Scrambles in the Eastern Graians.

VI.

By the EDITOR.

What's new to speak, what new to register?
Shakespeare, Sonnet 108.

SUCH is the question I expect most of my readers will be ready to ask. And what is the answer? The Tour St. Pierre by the west ridge, and the first ascent of the western peak of the Jumeaux de la Roccia Viva—or, to appease the precisian, I Gemelli della Roccia Viva. I hardly know with what face to appear once again as the narrator of new ascents in the Eastern Graians. But if the fact that

Love is love for evermore

be any excuse for an undying passion I may plead it as mine. Even the far greater glories of higher groups leave me still a worshipper of the Grand Paradis and his brethren. Not that I have not had passing passions for other mountains. 'Tis true that this year I sought a comparatively new love; but

If she be not fair for me,
What care I how fair she be?

We went to the Oberland—my friend P. E. Lord and myself, with François and Sylvain Pession, of Val Tournanche—but wind and sleet prevented us from completing the ascent of one of the hitherto unclimbed peaks of the Fusshörner after we had surmounted a magnificent chimney. Our rope was 100 feet, and was just long enough to enable Pession, after he had climbed the chimney in faultless style, to haul us up one by-one. Then came a strong wind, allied with eye-searching sleet, which nearly blew Pession off the ridge. The sleet changed to snow, the snow to rain, and we returned wet through to the Bel Alp.

The next day was sunless and sad. We could wait no more; we went to Zermatt. I had not till that evening a very clear idea of what the 'Vulgarisation of the Alps' meant. The truth was, as truth has a way of being, so unpleasant that we left Zermatt the next morning at three, and crossed the Théodule on a perfect day.

It was a very pleasant change from the noisy, crowded, brazen-band-tongued street of Zermatt to the pastoral simplicity of the Val Tournanche. Pession invited us to take a

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glass of wine with some of his near relatives—very good wine too, made, so we understood, at Châtillon, in the vineyard of one of his wealthier kinsfolk. We were glad to gratify him. It was a pleasure to both sides, and not, like greater meetings, unattended by the interchange of compliments—pleasant also.

From Val Tournanche, with Sylvain's mule harnessed to Sylvain's chariot, and with Sylvain himself for coachman, we raced downwards. On the way we learnt many things of the rural economy of the valley, and beheld the telegraph posts which François and Sylvain had hewn

> While on the steep
> The woods were in their winter sleep.

So we sped to Châtillon—at times, perhaps, a trifle nearer the edge of the road than the fastidious would desire. But then, of course, Sylvain knew to an inch the wobble of the wheel. There we had the pleasure of meeting Dr. F. W. Oliver, who was, like ourselves, on his way to Cogne. The crowd had vanished, and the true spirit of mountain companionship had taken its place.

So by the night train to Aosta. Thunder and lightning preluded our departure, and pouring rain attended our arrival. I was much grieved to find that my old friend M. Vernet, of the Hôtel du Mont-Blanc, was no more. On how many occasions had he welcomed me to that historic hostelry! Never shall I forget the day when the Courmayeur diligence arrived, crowded with passengers. 'Gentlemen, do not get down; I have not a room left,' was M. Vernet's prayer as the diligence drew up before his door. Dismay was general, and no one descended but I; touching my old friend and host on the shoulder I said simply, 'I have arrived.' 'Ah, M. Yeld, it is you? You shall have my own room.'

We found the Mont Blanc as excellent as ever. Though 'non omnia possumus omnes,' Carlo, the waiter, made a gallant effort to reach that ideal. The next day we were detained by weather, but on the morrow repeated the old programme—drove to Aymaville and walked to Cogne. We arrived in the early evening, and, looking back, saw Mont Blanc unclouded at the end of the valley.

Madame Gérard welcomed us with effusion, and was good enough to say that I always brought 'bonheur'—a statement which, as sixteen people sat down to dinner on more than one evening after our arrival seemed at any rate temporarily true. It was a greater satisfaction to see that almost every

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visitor—not the English only—was provided with the 'Climbers' Guide.' To Cogne, at any rate, knowledge comes, even if wisdom lingers.

On the afternoon of August 18, taking with us Joseph Jantet, of Epinel, as porter, we started for the chalets of Monei, which we reached in normal time. Hospitality we found as a matter of course. I thought the cows seemed fewer in number than usual, and learnt on inquiry that, owing to the dry summer, not only were there ten cows less than usual, but that the herdsmen intended to descend on August 26. I cannot with any face talk of the view, or, indeed, of anything else connected with these chalets, after so many visits to them.

But one fact I must not forget. Amos was not the only herdsman prophet, for when I talked to our host of the weather he said, 'Oh, it will be fine, but the wind will be strong.'

Though, good traveller, thou art not expected to 'hovel thee with swine,' yet this summer the mountaineer's bed was where goats had couched. Nor were we without a share in the troubles which the dry season had inflicted on the herdsmen, for the wild hay was very small in quantity, though its piercing qualities had not suffered in the least; indeed, what was wanting in bulk was made up in piquancy. I almost doubt whether one or two bits are not in my legs still. During the night there was the usual *émeute* amongst the cows, whereby sleep was slaughtered. But then the climber, of course,

Must make content with his fortunes fit.

At 1.48 the next morning, August 19, we were off, with a glorious moon to light us. After two hours' work up the moraine we halted to put on the rope; passed a little above the foot of the Cresta Paganini, where Pession did considerable step-cutting; and in 3 hrs. 55 min., without any hurry, reached the Col de Monei at 6.10.

As we breakfasted the wind was so sharp that Pession stamped up and down most of the time as he was eating his breakfast. The sun had little power, though we went up some feet out of our way to get the benefit of his rays. At 6.50 we started for the Tour St. Pierre by the W. ridge, and so closely did we stick to our work that the watch was never looked at till we were close under the summit. Pession's climbing as leader was perfect, and Sylvain was not inferior in his work as rearguard, the order being Pession, I, Lord,

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Sylvain. Jantet had descended to the Rifugio. How shall I characterise our work? There is—to the credit of mountaineers very rarely—the ascent taciturn, when, owing to circumstances of course beyond their control, such as rain or snow or wind, the climbers are in a state of active or passive bad temper. There is the progress jocund, when the way is not too difficult, the weather perfect, success certain, and a helpless porter furnishes the cause of wit in others. Then there is the climb hortative or interrogatory, according as 'Venez seulement,' 'Avancez seulement,' or 'Etes-vous bien placé?' 'Avez-vous encore de la corde?' may be said to be the watchwords.

To-day's work fell most naturally under the third heading. We scrambled over some towers and turned others; between them were patches of snow and ice, some of considerable size. At least two of these were so steep as to require care, and in one place Lord and I found ourselves astride on the beautifully curving ridge. Our enjoyment would have been perfect if the north wind had been less keen; but after all it did us one good turn, as it drove away all cloud curtains and gave us unforgetable views of the great peaks in the distance north and west. And, though 'la bella Italia' had discarded her Coan robe for a less diaphanous vesture, the Viso asserted himself majestically and fully justified Vergil's choice of him for immortality.

In one place between two towers there seemed to be a gulf that would take a fearful time, but there was luckily a sort of narrow isthmus between them, at first unseen. At last we arrived on the Pic de Retour, so pluckily reached by Dr. Baretti* and his companions in 1865. This I had always anticipated to be the crisis of the expedition. We did not actually—though very nearly—ascend to the top of the Pic, but turned it on the Monei side by a by no means easy bit of snow work. In the earlier days of mountaineering the passage would undoubtedly have been considered difficult, and failure to pass it no slur upon a climber. The Pic du Retour once behind us, I began to think success assured, but still we were a considerable time before we reached the top. In our anxiety not to get too much to the left (that is to say, to avoid Mr. Pendlebury's route) we kept too much to the right, and finally reached the summit from the S. rather than from the W. About three minutes from the top, as it turned out afterwards, we came to a very difficult rock face, and were treated to a splendid piece of climbing by Pession.

* *Climbers' Guide to the Mountains of Cogne*, pp. 71-2.

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Before we started from Cogne Pession had with much mystery exhibited to us certain wedges of wood which he proposed to take. It was something new in my experience, and I assented, little thinking that they would ever be of use. My good friend Pession, like most good men, has his harmless foibles, an affection for a certain air of mystery being one of them. Well, once again the unexpected accomplished itself. Two of the wedges were carefully inserted in crevices of the rock by Pession, and then taking off his sack, and assisted by Sylvain with shoulders, ice axe, and exhortation, in nine minutes he had by a strong effort disposed of the difficulty. We were then hauled up one at a time, making pretence to climb, and struggling with might and main. Personally I enjoyed it, though I did leave behind on the last rock a good deal of the skin of my knuckles.

We found the time on reaching the summit to be 12.6 P.M.—that is to say, we had taken 5 hrs. 16 min. from the col, with no halts worth speaking of. Say, 5 hrs. actual climbing. We had been too busy to think of taking times on the way up; in fact, as I said before, the watch was never looked at till we got to the difficult places three minutes from the top. The wind was keen, and did its best to molest our meal; but we protected ourselves as well as we could behind the cairn, and rather crowed over our success, though I much desired the genial warmth which Coolidge and I had been favoured with in our ascent of 1885.

At one o'clock we left, having decided to descend by the usual route, the north ridge. A very few minutes showed us that a serious task was before us. The wind was bitterly cold, and plenty of snow was plastered in the rocks. On a fine warm day this route is enjoyable. To-day—well, I liked it so little that I persuaded the guides [Sylvain was now leading, I next him, Lord next me, and François in the place of honour] to leave the ridge and try to our right. Here we were a little, though not much, better off. Sylvain went back to the ridge at the point where the snow or ice slope abuts on the rocks. He cut one step, and then a renewed debate resulted in his again climbing down to the right. I thought of what the couloirs on the Valeille side would be like this year, and resolved to fight against that route at any rate, but I did not like the prospect of cutting across to the ridge of the slope in the teeth of the wind. Pession afterwards owned that he had had serious fears that we should be benighted.

After a détour Sylvain returned to the snow about one-third of the way down the snow ridge. By this time the wind was

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much fiercer, and the chances of our getting to any sleeping quarters for the night were rapidly growing less. It did not seem safe to try any of the couloirs below us, and the quantities of stones below the usual route to the Valeille Glacier were a plain warning; so it was decided, on my earnest advocacy, to make a traverse to the usual snow ridge, and descend to the Monei Glacier by the rocks on the further side of the col between the St. Pierre and the Tour St. André.

It was bitterly cold, and the wind, now almost a gale, blew the dry snow about with a pitiless perseverance. Sylvain, who had to cut the steps, had a very unenviable task. His beard was soon full of ice, I, as I moved slowly, was nearly frozen, while Lord was little better off behind a big rock. Patois here was fast and furious as the wind itself, and what greater sign of difficulty can be looked for? The dry snow, which seemed at times to be illuminated, cut like hail, and filled our eyes and ears. At last Sylvain reached the snow-ridge, I joined him and was untied, and Lord and Pession hastened across. The descent to the col was child's play.

I now discovered one thumb to be partially frost-bitten, but hard beating and rubbing restored it. My companion had only saved his hands by continual beating. Once on the col we were in peace, for the gale was only local. We then went down the easy rocks W. of the Tour St. André to the Monei Glacier. At the foot of the rocks we came upon a big bergschrund, and much time was spent in finding a route across it; but of this we recked little, as here the wind ceased to torment us, while the sun warmed us comfortably. While Sylvain was at work I dozed off several times; the last time I was roused by the rattle of the huge icicles he was demolishing. A big stone or two came down, but only in a half-hearted sort of way.

Once across the bergschrund we made for the Col Monei, and rejoining our tracks of the morning, just before 8 o'clock reached the Rifugio after a day of 18 hrs., about 16 of which were devoted to work. At the Rifugio we had the pleasure of meeting SS. Vigna and his companions, who were carrying out a most successful campaign without guides.

This route by the rocks is distinctly the easiest in *descending* from the St. Pierre, and was again followed by Messrs. Oliver and Hiatt Baker with Alex. Burgener a few days later on their way over the mountain from Val Piantonetto to Cogne.

Let me here reply to an objection which I have heard made by some who have climbed the Tour St. Pierre: 'Yes, the St. Pierre is a fine mountain—what there is of him; we

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would there were more.' Well, let his detractors make the ascent by the W. ridge, and they will find that there *is* more of him.

Monday was a day of rest. The morning we devoted to the torrent, the afternoon to laziness. In the evening Jantet returned from Locana. He had been sent for wine and meat; he brought us vinegar and lard. But then he appreciated the vinegar; and as for the lard, 'twas all his fancy painted it, and even the strongest expressions of public opinion troubled him little.

On Tuesday, August 21, Pession, Sylvain, and I left the Rifugio at 4.45 A.M. to try the western and higher point of the Gemelli della Roccia Viva, which we had been forced by a thunder storm to leave unattempted, after ascending the eastern point in 1893. At starting the men wished to follow the Bocchetta di Monte Nero, but I, recollecting how steep it was, begged them to take the route round the Monte Nero himself, a bit of foresight on which I afterwards heartily congratulated myself. We found the Roccia Viva glacier much more troublesome than last year. It seemed to me to have shrunk considerably. If the mountains were abnormal in 1893, in 1894 they were still more abnormal; and when we got near the foot of Coolidge and Gardiner's couloir, on the E. of the Roccia Viva, it was a perfect object lesson in teaching the truth that no two mountains differ more than the same mountain in different seasons. The snow had shrunk much; instead of spotless white it was a dirty grey, and its centre apparently a stone shoot in full working order. That we might be under no mistake as to the state of things, a good round missile whizzed well out of it as we gazed.

Then we scrambled hastily for shelter, and went up a steepish ice-slope in unusually quick time. Once under a big rock, I believe the very one under which we sheltered from the thunderstorm of 1893, we halted to see how many stones were likely to fall, and seized the opportunity to take a meal. While we fed we saw S. Vigna and his party, without guides, arrive on the glacier by the Bocchetta di Monte Nero. They, like ourselves, soon found that the ice was by no means complaisant. We had before this seen a chamois, who at our shouts,

> Stretching forward free and far,

sought the wild heights of the Monte Nero.

Our meal finished, we started upwards, and, though I

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don't like being hurried, I here made no objection, but went as hard as I could. We crossed several places, more or less dangerous, at times at any rate, from falling stones, and then found ourselves on the steepest part of the mountain.

One hard place still comes back to me at intervals, for here Pession, having himself got up with a great effort and with all the help Sylvain could lend him, when I called out to him—he was then above me, waiting to help me up—'Est-ce que je puis me fier à la corde?' replied 'Un peu.' As he is an absolutely truthful man I made what effort I could to put as little trust in the rope as possible, but once certainly I hung by it and a bad handhold. I should explain that the ascent was not directly upwards, but slantwise.

After this bit, when we were standing togther, Sylvain remarked, 'Nous faisons tout ce qu'il y a de plus difficile.' Pession twice mounted on Sylvain's shoulder, and, to illustrate how absorbed he was in his work, I may relate that in one place, when I was standing close to him on a narrow ledge, and he was helping Sylvain up with the rope, he took a small handful out of my beard, which he had unawares included in his grip.

At 10.45 we were on the top, *i.e.* in six hours from the Refuge, of which probably something over an hour had been spent in halts. When we arrived I laid my hand on the topmost rock, then Sylvain climbed it to put a few stones together, and then I mounted it in haste by way of Sylvain's back. The view was marvellous, but, pile on adjectives as one will, a true description is still unattainable. To the plants which I found on the eastern peak I must add *Linaria alpina*, *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, *Hutchinsia alpina*, *Geum reptans*.

But we had little time for the view, as the men were anxious to be off. The wind was bone-searching, and the descent by our upward route distinctly not desirable. Thus we only spent fifteen minutes on the top. Before I moved Pession had let Sylvain down on the Roccia Viva side, and received back the satisfactory news, 'Nous sommes sauvés.' It was so, fortunately; but the descent was not easy. The rocks were snow-plastered, and the inclination somewhat steeper, I should say, than the north ridge of the St. Pierre. Hands suffered, but in twenty minutes we reached the top of the snow col between our twin and the Roccia Viva. Below the col in the warm sunshine

> Salubrious draughts the warrior's thirst allay,
> And pleasing conference beguiles the day.

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Ah! yes, the meat was potted bubblyjock, and the wine Moschato; but then success tempered alike the over-sweetness of the one and the over-spiciness of the other. The men talked, to my delight, of 'la bella Italia,' 'la bella vista.'

We left this spot at 12. To briefly describe our route I may say that we descended on the edge of the great couloir, very close to the rocks of the peak we had climbed; and we wasted no time, but went at full speed. In one place I was struck by a stone on the arm, but without any serious result, though we quickened our pace and, rejoining our morning's route above the big rock, scampered along the ice-steps and out on to the glacier at a run down a slope that on ordinary occasions I should have treated with comparative respect. On the way we crossed two bergschrunds. At a quarter to one we were well out on the glacier—*i.e.* in three-quarters of an hour from our lunch place. There were no difficulties worth mentioning, at any rate in the first part of the descent.

When we got near the Bocchetta di Monte Nero I carefully examined Compton's panorama, and can pronounce it absolutely correct. Every pinnacle of rock was in its place, every curve of sky-line snow accurately indicated. Pession had said on the summit, 'If we are on the glacier by 4 o'clock I shall be content.' And content we were long before 4 o'clock.

The weather was splendid. Indeed, Pession exclaimed, 'I have never seen so fine a day.' On the col we remarked on the changes in the glacier since 1892, and leaving at 1.15 reached the Rifugio at 2.5, keeping up something of the pace we had now grown accustomed to. As we made a halt of a few minutes to take off the rope—we had with us two long ones, one of 100 and another of 120 ft.—Pession delivered himself of the remark, 'There are who mock at having two ropes. They are dix mille fois bêtes.' Remembering what the rope had done for us this summer, I fully agreed with him.

The next day we went down the Piantonetto valley to Locana, and found the flowers as conspicuously plentiful and beautiful as ever. Near Locana we met S. Ratti, the editor of the 'Bollettino' of the C.A.I., with whom we had a very pleasant chat.

We returned to Cogne by way of Ronco, where the accommodation agreeably surprised us, and the Col de l'Arietta, halting at Brouillot to see the splendid sight of a sudden storm passing over the Grivola. Our last day was spent on the Pousset ridge and the Pointe du Pousset, where, with the

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famous view in all its perfection before us, we made our adieux to the great peaks.

I will conclude by saying that, though nothing is more to be deprecated than the arrival of the tourist multitude at Cogne, I was delighted to see there so many and so friendly mountaineers. Who knows of how many climbers history will in future summers have to relate—

> Though Zermatt's glories did his youth engage,
> He sought the Graians in his riper age?

THE FIRST ASCENT OF THE CENTRAL AIGUILLE D'ARVES.

By BENOÎT NICOLAS MAGNIN.

[This interesting ascent, though made in 1839, remained unknown to students of Alpine history till 1878. In that year the following narrative was read by the author at the Congress of the Learned Societies of Savoy, which was held on August 12–13 at St. Jean de Maurienne. Mr. Coolidge first heard of this ascent at Valloires on July 23, 1878, and on August 13 received from the author—then a notary at St. Michel de Maurienne—the original MS., which is still in his possession. It was printed in a limited number of copies for the Congress, and is here reprinted—the readings of the MS. being always preferred to those of the printed edition—as an important document relating to Alpine history. There are certain details in the narrative—*e.g.* the cities seen from the summit—which are due to the fancy of the spectators, but the fact of the ascent is established by a curious bit of evidence. In 1876 Signor L. Vaccarone discovered at the foot of the last rocks a Sardinian coin, which had escaped the notice of Mr. Coolidge in 1874, but (as stated below) had been left just in that spot, with another coin, by the 1839 party. Mr. Coolidge found a cairn on the summit, which he attributed to a legendary Savoie, a hunter, who no doubt really was one of the MM. Magnin. But since 1878 Mr. Coolidge has publicly and frequently maintained the reality of the ascent of 1839, his own climb in 1874 having been only the first by a traveller. For full details as to the whole story see 'Annuaire de la Société des Touristes du Dauphiné,' vol. xvi. 1890, pp. 119–122. The original MS. is adorned with a quaint pen and ink sketch of the three Aiguilles d'Arves, which we regret we cannot reproduce to illustrate the present reprint.]

Le 2 septembre 1839 était une de ces belles journées au ciel pur et sans nuages. Dès la veille nous [*sc.* les frères Pierre Alexis et Benoît Nicolas Magnin] avions fait nos préparatifs pour une excursion de chasse du côté des Aiguilles d'Arves. Partis vers une heure du matin, passant par la montagne du Vallon, nous arrivons aux premiers lueurs de l'aurore sur les hauteurs au-dessus des Carrelets. Nous y avons fait une halte pour observer le lever du soleil sur les plus hautes cimes. Bientôt nous avons vu des rayons illuminer les neiges éternelles du sommet du Mont-Blanc, et au même instant il colorait de ses rayons rouges la cime de l'Aiguille d'Arves du milieu, et peu d'instants après le sommet de deux pics du massif de montagnes des Hautes-Alpes au delà du Lautaret. De là nous avons traversé Combe Mianne, soit Combe Gelée, au milieu de laquelle serpente sur un pavé de pierres un

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