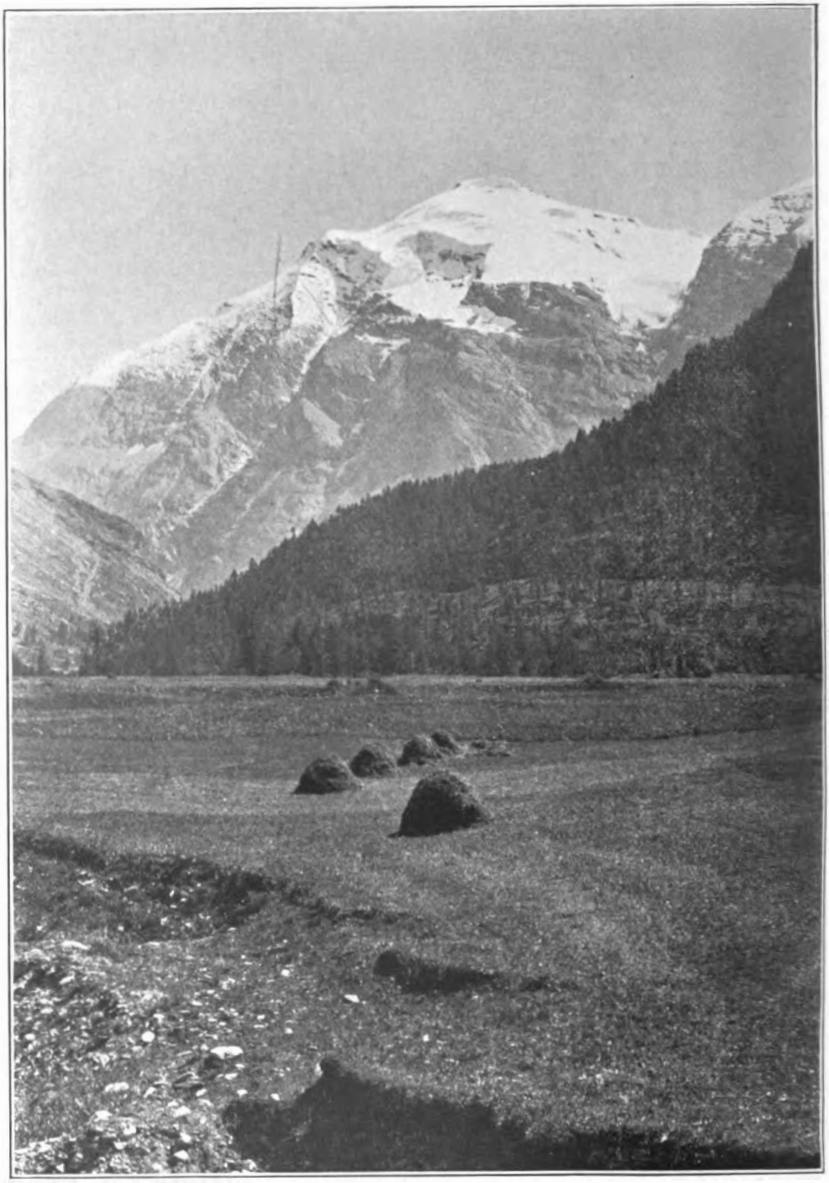


Sydney Spencer, photo. *Swan Electric Engraving Co. Ltd.*

THE POINTE DE CHARBONEL

FROM THE AVÉROLE VALLEY.

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THE

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Through the Graians.

By A. E. FIELD.

THE complaint is now often heard that the Alps are crowded, and that even remote mountain villages are hopelessly vulgarised by the hordes which are poured into them every summer by different tourist agencies. This is certainly true of many parts of Switzerland, but there are still regions, such as the Graian Alps, where the mountaineer can wander 'far from the madding crowd.' In August 1906 H. C. Bowen and I had a most enjoyable tour in the Graians, in the course of which we climbed fourteen peaks and crossed three glacier passes, besides indulging in various cross-country walks.

I travelled straight to the little village of Pralognan,* in the Tarentaise, which is charmingly situated at a height of 4,672 ft. above sea-level, in a beautiful green basin surrounded by pine forests, above which rises a fine amphitheatre of peaks. From the railway terminus at Moûtiers-Salins an electric tram runs to Brides-les-Bains, whence a service of motor-cars now runs to Pralognan, which can be reached in just over twenty-four hours from London. The motor (seats for which ought to be booked at the railway station at Moûtiers, as the accommodation is limited) does the 13 miles from Brides-les-Bains to Pralognan in 70 min., which is pretty good going, as there is a rise of nearly 3,000 ft.

Here I spent a pleasant ten days till Bowen arrived; sometimes I indulged in minor excursions, and sometimes I loafed about in the forest, which could be reached in 10 min. across the meadows. The hotel was full of French

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xxi. pp. 160, 219, 378, 521.

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families enjoying the mountain air; Jean and Marie played 'le tennis' on the gravel court just behind, while 'monsieur, madame et bébé' sat in the shade of the forest beside the spring, which gushed forth from the rocks. One afternoon I visited the Rocher de Villeneuve, a fine view-point, and on another I walked up a little peak which rejoices in the rather grandiose title of the Petit Mont Blanc, although its height is only 8,810 ft. It appears to owe its name to two facts: it has crags of white marble, and from its summit the Grand Mont Blanc is visible. On the way I found a wonderful variety of Alpine flowers; I learnt afterwards that Pralognan is well known to botanists for the richness of its flora.

Another day I walked up to the Col de la Vanoise (8,290 ft.), the most frequented pass in the Tarentaise, on which stands a most comfortable little mountain inn named the Refuge Félix Faure, and carried on under the auspices of the French Alpine Club. I lunched at the Refuge, and then persuaded the landlord, an old Chamonix guide, to accompany me up the easy peak of the Pointe de la Réchasse (10,575 ft.). We went up grass interspersed with rock, crossed an easy glacier for 20 min., and then walked along a nearly level ridge to the summit, which we reached in 1 hr. 35 min. from the Refuge. We spent ½ hr. on the top, enjoying the view of the great glaciers of the Vanoise, and then, after a halt for tea at the Refuge, I went down to Pralognan.

The day that Bowen arrived we set to work in earnest. We went up to the Refuge that evening with Jean Amiez, who is one of the best of the local guides. Then we climbed the Pointe de la Glière, the Grande Casse, and the Grande Motte on three consecutive days. We had intended to begin with the Grande Casse, but the weather was very uncertain in the early morning, and we did not get away till 6.40 A.M., when we started for the Pointe de la Glière (11,110 ft.). We went up a moraine and crossed the Glacier de la Grande Casse to the foot of some rock cliffs, which we ascended to the little Glacier de la Glière, which was reached at 8.25. In 1 hr. 10 min. more we were sitting on the top of our peak after an interesting rock scramble.

We returned by the same route, and next day we started at 2.30 A.M. in bright moonlight, skirted a little lake, scrambled up a loose and shifting moraine, and roped at 3.10. We climbed up some very smooth rocks till we could get on to the snow of the glacier. We went up the glacier for some distance, then turned to the left and climbed easy but rotten rocks for some 2 hrs. till we reached the arête. Near the top

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the ridge steepened and became very narrow; we found the snow much iced, so that a fair amount of step-cutting was necessary. However at 7.43 A.M. we reached the summit of the Grande Casse (12,668 ft.) and had a magnificent view, which included practically everything between Monte Rosa and the great Dauphiné peaks. We got back to the Refuge at 10.45, and took the opportunity of having an excellent wash in a secluded lake about 10 min. away.

On the following morning we started at 2.5 A.M., walked over the pastures for about ½ hr., and then turned off across slopes of loose stones, which were very unpleasant. During the next 4 hrs. we had a more unpleasant time, for we spent them traversing the S. face of the Grande Casse. This was easy enough, but very laborious; we crossed gully after gully by rotten ledges and shifting scree till we were heartily sick of walking on the left side of the boot. At last we reached the snow col on the long ridge connecting the Grande Casse with the Grande Motte; here we roped at 7.44, cut steps up the snow on to the ridge, crossed more stones, and then climbed easy but rotten rocks to the foot of the graceful final snow cone of the Grande Motte. We found it much iced—in fact, the snow on the surface had in parts of the ridge become converted into hard ice—so that we were much delayed by having to cut many steps, and it was not until 10.3 A.M. that we reached the summit of the Grande Motte, having occupied 8 hrs. in the ascent.

We came back nearly to the snow col, where we had roped on the ascent, and then descended straight to the Vallon de la Leisse, first by a series of glissades and then down a long grassy buttress, which was a very pleasant contrast to our laborious ascent. We reached the bottom of the valley at 1.10 P.M., and trudged steadily down it till we could cross the torrent by a snow bridge and remount by a faint track to the Vanoise path. We got back to the Refuge at 3.30 P.M., somewhat tired, but after tea we shouldered our rucksacks and walked down to Pralognan, where we spent two days in placid idleness in beautiful weather.

The next afternoon we sent off our luggage by circuitous routes to Val d'Isère, and went up to the Refuge again, arriving there at 6.45 P.M., just in time for dinner. We were now alone, and next morning, at 6.30 A.M., we turned out into cold clouds, and followed the Vanoise track down to the chalets of Entre Deux Eaux, where we turned up the Valley of the Leisse, one of the wildest glens in the Alps. Three hours or so took us up it to the Col de la Leisse (9,110 ft.), at

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its head. On the other side we crossed another col, the Col de Fresse, and descended beautiful pastures to the village of Val d'Isère (6,055 ft.), which we reached at 1.45 P.M. Here we found again a company of Chasseurs Alpins, the French Alpine troops, who had been at Pralognan. They enlivened the little village, and their band played each evening in the street. They were fine, sturdy fellows in a uniform which was loose-fitting, and made more for use than for show. We were informed that they were *en manœuvre*, from June 20 to September 8, and we can certify that their officers kept them well employed, as we frequently met them skirmishing on the mountains.

We stayed at the Hôtel Moris, where we were most comfortable. The landlord claims descent from the clan MacMorris, who were exiled from Ireland in the time of Cromwell. The house is full of strange and rambling passages, and a beautiful odour of new-mown hay pervaded my bedroom, which was next door to a loft.

The evening of our arrival we engaged Frédéric Rond, one of the two guides of the place, and started at 2.35 A.M. with him for the ascent of the Grande Sassière (12,323 ft.), which we reached at 7.58. We went up by the west buttress, which we found exceedingly easy and extremely monotonous. We spent an hour on the summit, which is on the frontier and commands a fine view down the Italian valley of the Val Grisanche. We went down the S.E. ridge, which was much more interesting, and then turned off down the face, where we had some trouble in finding a way down at all. Some prospecting, however, brought us down at length to a path at 11.15, and we got back to Val d'Isère at 1.35 P.M.

The next day we spent in the valley, where we sat down to dinner with five other Englishmen, who were also exploring this district. On the morrow we set off with Frédéric Rond at 3.10 A.M., and traversed the Tsanteleina (11,830 ft.), which was one of the most enjoyable climbs we had.

We roped at 6.43 A.M., when we reached the Glacier de Quart, on the S. face of the peak, whence some step-cutting brought us at 7.28 to the Col Bobba, on the frontier. Here we found some hard ice, but were soon able to take to the rocks, by which the summit was reached at 8.6 A.M. We spent an hour on the top, which looks straight down a beautiful and little known Italian valley—the Val de Rhèmes. We descended by the W. ridge, which is very seldom climbed, and had some really good rock-climbing of the Cumberland variety before we could get down to the Glacier de Derrière

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le Santet. We unroped at the foot of the ice, crossed the low pass of the Col de la Bailletta, had a refreshing swim in a little mountain tarn, and got down to Val d'Isère at 2.45 P.M.

After a day's rest we left our luggage at Val d'Isère, packed a few things into our rucksacks, and departed with them on our backs just after four o'clock on a cloudy morning. We had the pleasure of the company of Bergne and Bartlett, who were also going over into Italy. We followed the road up the valley for ½ hr. till it ceased, and then went up the mule track, which led through a striking but rather gloomy gorge to the green pastures of Prarion, just below the glaciers which form the sources of the Isère. Thence a steep ascent up grass slopes and a moraine brought us to the Galise glacier. A few minutes on the ice took us to the Col de la Galise (9,836 ft.), on the frontier. We left the sacks there, climbed the easy rock peak of the Pointe de la Galise (10,975 ft.) in exactly 45 min., came back to the pass, and descended into Italy down a steep couloir, called the Grand Colouret, filled with crumbling rocks and débris. At the foot of this a little plain and another steep couloir, the Petit Colouret, led down to the pastures.

We slid down the couloir, and here we parted company with Bergne and Bartlett, who were bound for Ceresole. They went straight down, while we turned sharp to our left along a goat track, which brought us in 25 min. to some chalets, where we got some milk. We then followed another little track up steep slopes with the hot sun of an Italian noon on our backs, till we reached an upper plateau, through which a stream meandered with its banks gay with the white cotton-grass. Here we had no track and no means of asking the way, but our sense of topography caused us to turn off to the right and cross a low ridge, which brought us in 50 min. from the chalets on to the good mule track of the Col de Nivolet, a few minutes below the pass. We passed two or three lakes, and descended a gently sloping upland plateau for about six miles past one of the King of Italy's hunting lodges, which was a favourite retreat of Victor Emmanuel II., the grandfather of the present Sovereign. On the way we had a fine view of the great peak of the Grivola, and at the end of the plateau, where it suddenly descends to the Val Savaranche, we sat down for ½ hr. at the brink of the crag, and enjoyed one of the finest views in the Alps. Opposite to us was the mass of the Grand Paradis, with its attendant peaks, and the jagged ridge extending thence to the Grivola, while more than 1,000 ft.

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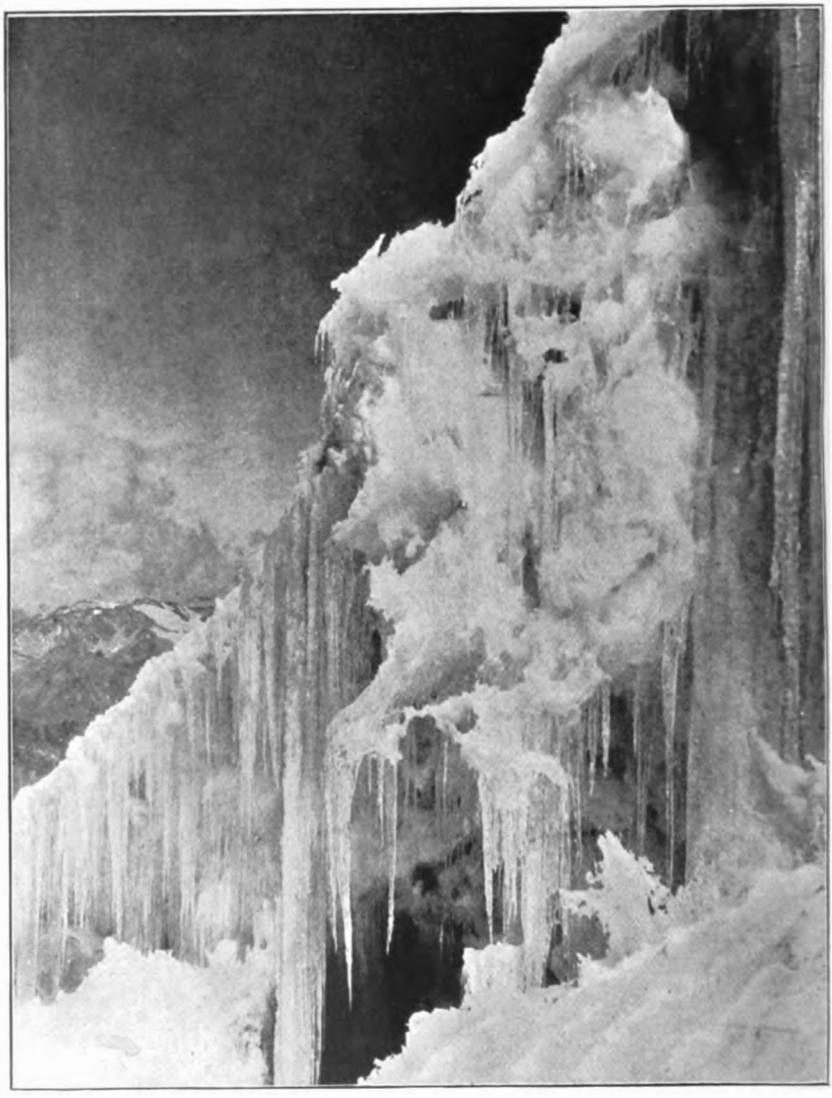
below us lay the green pastures of Pont, the little hamlet at the head of the Val Savaranche. In another ½ hr. we had descended the well-engineered path which zigzags down the face of the cliff, and reached the little inn at Pont at 3.43 P.M., nearly 12 hrs. after we had started. It is charmingly situated, and climbers who are not too exacting in their requirements can be quite comfortable there. The only thing that surprised us was that we had the place to ourselves, for the accommodation is good of its kind and the prices are exceedingly reasonable.

Next day we went up to the excellent Victor Emmanuel hut (9,105 ft.) of the Italian Alpine Club. This was my second visit to the hut, for in 1905 I had reached it from Cogne over the Grand Paradis. On that occasion our party had a most improving conversation round the fire in the evening. Our guide discoursed on the horrors of war, with illustrations from his own experiences in Abyssinia; and the porter favoured us with his views on conscription. Then we discussed various subjects, ranging from wireless telegraphy to the methods of elementary education in the Val de Cogne. The woman in charge of the hut next contrasted life in the mountains with life at Aosta, and we all decided that the former was to be preferred. Incidentally we surprised the company considerably by revealing the fact that England contained neither vineyards nor glaciers, and I think they concluded at once that it was a vastly overrated country. But the astonishment was still greater when, after the good lady had remarked that it was the feast of St. Grat, and that therefore there would of course be great doings in England, we had to confess that the patron saint of all the Aostan valleys was unhonoured in our country.

On the present occasion we stayed the night there, made a glacier excursion to the Col de Moncorvé in the morning, and in the afternoon we walked up one ridge of the easy peak of the Tresenta (11,841 ft.), and down another to the Col de Moncorvé again. We spent ¾ hr. on the summit enjoying a magnificent view of the Piedmontese plain, with the windings of the Po and the Maritime Alps and the Apennines behind: we could see Turin plainly with the naked eye, and even made out the Superga with its monument.

After another night in the hut we set off just after 4 A.M. and climbed the Grand Paradis (13,324 ft.), the monarch of the Graian Alps, in a cold north wind, which chilled us to the bone and formed icicles in our bottle of cold tea. We made the ascent with a Swiss party, but they were going

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R. C. Nevill, photo. *Swan Electric Engraving Co. Ltd.*

THE BERGSCHRUND ON THE GRAND PARADIS
in August, 1906.

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down the opposite face to Cogne, and so we parted company on the summit, and descended by our two selves. We had cut steps on the way up, but we found it necessary to cut a few more on the way down. The bergschrund was much wider this year than last, and could be crossed in one place only by a steep pillar of ice about 8 ft. high, down which we swarmed carefully one at a time, while small icicles rattled down from our feet into the depths of the great crevasse. After crossing this we moved along steadily, and in 1 hr. from the summit we unroped at the edge of the glacier, and went down the easy rocks, which brought us back to the hut at noon precisely. We went down to Pont, slept the night there, and next day started off down the valley at 4.26 A.M. by lantern light. We turned up one of the royal hunting paths in about 1 hr., and found our way over the easy but interesting glacier pass of the Col de l'Herbetet (10,686 ft.), whence we descended to the head of the Valnontey, and walked down the whole length of this charming valley to the village of Cogne, which was reached at 3.18 P.M.

We found Bergne and Bartlett there, and Bowen spent the next day with them in the ascent of the Grivola (13,022 ft.), which they traversed to Val Savaranche, while he returned to me. I felt no shame in taking a day off after the labours of the last three days, especially as I had been up the Grivola the year before.

Next day was spent by both of us in peaceful idleness, but on the morrow we left at 5.30 A.M. with my old friend Clément Gérard, of Cogne, as guide. We had also to take a porter, as we were bound for the Piantonetto hut with three days' provisions. The hut, which is situated at 9,141 ft. on a grassy shelf at the head of a wild valley, was reached at 2.53 P.M. over the interesting glacier pass of the Col de Monei (11,247 ft.). On the way we saw three bouquetins quite close to us. The King of Italy was at Cogne the week before, and his party shot thirty bouquetins and sixty chamois.

The next day we started at 4.35 A.M. with Clément, leaving the porter behind with instructions to go down to the highest chalets to buy milk and firewood. In 3½ hrs. we were sitting on the top of the Tour du Grand St. Pierre (12,113 ft.), after an interesting climb up the rocks of the S. face. In one place just below the summit we had a curious crawling traverse along a rock ledge, and close by a mass of rocks seemed poised in such a state of unstable equilibrium that we carefully avoided touching them, lest the greater part of the summit should descend suddenly upon us.

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We remained on the top for 1½ hr. enjoying a splendid view which extended from Mont Blanc and the Grand Combin right past Monte Rosa to the Bernina group in the far distance. Over a gap in this frontier chain we even descried the Bernese Alps, and could clearly identify the Jungfrau. In the other direction were spread before us all the peaks of the Graians with the great mountains of the Dauphiné behind. We climbed down the rocks of a great couloir, in some danger of falling stones, to the glacier pass of the Col de Teleccio, whence we cut steps down the steep ice of the Glacier de Teleccio right to its foot. This descent was exciting in places—in fact, in most places, as the glacier was in bad condition this year. However, care and caution, combined with the knowledge that even a single slip would be inadvisable, brought us safely down, and we got back to the hut at 12.37 P.M. In the afternoon we basked on the grass in the sun, and after our evening meal, which was rather scanty, as our supply of bread was nearly exhausted, we retired to bed, if a layer of insect-infested straw can be so called.

Next morning we said farewell to the hut at 4.18 A.M., and reached the Roccia Viva glacier over many stones in about an hour. We crossed the glacier and turned up some old snow, whence ¼ hr. on easy rocks brought us to the Colle Baretti. Here we took 20 min. rest, and after an easy climb reached the summit of the Roccia Viva (11,976 ft.) at 7.27 A.M.

The top of this peak affords a spectacle which is, I believe, unique, for in a kind of dip at the very summit is a small frozen lake, which is invisible from any other point. In accordance with our usual custom we went down another way, descending the great couloir in the S.E. flank to the Roccia Viva glacier, which we found much crevassed. We unroped at 9.9, scrambled up loose slopes to a pass known as the Bochetta della Losa and down the other side to the spot where a royal hunting-path began. For the next 6 hrs. we tramped along this path, which took us up hill and down dale, crossing spur after spur, and visiting valley after valley. We fortunately procured some milk at some chalets, where we rejoined our porter, who had come by a simpler route and was awaiting our arrival. Finally, after much toil in hot sun, varied by a smart thunder shower, which was quite refreshing, we arrived at the little village of Ceresole Reale at 4.40 P.M., all much exhausted.

We paid off our guide and porter, dined in company with some very noisy Italians, while a heavy thunderstorm was in

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progress, and slept in a bed again, which was quite a treat. Next day we saw the sights of Ceresole Reale—the waterfall and the mineral spring, which has converted the picturesque valley into a fashionable Italian watering-place. It is 4,907 ft. above the sea, but we had not been so low for more than three weeks, and we found it hot and enervating there. The weather was *tempo opprimente*, and if we had stayed there long, we should probably have succumbed, and become like the Italian visitors *qui ne bougent pas*, as we were told.

Even when we fled away at 3.38 A.M. next morning a hot wind smote us in the face, and the sacks on our backs felt exceedingly heavy as we toiled up paths through beautiful forest with Bartolomeo Rolando, one of the two guides of the place. We felt revived when we got on to a glacier again, about 7.30. We crossed it, and went up an easy couloir to the S.E. ridge of the Eastern Levanna, which we followed more or less till we reached the summit (11,693 ft.) at 9.38 A.M. The last 10 min. along a narrow rock ridge were quite interesting, and redeemed the monotony of the earlier parts of the ascent. We spent nearly 1 hr. on the top, till we were very cold, for a keen wind was blowing, and then said farewell to Italy and descended the north ridge to the Colle Perduto in ½ hr. Here we roped for the first time that day, made our way down the Glacier des Sources de l'Arc, and followed that stream down to the little village of Bonneval (6,021 ft.), which was reached at 3.49 P.M. by Italian time, or nearly 1 hr. earlier by French time.

After a day's rest at Bonneval, which is the highest village in the Maurienne, we started at 3.15 A.M. with young Justin Blanc, and walked about 5 miles down the road to Bessans. We left our sacks here, passed two *douaniers* who were sleeping out on camp bedsteads on the watch for smugglers, turned up the Val de Ribon, and went up steep grass slopes and a very tedious moraine till we struck the glacier. We got some step-cutting here, as there was much ice among the snow, and a pretty little rock-climb of about 80 ft. brought us to the summit of the Pointe de Charbonel (12,336 ft.) at 11.8 A.M. We basked in the sun for 1 hr., and then descended by the same route to Bessans at 3.58 P.M.

This is a large village, where the women wear a quaint costume and all ride about on donkeys, not using side saddles. I do not know what is the present fate of the old donkeys, but a very few years ago they were killed, salted down, and eaten in the winter, which lasts for a long time in this valley, where the snow lies on the high road till June. The mural

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decorations in the room of the inn where we fed must be seen to be appreciated; they are certainly beyond my powers of description, but I may say that one depicts a railway viaduct in which every brick is carefully and indeed painfully drawn in detail, while another contains a fountain, of which the perspective has gone hopelessly astray. Here we enjoyed an excellent dinner, lit up by a tallow dip stuck into an empty winebottle.

Next day we left our sacks to be forwarded to Bonneval by the diligence, and set forth in a thick ground mist at 4.10 A.M. As we ascended we soon rose above the mist, and had an exceedingly pleasant walk across beautiful rich pastures and a large easy glacier to the S.W. face of the Albaron. Here we had ¾ hr. of really interesting work, as we crossed a series of small bergschrunds and worked up a narrow snow arête to the summit (12,015 ft.), which was reached at 9.30 A.M. We stayed there nearly 1½ hr., rejoicing in the view of a beautiful sea of cloud, from which the Italian peaks close by rose like islands in a stormy ocean. Then we followed the easy S.E. ridge and turned down to the great glacier which stretches like a shelf along the N.E. face of the Albaron. We found it very much broken up and had very great trouble in finding a way through the intricate network of crevasses. We jumped several small ones, which had no bridge, but some enormous ones in the same condition necessitated considerable détours. After 2 hrs. of extreme uncertainty as to whether we might not have to climb back to the summit we got off the glacier at 1 P.M. and traversed some steep rocks for a considerable distance, till we could get down the scree to the Col des Evettes, whence a good path led down to the valley. We saw a fine eagle on the way, and reached Bonneval at 4.18 P.M.

Next day we crossed the easy mule pass of the Col d'Iseran (9,085 ft.) to Val d'Isère, where we had left our luggage. The following afternoon we spent 5 hrs. in the diligence, which took us 20 miles down the beautiful Tarentaise to the little town of Bourg St. Maurice. We slept there and took another diligence to Moûtiers-Salins, whence the night train conveyed us to Paris *en route* for home.

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THE TOUR DU GRAND ST. PIERRE, &c.

FROM THE GRAND PARADIS.

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