

would not best express the riper judgment of many of us!
At any rate, I have ventured to doggerelize the idea,

High Mountains are best from the Valley;
Why toil up their wearisome height?
Outside dull dark Churches we dally,
But inside snug Bierschrunds sit tight.

TWO DAYS WITH A GUIDE.

BY G. WINTHROP YOUNG.

I ADMIT that I climb with a guide. The confession is painful but necessary, and I must hope that the weakness will be attributed not so much to a want of originality as to a preference for a sense of security. I find that, take him all round, the guide meets me in better training, lasts rather longer, and occasionally climbs even better than the majority of amateurs with a month's holiday. This must be my apology. That it is one I am bound frankly to make anyone who has kept up with the admirable series of recent Alpine Club Papers will surely admit. To avoid indiscretion I will merely recall a few with periphrastic titles: 'Twenty Days with the Captain,' 'Ten Years with Sleepless Hope,' 'Slipping up (and down) Kabru,' 'That Slab on the Finsteraarhorn,' 'Five Years with Fortune'; and others are already on the way. Between such acts of serious comedy a climb with a guide is a bashful 'song and dance' interlude, in a nervous flurry to finish before the next genuine 'drop'-scene is ready. And yet the gentle art of managing a guide, digging him out of the depressing public opinion of the hut, humouring his local climbing superstitions, pressing him when he is only pouting, knowing where to yield when his real instinct is speaking, cheering him along when he's off under full sail, has its own fascination for the pseudo-psychologist, apart from the pleasing sensation of his stability at the further end of the rope. One such, however, I find enough for a progressive party; two guides at once constitute a house of lords, with a reactionary majority.

For the traverses of these Aiguilles—which I hope eventually to describe—Mr. Pilkington, in a kindly reference in his 'Fifty Years of the Alpine Club,' presents me with a second guide abstracted from Mr. Ryan's party,* a far more fitting adjustment of values for which I may not take credit.

* *A. J.* vol. xxiv. p. 22.

At the same time, I may, perhaps, disclaim any right to be classed with his distinguished 'somewhat centrist school' of 'Montanvert' rock-experts. Out of some twenty years of general mountaineering, only some ten days have been spent at the Montanvert, and the few well-trodden expeditions thence undertaken, as will be seen, were only of an exploratory and geographical character, to get a general idea of the local heights and levels, as recommended in Sir M. Conway's 'Alps from End to End.'

In August, 1905, Mayor and I (with guides) traversed the Charmoz and Grépon: an expedition only memorable because the Mummery crack was choked for us for 1½ hr. by a spasmodic Italian amateur, who had finally to be jerked down by Mr. Broome's guide, Alois Pollinger; and because Mayor's pre-Adamite mustard-coloured coat took this occasion to resolve itself unrent, unstained into its primary atoms, flinging out upon the air, like the One-horse Chay, in a puff of saffron dust.

On August 6, 1906,* Knubel and I left the Montanvert, as is customary, in the early hours, distracting the dreariness of the dark path with the contemplation of that exquisite omen the white cross of the Chamonix lights in the deeper valley. 1906 was the ideal season, the weather certain, the climbing conditions unimpeachable, and as we were in good temper and condition, we had a hope of doing more than the 'customary' traverse of the Charmoz and Grépon, not in order to get more 'done,' but in order to satisfy more hours of perfect daylight with a greater variety of perfect climbing.

The Nantillons glacier was firmly kind. We started on the face of the Charmoz in cool dusk, leading alternately as the convenience of the rope dictated, my own advances being, as usual, determined by a desire to escape carrying the sack as well as the camera. It was pleasant to find that the formidable ice-chimney yielded without posterior propulsion to a comfortable 'back and foot.' Writers sometimes remark on the rarity with which guides use this convenient method. Possibly the contents of the sack have some remote bearing on the point. On the ridge we met the dawn; a golden flood of cheerful promise, whose description has got somehow to be avoided. The first great gendarme, a familiar and terrifying illustration in climbing literature, with guide-folk swaying on the heads of ice-axes above abysses, proved a formidable obstacle for two men. We were wearing a thin

* *A. J.* vol. xxiii. p. 342.

doubled rope, which could be let out as reserve, and whose perpetually diverging spirals embraced throughout the day all the aiguilles upon which we had no intentions. On this occasion 60 ft. of it got jammed in a crack under our feet, and introduced an antiphonal commination service on its proper management. I then balanced breezily on one leg on the ledge subtending the gendarme, while Knubel enjoyed 20 min. of undiluted pleasure pirouetting on my head and shoulder in his efforts to get a loop over the pinnacle. His reach is short and his aim proved inferior. He thoughtfully kicked off my hat to wind his feet more firmly in my hair, and its substitute, a brown silk scarf built into a lofty turban, lent a touch of oriental magnificence to the rest of the day. Beyond this we enjoyed delightful climbing in the fresh morning air, although we invented, I believe, some needlessly violent routes in making sure we had reached the final summit. From the top we saw that we were likely to be anticipated on the Grépon, and sat for a while watching the curious descent of the Nantillons glacier by two guideless parties, who had, separately and apparently of intent, succeeded in getting benighted the previous day on the Grépon, having economically prepared themselves for the sacrifice by assuming only a tropical costume of boots and running shorts.

The couloir below the Grépon crack proved cold and disagreeably loose, and we broke through the sunny window at the top and out on to the Mer de Glace face with delightful relaxation in its welcome heat. Two parties of ladies, most spirited climbers, were negotiating the crack with the customary Chamonix incapables, and we spent a languid hour and a quarter rambling about the Mer de Glace wall, identifying Ryan's route and designing others, with occasional returns to satisfy the camera with the graceful procession up the chimney. When our turn came I elected to follow Knubel with 4 ft. of slack rope. I wished, on this second ascent, to decide whether I would ever willingly lead. The difficulties are not prohibitive, but there are some 10 ft. on a convex, cut off from all but space, where, if one began, as leader, to remember one had nerves, the climb would leave an after-taste of dissatisfaction. We passed the ladies with all good wishes. The oblique chimney back to the main ridge above proved far easier than on the previous occasion. The through way behind the awkward capstone had either been cleared out in the interval or it had been concealed before by frozen *débris* and ice. On the ascent of the slanting edge of the

split block on the Nantillons face, almost the most sensational, and, as the result of much knee-polish, most technically difficult passage, Knubel jammed his foot, and had to be hauled out of his boot by an impromptu rope pulley. I photographed, with satisfaction, his pained smile as he relaxed. The great 'Abseilung' down the big gendarme, always a most terrific performance, was quickly over, with the aid of that useful device the 'Kniebremse.' It is hardly worth repeating, except that the mistake has been recently perpetuated in 'The Complete Mountaineer,' that the looped rope here for the last man is not suspended round the erratic block on the flat summit, in which case it makes only a wireless telegraphic connection with the Mer de Glace, but is hung over a point some 6 ft. down the arête by which the descent is begun.

The rocks were in perfect touch, the sun was tempered by a veil of spring air, and the party crooned the songs of two nations simultaneously from the two ends of the performing rope with a unanimity that embraced everything but the music. As we were out for pleasure we basked long on the summit. Knubel shouted dreamy advice to the Chamoniards in difficulties at the 'Abseilung'—some of the ladies I regret to have heard were afterwards benighted—while I cleaned up all the tins and bottles within easy reach of one arm. I took some credit for this, until Mr. Godley became the champion of the picnic privileges of the tripper.* Now I am less certain of the propriety of my purification. After all, Cleanliness is only *next* to Godliness.

We saw Mayor and Robertson busily at work on the Aiguilles de Blaitière, and had idle comfort in the thought of the steps they were leaving us. The descent of the Nantillons face was hot and dusty, with a glare of sun and no comfort of wind. We hurried it over quickly, and got to the Col des Nantillons in about an hour from the top.

For all our indolence of rests it was still early in the day, and the Blaitière eyed us reproachfully. We piled coats, sack, and camera on the snow col, and kept only one axe. The sense of lightness when weight is removed in the middle of prolonged exertion, like the change from a 5-oz. to a 4-oz. foil in the course of a fencing bout, gives an extraordinary sense of ease and power. A man, too, in training probably goes at his best at the end of eight or ten hours' hard climbing. 'Now,' said Knubel, 'we shall see! Two

* *A. J.* vol. xxiii. p. 443.

aiguilles are all right, but a third or fourth for an already ageing Herr——?’ The fault must lie with the perfect conditions that we gave the Blaitière summits less leisurely consideration than their beauties deserve. We also did not want to keep Mayor and Robertson waiting. We passed them, descending, just below the ‘step’ of the arête, where a fixed rope is generally left for the return. Using their steps on the short ice slope that leads up to the col between the central and north peaks, we found our way—it was our first visit—up to the central summit. Here we devoted some ten minutes to meditation and an examination of the potentialities of the ridge to the Aiguille du Plan, then descended to the col, and trotted up the north peak. There were rumours in the air of taking in the south-west peak, but they were sternly repressed as mere summit slaughter. Our intention had always been only to travel the cirque at the head of the Nantillons glacier, and though the day was still young these aiguilles are too fine to take as afterthoughts.

The descent was the most delightful bit of climbing I ever hope to enjoy. I cannot assert that we were ever positively flying, as the party watching from the col might correct my estimate, but the sensation of smooth continuous motion was almost identical. The occasions on which the condition of the rocks, the condition of the weather, and the condition of all the members of a party are all working in perfect harmony must be rare. The sensation of pure physical enjoyment, the sound mainspring of all our active sports, reaches its highest expression in climbing, and only there in perfection for short periods. Eye and ear and mind are all recording actively, but for the moment the indescribable joy of ease in conscious effort dominates all higher sensations while it still contains them. Memory asserts we floated down: Mayor may be consulted as to facts. ‘Ach, Herr,’ Knubel commented sadly on the col, ‘wir machen noch manches zusammen, aber so klettern wir nie wieder!’ The whole party roamed gently back to the Montanvert for tea, resisting the passing fascinations of the Petit Charmoz and Aiguille de l’M. The times were given in a former note. They are not repeated, as the climbing was regulated by inclination and not by the clock. The circle, however, seems to have taken some 16½ hrs., of which three or four certainly were spent in orthodox abstraction.

Knubel’s forecast had to be disproved. Also the curl of the Aiguilles from the Charmoz to the North Blaitière has its natural serpentine corollary in the ridge from the Dent du

Requin to the Aiguille du Midi. There is a botched connecting link, including the Aiguille du Fou, but the rotten condition of these pinnacles could not decently be described outside the halfpenny press. Shortly summarised (since it is less well known), from the Aiguille du Midi a ridge runs north-east in a fine arête of snow and ice to the Col du Plan, which ought to be called Col des Pèlerins; there follows the indeterminate mass of an abortive aiguille, jammed vaguely along the ridge with forbidding walls at either end; * this leads to a high small col, the proper Col du Plan, from which falls the Plan Glacier and from which the Aiguille du Plan is usually climbed. From the Aiguille du Plan, on the south-east and almost at right angles, descends an impracticable ridge to the buttress of the Requin overhanging the Mer de Glace. From the Col du Plan (proper) a glacier fall descends, sweeping round the south wall of this impracticable ridge to the Mer de Glace. By this glacier the Aiguille du Plan is usually ascended by way of the Col, and from its lower end starts the ascent of the Requin.

On the anniversary of the Nantillons circle, August 6, 1907, I set out with Pollinger minimus for this ridge. Pollinger's discretion is longer than his reach, and the attempt was foredoomed. We climbed to a notch behind the Requin in order to investigate the impracticable arête up to the Plan. After a few hundred feet up and down of difficult rock we met an absolute cut-off. We returned, and made the ascent of the Plan the usual way. 'Senex promissa barba'—which I take to mean 'an old head in spite of only the promise of a beard'—refused even to look at the abrupt wall, as seen in face, of the abortive aiguille beyond the Col, or at the 'weeks of step-cutting' to its foot. We descended the nasty ice wall that crowned the col that year with a certain silence in the rear; for while one may never force a guide, however mistaken, there is no moral compulsion of volubility. Consequently the Requin was offered as a sop. It was accepted as promising distraction and exercise. The professional element extended itself so heroically on the ascent that it decided to recuperate a stage below the summit, and left me the extraordinary pleasure, so seldom justifiable, of finishing and enjoying alone the summit of a great alpine peak. The sensations that are crowded into these rare solitary moments, poised on a needle midway in space, with clouds and wind for company, do not allow

* A. J. vol. xxiii. p. 647.

fortunately of reproduction, for they would be intensely tiresome to listen to. We descended rapidly; but I was not entirely pleased with the airy anchorages that were considered sufficient for my secure transmission down the huge chimney by which the descent is made.

We had an appointment to meet Donald Robertson and the porters for a bivouac at the foot of the Géant icefall, with the object of spending a day or two in exploring the Mer de Glace walls of some of the aiguilles. As Robertson had invented a lightning route up the left side of the Mer de Glace, the junction was only effected after much deviation and crying in the wilderness through the intervention of a kindly German casual. A magnificent hollow rock, with green grotto moss and a silver spring, gave us very needful shelter; for the night sang itself in with a choir of colossal thunderstorms. To cower sleepless through a long night, under a rock throbbing with a continuous roar of thunder reverberating in its prison of huge precipices, blinded by a glare of unintermittent lightning, is a sensation impressive to a degree, but it insists too insultingly upon the fragility of human bones. In the morning we fled over fresh snow to the Montanvert.

Evidently it was to be Knubel or nihil. Robertson generously exchanged him for a day, with the result that three mornings later I was reproachfully awakened to applaud a cloudy sky, and to cherish the drowsy wish—I suppose we all know it—that it was just a little cloudier.* Packing took little time, for Knubel belongs to my 'Mathew Arnold' school of provisioning (though he rejects the name), which says that the sack shall be all only 'sweetness—and light.' We raced up the glacier, warned of our belatedness by the gleams of four or five lamps scattered up the night ahead. The crevasses met us with those hot sickly breaths of faint air that bode so ill for the weather and agree so badly with the recollection of a candle-breakfast off luke-warm coffee, cherry jam, and a Swiss cigar. As day broke we ran, to overtake time, and passing our last predecessors, some Italian guides returning home, sitting at the foot of the Géant icefall, we were volubly assured that their recumbent attitude was merely due to fear created by our pursuit. We knew the fall well that season, and reached the top at the end of 2½ hrs. from the hotel. Soon after we roped, and plunging into the great sweep of the Glacier de la Vallée Blanche

* *A. J.* vol. xxiii. p. 646.

before the sun had spoiled the surface, we hit a fortunate line up through its crevasses, and dragged more heavily over the snow to the foot of the south face of the Aiguille du Midi. The weather looked very unpromising; so after a meditative meal we struck right up the central rocks of the face, by a direct but rotten line that probably forms one of twenty first ascents on this side. Five and a half hours in all from the Montanvert found us glowering into a snow stormlet from the summit. We had at least the comfort of knowing that to follow our prospective ridge would be all on the way home—for it will be seen we were attempting the circuit this time from the opposite end—and we are confident that we could at any time force a way down to our right and so back on to the Mer de Glace.

The firm steep rocks of the north-east arête of the Midi launched us with a rush on to the long gradual ridge that curves in a white crest of snow and ice to the (so-called) Col du Plan. The first part of it was broad and comfortably crusted for a canter. As we descended, hard snow and even ice introduced spells of long and laborious step-cutting down irritatingly easy angles. Undoubtedly crampons would have been of service here. The final flick of the white lash of the ridge down to the col led us into error, for, to avoid its obvious demand for steps, we turned down a subsidiary ridge on the south face, in the hope of finding softer snow that would bring us back just below the col. The result was a sensational manœuvre down an ice wall and much loss of time before the col was regained by its south face. In an ordinary season this ridge should be a delightful snow walk.

What we had feared might prove the crux of the climb was now ahead, the abrupt wall of the abortive aiguille. It was gratifying to find, however, that calculations made from the Col du Géant some weeks before proved correct in fact. The steep wall was an overlapping screen; the ridge slid in behind it on to the north face, and an easy broken couloir gave access to the edge of the 'screen' higher up, where its rocks were sound and practicable. We were soon on the vague and truncated summit, where an aged stoneman relieved us of the necessity of claiming such an unself-respecting peak as a first ascent. I believe it was ascended, accidentally, by Sir Edward Davidson many years ago, and it has never recovered his refusal to recognise, by naming it, that at least its intentions of becoming an aiguille were laudable.

Its further end, however, the ridge which leads on to the

high col below the Aiguille du Plan, was all that Chamonix rock should be; red, solid, steep, dropping in precipitous edges, and yet always giving itself away by some sporting crack. It might well have been longer. A fine little rift down the south face of the last step brought us to a yellow bracket a few feet above the ice. Here we lunched, and then in a few minutes cut cautiously round the steep ice below the nose and up on to the col—the ‘weeks of step-cutting’!

The weather, which had been so far content with blustering squalls and thunder threats, now let itself go. White butterfly snowstorms that had been opening and shutting their wings against the great black wall of peaks to the east charged in ranks upon the wind, and committed suicide in icicles against the rope and our moustaches. But the junction had been made; the Aiguille du Plan, from this point, is one of those climbs that Alex. Burgener considered suitable for Sunday defiances of devildom, and behind all the storm lurked the suggestion, which everyone who has a ‘feel for weather’ knows, that it wasn’t quite in earnest.

We made the ascent of the aiguille without halt so as to keep warm (9½ hrs.), and were rewarded on our return to the col by one of those scenic changes that only great mountains can contrive. The storm clouds rolled up like the ashes of burnt paper, and a singularly liquid sunlight dripped in silvery pools through the flurried remnants of mist. The wet black ridges hissed round us with the melting of snow, and the swift drying of the rocks promised a secure afternoon and pleasant holding.

The unfavourable weather had hitherto put an ascent of the Dent du Requin out of mind, but its promise of a reward, in fun and warmth on fair weather rocks, for our long wrestle with the ice-ridge and the snow-wind was irresistible. The day was young and the sun only beginning. So I gently insinuated to Knubel the sanitary advantages and the geometrical propriety of finishing our curve on to the Requin. I was at the moment cutting steps down the awkward ice-wall from the col, and he grinned down at me over his axe: ‘For the last hour I have been wondering how soon you would suggest it!’ I think he cherished an immoral desire to cut down Pollinger’s record on the peak, set up a few days before. The more so, as in 1906 five of us, following a false line, had spent 20 hrs. of furious effort on the same rocks, and had been compelled to abandon an unconscionable amount of rope.

We took a long and lazy dream on the rocks at the foot.

The climbing had been more various and uncertain than on the Nantillons day the year before, and the mind at least was ready at an earlier stage to drift easily into the flood of coloured impression that forms its recompense for prolonged concentration.

As soon as we started I realised that Knubel was out for scalps. Since the compression of the rope interferes with the sentimental chewing of the cud of sensation, without which I am constantly assured that mountaineering is mere parlour tricks and pace, I chose the less schismatic course of following without it; until the serious climbing began at the descent of the big slab. The line was now a familiar one, the rocks in bracing condition. Treating them with all the respect due to old friends, we sat on the seemingly swaying top in some 52 min. from the glacier. The afternoon was a blaze of sunlight, and so still that the tobacco smoke drifted in rings round our heads. This introduced a discussion as to what would be the most attractive form for our spirits, in their necessary mountain reincarnation, subsequently to assume. If I remember rightly, the eagle had it, over the snowflake and the chamois.

An isolated clap of thunder drove us off needlessly soon. The descent of the big chimney was masterfully engineered, and we reached the glacier in 38 min. [I recall these times merely as an illustration of how treacherous 'times' are. With Pollinger some days before, under even better conditions, the time taken was some 10 min. slower each way; the year before we had spent rather more than ten times as long on the same peak, while intending, at least, the same ascent.] We drifted back, promiscuously and talkatively, to tea at the Montanvert; a day in all of some 15 hrs., but full of variety and mountaineering interest.

Neither the Aiguille du Midi nor the Plan, by the usual route, gives climbing enough for a good day, but by thus joining the two a really fine ridge expedition is secured. It is of no particular difficulty, and if taken, as it should be, from the Géant or Midi Cabane, of no exceptional length. As a return expedition for men coming from the Col du Géant to the Montanvert it would do well, and it offers a far finer mountaineering day than the ascents of the Requin or of the Géant, which constitute the usual programme. The ascent of the Requin could always be added to the day, if the snow on the Midi ridge were found in easy condition for rapid morning progress.

I also venture to suggest that the popular combination of

the Charmoz and Grépon is a mistake. Each is far too fine to be confused with the other, and each offers separately as much pure rock work as can be properly enjoyed in one day by any one but a solitary lunatic. If, as may often be the case, even with all proper scenic and digestive allowances of time, a light party finds it has an afternoon in hand after traversing one or other of the two, the ascent of the Blaitière, taken as a sequel, will give a greater contrast in climbing, with the charm of a new aspect and a distinct character.

It would be a mistake to suppose that either of the days described implies an overcrowding of effort or time. A light party, in fair weather, climbing with the almost automatic precision that mutual confidence and sympathy create, moves nearly with the speed of a single individual over easy rocks; and even among the Aiguilles the passages of really difficult rock where more time must be taken bear a very small proportion to the work of the day. It is equally mistaken to assume that continuous movement at a pace adjusted to the difficulty of the rocks does anything but heighten the appreciation of external appeals. Dawdling is delightful in its place, but dawdling on a peak like the Grépon, implying a constant relaxing and rebracing of muscle and mind, makes only for fatigue. Rest when taken should be real rest, in chunks, and not too frequent, for the machinery has to be restarted, and retuned gradually, each time.

The longer the hours of daylight that can be spent on the heights, and the larger the variety of climbing, of views distant and near, and of sensation that can rationally be experienced in these hours, the greater the passing pleasure and the after profit.

TRAVERSE OF THE DÔME DE LA SACHE AND MONT POURRI.

BY W. N. LING.

COMPARATIVELY little has appeared in the 'Journal' about this fine mountain, and an account of a traverse made in August 1907 may therefore not be without interest. Mont Pourri stands up grandly amongst the mountains south of Mont Blanc, and its massive bulk can be seen from many a top, but for some reason or other it does not seem to exercise the attraction which other peaks do on the mountaineering brotherhood.

It was one of the mountains which my friend Harold Raeburn and I had put on our list in our wanderings from the Meije to Mont Blanc, and, if it had not already been