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WITH A RÜCKSACK ON THE PENNINE ALPS.

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THE sun was shining brightly as we two dusty club members stepped off the Simplon train at Vernayaz in the Rhone valley. We had left Aberdeen some forty hours before, and the longest pause was three hours in Paris. We made Vernayaz the starting point for our three weeks' tramp. There is a choice of several roads for those who wish to walk from the Rhone Valley over to the Valley of the Arve at Chamonix. We knew the Col de Balme and the Tête Noire: the Salvan had lost some of its original interest, as one could now go most of that way comfortably seated in a railway carriage. We noticed on our map a path which starts on the right side of the Gorge of the Trient, and comes out on the Tête Noire road near the Tête Noire Hotel. On reference to our invaluable Baedeker we found that this was an interesting path, but that a guide was advisable for novices. This is a common statement in his guide book, and somewhat irritating, as unless one knows exactly what is Herr Baedeker's idea of a novice, the phrase is meaningless. This was my second season out, and as I had done nothing more exciting than the Brévent by the Chimney route, I suppose I had to write myself down as a novice. However, my companion had pierced the clouds, and strutted about on the summit of

the monarch of the Alps; so we ignored the ominous warning of the friend of travellers.

The first part of the walk is a steep ascent up a zigzag path in the rocks, then through delightful woods of larch and fir, here and there crossing a clear stream hurrying to lose its beauty in the dirty glacier water of the Trient far down the gorge. On we walked, thankful for the shade of the luxurious trees, and soon descended to the side of the stream. Far above and across the water the pretty village of Salvan nestled at the foot of rocky peaks. After about three hours' walking we reached a group of chalets called La Crete. Here we got refreshment, and judging by the astonishment of the natives at seeing us, and the extreme frugality of the repast to which we were treated, few must pass this way.

The only part of the path that novices would have any difficulty with is that between our halting-place and the Tête Noire Hotel; for some little distance it is hewn out of a precipice, and as there is no railing or other means of support, it might be awkward for anyone troubled with giddiness. As we left the woods we saw the full beauty of the distant hills. Far behind, the Grand Moeveran frowned down on the Rhone, ahead of us the smiling snow peaks of Savoy were lit up by the evening sun. The well-known Tête Noire highway was soon reached, and an hour's walking brought us to the frontier village of Châtelard, romantically situated in the valley of the Eau-Noire. Here we rested and appreciated more than ever the luxury of a bed. There is all the difference in the world between a fresh pair of blankets and a grimy railway rug.

The road between Châtelard and La Poya was dusty as we leisurely tramped along, and the grasshoppers were whistling merrily in the heat of the noon-day sun. At La Poya the Val Bérard comes down. It was our intention to strike up this valley to climb Mont Buet, a mountain known to history as the scene of the first recorded fatal climbing accident. Its summit is one of the best view points in the western Alps.

The day was rather doubtful as we wended our way up

the bank of the cool Bérard stream in the early hours of the morning ; however, it cleared later. We reached the Pierre à Bérard shortly after seven, and had breakfast. Mr. Whymper in one of his books on Chamonix says of the Pierre, "Here there is an erection that can hardly be called either hotel, restaurant, or refuge ; it has beds, and a reputation for high charges." We found the place very clean and the cooking excellent, and as to the charges, we must confirm Mr. Whymper's information !

There is very little difficulty in the ascent ; the path—so long as it lasts—is over good rock debris, which affords a thoroughly trustworthy footing, then the last 2000 feet is mostly over gentle snow slopes with some incipient glacier about 9000 feet up. Three hours' climbing brought us to the summit. The view at every step of the ascent was superb. As we left the hut, the neat little Aiguilles Rouges with their miniature glaciers were the dominating feature, but as we rose they seemed to sink down to make room for the higher and grander Aiguilles of the Chamonix Valley. North-eastwards from the summit we saw the far distant Bernese Oberland appearing over the nearer Dent du Midi. Eastwards we gazed far over the Col de Balme towards the Pennine Alps. In this direction there were some clouds, but as we looked, the rocky Matterhorn reared its rampant form through a wisp of snow-white cloud ; the sight lasted but for a second or two, and then all was cloud, but again it reappeared only to be immediately swallowed up. This was our first view of the Matterhorn, one that we are not likely to forget. But nearer and clearer and more beautiful stretched the long range of the Chamonix peaks, with hardly a cloud from the Aiguille d'Argentière to the Dôme du Goûter. Altering Scott we might have said,

Each snowy peak, each flinty headed spire  
Was bathed in floods of living fire,

but yet we could not stay long, for we were some 10,200 feet above the sea, and the cold was keen, so off we had unwillingly to go. An occasional glissade shortened the distance to the hut, and then the walk down by the clear

pools of the stream to La Poya brought us to the main road again; after a short pause at the Hotel Buet we mounted the Col des Montets on our way to Chamonix. We could not but rest awhile on the summit of the Col to drink in the beauty of the Aiguille d' Argentière. We do not know whether it needed Mr. A. E. W. Mason to tell us that this is a fine mountain, but there is no doubt that it is one of the grandest peaks of the Mont Blanc range. The walk down the valley of the Arve into Chamonix is too well known to need any description.

A few days of exploration at Chamonix was a pleasant interlude in our walk. However, we were bound for the south, so we started off one clear morning for Les Houches, a little village with a quaint church some five miles down the valley. Here we struck up the hillside and mounted the steep zigzag path to the well-named Pavillon Bellevue. From this point we descended to the Bionnassay valley, crossing the stream which flows from the glacier of that name. This valley is green and wooded, and the way was shortened by the company of a delightful Frenchman who was our companion that day. His views of life were very fresh, and his knowledge of the Savoy hills extensive; he was small of stature, and told us with a touch of sadness in his voice, that the Napoleonic wars had killed the best of the French race.

Our route lay over to Contamines, a quaint village nestling on the smiling slopes of Mont Joli. We kept on by this valley to the inn at Nant-Barrant, a quaint little resting-place, right under the huge Glacier de Trélatête of Mont Blanc. When we rose next morning we found the ground white with hoar frost, but the air clear and crisp. The stiff six miles to the summit of the Col du Bonhomme were finished before the hot August sun had peeped over the giant peaks that guard this pass. The view back down the Mont Joli valley is a striking testimony to the appropriateness of the French place-names. Our path still climbed up over the Col des Fours (8891) which was the highest point in our day's march. Here we descended rapidly over slate debris to the Torrent des Glaciers, and



SUMMIT OF COL DE LA SEIGNE.  
WHERE FRANCE AND ITALY MEET.

reached the inn at Les Motets in time for lunch. Our path now led over the gentle slope of the Col de la Seigne. Just after leaving Les Motets we passed the Custom House, as Italy and France meet on the summit of this pass. We climbed steadily upwards, the steepness near the finish preventing us from paying much attention to the hills around, when suddenly we reached the summit, and the whole beauty of the Italian Alps burst upon us. 'Twas our first sight of Italy, but often had we pictured the colour of an Italian landscape, and on that bright summer afternoon our hopes were not disappointed. High above us the blue dome of Heaven; at our feet the green Allée Blanche valley trended down to the vineyards of Piedmont; to our left the huge range and precipices of Mont Blanc reared high and clear into the sky.

“ And soon our eyes had drunk her beauty up  
Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup—  
And still the cup was full.”

This point of view has attracted the great explorers of the Alps. De Saussure has written of its magnificence, and Ritter, the German geographer, says “The view is unsurpassed in the Alps.” However, Courmayeur was six hours further on, and we were due to meet our companions there, so we could not spend too long by the cross where France and Italy meet. We descended over pasturage, passing some chalets 1000 feet from the summit, where we saw an ingenious churn, the motive power being a babbling brook that raced past the door. Green Lac Combal was reached, and the huge moraine of the Glacier de Miage passed before we came into the fir woods, where we saw a trespass-board, our first indication that we were in Italy, and had left the democracies of France and Switzerland behind. We had some light refreshment at an inn, but fared badly and were somewhat overcharged; however, on suggesting that we might be communicating with Herr Baedeker, we got a considerable percentage off our bill. Does the innkeeper desire more Aberdonian patronage?

The darkness came on about two hours before our day's march was done, yet although the distant scene was hidden,

we could see, or almost feel, the gigantic pinnacles of the Brenva ridge close on our left. Our path led us on through thick woods, high above the roaring torrent of the glacier stream. The scenery here is grand (so Baedeker says) yet we do not think that the walk by daylight could be much more interesting than it was to us that starlit evening. The feeling that we were in Italy, the eerie grandeur of the half-hidden peaks, the cheery villages we passed, and the hope of a merry meeting at Courmayeur, all helped to make this walk very sweet. We reached Courmayeur, found our friends, and spent the evening in talking over cols crossed and peaks climbed, till the grey morning was all but breaking.

The next day or two were pleasantly spent in the artistic, but evil smelling villages of Piedmont. Aosta, Ivrea, and Châtillon were visited by some of us, and each place had its own charm—some ancient arch, some imposing church, or some quaint, dirty, winding street.

One bright morning we found ourselves slowly driving up the vine-clad Val Tournanche to the village of that name. Here we engaged two guides to pilot us over the Théodule Pass into Switzerland. The sight of our party winding up the lower slopes of the pass was intensely amusing, and recalled Mark Twain's caravan of guides, porters, and other employees whom he took on his expeditions. However, we were going on to the glacier, and we had to endeavour to banish the humorous side, and think of the crevasses. Nothing exciting occurred, and we safely reached the refuge at the summit of the pass, which we found almost filled with Germans, Italians, French, and Dutch; in fact the small main room was a veritable Hall of Babel. But oh, it was cosmopolitan; the idea of sleeping on the hard boards of an Alpine hut between a stout German and a humorous Dutchman was rich; however, the realization was not quite up to the expectation, as sleep denied her balm.

At 3 a.m. our leading guide wakened us. His call was unnecessary for me, at least, as I had not slept. We drank some black mixture which they called coffee, and then in



BREITHORN FROM THEODULE HUT.



the dim light of that piercing cold morning we prepared to start. We were to ascend the Breithorn, which is some 13,800 feet high, but free from any special difficulty or danger. Shall we ever forget the feeling of keen anticipation and eerie pleasure experienced, as our first party roped up and led off to commence the ascent? The moon was full, so that lanterns were unnecessary. Hardly a word was spoken for long after we left the hut. It is on such an occasion that one understands the power of the mountains. It was all so strange, with not a sound but the chip of the ice-axes on the steep slope. Gradually the daylight crept in, and we saw where we were. Nothing but white virgin snow was around us for miles. The last 1000 feet of the climb is the only part that presents any difficulty, but here the ice slope is steep, and care has to be taken to prevent a slip. When nearing the summit of a peak, one is usually too much engaged with the difficulty of the ascent to notice the distant prospect, so that we were almost stunned by the panorama that met our gaze as we stepped out on to the ridge on the top. Far away to the East the Austrian Peaks were a perfect setting to the morning sun. A hundred miles to the south, away in the plains of Italy, Monte Viso reared up its lofty head. The range of the Alps from end to end simply lay at our feet. We cannot tell of all we saw.

On our return we "bagged" the graceful peak known as the Klein Matterhorn (12,750), from which the view seemed in some directions almost finer. The hut was reached about 10 a.m., and a short rest gave us strength for the long trying descent to Zermatt, where we arrived about 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

We made but a short stay in this much-frequented village. The next morning found us wending our way towards the Rhone. We made for the quaint little watering place of Leukerbad, some ten miles to the north of the Valley. We shall not try to describe the mingled humour and pathos of the bath-houses in this modern Bethesda. They are already of world-wide fame, and for any who do not know the mystery—let them be enlightened by con-

sulting Baedeker, or still better, "A Tramp Abroad." It was with difficulty that we tore ourselves away from the fascinations of Leukerbad; however, we had to cross the Gemmi Pass over to the Lake of Thun.

We had a few hot, tiring walks on our holiday, but none more so than this, and could wish our worst enemy no greater trial than to climb the Gemmi under an August sun. There is no respite; it is simply a steady grind from the base to the summit; however, if one has not been surfeited with views, the panorama from the top is worth having a look at on a clear day. On the walk down to Kandersteg we were much refreshed by the sight of the cool Daubensee, and felt tempted to join some jolly young Germans who were bathing; however we had to press on. This Gemmi walk is well known to all Swiss tourists, but we lost some of the real charm which it has to those coming from the North towards the Rhone Valley, as they mount up the gradual slope for some fifteen miles, and then have the reward of the whole range of the Pennine Alps suddenly bursting upon them.

Our stay in the artistic village of Kandersteg was short; we followed the valley of the Kander to Spiez, where we took train to Interlaken. After a day or two's rest we found ourselves at Meiringen. Starting from there we walked on the Grimsel route to Innertkirchen, thence striking to the east up the Susten Pass. This route is seldom traversed, but yet it is one of the pleasantest walks in Switzerland. Such a combination of smiling pastureland, happy villages, rocky pinnacles, and stern glaciers is not to be found in any other Swiss walk. We walked in sunshine till late afternoon, lunching under the vine-covered balcony of a quaint little inn. Rain came on before we reached the Stein Inn, that charming resting-place, where the kindly host placed his ample wardrobe at our disposal.

The clouds had cleared before the night closed in, and the sky gave promise of a bright to-morrow. We reached the top of our last col—the summit of the Pass—before the sun met us. We wended our way down, leaving the hills and the glaciers behind, and came upon the rail-

way at Wassen, from where we took train to Flüelen. Here we joined the steamer and sailed down the lake to Lucerne. For nearly three weeks we had been on the tramp, high up, where we met but few. And those few belonged to the brotherhood of the Open Road; perhaps this is why Lucerne seemed garish, and we were not over sad to shake its dust from off our feet, and turn our faces homeward.

Railway travelling is undoubtedly one of the drawbacks of a Continental holiday, and we were glad to make our last change at King's Cross.

The daylight was creeping in as I steamed north through Forfarshire. Looking westward towards our own hills, of Aberdeenshire and the Mearns, wrapped in the mists of morning with the light of a new day on their summits perhaps I thought that although

“From the great Valais Mountain Peaks my gaze,  
Hath seen the cross on Monte Viso plain,  
Seen blue Maggiore grey with driving rain,  
And white cathedral spires with flames of praise,  
Yet now that spring is here, who doth not sigh  
For showery morns, and grey skies sudden bright  
And a dear land adream with shifting light,  
Or in what clear-skied realm doth ever lie  
Such glory as of gorse on Scottish Braes  
Or the white hawthorn of these English Mays.”