

ALPINE NOTES.

To the Editor of the Alpine Journal.—My dear Sir,—I send you some notes of one or two excursions in the Adamello district, including an ascent of the Adamello, combined with a pass from the head of the Val di Genova to the Val Camonica.

On September 14, my friend C. P. Ilbert, and myself left Pinzolo in the Val Rendena, intending to pass the night at the head of the Val di Genova, and, if possible, combine the ascent of the Adamello from thence with a pass into the Val delle Susine to Ponte di Legno. We had spent the chief part of the previous day in endeavouring to obtain information as to our intended route, and a guide, or, at any rate, some one who professed to know something of the country. The latter we signally failed in doing, though we were fortunate enough to obtain the former in the shape of a publication (the exact title of which I forget now*), which contains a very graphic account, by Lieutenant von Payer, of an ascent of the Corno Bianco and the Adamello in 1864. The maps by which it is illustrated are extremely good, and both the book and a large map taken from it are to be found in the inn at Pinzolo. It is strange that at a distance of only $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours from the head of the Val di Genova, no one should know anything of the Adamello, but so it is; the only answer to enquiries being a reference to one Girolamo Botteri, mentioned by Mr. Ball, who, with Fantoma, a chamois-hunter, accompanied Payer in 1864. As, however, both these men absolutely refused to attempt the ascent of the Adamello when they reached the ice, and referred to it as 'la brutta bestia la drio,' we came to the conclusion that their services would not be very valuable if we could find them. We did, in fact, send for Botteri, but as he did not make his appearance, we started with a porter from Pinzolo, to carry some food, &c., and trusted to finding some herdsman in the Val di Genova who might know something of the district. We finally picked up Cesare Caturani, who accompanied Mr. Ball over what we believe to be the same pass (Bocchetta di Marocaro) as that traversed by ourselves. Caturani, however, flatly refused to leave the rocks at all, or put foot on the glaciers leading up to the Adamello, saying 'he shuddered,' so that we left him behind, and found our way to the top without him. Besides which, he has no mountaineering instinct whatever, and lost his way altogether in getting down into the Val Susine. About $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours' walking took us to the head of the Val di Genova from Pinzolo, and we managed to get fair sleeping-quarters at a saw-mill, about a quarter of an hour's walk from what Mr. Ball calls the malga of Bedole. The malghe, or châlets, however, were too full to be pleasant, as they were to be deserted the next day (September 15), and a great quantity of both bipeds and quadrupeds was collected there. We left the sega at about a quarter before 4 A.M. on the morning of September 15, and after a steep climb, at first through a pine-forest, reached the mandron, or

* It forms a number of Petermann's Geographische Mittheilungen.

shepherd's hut, described by Mr. Ball and from which Lieutenant Payer made his ascent in 1864, in about three hours from leaving our night-quarters. The view of the Vedretta di Bedole at the head of the Val di Genova is very fine, and the whole scene of snow-fields and glaciers from the mandron is striking in the extreme. I should not, however, recommend the mandron for sleeping-quarters, as it is little more than a hole, and it would be necessary to carry up wood, blankets, &c., from Pinzolo, as there is absolutely nothing in the hut.

From the mandron we followed the rocks which skirt the north side of the Vedretta di Bedole, leaving on our right the Lago Scuro, and the Col by which we eventually crossed into the Val Susine, and after climbing partly on the moraine and partly on the rocks for some two hours after leaving the mandron, reached the head of the upper ice fall, and took to the glacier at about 9.15 A.M. There is really very little choice of route thus far for anyone attempting the Adamello from the mandron, as it would have been almost impossible to cross the glacier lower down. At this point, Caturani refused to proceed farther, and we therefore left him to wait our return while we pushed on in a north-westerly direction for the foot of the Corno Bianco. We found the glacier somewhat crevassed, though not really difficult to anyone with rope and ice-axe, and soon reached the long snow-slopes which lead up and round the Corno Bianco to the foot of the Adamello itself. This peak is completely hidden from sight by the Corno Bianco, and it is not till you have rounded its west side that the Adamello becomes visible. We attacked it from its west side, and reached the summit, a pure snow-peak, corniced on its N. and E. sides, at 12.30. The distant view, which ought to be very extensive, was overclouded. The snow on the peak was just thick enough to enable us to dispense with our ice-axe, as far as step-cutting was concerned. We reached the rocks where we had left Caturani at 3.15., and found him blue with cold, and saying that he was half dead with hunger. As we had given him a very liberal share of our small stock of provisions, this latter complaint we regarded as unfair, while he had only himself to blame for the first. From this point to the Col over which our guide persisted in taking us, into the Val Susine (i.e. the Bocchetta, as he called it), is about $2\frac{3}{4}$ hours' walking in a north-easterly direction, over huge granite boulders, which I confess to having found very fatiguing, especially as we had been walking fast all day, with very short halts.

But we believed, and were confirmed in our belief when looking at the head of the Val Susine from Ponte di Legno, that it would have been possible to cross by a Col much to the west of the Bocchetta, and consequently much nearer the point where we left the glacier. It was, however, too late to try experiments, and we descended down a perpendicular face of rock, some twenty-five feet, on to the glacier below. This we crossed at its head, keeping to the left, when we reached another shelf of rock which divided the glacier. This, though higher than the first descent from the Col, was not quite so steep, and was not coated with ice, as Mr. Ball seems to have found it. The glacier has probably receded since then. After crossing the lower glacier, we found considerable difficulty in getting down into the valley, though if we had

had more light I have no doubt we should have got down more easily. Here Caturani lost his way entirely, and confessed that he did not know where he was, and after stumbling about in the dark for some three hours, we finally reached Ponte di Legno at 10 P.M. The proper route, after descending from the glacier, is on the left side of the stream. We took the right, and thereby made a considerable *détour* which might have been otherwise saved. The time required from the Col to Ponte di Legno would not in fine weather and daylight be more than three hours, if so much. The whole expedition is 'sehr lohnend,' as Bädiker would say, but is too long to attempt starting, as we did, from the Val di Genova. The start should be made from the mandron, or if starting from the Val di Genova, it would be more prudent to sleep at the mandron after ascending the Adamello, and go over the pass the next morning, as we came to the conclusion that it should decidedly not be attempted without daylight.

Inns, &c.—The inn at Ponte di Legno fully justifies Mr. Ball's description as to its high charges; in other respects we found it comfortable, and the food good. At Pinzolo, the inn is not clean, but otherwise it is tolerable. At Molveno, from which place we went over the Bocca di Brenta to Pinzolo, it is possible now to get meat, and fish from the lake. We took a son of the landlord Bonetti as guide to the top of the pass (five hours from Molveno), and found our way down to Pinzolo in about another five hours. It is not necessary to cross any glacier from the Bocca to Pinzolo, though the people at Pinzolo seem to think it is.

There is a good inn ('La Stella') at Pieve di Buono, at the foot of the Val di Daone, which would be found very convenient for anyone coming as we did from Cedegolo in the Val Camonica by the Lago d'Arno to the valley of the Chiese; and it is better to cross to Tiano, and so on by the Lago di Ledro, to the Lake of Garda from Pieve di Buono than from Condino. The summit of the pass from Pieve di Buono to Tiano commands a very fine view of the Brenta Alta and the Care Alto, at the head of the Val di Daone.

The inn at Cedegolo we thought very indifferent, and not deserving the praise bestowed on it by Mr. Ball.

RISDON D. BENNETT.

We take the following from the 'Anglo-American Times' of October 22, 1870. No other information has come to us, beyond that which was published at the time of the accident:—

'A correspondent in Switzerland informs us that the search on the summit of Mont Blanc for the sufferers in the recent catastrophe has resulted in the discovery of Mr. J. Beane, an American, who was one of the party. On his body papers were found proving his identity, which have been sent, together with his effects, to the U.S. Consul at Geneva. The following is a paper written by Mr. Beane in a grotto near the summit of Mont Blanc, and finished, in all probability, just before his death:—

"Tuesday, September 6.—I have made the ascent of Mont Blanc

with ten persons; eight guides, Mr. Corkendal and Mr. Randall. We arrived at the summit at half-past 2 o'clock. Immediately after leaving it I was enveloped in clouds of snow. We passed the night in a grotto excavated out of the snow, affording very uncomfortable shelter, and I was ill all night. September 7 (morning).—Intense cold; much snow, which falls uninterruptedly; guides restless. September 7 (evening).—We have been on Mont Blanc for two days in a terrible snow-storm; we have lost our way, and are in a hole scooped out of the snow at a height of 15,000 ft. I have no hope of descending. Perhaps this book may be found and forwarded. (Here follow some instructions on his private affairs.) We have no food; my feet are already frozen, and I am exhausted; I have only strength to write a few words. I die in the faith of Jesus Christ, with affectionate thoughts of my family; my remembrances to all. I trust we may meet in heaven. My effects are in part at the Hotel Mont Blanc, and partly with me in two portmanteaux. Send them to the Hotel Schweitzerhoff, at Geneva; pay my bills at the hotel, and heaven will reward your kindness." The letter ended with instructions for his family, and death must have immediately ensued on his having written his farewell.

'It appears from these dates that Mr. Beane and his companions were alive when the news of the disaster reached Chamounix. If, therefore, the expedition, which immediately started, had not been delayed by bad weather, it is probable that it would have been in time to save them. The bodies of Mr. Beane's companions have not been recovered, doubtless from being covered with snow. The other day, while the sun was shining on the snow, some black spots were perceived near the summit of Mont Blanc, which were presumed to be the bodies of the missing explorers, but while an expedition was being arranged for resuming the search, bad weather again set in, since which snow has fallen in such quantities that all hope of recovery is for the present abandoned.'

The accident on Mont Blanc, to which the above refers, is one of the most terrible that has ever happened to tourists in the Alps. The loss of a whole party, and of no less than eleven lives, is probably unprecedented. Owing to various circumstances, it has attracted comparatively little attention. The war has absorbed all public interest. Only one of the sufferers was a countryman of our own; and perhaps people thought that, whilst men were falling by the thousand in France, it was not worth while to make much trouble about a dozen more or less lives lost in the mountains. The main facts are so simple, that little explanation is needed. The one special danger of Mont Blanc is bad weather. The inexperienced travellers were probably ignorant of the fearful danger they were encountering, and had not the slightest conception of the risk to life and limb which accompanies even a successful ascent of the mountain under such circumstances. I once ascended Mont Blanc in a day so unusually fine, that we could lie on the summit for an hour, light matches in the open air, and enjoy the temperature. Yet, in two or three hours before sunrise, the guide of another party which ascended the same day was so severely frostbitten as to lose his

toes. Such things may happen in the finest weather, when proper precautions are neglected; but in bad weather it is simple madness to proceed. Why, one cannot help asking, did not the guides oppose the wishes of their employers?

The other accident which occurred this year on the same mountain suggests a similar question. A gentleman goes on with one guide and leaves two ladies alone with a porter. The porter gives one lady his arm, and walks across a snow-field notoriously full of crevasses. The catastrophe which occurred was that which every experienced traveller would have predicted as highly probable. I will not enquire whether, in this case, any blame attaches to the traveller; but it is difficult to imagine that anyone with the slightest pretensions to act as guide could have committed the folly to which it was owing that the porter lost his own life and that of his companion.

Now it seems a very difficult task to persuade travellers that there are very serious dangers in the Alps. If people will not be persuaded by the numerous fatal catastrophes, neither will they be persuaded though the 'Alpine Journal' should turn its thunders upon them for years to come. So far as travellers are concerned, we can only express the hope, but hardly the expectation, that they may gradually become more cautious. In the two cases, however, to which I have referred, the remarkable fact is the untrustworthiness of the guides. They must have acted in the most reckless manner, and in defiance of the clearest warnings. We seem, in fact, to be driven to a conclusion which Mr. Moore expressed very forcibly in a letter to the 'Times.' It is plain that the inferior guides at Chamouni are not to be trusted in high ascents. No doubt the great increase of tourists has had something to do with this unfortunate result. Every man in the village thinks that he is qualified to be a guide by his geographical position; and, though in every Alpine village, and especially in Chamouni, there are men fully up to the greatest responsibilities, it is equally true that in every such village there are men who are good for nothing more than carrying knapsacks. Now, it would seem that having used up the best material at Chamouni, they are beginning to pass off the inferior. The rota system operates in the most injurious way, as Alpine travellers have long pointed out that it must do. And the consequence is, that an inexperienced man goes to Chamouni, takes the first shoeblack or tailor who offers his services, and straightway puts himself in positions where a Balmat, a Couttet, or a Devouassoud might be severely tried. With a really experienced guide, I cannot but believe that the party who were lost must have been able to find their way. They might have suffered frostbites, or even lost the lives of some of the weaker members of the party; but that eleven men should be so bewildered as actually to be incapable of discovering a route, implies a singular want of that instinct for which a good guide is generally remarkable, and which all tolerable guides ought to possess. The main conclusion is, therefore, that we have one more strong argument against the rigid system which prevails at Chamouni; and that if the rota principle is maintained, there should at least be a line drawn between the guides who are qualified for high ascents, and those who are only fit to carry a lady's parasol to the Montanvert.

L. S.