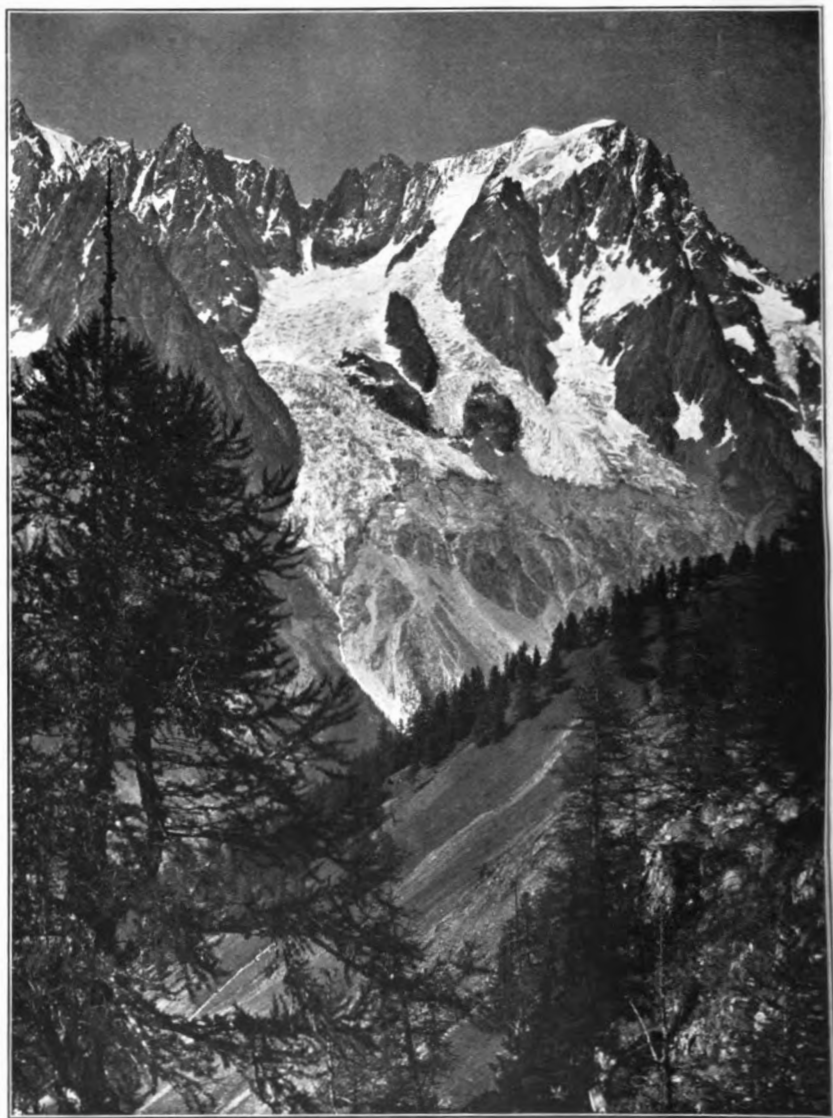




A. Holmes, photo.

Swan Electric Engraving Co.

LES GRANDES JORASSES, FROM LA SAXE.

(Col in centre of ridge.)

THREE LITTLE-USED PASSES IN THE MONT BLANC RANGE.

BY EDWARD A. BROOME.

THE *raisons d'être* for this short paper are, like the classic cols crossed last year, three in number. The first, the Col de Rochefort, I wish to strongly recommend to the numerous 'topmounters' passing backwards and forwards between Montenvers and Courmayeur. The second, the Col des Grandes Jorasses, I hope to clear from the evil imputations under which it has lain for a quarter of a century. The third, the Col du Mont Dolent, had such a reputation for difficulty, and has interested me so much for years past, that having, after several attempts, at last managed to get over it, I feel I must add a note about it.

The Col de Rochefort.—This is called in the 'Climber's Guide' a 'variation of the Col du Géant,' but it is a big and very interesting variation, being over a totally different glacier on the Italian side, and having two peaks (the Aiguilles Marbrées and the Mont de Jetoula) standing well up between the two routes. In crossing the Col de Rochefort there is all the interesting and typical ice-work of the Glacier du Géant, common to both passes; and then leaving on one side without regret the hôtel (!) newly built on the top of the Col du Géant, and the well marked path on the Italian side thereto, a pleasant substitute is found in good rocks and a steep glacier. This pass was first crossed by Mr. Eccles in 1877; and, though it must certainly have been traversed since, neither he nor we could hear of any further passage, till Mr. P. A. L. Pryor and I came over it twenty years later.

Starting from Montenvers, we left the usual Col du Géant track nearly an hour below the pass; we then bore to the left to the foot of the Aiguilles Marbrées, skirted them, and made for the lowest depression in the ridge, about half-way between them and the Aig. du Géant. The descent on the S. side was at first by very steep and broken rocks bearing off continuously to the right; and when the lower part of the rock wall was reached, we thought there seemed some little danger of ice falling from the cornice on the top of the col. This, however, could certainly be avoided, and a perfectly safe way off the rocks found. On reaching the Rochefort Glacier a traverse should be made across it (leftwards) to its E. side, the exact route, of course, depending on the state of the glacier, which we found much crevassed and interesting to work through. We struck the grass slopes on the left bank of the

final icefall, and, after a pleasant walk down the meadows, joined the Val Ferret cart road a few hundred yards E. of the Mont Fréty mule track. Four hours were taken from the summit to Courmayeur, but it could easily be done in three by any average party. I hope to recross this pass in the reverse direction another year.

Col des Grandes Jorasses.—The first crossing of this high pass by Mr. Middlemore (July 18, 1874), and his interesting paper on it, made quite a sensation, and led to a warm debate at the Club, and subsequent correspondence in the 'Journal,'* in which Messrs. Hinchliffe, Leslie Stephen, Dent, and others took part. The climb up the Italian side was voted too dangerous for anything, and its repetition more or less tabooed by the authorities; and, as a matter of fact, it never was recrossed, unless a report (which I have so far been unable to verify) as to one passage in the reverse—i.e. N. to S.—direction is correct. Years afterwards I read the paper and correspondence, and, having frequent opportunities of studying the pass from both sides, naturally took the greatest interest in the matter. I formed the idea that if we kept further to the right than our predecessors, and declined to be 'nearly forced into the gully,'† the rocks might perhaps be more difficult, but there would be less risk of having our heads broken.

Pryor and our guides being ready and willing to try, with the weather everything that weather ought to be, we toiled up to the Grandes Jorasses hut after luncheon on August 15, 1898. Leaving at 4 o'clock next morning, we reached the big schrund at the foot of the pass soon after 6. Here we began at once to ascend rapidly up the steep snow couloir, but kept well to the right of the avalanche track, and, after getting to the first rocks on the left bank of the gully, halted for breakfast at 8 o'clock.

From this point we had just two hours of truly magnificent climbing to the top, with little or no danger. The rock-ribs and chimneys selected were very steep, but also sound; and though once or twice we reached an impracticable bit, a traverse across a secondary couloir (and one of these was sensational and took half an hour) would always land us at the foot of another sound and feasible arête. The main thing was to mind the many missiles, and thus prevent possible punctures. At 10.45 we reached a lovely little snow basin, the south rim of which touched our topmost rocks, while

* Vol. vii. pp. 311-3 and 402-4.

† See *Alpine Journal*, vol. vii. p. 228.

the north rim formed the summit of the pass, probably a little E. of Mr. Middlemore's point. If the next party over should be geological in taste, and, while searching for specimens, should discover a somewhat unusual 'little bit off the top' in the shape of a favourite silver drinking cup left there, it is at their service.

Descending from the col, the first nearly vertical 250 ft. of blue ice (seen from the Montenvers Hôtel) took 1 hr. 35 min.; and the Mont Mallet Glacier being even more intricate than usual, we were quite satisfied to reach our quarters at 5 o'clock. I strongly recommend the climb, and should add that we were splendidly led throughout by J. M. Biener.

The accompanying picture, from a photograph by Mr. Alfred Holmes, shows all the southern side of the Grandes Jorasses Col,* also the route up the well-known, but often dangerous, peak.

Col du Mont Dolent.—There are two passages in print of this precipitous pass—the first by Mr. Whymper (from S. to N.) in 1865, and the other by Messrs. Hartley and Davidson (from N. to S.) in 1878. Mr. Whymper speaks of it as one of the stiffest things he ever did, and his account of the descent† has not encouraged others to cross from the Italian side. Some years ago I went with him to the head of the Argentiére Glacier, and had a good look at the col, while he photographed it. I believe it has been attempted on other occasions, and I know I tried (and failed) twice. The difficulty was getting up the huge smooth upper lip of the big schrund at the foot of the great couloir, which is usually black ice, generally overhanging, and only negotiable in one place. At any rate this is where we twice turned back, and I came to the conclusion that when the pass was impossible it was probably easy, and when practicable it would prove difficult—meaning by this that ice below would go with rocks in good condition higher up, while a climbable bergschrund would involve obliterated or glazed holds above.

Pryor and I slept at the Lognan chalet (now much improved, August 3, 1898); but next day it rained, hailed, and blew, with some fresh snow aloft, so we had to stop there, cool our heels, and get through the time in the best way we could. This bad weather, however, did us good by lessening the above-named initial difficulty, and on Friday, the 5th, with

* This Col was crossed from Montenvers to Italy by Mr. Evan Mackenzie on Sept. 8, 1894. *Rivista Mensile del C. A. I.* Jan. 1895.

† *Scrambles amongst the Alps*, p. 333.

J. M. Biener and A. Imboden, we started betimes, and got to the bergschrund in 3 hrs. from the chalet.

At the foot of the couloir the fresh snow was in capital order, and we got up the steep wall above the big schrund with very little difficulty. Once over this the slope must be quite 1,100 ft. high, and over 50° angle, while there is usually a choice of ice or rocks. In our case the difficulty now was to find out where the rocks ended and the ice began, for deep snow covered everything. We, however, drew no hard and fast line as to our route, but keeping always well to the left worked our way up wherever we could do so quickest, and, sometimes on ice, sometimes on rocks, but always in snow, got to the summit very wet and cold in 4½ hrs. from the foot.

Here we both were much struck by the extraordinary accuracy of Whymper's engraving of the 'Summit of the Col Dolent,'* as well as impressed by the narrowness of the corniced parapet and the steepness of the wall on both sides. A very short tunnel would be long enough to pierce the foot of this pass.

The descent of the Italian couloir to the Pré de Bar Glacier calls for few special remarks. The rocks are loose, and need care if any further services from the leading man are ever likely to be required! Also stones fall all the way down, and plough a great track in the broad snow slope at the bottom of the gully. We gave this track a wide berth till we reached its foot, but were then forced into it in order to cross the big crevasse at the only practicable place; and here one large stone whizzed by, much too close to be pleasant. Two and a half hours was the time taken from the pass to unroping on the lowest rocks of the Grépillon, whence it is no great distance down to the Petit Ferret path and the direct route to Courmayeur.

MOUNTAINEERING IN ARCTIC NORWAY.

By WILLIAM CECIL SLINGSBY.

(Read in part before the Alpine Club on March 7, 1899.)

Lyngen Fjord.

'WHERE there's a will there's a way,' is a proverb which stay-at-home and fireside philosophers are fond of quoting. Its truth, however, is more than doubtful. At any

* *Scrambles*, p. 334.