

DAUPHINÉ IN 1888.

BY W. ASBURY GREENE.

AS one can now get to and stay in Dauphiné with so much more comfort than in former days, it is surprising to find that travellers there are still so few and far between. So few, indeed, are they, that M. Tairraz, the manager of the Chalet Hôtel at La Bérarde, is often nearly alone in his thoroughly clean and comfortable inn, which was only opened in 1887. Further publicity may, perhaps, draw more travellers to Dauphiné, and that is the only excuse for the present paper, contributed by one whose scanty knowledge of the district in no way qualifies him to write on the subject, and who would not have presumed to do so were it not at the suggestion of, and, it may even be said, under pressure from, our Editor.

Besides the attraction of comfortable quarters, another advantage which visitors to Dauphiné now enjoy is the excellent guide-book compiled by Messrs. Coolidge, Duhamel, and Perrin. I must confess that it gave me for the first time an idea of the immense amount of work that can be done in the district, which I had before hazily associated with the names of the Meije, Ecrins, and Pelvoux, and with little, if anything, more. It is an indispensable companion for the mountaineer, and, when the long-promised maps by M. Duhamel are forthcoming, its value will be greater still.

Guide-book and Chalet Hôtel combined were the inducements which led Mr. F. C. Mills and myself to turn our steps towards Dauphiné in the autumn of 1888. We started with some misgivings, for we were unable to leave London before the end of August, and the fact that by far the greater number of ascents have been made in July or the early days of August seemed to indicate that the Dauphiné mountains go better early in the season than later. As a matter of fact, however, there seems to be no reason why mountaineering in September should not be as feasible in Dauphiné as elsewhere.

We left England on August 25, 1888, and travelled through Paris, *via* Chambéry, to Grenoble, which we reached next morning in time to secure places on the midday diligence to Bourg-d'Oisans. It may be useful to caution travellers that it is made noon in the town half an hour sooner than at the railway station, and that the diligence starts by the local time. After leaving Grenoble, the diligence runs

for several miles along an excellent road—in terribly straight lines, however—through a double avenue of plane trees, parallel with the Drac, until a short distance before Vizille. From Vizille the valley of the Romanche is followed, and the road mounts steeply in places. Hence, although the diligence is liberally horsed, the pace is slow, and it takes over six hours to cover the distance between Grenoble and Bourg-d'Oisans—some thirty miles only. I regret that I can say nothing as to the scenery, for the weather, both as we went and returned, was thick, and the clouds hung low on the hills. At Bourg-d'Oisans we were heartily glad to quit the diligence and find ourselves in comfortable quarters at the Hôtel de Milan. Here we were on the threshold of the mountain district, close to the junction of the Venéon Valley with that of the Romanche. La Bérarde lies near the head of the former valley, and forms the natural and most convenient headquarters for climbers.

Next morning, upon our host's advice, we took a carriage to Vénosc, near which place the *char*-road ends for practical purposes (though it continues in name as far as the Plan du Lac), and there transferred our modest baggage to a mule. The path leads through a wilderness of rocks to the village of St. Christophe, then rises steeply, and again descends abruptly to the level of the torrent, turning to the left past the village of Les Etages, and passing through a small wood of birch trees, lopped and clipped out of all natural shape, but still refreshing to the eye after miles of treeless waste, till at last the foaming Venéon is crossed and La Bérarde is reached. The little inn, with its square whitewashed walls and painfully neat appearance, is a hideous blot on the landscape—there is no denying it; but one will cheerfully forgive the unpicturesqueness of the outside for the sake of the thorough cleanliness and homely comfort of the interior arrangements. Here we had the pleasure of meeting an accomplished lady-climber, whose doings in Savoy and Dauphiné were recorded in the November number of the 'Journal,' and made arrangements to take on from her the chief guide of the district—Gaspard père. Meanwhile we engaged J. B. Rodier, and were well satisfied with him. He is a cheerful, good-natured fellow, and possesses a very fair knowledge of the mountains. As, however, in many other districts, where the guides have gained their mountain-craft from solitary experience as *chasseurs* rather than from professional guiding, those of Dauphiné have an aversion to snow and ice, which often causes them to make a tedious *détour* over smooth and

awkward rocks rather than commit themselves to a convenient snow couloir which an Oberland guide would hail with delight.

Mills, who had spent a week in the Lake district, was bent upon starting at once with a 'grande course,' and, contrary to my principles, which enjoin gradual training, I was weak enough to consent to start next morning for Le Plaret, a peak of 11,700 feet. The result was that, not far above the iron cross which marks the spot where M. Cordier was lost after making the first ascent of the mountain, I had a severe attack of mountain sickness, and elected to remain behind. The cause of mountain sickness has been the subject of a good deal of discussion of late, but in this case, at any rate, it clearly arose from want of condition and training. Mills duly reached the summit in about six hours from the start, and came back full of surprise and delight at the beauty of the view, the number and variety of the peaks, and especially the mixture of rock and snow which seemed to promise most interesting climbs in every direction.

Next day (the 29th) we strolled up the Tête de la Maye, the Rigi of the district, from which we had magnificent views of the Meije, Ecrins, Ailefroide, and other giants of the neighbourhood, took some photographs, and then clambered up slopes of *débris* and rocks to the Roche Blanche, whence a still more extended view is gained.

At 4.45 on the morning of the 30th we started with Rodier and Christophe Turc as porter for La Grave by the Brèche de la Meije. The way lies up the Vallon des Etançons, a wild waste of stones containing but one isolated patch of verdure, on which is a hut occupied just now by Provençal shepherds, who, having no pasture at all at home, bring their flocks great distances to munch the few blades of stunted grass which Dauphiné affords. The morning was brilliantly fine, and, as we mounted the snowslopes below the Meije, we had an excellent opportunity of studying its forbidding cliffs. There was a glorious view to the south from the top of the pass, but to the north-west, over the Grandes Rousses, heavy clouds were gathering and driving fast down upon us. So, after a short stay, we made quick work of the snowslopes which separated us from the Enfetchores rocks, down which we scrambled, and in pouring rain raced over the alps to La Grave, which we reached at 1.30 P.M.

Clouds filled the valley the rest of that day, and in most unpromising weather we started on the afternoon of the 31st for the Refuge de l'Alpe du Villard d'Arêne. In a thick mist

we reached the refuge, formerly an outbuilding belonging to some deserted mining works, and, having converted a barrow, used at one time in connection with the aforesaid works, into a cheery fire, passed as jovial an evening as surrounding circumstances would permit. Next morning we were off at 3.15 in weather which would have puzzled even the official forecaster, for everything was wrapped in dense fog. We hoped to make the ascent of the Grande Ruine, but expected to be obliged to make La Bérarde by the easiest available pass. Never was doubtful lantern light more uncertain, or foothold more difficult to make out, as we wended our way through the fog and a chaos of rocks and stones; nor, on the other hand, was ever the feeble dawn more welcome as it struggled late through the mist, and showed us the Glacier de la Plate des Agneaux just ahead of us. As we munched a second breakfast in the grey dawn, it was cheerily evident that the rising sun was making headway against the clouds, and when we had mounted a long and monotonous series of shattered rocks and *débris*, and reached the upper *névé* of the glacier, the sun fairly shone out. We now made for the Brèche Giraud-Lézin, from which, after about an hour's step-cutting, the central summit of the Grande Ruine was attained. The view was limited, a few summits only appearing above a sea of cloud, Les Ecrins dominating all. We descended after a short halt, and then made for the Col de la Casse Déserte. The glacier on the other side was a good deal crevassed, and gave some trouble, but only too soon we were on the stones, through and over which we descended to the Vallon des Etançons, reaching the inn at 3.30 P.M., just as a heavy snowstorm began. We found ourselves the only guests, but our kindly host soon had blazing fires in the *salon* and *salle à manger*, and very welcome they were, for the snow fell all the evening, and it was bitterly cold outside.

The next day (Sunday) the sun shone out gloriously, and the new snow disappeared fast, but it was with some doubts that we accepted Gaspard's positive assurance that the south face of the Meije would be in excellent order for to-morrow.

At 12.45 A.M. on September 3 we were again en route up the Vallon des Etançons in bright starlight. When we reached the Refuge du Chatelleret it was decided that it would be better to give the sun an opportunity of clearing the rocks of *verylas*, so we had a liberal forty winks on the straw, and started again at 4.45, reaching the promontory at 6.30. The rocks were still a good deal glazed, and in sheltered

places there was fresh snow still, but an unclouded sun was doing good work for us, and at 12.45 we were enjoying a perfect view from the top of the Meije, after six hours' continuously stiff climbing. The short half-hour we allowed ourselves quickly passed, and about five hours' steady work placed us again on the glacier at the foot of the promontory. It was then getting dusk, and was quite dark by the time we reached the Refuge, where our lanterns had been left in the morning. After a good meal and some hasty repairs to clothing, which had been rudely handled by the rocks, we scrambled over the stones and through the torrents of the Etançons valley, and reached our inn again at 9.45.

Next day, September 4, clouds filled the valley, and rain soon began and continued with brief intervals all day. After much conference with Papa Gaspard, a snow tramp up the Rouies was decided on for to-morrow, should the weather improve.

A cloudless morning greeted us, and at 5.15 we were off up the left bank of the Venéon, and at eight halted for breakfast on some rocks overlooking the Chardon Glacier. Mills had started unwell, and, not feeling better, returned with Rodier. Gaspard and I trudged up the glacier in deep new snow, encountering a fierce wind on the plateau, from which the snowy dome of the Rouies rises. By noon, when we reached the top, after plenty of step-cutting exercise for Gaspard, the wind had almost died away, and we had a glorious view of clouds rolling up from the south, revealing every now and then lovely glimpses of the Val Gaudemar lying deep below us, whilst to the north and east the sky was quite clear. We had left the provisions below, but pipes and some wonderful chamois stories from Gaspard whiled away an hour pleasantly, and at 5 P.M. we were back at La Bélarde. Les Ecrins was our object for next day, the start to be made at 2 A.M., but at that time the weather was execrable, and all we could do was to make a damp excursion to prospect a route up the Rocher de l'Encula from the east.

Next morning (the 7th) with the addition of Mr. F. Baker Gabb, who had turned up at La Bélarde, we set out to complete the new route, and reached the summit of the Rocher (as mentioned in the 'Journal' of November last, p. 146) without serious difficulty, but somewhat hampered by a driving snowstorm, which began about half an hour below the top, and lasted the rest of the day.

A spell of bad weather followed, with almost incessant rain. During this time our little company was strengthened

by Messrs. Coolidge and Gardiner and a luckless French family, who came up from Grenoble in the rain, went next day part of the way up the Tête de la Maye in a thick mist, and then trudged back down the valley in a hopeless downpour.

At 6 A.M. on the 11th we all left La Bérarde—a caravan of ten travellers, guides, and porters—for Vallouise by the Col de la Temple, and, after we had risen above the clouds which filled the valley, got a grand view of the Pelvoux precipices from the top of the pass. We parted from Messrs. Coolidge and Gardiner at the Chalets d'Ailefroide, having decided to sleep there and attempt the Pelvoux next day.

After a lively night, chiefly spent in contending with swarms of starving fleas, we got off at 3.30 A.M. in anything but encouraging weather. As we made our way up the Celce Nière valley the rain fell, and our hopes also, but, by the time we reached the ruinous Refuge Puiseux, matters had greatly improved, and near the Refuge de Provence there was sufficient sun to produce a vividly-coloured fogbow.

Gaspard altogether declined Mr. Tuckett's couloir, and we mounted the interminable rocks by the old route, but the new snow and a violent wind made progress slow, so that it was not till 1 P.M. that we reached the top. Owing to the bitterly cold wind, we had to hurry off after a hasty glance at the grand and extensive view which was suggested, rather than patent, to us, and at 4.50 resumed our knapsacks at the Refuge Puiseux and marched down to Vallouise, which we reached soon after 7 P.M. Between the Chalets d'Ailefroide and Les Claux the path runs through charming woodland scenery, which seemed a positive refreshment to the senses, chilled by the austerity of the stony wilds which we had hitherto learned to associate with the Dauphiné district.

Next morning the rain fell heavily, held up for a short time in the afternoon, and then came down again in torrents, which lasted until five o'clock on the following morning, when we started on the way back to La Bérarde by the Col de l'Ailefroide. The Col de la Pilatte, which we intended to have taken, was given up in deference to the weather. In the sudden way which was a peculiar feature of the autumn of 1888, the clouds cleared away, and it was a brilliant sunny morning when we halted for breakfast in the charming woods near the Chalets d'Ailefroide. The fresh snow was very soft and deep as we ploughed our way to the top of the pass, and it made the rotten rocks on the further side difficult to manage. Then the brief spell of fine weather was exhausted,

and we got back to our head-quarters with wet jackets at 7 P.M., again finding ourselves the sole occupants of the inn.

The following day (the 15th) Gabb left for La Grave, Mills went with Gaspard and Rodier to the Tête du Rouget, and I remounted the Vallon des Etançons to get some photographs of the Meije. Mills had a successful day on the Rouget, which he strongly recommends as a good rock climb. Ascending the grass slopes between La Bérarde and Les Étages, he mounted a large couloir of rock leading to the ridge somewhat east of the summit. This was very rotten, narrow, and in places difficult. The ridge had to be followed, and the summit, which looked quite close, seemed to get further off, and was only reached after several descents and ascents over intermediate ridges. The rocks positively glistened with mica and lead, which appeared a deep blue in the red rock for which the mountain is conspicuous. The descent was made by a steep snow couloir to the Soreiller basin, in full view of the crater-like Tête du Soreiller, and with a remarkably sharp aiguille called Pain de Sucre straight in front. The path then descended by the side of or high above the stream, among edelweiss of very large size, and in the greatest luxuriance, and came out close above Les Étages.

The 16th (Sunday) was fine, and we arranged to pass the night at the Refuge du Carrelet, and attack the Ecrins on Monday from the south and descend by the north face. As we set out for the hut, the clouds, which had settled down upon the mountain tops, were coloured gloriously by the setting sun. The Tête du Rouget seemed ablaze, and the grand conflagration threw ruddy flames high into the sky. The snows of the Pic d'Ailefroide blushed a deep rose colour. The effect was too wild and grand to be reassuring to those who were depending upon fine weather for the morrow, and, as we settled for the night in the comfortable Carrelet hut, it was with but slender hopes of completing the expedition.

The morning, however, was clear, but the stars shone only too brightly, and the air was constantly quivering with faint lightning. We got off at 2.30 and kept up steep slopes covered with dwarf firs, and afterwards over moraine, till we reached the point where it was necessary to take to the glacier, and here we shivered for an hour waiting for daylight. Resuming the march, we reached the Col des Avalanches at 7.15, and emerged into sunshine and breakfasted. Thence we climbed by rocks affording interesting

work, but doubtfully simplified in the most difficult place by a long wire rope, the slackness of which is apt to disturb the foothold—and the temper; afterwards up the steep little Glacier des Ecrins, and, as we began the last barrier of rocks below the summit, a thunderstorm, which had been growling in the distance, burst upon us with an accompaniment of blinding showers of hail, through which we scrambled to the top. No chance of a view being possible, we immediately turned to descend the steep snowslopes on the north face. Hail, or rather granulated snow, filled our eyes and ears, forced its way down our collars and up our sleeves as we floundered down to the bergschrund, over which we tumbled ungracefully at the narrowest place we could find, and then the storm cleared off for a time, only to come on again with increased vigour when we reached the Col des Ecrins. The guides voted the convenient though steep snow-couloir unsafe, and we had therefore a very uncomfortable hour on the rocks, every cranny of which was filled with melting snow and hail, raced over the Glacier de la Bonne Pierre, then along the crests of a series of moraines and so on to steep slopes of the worst and most treacherous stones I ever came across. Bonne Pierre indeed! An epithet of a very different kind would be more appropriate, and I fear was extensively employed as we tumbled along at the double. After sundry somersaults on my own part, I am grieved to say my moral nature had become so deteriorated that I positively rejoiced to see the great Gaspard himself pitched clean into the air and land in the bed of a torrent whilst his axe went hurtling through the rocks yards ahead of him. Then we reached the *gazon*, sat down in the wet, and ate bilberries, and finally reached La Bérarde at 5.30.

Next day we bade adieu to our excellent host, hostess, and handmaiden, said a cordial farewell to Gaspard and Rodier, and retreated down the valley homewards.

In conclusion, I would strongly recommend those who have not yet visited Dauphiné to do so. They will find plenty of excellent climbing of a varied kind. There are even still some virgin peaks, and many new routes to be done. As to creature comforts, M. Tairraz is an excellent cook and thoroughly understands how to make his guests comfortable, whilst civilisation has not yet so far advanced as to interfere with the free power and right of the visitor to do as he pleases. In many respects the natural features of the country differ widely from those of Switzerland, and, though one would, no doubt, give the preference to the softer beauties

of the Swiss valleys, the stony wastes of Dauphiné have an impressive grandeur of their own which is unequalled further north.

THE ASCENT OF MJÖLNIR AND THE EXPLORATION OF
THE GJEGNALUND GLACIERS IN NORWAY.

BY CHARLES HOPKINSON AND WM. CECIL SLINGSBY.

(Read before the Alpine Club, April 10, 1888.)

IN the summer of 1884 a new sheet of the Amtskarter, or Ordnance survey maps of Norway, was issued, and revealed, or suggested, the presence of a large snow-field about 17 miles long, and 4 to 6 miles broad, between the Förde and Nord Fjords, and west of the usual route from Vadheim to Faleide. On the map no great difference in height is indicated. At the east, a fine peak, Gjegalund, rises with grand northern precipices to a height of about 5,600 feet. Slingsby had often noticed this mountain, but had no idea that its surroundings were so fine, as a glance at the map suggested. West, the snow-field, which seemed to vary from 4,000 to 5,300 feet, terminates in two peaks, Kjeipen and Hjelman (The Rowlocks and The Helm), whose steep precipices face the storms of the Atlantic.

In the geological map this region is very conspicuous, as it forms the only important break in the continuity of the great mass of gneiss and metamorphic rock which stretches from the Sogue Fjord far past Romsdal. From the coast to the Hye Fjord the characteristic formations are sandstones and conglomerates classed as 'Siluriske,' which lie in massive layers, best seen in the cliffs of Skjærdal, and form a striking series of terraces on the upper fjeld. In Skjærdal also are remarkable examples of conglomerate, where small white and red granite boulders are aggregated into large secondary boulders, and are as clean and round as if they had only just been raised out of the sea.

In 1885 we agreed to take a short autumnal tour in Norway, in order to explore this snow-field, to try to climb some unascended peaks in Söndmöre, and, better than all, to attempt the conquest of Mjölñir, a peak in the Romsdal district, which we had every reason to expect would prove to be an exceedingly difficult rock climb.

On September 4 we were joined at Florö by Lars Janssen, a handsome man who had just returned from a short campaign with Mr. Russell Starr. The previous year he had