

SUR LES DIABLERETS.

BY ALFRED D. SMITH.

ONE of the most delightful valleys of Switzerland is the charming spot, situated to the north of the Diableret Mountains and about four hours' drive east of Aigle, where somewhat away from the swirling tide of tourists nestles the quiet village of Ormont Dessus. Here, with an hotel-keeper innocent of English, and at an altitude of some 4000 feet above the sea, one may forget that such a thing as business exists, and feel that repose of mind and body which comes from complete change of environment and the proximity of conditions that invigorate the health and charm the senses with their beauty. The majestic Diablerets to the south, beautifully wooded at the foot and shimmering with glaciers at their summits, aroused the climbing spirit within me, and having a Swiss friend, an experienced mountaineer, in the vicinity, his proposal one day to attack one of the heights on the morrow was irresistible.

"Up in the morning early" is a well-worn maxim among mountaineers, and, with the sun so overpoweringly evident as it was in the late summer of 1906, it is doubly necessary to act up to the sentiments of the old Scottish song. Swiss hotels are well used to meals at hours seasonable and unseasonable, so that, having risen at 4.30 a.m., and dressed by candlelight, on the 1st September last, M. Anglaise had no difficulty in enjoying his morning coffee at 5 o'clock, and 5.45 saw all preparations completed and a start made with the gradually increasing light heralding the approach of another day. Wending in a southerly direction our course was up the Creux de Champ valley, the path winding alongside the Grande Eau, whose icy waters, rushing through the well-wooded pastures of this peaceful spot, showed in their slaty grey colour the glacier source from which they spring. The path rose slowly, and having in remembrance the warmth of the recent days, it was delightful to enjoy

the cool atmosphere of the early morning air, and hopes were freely indulged that our solar orb would not show his too luminous rays over the mountain tops in front until a substantial amount, at least, of the climb had been accomplished.

Having no aneroid on this occasion, it is only possible to give approximate altitudes, but probably in an hour from the start we had risen about 700 feet, the sun now tinting with its morning light the mountains to the north, behind. The Diablerets here form an amphitheatre round the Creux de Champ (a rocky basin which these mountains partly encircle), the main stream of the aforementioned torrent taking its rise in the centre of them and descending sheer from the glacier; and the trees around, clustering on the lower parts, form a beautiful contrast to the mass of rock ascending in all its grandeur to the heights above. Having risen to about 5000 feet above sea level our path bore to the left, or to the north-easterly end of the range, and the more arduous work of the ascent began with a constantly winding path of considerable steepness, bearing in a zig-zag manner up through the trees that clothe the lower sides of the mountains. This verdure adds greatly to the latter's charm, and, with the grandeur of the rocky glacier-strewn heights above, is a combination of which we cannot boast in our own more modest Scottish hills. These trees grow up to a height of about 6000 feet above the sea, and the knowledge of this fact enabled us to estimate our altitude, as we would soon be nearly out of the wood—at least in one sense. Not, however, in another, for the chief work of the climb lay before us. Halts "to admire the view" began to be made, but on this occasion there was really some justification, and at 7.15, at an altitude of about 5,700 feet, a short rest was taken, the sun being now well up and tipping one of the peaks to the right and all the tops behind with a beautiful morning glow. Away to the west the Tours D'Ai stood out conspicuously, reminding one in their shape, though of course on a grander scale, of those well-known landmarks in the English Lake District, the Langdale Pikes. Being somewhat of a "Salvationist," I gazed with an ever-increasing interest upon

the gradually approaching rocks ahead, wondering what my Ultramontane friend had in store, only hoping that he had not over-rated my powers of negotiating inclines whose declivities verged on the perpendicular. Meanwhile, to wile the passing hour, he entertained me with cheery accounts of his recent experiences on these elevations, wherein falling stones, risky slips on the glaciers, and other items of mountaineering small-chat formed a leading feature.

Passing now a deserted hut we crossed a considerable patch of grass still growing at this elevation, but all vegetation ended at about 6,500 feet, the path then becoming indistinct over rough scree and boulders, the acclivity having a gradually increasing tendency up which the stocks of the ice axes became increasingly useful.

As before mentioned the start had been made at an early hour, in order that as much of the ascent as possible might be accomplished while the mountain was still in shadow, so as to escape the exhaustion which would be produced by the direct heat of the sun's rays. From time to time backward glances were cast at the line of light creeping up from below, with what seemed relentless speed, and knowing the effect it would have when it reached us, it was not till after nine o'clock that it was decided that it would now be desirable to take a little respite from labour and indulge in a second breakfast. Had it not been that the writer hailed from a Northern clime and was, therefore, more accustomed to the east winds of our Scottish capital than the balmy rays of a more Southern sun, a request for a breathing space would ere this have been made. Here at a height of some 7,500 feet we enjoyed a magnificent prospect of mountainous country spread out beneath, and appreciated all the more the benefit of the rest because of its delay. For an hour or more we gazed our fill upon a grandeur of scenery unobtainable nearer home, and refreshed the inner man with the provision which forethought had provided. But time and tide wait for no man, and—"The sun"—exclaimed my friend, and glancing up I saw the rays of the (on this occasion) unwelcome intruder striking my friend's headgear. Losing no further time, kits were speedily packed, and the ascent up-

wards recommenced. The general acclivity had increased to about 40 degrees, and we pressed on up the steep scree and sterile rocks, capital hand-holds being obtained, and at 8000 feet reached the edge of the Prapioz Glacier. As the rock was pretty good, it was not yet deserted, but the ascent continued up the right hand or southern side of the icy field for a few hundred feet more, and then, having duly roped, my leader traversed to the left, and, crunching the crystal ice, we commenced cutting steps up the glacier. It was delightful to a Northerner to touch the cool ice and snow once more, and, the crevasses not being large or dangerous, good progress was made. At 9000 feet a divergence was made to the right, and a magnificent view was obtained of the Tete Ronde peak surmounting the Mauvais Glacier, the latter so called because of the danger from falling stones to be experienced when traversing it, the wildness of the intervening declivities presenting that dizzy and awesome appearance which mountaineers so love to behold. After a short halt for a photograph of the writer, with the foregoing as a background, progress was resumed up the glacier, but as it was now less steep, step cutting was hardly required, and kicking footholds was sufficient, though just at the further end the axes for a few steps were again useful.

Now came the the stiffest portion of the ascent, for, some hundreds of feet above, cliffs, reaching to the top of the mountain, presented an obstacle which required some energy to overcome, and were the objects in which the Cairngorm member had been taking a peculiar interest some thousands of feet below. The practised eye of my Ultramontane friend, however, soon picked out the best route, and steadily but slowly, and taking all the usual precautions, the distance from the summit was gradually lessened. A good deal of the work was along ledges of outward sloping scree, where the shaft of the ice axe was invaluable as support. From ledge to ledge we crept, and I, for one, never moved without being assured that the rope was well and effectively hitched. Unfortunately the rock here was not very good, or progress would have been quicker, but, with one slight exception, no trouble was experienced from that *bête noire* of climbers—

falling stones. Nevertheless the climb was pretty toilsome, and, coming as it did at the end of seven hours' hard work, fairly exhausting. No regrets were therefore expressed when, on rounding a corner, it was discovered that the next ledge would crown our efforts with success, and, after traversing this, and receiving a shower bath in crossing a cascade, which came off the glacier above, a short steep slope of scree took us at one o'clock on to the Zanfleuron Glacier at the top.

The day's labour was now accomplished, and, as before-mentioned, there were no regrets, for it had been a long and trying climb, and the last cliff was, for a Salvationist, not one to be despised. It was a fine experience, nevertheless, and not one for a moment since regretted. Having been going, with the exception of the nine o'clock rest, almost continually for six or seven hours on a declivity by no means slight, a substantial halt was now necessary. Most fortunately the whole ascent was managed before the sun got round on to the Western face of the mountain, but the heights were scaled none too soon, for almost directly afterwards its rays were beating upon the cliffs. Even at this altitude, 10,000 feet above the sea, and upon the snow covering of the glacier, the friendly shade of a large rock afforded a shelter gratefully accepted. A two hours' rest was here taken, and the contents of the knapsacks energetically attacked, and, following the satisfaction of the inner man, a short snooze formed not the least enjoyable feature of the halt.

Although practically on the summit, another fifteen minutes' walk remained to the Dome. The view I shall not attempt to describe. It must be seen to be appreciated. But those who have been in this magnificent country can imagine something of one's feelings when, standing on the snow covered glacier, with the cliffs of the rocky Diablerets behind, we gazed upon range after range of Alpine peaks on every side, with the Matterhorn and Weisshorn towering above their fellows in front, the Mont Blanc, that monarch of European mountains, dwarfing its satellites to the right, we listened to the avalanches thundering like the booming of cannon into the depths beneath.

But, being pressed for time, we could not linger, and, after the inevitable photograph, set our faces to the north-east, across the Zanfleuron, and then the Sex Rouge Glaciers, passing between the Sex Rouge summit on the left, and the Oldenhorn on the right. Quick going brought us to the beginning of a rough path at 3.50 p.m., and by the descent of rough scree the Cabaine des Diablerets of the Swiss Alpine Club was reached at 4.10. After signing the visitors' book, and mentioning the route accomplished, the path, narrow and steep in places, was resumed, with scree in considerable quantity, down which the most expeditious means of descending was by standing glissades. Then followed a long weary path to the foot. Swiss mountaineers do not waste much time on such work, and there was not much breath left in the Edinburgh Member's body when he pulled up at a Swiss cow-shed by the road side at the Col du Pillon at five o'clock. The ascent of the Diableret is frequently made by ladies from this point, and presents no great difficulty except that at one point there is a nasty little staircase which may be awkward for those nervously inclined, and a little efficient assistance is desirable. Otherwise, the chief requisities by this route are plenty of time and a fair amount of power of endurance. But, certainly, no novice should attempt the ascent from the Creux de Champ, unless, in addition to his enduring qualifications, he be accompanied by a thoroughly experienced mountaineer, and be the possessor of, at least, a moderately steady head.

Only the high road home now remained, and a three mile walk brought us to Ormont Dessus about 6 p.m., after an absence of exactly twelve hours.