

lucubrations we hurried on to Couttet's, and ordered the somewhat homœopathic remedy of a bath to be prepared.

That the Aiguille du Midi can be ascended by the rocks on this Chamonix face by anyone consumed with an ambition to do so is, I think, beyond doubt. So far as I can find, there is no record of any ascent by this line.* We were not, I suppose, more than twenty minutes from the actual summit, and all serious difficulty was at an end when we stood on the summit of the ridge. I dare say it was a very fine expedition, but I am not at all sure that I should advise anyone now to follow our steps. Still, if any ardent mountaineer is desirous of completing what we began, I hope I shall not be misunderstood if I wish him as enjoyable a day as we had. Apart from the bad weather, I do not know that the expedition will be found flavoured with any particular spice of risk. I do not think there are likely to be any falling stones met with, which are almost considered *de rigueur* in any latter-day mountaineering expedition professing to be a novelty. In fact, I cannot but feel that I have occupied already too many pages with an exceedingly discursive description of a very trivial climb.

A VISIT TO MONTSERRAT. BY FREDERICK GARDINER.

THE weird-looking mountain mass of Montserrat, rising to a height of about 4,000 feet above the hill country of Catalonia, and broken up into the most extraordinary detached pyramids some 300 feet high, is well worthy of a visit from lovers of strange mountain forms.

This group, which is about 24 miles in circumference, is a great centre of tradition. On the east side, at the base of a huge rent in the mass (said to have been made at the moment of the Crucifixion), is the celebrated monastery of Montserrat, now partly in ruins. In the church there is an image of the Virgin, attributed to St. Luke the Apostle, and said to have been brought to Barcelona in the year 50 by St. Peter. The figure is black and carved in wood, and before it Ignacio Loyola watched in 1522, dedicating himself to her as her knight.

At one time the mountain was dotted over with hermitages, which have now mostly fallen into decay; the hermit who entered one was caged in, and never again left it alive. The monastery was much injured, and practically suppressed, in 1835; but some nineteen monks, who live in the strictest seclusion, still occupy the building.

At 2 o'clock in the afternoon of May 31 last, my wife and I, accom-

* We were assured by Jaun, who acted as guide on the occasion, that our route was entirely different from that taken by Mons. and Mme. Millot in ascending this peak in 1873 ('Alpine Journal,' vol. vi. p. 293).

panied by our courier, reached the station of Monistrol on the Zaragoza and Barcelona line, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the base of Montserrat; from which a good road (as roads go in Spain) leads to the monastery. It was intensely hot, and the whole mountain, which is of a dull red hue, shimmering in the heat, looked as if made of terra-cotta which had just been baked. A large diligence, like a city omnibus with the addition of a coupé, drawn by eight mules, was ready to start shortly after our arrival. We fortunately were able to secure the coupé to ourselves, for the rest of the diligence was crowded with holiday-makers from Barcelona, who ate, drank, smoked, and expectorated promiscuously, keeping up a continued singing nearly all the way. After a short delay we started, down-hill at first until we reached the foul-smelling village of Monistrol, about 2 miles distant from the station; beyond, the road mounts in zigzags on the face of the mountain, until the monastery is reached. The dust was fearful and the heat not inconsiderable, but the view we got at each turn of the road was interesting in the extreme, and unlike anything I had ever seen before. The whole country round was of a dull red colour, and was dotted with patches of yellow—the ripening corn-fields—and with the dull green of olives and vineyards. The driver of the diligence treated his mules with revolting cruelty, coming down upon the unfortunate beasts with a ‘thwack’ on any raw or tender part whenever we were on a steep place. After rising for about two hours we came to a short, level piece of road, and turning a corner sharply, arrived at the wall of the monastery. Passing through a large gateway we reached the courtyard in front of the church. After having signed our names in a book and produced our passports, we had rooms allotted to us for the night, very monastic in the simplicity of their appointments, and tenanted by a tribe of the most venomous fleas that it has ever been my fate to encounter. This, added to the heat, which even up there, with open window, was great, made sleep almost impossible. Fortunately the night was short, with a brilliant full moon, and nightingales singing all the time. There is a fairly good restaurant connected with the monastery, where visitors are fed at reasonable charges on three different scales of prices and on different flats of the building, the best being at the top.

We visited the church in the evening. It was quite dark, excepting round the altar, where the white-robed choir, kneeling round the rails, were making responses to the chanting of some unseen monk, the black figure of the Virgin in its brocaded dress, gilt crown, &c., surrounded by votive tapers, being the one bright spot in the gloom.

Next morning at daybreak we got up and started about 4 o'clock, my wife on a plucky little horse, our courier and myself on mules. It never seemed to suggest itself to them that we should go on foot; indeed, the heat was such as to make that almost impracticable. Passing the chapel, built where the figure was found, and the one where it refused to move and remained for 150 years, the path degenerates into a mere track where only the hoof of a Montserrat horse or mule could hold on, and passing close under the base of a huge obelisk of pudding-stone (or conglomerate) we entered one of the upper valleys of the group, with the monastery some hundred feet below and sur-

rounded by these pinnacles on every side. It was one of the most wonderful places I have ever seen; even Gustave Doré, in his wildest dreams, could scarcely exaggerate their fantastic forms. The path winds constantly upwards among this strange scenery till the highest hermitage is at length reached. We left the animals, and climbed the last 50 feet on foot to the highest point of the group. From the top there is a fine precipice on the north side, and a stone dropped clear would fall plumb for about 1,000 feet; but the picturesqueness of the mass is lessened, as one stands above most of the obeliaks. On the other hand, there is a glorious view of all the surrounding country; the sea and Barcelona were visible in the distance, and innumerable towns and villages scattered over the low hills and plains of Catalonia. Murray speaks of the view extending to the Pyrenees and the Balearic Islands, but that, I take it, must be early in the year, and not in the haze of a June morning; yet at all times of the year a visit to Montserrat must be full of interest, repaying one even for a night of the discomforts of the monastery. There are a number of stalactite grottoes in the mountain, but these we were unable to visit, as we had to hasten our return to Barcelona in order to catch the steamer for Palma, in the island of Majorca, where we saw the much more wonderful grottoes of Artá and Manacor.

NOTES ON OLD TRACKS. BY DOUGLAS W. FRESHFIELD.

V. The Gorges of the Roja and Spur of Turbia.

THE Col di Tenda is fully honoured among the great Alpine highways in Brockedon's classical 'Passes of the Alps.' That it is so little known to the present generation has been doubtless in part due to the nature of the only road between the pass and the sea. It crossed three dull and arid spurs in wearisome zigzags before reaching Nice. The diligences occupied twenty-three hours between that town and Cuneo.

Now, however, though the new road will not be completed for another twelve months, the route from Ventimiglia to La Giandola along the gorges of the Roja may be considered open, as the break is of only two miles, and a regular correspondence of public carriages has been established on both sides. The distance from Ventimiglia to Giandola is about seventeen miles. About five miles from the sea the valley of the Roja is contracted between steep rocks, and from this point to Tenda the basins of La Giandola and San Dalmazzo are the only openings in a continuous defile which by the grandeur and (what is rarer in ravines) the variety of its scenery well deserves a visit even from those who know all the gorges of the Central Alps.

The lower part of the valley shows in its vegetation the nearness of the Midland Sea. Oleanders grow in the torrent-bed, the hill-sides are swathed in olive groves. At long intervals a white Italian hamlet spreads itself out amidst verdure on some level spur or shelf above the defile. But the slopes are too often bare and arid, and it is only where great fountains burst out of the rocks and stream down to the Roja that bright green brakes and thickets refresh the eye. At some time,