route afterwards followed by Mr. Mummery in his successful ascent, a point about half-way between the depression separating the two divisions of the ridge, and the point 2 of Mr. Williams' sketch; and subsequently in 1880 Messrs. F. C. Hartley, J. Eccles, and W. E. Davidson reached a still higher point on the north-western ridge, probably some 30 or 40 feet lower than the peak ascended by Mr. Mummery on August 3, 1881.

NOTES ON OLD TRACKS. BY DOUGLAS W. FRESHFIELD.

IV. *The Mountains of Dante.*

A RECENT reference to Dante in one of Mr. Ruskin's articles on 'Fiction,' in the 'Nineteenth Century,'* has led me to look back to a well-known chapter in 'Modern Painters.'† I rise from its reperusal with a strong sense that Dante's feeling for Alpine scenery—in the broad and proper sense of the word Alpine—has been done injustice to. Without being tempted into one of those extravagances which employ and entertain bookworms; without endeavouring to prove—as some would endeavour to prove Shakespeare to have been an attorney's clerk or an apothecary's boy—that Dante was what his countrymen now call an 'alpinista,' it may be shown from his works that he knew and liked mountains better than Mr. Ruskin was at one time disposed to allow.‡ We find that when Dante wanted a beautiful background for stately figures, a place of sojourn worthy of poets or princes, he chose, not with the *bourgeois* Boccaccio the likeness of a Florentine garden, or a Val d'Arno olive-yard, but high ground, a mountain valley or meadow; that his references to mountains are by no means of a depreciatory nature; and, further, that, while few poets have talked of climbing so much as Dante has, none has shown so thorough a practical knowledge of the right way to set about it.

The broad assertion that Dante 'never alludes to the Alps except in bad weather or snow,' may be contradicted without going beyond Mr. Ruskin's own quotations, put before us to prove the contrary. The point of the comparison between the fogs of Purgatory and an Alpine mist, is surely not only the ugliness of the mists, but also the glorious effect of the sun bursting through them about sunset, when the plains below are already dead, and the light falls only on the mountain sides.§

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* Vol. viii. p. 407.

† Vol. iii. ch. xiv. and xv.

‡ No adequate materials exist for fixing exactly the time and place of Dante's travels or sojourns in mountain districts. It is probable that he must have crossed the Alps in going or returning from Paris; he is said to have visited Germany; tradition and the commentators take him to the Castle of Parstico, near Brescia, Val Lagarina in the Trentino, where he is said to have written part of the *Commedia*, Udine, and Tolmino in Friuli. In the Apennines he spent some time in a castle among the hills of the Lunigiana behind Spezzia, a visit of which many traces may be found in the *Commedia*, and he also resided near Gubbio, in the heart of the Peninsula.

§ *Purg.* c. xvii. l. 1. 'From the Alps,' says Cary, quoting Landino, 'all high mountains are in the Tuscan language called Alps.' 'Alpe' and 'Alpone,' on the contrary, as anyone in the habit of consulting ordnance maps is aware, are common country names for the upper portions of the Tuscan Apennines,

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The next quotation should have been made in the original. Compare

> Al fin d'un ombra smorta
> Qual sotto foglie verdi e rami negri
> Sovra suoi freddi rivi l'Alpe porta *

with

> Arriving at the verge
> Of a dim umbrage hoar, such as is seen,
> Beneath green leaves and gloomy branches, oft
> To overbrow a bleak and alpine cliff.

In this (Cary's) translation, adopted by Mr. Ruskin, *hoar*, *gloomy*, *bleak*, and *cliff* are all unwarranted additions of the translator. 'Dim' is a misprint for 'dun,' Cary's word. The 'rami negri' of the original is probably a piece of local colour (an ingenious commentator might make it refer to the pines as opposed to the broad-leaved forest). It is only necessary to glance at the context to see that bleakness and gloom are equally and utterly incongruous on the 'sommo smalto' of Purgatory.†

Again, Mr. Ruskin remarks that Adam of Brescia remembers the hills of Romena 'only for the sake of their sweet waters.' The passage runs, in the original—

> Li ruscelletti, che di verdi colli
> Del Casentin discendon giuso in Arno,
> Facendo i lor canali ‡ e freddi e molli,
> Sempre mi stanno innanzi.§

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for the rounded hilltops where the flocks and herds find pasturage. In this sense Alp is used by Lorenzo de' Medici (see his poem *Ambra*). 'Alp,' it should be remembered, is a word applied to the common summer pastures of mountain people, not, except by tourists and men of letters, to snowy peaks. Its etymology is disputed (see Ste. Palaye, *Dict. Hist. de l'Ancien Langage François*, Du Cange, and Grimm), but the connection with *albus*, white, i.e. snowy, must be given up. Of course I do not deny that primitive man when his ideas first began to outrun his power of utterance may possibly have given out the same sound to express both height and light. There is at any rate a poetical appropriateness about the fancy, and we may impute almost anything we like to such remote ancestors. But the namers of the Alps were a race much nearer to ourselves.

* *Purg.* c. xxxiii l. 107.

† I assume that the 'sommo smalto' of *Purg.* viii. 114, can only apply to the 'gran variazion dei freschi Mai' of the summit meadows of the Mountain of Purgatory. Mr. Ruskin, however, has either overlooked the passage or gives it a different sense, since he has devoted a page (*Modern Painters*, vol. iii. p. 228) to showing that Dante uses the word 'smalto' of the green enamel of the Poets' Meadow in another place, 'in order to emphasize the hard smooth lifelessness of the green crust covering the dark ground.' He adds that in Purgatory the word is not 'enamel' but 'herb,' which is true of another passage. Perhaps in Hell Dante thought of the substance, in Purgatory of the colours, of enamel. But even in Hell the Poets walk on a 'prato di fresca verdura.'

‡ Translators, unaware that in many mountain districts *canale* is a common term for a valley, perhaps miss the full force of the word where it means more than *channel* Anyone who will take the trouble to turn over ordnance maps may verify my statement, and prove to himself that Mr. Ball's ingenious hypothesis, that the Venetians transferred the name from the water-streets of their own city to the valleys of the Alps, will not meet the facts.

§ *Inf.* xxx. 65.

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Surely the verdure of the hills, some of the highest Apennines, as Dante has noted elsewhere,* and their cool soft glens, form an essential part of the picture.

Once more, is it quite fair to say that Dante shows no signs of having noticed 'the whole purple range of the mountains of Carrara,' from the stairs of San Miniato?† Since we are dealing in minute criticism, I may point out that the keenest observer cannot see 'the whole range of Carrara' from that famous standpoint, and for the same reason that the Spanish fleet remained invisible. The northern summits round Carrara are out of sight, hidden by intervening Apennines. The prominent summit from Florence is the Pania della Croce, Dante's own Pietra Pana,‡ which, when he wanted the image of a bulky hill, he chose, as evidently for its familiarity to Tuscan eyes, as the remote Tabernicch for the rhyme.§

But I confess that I attach but slender importance, one way or the other, to such notices or omissions. How many generations did it take to discover Monte Rosa from Milan, Mont Blanc from Geneva? Until distant mountains get proper names and human associations they are seen, perhaps even admired;‖ but seen and admired only with the clouds they so closely resemble, and so often mingle with, as parts of the sunset. Of all the Alps the Viso alone, 'Vesulus the cold,' impressed itself on Virgil and Chaucer.

The passages quoted in 'Modern Painters' are of course far from being the only references to mountains in the 'Divina Commedia.' In

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* *Purg.* xiv. 31.

† The statement made by Mr. Ruskin in connection with this, that Dante was 'equally regardless of the clouds in which the sun sank behind them' (the Carrara mountains), p. 249, seems to me quite as questionable. How is the assertion that Dante's 'only pleasure in the sky depends on its "white clearness"' reconcileable with *Paradiso*, xxvii. 27, the 'vapori trionfanti' of l. 71, or the gleam of sunlight through clouds, xxiii. 79?

‡ Pana and Pania, I should add, are both local expressions for a mountain, and the summits of the group are called collectively Le Panie. Cf. the Spanish Pena, our own Pens and Bens, and many other variations of the same root.

§ *Inf.* xxxii. 28. I accept provisionally—because I suppose they have some grounds for it—the commentators' identification of Tabernicch as a mountain in Hungary, though I can find no support for their assertion in geographical works. Mr. J. A. Carlyle somewhat cautiously says that Tabernicch is the name of a district containing a mountain, and a village called Tovarnich is found near the Lower Save in atlases. The only *Tabernus* known to Boccaccio (*De Montibus et Sylvis*, &c.) is Virgil's Taburnus in Southern Italy. Massa was anciently Ad Taburnas Frigidas; the mountain behind, now Monte Tambura, may have been Mons Tabernicus. There is also an Avernich Kofel above the Predil Pass, near Tarvis, on the ancient amber route from the Baltic. Signor Giuliani, of Florence, whom I have consulted, refers to a mountain near Adelsberg, known in the Middle Ages as Tavorney. But, he justly adds, no identification of the least certainty has yet been produced.

‖ Thus Claudian, *Fescennina in Nuptias Honorii et Mariæ*—

> 'Veneti favete montes,
> Subitisque se rosetis
> Vestiat Alpinus apex,
> Et rubeant pruinæ.'

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the first canto the poet is discovered attempting the ascent of a mountain—a 'bel monte' it is presently called. Virgil's first question to him is—

> Perchè non sali il dilettoso monte,
> Ch' è principio e cagion di tutta gioia? *

Dante speaks of the Cretan Ida as 'lieta d' acque e di fronde' and of the mountains of the Giudicaria as abounding in water. † He seems often to have thought of mountains in this way, with a lively sense of the beauty of their streams and forests.

I hope further to show that Dante had a keen eye for the picturesque incidents of mountain travel, and some appreciation of its pleasures as well as of its difficulties and hardships.

The following passages could hardly, I think, have been written by a confirmed hill-hater, such as Mr. Ruskin pictures to us.

The first ('Purg.' xxvii.) is too long for quotation entire. Dante and his escort are benighted, and lie down on ledges of the mountain, the nature of which takes away 'La possa del salir più che il *diletto*.' Here they take their rest among the rocks, quiet as goats who, having eaten their fill, lie watched by the shepherd. From their grot

> Poco potea parer li del di fuori,
> Ma per quel poco vedev' io le stelle
> Di lor solere e più chiare e maggiori.

All true mountaineers will recognise the truth of the last touch—and of these, 'Then we both sat down, turning towards the east, whence we had climbed, since to look back pleases everyone.' ‡

Again—

> Com' uom che torna alla smarrita strada
> Che infino ad essa li par ire invano. §

Of how many Italian Alps is this a true outline?—

> Questa montagna è tale,
> Che sempre il cominciar di sotto è grave,
> E quant' uom più va sù e men fa male. ‖

I have quoted in a previous number (p. 72) one of Dante's numerous descriptions of mountain meadows. One cannot but be reminded by these pictures of great flower-fields, of hidden valleys raised on high mountain sides, or tops, and approached by steep cornice paths, of the country behind Verona and Bassano, of climbs to the Sette Communi, or out of the Adige valley to the uplands of Molveno. This region surely—not the Apennines—is the source of the scenery of Purgatory. Dante's rock landscapes seem to me to come from the same part of the Alps. His crags are limestone with dolomitic characteristics. They must be climbed by long slopes of broken, unstable boulders, or by

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* It must be noted here that Mr. Ruskin, who is a versatile, as well as a subtle and most plausible advocate, and does not mind holding a brief occasionally against his former self, has elsewhere, when they did not stand in the way of his argument, given to these passages their natural import. See *Modern Painters*, vol. iii. p. 217.

† *Inf.* xiii. 97; xx. 64.

‡ *Purg.* iv. 52. § *Ibid.* i. 119. ‖ *Ibid.* iv. 88.

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chimneys which constantly bend and shift. When not grey, their general tone, they have a 'color ferrigno.' 'What Dante first fixes on is their frangibility;' they are treacherous, and the climber must test before he trusts each handhold.

There is something not a little ridiculous in seriously discussing Dante's climbing powers at all, much more in deducing them from the action of the Dante of the poem! We do not generally deny Bunyan a fair share of pluck because his Pilgrim 'suddenly made a stand when he beheld the hill, and how it hung over the way.' It is Mr. Ruskin, however, who has posed the question by declaring that 'by many expressions throughout the poem Dante shows himself to have been a notably bad climber.' Any Alpine Club jury would, I am confident, reverse this verdict on the strength of the following passage alone:—

'When we had reached the broken ridge, the guide turned to me with that pleasant look which I had noticed before at the foot of the mountain, and after having first by a thorough inspection of the broken crag settled on some plan in his own mind, he stretched out his arms and took hold of me. Then, with the air of a man who, while intent on the work in hand, keeps an eye to the future, seeming always to be looking forward, so lifting me up on to the top of one big boulder, he looked out for another jag, saying "Get well hold of that one next, but first make sure it will bear you."' Presently Dante gets out of breath, but though the ground is 'craggy, narrow, and difficult, and a good deal steeper than what had gone before,' he 'goes along talking, so as not to appear nervous.' *

Again, when Dante wants to give an idea of the steepness of the Mountain of Purgatory, he does not imagine an impossible angle, or, like modern writers, talk loosely of the 'perpendicular,' but quietly says that the slope was rather more than 45°, a fact impressive to climbers, who know that this is about the steepest that can conveniently be climbed, but to them alone.†

I feel no authority to say positively (as Professor Friedländer does ‡) that Dante loved to climb mountains. But surely these passages—and more of the same character may be easily found §—which read like a modern description of an Almer or Devouassoud at work, show at least that when there was any need he knew how to climb. I hold to Mr. Stephen's theory that by their books we personally know men, and it is to me impossible to believe that any of Dante's writing came from a man who was never so happy as when 'sitting in the sun' or 'walking in a dignified manner on flat pavement in a long robe,' as Mr. Ruskin puts it.

The conclusion fairly to be drawn from Dante's writings is that the poet was, not somewhat behind, but considerably in advance, of his age in his feeling for nature; that in so far as mountains were well-watered and wooded, or spread out into broad flower-meadows, he loved

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* *Inf.* c. xxiv. † *Purg.* iv. 41.

‡ *Ueber die Entstehung und Entwicklung des Gefühls für das Romantische in der Natur.* Leipzig, 1873.

§ If more are wanted, consult *Purgatorio*, cantos iii. iv. and x.

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them; and that he was, like Lionardo da Vinci (in his sketches), keen to note the characteristic features of their sterner landscapes, even where he no longer cared to dwell on them. The modern mountaineer will not readily give up his claim to a special bond of sympathy between himself and the poet who had such a taste and talent for exact topographical description, such a love of space, sunrises, and clear wide skies; who, whether by the aid of experience or intuition, has described so well and closely the incidents of mountain travel as we know it, of rock-climbing as we practise it.

NEW EXPEDITIONS—(*continued*).

Mont Blanc District.

Dôme de Rochefort (3,997 mètres = 13,114 feet). *August* 12.—Mr. J. Eccles, with Michel and Alphonse Payot, after bivouacking near the Capucin rock on the Glacier de Leschaux, started about 4.30 A.M., and in 1 hr. 15 min. reached the bergschrund, which runs from the Mont Mallet along the base of this chain. In 1873 it was impracticable, but in 1881 was much smaller, and was easily crossed. After it, a moderately steep ice-slope led in about half an hour to the base of the rocks, whence an easy climb led at 7.30 A.M. to the summit, of which this was the first ascent.

Monte Rosa District.

Rossbodenhorn (3,917 mètres = 12,794 feet). *July* 11.—The same party made what is believed to be a new route up the peak. Starting from the Rossboden châlets at 3.15 A.M., they kept along the same side of the glacier for ¾ hr., then crossed it to the base of a spur which falls from the ridge separating the Bodmer and Rossboden Glaciers. Mounting along the left side of this spur for about 1 hr. 30 min., they then took to its crest (crossing for a short time to the right-hand side), and thus reached the summit at 10.25 A.M. The line of ascent is well seen from the road between Simpeln and the Hospice.

Tête du Lion from the North. *August* 7.—Mr. J. H. Wicks, with Ambrose Supersax and Theodor Andermatten, starting from the Stockje hut, crossed the Tiefenmatten glacier to the foot of the great couloir leading up to the Col du Lion (2 hrs.), and having cut up an ice wall exposed to falling stones, took to the rocks on the (proper) left of the couloir (*i.e.* the Dent d'Hérens side), and mounted direct to the summit, the final ridge being struck about 100 yards west of the actual peak. The descent was made to the Col du Lion in ¾ hr. From the foot of the couloir to the top of the peak the party employed 7½ hrs. They consider the expedition dangerous and difficult, owing to the insecure nature of the rocks and to the falling stones, though the latter are for the most part confined to the couloir itself.

We may note here that the *Verstanklahorn* (3,302 mètres=10,834 feet) in the Silvretta district, which enjoys a very high reputation for

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