

THE LAC DE CHAMPEX.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE new edition of Ball's 'Western Alps' (p. 385) rightly describes the Lac de Champex as 'one of the most exquisite spots in the Alps.' Little visited though it be by English travellers, and less by English climbers, it appeals very strongly to all lovers of mountain scenery.

The lake itself is charming, and its setting all that could be wished. The great hills gently uplift their pine-clad slopes from its very shores, and the lordly Combin in his softer moods almost seems to pose in its watery mirror with as much pleasure as Beauty in her looking-glass.

An hour from Orsières brings the traveller to the ridge which forms the western boundary of the Swiss Val Ferret. He then descends gently to the lake, and forgets the dulness of the St. Bernard Road in the loveliness of the scene before him. Hard by the lake are a number of inns and pensions, the best known being the Hôtel du Lac and the Hôtel de la Poste. In 1898, Dr. Tempest Anderson and I spent some days here with much satisfaction. Perhaps the sylvan scenery appealed to us the more strongly because we had just left the Gemmi and its desolate though impressive surroundings. The Miltonic grandeur of the huge promontories of rock, like couching lions, which we saw through ever-moving waves of mist as we looked back at the Gemmi from Leukerbad haunted me all the way to Orsières. Nor was the memory of them dispelled till we reached Champex in the full sunshine of an August noon. We had not come with the intention of doing any hard climbing, for Sylvain Pession only was with us, François having been obliged to leave us to fulfil an engagement at Grindelwald.

On August 31 we had a pleasant walk up the Arpette glen. The first part of our way lay through the woods, from an opening in which—apparently the work of an avalanche—we had a fine view down the Champex Valley, and across the deep hollow of the Rhone to the Lake of Geneva. After the forest we came to the meadows, at the upper end of which the Arpette chalets are found. From this spot the many-headed, much-furrowed, forest-clothed Mont Catogne displayed himself to us. As we continued our way through heather and over broken ground, where the effect of rain



Dr. T. Anderson, photo.

Swan Electric Engraving Co

LE CLOCHER DU LAC DES CUGNOZ.

storms was very evident, the trees gradually grew smaller and further apart, till they ceased altogether.

When we reached a spot at the south foot of the Écandies Group we stopped to lunch and examine our surroundings. The ridge running leftwards, as we looked up the glen, from the Col des Écandies, rose in a savage many-towered wall, seamed with stone-raked gullies, two at least of which were crowned with snow cornices. We heard and saw the stones busily at work in these gullies. The Lac des Cugnoz was all but dry. The Glacier des Écandies seemed reduced to a little snow.

While we were at lunch a sharp rock-needle in the ridge of the Écandies which we had already noticed began to offer irresistible attractions. So Sylvain and I, leaving Anderson to photograph, as soon as lunch was over started for it. At first we passed to the right of the needle's main ridge, over a short steep grass slope which I liked not, neither did Sylvain. We then took to the ridge, and shortly came to a deep cut in it. The face between us and the cut was, roughly speaking, perpendicular. I was let down by Sylvain, who then fixed the rope over the top, and I paid it out for him to descend, though he hardly needed it. We then had a smart scramble up the ridge, and did not turn off it till just under the summit, when we passed to our right and found in front of us at right angles to the main ridge a little corridor with a big stone jammed in it. When we had squeezed through this we reached the top from the Col des Écandies side, after an interesting climb of a little over an hour, or, to be exact, 70 minutes. After a good look at the prospect, in which the Aiguille du Tour took a chief place, we descended to Anderson in 40 minutes. We followed the ridge to the big gap, and then went down the face on the Écandies glacier side. I think Anderson's illustration will fully justify my enthusiasm for this little peak, which we christened the Clocher du Lac des Cugnoz.

From the top we had seen our companion dispensing hospitality to two shepherd-boys who had been collecting thistles. They had each a large sack full. Thus they fatten the montivagous porker. On our return Anderson was entertaining four French ladies with bread and jam. Sylvain and I declined the seductive mixture, but, having found a bottle of wine, surreptitiously disposed of most of the contents, and when Anderson inquired whether the ladies would not like a little Fendant, we shameless ones declared that it would be much nicer mixed with water, and that we were afraid the supply had run somewhat short.

We then started all together for the glen below. The others enjoyed tea which the French party had prepared, while I wandered away to the right. One of the ladies had found a little bunch of white heather, and I was desirous of doing the same. Suddenly, as I was muttering to myself, 'Why, if a lady can discover a bunch, cannot I do so too?' I spied a fine tuft. Though the blossoms were small, they were beautiful.

The next day we again went lazily up the Arpette glen to the Fenêtre d'Arpette. The last bit of the way is steep and rough, though of course not technically difficult in the least. When we had reached the Col we had a view over the lower part of the Trient glacier. After a frugal lunch, at which the remains of yesterday's ox-tongue were, like all Gaul, divided into three parts, Sylvain and I looked about for a rockscramble. The little peak to the E. of the Col seemed extremely formidable for one so small, though if François had been with us we should certainly have tackled him. As it was, we spent a few minutes on the rock on the Écandies side, about 300 ft. higher than the Col. It is too insignificant to want a name, and did not call for the use of the rope. The day was almost cloudless.

On our way back, at about 5 p.m., we were witnesses of an unusual sight—

A throbbing star,
Seen 'mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose

—to the right of the Clocher du Lac. Though the sun was shining, we were at the time wholly in the shade. The Clocher himself looked so truculent that I felt well pleased at having bearded him. On a small scale he resembled the Aiguille Noire de Pétéret, and some rocks to his right were a fair imitation of the Dames Anglaises.

'C'est dommage,' said Sylvain, 'qu'il y a des places vertes; je préférerai la neige.' 'Mais, Sylvain, les places vertes sont assez mauvaises.' 'Mais oui, monsieur.' We heard many marmots whistling, and there was a fairly continuous noise from the missiles that swept the gullies of the cirque opposite us, above a wild and savage wilderness of stones to which they were hourly making additions.

At 6.15 the flying fragments of cloud were very beautiful, as were also the sunlit Catogne and the shadowy valley. Below the Arpette chalets, as we gazed at the Rhone and the Lake of Geneva, the mountains to the left took on an indescribable purple tint, while the clouds and sky were sunset-flushed,

and in the hollows of the hills there gathered a deep blue gloom.

My favourite stroll was to the edge of the Val Ferret. I paid many visits there in early morning, at noon, in the evening, by moonlight. In the morning, from one of the places of nestling green in the forest, I looked down on the *sata leta boumque labores* of the Val Ferret. If the crops fail to reach the Vergilian standard, the green meadows at any rate and the stately forests attain to it.

One Monday early, the all-weather traveller scored once more. I went out in the cold misty air to the forest overlooking the Val Ferret. The clouds enfolded the upper slopes. Suddenly looking up, I beheld the Grand Combin, and immediately in front of him innumerable black rock-needles powdered with snow. It was a splendid sight. As I gazed at it a jay came, and, perching on a tall dead branch, railed at me in his harsh voice.

Sunset on August 30—a *journée ravissante*, as the waitress described it—was a sight to be long remembered. As I went to see it, cattle were winding slowly homewards round the lake, and the music of their bells floated across the water. To the right of the Combin a pale orange cloud hung majestic; on its crest were lawn-like mists of rosy fawn.

The great peak, in this Coan raiment, reminded one of

Those fair ladies who would conceal from us
Only their scorn of all concealment.

Changes came swiftly. First the afterglow, then ere long the clouds behind the Combin began to prepare for black vesper's pageants. Later, when the full moon was regent of the sky, and softened with her tender radiance the placid mere and the high snows, as you stood by the water's edge you could imagine the great mountain to tower up from the other side of the lake. The Val Ferret and the Val d'Entremont are so completely effaced that you forget them.

The scene was perhaps even more impressive when a great cloud, with the scowl of the storm on its darkening skirts, drifted with ragged edges over the huge peak.

But I must not forget to mention the beauties of the sunset from the road to the Arpette Glen. There from an opening in the woods you may mark its changes over the Lake of Geneva and the Rhone Valley, and watch the mountains with the approaching twilight take to themselves a more imposing personality. Their greatness will grow upon you with the growing darkness, and as you turn homewards the breathless

woods seem ready to listen all night to the sonorous flow of torrent and waterfall, already deeper-throated than by day.

On Sunday evening many swains came up from Orsières, and there was revelry and dancing in a little cantine on the road to the Col de Champex. After we had left I saw several advertisements of Champex, and could not help noticing what a strong hold convention still has on innkeepers. Convention requires them to keep *voitures à disposition*, and therefore at least one of the Champex inns offers this advantage to its guests. But where are the roads? Doubtless they go on the principle that where there's a will there's a way.

ALPINE NOTES.

MONT BLANC DISTRICT.—The Pavillon de Bellevue, above the Col de Voza, has been since March the property of the well known guides Frédéric and Alphonse Payot, and in their hands is likely to be greatly improved. Their father, Jean Payot, who knew Jacques Balmat, will be 92 in August, and is still in excellent health. A good mule path was constructed last summer round the north slopes of Mont Lachat to the summit of the Tête Rousse by some guides of St. Gervais, and materials have been taken up for the construction of a 'pavillon' within a stone's throw of the shelter constructed by Bourrit's guides in 1785, but this will hardly be available before the end of the present season. It was ascertained last summer that water had again accumulated in the little Glacier de Tête Rousse; and to prevent the recurrence of a disaster like that which destroyed the Baths of St. Gervais in 1892 a tunnel is being driven through the ridge of rock that separates the Glacier de Tête Rousse from the Glacier de Bionassay Français. The operation appears to be of an exceedingly dangerous and uncertain character and is being carried out by Italian workmen who live in a hut close by. This hut and another on the S.E. side of the ridge of Les Rognes, used by the workmen engaged in building the pavillon, are not likely to be of any use to climbers, as I am told that objections have been raised on the ground that they are not licensed lodgings. The old hut on the summit of the Aiguille du Goûter was put into thorough repair last summer, and is fairly comfortable for a small party, but there is ice on the floor, and no doubt there always will be. A hut is also being built on the Col de Miage, and should be ready for use by the end of July. These various operations are likely to attract climbers to that very interesting but now somewhat neglected district the west end of the Mont Blanc massif. I should like to add that the new route taken by Mr. A. Holmes's party in descending the Aiguille de Trélatête last August* is a great improvement on the old; by means of

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xix. p. 143.