

THE GREAT PASSES OF THE WESTERN AND
CENTRAL ALPS.

BY DOUGLAS W. FRESHFIELD.

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MANY—I should be sorry to say how many—years ago when I was a small boy travelling with my parents, we met Tyndall at the homely inn at Breuil. He had been reconnoitring all day on the Matterhorn. When we sat down to the modest table d'hôte the principal item on the menu was chamois. Tyndall explained that it was the habit of Alpine innkeepers, when provisions ran short, to serve up an old goat in (what he described as) peat-sauce and to call it chamois. It has occurred to me since that this practice may possibly be alluded to in one of the lines that are taken by some to prove Shakespeare's personal acquaintance with foreign travel:

‘In the Alps,
It is reported, thou did'st eat strange flesh.’

I tell this story to-night because it seems to me exactly to fit the situation. Your Secretary, finding this year his larder empty, has taken to serving up his old goats. Sir Martin Conway, as the younger and less tough, suffered first. And now, as a last resource, I am put on the table. I had hoped to be able to read to you to-night a wholly fresh paper, on the life and times of De Saussure, but the material Mr. Montagnier is most kindly collecting for me is not yet all at hand, and I must therefore fall back on a discourse on Alpine Passes I gave four months ago to the Geographical Society. I am, however, conscious that this Club has to be addressed in a different spirit from that suitable for the groundlings at the lower end of the Row, and I have consequently made considerable changes in detail.

I shall venture to begin where Sir M. Conway left off last month. His paper had the perhaps somewhat unusual merit that it set one thinking. It had, he told us, a moral—‘Don't make a business of a pleasure.’ There are, he seemed to suggest, a dozen different ways of enjoying mountains. The man is happiest who can enjoy them in most ways. Don't

limit your interests to gymnastic prowess, or to 'times,' or to researches into minute details of orography, or climbing records. Refuse, therefore, to edit a Handbook, above all, a Climbers' Guide! Let your motto be '*Monticola sum, nihil montani a me alienum puto.*' Cultivate a moderate and temperate acquaintance with the relations between mountains and Science, Art, and History—but keep clear of Hannibal! So you will never have too much of the mountains, but among the trials of everyday life always be able to turn to them for refreshment and support.

With the doctrine I have thus far ventured to interpret, I most cordially agree. I have done my best in a humble way to live up to it, as the pages of our JOURNAL may bear witness. But these divagations of a mountaineer are more or less branches springing out of the stem of a climber's career. The character of the stem itself is apt to be profoundly affected by the soil from which it springs—the inborn tastes and character of the individual. In some of us the passion for heights is coupled with the love of travel. We have been bitten like Ioby by the gadfly of wandering. Others, among them not a few of the greatest climbers, have been in no sense travellers. Those who are not content without change of scene, who seek untrodden ranges as well as unclimbed peaks—or unnatural routes up peaks already climbed—are, I am conscious, often looked on by the pure and simple peak-hunter as not quite the real thing. Judged by the standard of Zermatt or Grindelwald, we are eccentrics; we have, as an Alpine specialist once told me, 'dissipated our energies.'

Well, we cannot help ourselves; we were born so, with an instinct not only to get to the top, but to go round and look at the other side of the objects in our path—and then to hurry on to another object. To the tour of Mont Blanc succeed the tours of Dykhtau and Kangchenjanga.

It is doubtless sad and bad and mad, but, oh, how sweet to find oneself philandering with the peaks of Caucasus or Himalaya! And the best of it is that our old Alpine loves never show any coldness on our return.

Still, I would not be taken as claiming any peculiar merit for the climber who travels. I pay due homage to the more highly specialised gymnastic qualities of the peak-hunter. He represents the perfect man before whom, as Emerson says, no mountain can stand. I will not hint here that perfection may be sometimes dull. All I would urge is that we accept, perhaps in a slightly varied sense, Virgil's untranslatable

words : *Quisque suos patimur manes* ; that we follow Chaucer's maxim :

'Hold the high way and let thy ghost thee lead.'

I hope most of my readers will agree with me that for the average man it is as well not only to see and climb as many mountains as possible, but also to take interest in them from as many aspects as he honestly can.

But—and here I come to the end of my argument and to my dilemma to-night—this point of view complicates the task of writing a short paper. It does so even if you want to describe a single climb, much more therefore if you take a general subject. When I undertook to deal with the historical aspect of a few passes I hoped to deal also with their physical features. I wrote several pages, with the result that the paper got first unwieldy and then as condensed and unpalatable as a stale Liebig lozenge. I found I was leaving out the personal touches and incidents that were the only things that I could hope would give it a little life.

When last year I inflicted on the Alpine Club a paper on the portion of the Alps which forms the Austro-Italian borderland and is included in the field of the present war, it was suggested to me that I might supplement it with some account of the more western part of the chain. I have followed the suggestion, though I have my doubts whether, in the lack of any immediate public interest in the region dealt with, I am wise in doing so. Moreover, in the time at our disposal, it is impossible for me to treat more than a single branch of the subject, and even so I can give only a most superficial survey of topics which would require several volumes to do them justice.

I propose, therefore, after a summary sketch of the relation between natural features and political frontiers in the part of the Alpine chain between the Mediterranean and the Orteler group, to limit myself to a selection of notes on the Great Passes of the Western and Central Alps.

It is popularly held that in this region, with the conspicuous exception of Canton Ticino, where Switzerland thrusts herself down on the Italian lakes, the frontier corresponds with the watershed. This is the rule, but there are not a few exceptions to it. If we start from the Mediterranean coast we find that France, when in A.D. 1860 she gained the County of Nice, was not content with the old Roman frontier of Italy which ran down to the headland of Turbia, but annexed the district of Mentone and the glens behind it, once dependencies of Monaco.

On the other hand, in order not to spoil one of Victor Emmanuel's favourite shooting-grounds, she left to Italy the headwaters of the Vesubia on the W. side of the range.

These are the only divergencies between natural and political boundaries in the Western Alps. To find the next we have to look as far E. as the Simplon Pass; there the pastures and villages above the gorge of Gondo, though on the Italian side, are Swiss. They are Swiss for a reason which will account for most of the irregularities we shall find farther E. A difficult gorge is a more practical barrier to human intercourse than an upland pasture.

Next we come to the great intrusion of Canton Ticino. From near the Gries Pass, just S. of the source of the Rhône, the frontier of Switzerland diverges at right angles from the main chain and skirts the E. edge of the Toce basin nearly to Lago Maggiore, which it crosses, then wanders among the foothills, giving all but the N.E. corner of Lago di Lugano to Switzerland, before it strikes N. along the ridge W. of Lago di Como to rejoin the Alpine watershed close to the Splügen Pass. This intrusion may be held to be sanctioned by lapse of time. But it had its origin in force of arms. The Swiss—I call them Swiss, for though 'Switzerland' did not form the official name of the Confederation until A.D. 1803, the name was in popular use from the date of the battle of Sempach (1386)—the Swiss Confederates finally occupied their present Cisalpine territories in A.D. 1512 as a payment for military services rendered to the Duke of Milan. Ticino has been at times on a small scale something of an Ireland to Switzerland. But it cannot be said that its inhabitants have shown any desire to share the burdens of the young Kingdom of Italy. They have found practical advantages in remaining Swiss. They are lightly taxed, their military service is never far from home, and their frontier affords some of them almost unique opportunities for a profitable pursuit, reputed formerly to have been the principal industry of my own county, Sussex—I refer to smuggling.

E. of the Splügen, and along the frontier of Graubünden, we find several minor irregularities. The Val di Lei, though harbouring one of the sources of the Rhine, is Italian. This is because its pastures are owned by peasants of Val San Giacomo. Among primitive peoples the limits of pasture-rights form one of the earliest boundary-lines, and one of the most eagerly insisted on. Fifty years ago the Suanetian communities in the Caucasus continually quarrelled and fought over them. The

Tibetan claim to the bleak uplands of Lhonak at the back of Kangchenjanga rested entirely on this form of user. Next we find the head of the Bregaglia under the Maloja Pass and the valley of Poschiavo, both on the S. side of the Alps belonging to Switzerland, while the pastoral basin of Livigno, feeding a tributary of the Inn, is claimed by Italy. In each of these cases the cause of the abandonment of the mountain crest is the same as on the Simplon : a defile near at hand makes a better practical barrier than a broad and easy pass.

On the whole, then, we may safely anticipate that no change in the western and N.W. frontiers of Italy will be caused by the present European convulsion. One happy result may be looked for : a relaxation of the mutual distrust which has made travel sometimes difficult and photography impossible in recent years on the Franco-Italian frontier. I must ask you to accept this as my excuse for being unable to show more photographs of the western passes.

I have not ventured to omit some reference to frontiers, because the topic is just now very much to the fore, and is likely to become still more so. But I must hasten to my main subject, Passes.

From among the various features of the Alps I have selected passes for this reason : they have a double interest, an interest human and historical as well as geographical and local. They are the features by which men are first and most naturally brought into contact with mountains. Consequently they come within the scope both of the geographer and of the historian, and form one of the many links between these two great branches of scientific inquiry.

In early ages mountains were as a rule objects of awe and reverence ; they served as links between Man and the Unseen. They were looked on as 'neighbours of the stars' ; they inspired a primitive emotion, which at a later date found articulate and eloquent, if vague, expression in the poetry of Byron, Wordsworth, and Shelley. But in classical times the dweller in the lowlands, the commonplace man when he was in his market-day mood, looked on the greater ranges as an interruption and a nuisance. To Horace the Alps were tremendous ; the Caucasus was inhospitable. Mountains were obstructions to be avoided, or got round, or over, as quickly as might be. The main object of humanity was to find the easiest way through them—in other words, to invent passes, and in this we have on the whole been successful.

The Romans regarded the snowy belt that fenced in Italy from a purely practical point of view. They made roads over it, they built, and ornamented with triumphal arches, military



towns situated in the high valleys, Susa and Aosta. They furnished the roads with rest-houses and post-houses, where horses could be changed. But they paid little or no attention to mountain scenery. It was not sufficiently humanised for

them. The Italian Lakes were, it is true, reckoned by Virgil and Catullus among the glories of Italy, but not until their charms could be admired from under the portico of a villa. No Roman had a word to say in praise of Geneva or Lucerne. The glow of dawn on Monte Rosa found no favour in the eyes of the dwellers at Milan. Monte Viso, alone of Alpine peaks, won a place in classical literature. The Romans kept to the passes and left peaks to look after themselves. At a later date, when the Empire had fallen and its paved roads gone from bad to worse, the dislike of the dweller in the lowlands for the Alps was intensified. Most of the travellers were pilgrims who wanted to get to Rome for Easter. They had therefore to cross the mountains at the very worst time of year, and found the melting snows and avalanches an unmitigated nuisance. Divines, averse to the hardships of travel, went so far as to suggest that mountains were an interpolation of the devil in God's universe. They called the snows *Monts Maudits*, *Accursed Hills*; in short, they swore at them.

It was the fashion in Roman times to speak of the Alps as the rampart of Italy. They have at all times proved a singularly ineffectual one. It was not the Alp but the Apennine, running across the peninsula from Genoa to Rimini, that formed the limit of *Gallia Cisalpina*. That is why the Rubicon got its fame. Livy tells us how before Hannibal's time the Western Alps had been frequently crossed and recrossed by Gallic hordes. Hannibal, it is recorded, found tracks and guides ready to lead him through the mountains. On their E. flank again the Alps could easily be turned by invaders approaching them from the valleys of the Drave and the Save, and crossing the Carnic or Julian Alps to the lowlands at the head of the Adriatic. And so it has gone on through the centuries: Goths and Huns, Lombards and Franks, Holy Roman emperors, French kings, Napoleonic and Austrian armies have swarmed over their ridges. 'How often'—wrote Sir Walter Raleigh—'have the Alpes given way to Armies breaking into *Italie*. Yea, where shall we finde that ever they kept out an invadour? Yet they are such as (to speak briefly) afflict with all difficulties those that travaile over them; but they give no securitie to those that lie behind them; for they are of too large extent.' The Alpine Passes have served as the neck of an hour-glass; the human sand runs through them easily either way.

In the following notes I shall pay no attention to glacier

passes, or climbers' passes, or side-passes over spurs and secondary chains. I confine myself to the Great Passes, by which I mean the passes over the main watershed which have been more or less continuously used not only for local purposes but by the peoples living outside the mountains and anxious to traverse them. The Great Passes are the lines on which the traffic across a chain from the lowlands at its feet tends to converge in times of peace, over which the armies tramp in time of war. Their vogue will vary; one or another will come into use according to the changing starting-points and goals of their users, or to the artificial hindrances created by political frontiers and tolls. The making of a paved track and still more of a road for wheels will serve to concentrate traffic and lead to the relative disuse of neighbouring and unimproved gaps. When we begin to go into details we shall see how the Mont Genève was for the Romans the great W. pass as long as they aimed at the Provincia (Provence); how the two St. Bernards came into use when their generals wanted to cross into Central Gaul or to Helvetia and the Rhine basin; and how a little later the Mont Cenis, lower and free earlier in the year from snow than the St. Bernard Passes, was found the most direct and convenient route between Lyons or Paris and Italy.

In considering the roads of the Western Alps we have to bear in mind that the track along the sea-coast, the modern Cornice, if practicable, was not made convenient for military traffic until after the subjugation of the Alps by Augustus, who built the monument at Turbia to celebrate it. Some inland route had to be found through the recesses of the range.

Now in any map of the Western Alps—that is for my present purpose the part of the range that lies between the Mediterranean and Mont Blanc—it will be noticed that the principal valleys, with the exception of the upper course of the Durance, run more or less E. and W., that is, transverse to the main crest or line of water-parting.

For the people on the W., in Provence and France, there were two great trenches which offered natural approaches to Italy, those of the Durance and the Isère. If you came from Provence or from Spain the Durance would serve, but where the valley made an angle to the N. you might be tempted to keep your direction and get across by a short route to the Piedmontese plain, or you might follow up the stream and use the gap at its head. In one case you would

take the Col de Vars and the Col de l'Argentière ; in the other the Mont Genève : these are the two great Durance Passes.¹

If however you came from Central Gaul you would naturally go up the Isère, until you found yourself called on to determine whether you would follow its zigzag course up to the watershed or strike boldly into the narrower but practicable valley of the Arc. You had to choose, that is, between the Little St. Bernard and the Mont Cenis.

Now let us fancy ourselves, not Gauls longing to rush Italy, but Romans eager to find a land-route to the Province, or to conquer Gaul. As we sit on the hill above Turin crowned by the modern Church of the Superga we shall see away to the S. of Monte Viso, where the plain runs wedge-like into the hills (hence the name of Cuneo), the mouth of the valley of the Stura. Right in face, conspicuous and tempting, lies the gap of the Dora Riparia leading up to Susa ; farther to the N.W. the opening of the remote valley of the Salassi, Val d'Aosta.

Now each of these adits corresponds to one or more of those on the W. of the chain ; the Val di Stura leads to the S. Durance Pass, the Col de l'Argentière ; the Susa gap leads to the N. Durance Pass and the Arc Pass, that is, to the Mont Genève and the Mont Cenis. Val d'Aosta leads to the Great and Little St. Bernard.

Dealing therefore with the mountain routes we find that there are two main valleys W. of the chain, those of the Durance and the Isère, leading respectively on the other side into the countries of the Taurini and the Salassi ; and this is what Polybius, as reported by Strabo, knew. He tells us there are four passes in all over the Alps, that along the coast, that through the Taurini, that through the Salassi, and then he leaps all the Central Alps and mentions the pass through the Noric Alps.

Before we deal with the W. passes in a little more detail, let me summarise my impressions of the state of the tracks in pre-Roman times. Livy tells us that Hannibal's passage was not a novel feat, that the tribes had been in the habit of crossing to and fro. Livy also tells us that the Keltic tribes passed down Gaul till they came to lands already occupied and ill-

¹ The lower valley of the Ubaye was formerly a difficult gorge. This is the reason for the use of the Col de Vars. All these passes have villages and cornfields a short distance from the top.

suit for pasture. Then may we not picture them drawn by the fame of Italy, marching up the broad trench of the Durance, until it turned N. and was to all appearance closed by the snows of Dauphiné? Here at the angle they had a choice: they might either turn their backs on the sun and follow the river to its source, in which case they would gain the Mont Genève, or they might climb over a broad down into the upper basin of the Ubaye (near where Barcelonette now stands), and then with an inappreciable second ascent reach the Alpine watershed at the Col de l'Argentière.

When the Romans established themselves on the nearer side of the Alps they had their headquarters at Cremona and Pavia, their main sub-alpine military posts at Turin and afterwards at Aosta. The broad gap from which the Dora Riparia issues, the most conspicuous feature in the view from the plain, would naturally draw Pompey to the Mont Genève, and Caesar to the Mont Cenis when he wanted to go N. to Gallia, and not to the Provincia, or Hispania. A few years later, when the Salassi had been conquered and Aosta (Augusta Praetoria) founded, the two St. Bernards gave access to the Rhône Basin and Helvetia.

Now let us move on and see what Varro, the librarian of Augustus, the most learned man in Rome of his day, an encyclopaedic intellect, has to say about the Passes of the Western Alps. In the commentaries on Virgil of Servius, a fifth-century grammarian, we find the following fragment of Varro. Its authenticity has not hitherto been seriously questioned. Dr. Smith in his well-known 'Dictionary of Classical Geography' quotes it in full, with the surprising comment, 'a passage in which there appears to be much confusion.' To any one who knows the Western Alps intimately there is no confusion whatever in this very plain and intelligible statement.

'The Alps can be crossed in five ways; the first next the sea, the second which Hannibal crossed, the third by which Pompey went to the Spanish War, the fourth by which Hasdrubal came from Gaul into Italy, the fifth, which from once having been held by Greeks is called the Grecian Alp.'

Now there is no doubt about the first and fifth of these passes, the Cornice and the Little St. Bernard. Must we not suppose that the other three are placed in their geographical order from S. to N.? It is, to say the least, a very plausible supposition. If we do so we must identify the

remaining three passes with the Col de l'Argentière, the Mont Genève, and the Mont Cenis. We have abundant evidence that Pompey's pass was the Mont Genève. But here my learned and peripatetic friend, Mr. Coolidge, may ask me, Why identify Varro's passes with these modern passes, when there are a dozen other routes by which the Western Alps can be crossed without danger? I reply, Because the experience of nearly twenty centuries has shown these to be the preferable main routes through the mountains; because they are the passes Napoleon, that most practical of field-geographers, recognised; because when Brockedon,² more than eighty years ago, published his fine work on 'The Passes of the Alps,' these were the five he selected for illustration; because they are at this day the only carriage roads across the Western Alps.

Political and military considerations or frontier difficulties may have tended from time to time to bring one or other of these passes into greater use and prominence, but traffic has on the whole stuck steadily to these five routes whether in the days of Rome, or of Carlovingian emperors, or of mediaeval pilgrims, or of French invaders of Italy.

Now the modes of transit have no doubt undergone many modifications between the rude paths trampled by the invading Gauls, the harsh *pavés* of the Roman Empire, the splendid high-roads of Napoleon, and the tunnels of to-day. But do not imagine the Alps even in very primitive times as pathless. Wherever in mountain regions there are inhabitants and pastures, there are paths. I have found them in the Caucasus, the Himalaya, the Atlas, all over E. Africa, everywhere till I got to the Mountains of the Moon, where the jungle reaches

² I have mentioned Brockedon, and it is proper that we should do him some tardy justice here. His fine work on *The Passes of the Alps* is too much neglected. He was an artist of merit, a portrait and landscape painter who illustrated his own books, and an energetic alpine explorer at a date when the Alps were little known. His portrait is among those of painters in the Uffizi at Florence. He was responsible for a great part of the early editions of Murray's *Switzerland, Savoy and Piedmont* (1838), and he was also one of the founders of the Geographical Society and a member of its first Council. Can any one furnish information as to what has become of the originals of the illustrations to his *Passes of the Alps* which were 'sold to Lord Vernon for 500 guineas'? (See *Dict. of National Biography*.)

to the snows. The Romans laid down their *Strata Romana*; that was the name given in after centuries to the Mont Cenis. Very little improvement was made for 1800 years. The modern *pavés* throughout the Italian Alps are bad imitations of Roman road-making. We have most of us uttered impatient exclamations while descending under an August sun those endless stony staircases.

It was a long time before any one traversed the chain on wheels. I have little doubt that, when he wrote his grammar while crossing the Alps, Caesar rode in a litter. The English pilgrims in the Middle Ages tramped and suffered. Wealthier people, Popes, Savoy princes and their ladies, rode in litters hung with rich trappings. Ordinary travellers hired *chaises à porteurs*, rude sedan-chairs. The men who carried these were known both on the Great St. Bernard and the Mont Cenis as 'Marrons.' No one has yet found a satisfactory derivation for the word. Some suggest that these porters were captive Moors, or perhaps natives of the Maurienne. There have been all sorts of wild guesses.

Ducange's 'Dictionary of Low Latin' gives perhaps the fullest information. He tells us that the word 'marron,' as applied to Alpine porters, first occurs in the ninth-century life of the Abbot of Cluny. It was frequently used down to the eighteenth century in the case both of the Great St. Bernard and Mont Cenis. We find it in Montaigne's Travels; Rabelais coupled it with gryphons. It was also applied to the outside dock porters at Marseilles and to the irregular brokers who haunted the streets round the Paris Bourse. Here Larousse's Dictionary warns me that I have been anticipated in an obvious jest. A Parisian wit—it tells us—being on a winter's day asked by a country friend who these loiterers outside the Bourse might be, replied 'They are our *marrons glacés*.' The term seems to have been specially applied to outsiders—unlicensed labourers or agents. In the West Indies it was used for runaway slaves or escaped domestic animals, and is there said to come from the Spanish word *cimarron*, a mountaineer. But the Alpine marrons did not get their name from Spain, unless indeed Hannibal brought it! Is it possible—I too will hazard a guess—that 'Marron' is derived from some old Romance word current both in Spain and Southern France? The Dictionary of the Spanish Academy says that it applies to men, animals, and trees that live in the wilds. In the Pyrenees it is used of cats that have run wild. Have we here possibly the missing link between the 'Marrons' vegetable and human—

between the forests of the untilled hillsides and the villagers whose cottages nestle in their shade? I should not be surprised if it turned out that 'Marron' was in the first instance a synonym for Highlander and then came to be applied to any freelance or interloper.³

When carriages came in, they came in first on the Brenner and the Mont Cenis, though on the latter pass they seem to have been taken off wheels and lifted over from Lanslebourg to Susa. De Saussure writes of going round from Geneva with his family by the Brenner in case the Mont Cenis was not open. It does not seem to have occurred to him that there was any intermediate course. Yet we read in exceptional cases of wheels crossing the Little St. Bernard in the eighteenth century.

And then appeared the great constructive energy that made all Europe move on, that improved laws, roads, and maps, destroyed boundaries, and brought the Alps for the first time since Charles the Great under one master—Napoleon. His splendid military road of the Simplon I shall refer to later on. Between A.D. 1800 and 1810 he made roads over the Mont Genève and the Mont Cenis, and surveyed and planned roads across the Little St. Bernard and the Argentière. The Cornice road had been begun by his orders in 1802, but was not completed until after his downfall. There was hardly a great pass in the Alps which did not echo to the tramp of his armies. The central knot, the St. Gotthard and Glarus Alps, was desperately fought over; the Splügen was crossed in the snow by Macdonald.

I shall now go on to take the passes more in detail, and I must first say something of the maritime pass, the Cornice. The motorist who glides in his own dust along the very modern coast road from Nice to Monte Carlo may deny that there is a pass. But those of us who have driven over the mountain—where at Turbia the 'Tropaeum Augusti,' the monument erected in honour of the subjugation of the Alps, still shows its Roman strength—know that the old *Alpis Maritima* was what Lassels would have called 'hill enough for any traveller.'⁴ No doubt under the Roman Empire the coast road was fairly

³ See also *Josias Simler et les Origines de l'Alpinisme*, W. A. B. Coolidge. Grenoble, Allier, 1904, p. 51 **, for a lengthy note on the word *marrons*, citing many instances of its use at different dates.

⁴ *The Voyage of Italy*, by R. Lassels, Gent. J. Starkey. London, 1670.

well kept, but in mediaeval times, as Dante tells us, the track from Lerici to Turbia had become a proverb for its ruggedness.

Our second pass is the Col de l'Argentière. It has been singularly neglected by modern authors, and I shall consequently try to make some amends by giving it more than its due proportion of space here. It was undoubtedly known to the Romans. Latin inscriptions have been found in the villages on both sides of it. But it does not figure in the Itineraries that have come down to us. As a consequence it has for the last eighty years—since Brockedon included it in his 'Passes of the Alps'—frequently been ignored by historical writers. Dr. Scheffel, a recent German writer,⁵ even goes out of his way to give reasons why no pass was wanted, or found, in the broad interval between the coast and the Mont Genève. I do not think these reasons satisfactory. He alleges the very easy nature of the Cornice road. In winter, it is true, the coast road is not liable to be blocked by snow. But at any other season the perpetual ups and downs of the Roman track, a veritable switchback all the way from Albenga to Nice, rendered it far more arduous than an average alpine pass. Dr. Scheffel goes on to discredit the Roman origin of Cuneo and Saluzzo, forgetting, surely, that many Roman inscriptions in both of these towns are recorded in Mommsen's 'Corpus Inscriptionum.'⁶

The first mention of the Col de l'Argentière in post-classical literature is found in a Provencal poem, 'La Vida de St. Honorat,' attributed to the thirteenth century. It narrates the flight of the Saint from Vercelli over the Alps to the Iles de Lérins opposite Cannes. He is described as 'climbing by a narrow path and gazing on a lake on the top of a mountain. The Mount of the Argentière in the wild forest'—

'Par un cendier estrech
E reguardan al puez a som d' una montagna
El Mont de l' Argentière en la forest estrayna.'

⁵ *Die Verkehrsgeschichte der Alpen.* Dr. Scheffel. 2 vols. Berlin, 1908-1914.

⁶ I pass over the Col di Tenda because it leads not into the County of Nice (now the Department of the Alpes Maritimes) but into the seaward glens E. of Turbia, and, as Mr. Coolidge writes, 'has been chiefly useful to the local lords.' See Mr. Coolidge's articles in the *English Historical Review*, vol. 31.

Passing on to A.D. 1415 we find evidence of the traffic across the Col de l'Argentière. In that year the magistrates of Larche, the village nearest the pass on the W., were heavily fined for not maintaining the poles that served to mark the track in winter, and twelve years later those of Vinadio suffered similarly for neglect in the repair of a bridge.

In the fifteenth chapter of his 'Historia sui temporis' (1533) Paulus Jovius writes :

'The Argentarian Alps join the Cottian ; among t'e Ancients they were less celebrated because the narrowness and frequent roughness of the roads render them scarcely passable for pack-horses or carts. By the Argentière those who are going by Avignon and Narbonne into Spain usually cross into Provence.'

Note the last sentence—it was the pass for Spain.

Paulus Jovius tells the story of Francis the First's passage in A.D. 1515 before the Battle of Marignano, and Sismondi has dilated on it with an utter lack of geographical knowledge. Francis had with him an 'incredible number' of carriages and powder-waggons, 72 large cannon and 300 smaller pieces drawn by 5000 horses. The N. passes were in the hands of the enemy. The host marched from Grenoble up the valley of the Drôme, crossing to that of the Durance. At Embrun they rested and revictualled. Thence they set out with five days' provisions to traverse the Alps. They forded the Durance at Guillestre and crossed the Col de Vars to the upper Ubaye. At St. Paul they halted for the night, while the Rocher de St. Paul, a steep and exceedingly rotten cliff overhanging the gorge of the river, was made passable for cannon by blasting. In this hamlet, nearly 5000 feet above the sea, Francis gave a great supper to his captains, and here also he wrote a letter to his mother, Louise de Savoie, which has come down to us. It is crude in grammar and spelling, but not without schoolboy force in the simple description of the difficulties that have been overcome, and how bored the Grand Maître has been at having to dismount and walk so much.

Next day they traversed the Col de l'Argentière and camped on the Italian side. They had further difficulty at the Barricades, but on the third day from Guillestre the defile was overcome and the army issued into the smiling open valley of the Stura, which Brockedon truthfully described as one of the fairest scenes in Piedmont in a passage which may recall Livy's phrase in the narrative of an earlier military adventure.

Indeed the coincidences between this march and that of Hannibal stand in no need of pointing out : the provisionment in the Durance Valley, the passage of the river by a ford, the difficulties at the Rock, the Barricades met with on the descent. But I will not plunge to-night into the interminable discussion on Hannibal's Pass. In 1590 Charles Emmanuel of Savoy visited the pass, and in a letter to his wife described the mountain as one of the most beautiful, and the lake on the top



THE ASCENT TO THE COL DE L'ARGENTIÈRE FROM LARCHE.

as one of the most charming he had seen, a very surprising and creditable sentiment for the date. The Col de Vars and Col de l'Argentièrre were again in A.D. 1692, 1700, and 1744 crossed and recrossed by armies. The story of the last campaign is told by the Marquis de St. Simon. In this the Barricades were turned by sending troops by a circuitous track over the hills.

When we come to later days, we learn from the Marshal de Pezay that in A.D. 1775 the Col de l'Argentièrre and the Col de Vars were both practicable 'for carriages of every description.' But there can never have been more than the rough country road which remained till the end of the nineteenth

century. We find Napoleon ordering a high-road over the pass with the title of 'Route Impériale de l'Espagne en Italie.' But his road was not made until the end of the nineteenth century.

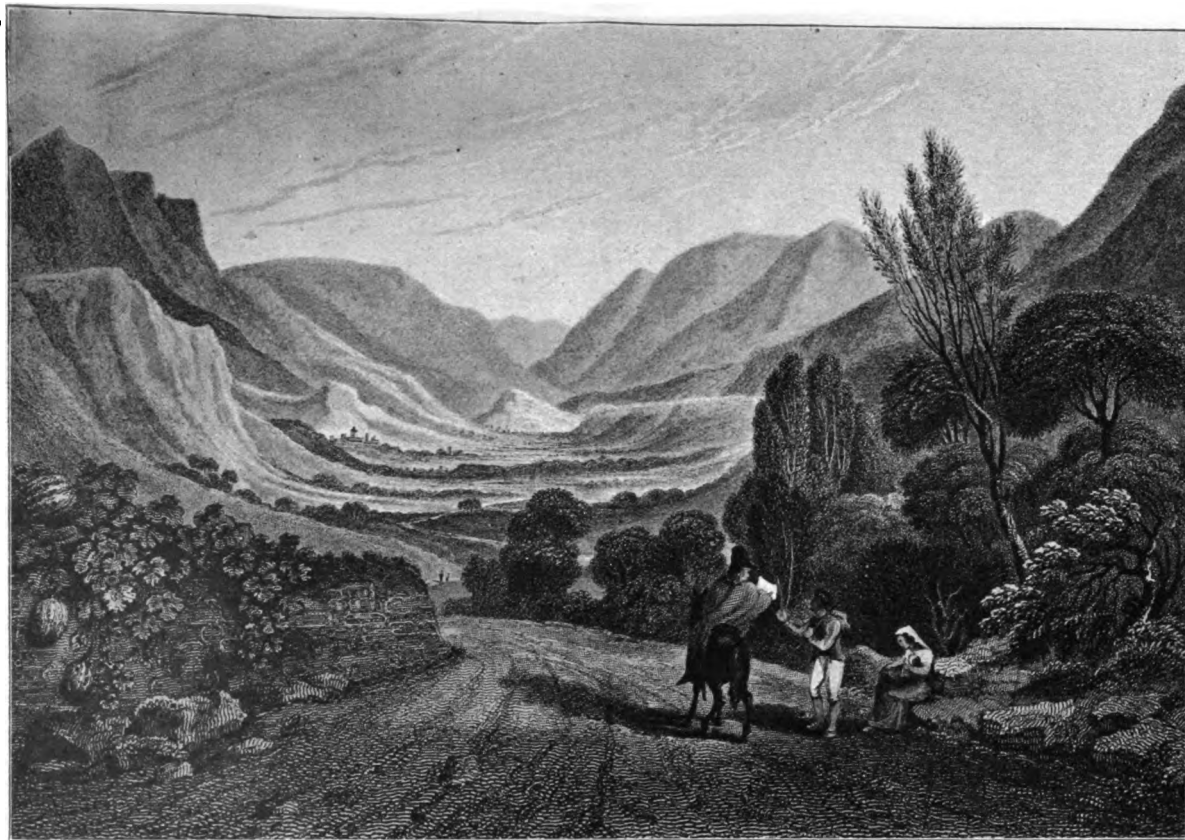
In modern times the Col de l'Argentière has been primarily a peasant's pass. Such obstacles as it presents lay not in crossing the watershed, which is a flat meadow with a lake,



LAC DE LA MADELEINE AND COL DE L'ARGENTIÈRE
LOOKING TOWARDS FRANCE.

but in the defiles on either side. The traveller by the modern road has difficulty in realising its former terrors ; but Brockedon, a capable witness, is emphatic as to their reality even in the last century. This is his description of the gorge on the E. side, in the valley of the Stura :

' After passing the village of San Bernardo, the traveller enters a fearful defile called the Barricades. The road is carried along a shelf of rock above the river cut out of the precipices which darken and overhang the ravine and present an almost impregnable barrier to the passage of the valley.'



VALLEY OF THE STURA.
FROM NEAR VINADIO (looking E.)

(From "Passes of the Alps" by W. Brockedon.)



MONT DAUPHIN AND THE UPPER VALLEY OF THE DURANCE.

FROM THE ASCENT TO VARS.

(From "Passes of the Alps." by W. Brockedon.)

And Professor Spenser Wilkinson quotes Bourcet, a famous French military writer, as instancing the Barricades as a typical example of a position which a small force may hold against a whole army.

On the French side the Ubaye below Barcelonette plunges into a wild ravine. This used formerly to be avoided by the passage of a grassy ridge—the Col de Vars, 500 feet higher than the main pass—leading to the Durance. The ascent to the Col de l'Argentière from the point where the Col de Vars track joins the Ubaye is so slight that in point of fact the route is hardly to be reckoned as a double pass, resembling in this respect the combination of the Julier and the Maloya. On both passes villages and cornfields are found within a few hundred feet of the summit ridge.

The Col de la Traversette (9679 feet) under Monte Viso is noteworthy for the tunnel pierced a few feet below its top in A.D. 1480 by Louis XI. of France and the Marquess of Saluzzo in order to promote trade between France and Italy. But it is too lofty to be used except under political exigencies, and is not a great pass.

The story of the Mont Genève might occupy my whole time. It was the great Roman Pass to the Province, made by Pompey and improved by the local kinglet who gave his name to the Cottian Alps. We have full details of its stations in the Itineraries. It was at one time peculiarly the French Pass, the Alps N. of it on both sides being till recently possessions of the House of Savoy. In the twelfth century a pope and an emperor crossed it. Charles VIII. and Louis XIII. used it. But it could not compete successfully for general traffic with the next pass on our list, the Mont Cenis.

The Mont Cenis is the most direct route from Central France into Italy. Its disadvantages were the steepness of the track above Susa on the Italian side, and the narrowness of the Arc valley, which is very liable to spring avalanches. The pass is not mentioned in the Itineraries, and there is a lack of local evidence of regular Roman use, though Roman remains have been found at St. Jean in the Maurienne. Gibbon thought Constantine crossed the pass in A.D. 312; but this is unproven. It is incredible, however, that the Romans for generations should have garrisoned and adorned Susa without discovering that one of the easiest passes of the Alps lay within a day's walk of their quarters. Again, long before the sixth century, in very early Christian times, the Maurienne was both ecclesiastically and politically connected with Turin. This fact

is surely sufficient circumstantial evidence that the two sides of the chain were connected by an easy and frequented pass.⁷ The first mention by name of the Mont Cenis is when Pippin crossed it in A.D. 756. It became the favourite route of the Frankish kings, and, when they wanted to pass the Western Alps, of the Holy Roman emperors. Pious pilgrims and Court ladies had adventures on it. They were taught to glissade on skins, or toboggan, from the top down to Lanslebourg. Sometime in the eighteenth century an English party found the experience so delightful that they spent several days at Lanslebourg in order to enjoy it over and over again. They surely deserve fame as the precursors of Winter Sports. The pass had one military disadvantage. The defile below Susa was in the days before cannon very defensible. It was called the Gate of Italy. Charles the Great thought it worth while to send half his army round by the Great St. Bernard in order to be sure of taking the Lombards in the rear at this spot. Note that on all the W. passes the military defence of Italy was not on the watershed, but in a gorge on the Italian side; on the Argentière that of the Barricades, on the Mont Genève and Mont Cenis that of La Cluse, on the two St. Bernards that of Fort Bard.

In much later days many men of letters sought Italy by this route; to mention only a few, Coryat, Montaigne, Rousseau, Gray, and Johnson's friend, Mrs. Thrale. Perhaps the most entertaining account of the passage is that of Coryat the Elizabethan traveller, the guest and butt of the wits at the Mermaid Tavern. He took about six hours from Lanslebourg to Novalesa, the great monastery above Susa. He rode up, but had to walk down, where 'for the space of 7 miles' he 'continually descended headlong.' 'The waies were exceeding uneasy. For they were wonderful hard, all stony and full of windings and intricate turnings of which I think there were at least 300 before I came to the foot. Still I met many people ascending and mules laden with carriage and a great company of dun cattle driven up the hill with collars about their necks.' After his return Coryat threatened a certain 'vilipendious linendraper' with an action for belittling his Alpine feats. I should have given the side on the evidence of linendraper.

⁷ For an account of the early connexions of the Maurienne with Susa and Turin see an article, 'The See of Maurienne and the Valley of Susa,' by R. L. Poole, *English Historical Review*, vol. 31, No. 121.

Mrs. Thrale's (or rather Mrs. Piozzi's) reflections on the passage of the Alps are not without interest, for she catches the sentiment of the eighteenth century on the turn. She lays down that in a mountain country 'horror constitutes beauty.' She finds that 'such tremendous appearances inspire a satisfaction that there is something great to be seen on earth' and proceeds to a rather elaborate piece of word-painting of Savoyard scenery, while she declares that 'the Italian side of the Alps is an astonishing journey and affords the most magnificent scenery in nature.' Here we see traces of the beginning of the change in the mental attitude of the literary world towards mountains, of the fever which was to break out more fully in the beginning of the nineteenth century in the romantic poets, and was even to seize at odd moments on unexpected victims such as Charles Lamb. Coleridge's hymn to Mont Blanc is well known; less familiar is the following passage from one of his letters. I have abbreviated it somewhat :

' I never find myself alone within the embracement of rocks and hills, a traveller upon an Alpine road, but my spirit careers, drives, and eddies like a leaf in autumn. . . . I think that my soul must have pre-existed in the body of a chamois-chaser. The simple image of the old object has been obliterated, but the feelings, the instinctive habits, and incipient actions are in me, and the old scenery awakens them. The farther I ascend from animated nature, from men and cattle and the common birds of the woods and fields, the greater becomes in me the intensity of the feeling of life. Life seems to me then an universal spirit which neither has nor can have an opposite. I do not think that it is possible that any bodily pains could eat out the love of joy, that is so substantially part of me, towards hills and rocks and steep waters; and I have had some trial.'*

To realise this picture of the philosopher and opium eater of Highgate Hill as the inheritor of the instincts of a 'chamois-chaser' requires some stretch of imagination! But the love of mountains has, I think, seldom been more feelingly expressed, and the passage seems worthy of being brought before the notice of our providers of Alpine snippets.

The Little St. Bernard was a convenient cut from the Cisalpine to the Transalpine dominions of the House of Savoy. It links two great valleys, those of the Isère and the Dora Baltea. It had a hospice on the top, but its importance seems at any rate after Roman times to have been more local than inter-

* Cottle's *Reminiscences of S. T. Coleridge and R. Southey*, 1847.
VOL. XXXI.—NO. CCXV.

national. It could not compete with the Mont Cenis when that route had become established. For one thing it holds the snow later in the year owing to its greater height and more northern position. It did not become a carriage road till A.D. 1861, but the old track was so good that in 1824 Brockedon was able to get a light carriage over it on its wheels. Its literary fame has come from the fact that Brockedon, Dr. Arnold, Bosworth Smith in this country, and Mommsen in Germany—I mention only a few out of many names—have proclaimed, I cannot say argued, it to be the Pass of Hannibal.

As I said before, I am not about to plunge into this old-world controversy. I shall not attempt to persuade you that I know the pass which Hannibal crossed. But I do know a pass he did not cross, and that is the Little St. Bernard. This can be shown on the evidence of Polybius alone. No ingenuity can force his description of the descent into Italy to fit in with the long defiles of the Val d'Aosta.*

But let us dismiss Hannibal and get on to the Central Alps—what we call nowadays the Swiss Passes. For my present purpose I shall abandon the division between the Western and Central Alps (the Simplon) adopted by our former President, Mr. John Ball, in 'The Alpine Guide,' and treat the Pennine chain as part of the Central Alps. In this region there were in the earliest times no great roads of national migration or commerce such as the Durance Passes in the Western Alps, or the Brenner, Auf der Plöcken, and Birnbaumer Wald in the Eastern Alps.

Look for a moment at any good map of the Central Alps. The feature that must first strike the observer in this part of the range is the parallelism of the great valleys to a double chain. It is a ridge-and-furrow arrangement with interruptions. Unless you go in through the gap of the Rhône at St. Maurice, or that of the Rhine near Ragatz, you see at first no way of getting from the plains of Switzerland to Italy without crossing at least two passes. Closer examination reveals the spot where the Reuss pierces like a needle the northern ridge and leads to the St. Gotthard. But for centuries this gap remained practically impassable owing to the gorge of Schöllenen. Here then you have the three main lines of approach settled, but the actual point in the ridge to be crossed has varied according to local obstacles and local conditions—physical and political.

* See on this question *Hannibal's March through the Alps* (Spenser Wilkinson; Oxford, 1911) and *Hannibal once more* (D. W. Freshfield; London, 1911).

The Rhône Pass *par excellence* was at one date the St. Bernard, later the Simplon. Minor snow-passes, the Col de Fenêtre, the St. Theodul, and the Monte Moro or Antrona Pass were from time to time brought into use, but mostly for local traffic.

Do not run away with the idea some writers seem to have that because a pass is not in the classical Itineraries it was wholly unknown or untraversed. It may be a help to realise what the state of the Alps was in early Roman times if we compare it with the state of a newly conquered region like the Caucasus fifty years ago. There were not a few passes in the Central and Western Caucasus known to the Russians, and occasionally used for military purposes, which were not to be found in their official Itineraries, and were ignored by general geographers.

The Great St. Bernard has a varied story. The Romans had a garrison at Aosta and another at Octodurum, now Martigny. At Agaunum, now St. Maurice, the gate of the Valais, where 'a key unlocks a kingdom,' the Theban legion is said to have been decimated for refusing to pay divine honours to their emperor. Fugitives from it, according to legend, supplied those queer saints with water-buckets and sore legs who figure in faded frescoes on the walls of wayside chapels. They were the evangelists of the Western Alps.

The Romans as their empire grew needed a direct pass to Helvetia and the Rhine, and they habitually used the Great St. Bernard. They built on the top a temple, or a shrine, to the local deity Jupiter Penninus, and they erected a hospice at St. Pierre, or Peter's Castle as a monk of Canterbury calls it, on the N. side. The Romans provided such refuges at fixed distances on most of their main Alpine roads. After the break-up of the Roman Empire the Val d'Aosta fell not to the Lombards but to the Burgundians, and the frontier of Italy was not on the Alps but in the sub-alpine gorges at Fort Bard on the St. Bernard and Aviliana on the Mont Cenis. The pass was in constant use. In the eighth century Bede tells us many English nobles and common folk, men and women, made the pilgrimage to Rome. Some of them may have met, in the winter of A.D. 801, the Jew Isaac leading an elephant as a present from Harun al-Rashid to Charles the Great, surely the first of his race since Hannibal to cross the Alps. It seems to have been Charles the Great's favourite pass, and many Holy Roman emperors trod in his footsteps. Our king, Canute, who himself in A.D. 1027 crossed the Alps, remonstrated with pope and princes against the extortions to which our

pilgrims and merchants were frequently subjected in the gorges of the Alps.

From the ninth and tenth centuries onwards the Great St. Bernard was much favoured by British and even Icelandic pilgrims. They utilised the waterway of the Rhine as far as Basle, and then crossed the W. of Switzerland by the Roman road passing Aventicum. At Vevey they prayed in the church of St. Martin, the patron saint of travellers, for a safe passage of the Mount of Jove. Thence they followed the narrow road along the lake shore past the walls and towers of Chillon—lucky if the lord of the castle happened to be at home and amusing himself by watching out of his window the troops of passers-by. Then, we read, Count Aymon (he lived about A.D. 1340) would invite the pilgrims to food and drink and bestow alms and clothing on the needy. And so they came to the great monastery of St. Maurice, where they admired the gifts left by famous men of old who had safely passed the mountains, the golden jug of Charles the Great and the precious locket of St. Louis. The monastery of St. Bernard (founded in A.D. 1008) had some curious connexions with England. It owned the Chapel of Romford and the Hospital of Havering in Essèx, which was bought from it by William of Wykeham and presented to New College, which I believe still holds it.

Our countrymen did not enjoy the passage of the Alps; one of these tenth-century pilgrims put into the documents he drafted the following imprecation: 'May he who breaks this covenant be tortured by the bitter blasts of glaciers and the Pennine army of evil spirits.' But they were still more afraid of the Saracens who infested all the western passes, the freebooters who had found a footing in Provence. Very few of the Englishmen who frequent the Riviera have explored their lair, Fraxinetum, now La Garde Freinet, on the crest of the Montagne des Maures. On a crag projecting from the skyline some seven miles to the N. of the natural harbour of St. Tropez, and overlooking on the other side the broad valley which slopes down to Fréjus, the freebooters established their eyrie. All that remains of it are a few walls and cisterns cut deep into the natural rock. Hence their bands went out to sweep the passes of pilgrims, or to pick up and hold to ransom a fat abbot. They got as far as the Great St. Bernard and even farther, into Graubünden; though in some of the chronicles it is difficult to distinguish their raids from those of freebooters, Hungarian and others, from the N. or E.

We may dismiss the legend which assigned to the Saasthal names of Alphubel and Mischabel an Arabic origin. There was once a professor of Arabic in one of the universities of, shall we say Laputa, who thought Distel Alp might also be Arabic—he found in it a corruption of words meaning ‘the haunt of an eagle.’ The donkey who carries up the herdsman’s packs to the Alp might have furnished him with a simpler derivation. As to Pontresina and Castel Mur in Graubünden, one is an Italianised form of the Romansch Punt Raschuns (Pons Rhaetiae), and the other marks the Roman station ‘Ad Murum’ on the Italian side of the Septimer, where a wall, still existing, served to mark the frontier of Praegallia (Bergell) and bar the entrance to Italy.

The Saracens were finally driven back seawards about A.D. 970. A few years later St. Bernard of Menthon founded the monastery on the top of the famous pass and substituted his name for that of Jupiter Penninus.

After the tenth century, when the danger from freebooters was removed, and the passes of the Western Alps resumed their place as roads to Rome, the Great St. Bernard became a frequented commercial route, and the monks and their famous dogs found plenty to do in the winter, and still more in the dangerous spring months.

I must hurry over its later story, quoting only a few scraps of curious detail quarried by the late Signor Vaccarone out of the accounts in the State archives at Turin. From these we learn that in the fourteenth century bales of English wool passed in quantity through Martigny, and paid an impost per bale for the maintenance of the road as far as Riddes. Travellers and their guides were also taxed. The inhabitants of St. Rhémy were granted an exclusive right of acting as guides—a sort of forerunner of a Guides’ bureau. Easter presents were sent across the Alps to the Court of Savoy. The Bishop of Sion sent on one occasion twelve marmots, the Prior of Chamonix in A.D. 1875 twelve baskets of what is described as ‘most exquisite butter.’ This is notable as an early proof of the easy relations of Chamonix with the outer world. The ‘Signori’ of Val d’Aosta sent still more mixed presents to their sovereigns; the Countess at the same date received some barrels of the muscat wine of Chambave and several bears, the Count a number of bouquets.

One more note. In January A.D. 1484 Amadeus the Eighth, anxious to assist his general in an attack on Chivasso, succeeded in sending a heavy piece of artillery, a *bombarda*, over

the Great St. Bernard, thus anticipating by centuries the feat of Napoleon.¹⁰

In May A.D. 1800, before the snows had fully melted, the monks saw a strange sight—Napoleon and his army on the way to Marengo. Fighting was going on in the Maritime Alps and on the Genoese coast between the French and Austrians, and Napoleon having collected his army at Dijon was able to mislead the enemy and burst from an unexpected quarter on their flank into Piedmont. Some historians have disparaged this feat. Those of us who have crossed the Alps in May, or even in June, by one of the Great Passes and have been tilted out of our sledges into soft snow-beds will not think so lightly of it. I possess a medal of the time, in which Napoleon is represented as breaking the rocks not with vinegar but in a Jovellike way with flashes of lightning. On the reverse is the head of the stately Josephine. In fact Napoleon, in place of leading the way, seems to have waited three days at St. Maurice until his vanguard had safely reached Aosta. Moreover, in place of caracoling over the Alps on a charger the hero rode a led mule. History might have missed this detail but for the circumstance that Napoleon showed his gratitude to the animal's leader by conferring on him a pension. It is curious that the Great St. Bernard was one of the last additions to Alpine carriage roads, the new road having been completed only in the present century.

I pass on to the tracks other than the Great St. Bernard between the Rhône Valley and Italy. For centuries the St. Bernard found no rival among the possible passes of the Pennines. The Col de Fenêtre, the Collon, and the St. Théodul, all glacier passes, might be crossed by peasants, pedlars, or refugees, but they were never more than byways. None of them are difficult, but on the two latter crevasses may be met with. Consequently we gather from Simler's '*Descriptio Vallensiae*' that already in the sixteenth century Zermatt had learnt the use of glacier guides, ropes, alpenstocks, and snow spectacles.

The St. Théodul was from A.D. 1538 known as *par excellence* the Glacier Pass, Gletscher Mons, or Monts Roeses. Roesa or Ruize is the Val d'Aostan term for a glacier. It is used in De Saussure's '*Voyages*.' As in so many cases the name of the pass slowly got itself attached to the mountains about

¹⁰ *I Principi di Savoia attraverso le Alpi nel Medioevo* (1270–1520); Torino, Via Alfieri 9 (Club Alpino), 1902.

it, and finally to the highest of them; hence we have our Monte Rosa. Roman coins going back for six centuries from A.D. 400 have been found on the crest. It was fortified in A.D. 1688 to prevent the Waldenses returning by it to their native villages.

Far more important passes were the Monte Moro and the Antrona Pass leading, like the Simplon, from Canton Valais to Domo d'Ossola and Lago Maggiore. They were rough mule-paths, but the first to the E. of the great ice-barrier of the Pennine Alps, the longest continuous ice-field in Central Europe. They were superseded by the Simplon. There is no satisfactory evidence that the Simplon was used by the Romans. The gorge of Gondo on its southern side was a formidable obstacle. Until relatively recent times what traffic there was avoided it by a second pass leading from the head of the gorge through Val Bugnanco to Domo d'Ossola. The path, before Napoleon made his road, is described as a dangerous track. It served, however, as a useful trade route, and De Saussure, who crossed it, speaks of it as a good mule-road, though narrow in places. The first hospice on it was built in A.D. 1234. To the commercial importance of the Simplon as a road to Milan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the stately house of the Stockalpers at Brieg bears witness. Evelyn gives us an interesting account in his diary of his passage on horseback in A.D. 1646. It is worth noting that he crossed in spring and not in autumn, as owing to an interpolation Dr. Arnold was led to think. The error led Dr. Arnold into speculations on a change in the climate of the Alps which had no solid foundation. Napoleon, who found once enough for the St. Bernard, made the fortune of the Simplon by his new road, and from his day it has eclipsed all the other passes between the Mont Cenis and the Brenner as an easy way to Italy.

Farther E. the route of the Grimsel and the Gries, a double pass, carried some traffic from Canton Bern into the Milanese, and bands of hungry peasants trooped over it in years of famine from the Vale of Meiringen to buy meal for their families.

There was a vague but general impression in the Middle Ages and down to the eighteenth century that the St. Gotthard group was one of the loftiest parts of the Alps. The logical ground for it was that the great rivers, the Rhône and the Rhine, have their sources there, and that rivers flow downhill. Its wild character may have helped. Near it, as in a sort of No Man's Land, many Bishoprics met—Chur, Constance, Milan,

Novara, Como, Sion, and Lausanne: ¹¹ E. of it was Germania; W. Gallia. Before a passage was established from N. to S. there was a certain traffic across it from E. to W. by the Oberalp and Furka, to which Andermatt and Hospenthal owed their origin. It was doubtless by these passes that the German-speaking colonies, which established themselves in the Upper Valais and in the heads of some of the Italian valleys, found a way westwards.

I have already pointed out the natural advantage of the St. Gotthard in its enabling a traveller to take a straight course through the Alps from Basle to Milan without crossing more than one mountain ridge. But this advantage was for centuries more than counterbalanced by various obstacles. The shores of the Bay of Uri were practically pathless; this perhaps helped to keep off armies and emperors who travelled with troops of horsemen. There was a more serious obstacle in the gorge below Andermatt. So formidable was it that the Urseren Thal was for years attached to the Convent of Disentis in the Vorder-Rhein Thal, and only later became part of Canton Uri. Before the Urner Löch was pierced in A.D. 1707 all traffic had to pass over a wooden gallery, the *Stiebende Brücke*, the spray-washed balcony confused by Schiller with the original Devil's Bridge. It is not till the beginning of the thirteenth century, A.D. 1236, that we hear of traffic over the St. Gotthard, and from that time forward the traffic was almost entirely commercial. The merchants of Lucerne, who had previously gone round by Chur and the Septimer, began to use it as a road to Italy. The rise of the St. Gotthard corresponds with the growth of Bern in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and the commercial rise of Milan after the peace of Constance. It was pre-eminently the Milanese Pass. The pasturages on the top and the southern slope belonged to the Archbishop of Milan, who in A.D. 1431 enlarged a hospice for travellers that had been founded about 1330. Then in the fifteenth century the Swiss got hold of Val Leventina and, after some reverses, made good in A.D. 1512 the conquests which they hold to this day as Canton Ticino. In the Napoleonic wars this region saw some of the bitterest mountain fighting between the French, Austrians, and Russians.

The St. Gotthard was not made into a proper carriage road till A.D. 1820; but in the preceding century, in A.D. 1757, De Saussure met an Englishman on the top who had succeeded

¹¹ See *Mercurius Helveticus*, J. J. Wagner, Zürich, 1688.

in driving or lifting a light carriage over it. This Englishman was Charles Greville, the father of the Diarist. The exploit cost him £24; the services of eight men as well as four horses were found necessary. About the same date the annual traffic over the pass amounted, we are told, to 40,000–50,000 travellers, 7000 tramps, and 150,000 animals. Its railway is now by far the most stupendous example of modern mountain engineering in Europe.

The next pass to the St. Gotthard, the Lucmanier, the Pass of the Great Forest, *Lucus Magnus*, leads from the head of the Vorder-Rhein Thal to Bellinzona. The famous convent of Disentis was its starting-point. It sank in commercial importance as the St. Gotthard rose. But it had been from early times a frequent route of the Holy Roman emperors on their way to Italy. It was crossed by emperors in A.D. 965, 1004, 1146, and 1186, and again in 1481. But it was the Abbot of Disentis (a Prince of the Empire) who did most to keep it open by building hospices on the mountain, and in A.D. 1780 started a wheel road. The Abbey was ruined by Napoleon, and the road was not completed for ninety years, till A.D. 1871.

The San Bernardino (named after the Sienese saint) was only occasionally used. It was first called '*Mons Avium*,' and may have been known to the Romans. Horace's choice of an appropriate epithet for the source of the Rhine—*luteum* (muddy)—looks as if some Roman had been near the spot.¹² The last two passes lead to Bellinzona and Lago Maggiore. The remaining passes of the Grisons all concentrate on the head of the Lake of Como. The difficult gorges of the Hinter-Rhein rendered the Splügen less serviceable than the Septimer. But it was well known to the Romans, and in the Middle Ages. Leonardo da Vinci in his notes gives some amusing details of a trip he made towards it. In the Val di Chiavenna, he tells us, there are deer, bouquetin, chamois, and terrible bears, but you have to climb on hands and feet to catch them. From mile to mile there are good inns and good living at four soldi the reckoning, and up at the head of the valley—this is on the ascent of the Splügen—'waterfalls of 700 feet which it is a

¹² The received text reads: '*Defingit Rheni luteum caput*,' and the commentators suggest that the minor poet to whom Horace is referring showed his bad taste by libelling the source of the Rhine, which they imagine to be, like most sources, clear. But '*defingere*' is a verb found hardly anywhere else in the classics. '*Depingit*' would seem to me a reasonable emendation.

pleasure to see ' ; no doubt the fall of the Madesimo, which the old road passed under.

The passage of an army under Marshal Macdonald in the winter of A.D. 1800 was one of the most daring feats of the French forces in the Alps. The modern carriage road through the Via Mala and over the pass was not completed till A.D. 1823. The Splügen is one of the passes that illustrates well the formidable barrier made by gorges and how long they remain impenetrable. Some of its traffic is said to have gone over a second high pass into a side glen of the Vorder-Rhein in order to avoid the Hinter-Rhein defiles.

The most direct pass from Chur to Chiavenna is undoubtedly the now neglected Septimer. It found a rival in the, for travellers from Lago di Como, more circuitous Julier. The two passes are practically of the same height ; that both were in use in Roman times the name of the hamlet in the Oberhalbstein where their tracks rejoin, Bivio, affords sufficient proof. But neither is shown in the Peutinger Table, and only one of them is mentioned in the Antonine Itinerary. This gives the distance between Admurum (Promontogno) and Tinnetio (Tinzen) as XV miles. In fact, the distance by the Septimer is about twenty-five Roman miles. A second X may have been dropped out. By the Maloja and Julier the distance is nearly double. The latter route involves going round two sides of a triangle in place of along the base. The Julier was probably used chiefly in combination with the Bernina. Dr. Scheffel, however, is at pains to maintain the paradox that the Julier was the older and more frequented pass. His principal argument, the finding near the top of a hoard of Roman coins, seems inconclusive. A similar discovery has been made on the St. Théodul, which was certainly not the first or favourite Roman pass over the Pennine Alps. In the Middle Ages the Septimer ranked with the Great St. Bernard and the Brenner as a pass for emperors. It was under the special patronage of the Bishops of Chur, who derived a revenue from its tolls. One of them used his position at the Imperial Court to obtain a prohibition against travellers using any other pass in this region ! The unfortunate traveller over the passes in the Middle Ages was met at every turn by tolls and taxes on his goods, levied by bishops, convents, or counts, and this naturally led to his at times using byways.

The natural advantage of the Septimer lay in the fact that the only bad gorge on the N. side could be easily turned by climbing over the broad low saddle of the Lenzer Heide. The

track over the Alpine crest constructed in A.D. 1390 still exists, and in its present ruinous condition provides one of the most objectionable paths for foot-goers in my knowledge. The reason for its disuse is that when carriage roads were called for the Julier, a pass known but apparently little used in Roman times, was preferred. It fulfilled a double purpose as a means of access to the Engadine and as a road to Italy, for in the absence of any ascent on the N. side of the Maloja the Upper Engadine serves simply as a landing halfway down the stairs to Lago di Como.

The Maloja, I may note here, is interesting geographically (or morphologically as the scientists say) as the best instance of what a recent German writer calls a valley-pass penetrating the entire chain. The great longitudinal valley of the Inn is continued by the much lower trench of the Bregaglia, and separated from it by nothing but a grassy bank. The nearest approach to this feature in the Alpine watershed is the mound in the Pusterthal which divides the headwaters of the Adige and the Drave.

In the Middle Ages the Julier was used mostly as a through route in connexion with the Bernina and the passes of the Bergamasque Alps, of which the chief were the Passo di San Marco and the Aprica. These, when the Spanish occupied the Milanese and had a castle at the head of the Lago di Como, enabled travellers to avoid their dominions and 'pop up,' as Lassels says, at Brescia.

In the E. of Graubünden, in the Livigno district, there are quite a number of passes which I must leave out of consideration, though some of them are not unknown in military history. They cross relatively low grassy ridges, but are defended by intricate valleys and gorges.

The next important pass is the Umbrail Pass or Wormser Joch. It was frequently used during the great days of Milan in the sixteenth century by princes and merchants. It was the direct route from Tyrol by the Inn Valley and the Vintschgau to the Lago di Como by the Val Tellina. It was only in A.D. 1820 that it was superseded by the 800 feet higher and adjacent Stelvio. At that date the Austrians wanted a direct military access to the Milanese, and, since Switzerland owned the Münster Valley N. of the Wormser Joch, had to take their road over a loftier ridge, the highest carriage pass in the Alps, 9055 feet. When you read in historical works of the passage of the Stelvio in early times you may, as a rule, take it that the Umbrail Pass is intended.

Here I touch on the limits of the Austro-Italian frontier.

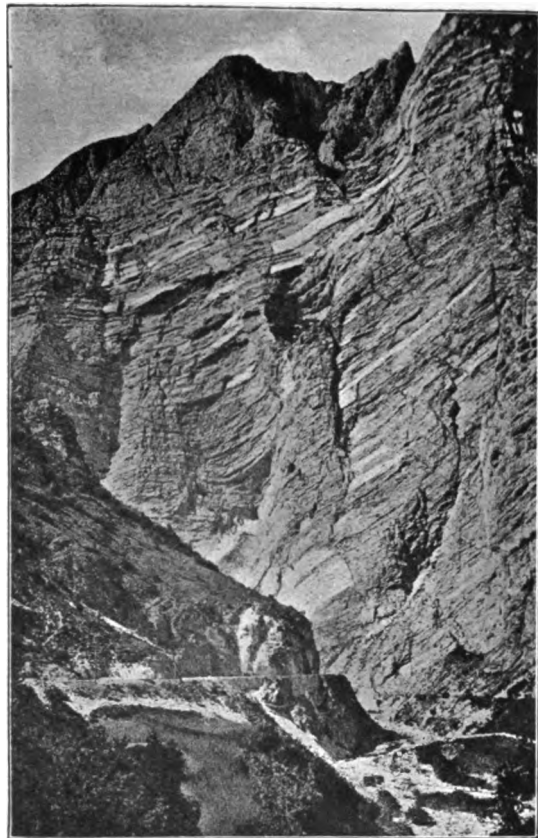
Let me refer in conclusion to what seems to me one of the main features in the story of the Passes. In the beginning they were few and far between, but as Roman roads decayed and the Empire broke up, as frontiers and custom duties and road dues multiplied, and greedy nobles and bishops exacted tolls, they became more numerous. Merchants looked out for the cheapest and safest, and not necessarily the shortest road. When all tracks were bad there was not so much to choose between. But when roads for wheels were once established, traffic again became concentrated, so that you find the carriage roads of the nineteenth century practically reviving the *Strata Romana* of the first century.

And what about the twentieth century? I confess I have felt a certain sadness in preparing these few and imperfect notes, which in no sense pretend to be a history of the Passes.¹³ For to write of the Alpine Passes seems, as it were, to compose an obituary notice. Will they soon be no more, superseded by horrid, if convenient, tunnels? The old diligences are being taken off. No more, as a rhymist has it:

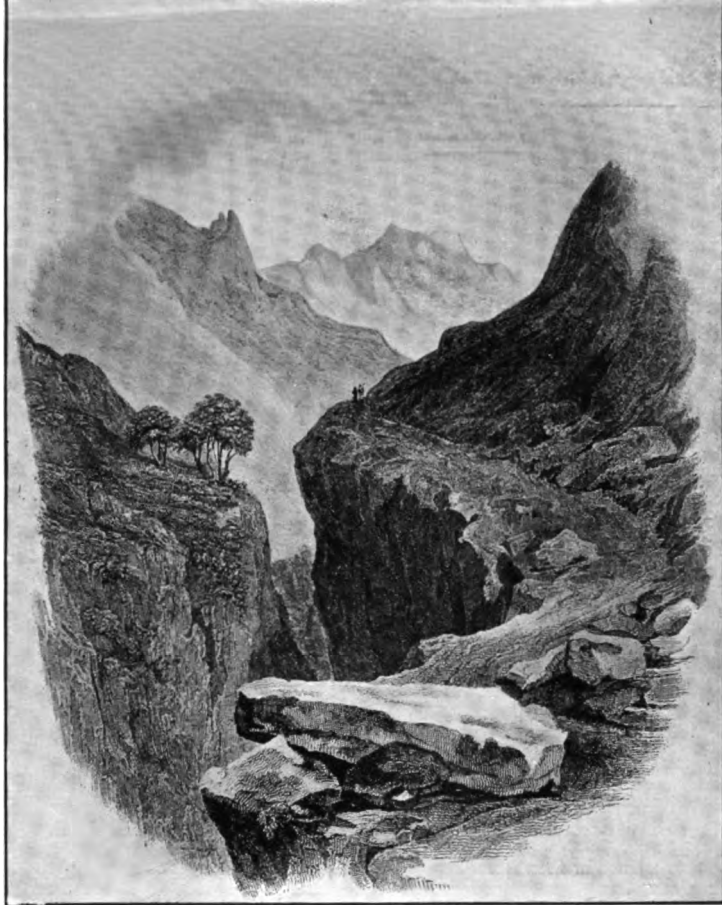
‘No more the jangling post-chaise plies
Across St. Gotthard’s frozen ridge;
The De’il grown older, grows more wise,
He burrows where he built a bridge.’

No longer shall we climb slowly among the pines and waterfalls into the keen mountain air, then plunge down the long zigzags to the chestnuts and the trellised vines and the campanili and the little untidy brown towns, every stone of which speaks and smells of Italy. We shall be carried like sardines in a box from one Palace Hotel to another. A single lifetime has done it. I can remember sixty years ago, when a dozen diligences started from in front of ‘The Three Kings’ at Basle. Then for a generation we lost the approach to the Alps, the wonderful vision of the snows from the Jura. But time brings for the aged its revenges and compensations. When, like some of my contemporaries, we grow stout and in the words of the Public Orator can ‘only climb the Gornergrat and are rather proud of that,’ there is still a resource left to us. Do not

¹³ For fuller details I would refer the English reader to the works of that indefatigable student of Alpine history, Mr. W. A. B. Coolidge. See in particular *The Alps in Nature and History*. Methuen. 1908.



DEFILE OF LE BARRICATE.
NEAR PONTE BERNARDO, VAL STURA.



SCENE NEAR SAMBUCO, VAL STURA.

Moncimour.

S. Punte di Valsora. N.
Bocchetta dei Ronchi.



R. L. G. Irving, photo.

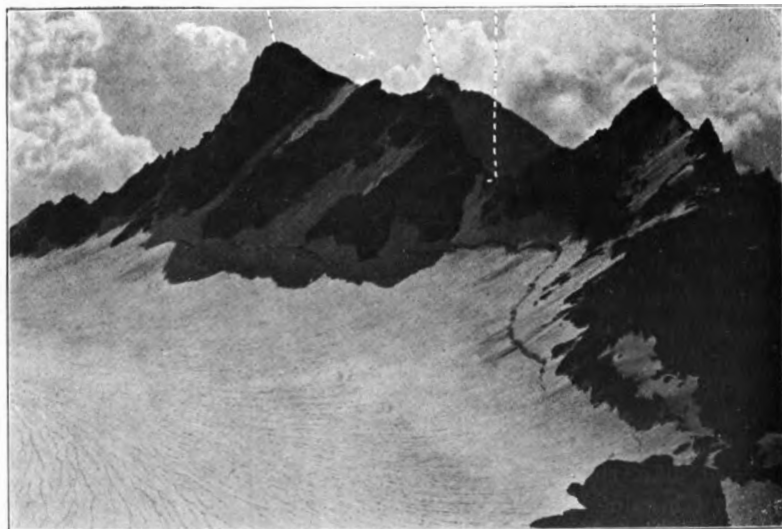
FROM THE COLLE DELLE UJE.

..Grande Uja.

..Gialin.

..Colle delle Uje.

..Piccola Uja.



R. L. G. Irving, photo.

CIARDONEY GLACIER.

FROM GAP N.E. OF SCATIGLION.

scorn the motor. It will enable you not only to revisit the Alpine Passes, but to approach them, as our ancestors did, through the stately avenues and vineclad hills of Central France and the idyllic landscapes and picturesque mediaeval townlets of the Swiss lowlands; it will help you to ramble at leisure over the sunny hills of Savoy and to enjoy once more the familiar beauties of Val d'Aosta and the flower-decked meadows of the Col de Lautaret or the Dolomites.

THROUGH VAL SOERA.

BY THE EDITOR.

PERHAPS it may not be altogether superfluous to explain the position of Val Soera. If a climber leaves *Cogne* for *Noasca* or *Locana* he may go up the *Valnontey* and crossing the *Col de Grandrou* descend the *Val di Noaschetta* to *Noasca* or passing the *Col Monei* reach *Locana* by the *Val Piantonetto*. Should he desire to follow a more easterly route the *Vaileille* and the *Col Teleccio* will bring him into the *Val Piantonetto* and so to *Locana*. All these routes are well known and fairly often used, but there is a yet more easterly passage of which this paper is to speak. The traveller may traverse the *S. Sengie Col* and either cross the *Ciardoney glacier* to the *Colle delle Uje*—in which case he will find himself above the eastern branch of *Val Soera*—or cross the same glacier westwards to the *Valsoera glacier*, and he will then stand at the entrance to the western branch of *Val Soera*. To reach *Locana* he descends *Val Soera* and then rounding the ridge between that valley and the *Val Piantonetto* into the latter valley joins the route of the *Cols Monei* and *Teleccio* and drops down on *Perebecche* and *Locana*.

On August 17, 1913, I started with Benjamin Pession, of *Val Tournanche*, from *Cogne* for the southern *Sengie Col*. Though the air was crisp and the voice of the torrent insistent, yet the subtle glamour of the moonlight made our progress almost like the involuntary movement of a dream. But when I became thoroughly awake as the mule bore me up the steep zigzags above *Lilla* I began to dream in earnest of how the beautiful day should be put to good purpose. As to the tramp of three hours up the *Vaileille*, I used to think