

## CHANRION AND OTHER PLACES: AN EARLY HOLIDAY.

BY W. LARDEN.

AFTER eight summers of Switzerland in August, I find myself now obliged to go early in June, and to come away about the middle of July. This first experience of so early a summer holiday has been disappointing as regards climbing; all the more, perhaps, as things were particularly backward. Still some account of my quiet experiences may be of interest.

I travelled *viâ* Paris; had time at Berne to post my Gladstone (under 20 kilos.), rope, &c., to Innertkirchen, to have breakfast (the station restaurant, by the way, feeling very comfortable and homelike, after France), and to get a map at Francke's; and, after a very beautiful trip down the lakes, reached Meyringen early in the afternoon of June 12.

Setting off thence with knapsack, I reached Gadmen, after a very leisurely walk, in the evening. Having been moving ever since 11 A.M., Wednesday (June 10), I was tired in head and body, and looked forward to a good dinner and a rest. But here, alas! I found that June is not August. After offering me 'whatever I liked,' they supplied me with soup containing garlic, sausage also containing garlic, a *very* heavy omelette made mainly of flour, and poor bread. Naturally my sleep was not good after this. On such fare I had to live for two days, until some meat arrived from Meyringen.

However, the people were very friendly; and I found the landlord, Herr Tännler-Weissenfluh, a very intelligent as well as honest and obliging man. I reaped the fruit of some solitary 'grind' at German, as I found him interesting to talk with. I was the only guest.

A day's excursion to the Engstlen Alp showed me the hotel empty—I was the first visitor—and the grass still brown from snow, some of which, too, lay about in patches.

As soon as Stein was opened I went up there—still the first guest. However, a non-climbing friend joined me in two days' time.

The walk to Stein is very beautiful; even in June such colour in rocks, trees, and whortleberry bushes, and the nooks so filled with flowers, ferns, and mosses. And then the views back as one rests on the zigzag ascent! To one used to the valleys running up to the Monte Rosa group

these Bernese Oberland valleys are very lovely—so much more colour, so much less desolation. Then the villages are so different. Here, we have bright-looking picturesque châteaux of the ideal Swiss type, made interesting, too, by the inscriptions branded on them. All suggests a clean and sunny life. There—well! just look at Haudères beyond Evolena! One wonders if the people who invented such a place can be of the same order of beings as those who built, say, Adelboden. But man is conservative, and I still retain an affection for the blackened, dirty, ruinous Rhone-valley kind of village. One feels there that there are age and history, while in the Bernese Oberland one thinks of prosperity, visitors, and—toy shops!

Stein has a grand air, and should be a fine place for amateur, and other, climbing; but weather was against it then, and my friend wished to leave for Adelboden. I did not feel equal to more solitude in bad weather, so I went too.

Adelboden is certainly a beautiful village. A fine old plane tree in the churchyard, and the inscriptions on the houses prevent one from feeling it to be a toy village. From a little way off the tree and church formed a comfortable centre to the houses, and one almost thought of England; the whole felt rural. While there, I found a way (whether the right way or not I cannot say) up the Lohnerhorn. I have never seen more rotten rocks; they are not so much rotten as apparently made in small pieces, and put together afterwards. For the Wildstrubel I had no guide, and the weather was bad; hence I had to leave it alone. After five days we went off to Binn.

The Binnenthal was quite a revelation to me, even after the Bernese Oberland. The trees, magnificent firs and larches, the flowers and ferns, the rocks, and, perhaps above all, the beautiful streams—not *gletscher* water, but clear and of a delicate green tinge—formed a whole that was charming. After such valleys as the Val d'Hérens, from Sion to Evolena, it is wonderfully refreshing and homelike in the Binnenthal. And the waterfalls! There is a fine fall above Heilig Kreuz; and above that, on the Ritter Alp, a still more wonderful slide of water of great length and of bewildering energy. And the stream that descends from the Geisspfad See is well worth a day's ramble along its banks.

Nor is snow lacking. The Ofenhorn crowns one valley; and the Hüllehorn shows above the trees up another.

Moraines are missing in the views; but even the most enthusiastic lovers of mountains have no love for these types of desolation and waste. The grandeur of Saas Fee one has not at Binn, it is true; but there is room in Switzerland for both, and one does not want to be soothed and stirred at the same time.

Binn itself is a quaint village. It is very black and very dirty; and the 'approach' to the hotel lies between manure heaps. But the hotel itself stands above all smell; and the whole view of irregular, weather-stained, tumble-down châteaux, huddled together for warmth and mutual support, of white church, and of green pastures, of dark pine woods, with enough snow mountain rising above them to raise the mind to the snow world above, is singularly restful and satisfying. The shorter walks are very delightful: so much of stream and rock, of wood, fern, and flowers; such pleasant shade; such absence of Alpine desolation. And the climbs, if not hard, are yet interesting, and do not involve the tedious and hot descents such as almost spoil the end of many a day at Zermatt or Saas Fee. At Binn one strolls home in the shade, and bathes under a waterfall on the way.

One day we went up to the Ritter Joch—a grand view there. Then I took our 'guide,' much to his alarm, a slightly new way (an easy one) up the Helsenhorn. His ideas were original. He had 'no fear on the snow'—*i.e.* would tramp over a covered glacier without a rope—but he was alarmed at the rocks. 'If one became giddy?' We had glorious glissades down in soft snow; a new feature to me, used as I was to August slopes. I should have been glad of the leather 'trimmings' adopted by some of our practical and regardless-of-appearances Swiss brethren.

Among the attractions of Binn I must not omit to mention two—the landlord, Herr Schmid, and the telephone, especially in combination. The former is all one can desire or imagine as regards courtesy and goodwill. Moreover he is a really interesting man to talk with, and the more one hears his views the more one likes the man. (Second reward of my private grind at German.)

Then the telephone! Any wet day one can pass an hour full of amusement by sending a telegram (of any sort, to anyone, anywhere) and by being present at its despatch. The message goes first to Aernen by telephone. Now the family live partly at Binn and partly at Aernen. Naturally, then, there is much preliminary family talk, in the quaint Swiss dialect. Though somewhat one-sided to the audience,

one can guess the inaudible replies. Thus Miss Gardner telegraphed for Xaver Imseng to Saas Fee; telegram 'to follow' if he were away. The message began with enquiries as to a most interesting family event in Fiesch. We were all pleased and relieved to hear that all was well and 'that it was a boy.' After a time the real message began. Xaver's name took a quarter of an hour. It was pronounced in various tones, and spelt forwards (and backwards?) 'Faire suivre,' latter word two very distinct syllables, took twenty minutes. We had plenty of time, so enjoyed the performance much, going away at intervals to laugh in distant places. We went to dinner after a time, and the telegram was finished before we went to bed. The guide got the main part of the message rightly; 'faire sui-ver' had worked. I should add that the telephone is Herr Schmid's barometer, and that, at the time, there was 'thunder about,' which caused the instrument to bubble and fry more than usual.

One day Miss Gardner, Xaver Imseng, and I went a pleasant excursion up Cherbadung. We came back along the arête on the Schwarzhorn. There Xaver set up a stoneman, no sign of travellers being seen. We then struck a new way down, towards the Geisspfad route, the steep snow at that time not requiring steps. Feeling that I, who was descending first, was not wanted on the rope, I untied and had a magnificent glissade in two pieces. First a long steep slope, managed sitting, the ice-axe buried and tearing up the snow in fine style. This ended over rocks, at which the brake enabled one to stop. A short scrambling descent and traverse took one then on to long snow slopes below a small hanging glacier, and there was another long but rather rougher glissade, for which the powerful ice-axe brake proved 'necessary and sufficient,' as mathematicians say. In August these slopes would probably need steps all the way down. The walk to Imfeld was down a beautiful valley by the torrent before mentioned. I thought of trout. The whole expedition was most enjoyable and not tiring. I cannot help thinking (with Mr. Conway?) that such expeditions should not be so neglected as they are. We go out for holidays and refreshment, and are too apt to divide our time between long and exhausting strains, and 'loafing' about an hotel in a village crowded with tourists of all nations. At Binn one is in the country; the mind is satisfied and rested.

Then we went up the Hüllehorn the wrong way and came down the right. The rocks at the top afford (especially when

snow-bedecked) a pleasant scramble whichever way one goes, and one can easily make a climb up the lower part—as we did.

Some time before, an elderly Swiss artist, by name M. Lugardon, whom I had met several times at Arolla, a most kind man and one devoted to the mountains, had written to me telling me I ought to visit Chanrion. I am a member of the Geneva section of the Swiss Alpine Club, and so felt especial interest in seeing the new *cabane*, the more so as it lies near Arolla.

So, on descending from the Hüllehorn, I packed up and got down to Sion that night. Next day the 4.45 a.m. train to Martigny, then the *Postwagen* to Chables. There I got a nice young porter, called Edouard Bruchez, to carry my things (including some provisions) and set off in a broiling sun at 1.30 p.m. We reached Mauvoisin at 6 p.m. Some time later the porter stayed behind for some milk, and I went on alone. I had no map, and only a vague idea as to where Chanrion might be, as I had never been farther than the path off to the glacier 'Lyrerose.' After crossing to the right-hand bank of the stream I got pretty high up and then lost the path at a place that I will call 'A.' But I chose the best defined track that I could see farther on.

Passing round a corner and along screes I crossed a stream. I supposed it to be the stream from the Otemma Glacier; but, without map, with mist about, and gathering dusk (the sky was clouded over) I could not be sure. On the other side I followed the path as well as I could, guided partly by occasional stones set up on end. But at last, finding a moraine to my left, and snow (spring or winter snow remaining) in front of me, I halted. It was 9.30 p.m., and so dark, on account of the mist, that I had to light a match to see my compass. I found I was going due south. With a map I should have found that I was near the top of the Col de Fenêtre, and had the little Glacier de Fenêtre on my left.

I turned round, and by the expedient of laying my head on the ground was able to see the stones spoken of against the sky at intervals. But I soon lost the way, and had to feel for a route in the dark. Finally I came down to the Otemma torrent by the side of the moraine of the Glacier de M. Durand. Till one tries it one can have no idea how difficult, and without care how dangerous, an ordinary hillside is in the dark. Of course I had my axe with me; otherwise I could not have got along at all, as I could, by sight

alone, not distinguish between a black patch and a hole between boulders.

I found the bridge again, and finally returned to place 'A.' Here I lost the path again. Vainly I looked for a lantern in search of me! I mounted various small heights, but saw nothing. At last a light appeared far below, on the route to Mauvoisin. I lit numerous matches, but without response. Very tentatively, and with much probing with ice-axe below me, I got down bit by bit; and at last struck the path, and so found the bridge leading to Mauvoisin. Blundering along on the other side, I suddenly came on a strange sight—a group of moving forms, emitting tinkling sounds, and lit up, especially about the feet, with fitful fire. Phosphorescent goats! What could it mean? After tumbling over a cow or two I reached the group. All was explained. A milk hut had its roof flush with a slope; the goats had walked on to the roof, and through the chinks of this came light from a huge fire demanded by some midnight incantations in which curds took the place of toads in the caldron and two *bergers* answered to the three witches. And it was intermittent light shown by the opening and shutting door that I had taken for a moving lantern!

It was now 12.30. I was very hungry, but had kept off an 'empty' feel by drinking much water—a good plan, by the way.\*

The *bergers* could not help me. So, fearing that the porter and M. Lugardon would be looking for me all night, I turned out of the glow of the hut and sat on a high knoll in the quiet and dark. At last I saw a veritable lantern far away back at place 'A.' I lit responsive matches, and the lantern stopped to look; clearly it had seen my matches.

To cut matters short—or less long—I will add that I stumbled up to meet the lantern and found that my porter bore it, while a small boy—M. Lugardon's factotum—accompanied him. We reached the *cabane*, by a path at places invisible even with aid of the lantern, at two o'clock. I was tired indeed! Thirteen hours the day before, and now 12½ more without food, besides coach and railway travel. Old M. Lugardon, who did not know I was coming, turned out to comment on the noise at this late hour, but finding that it was I, and hearing my story, he showed his usual kindness and comforted me with hot cocoa and other nice things.

---

\* [We should like a medical opinion before recommending for general use this means of producing a sense of repletion.—Ed.]

Next day I looked round. It is a grand place. Placed some 8,000 feet above the sea, in fine air, it commands alps dotted with small lakes in the foreground, while farther off stand up a ring of snow mountains.

I found M. Lugardon established there with painting materials, photographic apparatus, two goats, and a small boy to tend them. He shared with me the milk (not too plentiful), and also other good things, as cocoa, &c. ; for my hastily-obtained provisions were not at all satisfactory.

One day I went up Mont Avril for a view, and had a fine series of glissades down. Another day I scrambled up the Pic d'Otemma. My late porter happened to be up at the hut again, and went with me for the fun of the thing. He was rather amused at being guided up by a traveller; but he did not mind it, and took mental notes of the way for future use. He was only 19 years of age, and inexperienced; but he seemed sure-footed, and was certainly a courteous and intelligent companion.

More than this I could not do, not having companion or guide, but my four days at Chanrion have left such an impression on my mind that I mean, if possible, to stay there for a time next year and to get Joseph Quinadoz over from Arolla. If only I could find a companion at that time! But I fear it is too early.

Such was my uneventful holiday this year. It was too early, and the season was, they told me, about three weeks late. One merit I can claim: I was not 'centric.' In fact my route to Chanrion, *viâ* Col de Fenêtre, was decidedly eccentric.

[P.S. If this paper meet the eye of any friend who also is in want of a companion for a holiday in Switzerland next year between about June 9 and July 15, I should be very glad to discuss plans with him. It has occurred to me that one might camp out at Chanrion with satisfactory results; or perhaps try what Tyrol is like in the early summer.]