latter are worthy of attention so are the Bregaglia mountains. Further, few people realise how low these valleys lie: seven or eight thousand feet from base to summit is common, while the Disgrazia is nearly as high above Sondrio as Mont Blanc above Courmayeur. Again, it will be found here, more than in most districts, that the best way down often differs from the best way up, and leads one into quite a different valley. Great variety of scenery and long days out are easily secured, and on the rocks themselves there will be found full scope for the agility of the youngest. If one leaves them too long one may fail to get up some of them at all; and for those who want to try something new and startling there remains as yet plenty in the realm of new routes. The Zocca has been climbed but twice, once from the north and once from the south, the splendid W. arête from the col having never yet been tried. The E. ridge of the Rasica and the S. ridge of the Badiletto remain, and plenty more; and there remains—perhaps there will always remain—the great N. face of the Badile: the man who first climbs that can rest assured that he will have done a very 'big thing.'

## Early June in the Pyrenees.

By VICTOR H. GATTY.

ON one of the closing days of May last year I found myself driving up the twenty kilometres of hilly road which separate the end of the electric railway at Luz from Gavarnie. A pleasant, elderly, red-faced man riding a donkey alongside discoursed to me about the mountains, of which he seemed to have a thorough knowledge; he proved to be Henri Passet, Charles Packe's old guide and his companion on most of the many expeditions which make his 'Guide to the Pyrenees,' though published forty years ago, still the most useful and reliable for the mountaineer; indeed, so far as I could judge, the Pyrenees, more fortunate than the Alps, have altered little since that day.

Accounts of Pyrenean ascents have most generally described the conditions existing in the later part of the season, when ice and snow have retreated to their furthest strongholds. Perhaps the charm of the early summer, when the winter's snow still covers thickly summits even of secondary rank and throws out long tongues towards the lower valleys, bringing the mountains and the views from them more nearly to an

Alpine level, may be some warrant for the repetition of a thrice-told tale.

My arrival at Gavarnie unfortunately coincided with the end of a spell of fine weather which had lasted through May, and for the next three days rain fell with a vigour and persistence which Seathwaite could hardly rival, However, as my friend Vigdal once philosophically remarked to me under similar conditions in the North, such weather is more conducive to health and activity than are heat and cloudless skies, and it proved possible to occupy the time profitably in training walks through the Port de Gavarnie, one of the lower passes into Spain, and to the summit of the Piméné, the most prominent of the smaller peaks round Gavarnie, some 9,200 ft. in height.

The Port (7,485 ft.) was still encumbered to some extent with snow, and barely open for horse traffic, and the peak was still snow-covered for some 1,600 ft. downwards from the summit on which, at 3.30 P.M., the temperature was no more than 36° F. : standing there in mist and sleet, the conditions seemed more appropriate to our own Lake hills in January than to the confines of sunny Spain on the first day of June. Jean Trescazes, who accompanied me, went doubly armed with an alpenstock and an umbrella of Gargantuan dimensions, which he only abandoned when, in the winds of the Piméné, it seemed likely to lead to an experiment in aerial navigation. During the course of these excursions I was initiated in a piece of knowledge always most useful to a mountaineer, it was a new method of drinking. The Pyreneans carry their wine in a skin, as elsewhere, but, instead of pouring it into a cup or drinking from the neck, they use a kind of nozzle, and, holding it a little distance off, direct the stream straight into the mouth. Those on the French side drink in this way only whilst on the mountains, but I was told that on the Spanish side a similar arrangement with a glass bottle is used at table ; where there are many mouths and only one vessel it has obvious advantages, apart from its merits as a gauge of sobriety.

The next day the sun shone once more, and, after consultation with Jean and a distant inspection of the Vignemale, it was decided to start forthwith for the Refuge d'Ossove, which lies at a height of nearly 9,000 ft. close to the peak. It was a hot trudge up the long Vallée d'Ossove, the first three hours only showing a gain of 1,800 ft. out of the 4,400 ft. to be ascended. Above this point the walk was mainly up snow, as the narrow valley was filled down to the 6,000-ft. level with

the remains of huge avalanches which earlier on must pour into it from all sides. In the season it is, of course, a horse excursion across the Col de Vignemale to Cauterets; at this time the Refuge, a stone-built structure tarred all over, which lies a little below the pass, stood in the middle of a wide snow-field. It had not been opened since the previous autumn, and the wet flagged floor, almost entire absence of furniture, and lack of all windows save a narrow iron-shuttered slit, made it a much less inviting habitation than the wooden huts of the Alps.

Upstairs things were better, and, supper despatched by a roaring wood fire, the materials for which our porter, Jean Marie Salles, had carried up from Gavarnie, we passed a very comfortable night on the straw, which had happily kept dry through the winter.

Next morning it was fine, but not so cold (38° F.) as one could have wished in view of the long snow tramp before us; a light cloud hung on the Vignemale, which from this point is seen as a sheer rocky pyramid, as we left the Refuge at 5.30 A.M. To reach the glacier it is necessary to descend about 300 ft., and then to traverse across rocks to a point about the same height as the hut; then followed a long pull of two hours up slopes of snow, which entirely concealed the ice, to the foot of the final peak. This peak only rises 350 ft. above the glacier, but looks considerably more, and rather suggests the final peak of the Rothhorn from the Zermatt side. In the later season it is all rock, but at this time it was entirely covered with snow, which we found in very good condition; fifteen minutes from the glacier sufficed to land us by the big cairn which Count Russell has had built on the top (10,820 ft.): the 'refuges' which he has hollowed out of the rock, one of them only a short distance from the summit, were all buried under the snow, and the cairn and all projecting rocks were covered with a glistening sheath of ice.

The view was clear on all sides. To the N. it reaches to the plain of France; to the S. it stretches over ridge after ridge of the arid-looking hills of Spain; between, as far as the eye can reach, to the E. and to the W. run the snowpeaks of the Pyrenees, a band of white marking off the two countries as clearly as on a map. This is the most striking feature of the view, and is doubtless better seen early in the summer than later on, when most of the snow has vanished.

After an hour spent very comfortably in the sunshine we started down again at 9.15. The descent of the peak required some care, as it is steep, and the snow was not so good as

it had been earlier and was somewhat loosely attached to the rock. Once on the glacier all was plain sailing, excepting that the snow was bad and rapidly became worse; in an hour's time we were close upon 3,000 ft. down and reached the avalanche snow, which, as always, was much harder, and soon took us to the open valley below the Cascade d'Olette. Here, whilst we lunched by the stream, my guides foregathered with a brother *chasseur* who was out after izard. This time of the year is legally the close season, but such distinctions do not appear to be recognised by the profession in these parts.

Heavy thunder-rain which caught us before reaching home was the prelude of more broken weather, of which I took advantage to move on to Luchon, visiting the Grotto of Lourdes on the way. At Luchon the summer season was to be seen in the chrysalis stage; at the Casino gardens one rather chilly evening the band played for the predilection of the writer alone.

Leaving such delights behind on the first day which gave promise of better weather, I drove up to the Hospice de France, an inn which lies at the end of the highroad whence branch off the paths to the Port de Picarde and the Port de Venasque, mule passes into Spain: with me were Jean Courrège as guide and his elder brother Maurice as porter, the latter armed with a tall axe of prehistoric type, the cutting edge parallel to the shaft. From the hospice we crossed the Port de Picarde, intending to sleep at the Rencluse and climb the Pic de Nethou next day, but the fates willed otherwise. There was a dense mist on the pass and deep snow on the S. side, which quite upset Jean's calculations, with the result that we wandered about for three hours without finding the way, somewhat deviously as my compass told me. Realising that we had the alternative of a night in the snow or a return to the hospice we chose the latter, and reached the inn just after dark.

Here the good landlady gave us a warm welcome, and we were soon supping in the big kitchen before a fire of whole tree-trunks, 5 ft. or 6 ft. long, burning on a huge open hearth, whilst at a long table on one side sat a picturesque company of herdsmen, Spaniards about to cross the pass into their own country, and foresters, finishing their evening meal.

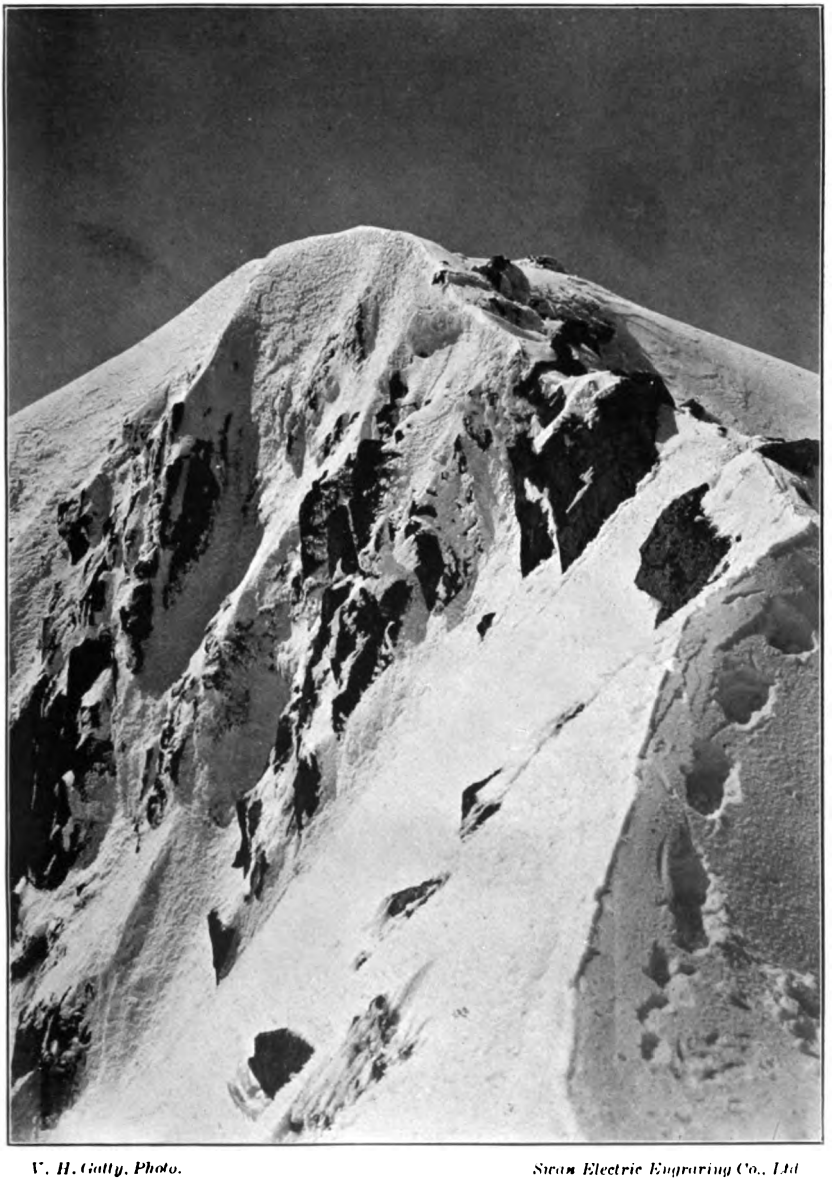
Next morning, June 9, after a breakfast of freshly-caught trout, we started upwards again, this time for the Port de Venasque. The mists still hung low and closed in on us before reaching the Port, to gain which a long traverse

over snow had still to be made. Once on the top (just under 8,000 ft.) the conditions improved, and we found fine weather and sunshine on the Spanish side. To reach the Rencluse it is necessary to drop down some 1,700 ft. into the valley of Venasque, a fine wild glen with no human abode in sight, deserted except for a few months in the later summer by all save the izards, a herd of which we saw below. A short pull up on the further side takes one to the Rencluse, a hollow sheltered on three sides by cliffs, beneath which the stream, which enters on the fourth side, disappears underground. There is a rough stone shed without windows, at one end of which is an enclosure like a sheepfold, open at the top, but completely sheltered by an overhanging rock, in which it is usual to sleep. Inside the walls we soon had a huge fire of logs, which are to be found in abundance close by, allowing of a lavish expenditure of fuel, usually so precious at a mountain shelter; at the Rencluse the fire can be kept burning through the night, which thus passes very pleasantly. Sleep under such conditions is, however, seldom continuous, and as I woke from time to time I saw the clouds, which were at first unbroken, gradually vanish, until the stars shone out of a clear dark sky.

At 2.30 A.M., being the possessor of the only watch, I roused the guides, and at 3.15 we had drunk our hot tea and left the shelter. The light was just sufficient to enable us to leave the lantern behind, and up above the peaks of the Maladetta looked ghastly white in the dawn; the salmon tints of sunrise which soon followed were not intense, although the sky was unclouded.

The slope we were ascending was mostly snow, sufficiently steep, without steps in its then hard-frozen state, but vastly preferable to the scree and boulders which are exposed later in the season. At 4.32 we reached the Portillon, the point at which the rock ridge bounding the Nethou glacier is passed. Then followed a long diagonal traverse across the glacier up gradually steepening snow to the Col Couronné, which lies between the Pic de Milieu and the Nethou. At this point the snow slope, instead of continuing up to the summit ridge of the col, ends in a drop of 20 ft. or so, and then rises again to the col, thus forming a deep basin enclosed on all sides. Later on water collects and forms a small lake; but at this time it was all snow.

Immediately above the col rises the Dôme de Nethou, a steep rounded hump of snow, to climb which some step-cutting was required. The Dôme tapers in the upper part into a ridge



*V. H. Gatty, Photo.* *Swan Electric Engraving Co., Ltd*

THE SUMMIT OF THE PIC DE NETHOU
AND THE PONT DE MAHOMET.

which leads to the Pont de Mahomet; this in the later season, when it is more usually climbed, is well known as a sharp, broken rock arête with a long drop on either hand. At this time it was quite buried under snow. Here Jean called a halt, and after considering it a little announced: 'On ne peut pas passer; il y a trop de neige.' As we were now within 150 yds. of the top, and the arête did not really seem by any means impassable, a retreat was unthinkable, and our leader was easily persuaded to modify his opinion and go forward. Though it proved a passage needing care in its wintry condition, we found no difficulty in crossing, as the snow was excellent. Once across the Pont, a few steps more brought us to the top (11,165 ft.), a flattened dome of snow with its greatest length N. and S., at 7.45 A.M.

The view was unclouded, and to the E. and W. seemed almost limitless, extending over a sea of countless snow-capped summits stretching away into the far distance. This is the chief feature of the view; in other respects it is less striking than that from the Vignemale. Owing to the superior height of the Nethou all the other peaks are looked down upon—a point of view from which no mountain looks imposing—and from its position on the Spanish side of the range it lacks the outlook over the low country to the N., and the character of the range as a narrow chain of high mountains is no longer so plainly seen: in one direction only the eye reaches to the bottom of a cultivated valley, where, in the Val d'Aran, a small town can be seen 8,000 ft. below.

Whilst I was occupied with photography my guides were engaged on an endeavour to dig out the book, which is kept under a rock, as they were anxious to record the first ascent of the season. After labouring manfully for some time they gave up the attempt, as there were two metres or more of snow above the rock; their exertions were perhaps in part prompted by the temperature, with the thermometer at 28° F. and a keen wind blowing from the N.E. it was very chilly, notwithstanding the bright sun.

At 8.35 we recommenced the descent and got over the 'Pont' without difficulty, the snow still being good. On the glacier there was the usual labour, increasing as the sun got higher, of plodding through the softening snow. On the descent from the Portillon this was added to by the fact that there were concealed hollows under the snow amongst the boulders, into which one descended bodily at times. The Rencluse was regained once more at 11.25, and here we relit the fire and had a comfortable lunch, leaving again at 1.15.

The Venasque valley looked very beautiful, with its shining lake below and the snows of the Pic des Posets in the background, and repaid the hot trudge up the stony slopes leading to the Port de Venasque. At the Port, which we reached at 3.27, there was again a change of temperature, and we had no cause to dally on the descent, which sundry glissades down avalanche snow helped to shorten and brought us once more to the Hospice de Luchon at 4.40 P.M.

As those who have read the account of these expeditions will gather, and I think they are fairly typical of Pyrenean ascents, serious climbing forms a small proportion of the whole day's work: at the time of year they were made, when there is vastly more snow than later in the season, I think that on the higher peaks the conditions are more nearly those of winter than of summer: the starting-points are often low, and the distances to be traversed long, but that is because roads and railways and high-placed hotels have not multiplied as in the Alps: this lack of conveniences the mountaineer will not regret, for so he sees the upper world as Nature made it, still unspoilt.

---

## An Adventure on the Winter-Lücke.

By C. W. COBB.

BEFORE I tell the following story of a marvellous escape from death I should like to say a few words in explanation of the circumstances which led to such an adventure. I have wandered about the Alps every summer for the best part of thirty years. I have taken part in many expeditions, great and small. For years we have been used to find our way for ourselves on easy excursions below the snow on lesser heights, taking our provisions with us for the day, and until August 14, 1905, without a mishap worth mentioning. I was, I confess, under an entire misapprehension with regard to the nature of the expedition, which should not have been undertaken by our party. I failed in judgment, as will be seen, and finally was guilty of one of those momentary acts of carelessness for which the mountains are wont to exact terrible penalties.

On August 14, 1905, my wife, my second son, and I started from the Hotel Damma Gletscher, Göschenen Alp, at 7.15 A.M., to ascend the Alpligen-Lücke, which lies to the south of the valley, and from it the Lochberg, for the view. The