

	Old Italian Map	New Italian Map	French Map	Bossoli's Panorama from Sanctuary of S. Chiaffredo
13	—	—	(3,051 m.) (point where ridge turns abruptly to W.)	—
14	Monte Granero (3,105 m.) (Meidassa di Viso)	M. Granero (3,170 m.)	—	Médasse (3,122 m.) (so called at Crissolo)
15	—	M. Meidassa (3,105 m.)	—	—

Note that neither 14 nor 15 are on the frontier, but are E. of the point 3,051, and overhang the Val Pellice to the N. Bourcet's old map marks the Monte Viso, the Col de Coulaon and the Col de Viso (= the Traversette). Consult on the whole subject the excellent remarks of M. Guillemin ('Annuaire du C. A. F.' iv. 583-4). The peaks 3 or 4 are usually called Viso di Vallante, and really form a single mass.

THE SANCTUARY OF SAN CHIAFFREDO.

BY DOUGLAS W. FRESHFIELD.

[THE following pages were written in 1878 as the introduction to a paper which is now superseded by Mr. Coolidge's subsequent ascents. The part of it referring to the Vaudois valleys may be published some day among 'Notes on Old Tracks.']

In a recent paper in which I gave some hints as to the exploration of the Maritime Alps—an exploration which has since been successfully carried on by Mr. Coolidge—I spoke of the glorious appearance of Monte Viso seen from among the walled and towered towns which cluster on the plain of Piedmont at the foot of the Western Alps, and I promised at another time to turn towards the mountain. This promise I now fulfil.

A branch line from the Cuneo Railway leads up in some 2½ hours from Turin to Saluzzo. I shall not attempt to describe in words of my own the approach to that town. The landscape has been drawn long ago in lines which bring before us now, as well as they did in the 14th century, its great features—the white mountain, and the rich town-studded plain. I cannot resist quoting Chaucer :—

Ther is at the west ende of Itaille,
Doun at the root of Vesulus the colde,
A lusty playn, abundaunt of vitaille,
Wher many a tour & toun thou maist byholde
That foundid were in tyme of fadres old,
And many anothir delitable sight,
And Saluces is this noble country hight.

Saluzzo, however, is not properly a mountain town, and we may pass on at once to Paesana, where for those who are following the Po, the

carriage road ends and the mountains begin. It is at this village or in its neighbourhood that the painter who desires to do justice to Monte Viso should fix his camp.

Near at hand spreads a fertile valley full of homesteads, chestnuts, maize, trailing vines, and all the usual incidents of Italian landscape. The mountains which inclose it are bold without being bare; they rise, ridge beyond ridge, here a rugged edge of cliff, there a beech-crowned knoll, forming many succeeding distances. Above them all, alone in the sky, soars the whole height of Monte Viso. It presents itself as the same noble pyramid which has been a familiar feature in the view from so many Alpine peaks, unaltered except in grandeur by approach. The path to Crissolo and San Chiaffredo lies along the valley beside the bends of the dashing stream amongst charming scenery. Towards evening in September two processions meet on it. One, made up of families on foot, with their babies strapped on to donkeys, climbs slowly upwards, singing or reciting prayers and hymns by the way. The other, decked with bright tufts and medals, the tokens of pilgrimage, is returning joyfully to the plain.

Beyond a waters-meet the white church and hospice are seen, high perched on the right-hand hill. The path accompanies the stream, below and beyond the Sanctuary, to the hamlet of Crissolo, one of the highest in the Po valley. It is made up of several groups of houses, the chief of which consists of a tiny town-hall and a number of humble inns. The town-hall bears inscriptions recording the visits of royal princes, Alpine Clubs, and the members of a Boatmen's Society from Turin, on their way to explore their river from source to sea.

From the village, a path, at first steep, leads back in about ten minutes to the Sanctuary.

The new laws of the Italian kingdom with respect to the property of religious corporations have in many parts of the Alps produced a change to the advantage of travellers. Thus, at Pesio, on the north slopes of the Maritime Alps, at Oropa near Biella, and here at Crissolo, the extensive buildings belonging to the Church have been converted into inns, or, as Italians call them, 'Stabilimenti Alpini,' places of bodily and mental refreshment for the citizens of the plain, who cannot afford to spend their whole lives in selfish isolation, but are glad enough of a few weeks' refuge from daily work and the southern sun.

Unlike his great tributaries, the Po stays but for a short time among the Alps. Within twelve miles of its birthplace the river is flowing peaceably amongst verdant foothills; within twenty, it is already in the great plain. Hence its source, marked out as it were by the noble pyramid of Monte Viso, has been since Roman times known and accessible. To the country people it is a much-frequented place of pilgrimage. Their devotion is now paid to the Virgin and a special saint of obscure history. But it is difficult not to recognise the continuance under another title of an older worship. 'Alla beata Vergine' is the dedication of one village inn, 'Ai Sorgenti del Po' of its next neighbour. San Chiaffredo would hardly have had so many devotees except as the successor of the great river-god Eridanus.

The Sanctuary consists of a long plain range of buildings facing

southwards to the valley. Beyond the inn, and at the head of the terrace, is the church, a building of some age, but small architectural pretensions. On the right hand on entering is the shrine, a circular chapel surrounded by an iron railing, within which are exhibited the relics of the saint. Round and round it in a constantly renewed circle tramp the pilgrims muttering their prayers and Aves. On the walls hang the trophies of the saint, evidences of his miraculous gifts, or of the power of faith on a certain class of physical ailments, an array of antique crutches and extremely modern and improved trusses, which it seems a pity should be thus wasted on a whitewashed church-wall!

The terrace is alive morning and evening with peasants who throng the stalls which supply pictures of the martial saint, medals, and little gay tufts. San Chiaffredo having been a soldier himself, gives Cæsar his due, and is liberal enough not to object to the red, white, and green colours which are worn as a sign of pilgrimage.

The natural attractions of the place are great, but the accommodation must be improved before English travellers will frequent the 'Stabilimento Alpino.' Those who care for what northerners think the decencies of life will only make it a halting-place for a night. The mountaineer going to Monte Viso finds a clean bed, a good dinner and wine, and does not care to look further. But the furniture, floors, and staircases, seem to have taken a monkish vow never to submit to pail or brush, from which no secularisation can release them. Moreover, during September, the month of pilgrimage, the eating-rooms (there are half a dozen) are taken entire possession of by a crowd of peasantry, well-behaved enough, but decidedly noisy. In short, if the courteous host means his house to be a resort of travellers, he must thoroughly cleanse and refurnish part of it, and reserve it for their use. It would be wrong, however, to encourage speculation by holding out false hopes of foreign patronage. A few strangers would doubtless be attracted, but for some years he must rely mainly on the support of his own countrymen. Crissolo is too far from the common round of English tourists to come suddenly into vogue.

The chapel and inn are built under the crest of a long thin low spur which runs out from the higher mountains, and delays the meeting of the Po and its first affluent. Its northern banks are richly wooded, and pleasant shady paths might be made along them; but the view is to the S. and W. The young stream of the Po leaps along the bottom of a narrow winding glen, thickly draped with copses, now gilded here and there by the recent frosts. Above the woods spread the broad bare downs, which serve as a pedestal to the great pyramid of Monte Viso, seen here in all its splendour and symmetry of form with a picturesque black rock, known as the Visolotto, by its side.

Through the opening between the hills towards which the waters flow is seen a portion of the plain of Piedmont, pale and phantomlike in the morning hours, towards evening distinct with fields and hills and a white cliff which may easily be taken for a town. The only weak point in the landscape—nature is seldom above criticism—is the character of the pedestal on which Monte Viso is raised. The romantic sharp-crested ridges seen from Paesana have disappeared. The broad

downs, which stretch between the eyes and the great pyramid, require the cross lights and shadows of a low sun to show to advantage the folds of velvet turf which cover them. At noonday they interpose a tame and prosaic bar between the majestic peak and the romantic glen. Man, however, and not nature, is after all responsible for their bareness.

It was my fate to see more of Chiaffredo than I had intended, for a severe attack of neuralgia laid me up for twenty-four hours, and I was forced to allow my companion, Mr. C. C. Tucker, and François Devouassoud to climb the Viso without me.

Although September had not long begun, the air at this height (4,728 feet) was too chilly for me to venture to sit long out of doors, and the hours were passed at my window, through which the Viso persisted in staring in a way which under the circumstances was unkind. Once I set out for the cavern on the opposite side of the valley, the Grotta del Rio Martino, but my courage failed me. However, even had I seen it, I could scarcely have ventured to describe it, for, according to a local writer, 'he who would speak of its form and its beauties must have a hand used at once to the geologist's hammer and the painter's brush. Nor is this enough. To give expression to the secret emotions caused by its visit, there is need in truth of the sweet sensitiveness of the poet and the productive imagination of the romantic author!' So I am not sorry to leave for my friend the Editor the privilege of playing 'vates sacer' to this most compendious of caverns.

The impressions my day and a half's solitude has left on my memory are chequered. There were moments of delight when the plain shone like a golden sea, before the sun sank below the hills and the valley depths turned black between the purple hills. The extraordinarily pure and bright air might have made mere living a pleasure; but it seemed at the same time to add to one's capacity for toothache. The advance of the long line of peasants, as they wound in and out of the rocks along a mile or two of rough road, was pleasant to the eyes; and the sound of their hymns, as, mingled with the bells of Crissolo, they rose to the ears, was most romantic. But Vespers were too soon at an end, and then, the Madonna and San Chiaffredo satisfied, the whole first floor of the inn was invaded by the peasantry. Each of the six or seven rooms, which open one from another, had its three or four tables full. Round each table a little swarm of four to ten youths and girls clustered. A couple of open wine-flasks were set down between them, and then off they started in part-singing, each room having at least one set perpetually going. 'Maria' was still the general burden of their songs, but there was a good deal also about profane love. They all behaved admirably; they did not get tipsy or romp or quarrel, but their melodies were the reverse of soothing to disordered nerves.

The literature of Crissolo naturally did not offer any prolonged occupation; the story of the saint under whose patronage the Sanctuary lies may be got up pretty thoroughly in a few hours and told in as many minutes. His name appears to be a popular corruption of Godfrey, Giotfredus. Sanctus Giotfredus was a soldier of the Theban legion.

Towards the close of the 3rd century the Emperor Maximian had need of some good soldiers in Gaul, and this legion, numbering nearly 7,000 men, was brought from the East. The soldiers had crossed the Alps and were encamped at the modern St. Maurice in the Rhone valley. The Emperor was at Octodurum, the modern Martigny. Some suspicion was thrown on the fidelity of the troops, who in their sojourn in the East were reported to have become infected with new doctrines. They were required to sacrifice to the Emperor; and also, it is said, to march against the Christians in Gaul instead of against the Belgic tribe they had been summoned to subdue. The Theban legion protested their loyalty, and at the same time refused to submit. Twice they were decimated. When this cruel measure failed to break their spirit, the incensed Emperor surrounded them with other troops and slew them to a man.

So the best authorities relate. But an obvious difficulty arises. If the Thebans all died round their eagles at St. Maurice, how is it that their bones are not there also, instead of lying 'scattered o'er the Alpine mountains cold' in many distant spots? Even martyrs, it may be argued, may run away, if by so doing 'they live to preach another day,' and the text, 'If they persecute you in one city, flee into another,' has been seriously quoted as an authority for such conduct. But this explanation does not satisfy the enthusiasm of the majority of S. Chiaffredo's Roman biographers. He and his companions S. Vitalis, S. Candidus, S. Victor, S. Magnus, and S. Constantius, it is assumed, were by some chance away from their regiment, on sick leave or in a rearguard, and so escaped the general slaughter, only to perish later. There is another version, according to which the saint's bones were brought hither from the Rhone valley by the faithful after his death, but this is not generally held authentic. Anyhow, we are required to believe that S. Chiaffredo was a soldier of the Theban legion, and that he is buried here at Crissolo.

How, we next inquire, was his tomb preserved or discovered?

'Once upon a time,' no nearer date can be assigned, a peasant girl was ploughing, with a yoke of oxen, the hillside on which the church now stands, when of a sudden the plough struck against a huge stone, and oxen, plough, and girl went over the edge and down the steep cliff which overhangs the glen of the Ciampagna. Marvellous to relate, no injury was caused by the fall. When the stone which had caused the accident was uncovered from the earth an inscription was found on it to the memory of San Chiaffredo, martyr under Diocletian and Maximian. It may be remarked in passing that other tombs have been found near the same spot which are referred by antiquaries to pre-Roman times.*

The first historical fact about the shrine seems to be that it was restored in the 8th century by Aripert, King of the Lombards. In succeeding centuries it grew in wealth and renown, thanks to donations

* Roman inscriptions found in the territory of Crissolo refer also to a Temple of Mercury. Such a 'heaven-kissing hill' as Monte Viso may well have served the messenger of the gods to light on.

of the Marquesses of Saluzzo, and the crowds of pilgrims. The present church is said to have been founded in A.D. 1444. About A.D. 1500, the heretics of the valleys to the north began to be troublesome. The injuries inflicted by them were repaired in 1551 by the French, and the lilies of France are still visible on the columns of the nave. The precious bones of the saint were transferred in 1593 to the Castle of Revello, and remained there till 1642, when they were again transported to Saluzzo; only a few fragments (a rib and a hand) being still left at the Sanctuary for the adoration of the faithful. 'On June 12, 1655,' writes Bishop Agostino della Chiesa, 'the heretics burst out of Val di Lucerna, sacked Crissolo, broke violently into parish church and Sanctuary, overthrew the statue of the Virgin with their arquebuses, smashed shrines and pulpits, cast to the winds books and vestments.' The priest, foreseeing their peril, and fearing, I suppose, lest the saint might not think so small a part of himself worth a miracle, had taken the precaution of hiding the rib and hand in a more remote chapel. Even there they did not escape the impious fury of the Vaudois, who broke open the altar in which they had been deposited, and contemptuously scattered the bones, not however so thoroughly but that they were recoverable by the pious care of their guardian. A few days later the marauders were properly punished, being caught on another of their forays by the horsemen of the Duke of Savoy and cut to pieces.*

Besides miraculous cures, the saint's sanctity has been attested by more than one remarkable event. Two large caldrons in which he was wont to make soup, with his companions, have been several times stolen, but each time have returned of their own accord to the shrine. Again, a thief trying to break open a cupboard containing valuable objects, pulled it over on himself, so that he could not escape—which was clearly a very remarkable miracle, and does not appear to be disputed in any quarter.

In 1833 the annual number of pilgrims to the shrine of San Chiaffredo was about 6,000, and at the present time there may well be as many, if it is as frequented during the whole month of September as on the three days of our stay.

* As we are giving the Roman view of the Vaudois, it is perhaps fair to quote an impartial tribute to them from a Swiss writer of the sixteenth century. It is curious to see how Rome had recourse to the old calumnies which had served against her own founders.

'Sunt et alia itinera inter montem Genebræ et Alpes Maritimas, veluti per vallem Perosæ, item Lusernam vallem et Angroniam et collem Crucis, quarum vallium incolæ vulgò Christiani nominantur: credo quod neglectâ Romani Pontificis auctoritate et contemptis monachorum societatibus se Christo uni et soli, in quem baptizati essent, addictos dicerent et ab eo nuncupari vellent. De his quidam multa portentosa memoriæ prodiderunt, atque ipsos impura et libidinosa sacra, et promiscuos in his concubitus exercere scripserunt, quæ tamen falsa et conficta esse cum ipsi arguunt, tum etiam omnes qui cum illis commercium exercent, qui viros probos et moderatos esse testantur.'—Simler, pp. 233-4, *De Alpiibus* (written 1567, published 1633).