

## OCTOBER IN THE MONT BLANC RANGE.

By C. F. K. CARFRAE.

**A**S a rule very few ascents are made in the High Alps after the early part of September, mainly owing to the shortening hours of daylight and the increasing cold. However, the following notes on what my brother and I were able to accomplish last October may be of use to those who are placed in a similar position to ourselves, and who are not able to visit the Alps during the regular climbing season.

On Tuesday, October 6, we arrived at Chamonix, having engaged the guides, Alexis and Henri Brocherel of Courmayeur, of Himalayan fame, for a fortnight 'to do what climbing we could.' The two brothers are well known amongst climbers as having made many ascents in the Himalaya. Our success this autumn was largely due to their enterprise and dash.

We were told that no snow had fallen for ten days, and that the weather had been perfect; however, as nobody had been climbing, information as to the actual condition of the mountains was not forthcoming, and it was for us to discover that peak after peak was practically free from snow and ice, that difficulties from these causes which had presented themselves in July and August had now vanished, and that climbing at this season, when such abnormal conditions exist, and when due precautions are taken, is just as enjoyable as at any other time of the year. This applies more especially to the season just past, one of the worst on record as regards bad weather.

On the evening of the 7th our guides arrived from Courmayeur, and we decided that with such beautiful weather we should begin work without delay. Accordingly, at 5 A.M. on the 8th, we left the Hôtel Couttet for the ascent of the Aiguille d'M and Petit Charmoz. Breakfasting at the Montanvert at 7 A.M., we reached the Col de la Buche, between our peaks, at 10.15. Both the Aiguille d'M and Petit Charmoz proved delightful scrambles, each taking us about 1 hr. from the Col. We descended from the Col by the western couloir, which, like that on the eastern side, was quite free from snow; then by the lower part of the Glacier des Nantillons, reaching Montanvert at 2.30 P.M. That evening, my brother, who, as a field-gunner, had not been accustomed to much walking, decided on a day's rest on the morrow, preparatory to traversing the Grand Charmoz, which, weather permitting, we intended to attempt on the

10th. Meanwhile, as there was no sign of a change, the Brocherels thought that the rocks of the Aiguille du Moine would form a delightful training ground for the harder climbs we had in view, and as the Light Infantryman felt no ill effects from our first expedition, we decided that this should form the next day's programme.

On leaving the Montanvert at 5 A.M. there was a gentle breeze blowing down the Mer de Glace, and I think that both the Brocherels and myself were glad we had 'something warm inside,' and that our woollen helmets fitted closely about our heads. After three hours' delightful walking, first up the glacier, then over the steep rocks directly below our peak, and then past the Couvercle hut, we reached the rocks which do not terminate until they form the small rocky summit of the Moine, practically a lower spur of the great snow-capped Aiguille Verte. After an interesting, but not really difficult climb, we found ourselves on this summit at 10.30 A.M.; the wind had subsided, and there was not a cloud to obstruct the glorious view around us. After resting a quarter of an hour we commenced the descent, reached the bottom of the rocks at 11.40, and after some refreshment continued our journey to the Montanvert, which we reached at 2.45. My brother had come out to meet us on the glacier. We were glad to see him 'going strong,' and evidently quite fit for the exertions we were to make on the Charmoz on the following day.

The sunset was magnificent, and, when we all turned in at 8.30, we had every cause to look forward to a day such as we had just spent.

There was hardly a stir in the air when, at 5 A.M. on the 10th, we started wending our way upwards towards the Glacier des Nantillons. At 7.10 A.M. we were stepping briskly over its surface, which at this time in the morning always gives such an ideal grip to the boot nails. But we soon discovered that the Glacier des Nantillons was not all the plain sailing which we had hitherto experienced; the ice-fall, although not extensive, is very steep, and it is necessary to turn it by the rocks on the right. At the first two points we approached the rocks a yawning gap was discovered separating the glacier from them, and a successful attempt to cross would have been an impossibility. Finally, we arrived at a spot, where, after some skilful step cutting on the part of the Brocherels, we were able to leap from the glacier to rocks. All difficulties from ice and snow were now at an end, and when we got to the rocks we found the chimney on the

north face in perfect condition. After a delightful climb we reached the first summit at 12 noon, and then began the traverse, which occupied us  $1\frac{1}{4}$  hr. The rocks were in splendid condition; it might have been the height of summer. But it is hardly necessary to describe the climb. We descended the great couloir between the Charmoz and the Grépon, and in so doing had a close view of the Mummery Chimney on the latter peak. Its appearance certainly did not invite an attempt to climb it, as it was filled with snow and ice; but I am told that this was its condition during most of the summer. We found ourselves at the Rognon again at 3.5 p.m., and after a halt of half an hour or so continued our journey to the Montanvert, which we reached at 5.35 p.m.

On the 11th the weather remained perfect; we enjoyed a good rest and decided on an expedition to the Tacul for the next day, intending to spend the following night at the Couvercle, and, if possible, try our fortune on the Aiguille Verte on the 18th.

We were heavily laden on leaving the Montanvert at 5.30 a.m. on the 12th; however, at 8.30 a.m. we halted near the Lac du Tacul, leaving our provisions and wood for the Couvercle hut to be picked up on our return from the Tacul. After a somewhat uninteresting climb, chiefly consisting of very easy rocks followed by a long and steep snow slope, we reached the summit at 11.15 a.m. We were not to be disappointed in the view for which the Aiguille is famed, for every peak on the range which could possibly be seen stood out clearly against a cloudless sky, and my brother was fortunate in securing excellent photographs. At 11.45 we were on our way downwards, and, after traversing across the summit rocks, descended the Glacier des Périades on the left, and arrived at our first halting place at 2.45 p.m.

By this time there were signs of a change in the weather, and clouds seemed to be collecting from all directions; however, we hoped that these would not prove the precursors of a storm, and set off for the Couvercle, which we reached at 4 p.m.

At dawn on the 18th a little snow was falling, and, as we were in a land of clouds and mist, all hope of the Verte was abandoned; but the Brocherels thought that my brother, who had not already done so, could climb the Moine without danger. The threatening aspect of the weather seemed to give them a considerable turn of speed, for they accomplished the ascent of the rocks in an hour and forty minutes, re-

turned to the Couvercle in another hour and a quarter, and arrived at the Montanvert at 1 P.M. I had reached that welcome spot some three hours previously, feeling that my day off was certainly a very sound idea. The weather was now picking up, and we decided not to run another risk of a final 'break up' before trying Mont Blanc.

Everything seemed in our favour on our return to Chamonix at 4 P.M.; the clouds had disappeared as if by magic, the air was beautifully clear, and the registering barometer at the Hôtel Couttet showed a gradual rise since that morning.

On the 14th, as the glass continued to rise, we set out at 10 A.M. for the Grand Mulets. We were all carrying spare clothing, &c., as we intended to traverse our peak descending on the Italian side by the 'Dôme Ridge.' We reached our resting place at 3.30 P.M.

It was exactly twelve hours later when we left it, clad in sweaters, woollen helmets, extra socks, Alpine gloves, and everything else calculated to keep out a sharp breeze which was blowing from the N.E. It was too cold to stop for rest or refreshment, until we reached the Refuge Vallot at 8 A.M. After a hasty meal, during which everyone was busily employed kicking the circulation back to his toes, we resumed our efforts and were standing on the summit at 10 A.M.

Most of our climbing had been in the shade of the mountain, and we were very thankful for the warm rays which were now pouring upon us. We had yet many hours to go before we should see Courmayeur, and after a few minutes' rest we began to retrace our steps, which we followed, until we were just below the Refuge Vallot, then passing over the Dôme du Gouter we found ourselves at the top of the steep corniced ridge at 11.15 A.M. Alexis had to cut steps the whole way down, but the descent only occupied  $1\frac{3}{4}$  hr.—very good going under the circumstances. After this there was no difficulty until we reached the Dôme Glacier, whose surface was singularly free from snow, and consequently crevasses, completely covered in July or August, now presented themselves, and seemed to try their best to arrest our downward progress. Steps had to be cut in many places when passing through the ice-fall; but, finally, on getting on to the rocks to our right we saw the welcome outline of the Dôme hut, which we reached at 4 P.M. Our supply of provisions was low, and there was nothing for it but to push on. As we entered the long deep valley which is filled by the Glacier de Miage darkness was coming on apace, and on arrival at the terminal moraine lanterns were lit. The path which winds from this point

down the valley was of a continuous gentle slope, and we were very thankful for the easy going. But when, after two hours of it, we were informed that there was yet 'a big hour' to go, we realised that the journey was rather longer than we had anticipated. It was 9 p.m. when we at length reached Courmayeur, and when we turned in at 10.30 we felt that if ever we had earned a night's repose we had done so on this occasion.

The next day there were no signs of any change in the weather, and we agreed to start at 4 a.m. the following morning for the Aiguille du Géant, return to the Italian Refuge on the Col du Géant, and spend the week-end there. It was 9 o'clock on the 17th when we finally completed the long toil of nearly 7,000 ft. up from Courmayeur and stood outside one of the highest mountain hotels in Europe. The view to the south was magnificent, and included many of the principal peaks of the Zermatt district and Italian Alps. We here had a good rest, and, setting out again at 10.30, we crossed the Col du Géant and began scrambling up the easy rocks which formed the base of our peak. My brother, who had had four hard days previous to Friday's rest, here began to go *très doucement*, and it was 2 p.m. when we at last reached the base of the final peak. It was here evident that he could not possibly enjoy the climb of the difficult rocks that were before us, and it was with many regrets that we left him to rest until we should return. The climbing from this point was delightful, but offered no serious difficulty owing to the fixed ropes which were quite free from ice. After an hour's work we reached the first summit, and in another ten minutes had passed the rather awkward cliff between the two, and were seated on the small slab of rock to which is rivetted the image of the Virgin erected by the Curé of Courmayeur, and which Henri Brocherel had assisted in bringing up. As the hour was late, we at once began the descent, and reached the spot at which we had left my brother at 4.45. He had enjoyed a good sleep in our absence, and was all for moving on at once. Darkness was fast approaching when we retraced our steps across the Col du Géant, and it was 6 p.m. when we returned to the 'Refuge.' The Brocherels and my brother had had five long days' climbing in the past six, and Sunday's rest was, indeed, a welcome one for all of us. We all found the plentiful supply of blankets extremely useful on this *jour de repos*, and we were quite happy with three or four of them worn across the shoulders. I could not resist the temptation for a scramble in the afternoon, and following

the rocky ridge above our refuge, past the old hut, I reached the summit of what I am told is the true Aiguille de Saussure, at the foot of which de Saussure camped in 1788. It cannot be much more than 300 ft. above the pass. On Kurz's map this name is given to a point further along the ridge towards the Tour Ronde.

That evening we made our plans for our last climb—the Dent du Requin, which was to be taken on the way down to Chamonix. After a magnificent breakfast of sardines and *petits pains* we started away across the Col at 5.30 A.M., and without much difficulty from crevasses reached the rocks of our peak at 7 A.M.; for the next hour and three-quarters we were climbing over fairly easy rocks, during which the monotony was relieved and an occasional breather afforded by some steep pitches which had here and there to be negotiated. The summit, which had for some time been obscured from view, now suddenly showed itself. We had just rounded a corner which led on to a large and perfectly level platform, and the sight seemed to invite us to be seated, to rest and refresh, before attacking the 500 ft. of rock before us; in fact this halting place proved so comfortable that three-quarters of an hour elapsed before we again were under way. After traversing along some diminutive ledges we struck straight upwards for the top. Nobody could have desired rocks in better condition; there was hardly a particle of snow to be seen, and the sun, to which we were exposed the greater part of the ascent, made climbing delightful. At 10.40 there were no more upward struggles to be made, and the view from our last summit was certainly one of the most beautiful we had enjoyed. We had decided on a descent by the Great Chimney, the upper part of which was reached soon after leaving the summit. The great natural fissure, at whose top we now stood, would certainly have tried the skill and strength of the most agile of climbers if no artificial aid was used, and it was with some relief that we saw Alexis passing a 200 ft. rope which he had brought through an iron ring conveniently fixed in the rock. We now, one by one, had to pass hand-over-hand on this rope down the chimney. The continual gripping of an Alpine rope is very fatiguing to the fore-arm muscles, especially when one cannot make much use of the legs to assist in supporting one's weight. However, we soon found ourselves down again at the platform. The hour was 11.40, and, as the Brocherels seemed to think that the ice-fall of the Glacier du Géant would cause us some trouble, we did not remain here long. Descending partly by the rocks

on the left we were able to turn those séracs which seemed likely to give us the most trouble, and at 1.30 all serious climbing was at an end and only the easy walking of the Mer de Glace separated us from the Montanvert, which we reached at 3.15.

During our twelve days' climbing we had enjoyed the most perfect weather, and only on one occasion had we been obliged to alter our plans. We had accomplished eight ascents, and might, indeed, consider ourselves among the luckiest climbers of the year.

---

### SIX DAYS IN THE VALPELLINE.

By THE EDITOR.

ON August 24, 1903, Tempest Anderson and I, with François and Sylvain Pession, left Arolla together, and when we had walked some distance, in pursuance of a plan agreed upon some days previously, he took Sylvain and went to the Bertol hut, whilst François and I crossed the Col de Collon to Prarayé. I had but once previously visited the Valpelline, in 1876, when with Anton Ritz I had made a short round of passes, starting from and returning to Zermatt. We had struggled over the Theodule after a rude battering from a snowstorm, and the next day reached Prarayé by the Col de Valcournera. On that occasion there was no bread to be got at Prarayé except the black variety—so hard that a novice who received a piece in answer to a request for bread might well think that he had been cheated with a stone.\*

The Valpelline is still but little visited, and remains unspoilt, while the new Ball says of it: 'The scenery of the Valpelline is throughout of the first order, especially towards its head, and is worthy of comparison with that of the exquisite valleys S. and E. of Monte Rosa.' No one who knows the district will think this praise exaggerated.†

On the 25th I was to have been called before 3 A.M., but François came and said the weather was too bad for a start to be made. The new snow visible in the morning confirmed

---

\* For a description of the end of the Valpelline and the accommodation to be found there in 1863 see *Alpine Journal*, vol. i. p. 211 foll.

† All visitors to the Valpelline should consult the monograph in vol. xxxii. of the *Bollettino* of the C.A.I. entitled 'In Valpellina,' by SS. E. Canzio, F. Mondini, and N. Vigna.