

FROM SIMPLON TO TOSA FALLS.

By R. MELVILL BEACHCROFT.

MANY years have passed since my first visit to Tosa Falls, and the charm with which the district then inspired me scarcely needed the propelling influence of Mr. Cust's recent vivid descriptions to attract me thither again.

It was not, however, until the past summer that an opportunity offered of making the direct route thither from Simplon (a route that has always struck me as presenting more than the usual number of attractions), and since the result has more than answered my expectations, and as few, if any, travellers seem acquainted with it, a short description may not, perhaps, be out of place in these pages.

Leaving Saas Fee on August 27, my wife and I, accompanied by Mr. Fairbanks and Mr. Guillemard, crossed the Rossbodenjoch to Simplon. This pass, which receives far less attention than it deserves, is at least 1,400 feet lower than Baedeker makes it out to be. Those, by the way, who wish to solve the question of the whereabouts of the Rossbodenhorn can readily do so from the top of this joch.

Having engaged Ignaz Joseph Dorsaz, the only guide of the Leone district, and who pays almost too exclusive attention to it, we started the following morning, and, pursuing the usual track, skirted the west side of the Alpien Glacier as far as the ridge overlooking the Kaltwasser Glacier, thence gaining the top of the Leone by the rock arête which affords a pleasant scramble, the weather being all that could be desired. My wish had been to descend to the Kaltwasser, and so reach the Alpe di Veglia, at the head of the Val Cherasca, but Dorsaz, despite the charm he carries about with him in the form of a wondrous antique piece of magenta silk wound round his hat, and which he vows is an antidote to lightning and thunderbolts, flatly declined to lead or follow, so there was nothing for it but to take the usual route along the eastern ridge. Following the latter for three-quarters of an hour, and resisting the temptation offered by a gully which seemed to give a practicable lead to the Lago di Vino, visible deep below, we regained the Alpien Glacier, and in a quarter of an hour struck an easy depression in the ridge; this after a glissade landed us on the south-east side of the mountain; a fatiguing hour followed, varied only by the collection of a few rare plants, and we at last rounded its eastern buttress and found ourselves on the banks of the desolate but highly picturesque Lago di Vino

above mentioned. A rough and direct descent from the furthest end of this lake down a steep grassy gorge, fringed with most exquisite flowers and ferns of all kinds, brought us to the head of what is locally known as the Val Camperi, down which the crystal waters from the lake dance in a succession of bright cascades; the little valley rapidly extends into broad meadows, the châteaux of the Alpe di Veglia being visible on higher ground beyond, while to our left and nearer the head of the main valley are scattered a few châteaux known as Al Ponte, with signs at a little distance off of a new building in course of erection. Dorsaz had been sent on to forage, and, as it was now past 6 P.M., we were not sorry to pull up at the diminutive dwelling which answers to Baedeker's "rustic inn." This consists of a kitchen and attic over, wherein are three straw beds. The situation naturally gave rise to some trifling domestic difficulties, but these were soon forgotten in the repast which Dorsaz, who, as head waiter, eclipsed all deficiencies he may have shown as guide, quickly dished up. An open lean-to, enclosed with blankets, made an admirable though draughty dining-room, and the tallow candles pocketed at Simplon, being encased in paper frills to keep off the wind, revealed, till blown out, the startling nature of the dishes before us.

While dinner was being discussed, stock was taken of the surroundings. Alpe di Veglia (or, more strictly speaking, Al Ponte) is at a height of 5,800 feet, and occupies a position which is simply unique. Immediately above rises the eastern ridge of the Leone, capped as viewed from our inn by a small glacier, which looks as if it might (though according to our host it does not) give access to the summit. Around lie rich, well watered meadows, studded with fir and larch, while wooded glades, intersected by lovely streams, extend upwards towards the rocks of the Aurna; the Val Cherasca itself stretching away below and losing itself in the hazy Italian atmosphere. A word as to our aforesaid host, Giovanni Roggia by name; a good sportsman, the law, which at present prohibits the slaying of chamois on the Swiss side of the Alps, is all to his advantage; the owner also of a brace of pointers and two or three guns, he is ready to give anyone the use of these. Something he knows too of the flowers and minerals with which this valley teems, and high is his praise of the mineral water which has lately come to light in the district, and which he hopes may bring customers to his new hôtel—the new building noticed above, and which is to be ready with its nine bedrooms by next season. Altogether, both the Alpe di Veglia and mine host

impressed us greatly, and when one considers how easily accessible the place is, it is surprising no one has yet been found to sing its praises. From the Simplon Hospice the Alpe is to be reached, *via* the Kaltwasser, in five and a half hours. From Isella it is a matter of three hours only, while there are the easy passes from the Binnenthal and Bérisal, to wit, the Ritter, and the Forcletta, neither of them occupying more than from six to seven hours.

Bidding adieu to Giovanni, and promising to pay his new hôtel a visit next year, we took to the right bank of the Valtendra stream, and in two and a half hours reached the Col of that name (8,000 ft.); in lieu of descending it, we hugged the hill-side, making for the Passo di Buscagna, and, though sorely puzzled by a thick mist, succeeded ultimately in striking the pass. This brought us face to face with the imposing southern face of the Binnenthal mountains; keeping then to our right and descending through a forest of rhododendrons, we reached the first châlets in three hours from Valtendra, and were hospitably entertained by Italian herdsmen. From this point the hour's walk to the Val Devero is the most beautiful of the kind imaginable. The chief stream forms a series of frothy, bath-suggesting rapids, while from some 400 ft. above a subsidiary cataract tumbles to one's feet, framed by trees and rocks, a picture such as any painter might well, though vainly, wish to see transferred to his canvas. Immediately below this point the head of Val Devero spreads out at once into a broad, verdant expanse, with the village of Al Ponte in its midst, encircled on all sides by wooded heights topped by jagged and perpendicular peaks which reminded us greatly both in shape and colour of our old friends the Dolomites. Here, if anywhere, was the spot for a halt, height 5,300 ft., and everything that heart of climbing man could wish for. What Bacdeker mentions as an auberge turned out an eminent success, albeit the *ménage* had removed itself to the hunting châlet of an Italian noble a little further on. This fact, however, turned out to our profit; the owner had let it to the Duca di Torino and other sportsmen, and we were permitted to take our meals in the great man's kitchen; so while the swells took their sumptuous, and rather noisy, repast upstairs, we filled ourselves with the crumbs that fell from their table, much to the delight of the chef and his rustic staff.

It was with great regret we turned our backs on this beautiful valley; my wife indeed was so charmed with it that she and

Guillemard descended it as far as Premia, and made their way thence up to Tosa Falls. Fairbanks and I, however, continued the direct route. Three-quarters of an hour's gentle stroll up a placid stream brought in view the beautiful lake, or more properly, lakes of the Col di Lago; striking at once a path which led in a slant to the right and keeping well above the lake, we reached a plateau which rises about 1,000 ft. above it. The view from this is worth recording; the wild Val Deserta branches up from the lake below, fittingly crowned the Della Rossa and Schienhorn, while the shining face of the Ofenhorn lends brightness to the scene. The Fletschhorn range stretches away to the west, the Weissmies standing up like a second Weisshorn, while in the further line of distance are clearly visible the two peaks of Monte Rosa, supported by the Strahlhorn. Two hours more over sloping pastures, the grazing ground of many cattle tended by Italian peasants with the longest of leathern thongs, and the grand old Bietschhorn rises over the broad Albrun Pass to our left, which here forms a wide gap in the range, sufficient to give the Oberlanders a glimpse into sunny Italy and the Italians some idea of the giants lying across their border. *Névé* is now reached, which gives a good lead to the Colle di Vanin (8,600 ft.). Descending the Col a few hundred feet, the marvellously deep blue Lebendun Lake comes in sight 1,600 ft. below; so blue is it that it tinges the very mountains with a rich purple tint. Crossing the torrents to our left, and keeping to that side of the lake, we reached its easternmost end in an hour from the Colle di Vanin; opposite, or north-east of us, was what should be the Nuefelgiu Pass. The map, however, made this pass lie due north of where we stood. Forgetting the grievous uncertainty of the Federal map in respect to the Italian side, and unmindful of the previous experience of Mr. Gardiner in 1878, we elected to follow the map, keeping due north, and, to our endless grief, struck a ridge which brought us close to the little Obersee, with the ice-fall of the Hohsand glacier ahead. According to the map, the main ridge should have separated us from the Obersee; to set this straight, therefore, we backed eastwards, and made up the range of hills to our right; an hour and a half's grind only landed us, however, another 1,000 ft. higher, with the Hohsand fall still facing us, and a higher ridge yet to the east. Leaving Fairbanks to study the map, I climbed this latter ridge, nearly another 1,000 feet; this landed me on the small glacier which, as we afterwards found, is the one overhanging the Nuefelgiu Pass. Seeing this glacier to be shut in above me by a semicircle of

rocks, the same which puzzled Mr. Gardiner,* I rejoined Fairbanks after an hour's absence. A dive down the steepest of gullies followed, part shale, part snow, and we arrived within measurable distance of the ice-fall of the Hohsand. There remained nothing for it now but to beat a retreat or surmount the ridge separating us from the Hohsand glacier itself; it was 4.30 and we were pumped. This perhaps best explains the undoubted difficulty we experienced in topping the 1,500 ft. which the latter course necessitated; no foot, and less hand hold, was about the measure of it; an hour, however, saw us safely on the summit with the western slope of the Hohsand at our feet. To the right was Mr. Gardiner's Ofenjoch; further on the black-faced Bannhorn and Thällhorn; behind us the Hohsandhorn, and the Rothhorn to our left face. At racing speed, and aided by the very longest possible glissade, we trotted across the glacier, reaching the opposite bank in three-quarters of an hour, just as the sun finally disappeared. The path leading from the Gries Pass was ultimately struck, and the sight of a phantom figure on the opposite bank of the river was most welcome as betokening a near approach to Morast. The phantom fortunately resolved itself into a native, by whose aid, and that of a lantern, we finally reached Tosa Falls long after night had fallen.

Although the weather now broke, we were finally able in cloud and rain to clear up the mystery of the Nuefelgiu Pass, and to explain our discomfiture by the misplacement on the map of the Lebedun Lake. The walk, however, had been a most pleasant one, and I can strongly recommend others to follow in our footsteps. The whole distance may be covered in three days; and, if our route is followed, excepting the ascent of the Leone and the error over the Nuefelgiu Pass, no single day should involve more than seven hours' easy walking.

ACROSS THE PYRENEES. BY FREDERICK GARDINER.

To the traveller in the Pyrenees, accustomed to the accommodation of Switzerland, the almost entire absence of good inns in high places is very noticeable. In such places as the Bioux Artigues, Lac de Gaube, Hospice de Luchon, and the Cirque de Gavarnie, were they situated in Swiss territory, there would be flourishing hôtels, instead of either nothing at all or miserable wooden shanties where the traveller is taxed almost beyond endurance.

One noticeable exception we found at the comfortable little inn

* 'Alpine Journal,' vol. ix. p. 63.