

at the termination of the engagement is optional, but would generally be expected, as a mark of satisfaction on the part of the employer.

Towards the end of July the weather became very favourable, but I was by this time obliged to leave the Dolomites. I had, nevertheless, the satisfaction of climbing, after I left them, the Gross Glockner and Gross Wiesbachhorn, which I accomplished in two successive days, the former from Hoffmann's hut on the Pasterze glacier, and by Hoffmann's route across the glacier, and up the ice-fall; the latter from the same hut going over the top of the Glocknerin. The ascent from this side is free from difficulty, but we had a long plough through soft snow, which I felt the more, carrying my own knapsack. We employed $5\frac{1}{2}$ hours including all stoppages from the Johannishütte to the summit, and about 4 hours down to the Wasserfall Alp at the head of the Kaprunerthal. My guide on this occasion was Trebüsser, whom I discharged at the Wasserfall châteaux. The previous day I had taken leave of my friend Trueman—who had made the ascent of the Glockner with me—at the 'Adler'sruhe,' from which point he descended by the Leitherthal to Heiligenblut, to return, much to my envy, once more to the Dolomites.

A NEW PASS IN THE CHAIN OF MONT BLANC. By
L. STEPHEN. Read before the Alpine Club, Dec. 16, 1873.

A QUEER sensation which sometimes comes over me on the sight of some familiar Alpine view may best be illustrated by a literary parallel. In reading some genuine old English dramatist, I have been tempted to exclaim, What does this fellow mean by imitating Lamb's 'John Woodvill,' or Taylor's 'Philip Van Artevelde'? Why doesn't he see the absurdity of mimicking a man who was his junior by two centuries? His local colouring is the same, if it is not quite so obtrusive, as that of our modern Elizabethans. In the same way the view from the Weugern Alp, or the Görnergrat, or the Montanvert strikes me as little better than a plagiarism. Have we not seen the very same design used over and over again for the lids of carved boxes, and worked to death by the artists of those pictures with blue glaciers, and white peaks, and melodramatic chamois which stare at us from every shop-window in Interlaken or Chamonix? Why should the eternal Alps enter into rivalry with such puerile performances? In no place have I been more frequently seduced into this whimsical inversion

of logic than at the Montanvert. The Montanvert, in fact, is, with the possible exception of the Wengern Alp, the most cockney-ridden of all the well-known points of view. Within a few hundred yards of the inn, lies a monument which strikingly illustrates this truth, and which, I fear, hardly receives from members of this club the attention which it deserves. On the old moraine, just above the place where the solemn echoes of the mountains are waked for the sum of ten centimes, lies an ancient gray stone, on which are carved the names of Pocock and Windham. Some Old Mortality of the district appears to have preserved this inscription which marks the bivouac of the first British tourists 130 years ago. Having surmounted the peril of the ascent to Chamonix, these primitive adventurers, whose memory should surely be dear to us, succeeded in scaling the Montanvert, and doubtless felt that they had well earned their night's rest beneath the now historical block. Perhaps the Alpine Club might do worse, in case of necessity, than apply a few francs towards the preservation of this memorial of their ancestors' heroism. Another inscription commemorative of tourist enthusiasm never aroused my conscious attention, often as my eyes must have rested upon it, until this summer. All who have made expeditions from the Montanvert remember that queer little octagonal edifice opposite the door of the inn, which seems to be a compromise between a stable, a kitchen, and a sleeping-room for the guides. Here, I have sometimes fancied, were held the private sittings of the Everlasting Club commemorated in the 'Spectator.' I have never, at least, looked in at any hour of day or night without seeing a guide seated by the fire—eating, drinking, or smoking with stolid persistency, and generally conspicuous for that air of extreme personal comfort which is only produced by the consciousness that you are keeping somebody waiting. The impatience which is naturally produced in the mind of an external observer had, I presume, hitherto prevented me from noticing that above the door are engraved the words, *A la Nature*. In fact, the building was erected by a prefect of some half century ago, who indulged in the good old-fashioned sentimentalism of the Rousseau school, and devised this rather pagan edifice for the benefit of his fellow-creatures. Then it was probably an almost solitary example of a building intended for the accommodation of Alpine sightseers. Since that day, two or three generations of tourists must have gazed from its doors up the ice-stream of the Mer de Glace, and admired the great block of the Géant and the Jorasses framed so symmetrically between the gigantic portals of the Charmoz and

the Verte. The view has indeed become so familiar that almost every Alpine traveller, and many travellers who have never been to the Alps, could draw a recognisable outline of its main features with their eyes shut. My present audience, I doubt not, is as familiar with its details as with a well-known passage beginning 'dearly beloved brethren;' and, as the statement that 'the Scripture moveth us in sundry places' sometimes reaches their ears without exciting a very vivid emotion, so the eye glances along the well-known ridges without setting up any conscious train of reflection. To some such cause, at least, I must attribute the really curious fact, that up to the year 1873 nobody had yet attempted one of the most conspicuous passes in the whole range of the Alps. The grand block of the Jorasses is abruptly cut away, as we all know, at its northern end, and thence to the wild labyrinth of ridges which culminates in the Aiguille de Léchaud, there stretches a level saddle, over which, as is obvious to the meanest capacity, there must lie a route to Courmayeur. Indeed it would be the natural route for anybody intending to cross the Col du Géant by the light of nature. If you would make a bee-line from the Montanvert to the nearest points of the Italian valleys, your route would take you straight across this col, which is as obtrusive as the Théodule from Zermatt, or the Jungfrau Joch from the Wengern Alp. The apparent steepness of the final barrier indeed was forbidding; but in an ascent of the Mt. Mallet, which I described to the Club two years ago, we had gone near enough to see that this appearance, as in so many other cases, promised to be illusory. M. Loppé was especially impressed by the view, and had frequently suggested to me the propriety of an assault when arranging the plans of coming campaigns. The discussion assumed fresh prominence during certain tobacco parliaments held in the beginning of July last in front of Couttet's inn at Chamonix. It took a practical turn on the arrival of Messrs. T. S. Kennedy and J. G. Marshall, who contemplated the same expedition, and brought two excellent guides, Johann Fitscher of Meiringen, and Ulrich Almer, son of the hero of Grindelwald. Kennedy and Marshall had already acquired useful information by examining the col from the other side, and were eager to add this to their previous conquests. Loppé was naturally keen about the best pass of really first-rate excellence in the district which may fairly be called his own. For my part, I have long abandoned difficult and dangerous expeditions. Moreover, I was at Chamonix in the interesting character of invalid. I was suffering from a state of mind and

body which wives and mothers generally attribute to overwork, and which one's masculine friends consider as a pronounced attack of idleness. Whatever the origin of my symptoms, I took a course which I can strongly commend to all my hearers. I consulted a distinguished physician who to his great medical skill adds the special merit of being a member of the Alpine Club. He prescribed—less to my surprise than to my satisfaction—Alpine air and indolence. The last phrase I took to include moderate walking exercise, and, though abjuring anything bordering upon the performance of athletic feats, I felt myself at liberty to accompany my friends in the humble character of historiographer, with liberty to turn back if the danger or the fatigue should prove excessive.

And so it came to pass that once more I was sleeping at the Montanvert, on the night of Sunday, July 13. The weather was so questionable that I had delayed my departure till the last possible moment. Throughout the early summer we had a series of thunderstorms, the temperature, lowered by each storm, gradually becoming almost unbearably hot, till we were relieved by another explosion. On this occasion a storm had just passed, but as Loppé and I climbed the well-known Montanvert path in the late evening, the heavy pine-branches were still dripping with moisture, and an occasional thunder-growl muttered amongst the distant ranges. I had therefore turned in with some doubts as to the next day's weather. A happy faculty of sleeping soon produced utter oblivion, though my couch was little softer than Pocock and Windham's stone. What passed for a mattress seemed rather to be a cylindrical bolster of abnormal hardness, and reminded me of that dummy which Jack the Giant-killer placed in his bed in one of his adventures; as it would have been only too well calculated to withstand the most vicious blows of an infuriated Blunderbore. I see that I am inevitably falling into the old groove. I am treating the Club to the thousand and first description of the discomforts of bad beds. My only excuse is, that the grievance is as lasting as the grumbling. The Montanvert inn is a disgrace to the district. The commune of Chamonix receives, I am told, a rent of some 500*l.* a year for this dirty, tumbledown, old hovel, which has received no improvement or addition since it was first erected. The number of visitors must have multiplied tenfold, but the accommodation is strictly stationary, and the prices steadily advancing. This phenomenon is quite in accordance with the laws of political economy. Monopoly, whether of railways or innkeepers, is fatal to the comforts of travellers. To complain is probably mere waste of ink; and

yet one would fain hope that the good people of Chamonix may be impressed in the course of a generation or two with the conviction that better accommodation on so celebrated a point of view would provide an excellent investment for some of their spare capital. In Switzerland the Montanvert would have been rebuilt and enlarged a dozen times over; and the example of their enterprising neighbours should be set before these good stolid Chamoniards as vigorously as possible. Meanwhile, in spite of dirt, discomfort, a squalid bedroom, and a close atmosphere, I was sleeping peacefully on the early morning of the 14th, lapped in some dim consciousness that I had still an hour and a half before the inevitable hour of starting, when a stentorian voice resounded through the house—‘*Olé ! là-bas ! Aufstehen ! Garçon ! get up !*’ were some of the fragmentary utterances which rang like a trumpet through my dreams; and led me to realise the fact that my young friend Marshall, boiling over with the impetuosity of youth, was resolved to avoid any danger of oversleeping by premature vociferation. Some wretched tourists, it was true, were beginning to fortify themselves by a few hours’ repose for the toils of an expedition to the Jardin. They must take the consequences of venturing into the haunts of the enthusiastic climbers, and speedily they had a lively accompaniment to the vocal music played on the planks by a pair of sturdy hobnailed boots. Lulled by this music, I endeavoured to compose myself once more to rest by carefully extending myself along that granite column which played the part of mattress. Alas ! my efforts were in vain. The voice became more emphatic.

Still it cried ‘*Sleep no more !*’ to all the house ;
Marshall hath murdered sleep ; and therefore Loppé
Shall sleep no more ; Stephen shall sleep no more.

Nay, if I am not mistaken, a personal application was given to some of the more energetic remonstrances ; and, finally, I found myself dozing over the usual fragments of dry bread and tepid coffee, and endeavouring, according to a principle which I observe with undeviating punctuality, to shirk all responsibility in the matter of ordering provisions or otherwise arranging for a start. Still drowsy and dull, I turned out about three o’clock into the drowsy night. The prospect was equivocal. Torn fragments of vapour floated aimlessly above the valleys and clustered in long streamers upon the mountain sides. The pyramid of the Aiguille Verte was nearly hidden ; on the opposite side, the Aiguille de Charmoz appeared, as it were, in a ragged dressing-gown, resembling the costume of Mr. Pick-

wick's companions in the Fleet Prison. A maudlin kind of monster it seemed, apparently reeling homewards from some debauch in a general state of intellectual haziness. One huge finger—well known to all buyers of photographs and coloured drawings for the last fifty years—was held up, pointing, with a muddled significance, towards the heavens. Doubtless some sort of meaning might lurk in that intoxicated gesture; but I am no diviner of omens. Whether the old Charmoz intended an encouragement or a warning was to me an impenetrable secret. Perhaps, too, my language is rather profane. The mountain, gleaming in the dim moonlight through the veil of mist, and revealing that strange pinnacle of rock which, as I have since seen it from a nearer point, is one of the most daring of mountain spires, should have excited awe rather than unseemly familiarity. I do not profess, however, to have my emotions at command; solemn objects sometimes fail to create in me that 'great disposition to cry' which is the becoming mode of testifying sensibility to natural beauty. Moreover, I have a spite against the Charmoz. I tried to climb him a few weeks afterwards, and his scarped cliffs foiled our best efforts; and, therefore, I take the liberty, not unprecedented under such circumstances, of attacking the character of a mountain which has shown itself too hard for me. We had soon turned our backs on the Charmoz, and, as we advanced, two facts became evident: the sunrise was healthy, giving promise at least of a tolerable day; and the pace speedily threatened to be tremendous. Our party was of heterogeneous composition. Experience was represented by the elder travellers, and youthful precipitance by our friend Marshall. Youth accordingly set out, in spite of sage warnings, at a brisk rate, and was soon leaping crevasses in a playful spirit far ahead of creeping age. Had we been united we might have succeeded in suppressing this undignified impetuosity; but the guides, as well as their employers, were divided. Loppé and I had engaged Henri Devouassoud, a younger brother of the well-known François. Now, Henri, and I am glad to make the remark in view of some recent criticisms upon Chamonix guides, is a strong, willing, and pleasant fellow, though not, as I judge, more than second-rate as a leader of a party. He caught the contagion from Marshall, and was willing to show his Oberland companions that a Chamonix guide could make the running. Accordingly, we crossed the glacier at a pace which brought us to the foot of the final bergschrund in little over three hours. It is, I am aware, contrary to all rules of Alpine writing to reach a berg-

schrund so early in the narrative of the expedition. But I have a sufficient apology. It is as easy to get to this bergschrund as to reach the Jardin—as easy as another process which I need not particularly mention, and the facility of which needs no demonstration to an audience of travellers by profession. There is simply a gently sloping snow-plain to cross, where the few crevasses could be turned by trifling deviations from our route; and thus our only mentionable adventure was the inevitable quarrel with the porter from the Montanvert, who asked more for going part of the way to the Jardin from the inn than he would have received, according to the tariff, for going the whole way from Chamonix and back. Moreover, I am not going to let my hearers off too easily. For here I must insert a brief digression whilst we are eating our breakfast and speculating upon the best line of assault. A day or two before we had committed the usual folly of an exploring expedition. It had the normal fate of such performances. We had climbed to nearly our present position and had thence watched a noble bank of boiling cloud, which effectually screened from sight every detail of our proposed route. One incident, however, deserves fuller commemoration. As we began to climb the snow-slopes we observed at a little distance ahead certain mysterious objects arranged with curious symmetry in a circle upon the glacier. Some twenty black spots lay absolutely motionless before us; and as we approached we became aware of their nature, and not, as I will venture to add, without a certain feeling of sadness. In fact, we had before us a proof of the terrible power with which tempests sometimes rage in these upper regions. The twenty objects were corpses—not human corpses, which, indeed, would in some sense have been less surprising. As a melancholy accident has lately shown, man may easily be done to death by the icy winds which have such terrible power in these exposed wastes of snow. But the poor little bodies which lay before us were the mortal remains of swallows. How it came to pass that the little company had been struck down so suddenly as their position seemed to indicate gave matter for reflection. Ten minutes' flight with those strong wings would have brought them to the shelter of the Chamonix forests, or have taken them across the mountain wall to the congenial climate of Italy. Whether the birds had gathered together for warmth, or been stupified so suddenly by the blasts as to be slain at once in a body, there they were, united in death, and looking, I confess, strangely pathetic in the midst of the snowy wilderness. I mention it here, not merely because none of us had met with such an incident

before, but also for another purpose. We proposed at the time to give to our pass the name of the *Col des Hirondelles*, which may be justified by the precedent of the Adler Joch at Zermatt. First discoverers have, I believe, a right to christen their passes; but, unluckily or otherwise, it is one of those rights which is not very valuable, because it cannot be enforced. If future travellers choose to call the pass the Col des Jorasses, or the Col de Léchaud, we cannot exact any penalty from them. So far, however, as our authority is recognised, I beg to state that we in all due form passed a resolution declaring that henceforth the col which I am about to describe should be known to all whom it concerns by the sole style and title of the *Col des Hirondelles*. And having thus done my duty to the swallows, and given satisfaction, as I hope, to such souls as Mr. Darwin and the Thirty-nine Articles may allow them to possess, I will return to the narrative of our adventures.

As I have already said, a precipitous wall stretches northwards from the foot of the Jorasses. On the French side it consists chiefly of rock; on the Italian it is covered by the wild Glacier de Freboutzie. As we approached it we recognised various routes, each of which appeared at times to be easy, and then again put on an appearance of inaccessibility from some different point of view. Close to the Jorasses there descends a broad couloir of ice, crowned by a wall of serac, as to which it is still a matter of controversy whether it ever does or does not discharge avalanches. I cannot decide the point, not having made the necessary observations; but I may briefly say that anyone who likes to risk these possibly non-existent avalanches might probably shorten his route to the summit. It would, perhaps, be possible, moreover, to reach the top of the col by climbing the lower rocks of the Jorasses, and so keeping entirely to the right, or south, of the great couloir. To the left, or north, there is a long rocky wall, seamed by deep narrow couloirs of much smaller dimensions, occasionally varied by steep snow-slopes, by scarped surfaces of rock, and by huge ribs which descend steeply from the summit and are more or less cut off at their lower extremities. More than one route might, perhaps, be discovered amongst them. Our attention, however, was fixed upon the ridge which bounded the great couloir immediately to the north, and upon a very deep and narrow couloir, which again lies immediately to the north of the ridge. This last couloir was filled with snow at the time of our passage, and, as seen from the Montanvert, appeared to us like a bright white thread. The snow, however, frequently disappears, and the whole wall then seems

to be little more than a mass of rock. To be clear, I shall call this last narrow couloir the chimney, and I may proceed to describe our assault.

The chimney opens out at its lower end, and is lost in the main slope above the bergschrund. At 6.45 we attacked this natural fosse with the usual gymnastics. They involved no particular difficulty, and I only had to complain of a decided propensity of the rope to get itself entangled in my hat. The said hat, having shrunk, was easily knocked off my head, and the fact that I was constantly struggling to preserve it against the skilful assaults of the rope may show that the line of ascent was tolerably steep. For a time, however, the climb was perfectly easy. Digging our feet into soft but tenacious snow, we speedily reached the chimney and found it in good condition. The snow-bed which lined it enabled us to climb hand over hand without a check for some considerable distance. But by degrees, Fischer, who was leading, became nervous. He has a prejudice, in which I admit that I share, against stones bigger and harder than the human head, and subject entirely to the force of gravitation. Loppé, who is always loudly proclaiming his own extreme prudence—it is his pet virtue, and the only one upon which he prides himself—is a sceptic in the matter of stones. Whether he has confidence in the strength of his skull, or a faith in his capacity for being missed, I cannot say. However, he assured us emphatically that stones would not fall, or if they did fall, would not hurt us. Deaf to these arguments—I call them arguments for want of a better word—Fischer insisted upon leaving the chimney and climbing the rib between ourselves and the great couloir. And hence arose a division of the party, and a certain amount of emulation, though no want of cordiality. Whilst Loppé and Devouassoud as representatives of Chamonix stuck to the chimney like men, we effected a flanking movement on to the rib. Now, as all climbers know, these transverse performances, which, if I may say it, take a mountain across the grain, are apt to lead to difficulties. For about fifty yards we had, what seemed to me, a really nasty bit of climbing. The rocks were powdered with a layer of snow, sufficiently deep to aggravate seriously the difficulties due to their rottenness and irregularity. I will not presume to say that the consequence of this was any real difficulty. Objectively speaking the rocks may have been easy; subjectively considered I heartily condemned them. A different word has been used in some translations from the Greek. At any rate, I was reduced to a state of mind of which many

travellers have never been conscious; that is to say, I got so far as the incipient stage of a resolution never to trust my precious neck (the word precious, again, is used in a subjective sense) in discovering new Alpine passes. One or two positions, distinctly imprinted upon my memory, could be easily represented by Mr. Whymper's pencil, but are not so easily translatable into language. Nor, indeed, is it worth while to tell the old story over again. The discontent incident to precarious scrambling was aggravated by the sight of Loppé and Devouassoud climbing their chimney with great ease and rapidity and greatly gaining upon us in height. Soon, however, the tables were turned. Once on the backbone of the ridge we had the best of it. In fact all difficulty was over, and we moved at breathless speed towards the top. Fischer was excited, and felt that his reputation was more or less at stake. We were bound to be first on the top, lest those *verrückte Französer*—the name, I deeply regret to say, which he applied to our excellent friends in the chimney—should laugh at our beards. We saw, indeed, and the sight was balm to our souls, that they had left the chimney on the opposite side, and were pressing, with some difficulty, up a steep snow-slope which led them to a part considerably to the north of that at which we were aiming. It brought them, however, to the side of a great knob which here crowns the ridge, and we were therefore invisible to each other during the last few hundred feet. All the more we strained every nerve to reach the top; and a new cause increased our anxiety. I had pointed out to Kennedy the beauty of certain light clouds which were drifting over the col from Italy, and tinged by prismatic colours as they came above our heads. Unluckily they came thicker and deeper. As we reached the snow-mound on the summit-ridge we were enveloped in a light vapour which effectually hid from us the grand precipices of the Jorasses, and, for a time, concealed all but the snows in our immediate neighbourhood. We raised a shout, partly of self-applause and partly as a challenge to our rivals. Had we reached the top first? I have an opinion upon that subject, and it is one which I think I could support by sufficiently conclusive facts. I will add, however, that no persuasion, short of absolute physical torture, shall induce me to reveal it even to this Club which has the first right to my confidence. Far be it from me to give the slightest sanction, direct or indirect, to any spirit of rivalry between climbers. Racing in the Alps is an utter abomination, and I have never been guilty of such a crime; except, indeed, once in an ascent of Mount Blanc, and again, I

fear, in a dashup the *Æggischhorn*, and yet once or twice more on some of the *Oberland* peaks, and perhaps on a few other occasions which I decline to mention more particularly at the present moment. But my principles are good if my conduct is occasionally inconsistent. And therefore, without throwing any light upon the question, I will merely remark that our party reached the summit about nine; having thus occupied a little over two hours in climbing the last rocks. I should guess their height very roughly at some 1,200 feet; and, as the process involved some step-cutting, and the passage of the *bergschrund*, it will be seen that no serious difficulties were encountered. I will add further, that though our col was the point which would naturally be selected from the French side, the descent upon the Italian side was probably easier from *Loppé's*. The difference, however, is trifling.

To lie on the summit of a new and first-rate pass is a pleasure which, in the nature of things, can be but rarely enjoyed. Our spirits were naturally exuberant. What was it to us that imagination instead of bodily eyesight had to picture the butt-end of the lion-like mass of the *Jorasses*, the wild sea of unfrequented peaks towards the *Léchaud* and *Triplet*, the long vista down which the *Mer de Glace* flows to the *Chamonix Valley*, and the purple hills towards the *St. Bernard*? If to us it makes little difference, it clearly makes less to my hearers, except that it saves them a passage of description which they can imagine for themselves quite as easily as we imagined the view. They may take it for granted, too, that we were hilarious, excited, full of fellow-feeling, and very much inclined to such sky-larking as can be indulged upon a glacier. And I may add, that, the sky-larking was of a very superior order. A momentary rent in the clouds had revealed the green valley floor of the *Val Ferret*, some 7,000 feet below us, and showed, too, the right way to reach it. From our feet the grand glacier, strongly resembling the upper part of the *Viescher-firn* below the *Mönch-joch*, hurled itself madly downwards from the mighty cirque of cliffs. It was a glacier of a rollicking spirit, given to plunge in broad curves over hidden ridges of rock; playing all kinds of practical jokes with grotesque masses of serac; sometimes allowing us to indulge in a glissade where we had expected to be cut off by an ice-cliff, and sometimes playfully opening a large crevasse beneath our feet, and forcing us to take a flying leap which was decidedly more convenient from above than it would have been from below. It was a grand sight to see the heavy weights of the party hesitating for a few moments above

some such chasm, and then come flying through the air with the swoop of an eagle and the grace of a coalsack. It was delicious to go head over heels in a huge bank of knee-deep snow, and feel that the farther you fell the more trouble you saved. Without a single serious check we rushed at the *pas gymnastique* from the foot of the first snow-slope, which was a little too steep to be trifled with, to the point where we had to leave the glacier. And it is only necessary to say, for a rule to our followers, that they will not go far wrong if they keep as much to the left as possible during the descent. The knowledge acquired by Kennedy's party on their former expedition was of material service to us in discovering the precise route to be followed. The Glacier de Freboutzie itself falls over cliffs through which it is impossible to find a way. But, by crossing the ice which descends from the Aiguille de Léchaud, just above the point where the torrent bursts forth in a waterfall, a lofty patch of grass is reached on the northern side of the lateral valley. Thence to the floor of the Val Ferret there is a rather troublesome walk. It is necessary to find a passage through some rather slippery rocks, and when at their base to cross a region covered with huge loose stones, which appear to be the ruins of a gigantic moraine. For half an hour, I should think, we were risking sprained ankles across this detestable wilderness; but safety and luxury were at the other end. It was a delicious walk that afternoon down to Courmayeur. Delicious was the milk which an old woman brought from a *châlet* in return for a franc, volunteering to throw a prayer for our souls into the bargain. Delicious, too, was the rest under a clump of fragrant pines, rendered still more fragrant by our fumigation, on the edge of the flooded meadows. And most delicious was the view of the soft Val d'Aosta which opened upon us as we rounded the Mt. Saxe, and saw the group of inferior mountains round Courmayeur, whose graceful forms and rich hues announce their Italian character. With all my love for the sterner scenery of the hither side of the Alps, and my dread of demoralisation in the lazy atmosphere of the South, I cannot deny that Courmayeur is one of the very most exquisite of all Alpine scenes. I felt friendly towards the good-natured Italian bathing guests, who stared at their uncouth visitors from the ice-world as their classical ancestors might have stared at a newly-caught Briton. Even that noble creature who rejoiced in the costume of our operative bandit by way of tribute to the general spirit of the place, was pleasant in my eyes; for was not his

presence suggestive of good inns, where we might luxuriate in some comfort, and with less interruption from Cockneydom than at Chamonix? The next day was spent as the day after a grand expedition should always be spent—in chewing the cud of our recollections whilst lounging about the lovely Courmayeur meadows. We lay in the sun in company with basking lizards, alternately watching the idiotic pranks of the grasshoppers, who are always taking the most violent and purposeless exercise in the middle of the day, and speculating on the possibility of making a direct escalade of Mont Blanc by the southern buttress. That feat still waits for a performer. Loppé and I returned next day to Chamonix by the Col du Géant, arriving at about the same time with the telegram which we had despatched on our arrival at Courmayeur.

And now it only remains for me to give an impartial estimate of the merits of our pass. Its height is not marked upon the French map, and I can only conjecture that it is approximately the same as that of the Col du Géant. Comparing it with that king of passes, I may say, in the first place, that it would probably occupy a rather longer time on an average. Six hours brought us from Montanvert to the summit, and six more took us to the inn at Courmayeur. The first six might have to be indefinitely extended in unfavourable conditions of the snow. I do not think, with some of our party, that we were exceptionally lucky in this respect. I am rather inclined to the opinion that the new snow bothered us on the rocks more than it helped us in the chimney. This is a matter on which subsequent experience must decide. The climb, however, of the last ridge will always present greater difficulties than any part of the Col du Géant route, unless, indeed, it should happen that the passage through the seracs, now so easy, should again become troublesome. On the Italian side, again, the Col des Hirondelles, though not exceptionally bad, lies over a very contorted glacier, and may at times be toilsome, especially in the ascent. It, of course, will require more labour than the delightful walk over the Mont Fréty to the Col du Géant. On the whole, therefore, our pass will probably be the more laborious of the two. Comparing them in regard to scenery, I fear that there can be but one reply. The Col du Géant is and must always remain one of the first two or three, if not actually the first, in beauty of all Alpine passes. The partiality of new discoverers has set up rivals to it at one time or another; but its grandeur and variety are always fresh, and nowhere, in my

knowledge, to be fairly equalled. The view towards Italy, the magnificent view of Mont Blanc, the grand basin of the upper glacier, the icefall, still noble in its decay, may be separately equalled elsewhere; but I do not think that any pass, even in the Oberland or at Zermatt, presents so marvellous a combination. The Col des Hirondelles, shut in by the Jorasses, must have but a limited prospect if any, of the great peaks. To my mind, its great charm is in the wild Glacier de Freboutzie, which is the perfection of savage seclusion. I always love these recesses of the great chasm, where the spirits that haunt solitudes have not yet been finally exorcised. Centuries will elapse at our present rate of progress before the Freboutzie will become a sight-seer's glacier, and perhaps by that time it will be a glacier no more. All that I can fairly claim, however, for our new pass is that it may afford a useful alternative to the Col du Géant; but it is eminently beautiful, though decidedly inferior to its superlatively beautiful rival. Moreover, no true Alpine traveller can look at it from the Montanvert without wishing to cross it. If he does, it is my last warning to him that the descent towards Italy, easy enough when the right way is known, requires some local knowledge or careful steering. May our successors have as good fortune as fell to our lot in this as in all other respects. If so, I have no fear that they will be ungrateful to the fortunate discoverers of this, amongst the most familiar of all great Alpine passes as part of a view, though the last to be recognised as a practicable route.

ALPINE NOTES.

THE SOUTHERN ALPS OF NEW ZEALAND.—The following extract from a despatch from Sir G. F. Bowen to the Earl of Kimberley, dated Wellington, New Zealand, February 20, 1873, has been forwarded for publication.

‘A graphic and scientific description of the Southern Alps, explaining their geology and physical geography, will be found in the twenty-first chapter of Dr. Hochstetter's work, which embodies the researches of Dr. Hector, Dr. Haast, and other explorers and naturalists.

‘The Southern Alps proper commence south of the Saddle between the Teramakan and Hurnuni rivers, on the boundary between the provinces of Nelson and Canterbury. Here, in the middle of the southern island, the mountains attain their greatest height, and as far as Haast's Pass, on the boundary of the province of Otago, leading from