

## A FORTNIGHT IN ZERMATT.

BY JOHN R. LEVACK.

THE long night-journey from Paris was nearly over. The heavy train had climbed steadily through the Jura mountains till Vallorbe was reached, where a pretence was made of having luggage examined, as we had entered Swiss territory. The sun was shining and the early morning air was actually balmy and still. We had come down through Scotland and England two days before, and had had more than enough of dark skies, lowering clouds and driving rain. How it had rained! All the flat counties of England through which we had passed were flooded, and London was in the grip of a south-west gale with a rain-storm to match. It was still blowing and raining when we left London next morning, and the Channel wasn't exactly smooth. Being good sailors, we, I am afraid, took an unholy delight in going round the decks and noting the different degrees of sea-sickness presented to us. The greater number of passengers had succumbed, and all degrees of the malady could be noted, from the slightest frown on the brow of some immaculate Frenchman who was beginning to "hae his doots," to the limp abandon of some poor pallid wretch who had once been a jovial red-faced Englishman, but was now in the last stages of green and black despair.

This part of the journey was soon over, for it only occupied about ninety minutes, and the French coast was quickly reached, and everyone plucked up courage. Seasickness on a short voyage does no harm, probably rather the contrary.

It rained all the way to Paris, but the evening was clear and fine, and we left the Gare de Lyon at 9 p.m. that night under a cloudless star-lit sky. It rained again shortly after, and continued so till morning, but now at Vallorbe the sun had risen and was breaking through the

clouds, and at last we hoped that we were running into good weather.

The long train slid smoothly down the steady incline to Lausanne, and we could see the sparkling waters of Lake Geneva shining in the sun, whilst on the far side of the Lake towered some of the giant peaks towards which we were journeying.

Soon Lausanne was left behind and we were skirting the beautiful shore of the lake, past Montreux and Chillon, and up the Rhone valley to Martigny. Here we left the train for a few hours to wait for Mr. and Mrs. Reid who were coming down from Chamounix to join us and then go on to Zermatt.

We wandered through the interesting old town and thoroughly enjoyed the mild balmy air and bright sunshine, and, as we were surrounded on every side by towering mountains, we felt that at last we were in Switzerland and on holiday. We had planned a fortnight of hard climbing on the peaks around Zermatt, and for this purpose had engaged a guide whom we had met the previous year on the verandah of the Hotel Mont Cervin in Zermatt, and who had taken us up the Riffelhorn and across the Findelen Glacier. Emil Gentinetta was his name, a cheerful giant, not tall, but long of reach and with a grip like iron. What he does not know about the mountains is not worth knowing. I had written to him and had arranged that he was to devote himself to us for a fortnight and take us up whatever peaks the bad weather would leave us.

We left the train at Visp and got into a small mountain railway train which has to traverse the steep narrow valley of the Visp for twenty-three miles before Zermatt is reached. The carriage is like a tram-car, open on all sides, so that an uninterrupted view of the scenery can be obtained.

The valley is typical of all the Valaisian valleys—deep, narrow and gloomy. The train skirts the steep side of the valley, sometimes on the one side, sometimes on the other, whilst, far below, the noisy Visp river roars a welcome to all. At times, the valley broadens out, and on com-

paratively flat ground is seen a cluster of straggling chalets gathered round a more or less pretentious church, whilst round about one notices several well-tilled fields of corn and barley.

On our way to Zermatt we pass several such villages, Stalden, San Niklaus, Randa, and Tasch, each with its church.

The way up to Zermatt is steep and therefore slow, and it takes  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours to cover 23 miles. At times the road is fairly level and the speed is not so bad, but every now and then a steep section of the railway necessitates the help of the third rail and cog-wheel, and we crawl like a snail. But we do not mind in the least, for the scenery is magnificent, and we have time to enjoy it to the full. We creep along a steep rocky face which slopes and drops down to a dark rocky gorge at the bottom of which roars an unseen river. The slopes are covered with grass and flowers of all colours, and rise steeply to splintered summits that seem to overhang the gorge. Snowy glacier peaks tower up on either hand, and occasionally one sees the long white streak of a glacier sloping steeply downwards from the clouds.

Just before reaching Zermatt, the railway narrows, and we swing round some rocks close to the torrent of the Visp, then we pass through a tunnel and pull out on to flat ground, and are at last in Zermatt.

On emerging from the tunnel we get our first view of the Matterhorn towering at the head of the valley. We were fortunate, for we had a clear and cloudless view of the great rock-pyramid. It is not possible to set down one's impressions on seeing, at close quarters and for the first time, this peerless example of Nature's marvellous handiwork.

We noted, however, that all the great peaks carried much more snow than they should have done at this time of year, and this boded ill for our chances of climbing them.

The first peak on our list was the Unter Gabelhorn, a

rock-peak 11,150 feet high, and one of the favourite shorter climbs from Zermatt.

The precipitous western slope of the valley is cut deeply into just behind the village by a well-marked gorge which leads up to a great glacier-filled basin encircled by a chain of giant peaks. The first peak to the left of the gorge is the Unter Gabelhorn, and seen from the Trift hut, the little hostel at the head of the gorge, it looks remarkably like Sgurr nan Gillean in Skye.

We left Zermatt about 6 a.m. on a dark and rainy morning, not a very cheerful outlook, because rain in Zermatt meant snow at the Trift and above it. As we mounted up, the weather cleared and we saw the sun rise over Monte Rosa. But long before we reached the hut (7870 feet) we were walking through freshly fallen snow, and our peak was thickly coated and hopelessly out of condition. A strong and icy wind blew down from the heights, and dense clouds of snow were constantly being whirled about the higher tops and ridges. No one could traverse the pinnacles of the Unter Gabelhorn that day without the certainty of frostbite. So the guides suggested doing the Mettelhorn (11,188 feet), an easy peak, up which one just walks. We had the full force of the gale here, and we had icicles on our caps and moustaches before we reached the top. But we had a glorious view, my first from any height in Switzerland, and, sheltered behind the topmost rocks below the cairn, we paid homage to the magnificent panorama before us. Six thousand feet below, and almost sheer down, lay Zermatt, an absurd-looking cluster of houses at the bottom of the valley, whilst across the valley towered the peaks of the Mischabelhorner. Then, to the right lay the ridge of the Gorner Grat with its culminating point crowned by a big hotel at the terminus of the well-known mountain railway leading up from Zermatt. Behind all this rose the giant mass of Monte Rosa, beautiful beyond description in its everlasting snow mantle, and, still further to the right, the Lyskamm, the Twins, and the Breithorn carried the eye round to the summit of the Theodule Pass, a highway into Italy since

the days of St. Theodule, Bishop of Sion. Then the sky line, sweeping along to the westward as the Furggenrat, extended right to the base of the great eastern face of the Matterhorn, which towered far into the blue sky, its steep ridges and snow-clad precipices showing up magnificently in the brilliant sunshine. Viewed from the bottom of the valley the Matterhorn always looks magnificent and awe-inspiring, but when seen from any height its wonderful shape, its individuality, and its isolation, impress the climber to an extent not equalled by any other mountain in Switzerland. Westwards from the Matterhorn, peak after peak, snow-clad and grand, stood up clearly till we could see the topmost ridge of the Dent Blanche, and coming nearer, we could just make out, at times, the sharp point of the Ober Gabelhorn and the ridge sweeping down to our intended peak, the Unter Gabelhorn. But all the mountains on this side of the valley were storm-swept, and great masses of snow-cloud tore continually over them, so that we got only occasional peeps of the topmost pinnacles. Across the great Trift basin behind us towered the Wellenkuppe, the Trifthorn, the Zinal Rothorn, and, further to the right, the magnificent Weisshorn, the finest, in many respects, of the lot.

We scrambled quickly down the slabby rocks of our peak, in the teeth of the gale, and speedily gained the shelter of the Trift. Zermatt was reached soon after, and we voted our day a success.

Next day I took a day off, and walked down the valley to Randa, a lovely walk along the side of the roaring Mattervisp, past clusters of huge pines and interesting Alpine chalets, with entrancing peeps of the great peaks all round.

Our next expedition was a traverse of the Furggenrat, the ridge running eastwards from the base of the Matterhorn to the Theodule Pass. This ridge is well over the 10,000 feet level, and rises in several places to considerably over 11,000 feet. It is narrow and sharp, often consisting of a delicate knifeedge of snow, along which one has to walk, whilst at times steep rocks rise out of the snow and

give the climber exciting moments traversing them. We were caught in mist just as we reached the ridge. We had slept over night at the Schwarzsee Hotel (8495 feet) at the foot of the Matterhorn. From my bedroom window at 4 a.m., I had a view of the great eastern face of the mountain, bathed in the ghostly radiance of a full moon, and I shall never forget the extraordinary beauty of the scene, enhanced as it was by the absolute absence of sound of any kind.

We set out at 5.30, when the peaks were just beginning to be tipped by the rosy tints of dawn. The Matterhorn and the Breithorn, however, had some wisps of cloud upon them and the guide shook his head. It was going to be a bad day, he said. We passed along the base of the Hörnli, and across the Furgg glacier to the foot of our ridge. A steep climb up a snow couloir and ice-covered rocks brought us to the ridge and into mist. A strong wind was now blowing, and we were in for trouble. After a halt for food, we started along the ridge, gingerly picking our way along the narrow snow crest, from which steep snow slopes swept downwards into nothingness. Soon we came to rocks towering up from the snow. Over and down these we went, and again along the snow. A second rock peak was reached, the Furggenhorn (11,476 feet) the rocks of which were iced and difficult, especially during the descent on to the narrow snow arête, which stretched away ahead, dim and mysterious in the swirling mist. At one point during the descent I slipped from my holds and swung clear out on the rope, dangling at one moment over Switzerland and then over Italy, but I was speedily lowered to safety, the guide followed, and we continued along the ridge till the last peak was reached, the Theodulhorn (11,392 feet). This we skirted, as the weather was rapidly getting worse, and we glissaded down soft snow till we reached the Theodule Pass near its summit.

A short walk over snow-covered glacier took us to the upper Theodule hut, a miserable-looking shanty perched on some rocks at the foot of the Theodulhorn and at the

summit of the pass (10,900 feet). The shelter was very welcome after the gale we had been struggling against, but the interior of the hut was dark and forbidding, whilst the floor of the main passage was a solid slab of ice. We dried our clothes at the stove, got some piping hot soup, and, after a rest, decided to descend to Zermatt, although the original plan was to stay at the hut overnight and climb the Breithorn next day. The guides at the hut all agreed that climbing next day would be impossible on account of the weather, so we started off down the Upper Theodule glacier in dense mist and a raging snowstorm. Lower down, when we had passed the snow line, the snow turned to rain, but the mist became, if anything, denser. We got wetter than ever, our tempers did not improve, and it was dark before we reached Zermatt. Never was a hotel more welcome than was the Monte Rosa that night, when three wet, weary climbers crawled up its stairs to change into presentable garments before appearing in the dining-room to enjoy a first-class dinner, as only hungry climbers can.

Next day nothing was done except a walk down the Zermatt valley to Tasch, but on the day after that we took the Gorner Grat railway up to the Riffelberg station, then walked over the ridge past the Riffelhorn and down to the Gorner Glacier, which we crossed to the rocks at the foot of Monte Rosa, known as the Untere Plattje, on which is situated the Betemps Hut at a height of 9190 feet. The weather was magnificent, and we were surrounded on all sides by glaciers—in fact, we were on a small rock island in the midst of the greatest and most elevated glacier system in Europe. As we sat on the warm, sun-baked rocks in front of the hut we had our backs to the steep ice slopes of Monte Rosa, whilst away to the right we looked across the vast ice-river we had crossed—the Gorner Glacier, beyond which rose the steep rocky slope of the Gorner Grat, whilst to our immediate left towered the snowy Lyskamm with the steep ice-fall of the Grenz glacier at its foot. Further along to our left the snowy domes of the Twins, Castor and Pollux, carried the sky-line along to the

Breithorn and the Theodule Pass, and so on to the long Furrigen Ridge stretching away to the base of the Matterhorn, which towered serenely over all; and, further away to the right, the glittering peak of the Dent Blanche peeped up over the black, rocky point of the Riffelhorn. Glaciers flowed down from all the peaks to join the parent Gorner glacier which filled the vast valley for miles with a sea of ice, silent, mysterious and indescribably magnificent. An hour passed all too quickly and we could scarcely eat our lunch for gazing at the wonderful panorama spread out for us, but it was time to return, and we scrambled down the rocks to the glacier and sauntered homewards.

Two days afterwards, we went up to the Trift hut behind Zermatt with the object of climbing the Unter Gabelhorn, and, if the weather remained fine, the Wellenkuppe. We slept at the Trift (7870 feet) and started at 6 a.m. in a dense mist to climb up the grassy and scree slope towards the eastern ridge of the Unter Gabelhorn. As we mounted we suddenly got above the mist and had a surprisingly beautiful view of all the peaks in brilliant sunshine in a cloudless deep-blue sky, whilst below us was a perfectly level sea of mist filling the Zermatt valley. Our climb took us over steep rock pinnacles, several of them sensational to a degree, and reminding one strongly of the pinnacle route of Sgurr-nan-Gillean in Skye, except that here we were over 11,000 feet up instead of, as in Skye, 3000 feet. The final tower of the mountain rose almost perpendicularly from the col or gabel between it and the last pinnacle, but the rock was splendidly firm and the holds were abundant. One could not help experiencing a feeling of exultation on looking downwards, often between one's legs, past the great rock walls of the mountain to the glaciers at its base far below. The summit is not a roomy place, so we clung round, the cairn as best we could, whilst photographs were taken of the surrounding panorama. The Matterhorn looked especially grand, the whole northern face, from the summit to the level of the Zmutt glacier;



a vertical height of nearly 9000 feet being visible. The descent was by a vertical rock chimney, direct from the cairn down to a steep snow couloir on the west side of the mountain, and so round again to the Trift hut. The weather was again threatening, and the guides decided that the Wellenkuppe would not "go" next day, so we descended to Zermatt that evening.

The weather was now getting progressively worse. There was no longer any prospect of climbing any of the higher peaks, for fresh snow fell every night, and the temperature was much too low to allow of any mountain expeditions being undertaken. Accordingly it was suggested that a day should be spent in descending the ice-fall of the Gorner Glacier. Where a glacier passes over a steep section of its bed, it no longer remains a level smooth river of ice, but becomes broken up by a series of great transverse cracks, and is consequently transformed into a veritable chaos of ice pinnacles and ridges, separated by huge crevasses and ice-caverns. These pinnacles are often 80 to 100 feet high, and, as they generally slope downwards in the direction of the glacier stream, they are in a state of extreme instability, and every now and then topple over, with a crash and a roar, into the yawning crevasses below them. The traverse of the Gorner ice-fall meant a journey downwards over some dozens of these seracs, as they are called, and meant step-cutting in hard blue ice at angles I had hitherto only dreamt of. The performances of the guides that day were a revelation to me as regards ice-craft and balance. When we were at one time poised giddily on the knife-like summit of an ice-ridge, or again climbing a vertical ice-wall, with our feet and hands clinging insecurely in minute pigeon holes in cold blue ice, and an apparently bottomless crevasse below, it is no wonder to me, even now, that I said to myself: "If ever I get ashore out of this, never again!" But the guides were mildly sarcastic. Emil would say, at some particularly stiff place: "Go on, Mr. Dr., I haf you," and, again, "Ach, you are walking like a child, I will show you." The result of all this was that we learned,

to some extent, that we must not sit when climbing down a steep ice-slope, and that balance is a fine art only to be acquired by much practice on a glacier ice-fall.

Our fortnight was nearly at an end, and it was seen that all the high peaks were already putting on their winter garb. No one had ventured on the Matterhorn since the 18th of July, and only one party had crossed the Weisshorn at the expense of several fingers of the leading guide from frost-bite. One climber staying at our hotel tried Monte Rosa and had to retreat with one hand badly frozen. The summer of 1912 will be long remembered for its persistently low temperature, and its consequently disastrous effects on the climbing season in the Alps.

Our last excursion was across the Findelen Glacier to the Fluh Alp hut. We went guideless, and practised step-cutting on the steep ice. The weather was cold and stormy as usual, and, after tea at the hut, we started down the Findelen valley late in the afternoon.

A few flakes of snow fell, and the clouds crept down over the great peaks little by little. Occasionally the sinking sun would pierce some rift in the huge black masses that streamed over the Dent Blanche and the Matterhorn, lighting up the whole valley with wonderful shades of orange and pink, whilst again the whole landscape would appear one uniform tint of grey, relieved only by the melancholy white of the dimly seen snow-fields high up on the mountain sides.

Zermatt was reached just as darkness had set in, and we were glad to enter our hotel in time to escape a heavy rain storm.

We left for home next afternoon in pouring rain. The heavy mist was down almost to the streets of Zermatt, and when it lifted a little at times we could see that the fresh snow line was down almost to the village.

Later on we learned that for days afterwards Zermatt was covered with snow, and so the climbing season was over.