

THE MARITIME ALPS. By the EDITOR.

1. *The Coast Ranges.**

'Alpes Maritimæ proximæ sunt mari Ligustico; ab his Alpium initium sumunt veteres ferè omnes.'—SIMLER, *De Alpibus Commentarius*.

THE author of 'Aurora Leigh' has described in picturesque verses the strange sights which greet the traveller when day dawns on him as he speeds southwards in the night express from Paris to Marseilles. The poplar avenues, green orchards, quiet homesteads, low rounded hills, and trim river-banks on which he closed his eyes have given place to grey gnarled olives and cactus hedges, white flat-roofed farms and age-stained cities, abrupt red ranges and stony plains between which the Rhone rushes with southern impetuosity to the sea. The landscape might, at one moment, be in Africa, at another in Syria; it never resembles true French scenery.

Those who hurry on to Nice or Mentone have before them a day of splendid surprises—Marseilles, stately on her brilliant bay; La Ciotat among its fantastic crags, like some seaport in a Pompeian fresco; the broad fertile valley which leads back again to Fréjus, and the blue Midland Sea. There is still, however, something in store for anyone whose eyes are not wearied with so much beauty. As the train, suddenly leaving behind the red porphyry headlands and green glens of the Estérels, dashes past the ruinous castle of La Napoule, and across narcissus-strewn meadows, through which a bright trout-stream finds its way to the sea, the snowy Alps burst for the first time into view. Whatever the season, their silver heads shine against the eastern sky, soaring high above the village-crowned foot-hills, and contrasting vividly, both in form and colour, with the flat-topped tawny crest of the nearer range which shelters Grasse.

Again, after Cannes has been left behind, our eyes are drawn up from the rose hedges and wild tulip beds which fringe Golfe Jouan to the great range of snow, appearing, a sudden ghostly vision, above a low hill cloaked in ancient olive groves. The jagged mountain to the east is Mont Clapier; the comely pyramid in the centre seems to be the Cima di

* The Editor proposes to complete this paper, in one or two subsequent sections, by giving some account of the seaward valleys of the central chain, of the crest itself, and of the northern glens which open into Piedmont at Cuneo.

Mercantoura of maps. To the west, behind the rounded mass of Mont Mounier, a singular rock-peak rears itself into the sky. Both I and Mr. W. Mathews, who, as its conqueror, ought to know the great Italian Alp, thought we recognised in it Monte Viso. But the discussion of questions of topography may be postponed. The first feeling of most travellers is one of simple delight at a combination of sea and snowy Alp hardly to be seen again in such perfection short of the far easternmost bay of the Black Sea, where the voyager issuing from Batoum has on his right hand

Καύκασον αἰπήντα Κνταίδα τε πρόλιον Αἴης.*

There is a foolish commonplace that off the mountains mountaineers have no eyes. Mr. Ruskin has more logically laid down, that having run altogether to leg, Alpine Clubmen have no eyes anywhere. But he then goes on to admit that 'as soon as you can see mountains rightly you will see hills also and valleys with considerable interest.'

I assume that, as a body, we do see mountains, if not with the exquisite instinct of observation, and the still rarer faculty of recording with pen or brush the results of that observation, which give the author of 'Modern Painters' a place among the first of nature's interpreters, yet with an appreciation which grows with years in every one of us, and is fostered, and has been in many cases created, by our walks and scrambles among the Alps. Believing, therefore, that we do see mountains rightly after our imperfect way, and accepting readily Mr. Ruskin's second dictum, I shall not apologise for saying something of the lesser hills and valleys of the Provençal coast before I mount to the snowy Maritime Alps.

Cannes itself is well known to English readers.† It would

* The ancients, as a rule, paid little attention to individual summits. Monte Viso is, I believe, the only Alpine peak mentioned by name in the classics. It is curious therefore to find Arrian, in his report to the Emperor Hadrian on the coasts of the Black Sea, writing, 'We had a view of Mount Caucasus, which is in height much the same as the Celtic Alps. A certain summit (κορυφή), called Strobilus, was pointed out where Prometheus is fabled to have been suspended by Hephæstus, at the command of Zeus.' Strobilus is clearly Elbruz, whose blunt top resembles in shape a pine cone, whence probably its classical name.

† See Dean Alford's 'Sketches from the Riviera,' Mr. J. R. Green's 'Stray Studies,' P. Mérimée's 'Lettres à une Inconnue,' and the local handbooks. Amongst these English visitors will prefer the 'Guide to Cannes,' by F. M. S. (London, Stanfords, 1878), which is excellent as far as it goes, and has a carefully compiled and corrected map.

be difficult to say anything new in praise or dispraise of the southern Torquay which has overgrown the quiet fishing village which ninety years ago sheltered De Saussure. It is a place of violent contrasts. We remember it by its life-giving, serene air, its exquisite land and sea, its rose, violet, and cassia gardens. But on the spot one cannot always close one's senses to certain drawbacks—architectural horrors in the shape of barracks for invalids, cockney-gothic castles or box-like French villas; scents, evil as well as good. Let the inhabitants look to their own interests. The drainage is notoriously bad, and the value of property along the sea-shore has already been seriously affected by it. The town councillors show their sense of the situation by spending all their spare money in building a new theatre!

There is much to be explored in the country near at hand. Immediately behind the hotels we may mount steep roads between villa gardens where the roses cover every trellis, and are not content until they have climbed high into the cypress-spires, to fall back again earthwards in spring in a cascade of white blossoms. Above the villas spreads the fir forest with its odorous, thorny undergrowth, where the naturalist may hope to capture a green frog in a pool, to come upon a company of poisonous caterpillars on one of their head-to-tail journeys; or, if sharp-sighted enough, to discover and dig out the exquisitely contrived nest of a trap-door spider. In a quarter of an hour we come to the terrace path beside the watercourse which winds round the hills to the chapel of Notre-Dame de Vie. For miles and miles we look out over swells and falls of waving olives and red terraced hills—a spacious, stately landscape. Close at hand Le Cannet, where Rachel died, ranges crescent-wise in its sheltered hollow; Mougins clusters on its airy hill-top; Grasse catches the sunlight on its high terrace; while opposite the purple capes and peaks of the *Estérèls* hem in the blue waters. If we cross over a spur, we shall come down upon the little basin (an old lake-bed?) of Vallauris, which supplies the clay M. Massier makes into pottery, which imitates and recalls the soft grey and blue colours of a southern sea on a day of wind and cloud.

No view on the whole coast surpasses—one only, so far as I know, rivals—the noble prospect from the lighthouse of Antibes. Above the broad purple Bay of Nice the land rises in three tiers of lofty hills. The lowest is half hid in a grey cloud of olive woods, jewelled here and there with bright towns set on the edge of the waves, or high on the hill-tops against the rich browns of the middle range, which shelters Grasse and Nice.

Above its bare and tawny slopes the golden snows of the Maritime Alps glow upon the horizon.

As we rest against the roots of the olives a brown figure, with a wallet and a violin, climbs up the paved chapel-lined track from the town. As he comes nearer I recognise in the old man with a musician's face the friar of the chapel hastening to play the vesper hymn on an organ he has framed with his own hands out of the great reeds of the country, and set up in the choir under the votive tablets which tell how many mariners have escaped perils by sea, from sudden squalls or English cruisers, through the grace of Our Lady of Antibes. Hence one may wander onwards, through corn-fields and olive-yards, past tiny white cottages with red-tiled courts, each overhung by its lemon or pomegranate tree, down to the bay, where the fishermen keep their boats, or the farthest cape, where the purple, white-crested waves break to pieces on the low reefs of rock; and wicked Monaco, hidden from every other point of the coast, peeps out like a witch behind the cliffs of Eza and Turbia.

I must not attempt to catalogue or describe all the landscapes which come back to my memory. There is scarcely a brow or dell within five miles of Cannes I have not rambled over, scarcely a peasant's olive-yard that I have not trespassed upon, and every one of these rambles left behind it some new and brilliant picture to add to my gallery of recollections.

Little to be pitied is the Alpine climber whom fate compels for a season to haunt the Estérel^s.* Their highest crag, it is true, only just surpasses 2,000 feet; but the summits, which, seen from Cannes, rise in a long undulating line against the western horizon, if hills in height are true mountains in character. On the first morning their outline seems perfectly beautiful; yet every day reveals fresh charms in its complicated simplicity. Three times above the blue bay of La Napoule the ridge rises and falls in graceful curves, then, after a wide sweep, springs up into a bold summit, like an Alpine crest taken off its pedestal, broken as it sinks seaward by tall spires. This is the Cap Roux, or Red Cape, a well-known landmark to mariners. Where the mountain is bare, the rocks are of red porphyry; where it is clothed, the covering is a dense growth of evergreens. Distance blends both into a purple bloom, which nothing but the fiercest mistral can destroy.

* Estérel^s is the local, Estrelles the common literary form, stamped with Mr. M. Arnold's approval in the line, 'Up the steep, pine-plumed paths of the Estrelle.'

The plain of the Siagne, five miles of alluvial level, separates the last hotel of Cannes from the ruined castle of La Napoule,* at the foot of the Estérel. The early train will carry us swiftly across it, and, after traversing by a tunnel the headland of La Théoule, land us at Les Trayas, a solitary house between the sea and the mountains. Exchanging a friendly greeting with the station-master, who leads a hermit-like existence, cheered by the occasional reversion of a Paris newspaper, we make our choice between the four footpaths which diverge from the platform. First let us ramble along the coastguards' path towards Cap Roux. No greater contrast can be imagined to the cliff paths of our native coasts. Here there is no swell of surging or moan of retreating tides, no boisterous breeze shifting ever from side to side and vexing the sad sea into grey, short, restless billows. The tideless main pours steadily its deep smooth swell into the echoing caves of the rocks. The waves are purple in the shadow, or above the dark seaweed beds, green in the pure sunshine; round the ruddy crags which lie out among the waters they break into bright columns of foam. The path is half buried in a thicket of fragrant bushes which form a hedge along the cliff—laurels, myrtle, arbutus, thick-leaved cistus, lit up in April with a galaxy of white stars, tall heaths with wax-like blossoms, prickly thorns. Where a cottage once stood fruit trees are in blossom. The stiff boughs of a fig tree are already, in February, tipped with jewel-like buds, which in a few weeks will broaden out into glorious leaf. The dry warm air vibrates with sensible waves of sunshine and sweet aromatic scents. Beside us a trickling brook flows out of a steep narrow glen, where it is soon lost to sight between rocky bluffs and tall fir-stems. Such must have been the sky and sea

‘That old-world morn in Sicily
When on the beach the Cyclops lay,
And Galatea from the bay
Mock'd her poor, love-lorn giant's lay.’

Lying along the turf and under the fragrant bushes, with the starry blossoms of the cistus dropping on one's face, it is difficult not to fancy the old world still young, the new world unborn. Even the huge bank thrown across the glen just where it becomes a bay is no stumbling-block to faith. May it not be the Cyclops's doing—a barrier to prevent the union of the sea nymph and her lover. That sudden roar and shaking of the mountain beneath us may be the giants' groan.

* In the process of being rebuilt and converted into an hotel, 1877.

All day dreams must have an end, and this one is cut short by the appearance of Polyphemus himself in the shape of the snorting engine of the Paris express, which dashes over the high embankment and recalls us rudely to the nineteenth century. Not altogether a bad century, however, since in thirty-six hours it brings shivering Britons out of their damp purgatory and enables them to enjoy for a space this healing paradise, if not as children who have lived only in the sunshine, yet with the more deeply-felt and cherished delight of prisoners escaping for a space from the gloom of their prison house.*

Beyond and westward of Cap Roux lies the quiet haven of Agay, a station without a hamlet, unless two or three scattered farms deserve the name. Landlocked on three sides by steep wooded hills, the sea touches the shore in a ripple which has the brightness of a smile and scarcely more motion. Two or three rude Mediterranean barks are moored off the shore. On the right rises a bold promontory crowned with a signal. Its steep sides are built up of ruddy rocks and fir-stems crowned with dark green leafage, between which glows the deep blue Mediterranean, flecked by white dazzling seagulls and a few distant sails. The great gulf of Fréjus spreads away to the distant lighthouse of Cap Camarat, embracing in its curve the headlands of the Montagnes des Maures and the shining bay of St. Tropez.

Turning my back on the sea, I followed one day the stream which filters through the sands of the beach, and found a broad valley stretching inland between the waste, pine-plumed heights. The water is shaded by a thicket of oleanders and aged cork-trees showing the scars of many flayings. Presently some tilled ground, a few animals, and a solitary house met my eyes. I fancied myself on the point of discovering Circe's retreat, and felt almost uncomfortable when a real pig introduced himself.

Hence paths lead back to Le Trayas or La Napoule across the hills. Under the landward side of Cap Roux stands the milestone which marks the line of the old Roman road. A

* Mr. J. A. Symonds has truly felt and eloquently expressed the Greek character of much of the mountain scenery on this coast ('Sketches from Italy and Greece'). On looking back at his paper I find I have, perhaps, laid myself open to a charge of plagiarism. I prefer, however, to leave the text as I wrote it. To describe the Estérelles without laying stress on the classical suggestions they call up would be to be false to the spirit of their scenery.

little farther is a spring draped with maidenhair and shaded by chestnuts, above which, in a hole in the rock, St. Honorat and many of his successors found an agreeable hermitage, and some fugitives in the days of the Revolution a hiding-place.

Here we are on classic ground for mountaineers. In April, 1787, just before his successful ascent of Mont Blanc, De Saussure explored the Estérel. He has left us a detailed account of the hermitage as he saw it, and of his ascent of the porphyry peaks above it. After describing the fountain, he goes on, 'Les jardins ne font pas moins de plaisir, et quoique le goût moderne reprouve tout ce qui est régulier, cependant un peu d'art et de symétrie fait un agréable contraste avec la brute et sauvage nature de ces montagnes; et les allées droites de ces jardins, placées en étagères couvertes de berceaux de vignes, et terminées par des niches creusées dans le rocher, firent sur moi l'impression la plus agréable.' The garden in the wilderness and its keeper have long since disappeared, and those who seek to climb the Montagne du Cap Roux must find their own way.

De Saussure, of course, did his duty as a climber. He took the hermit with him, not as guide, for the idea either of climbing or even naming the hill never seems to have suggested itself to the holy man. Consequently they first made for the western point, the tower-like Raou (Rocher) Dauphinier ('Latte,' De Saussure calls it). This rock looks formidable in the distance, but there is an easy though rough way to the top. The crest between it and the Montagne du Cap Roux is broken by a huge inaccessible rock-mass, the Grénier, and to get round this entails a plunge into a thorny thicket—'horribles broussailles,' the savant calls them—and the modern climber will use an at least equally strong epithet. Indeed, this new form of endurance may be safely recommended to those who cannot properly enjoy mountain scenery without suffering.

Seen from the western or Fréjus side, the range of the Estérel sweeps round in a semicircle from Cap Roux on the right to Mont Vinaigre on the left. A lower ridge runs across in a straight line, forming the string to the bow. Through this barrier the two sources of the Agay stream cut deep gorges. The northernmost escapes by a narrow doorway between two tall cliffs supported by bold buttresses, long spines of rock weathered into the most fantastic shapes. The eastern stream flows out of a much longer defile. For a mile and a half it runs through a narrow and tortuous cleft, where the clear deep pools reflect spires and pinnacles of red porphyry, or tall firs

rising out of a dense tangle of southern scrub. The upper end of the defile is guarded by two natural obelisks. Beneath them lies a tiny meadow, a solitary and romantic spot, hardly visited twice a winter from Cannes. The glen is known, according to the French Ordnance map, as the Vallon du Mal Infernal. A peasant belated among its weird crags might easily have fancied himself in enchanted ground. But have not the surveyors made a mistake? One of the peaks of the Maritime Alps is the Rocca Malivern, taking its name from an alp at its base. Here M. Joanne explains the derivation as 'Mal Inverno,' 'mauvais hiver,' which is, to say the least, plausible. But etymology is dangerous ground for the unlearned. A fellow-countryman lately proclaimed in my hearing that the Cornice road was named after a Mr. Cornish, the English engineer who constructed it.

The hills which hem in the glen are traversed in every direction by good paths cut at Government expense. We may cross back straight to Le Trayas by an easy and picturesque pass, or traverse either flank of the Montagne de l'Ours, descending at last to the farm of Maurevielle, by terraces running amongst groves of firs, arbutus, and evergreen oaks and cork trees, whose trunks, of a deep wine-stain hue, repeat the colour of the rocky tusks which break the hill-side.* In some corners, which have escaped the ravages of the fires that from time to time devastate the forest, the trees attain great size. Everywhere there is the same odorous undergrowth, woven of tough thorns, myrtle, and cistus. In this winterless land December only adds a touch of brightness to the evergreen thickets by hanging the arbutus with scarlet berries, which mingle with the tiny cream-coloured blossoms, a symbol of the union of autumn and spring. As we return eastwards we face the broad-backed hills of Vallauris, from which the Cap d'Antibes stretches out like a green sickle into the sea. In the distance the ranges beyond the Var glow ruddy against the sun, and high in the sky soar the white summits of the Maritime Alps, the wall of Italy, the watchman on whose shining battlements looks across to Turin and Monte Rosa.

* In the French Ordnance map a singular error occurs in the delineation of this part of the chain. The head of the valley of Maurevielle is destroyed, and a fictitious western branch of the glen of the Rague substituted in its place. None of the paths and cart-tracks of the Estérrels have been put into this map, which was engraved some years ago, and does not appear to be kept up to date even as to high roads, e.g. the road from Grasse to Vence.

Unless a carriage picks us up at La Napoule, we must (to avoid the circuitous and dusty high road) cross the railroad bridge over the Siagne, and walk home through the narcissus meadows and the stone-pine grove, or along the sands, watching the sunset colours slowly fade from sky and sea until all is dark below, and the faint glow in the upper air is reflected only where a long bar of light marks the wet stretch of sand left by the last advance of the quiet waves.

Day after day one may wander among the seaward slopes and hidden glens of the Estérelles without meeting a human being. The intense solitude is rarely broken even by the cry of an animal or a bird. Life seems to be concentrated in what are called inanimate forms of nature—the murmuring brooklet, the rough-limbed mountain, the dancing air, the laughing sea. All these become so vivid and palpable as separate existences, that it is quite natural to fall back into a Greek frame of mind and to accept the fair old Greek embodiments.

But if half the Estérelles is, except to a few old Cannes residents, an unknown desert, their highest summit, Mont Vinaigre, is a household, or rather a *table d'hôte*, word to visitors. It serves them as a frequent excuse for their favourite form of recreation, a gigantic picnic party, at which a dozen to twenty people talk, unpack, eat, pack, and talk again; and the only thing forgotten is the scenery.

The mountaineer must not, however, abandon Mont Vinaigre because its solitudes are now and then rudely broken in upon. Besides the post road to Fréjus, which traverses one of the shoulders of the mountain within three-quarters of an hour's walk of the top, he may find plenty of picturesque bypaths to the signal which crowns the highest of a spine of bold porphyry crags. If he is an enthusiast for moonlight and sunrise, there is even a natural cave where he may pass a weird night in dreaming of the brigands or wild boars who used to haunt the neighbourhood.*

From the top there is a most noble and delightful view over the coast country of Provence from Draguignan on its high hill-side to Nice on the spacious bay—the true Garden of the Hesperides, set between the blue sky and bluer sea. The mountain itself supplies as foreground a tangle of rocks and pines and cork trees, such a scene as Salvator Rosa sometimes indicates with a dull eye and rough brush, which miss all but

* 'L'Auberge des Adrets,' a once well-known French melodrama, takes its name from a hamlet close at hand.

surface effect. The charm of the panorama lies in the perfect definition of picturesque details and local colours in the white towns and hamlets, pine groves and meadows, high crags and olive-clad plains, sea gulfs and vessels, all spread out over an immense field. The mysterious, vague sublimity of a great mountain view is absent. In place of one overpowering effect, we enjoy a multitude of incidents perfectly combined into an harmonious whole.

The first time I stood on Mont Vinaigre I was witness to a very singular and suggestive vision. The morning had been bright, but as the day went on a gray pall, portending rain, had risen in the west and slowly stretched overhead, blotting out all the fair colours in land and sea, and blurring the delicate features of the wide landscape. But above the Var valley some counter air-current kept the clouds in check, and on the eastern horizon the snow peaks shone forth against a pale blue sky, pure and brilliant, so that one might fancy them a row of great white-winged angels looking out from their untroubled heaven on the dark plains of earth.*

There is a neighbouring height, the view from which rivals, perhaps surpasses, that from Mont Vinaigre. The Tanneiron is comparatively a tame hill. Clad below in steep pine-woods, it broadens out towards the top into wide, sunny spaces, where vines and fig trees flourish. On the highest crest—tell it not

* The following hints may be of use to a good walker in the Estérels. I assume he has provided himself with the Ordnance map, to be bought at Nice or Paris (Librairie Dumaine, 30 Rue et Passage Duphot):—

1. By rail to Le Trayas station; take path from Cannes end of platform, which leads up to gap N. of the M. de l'Ours; follow path round its sea face to gap at its opposite base, and descend through the Vallon du Mal Infernal and by the banks of the Grenouiller to Agay.

2. Ascend Cap Roux from Agay by hermitage of St. Honorat, descending directly to the sea-coast path, and following it past Le Trayas and round the Pointe de Théoule. The view from the coast-guard station on the cape looking over the bay of La Napoule, with Cannes, Grasse, and the Iles de Lérins in the middle distance, and the Alps (and sometimes Corsica) on the horizon, is one of the most exquisite and perfect on the coast. This point, though only half an hour's walk or ride from La Théoule, is seldom reached by Cannes excursionists.

3. From Agay walk to gorge under the Serrière des Partus. Then take the path which climbs through the rocks on its N. side and follows the ridge to Mont Vinaigre; ascend Mont Vinaigre and descend to the pass at its E. base; follow the roads and paths which keep close to the watershed as far as the cart-road which crosses the path S.E. of the Signal du Marsaou; descend by this to the Fréjus road.

in the Alpine Club—stands a cottage. A rough cart-track mounts from the bridge over the Siagne on the Fréjus road to the top, and a terrace path, commanding the most lovely views of Grasse and its gardens, follows the long back of the range to a pilgrimage church, whence it descends to the bridge above Auribeau, or by a shorter cut, which, unless the miller's punt is at hand, may involve wading the Siagne, to the village itself.

Below Auribeau, a hamlet clinging round the top of a steep hill, the river, here dammed up into a broad, tranquil stream, flows for half a mile through a picturesque dale. Steep banks clothed with firs and cork trees, and lit up in April with golden broom and white-starred cistus-bushes, hem in meadows and willow-fringed watercourses which might have been brought straight from the valley of the upper Thames.

When the Estérel's have yielded up all their secrets, when we know all that lies between the walls of La Napoule and the stone pines and ruined arches of Fréjus, the scattered villas of the quiet French watering-place of St. Raphael, and the beacon crag of Agay, it is time to turn northwards.

Behind Grasse, some fourteen miles from the coast, a long range rises abruptly in a continuous line, closing in the horizon of all views near Cannes. The slopes are only powdered with snow for a few days in winter; but the highest crest is outlined with a thin white edge long after the sheltered sunward face is bare. Below the hills are grey with olive groves. The bare rounded tops take a fresh colour in winter with every change of light—now the pale amber of Egyptian ranges; now, like Scotch hills, blue and grey under passing shadows.

In the centre, under the snowy crest just spoken of, the long uniform wall is broken to its base by a deep cleft. Two huge opposite cliffs throw their shadows, morning and evening, across at one another. This is the gorge of the Saut du Loup.* The crest is the Cheiron (5,813 feet), the highest summit in the block of mountains between the Var and the sea.

The road to the hills leads past Mougins, perched on its airy hill-top, through Mouans, where under the ancient olive stems

* The 'Saut du Loup' is a phrase constantly in the mouths of visitors to Cannes. But what natural feature it refers to they cannot agree. Some say—and this is the most plausible explanation—that it refers to the waterfall of the river Loup, which makes several bold leaps in the bottom of the gorge. The author of the 'Visitors' Guide to Cannes' makes it out to be the cascade of the stream which falls from Courmes. A third party maintains that the name immortalises a wolf who leapt over the cliff of Gourdon! There can be little doubt, I should think, that the first derivation is the true one.

the anemones burst forth in March like a troop of Mr. Doyle's fairies, of every hue and size, from the modest purple star to the blazing scarlet sun-anemone, a firework of a flower. Then it mounts the long hill-side to the town of Grasse between terraces which in April are a staircase carpeted with wild hyacinths and daffodils.

Grasse hangs on the steep slope looking out to the distant sea in a position resembling in some respects that of Broussa, while its steep narrow streets recall Siena. The town has still an air worthy of the ancient Provençal republic, which was alternately the ally of Pisa and of Genoa, as the politics of its rulers swayed from Ghibelline to Guelf. It has a heavy twelfth-century cathedral, and had until last winter a promenade shaded by noble plane-trees. Some barbarous official has laid his axe to their roots. When last I saw them the noble old trunks were prostrate, and, sound to the core, gave the lie to the plausible bystander who suggested they had been condemned as dangerous. I am bound to say he only added this excuse in consequence of the scorn with which I had received his previous suggestion that new trees would be prettier. Yet Grasse calls itself artistic, and holds fêtes in memory of the native painter Fragonard, famous for his questionable nymphs and goddesses.

Beyond the gate of Grasse the Vence road runs along a terrace high on the hill-side; bare rocks rise above; below, swells of fir and olive, broken here and there by tall cypresses or a white village church, stretch away to the blue bay of La Napoule. After a low brow has been crossed the scene changes. Neighbouring hills cut off the views towards the sea, and the road enters the valley of the Loup. Sweeping round deep hollows in the hill-sides, the haunt of primroses, it approaches Le Bar, a large village with an old church which contains a fifteenth-century altarpiece of the Tuscan school. From the terrace close at hand the gorge of the Loup is first seen. Two tremendous headlands of golden limestone front each other. The rocks fall in precipices of between 2,000 and 3,000 feet into the great chasm.* On a half-way shelf on the brink of the cliffs stands Gourdon, a hamlet of refuge in the old times.

The high road leading to Vence descends rapidly amongst

* The bridge of the high road (not shown on the Ordnance map) is about 550 feet above the sea-level; the shelves on the top of the lower cliffs, along which the roads to the hamlets on the uplands pass, 2,860 and 3,340 feet respectively.

olives to the river-side, to mount again by a long ascent to Les Tourrettes. We leave it at the bridge, and follow a footpath which, stealing up on the right bank between orange gardens and violet beds, climbs to the very base of the wall of crags.

After creeping for some distance under the rocks, and crossing numerous gullies full of dripping maidenhair, the path comes back to the stream, where it is tightly grasped between the huge precipices of red rock. A deserted mill is passed on the opposite bank. A little higher the path crosses the river. At this point picnic parties are stopped by a skeleton bridge. The stream roars below, and from rock to rock, a distance of perhaps 10 or 12 feet, three poles extend, the faggots and earth which were once laid on them to form a pathway having long since fallen in. Last year, however, it was an easy matter for anyone not too proud to crawl to get across by the boughs.

The few who venture over find themselves in the heart of as wild and romantic a chasm as can be met with in the Alps. Broken cliffs, only here and there giving scanty goat-pasture, spring straight from the water-side. A few chestnuts cling to the crags. So narrow is the cleft that a mere strip of sky is visible overhead, against which, looking back, the great rocks forming the portals of the gorge throw out their bold outlines. Deeper in the defile there is no more room for the path, which passes along a gallery carried round the face of a crag overhanging the stream. This gallery I found much in the same state as the bridge—that is to say, only a few withes remained, bound to iron stanchions in the rock. These, however, could be wormed over by a light weight. Beyond this *mauvais pas* a stream tumbles in a great leap across the path coming down from Gréolières, a hamlet 2,000 feet overhead. At last the track abandons the river, and a rude staircase in the limestone rock, which anyone unaccustomed to mountains might very easily fail to notice, leads up some 300 feet to a brow whence all the height and depth of the abyss are seen at a glance. A path, easy except for those subject to giddiness, traverses the face of the cliffs, passing at one place under a waterfall.

The gorge is now left behind, and the upper valley opens before us. In winter it is bare and brown. The few scattered cottages are connected by horse-tracks. A new road running to the village of Cipières keeps high along the western hill-side. It is useless to those making for the Cheiron, who must keep close to the water on its (true) left bank as far as the point where the valley of the Loup turns due west, and a road leads up a side glen to the right to the high plateau of Coursegoules.

Following this for a hundred yards, and passing close to the hamlet of St. Pons, I began to climb the great face of the Cheiron, conspicuous from the hills near Cannes. The next two and a half hours were devoted to steady treadmill work up very steep grass slopes, broken only for a few minutes midway by a cultivated shelf. A little more than halfway up the ascent of 4,000 feet I turned round for a moment to rest. A high snowy range, very clearly defined, with peaks shining in rosy light and pearly shadows in its hollows, had risen above the ridge behind me, itself 3,500 feet high. I had to think twice before I could convince myself that no Maritime Alp could possibly have got so far to sea, and that these substantial snow-peaks were the same I had seen from lesser heights as semi-transparent ghosts floating in haze above the watery horizon, the mountains of Corsica.

Time was running short, and I could not afford to halt. At last I was up to the level of the cliffs seen from the hills behind Cannes. To be able to use hands as well as feet was a delightful relief in the long uphill strain. I took the steepest rock I could find, and indulged my scrambling instinct. A short gully led up between two crags. As I reached the crest I was met by an icy blast which nearly knocked me back again. A few steps to the right and I was on the top of the Cheiron, under the lee of a big ruined signal, erected, no doubt, for trigonometrical purposes. It was late in the afternoon, and the sun was low in the western heavens. A wilder view I had never seen even from the greatest heights. The sky was already deepening to a red winter sunset. Clouds or mountains threw here and there dark shadows across earth and sea. The Estérelles had sunk to a cape of the size of Beachy Head. Far beyond them stretched the coast of Provence. The great Gulf of Fréjus was spread out with all its bays and capes. Beyond it, over the Montagnes des Maures, as the old Burgundian provinces are seen from Mont Blanc over the Jura, the long land-line receded northwards towards Toulon, broken where the Iles d'Hyères lay apart from the land.

Far out at sea Corsica burst out of the black waves like an island in flames, reflecting the sunset from all its snows. From the sea-level only its mountain-tops, and these by aid of refraction, overcome the curvature of the globe. From our height we seemed to see down to their roots, the capes which break the waters.

The back of the Cheiron itself is a broad pasturage, partly wooded, covered in summer with flocks and herds and vocal with shepherds' songs. Now it was a howling wilderness

of snow and ice. That way lay winter. I had climbed the great screen which, like the mountain-wall of a fairy tale, protects the lemons and palms of Provence. In front was the country of the north wind. It was strange to turn the head from the fertile coast studded with bright towns to the white leagues of frozen hills which stretched one beyond the other towards Gap and Grenoble. If the knife-edges of Dauphiné were in sight, they were indistinguishable from lesser snow-clad heights. Elsewhere the horizon confirmed my impression that there is little attraction for the mountaineer in the Basses Alpes.* The familiar peaks of the Maritime Alps still remained by far the most striking features of the mountain panorama.

It was not, however, a view in which one cared to linger over details or was eager for the recognition of localities. The overpowering effect of the vast weird landscape was due, not to any individual feature, but to the general expression. Placed in solitude under the influence of this lurid sunset on the high desolate hill-top between the snows and sea, the most matter-of-fact tourist could hardly think for long of such small things as hills and gulfs and cities. One felt brought face to face with a mighty struggle between the principalities and powers of nature, a strife in which night and winter were allied against day and summer, and were on the point of gaining the mastery. As the sun sank redly in the west, the sea grew more and more grey; the flush died off the Corsican heights and left them wan ghosts on the edge of the world; the last gleams faded from the warm green shores and the red promontories beyond Nice; the icy blast from the leagues of northern frost and snow shrieked past with an even fiercer howl of triumph, as if about to seize on the last strip of sun-protected land underfoot. The dramatic force and mystery of such a scene are familiar to most climbers; they can scarcely be conveyed to those who are strangers to high mountains.

Having lingered as long as the swift approach of darkness would permit, I slid over the snow-slopes on the N. side of the mountain to a gap a quarter of a mile E. of that which I had mounted through. My descent might be summarised in an alliterative line familiar to youth. By a run down the rugged rocks I succeeded in reaching, with ragged clothes and knuckles, but otherwise unharmed, a good path just before

* The Lac d'Allos and Mont Pelat (10,016 feet), S. of Barcelonnette, will probably best repay a visit in this region.

dusk. It crossed a watershed, and then circled round the slopes to the large mountain village of Coursegoules, where I arrived in pitch darkness at about 6.15 P.M., in 1½ hour from the summit.

The village inn gave me a partridge for supper and a comfortable bed. At an early hour next morning I set off by moonlight to return to the sea coast at Cannes. The road lies across wild, silent downs, alive in summer with shepherds and shepherds' songs. Often, I was told, they sit on neighbouring hillocks and chant alternate strains to the music of their pipes. At last, as the east whitened, and the full moon paled in the western sky, I saw from the outmost folds of the hills the wide sea-spaces, and dropped by steep zigzags down a barren gorge, and past an old castle of the Templars to the ancient town of Vence and the orange-girt walls of St. Paul.

There is another gorge in these hills which well deserves a visit. The water which supplies Cannes is brought in an open aqueduct, over twenty miles in length, from the Siagne near St. Césaire. This village lies some ten miles W. from Grasse on the first shelf of the hills. It is approached by a road across a bare plain so thoroughly Syrian in character that one finds oneself involuntarily looking out for camels and a domed Moslem tomb. You may enter it and walk about its streets without further discovery, unless chance leads you to a terrace a few yards behind the church. There you find that the whole village is built on the brink of a great chasm. Far below (1,500 feet, I should say at a rough guess) the clear stream of the Siagne, newly born out of great caves in the hills two or three miles higher up, flows at the bottom of a steep-sided glen, cultivated wherever the cliffs allow it. The olive groves pour down to the bottom in a great silver-green cascade.

The aqueduct which feeds Cannes draws its supply from the stream a mile or two higher up. By a little scrambling it is possible to follow it in the opposite direction, looking down on the still green pools, the sparkling shallows, and high arched bridges of the Siagne, and the clusters of sun-stained buildings—mills or farm-houses—which gather beside the stream. The high road from Grasse to Draguignan is joined close to the wide-spanned arch which marks the frontier of the Alpes Maritimes and the Var departments.*

* An interesting walk I did not take is to follow the line of the Roman aqueduct from the Siagne to Fréjus, about twenty miles. (See F. M. S.'s 'Guide to Cannes'.)

Here, before leaving the mountains of the coast and turning inland, I may add a few lines on the view-points of Nice, Mentone, and San Remo; Mont Chauve, the Berceau, and Monte Bignone.

The Mont Chauve is reached by the charming country road which leads to Aspromonte, and it is easy to descend from it to St. Martin le Var or Les Tourrettes on the Lantosca high road.

The double-headed point of Le Berceau seen from Mentone is from below one of the most tempting of Mediterranean mountains, and nothing can be more beautiful than the lower part of the walk, whether the ridge track to Castellar or the footpath through the Val di Mentone, a bower of orange and lemon groves, is taken. Perhaps the best route is through Castellar and up past the old eagle's nest of Castellaras, now in ruins, reaching the gap between the two points of Le Berceau from the N., and descending by the seaward face. The view, however, is not equal to that from most of the coast mountains, being confined in many directions by ranges close at hand; nor is it improved by following the ridge inland to the higher Gramont, the culminating point in this neighbourhood.

Far more beautiful is the San Remo mountain, Monte Bignone. The ordinary path by San Romolo, however, should be avoided. A preferable track winds through vineyards to the chapel of San Pietro and the Croce di Fara, and then climbs a spur of the mountain. At first it is bare, and the clay strata, turned up vertically to the sky, look like the ribs of a famished monster. Above spreads a great pine forest, in which it is easy to miss the way, but difficult to lose it badly if the obvious rule of going always uphill is observed. The top of Monte Bignone is a long down broken by beech copses, sloping gently for some distance seawards, precipitous on the N.W. face. It commands a most romantic view over a landscape Italian in every detail. The wide basin of the Nervia spreads out towards the snowy Alps; steep-sided ridges, crowned by the brown houses and white campaniles of walled hill-villages, divide narrow winding glens. On the other side the chestnut forests of Ceriana are seen, but the town itself, one of the most picturesque in Italy, is hidden.*

* There are obvious traces of ancient entrenchments on the summit of Monte Bignone, of which I have found no explanation. The top of the neighbouring and lower Monte Caggio is a huge pile of stones, which appears to have been heaped together by human agency.

It is easy to descend from the top to the pilgrimage church of San Romolo, whence a paved path leads down directly to San Remo. A good walker will prefer to follow a terrace road which runs along the face of the hills to Ospidaletti; by turning off it above Signa, San Remo may be gained by that village. A still more charming descent is found by crossing the backbone of the hills and following the crest of the spur which ends in the Cape of Bordighera. The views looking westwards from the neighbourhood of that village are perhaps the most perfectly romantic on the Riviera, and, if the hotels were anywhere but in the ugly Marina behind the railway station, Bordighera would probably before this have become one of the most frequented health-resorts of the Mediterranean coast. The neighbouring scenery shares with that of Cannes two qualities wanting among the romantic glens of Mentone or the quieter hills of San Remo—spaciousness and variety in character. The bottom of a valley ringed by impending hills, even though it open on the sea, cannot—at least to my taste—compete as a place of long sojourn with a spot which presents landscapes at once bold and broad, varied in themselves and capable of infinite variety of expression, according to season and weather, and crowned by that most beautiful and suggestive of all natural objects a distant snowy chain.

THE CONGRESS OF ALPINE CLUBS AT PARIS IN 1878, AND FÊTE AT FONTAINEBLEAU.

At the congress of the French Alpine Club which took place at Grenoble in 1877, resolutions were passed 'that there should be but one international congress per annum, to be organised successively by the French, Italian, Swiss, and German clubs,' and 'that henceforth the congress should be held in the mountains and not in a town, an exception, however, being made in favour of Paris in 1878, on account of the Exhibition.' Probably the wisdom of the former of these resolutions is sufficiently apparent, and the writer of these lines, at any rate, has no cause to regret the exception that made Paris the centre of the festivities of the past year.

On September 6, 1878, the congress was opened, not at the Trocadero, as was originally intended, but at the palace of the Tuileries, when M. Adolphe Joanne, the esteemed president of the French club, delivered a carefully prepared and animated address upon the subject of 'Alpinism.' M. Talbert, V.P. of the French club, followed with an account of Alpine reunions at Lauteret and Interlaken. M. Le Colonel Goulier addressed the congress on the use of mountain barometers, and M. Charles Durier introduced an ingenious theory of the passage of the Alps by Hannibal.

On the 7th the congress was continued. It was addressed by M.