

LYSEKAMM AND MONTE ROSA.

(Unpublished letters from the late Miss Gertrude Bell.)

BREUIL, Sunday, August, 1904.

DEAREST FATHER,—I have had such a delicious 2 days. I started at 7 yesterday and walked all down the Val Tournanche to Châtillon—17½ miles which I did in 4½ hours. It is the loveliest valley I have seen in all the Alps. The upper part is open meadows lying under the Matterhorn, with a lovely stream and meagre companies of pines most exquisitely planted. Then the valley narrows into a splendid gorge down which you step on to the high meadows of Val Tournanche, and so downwards into chestnut woods, the road turning and winding between the rocky hills which form an ever-varying frame to the great rocky head of the Matterhorn nodding over all. At Châtillon I hoped to lunch, but finding I could just catch a train, I ran down to the station and went on hungrily to Aosta which I reached at 12.30. Do you know it? It is a charming Alpine town, the great glaciers of the Combin and the Rutor shining along its narrow streets. I spent all the afternoon looking at Roman gates and arches and Lombard towers, sustained the while by most excellent black figs of which I bought handfuls for a halfpenny. All the pergolas were hung with grapes almost ripe—oh, it was Italian and delicious beyond words.

I left by a 5 o'clock train this morning, reached Châtillon at 6, where I breakfasted, walked about and eat grapes and looked at a lovely Roman bridge. At 9, I drove up in the diligence to Val Tournanche. I had a companion with whom I presently began to talk, a tall fair Piedmontese, whom I presently discovered to be one of the lights of the Italian Alpine Club. His name is Bobba.¹ He and his family were staying *en villeggiatura* at Val Tournanche and after lunching at the hotel, mostly on spaghetti and cheese, I went up to their chalet and had coffee with them. Then I had the most heavenly walk up here, a golden wonderful afternoon, and I crossed over some meadows to see the beautiful little lake in the woods and without doubt it is the most beautiful lake in the world.

¹ Signor Commendatore Giovanni Bobba.—*Editor*.

It runs over some rocks into another blue pool lower down, with pine trees growing round, and the upper lake is a perfect mirror for the Matterhorn. The weather is gorgeous and we start for the hut to-morrow, traversing to Zermatt.²

Amicis³ is staying at this hotel—I haven't made his acquaintance. His son⁴ is climbing with a very celebrated Italian Alpinist, Guido Rey. I introduced myself to him the other night when I dined here, for he is a cousin of M. de Filippi, and we had a long and interesting mountain talk. He has gone off on an expedition to-day so I shall not see him again.

This is a nice place. I'm so glad I came. I think next year I shall explore the Grivola district. I want to see much more of Italian Alps.

Ever your affectionate daughter,
GERTRUDE.

I shall be rather glad to find letters at Zermatt.

RIFFELBERG, *Sunday, 14 Aug., 1904.*

DEAREST MOTHER,—I am having two well-earned days off, and this one is more beautiful than words can say, cloudless, the great peak of the Matterhorn cutting up into an absolutely blue sky. I'll tell you my adventures. I left here about 3 on Thursday and went down to a hut⁵ on the glacier at the foot of Monte Rosa, about 2 hours off—first down and then up for the Riffelberg stands very high above the glacier. As we got into the hut it began to rain and heavy thunder clouds blew up. There was the usual strange hut company—a German, a Dutchman, 2 Greeks, and me. I slept extraordinarily sound on my straw, but at intervals I heard it thundering. However, at 5 it was clearer though still rather doubtful, and we determined to start, much to the disgust of the fat . . . who was clearly looking forward to being prevented from taking any further exertion.

We were the only party going for the Lyskamm. We speedily left the others behind and went on our way up a very long glacier, pretty tedious, except for some tolerably amusing séracs. After about 3 hours we turned off from the way up to the pass and had an interesting hour under and up séracs

² The traverse of the Matterhorn is described in 'Letters of Gertrude Bell,' i. pp. 170-1.

³ The late Edmondo de Amicis.

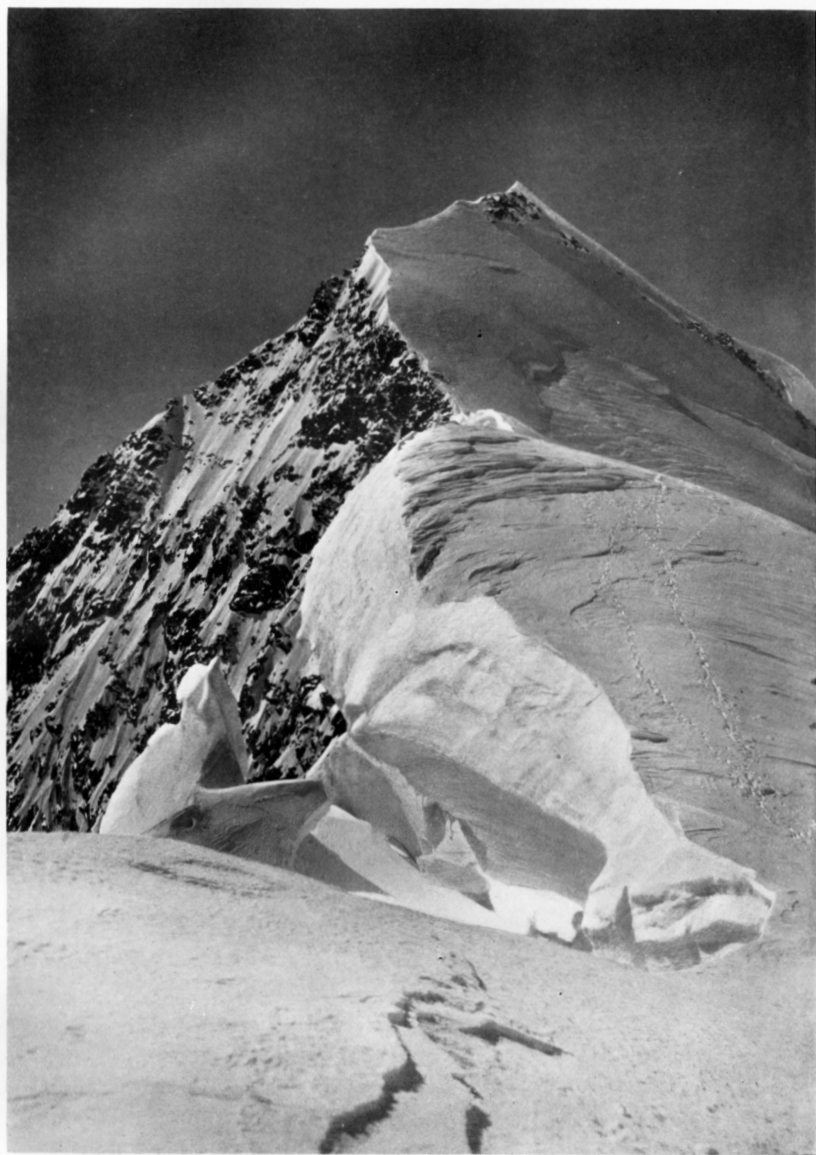
⁴ Ugo de Amicis.

⁵ Bétemps Club hut.

in bad condition, which gave us some trouble. So we reached the shoulder at the foot of the Lyskamm. We climbed up through very soft snow on to the arête, the guides shaking their heads and saying that if the snow was as bad there we should not be able to do it. But it was pretty cold and fortunately we found it in excellent condition so that a very little cutting and kicking cleared the new snow out of the steps. The arête of the Lyskamm is famous. It is very very sharp and has an immense snow cornice, rather smaller than usual this year. You go along some 15 ft. below the summit to avoid the cornice, on the side of a snow slope as steep as snow can lie—curving over below so that you look down into a thousand feet of nothingness. The head needs training as much as the body. I felt terribly frightened when I found myself out on this airy arête and I went through 10 minutes of unmixed fear. (N.B.—I nearly turned back, but I knew I should have to go through with it some time and it might as well be on the Lyskamm as anywhere.) Presently I began to feel happier and by the time we turned to come back down the arête, generally a more alarming process than ascending, it was all one whether we were walking on the edge of a precipice or on a flat glacier. So I hope that's over.

The *Lyskammgrat* is enough to strike courage into the softest heart.

It was 3 by the time we got down to the shoulder and I was so tired that I went to sleep for half an hour. We were going to sleep at the Margherita Hut on one of the peaks of Monte Rosa, and we had a most tedious $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours round the head of an immense glacier and up a snow slope which was, as Schwartzen admitted, *ungemein lang*. The hut is 14,965 ft. up so you see there was a pretty long pull for the end of the day and one felt the elevation a little. The kind Italian guardian ran down the last slope towards us with a bottle of hot coffee which was most refreshing. It is a miserable hut, but one puts up with a good deal on the highest inhabited point in Europe. It's inhabited for two months a year. There is one observatory attached and two delightful Italian professors were up there making observations. They did me the honours and made me a bed in the Observatory sleeping room where I slept peacefully for an hour before dinner. They had a colleague up on a visit who was a Finn, a big, square man with a grave, unhappy face. He began at once talking about the war and 'We hope the Japanese are going to revenge us,' he said. The other inhabitant of the hut was an extremely



Photo, H. Speyer.

The great cornice on E. Arête of LYSKAMM.



Photo, H. Speyer.

Looking E. from near the great cornice on the LYSKAMM towards Peaks of MONTE ROSA. (Note curious mist effects owing to warm morning following very cold night.)

cheerful handsome Italian Captain of Cavalry who chattered agreeably during dinner in several languages. You may judge how exquisite were his manners when I tell you that he complimented me on my Italian! After dinner the professors invited us to dessert in the Observatory and gave us tinned peaches and wine and other delicacies—charming people they were. I had a bad attack of inflammation of the eyes in the middle of the night which caused me acute pain. Heinrich⁶ treated it most successfully with a poultice of hard warm white of egg and in the morning I was nearly all right again. It had been a fearfully glaring day—mists with the sun shining through which burns much more, I always think, than clear sun.

We didn't start till 7 next day as we hadn't a very long climb in front of us. It was a gorgeously clear morning and the whole of Italy lay revealed at our feet. Monte Rosa is not a mountain at all, but a group of 7 peaks. We were at the top of the Signalkuppe, we traversed the Zumsteinspitze and climbed to the top of the Dufourspitze which is the highest and very little below Mont Blanc. This took us about 3 hours. We saw all the Alps in the world, the Oberland, Mont Blanc, the beautiful Italian group of the Grivola and the Paradiso and our own Pennines all round us. Then we ran down immense snow slopes and got back to the hut in which we had slept the first night in under 2 hours. So we came on here where I am settled till Tuesday morning. It was quite pleasant to come down to a lower level after spending 2 days so very high up—it is *very* pleasant indeed to be doing nothing after such a very energetic beginning.

Ever your affectionate daughter,

GERTRUDE.

(Concluded.)

[In printing these two letters, apparently the last still available of Miss Gertrude Bell's Alpine epistles, we again express our sincerest thanks to Sir Hugh and Lady Bell, as also to Sir Ernest Benn, for the honour and privilege accorded to the JOURNAL in being allowed to publish these unique and charming records of a few episodes in a great career.—*Editor*, 'A.J.']

⁶ Fuhrer.