

MONT BLANC FROM COMBLOUX

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BYE-CORNERS IN SAVOY,
WITH SEVERAL NEW WAYS TO MONT BLANC.

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(Read before the Alpine Club, June 10.)

Written in a bye-corner. —*Sterne*.

MOST of my readers must at some time or other have watched, as I did the other day, a party of rustic pleasure-seekers in a picture gallery. My country critics seemed never quite happy until they were close enough to stick their umbrellas into the canvas which had the misfortune to be the object of their momentary curiosity. Their proceedings interested me, for they suggested a train of reflection. 'Substitute,' I said to myself, 'alpenstock or ice axe for umbrella, Mont Blanc for Titian, and here is a very exact parallel to the conduct of most modern tourists towards the monarch of mountains.' 'In the season of 1883,' boasts Chamonix, 'fifty-four ascensions have been made to Mont Blanc.' How many of the 'ascensionists,' I should like to know, saw Mont Blanc as well as climbed it? We have all heard of the American ship-captain who reached Rome in the morning, drove straight to St. Peter's Piazza, went to the top of the dome, and returned by the first train after lunch to his vessel at Civita Vecchia. He had, he reckoned, seen all there is to be seen in Rome straight off. That man was a typical specimen of the genus, the alpine variety of which we are now considering.

Chamonix is so placed with respect to Mont Blanc that the summit loses half its effect, and few strangers can even make out which is the real top; the valley is monotonous and unpicturesque in form, and has little variety in vege-

tation; the true beauty and grandeur lie not under, but either on, or a little way off, the great mountain. But what does the tourist care? Beauty has had no place in his life, and why should he trouble himself about it all of a sudden? Is not his holiday humour amply satisfied with oddity, excitement, and good dinners, and cannot he find all these in the crevasses of the Mer de Glace, the Mauvais Pas, and the *tables d'hôte* of the Chamonix Hotels?

Close contact with mountains has its advantages; and I, at any rate, shall be the last to depreciate them. But it ought to come as a supplement to, not as the substitute for, those distant and general views which best display the whole structure, proportions, and meaning of nature's architecture. This to me sounds a platitude; to many tourists and some climbers it may, judging them by their practice, rather seem a paradox.

It was not held so in our fathers' days. In their time—for some of us in our own—Sallanches and St. Martin were both names kept in affectionate remembrance. To that simple generation 'Did you see the view from St. Martin?' was as interesting a question as 'Have you done Mont Blanc?' has become to their successors. Turn over the pages of any of the old albums full of the coloured lithographs for which Mr. Ruskin has spared a well-deserved word of appreciation. Amongst the blue skies—now too often black and faded, but once pure and smooth as the illuminations of an old Missal—you will hardly fail to come on a 'View of Mont Blanc from Sallanches.' Every traveller slept beside the Arve at the country inn of St. Martin, and wandered out on to the high-arched bridge the diligences now rattle over, towards sunset to watch the last rose colour fade off the broad slopes of the Dôme, again in the morning to wonder at the marble-like purity of the snows, seen themselves in shadow through a transparent veil of early sunshine. The level lines of the plain, now in great part reclaimed from the Arve, add to the effect of the mountain. This plain was meant by nature to be a lake. Unfortunately the numerous torrents which pour down into it, particularly those which flow from the friable slates (even the roadfarer may notice that the little stream from Combloux brings down in its course of four miles more rubbish than the Bonnant in its course of twenty), have filled the basin with 'the sand, gravel, and pebbles' which, as De Saussure tells us, now compose its soil. Yet even a hundred years ago a sudden flood could cover its surface, and De Saussure describes the town of Sallanches,

seen on the edge of the waters, which reflected its 'tall and glittering spires,' as offering a 'picture of the greatest beauty.' In an old print of 1697, a facsimile of part of which is here given, the spires and towers of Sallanches are well shown.*

What do the tourists of to-day see of this once celebrated landscape? Having lived two autumn months among these Lesser Alps, I can judge pretty well. In the hottest, cloudiest afternoon hour three huge, yet generally overcrowded, vans stagger up to the door of the Hôtel des Messageries at Sallanches. There they discharge their hungry, thirsty, ill-conditioned load with half an hour's leave to snatch, gulp, grumble, and pay. Then the personal conductor again marshals his following and the caravan departs as it came in a dust cloud of its own making, dense enough, even were the sky otherwise clear, to destroy all pleasure of vision, to poison all delight of breathing. Much-doing, more-done tourists, how we pitied you as, lying reclined *in remoto gramine* in the



THE SPIRE OF SALLANCHES (FROM A PRINT OF 1697).

clear, fragrant air of our upland lawn, or under the laden apple boughs of our valley home, we saw far below, rolling along among the poplars of the plain, the cloud which veiled your strange pilgrim's progress!

The contrast between the old and this new style, between

* The draftsman of this curious production would seem to have drawn what he names 'les glaciers' with sufficient fidelity as to outline, a care which has been rendered futile by the 'taste' of the engraver, who has embellished the Col de Miège and the top of the Dôme with some scattered forest.

† 'Mais moi aussi j'appartiens à la caravane'—speech of a French tourist (belonging to Lubin, the Parisian Cook) to a Florentine inn-keeper.

De Saussure or Shelley * on their mules, or even Albert Smith in his country cart, and these van-loads, is depressing. Yet possibly our ancestors get more credit for taste than they deserve. Had the early tourists appreciated the Vale of Sallanches they would surely have done something more than stare from the bridge; they would have gone on to explore the neighbourhood. The view of Mont Blanc from the town is obviously imperfect. The effect of the top of the mountain seen over the Dôme is in no way that of a crowning pyramid, but rather, if the irreverence of the comparison may be excused, that of a button on the top of a Scotch cap. In the glory of the whole chain we easily forgive this failing, but we can never quite forget it. Now anyone who is at home among mountains must know that from a slightly higher standpoint this defect would be less conspicuous; and behind the church tower, the pedestal of the noble spire which perished in the conflagration of 1840, rise slopes in themselves charring enough to tempt to a ramble. De Saussure's artist (Bourrit) must have gone some way up them to find the subject engraved in the head piece to chapter xiii. of the 'Voyages.' But recent travellers have been slow to follow the example. At least no one has taken credit for so doing, unless my friend Mr. Leslie Stephen, and possibly Mr. Ruskin.†

It was, I believe, the break in the road rather than the beauty of the scenery which delayed the last generation. The carriage road in their days went no farther than Sallanches.

Longer ago than anyone would have believed possible before the publication of Mons. Bonnefoy's invaluable collection of the historical documents relating to the Priory of Chamonix,‡ the upper valley was made accessible to wheels. In 1458 a prior bargained with the priest of Servoz for the construction of a road, 'bonum condecens et sufficiens,' wide enough for his wine carts, through the gorge of Les Montets. It was to have parapets and passing-places, and

* It is much to be regretted that the letters describing his visit to Chamonix in 1816 were not included in the selection from Shelley's correspondence recently published. They may be found in Moxon's edition, published in 1852.

† See 'Modern Painters,' vol. iii. p. 141, 'Alpine Journal,' vol. v. p. 289. I have to apologise I find, on looking back, for some unintentional repetition of Mr. Stephen's argument. But it is time it should be repeated!

‡ See 'Alpine Journal,' vol. xi. p. 484.

to be of such an incline that two horses might draw up it what would be a load for one on the level. But when in modern times we first hear of the track above St. Martin it is as a mule path. In 1775, we are told, a rough car road was made, in order to accommodate the visitors to the glaciers, even then numerous enough to support three hotels at Chamonix and rising to 1,500 in the year. But it was not until 1869 that the upper valley was brought within an easy day's drive of Geneva.

Napoleon III. was the prime author of the decay of St. Martin. When, after the war of 1859, he tempted Savoy to desert her old princes, he had some reason to fear lest the high country might vote for union with republican Switzerland rather than with imperial France. Cheap lucifers and a 'free zone'—that is, exemption from import duties—were baits dangled successfully before the eyes of the mountain dalesmen, a race shrewd rather than sentimental. New roads were added to the bribe. When Chamonix opened wide its gates to receive an empress and a coach and four the old halts on the road became no longer necessary. St. Martin, Chède and Servoz lost their vogue.

But the causes here brought forward affect only the ordinary traveller. The mountaineer ought to be independent of the world of wheels. Unfortunately there is a certain cockneyism even among climbers. The 'cockney climber' has been lately defined for us by Mr. Conway in the 'Alpine Journal,' as 'one who cares nothing for secondary peaks.' Now it must be allowed that to that despised class—if not to a lower—the summits round Sallanches belong. The limestone crest which girdles the granites of Mont Blanc on the north-west has in truth few of the requisites for modern popularity. In the Eastern Alps the tourist, being bidden thereto by his red book, might allow himself to gaze curiously at the bold bastions or the fantastic sky-line of such a peak as the A. de Varens; but in Savoy he has come to see glaciers, and nothing short of a glacier will he look at. Here it requires the independence of mind of a Théophile Gautier or a Ruskin to keep eyes for anything below the snow level. Besides, while these peaks are not difficult enough to attract the neck-or-nothing cragsman they are yet a good deal too steep and rugged for the everyday traveller. One summit, however, is known to some of either class. A few adventurous tourists climb, and not a few climbers condescend to stroll up, the Buet. But they carry their explorations no further. Yet the Buet view, like the

St. Martin view, has its failing, conspicuous in every photograph. No plain intervenes between the spectator and the great granite pinnacles; no receding valley leads his eyes up to the mighty dome; no flashing torrent illuminates the broken gorges. The range of the Aiguilles Rouges runs across the foreground, and cuts off with its saw-edge all the foundations of Mont Blanc. The view has breadth and height, but no depth. Yet most of its visitors fail to notice that the mountain is but one point in a chain which offers a large choice of accessible Belvederes.

Before we proceed on our search for this perfect view it may be well to note the broad geological features of the district. The forces which raised the granite of Mont Blanc from its subterranean bed tilted up on its northern flank a parallel limestone ridge stretching from the Rhône valley to the Lake of Annecy. It is broken in three places, by the gorges of the Sixt torrent and the Arve and at the Col des Aravis. The space between the granite and the limestone is filled by soft shales and slates forming downs of rounded outline, whose broad tops, covered with wood and pasture, and coloured in autumn with crimson frost-touched bilberries and purple heather, resemble Scotch hills and form an effective contrast to the rigid crags on either side. Only in the Buet do these shales lift themselves to the dignity of a mountain summit. The view of Mont Blanc we are in search of can obviously only be had from some point in the limestone screen or on the lesser heights between it and the granite; for, once behind the screen, we must go so far before we can again see the snows that they will have become distant objects, beautiful indeed, but no longer sublime. For description's sake the limestones may be divided into three sections. The first from the Rhône to the Pointe des Salles is Mr. Wills's property.* The second includes the peaks and passes between the Col du Dérochoir and the Arve; the third, those from the Arve to the Col des Aravis.

The portion of the range on the traveller's left as he mounts from Sallanches to Servoz corresponds to our second section. Its southern face may be roughly described as a steep bank from the top of which, but standing back so as to leave

* See the 'Eagle's Nest' and 'Alpine Journal,' vol. ii. p. 49. The division given above is only good for literary purposes. The Col d'Anterne is the proper physical boundary between the first and second sections of the range.

room for a level terrace at its base, rises a turreted wall. The loftiest tower is the *Pointe de Colloney* (8,833 feet), of which the better known *Aiguille de Varens* (8,087 feet) is the corner bastion. The breaches in the wall are few, and the tracks up its face therefore are either, as the *Col du Dérochoir*, rough scrambles, or, as the *Echelles de Platé* and the sledge track which attacks the shoulder of the *Aiguille de Varens*, the result of skill in finding the weak point in precipices which from many points of view look vertical, and of labour in building staircases practicable for mountain cattle.

At the foot of these precipices and along their whole length, falling from E. to W., stretches a broad terrace, in its upper portion alp, then woodland, lastly fields and orchards. The views it commands are some of the noblest in the neighbourhood of *Mont Blanc*; yet its primitive peace is unbroken by any visitors except the native herds. The foreign ants keep to their white track in the valley 1,500 to 3,000 feet below.

The walk up to this terrace is charming, whatever the starting-point. There is ample choice of paths—the walnut-shadowed lanes behind *Passy*, the vineyard alleys near *Chède*, or the grass-grown forest tracks which wander through the woods towards *Servoz*. Seldom in the *High Alps*—nowhere perhaps so close to the glaciers, for *Mont Blanc* is much nearer at hand than *Monte Rosa* at *Ponte Grande*—do we meet with so much variety and beauty of foreground. Moss-grown farmhouses with wide balconies are overshadowed by spreading walnuts; vines climb high among the tree-tops, or grow in vineyards which yield in October the most delicious clusters of *Muscat* grapes. Country lanes with all the quiet charm of *Somerset* wander amongst heavily laden orchards, open hay meadows, copses of oak, or high beech woods. When we look beyond the landscape seems arranged to show off its crowning glory. The dark, densely wooded cone of the *Tête Noire** and the blunter brow of the *Prarion* throw up the snowy flanks of the *Aiguille du Goûter*. On either side the smooth, poplar-sprinkled meadows of the *Vale of Montjoie* and the steeper, pine-clad gorge which holds the shining reaches of the *Arve* lead the eyes up by natural corridors to the icefields of *Mont Blanc*.

Each upward step is rewarded by the addition to the view

* Not to be confused with the well-known defile of that name on the other side of *Chamonix*.

of some fresh peak. Now it is the Aiguille de Bionassey coated in mail of glistening sérac, now the Dôme du Miage looking down on the spire of St. Gervais, or the blunt crags of the Aiguille du Midi contrasting with the white flood of the Bossons Glacier. No wonder that the 'historian of Mont Blanc,' the enthusiastic Bourrit, chose a spot on these slopes, a boulder beside the now vanished Lac de Chède, for his burial place, though I confess to a doubt of the entire truth of his assertion that he discovered the site while running *after* a wolf. If the nominative and accusative were transposed the story would be more credible to those students who have made friends with Bourrit through his books.

On the angle at the western extremity of this terrace, and above St. Martin, a native of Passy has built himself a stately summer house. Behind this empty and generally deserted pavilion lies a meadow, framed on three sides by beech woods and on the fourth overhanging—literally overhanging, for the rock has been hollowed by weather—a long slope clothed in oak woods. The Aiguille de Varens shoots up overhead; Mont Blanc towers serenely opposite.

One uphill track leads towards the Aiguille, a second to the meadow shelves above the cascade of the Nant d'Arpenaz. We take a lane which follows the terrace under the limestone cliffs in the direction of Servoz. Meadows and copses extend as far as the stream which, springing full grown from the base of the precipices of Platè, acquires in its last leap name and fame as the Cascade de Chède.

Thence the cart track zigzags uphill through the beech woods to a broad meadow about the size of Lord's Cricket Ground and level enough to pitch wickets on. A low bank divides it from a smaller platform. Both are encircled by pine and beech woods. The limestone cirque, with its bold cliffs and buttresses, gives a shelter on the north; the fantastic crags of the Chaîne des Fiz lean over one corner. Straight in front the snows rise in a majestic sweep from the Corridor to the Calotte.

A broad level gives force even to the undulations of lowlands; woods have their own romance; here both seem to meet to glorify Mont Blanc. The turf, in spring a mass of blossom, is starred even in late autumn by a few gentians and a crowd of pale crocuses. At the later season the woods and the atmosphere give the colour. I despair of making anyone realise in imagination half the glory of the foliage as I saw it last in early October. Among the mass of

beeches two tones were prevalent, a pale saffron and the deepest red gold. Here and there a single tree or a clump of alders retained their summer green. The birches fell in yellow showers clear and soft as laburnum blossom. The pines formed a steadfast background of dark green, varied here and there by turning larches.

Above this meadow rough sledge tracks lead through woods and glades which open from time to time into broad hay fields. The largest of these meadows is known as La Plaine Joux. Two Roman inscriptions are preserved in the churchyard of Passy, and there is at any rate nothing impossible in the supposition drawn by local antiquarians from the name that the Romans here established an altar to Jupiter Penninus, who towers opposite in his proudest pomp.

From this Alp, the seat of a chalet* establishment, those who keep to paths will either run down corkscrew tracks to Servoz or, bearing still upwards, gain the muleroad which leads from that village to the Col d'Anterne and so to Sixt or Chamonix. But those who do not mind a scramble and wish to see something of the Désert before returning to St. Gervais had better make for the Col du Dérochoir, a hunter's pass in the ridge west of the Chaîne des Fiz. The climb from a distance looks uninviting, but is in truth singularly interesting. It leads over the scene of one of the greatest catastrophes in the Alps.

In August 1751 news reached the Court at Turin that a volcano had burst forth near Sallanches, and that flames and showers of ashes were issuing from it. The King despatched Donati, a savant whose merits have been rewarded by his name being attached to a comet, to see what was really the matter. After travelling four days and two nights without halt Donati found himself in presence of the phenomena. The mountain was enveloped in clouds, great blocks fell from time to time with a noise exceeding that of the loudest battery, and all the neighbouring country was covered with a fine ashlike deposit. Every peasant was ready to swear he had seen flames, but none was bold enough to approach the spot whence they were supposed to issue.

Donati penetrated into the clouds and to the edge of the chasm. There he saw that a mountain-side was falling into ruin, and that the smoke was nothing else than the

* I prefer to follow the almost universal example of the best French authors, confirmed by Littré's Dictionary, rather than the pedantic practice of British printers, who love to circumflex the *à* in chalet.

dust raised by the boulders in their downward rush. He ascertained to his own satisfaction the cause of the disaster. The rock which had fallen proved to be a hard marble. This marble when in situ had lain between an uppermost layer of slate and a lower layer of the same soft material. The upper slates and the marble had allowed the passage of water through cracks at right angles to their cleavage. A very snowy season had so saturated the ground above that the water, penetrating through the cracks in the marble, inundated the lower layer of slate and caused it to give way, thus precipitating the whole mass towards the Arve.*

Similar accidents have happened in other places, as on Ararat in 1840, when the peasants fancied that they saw flames, and a legend (which has unluckily found place in Prof. Huxley's 'Physiography' as a fact) of a volcanic outburst was started; and in 1877 in the commune of Ste. Foi, near the Little St. Bernard, when the dust clouds were visible from the Col du Géant, twenty-five miles off, and the fall lasted during three months.†

What the traveller now sees are huge mounds of débris marking where the main bulk of the fall rested. More

* Donati's Report of the Landslip of the Rochers des Fiz, 1751. 'After travelling four days and two nights without stopping I found myself in face of a mountain enveloped in smoke, from which were incessantly falling, day and night, immense masses of rock, with a noise exactly resembling thunder or a battery of cannon, but much louder. The peasants had all left the neighbourhood, and only ventured to watch these landslips at the distance of above two miles. The surrounding country was covered with dust, much resembling ashes; in some places this dust had been carried by the winds to the distance of five leagues. The peasants said that they had seen at times a red smoke during the day, and that during the night it was accompanied by flames. These appearances made it generally believed that a new volcano had opened; but I examined the pretended ashes and found that the dust was composed of pounded marble. I observed the smoke attentively, but I saw no flames and perceived no odour of sulphur. I examined also with care the springs and rivulets, but they presented no indication of sulphurous matter. Perceiving, after these researches, that there was no volcanic eruption, I passed through the smoke, and, although alone and without escort, I advanced to the edge of the ravine. I saw there an immense crag which was crumbling into the abyss, and I observed that the smoke was nothing more than the dust arising from the fall of the stones.'—*From De Saussure's 'Voyages.'*

† See 'Alpine Journal,' vol. viii. pp. 415 and 450. A similar landslip in Savoy is mentioned by Leonardo da Vinci. See Richter's 'Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci,' vol. ii. p. 245.

curious is a section of the cliff which started intact, but soon halted without breaking up in its downward course, and now overhangs threateningly a steep slope. Had it not been for the half-way terrace the valley of Servoz would have fared badly; as it was the damage done must have been chiefly in the curtailment of pasturage. But neither De Saussure nor Donati paid any heed to the human aspect of the catastrophe.

The lowest point in the present line of cliffs is inaccessible; but a few yards to the west, where the small end of a fan-shaped bank of débris rests against the rocks, there is no difficulty in climbing their face. No difficulty, that is, in fine weather; * for by missing the way, or when ice has glazed the cliff, a fatal slip is possible, as was proved some years ago in the case of a workman crossing alone from Servoz to Sixt. The poor man lost his footing on the rocks, and his body was found months afterwards at their base. It is probably this accident which has led to the Dérochoir being stigmatised in Joanne's Guide Book as 'passage devenu excessivement dangereux.' From the ridge the view to the north is as uninteresting as any alpine view can well be. Little is seen beyond the trough-like glen of Les Salles, with its meadow shelves and stables, where in place of cows a troop of young horses spends the summer.

To return to the valley of the Arve we cross the northern slopes to the Col de la Portetta. Part of the way lies through an autumn flower garden, the rest over the skirts of the 'Désert,' of which more anon.

A short downhill run brings us to the Chalets de Platé, which lie in an oasis near the edge of the limestone waste. We are now on the verge of precipices. The beginning of the corkscrew track which threads them has to be hit off. For the first 200 feet it is hewn out of cliff faces. Below advantage has been taken of an exceedingly steep gulley in which it coils itself. Among the highest beech copses a glorious fountain bursts forth, a plunge into which may wash off the dust of the arid cliffs. In ten minutes more we regain my beautiful meadow and have at our choice half a dozen paths, any one of which will bring us down again to the bank of the Arve.

I had long planned and put off a walk to Sixt over one of the peaks at the south-west angle of the Varens range. At last, one glorious frosty October morning, alone and laden

* A stoneman on the ridge marks for travellers ascending from Sixt the only point whence a descent is possible.

only with food enough to ward off starvation, I ran down 4,000 feet into the Vale of Sallanches, passed through the damp fog of the river banks, and then upwards among the reddening vineyards and leaf-strewn meadows of Passy. After two hours of steady tramp I had regained the lost height, and sat down on the steps of a small hay chalet to look across the valley at the home I had started from.

I was about half-way up a long steep meadow which lies on the very angle of the chain, cut off both above and below by cliffs. The lower tier are easily pierced by a sledge path. To reach higher ground it is needful to mount into the corner under the Aiguille de Varens, where an unexpected and curiously constructed cattle track leads through the rocks to the higher level of the huts of La Barme and past them to Platé. Where under the Aiguille the track descends to La Barme I left it to adventure on the Désert.

Wherever any large mass of uplifted limestone is exposed to the action of the air one of these wastes is sure to be found; but they are not so common in the Alps as to be familiar to travellers, and paths naturally avoid them. Perhaps they owe some of their singular horror—for they are singularly horrible—to the contrast between their smooth appearance at a distance and the labyrinthine pitfalls they expose on nearer approach. The stock comparison to a glacier of stone is not a bad one. Here, as on a glacier, there are huge bosses, deep narrow clefts, of which no eye can reach the bottom, a blindingly white surface. But the sense of desolation is greater even than on the ice fields. The glacier has something orderly and organic in its nature: it is surrounded and protected by its parent peaks; the sound of living waters pervades it: the limestone desert lies bare and borderless to the sky; no noise except the clang of the steel-pointed ice axe or the grind of the nailed heel on the harsh, arid surface breaks its hideous silence. Lay hold of the rock, and its sharp edges cut through the coarsest glove. Such might be the scenery of the moon or of any exhausted, lifeless planet over which the vault of heaven shines only in mockery.

Avoiding the broader chasms by keeping close to the cliffs of the Aiguille de Varens and its sister pinnacle,* where fallen boulders choked their depths, I reached the foot of the low steep cliffs of a nameless summit, the spur from

* These two peaks might be included in the day's work by active climbers. Both seem to offer a sharp but short scramble.

which separated the hollow I was in from the larger basin of Platé on the east. I climbed the crest—a short sharp scramble—in the expectation (for which the French map gave sufficient ground) that I should be able to walk from it along a broad ridge to the Pointe du Colloney.

But the connecting link was not at all what I had hoped for. The crest was narrow, and its smooth, sloping surfaces were coated with snow, half frozen and then refrozen into ice. Rocks in this condition are at all times my abhorrence, and I would as soon have tried to fly as trusted myself alone upon these. Moreover, the ridge was broken at the base of the Colloney by a little cliff of some thirty or forty feet, which might possibly have stopped me at the last.* This cliff ran all round the side of the mountain in view. It was, in fact, the remnant of an horizontal layer or stratum which had perished elsewhere under atmospheric action. It is not pleasant to abandon an ascent which has been accomplished by French engineers, and their cairn fronted me very conspicuously. I must, however, either make an enormous circuit, or get down at once into the head of the Platé basin. The latter course at first sight seemed difficult; but a more careful survey showed that the snow, though it lay at a high angle and was too much broken by rocks for a safe glissade, could be used to tread steps in, and that after some 300 feet of descent level tracks could be made under the eastern face of the Colloney to its further ridge. Unluckily, after I had got well under the mountain I was tempted by a buttress. Its easy chimneys brought me in front of glazed faces and overhanging icicle-dripping knobs it would have been folly for a solitary man to meddle with. I thought of Mr. Clarence King's famous feat on an ice-stalk. But prudence mastered emulation; so down I had to come again, not without some loss of temper as well as time, for the day was passing, and I seemed likely to be balked by a peak which I knew, the right way once found, to be perfectly easy.

I had hardly advanced a hundred yards beyond the buttress when the key of the fortress was in my hands. Loose

* This ridge will probably be found 'perfectly practicable and easy' by the next comers, who are a 'party' and meet with no ice. In the Alps 'conditions' are everything, and the same place is never the same, a truism which human vanity is slow to accept, for it is apt to interfere sadly with one of the principal pleasures of late-born climbers—that of boasting themselves in Homeric phrase to be—what they doubtless are—'far better than their fathers.' The red line in the map wrongly takes me along this ridge.

and easy rocks led up to a notch in the eastern ridge of the peak. On gaining this notch the northern flank came into sight. I had nothing to do but to follow in the footsteps of two chamois which had recently made the ascent across snow-banks broken in one place by steeper rocks.* I regained the crest a few yards only from the top, and walked along it to the cairn.

The summit of the *Pointe du Colloney* consists of a flat steep-sided mass of limestone, and may be compared to the highest step of a pyramid, unpretentious from a distance, but puzzling to climb save where weather has broken down its verticality. One guide-book—the only one that notices the ascent of the mountain—calls the top ridge ‘narrow.’ It is so from one point of view: that is, it is not much wider than an average London builder’s staircase. But except to those who wish to proceed along it arm-in-arm (as the author of the remark very probably did, for it is in this attitude that many tourists reach their peaks) the appropriateness of the epithet will not be conspicuous.

I was on the top by one o’clock, and, as I had started at six and gone over 10,000 feet of ups and downs, there had not been so much time wasted. I could still spare a long hour for the view, and yet hope to see Sixt before nightfall.

That hour was perfect. There were clouds in the sky, but none touched even the highest earth. Only upon the brow of *Mont Blanc* the spirits of the air wound and unwound transparent rainbow-tinted scarves of vapour, visible for a moment and then again lost in the purple of noon. In the north a pillar-like cumulus stood over the summit of the *Voirons*. As I watched it two horizontal bars opened out, at one moment resembling the arms of a gigantic cross, at another the wings of some monstrous bird.

Across the upper sky the cloud processions moved peacefully with no audible sound of wind. The herds had already deserted the high pastures, and the face of the earth, but for some muffled sounds of falling waters, was noiseless about my ‘solitary hill.’ No living creature was visible in the vast horizon. I was alone with *Mont Blanc*. To the feelings suggested by such a scene, Shelley has given expression in his famous ‘*Lines to Mont Blanc*,’ and it is well to leave them in the poet’s hands. But let us remember,

* Chamois, I may remark, generally, unless when pursued, take the easiest course. Deliberately to go up a mountain the wrong way was reserved for the human intelligence.

while we do so, that there were mountain lovers before the last century, that Rousseau and his successors were not the first to express in adequate language, much less to create, the feeling for mountains we often call 'modern.' Conrad Gesner, the Zürich physician and naturalist of the sixteenth century, when he wrote, 'Hic in profundo et religioso quodam silentio ex præaltis montium jugis ipsam fere cælestium, si quæ est, orbium harmoniam exaudiri tibi videberis,' came very near to Shelley's—

'Deep music of the rolling world.'

It was to the naturalists of the Zürich school that the renewal of the primitive friendship between men and mountains was in the first place due.

To come back from the harmony of the spheres to matter of fact. From the Colloney the shape of the summit of Mont Blanc is singularly graceful, and its aiguilles present themselves effectively. But, on the whole, I must give the preference to the view from the Pointe Percée. The only Swiss mountain remarkable was the Weisshorn, very finely seen through a gap in the nearer ranges. The characteristic of these Savoyard views is the solitary predominance of Mont Blanc. The horizon shows no cluster of rival peaks as at Zermatt, no long array of snows as at Turin. The Dauphiné peaks are too distant for scenic effect, and even the beautiful and ill-named Mont Pourri, the Gross Glockner of the Western Alps, is completely dwarfed by the snows of the Monarch, as he stands up far above and in advance of the receding lines of his kindred.

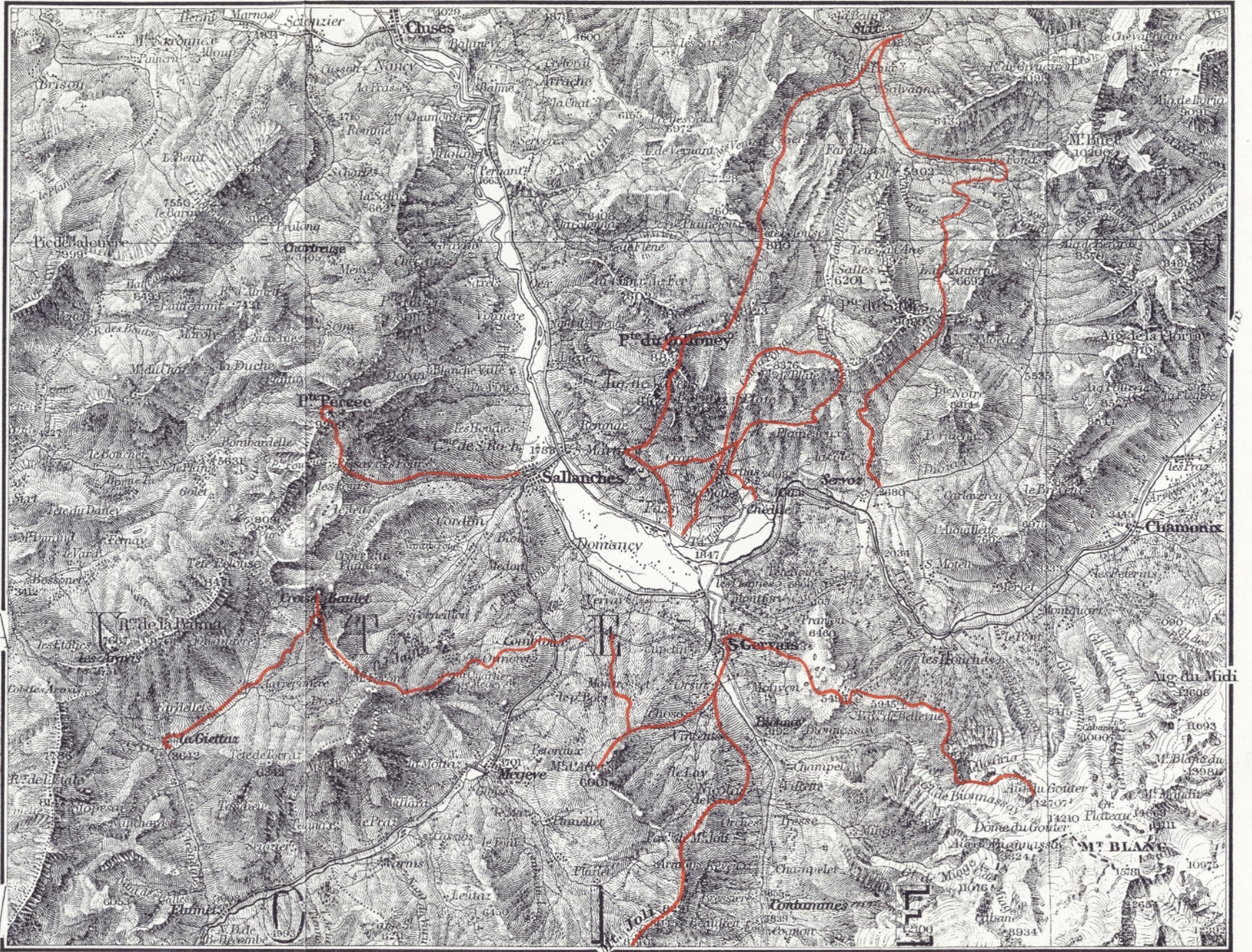
The foundations of the Colloney itself are, after Mont Blanc, the most notable feature in the view. Even as seen from above, the great buttresses which fall away towards the Arve show us superb specimens of mountain architecture. The eye plunges down a precipice to rest on two swelling lawns, the caps of bold bluffs which in their turn fall in cliffs to the meadows beside the river. Beyond and opposite, the Pointe Percée lifts its bastions from the abyss with similar abruptness, its crest showing from this point as a sharp and shapely wedge.

It would be possible to descend into the snowy hollow on the north of the Colloney, and so to return to Sallanches by the lawns above the Cascade d'Arpénaz.

I retraced my footsteps to the foot of the peak, and then followed for some distance the continuation of its northern ridge. The ground I had to traverse was terribly broken, a

From the Alpine Club map of Switzerland, by permission.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF SALLANCHES.



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Author's route ———

Stanford's Geog. Estab^d

very labyrinth of rough white bosses and hollows, split up in every direction by hideous chasms. The surface was fretted by air and rain into sharp edges which cut like knives. Not a flower or a blade of grass clothed its nakedness. Scrambling up and down, in and out, impatiently, yet with some caution—for what would be the fate of the solitary man who lamed himself or broke a limb on such a spot?—I found myself before long in the very heart of the wilderness.

I had reached the unused and nameless pass (shall it be called the Col de Platé?) which is afforded by the lowest point in the ridge which divides the ground sloping towards Platé, from the broad glen trending in the direction of Magland, through which lies the track mentioned in guide-books to the Lac de Flaine.

In the centre of the gap, hemmed in by cracked and broken tiers of white rock lay two bowl-shaped pits or caldrons, grim amphitheatres, looking even in broad daylight fit scenes for the meeting-place of ghostly visitants. At this point I turned my back on Mont Blanc, and descending slightly, made my way, as best I could, towards the grassy ridge abutting on the Tête Pelouse, which separates the waters feeding the Lac de Flaine from the basin of the Sixt river—the Giffre. I thought myself fortunate in finding something like a track which, though often, and at last irretrievably lost, carried me on fairly at a level across the comparatively smooth skirts of the Désert.

In two hours from the Pointe de Colloney I had reached the pass under the Tête Pelouse, and was looking on the Lac de Gers. I ran quickly down the steep grass to the huts beside the water, where I was hospitably invited to wait for the milking by some epicene persons in a style of clothing which (except that there was but little skirt to divide) appeared to be of the character dress reformers wish to introduce at home. This Savoy arrangement was adequate, but inelegant.

In the charming evening hours I strolled down beside the waterfalls through the thick damp mossy woods and over the steep hay meadows to the valley, entering the level corn-fields of Sixt as the peasants were leaving off their field work, and reaching the familiar convent-inn as the last sun-beam faded from the rocks of the Pointe de Tinneverges.*

(To be continued.)

* Nine hours ought to be ample for a good walker from the Bains de St. Gervais to Sixt over the Colloney; 5 hours up, 4 hours down.