sufficiently so to induce us to use the rope, and in two hours from the false col we drove our ice-axes through the corniche of snow which roofed the top of the ridge, and clambering through the hole thus made, found ourselves on the *névé* of the Glacier du Grand Tetre. There was

* An Italian party subsequently crossed the gap we had passed by, and thereby created a second Col du Grand Tetre, the most direct from the hamlet of Ceresole; our pass (numbered 1 in the woodcut) is preferable for those bound for the lower Val d'Orco.

no mistake this time ; the ridge separating us from the Glacier du Mont Corvé on our right, the Mare Perci, with its top strangely pierced and showing a patch of blue sky through its solid granite, on our left, and the broad and easy glacier stretching away at our feet, with the châteaux of Pont and the green pasturages of the Val Savaranche just showing over its white and ample folds.

Foreground and distance were alike enchanting. The rocks among which we sat were a-blaze with pink stonecrop. We had only to glance downwards to take in the whole length of Val d'Orco, till its bounding ridges melted into the Italian plain, or to raise our eyes to encounter the huge form of Mont Blanc towering above the nearer ranges. We had thought it impossible to have a clearer view of Italy than that gained from the Tour St. Pierre, but the atmosphere to-day was so pure that we could not only follow the golden threads of the rivers in their windings to join the Po, but clearly distinguish hedges, and even single trees upon the plain.

Our descent was very rapid, half run, half glissade. When we were half-way down the glacier, two chamois started from the moraine, and crossed in front of us, circling round within easy shot, or even stone's throw, in their endeavour to take refuge as soon as possible in the higher regions of the snow-field. They were instantly followed by thirty-four others, of every age and size, some indeed so young that one almost fancied they might have been captured by a fast runner. The guides were wild with excitement, and perhaps, in spite of penalties and gardes de chasse, two or three of the herd would have fallen, had Balley's gun been in his hands instead of safely stowed away with his eleven children in the cottage at St. Pierre. Immediately afterwards we came upon the bones of a bouquetin, apparently long dead. Further search was rewarded by the discovery of the horns, lying some distance below the skeleton, in one of the little runnels by which the surface-water of the glacier is carried off. They were a good deal damaged by the wet and exposure, but we were glad to carry them off as a remembrance of the beautiful, and hitherto unvisited, glacier of the Grand Tetré.

We quitted the glacier by its left bank, and reached Pont in some hour and a quarter from the Col, by a good cow-path. We walked sharply on to Val Savaranche, where the absurd individual who kept—and I trust (for the sake of those who study Nature in her most varied forms) still keeps—the inn, was livelier even than usual. The poor man was aware of the sobriquet of 'Marmot' which he had acquired, and

resented it greatly. He had, indeed, accused Payod on a previous visit of having been the author of the 'mauvaise plaisanterie,' and complained that he could no longer go down to Villeneuve without being chaffed. This, no one who was acquainted with his manners (those of a rather superior and very festive crétin) would find any difficulty in believing. He had been warned of our approach by the porter whom we had despatched the day before over the Col de Nivolet to secure us a carriage from Aosta, and had provided a fair luncheon for us in consequence.

Three hours more brought us to Villeneuve, where we found quite a panic prevailing; a man apparently having just died of cholera, and others lying ill. It is an ill wind however that blows no one any good, and the commercial spirit of the English saw in the unfortunate occurrence an opportunity of transferring to their vehicle the available fruit-stock of Villeneuve at greatly-reduced prices. The guides however partook of the cholera scare, and, though offered a share in the spoil, superstitiously refrained until the carriage had surmounted the great step in the Val d'Aosta, and they were full in sight of their native snows. Then their scruples vanished, and with the scruples the larger portion of the pears and apricots.

The glorious pass over the chain of Mont Blanc with which we closed this chapter of our tour does not come within the scope of a paper on the Graians. The latter are now too well known to need a panegyric. Suffice it to say that, what with the exceeding beauty of the region explored by us, the glorious weather we met with during those expeditions—and, I may add, the good fellowship which prevailed amongst our party—no summer tour ever afforded (to me, at least) more pleasant or brighter memories than are recalled by the title which stands at the head of this paper. One member of that party (Mr. Backhouse) died in England in the summer of 1869, almost at the moment when Mr. Whitwell and I at Grindelwald were making preparations for an ascent of the Eiger, which we hoped he would arrive in time to share. We were on the way to the Wengern Alp, wondering at his non-arrival, when we received the news of his death. As one who took part in his last considerable expeditions, and might perhaps have shared in some of the more ambitious projects contemplated by him at the time he fell ill, I may be excused for this slight reference to one whose least claim perhaps to the affection of his friends consisted in his being a genial comrade and a bold and successful mountaineer.