

EXPEDITIONS FROM THE SAAS THAL. By FREDERICK GARDINER.

THE proximity of Saas to the deservedly renowned mountaineering centre of Zermatt (which absorbs so large a proportion both of the climber's energy and time) should have called attention in a greater degree to the expeditions to be made from the former village. The earlier explorers of the high Alps having made many expeditions in this neighbourhood, they have been but rarely repeated, yet the views obtained from any of the three principal peaks east of the Saas Thal are almost unrivalled; and for those to whom difficulties combined with a spice of danger are an irresistible attraction, perhaps the passes of this group between Saas and Simplon form as 'happy a hunting-ground' as their hearts could desire. The pass of the Monte Moro to Italy, the Weissthör to the Riffel and Zermatt, and the Alphubeljoch to Taesch and Zermatt, are the most frequented expeditions, the Adler Pass being sometimes crossed, but not so frequently as the others, while the Ried Pass, Mischabeljoch, Domjoch, and other expeditions have been but rarely undertaken, though well worthy of attention. On July 4 the Simplon diligence deposited my friend Cox, my guide Peter Knubel, and myself, at the door of the hospice, and from that we made our way on foot to the village of Simplon, our object being to make the ascent of the Rossbodenhorn from that place and descend to Saas. We had been mountaineering during the greater part of June in the Diablerets districts and the Oberland, and our second guide, Peter Egger of Grindelwald, had left us to join the Hon. Miss Plunkets, so our first care upon arrival was to inquire after some one to take his place. Of the two men mentioned in Mr. Ball's Alpine Guide (page 371), viz., Zum Kreml and Jordan, one has been 'gathered to his fathers,' and the other, being a 'man of substance,' no longer goes as guide, and the only person in the village acting in that capacity is one Joseph Dorsez, a garrulous individual (much of the stamp of the famous Pic of Dauphiné) who did not scruple to demand a considerable sum for his services. As there was an unusual quantity of snow for the season of the year, we determined to make an early start so as to avoid as much as possible any risk from avalanches. Accordingly, we left Simplon shortly before midnight. Starting by lantern-light is always an objectionable proceeding, and the illumination afforded by the single candle contained in a dingy lantern is most frequently absorbed by the person imme-

diately behind the bearer, and those in the rear stumble along over the roots of trees, uncompromising boulders, and unsuspected pitfalls, occasionally finding vent for their feelings by the use of unparliamentary language. By leaving Simplon at midnight, we had the prospect of four hours' darkness before us, the first of which was spent in passing through a pine forest by 'devious ways.' The weather was fair, but some evil-looking clouds were floating across the sky; luckily for us, the day turned out moderately fine, though somewhat cloudy. This was, however, the commencement of fine weather, which lasted almost unbroken until August 20, the longest spell it has ever been my good fortune to spend amongst the mountains. Once the forest passed, patches of snow were soon reached, which, having been considerably thawed during the day, had only partially frozen to about the consistency of a pie-crust, and I had the satisfaction of seeing my companions skim it without leaving an impression, while in my case, alas! my ponderous weight sent me through with a jerk at each step, filling me with 'hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness;' luckily for me, as we got higher up it was harder frozen. The path, or rather the track, by which we had come as far as the Wengern Alp ceased there, and we had to pick our way as best we might, along the upper slopes of the Laquin Thal, until the Hohsaas was reached, where we extinguished our light and awaited daybreak. When we started, our intention had been first to have crossed the Fletschjoch, and then ascend the Rossbodenhorn from the snow plateau between that peak and the Laquinhorn, but when we got a view of the pass the route was so overhung with evil-looking snow cornices, portions of which were rattling down upon the glacier below, even at that early hour, that it was evident considerable risk would be incurred by attempting it. To our right the S.E. arête of the Rossbodenhorn offered a possible means of effecting our object; it was obviously difficult, but there was no risk from avalanches. We determined to attempt the ascent by this arête, and found the rocks loose and in many places covered with a thin coating of ice, and in some parts almost perpendicular. Great care was required, and our progress was painfully slow, for Dorsez was not merely incapable as guide in difficult places, but required considerable assistance, and aggravated his incapacity by keeping up a continual whine, to which Peter Knubel, upon whom was thrown the whole 'burden and heat of the day,' occasionally retorted with a short sharp laugh expressive of extreme scorn. We more than once feared that the difficulties of the rocks would cause us to accede to the oft-repeated re-

quest of the dolorous Dorsez, viz., that we should turn back. At midday we reached the top of the rocks, having taken twelve hours from the village of Simplon, and in about fifteen minutes more reached the summit of the Rossbodenhorn by an easy snow arête. Both Cox and myself wish to express our high admiration for Knubel's rock-climbing powers and skill upon one of the most difficult expeditions any of the party has hitherto undertaken. Towards the Oberland the view was clear, but to the south and west it was shrouded in mist, so we had not much inducement to make a long stay upon the summit. In descending we did not meet with any special difficulties beyond those usually met with from crossing the snow late in the day, but we had to keep a sharp look-out for any avalanches that might be travelling in our direction. Dorsez was almost as timorous upon snow as we had found him on rocks, and I occasionally felt inclined to make him 'speed his pace' by urging him forwards in an undignified manner. I cannot discover any special name for the glacier by which we made our descent; it lies between the Jägi Hörner and the S.W. arête of the Laquinhorn, and must, I presume, be included in the name of Trift Glacier, which is the name given to the glaciers *en masse* west of the Triftgrat at the head of the Triftbach Thal. Probably later in the season this glacier is much crevassed, but we found but slight difficulty from that cause.

We reached the Trift Alp at 3.30 P.M.; it was still untenanted, at which we were scarcely surprised, for the pasturage in the vicinity had only quite recently emerged from the snow, large patches of which were still visible at no great distance. While there, the curtain of mist which had hung over the mountains to the west cleared away, and the Mischabel Hörner, flanked by the lovely Fee Glacier, came in view, displaying a majesty of appearance little thought of by those who have only viewed them from the other side, or whose impressions have only been formed from a wearisome trudge up that most fatiguing of mountains—the Dom. Passing by the châteaux of Brunen we reached the village of Saas at 4 P.M. The hotel had but recently been opened, and we had been preceded but by few visitors, and were received with effusion by the voluble host.

Before concluding my description of the Rossbodenhorn, I may mention that it is the lowest of the three principal summits of the group east of the Saas Thal, but the difference between them in point of altitude is not very great. They rank thus: Weissmeiss, 13,225 ft.; Laquinhorn, 13,173 ft.;

and Rossbodenhorn, 13,084 ft. With regard to the nomenclature of the two latter, considerable confusion exists, the name Fletschhorn being appropriated by both. At Simplon they are known as Laquinhorn and Fletschhorn, while at Saas, Fletschhorn is the name given to the former, and Rossbadenhorn to the latter; the Swiss Alpine Club map inclines to the Simplon view, while the Alpine Club map and Swiss Federal map give the name of Fletschhorn to the higher peak and beyond giving the height of the lower ignore it altogether. Unfortunately my friend Cox had to return at once to England, so that when I started the following morning for the Weissmeiss, I was alone with Knubel and Dorsez. The route I had chosen was by the Almagel Thal, Weiss Thal, and Zwischbergen Pass. We left Saas at 12.25, and proceeded up the Saas Thal as far as the village of Almagel, and then took the path leading to the Almageler Alp, where the Almageler Bach falls into the Saas Thal in a fine cascade. When we reached the Alp we found it still surrounded by snow, and of course untenanted; and passing through the Weiss Thal reached the Zwischbergen Pass without any difficulty, and then I had the satisfaction of dispensing with the further services of my Simplon guide. A somewhat steep but perfectly easy snow-slope culminating with a short rock arête, led to the top, which Knubel and myself reached at 8.25 A.M. A more perfectly clear and extensive view I have rarely beheld, and looking at our route of the previous day, it seemed almost perpendicular, and had we first beheld it from the summit of the Weissmeiss, I doubt whether we should have attempted it. There are few tasks more difficult than to give expression to one's impressions, either in speech or writing, of a perfect view from a high peak, even when fortified with ample notes. As a man may be a good parish priest and but a sorry preacher, so a mountaineer may rank high as an athlete, and most thoroughly appreciate the marvels of nature by which he is surrounded, without being able to convey to others any very vivid impression of what he has either seen or felt; and as the production of an essay is a performance of which he is far less capable than that of cutting up an ice-slope or crossing a perilous arête, his efforts should be viewed with far more leniency than they are by certain trenchant critics. We descended rapidly to the Zwischbergen Pass by a long-continued glissade. Having first hurled down a huge piece of rock, we followed in its track, and after trudging knee-deep in the soft snow of the Weiss Thal we reached the Almageler Alp at midday, and the village of Saas at 1.30 P.M. While looking across the Triftgrat at the

Laquinhorn from the summit of the Weissmeiss, I questioned Knubel about attempting that peak the following day, to which he replied, 'Il faut profiter du beau temps,' and it was indeed weather worth profiting by. We started at 12.15 A.M., July 7. No lantern was, I am thankful to say, necessary; the moon was at its full, and everything clear as day. Retracing our steps as far as the Trift Alp, we kept to the right bank of the main stream until we reached the huge moraine at the foot of the Trift Glacier, crossing which we reached the S.E. arête of the Laquinhorn, by which route this peak is usually climbed. The rocks were somewhat loose, and occasionally glazed with ice, but we met with no serious difficulty until we were within about 500 feet from the summit, where a slope of blue ice and hard-frozen snow confronted us, which it took some time to overcome. The day was as marvellously clear as its predecessor had been, but the N.E. wind, which had brought the fine weather, punished us severely both in feet and hands. The summit we reached at 7.30 A.M., and we enjoyed another perfect view, somewhat marred by the extreme cold. It seemed indeed hard that Cox, who has shared so many of my Alpine pleasures, should, after having endured a week of bad weather on the Wengern Alp, be obliged to return to England just when the fine weather set in. We returned to Saas at 11.30 A.M., and during the afternoon reached the Mattmark Inn, which had but recently been opened, and was in a condition which it would have been flattery to call damp, and on the following day I arrived at the Riffelhaus at 9.30 A.M., *viâ* the Schwartzberg Glacier and Weissthör. Until July 24, the weather remained splendidly fine, and I accomplished many successful expeditions round Zermatt. The 25th was a continuously wet day, and snow fell almost as far as Zermatt, but the following day was gloriously fine, and the peaks visible from the village looked very beautiful in their mantle of fresh snow. As it would have been unwise to attempt any of the high peaks until it had somewhat disappeared, almost the entire mountaineering contingent at Zermatt joined me in an expedition to Saas by the Mischabeljoch, accompanied by a numerous body of guides. Our party consisted of Dr. Porges, the Rev. F. Wethered, Messrs. Coolidge, Cust, Courtenay, and myself; we slept that night at the upper Taesch Alp in the Mellichen Thal, where, the accommodation being limited in the cowherd's hut, we stowed ourselves away as best we might in pigsties and other convenient resting-places. Leaving the chalets at 2.50 A.M. July 27, we reached the pass without meeting difficulties of any sort at 6.37 A.M., and from that four

of the party made the ascent of the Alphubelhorn, from which they enjoyed a splendid view. From the pass Cust took an excellent sketch of the Fletschhorn group. We met with no difficulty in the descent except from soft snow, and reached the village of Fée shortly after midday. It is an astonishing thing to find no inn at Fée, which is very charmingly situated, and much more beautiful than Saas, but possibly the want of encouragement met with by the innkeeper at the latter place may account for the absence of enterprise. The next day our party divided, Dr. Porges returning to Zermatt by road, Courtenay ascending the Weissmies, Coolidge returning to Zermatt over the Allaleinhorn, while Wethered, Cust, and I took the Ried Pass to St. Niklaus. This pass has been but rarely crossed; and although it does not involve any very special difficulty, is decidedly interesting, and some of the seracs of the Ried Glacier are very beautiful; the view from the pass itself, however, has no special feature to recommend it. The neighbourhood of the Ried Glacier, Knubel told us, is one of the best for chamois-hunting in the commune of St. Niklaus; we saw no chamois, but near the top of the pass viewed their traces in the snow. The Ried Pass was the last expedition I made in the neighbourhood of Saas. Of course the fact of having had fine weather for each expedition I made to and from the Saas Thal may incline me to take a *couleur de rose* view of its attractions, but I think that any mountaineer who has not hitherto visited this valley, if he is favoured with ordinarily fine weather, will scarcely regret any time he may have devoted either to peaks and passes between Simplon and Saas, or those between Zermatt and Saas.

ALPINE AND ARCTIC TRAVEL. By C. C. TUCKER.

THERE is, perhaps, no section of the British public, outside the immediate and very limited circle of Arctic explorers, so well qualified to understand the reports and to criticise the proceedings of the late Arctic Expedition as the members of our Club. The acquaintance which Englishmen in general have with the most ordinary features of ice and snow travel is small indeed; and the comparative helplessness of English farmers and labourers (the remark does not probably hold good with respect to the population north of the Tweed) when they have to deal with a snowfall above one foot in depth, sometimes surprises the travelled persons who do not reflect how rare a phenomenon such a snowfall really is in England.