



*Photo by*

*Mrs. R. M. Williamson.*

**THE FERPICLE GLACIER AND HOTEL BRICOLLA.**

## THE COL DU GRAND CORNIER.

BY R. M. WILLIAMSON, M.A., LL.B.

THOSE who know Arolla, one of the choicest pearls in the chain which binds mountain lovers to Switzerland, will remember that less than an hour after passing Evolène they reach the small village of Haudères, where the driving road ends, and where those bound for Arolla swing sharply to the right and enter a gorge dominated on the left by the Dents de Veisivi. In the village and just before crossing the stream descending from the Ferpècle glacier a rough path turns off sharply to the left, and, winding through larches, brings the wanderer in a little time to the attractive little Ferpècle inn, more like a toy chalet than an inn. One might spend some days in that attractive haven. As it is, it yields us comfort and solace before entering on the more tiring part of our journey, for we presently get above the trees, there is no shade, and the sun is overhead. The view is, however, one of extraordinary beauty. The great Ferpècle glacier is straight in front, to the left is the Dent Blanche with its terrific western sweep of precipices, while on the right is the great mountain mass separating the Ferpècle glacier from the Arolla valley, and on the sky line the spotless mantle of the Wandfluh. Scarcely a soul is to be seen save a herd boy or a haymaker, for we are now in a back water, the procession of men and mules having set its face towards Arolla.

Our destination for the day is the hotel on the alp Bricolla at the height of 8,000 feet, which we reach at one o'clock. It occupies a fine situation on the edge of a cliff, a thousand feet above the spot where the Ferpècle glacier and the glacier du Mt. Miné unite. To the South is the great snowfield which one crosses on the way to Zermatt, but the most dominating feature is the Dent

Blanche, now so near, and from this side looking as sinister as the Matterhorn does from the Staffel alp.

When happier times return the hotel Bricolla should be full throughout its brief season. It is four hours from Evolène and ten hours from the nearest railway station, but within twenty minutes of our arrival a lunch was provided which would have brought no discredit to a Strand eating-house. There were no other visitors in the hotel, and Madame had no notice of our expected arrival. The hotel Bricolla is on this occasion, however, only a halting place on the way to Zinal by way of the Col du Grand Cornier, the depression between the Dent Blanche and the Grand Cornier first crossed in 1864. The sunset seen from this crow's nest was almost fearsome in its beauty, and the pink of the alpine glow on the snow-peaks was very striking. In the night a storm of wind arose which shook the hotel to its foundations and roared along the passages, suggesting that only a slightly stronger puff was needed to lift the whole building and deposit it on the glacier below.

At a quarter to three on 15th July, 1913, we were roused, and by half past were off in darkness and mist, but the latter gradually cleared somewhat, and as the sun got up a wonderful panorama was presented on all sides, particularly towards Arolla, the Aiguille de Za shooting up like a giant's finger, but ever and anon hidden by swirling mist which came billowing up from the great cauldron between us and the Bertol hut. In about an hour we reach the glacier and are tied up. One of the photographs shows the view westward from this point. We are now close under the Dent Blanche on the side which few attempt to climb unless they have tired of life. It was when ascending this side that Mr. Glynne Jones and three guides perished in 1899.\* They are all buried beside each other in the little churchyard at Evolène. I asked the leading guide if he could point.

\* See *C.C.J.*, iii., 125.



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LOOKING WESTWARD FROM COL DU GRAND CORNIER :

THE AIGUILLE DE ZA ON THE LEFT.

out the place where the fatal slip was made. He pointed far up and then nodding his head towards his companion said, "His brother was one of them."

About seven o'clock we reached the Col (11,628 feet). Looking down the other side I must say I was somewhat taken aback. So far as the eye could judge the descent was perpendicular, but the guide said it was a staircase. The middle of the Col was topped by a cornice of ice which made descent at that point impossible, but slightly to the left a way was found down which we moved cautiously, one at a time. A welcome shelter was also found from a bitter wind which seemed to be searching every vital, and here, in somewhat uncomfortable quarters, we disposed of second breakfast. The staircase proved easier than it looked from the top, and in due time the glacier was reached and we steered in the direction of the Mountet hut. We were presently brought up, however, by a yawning crevasse which seemed to stretch across the glacier as far as the eye could reach. The guides explained that no one had crossed the Col that year, and that the year before there had been a snow-bridge at the point to which they had led us, but that it must have been destroyed. We now made a long sweep to the right. The snow was soft and the going heavy, but we ultimately reached a place where it was thought the crevasse could be negotiated, just under the cliffs of the East arête of the Dent Blanche. Here we came to close quarters with the crevasse, and the colours in its depths were indescribable. They seemed to riot for the mastery and brought to mind the poet's description of the snake:—

Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue,  
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,  
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barred.

A fairy seemed to be inviting us to enter her wonderful ice palace and to leave for ever the heat and glare of the day, but it was no place either to discuss Keats's poetry or the number of centuries which would elapse before

the glacier would re-deliver us to the world if we entered it here. Overhead depended a number of icicles, any one big enough to carry off the whole four if it fell on us, and they seemed to be in a state of unstable equilibrium, judging from the wreckage lying about. In some way which I never quite understood we surmounted that crevasse, zig-zagged round some others, and were soon at the Roc Noir basking in the sun which now fought his way through the clouds. Sir Leslie Stephen, who cannot be accused of using exaggerated language, says that the circle of mountains of which this spot is the centre yields one of the very noblest prospects in the Alps—Lo Besso, Zinal Rothorn, Trifhorn, Gabelhorn, Dent Blanche, Grand Cornier, and Bouquetin. Unfortunately for us, the mists refused to clear sufficiently to let us see its full glory.

The guides counselled staying at the Mountet for the night, but we decided to push on to Zinal. The walk down the glacier Durand was at least cooling for the feet, for the slush lay deep. That was followed by a tiring walk over the moraine, redeemed, however, by an almost dazzling view of the Weisshorn, surely the most faultless of mountains. We arrived at Zinal about two o'clock, having been out ten hours and a half. The rests did not exceed half an hour, and considering the state of the snow and the time lost through searching for a way across the crevasse the guides said the time was good. Zinal is changed since Sir Leslie Stephen could write that the arrival of himself and two companions with two guides rather more than doubled the resident population.

A good rest before dinner, followed by twelve hours' sleep, enabled us to enjoy the walk next morning down the valley to Vissoye, one of the most delightful walks of which man can dream, when the dew is on the grass and butterflies of all sizes are disporting themselves in the sunlight.