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**Freshfield, Douglas W.**

**London, 1875**

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich**

Shelf Mark: R 1982/234

Persistent Link: <https://doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-8364>

Chapter VI. The Bergamasque mountains.

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## CHAPTER VI.

## THE BERGAMASQUE MOUNTAINS.

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Up, where the lofty citadel  
 O'erlooks the surging landscape's swell;  
 Let not unto the stones the day  
 Her land and sea, her lily and rose display.      EMERSON.

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VAL D'ESINO—THE GRIGNA—INTROBBIO—FORCELLA DI CEDRINO—VAL TORTA  
 —AN OLD TRAVELLER—VAL BREMBANA—BRANZI—PASSO DI GORNIGO—  
 GROMO—VAL SERIANA—BONDIONE—MONTE GLENO—VAL BELVISO.

THE sharpest form of pain has in all ages been imagined under the figure of a man with the object of his most eager desire ever dangling before his eyes but out of reach. If—may the omen be void!—any of the Alpine Club should in another world ever realise the punishment of Tantalus or Dives, they will probably be placed opposite a peak cut off from them by some impassable gulf.

Such threatened to be our fate as, with the natural gloominess of three o'clock in the morning, we strapped up our humble bags in the marble halls of the Hotel Vittoria at Menaggio under the indignant and contemptuous survey of an awakened porter.

When we issued into the night the luminous Italian stars flamed out of a perfect vault, blotted only at the edges by the dim shapes of the mountains. The keen northern breeze which intruded on the languid scent-

laden air of the lake was the best promise of a day of unclouded sunshine. Yet this breeze was the cause of all our fears; under its influence the lake was stirred into waves which broke noisily against the terraced shore. Our goal was the Grigna, and between us and Varenna lay three miles of dancing water. There was no steamer for hours; and it is no rare thing for the passage to be impossible for small boats. Doubtful and depressed, we hurried round to the little port.

It was a happy moment when a cry answered our shouts, and the boat, ordered overnight, shot up with its four rowers through the darkness. We were soon on board and out of sight of François, left to search for a missing portmanteau in the custom-house of Como.<sup>1</sup>

The shelter of the land was soon left, and our broad-bottomed boat, keeping her head to the wind, as if making for Colico, began to do battle with the waves, which knocked her from side to side like an unwieldy cork. We were anxious as to the behaviour of our rowers. The boatmen of the lake are not all to be trusted. The year before I had seen a Colico crew give way to the most abject terror at the mere approach of a storm-cloud which turned out to be quite empty of wind. For ten minutes before the rain burst on us they did nothing but alternately catch crabs, and curse and kick the crab-catcher. The Menaggio men showed themselves, however, of very different metal. They

<sup>1</sup> Travellers often forget that all locked luggage coming from Switzerland is stopped at the Italian custom-house. In the present instance the portmanteau had been directed Porlezza, in ignorance that, by an absurd postal law, which it is worth while to call notice to, everything is sent from Lugano to Porlezza via Como!

rowed hard and talked little, and the stern-oar, standing up to his work like the rest, gondolier-fashion, steered with so much skill in avoiding the wave-crests that, knocked about as we were, we only shipped one sea during the passage.

The mountain-forms were growing less ghostly, and the first pale gleams across the sky were reflected still more faintly on the surface of the lake as we ran ashore on the beach at Varenna. The little town was still asleep under its cypresses, but a light gleamed from the windows of a waterside inn, which soon furnished us with coffee and an omelette.

A few hundred yards north of Varenna the glen of Esino, through which lies the way to the Grigna, opens on the lake. The 'Alpine Guide' describes a path leading past the castle and along the (true) left bank of the stream. But the more frequented track, a steep pavé between vineyards and villages, starts from the bridge of the Stelvio road and mounts the further hillside.

In the old visitors' book at the Montanvert Inn was to be read a characteristic entry, 'found the path up, like that to heaven, steep and stony.' Mr. Spurgeon would find Esino much more difficult to get to than heaven. The path is laid with large smooth rounded stones, placed at such a high angle as to render back-sliding inevitable. Fortunately there was abundant consolation in the exquisite glimpses which met us at every corner, and boots and tempers held out pretty well, until both were rewarded by a smooth terrace-path circling round the hollows of the upper hills.

Where the deep ravine rose towards us, and two steeply-falling brooks united to form its torrent, the

church of Esino stood forth, the ornament of a bold green spur projecting from a broad platform covered with fields and trees.

Half the village lies a few hundred yards higher on the hillside, and the only inn—a mere peasant's house of call—is the first house in the upper hamlet. The blacksmith appeared to be the official guide to the Grigna, but in his absence a substitute was provided in the master of the inn. His first act was to pack an enormous basket of bread and wine, of which he said we might consume as much as we liked and pay him accordingly, a primitive but not, as we afterwards found, particularly economical arrangement. His next proceeding was to offer a few coppers to a girl to carry the basket to the last shepherd's hut. In the Bergamasque country we soon became accustomed to our porters acting as contractors and subletting a portion of their contract to any chance passenger or herdsman they met on the way.

A charming path leads up from Esino to the Cainallo Pass, the direct way into Val Sassina. Large beeches grow in clusters amongst tufts of underwood, or overshadow shallow ponds, the frequent haunts of the herd. Below lies the long ribbon of the lake, its waves reduced to a ripple, which the sloping sunlight hardly makes visible. Away beyond the green gulf leading to Porlezza and the hills of Maggiore glows the supreme glory of the Alps, the snow-front of Monte Rosa. Right and left the faint and far forms of the Grand Paradis and Grivola and the Oberland peaks attend in the train of their queen.

Instead of crossing the pass the route to the Grigna turns southward along the ridge until some 500 feet

x a new inn - 1880

higher it reaches the edge of a great horseshoe-shaped recess in the north-east flank of the mountain. The limestone here breaks below into many fantastic spires, the precipices opposite are abrupt, and the whole landscape has a severe and bold character unexpected in this region.

The circuit to the opposite side of the recess where the real climb begins is somewhat tedious. Beyond a cattle-alp, which affords milk, the mountain becomes a bare mass of limestone, the hollows in which are filled, first by grass, then by snow. The top lies still far back, and the ridge on the right which cuts off most of the view looks tempting. It is not comfortable ground, however, except for a tolerable cragsman. Keep below to the last, and when you clamber on to the highest crest your patience will be rewarded.

A moment before a rock was before your eyes, now there is nothing but the straight-drawn line of the Tuscan Apennine. The vast plain of Lombardy has, for the first time all day, burst into sight. Surely there are few sights which appeal at once to the senses and imagination with so much power. Possibly the Indian plains from some Himalayan spur may have richer colours, certainly the northern steppe from Elbruz has greater boundlessness. But they are not so much mixed up with associations. This is Italy; there are Milan, Monza, Bergamo, a hundred battle-fields from the Trebia to Magenta.

It is natural to compare the Grigna panorama with those from Monte Generoso and Monte San Primo. As a perfect view of the Lake of Como the Monte San Primo is unrivalled. The delicious dip from Monte Generoso on to Lugano perhaps surpasses in beauty the

wilder plunge of the Grigna upon the Lago di Lecco. But for the plain and the great range I unhesitatingly give the palm to the higher mountain.

The last spurs of the Alps are here singularly picturesque. The bold forms of the Corno di Canzo and Monte Baro break down to display the shining pools of the Laghi di Pusiano and d' Annone, and the hills and towns of the Brianza, a fair garden country full of well-to-do towns and bright villas, the country seats of the Milanese. Hither Leonardo may have come, and looking across the narrow lake or from beside some smaller pool or stream at the stiff upright rocks of the Grigna and the Resegone, have conceived the strange backgrounds with which we are all familiar.

From mountains of middle height the general aspect of the range is ordinarily one of wild disorder. It is but rarely any distant group is completely seen; only, wherever the nearer ridges subside, one or two peaks come into view disconnectedly and as it were by chance. From more commanding summits the contrary effect is produced; intervening and minor masses sink into their proper place; they no longer produce the impression of a hopeless labyrinth, but combine with the great peaks to form well-defined groups.

In most Alpine districts the Grigna (7,909 feet) would rank among minor heights; on the shores of Lago di Como and at the edge of the Lombard plain it is a giant. Its extra 2,000 feet enable it to look not only over neighbouring hills but into the hollows which separate them—hollows filled with an air like a melted jewel in its mingled depth and transparency of colour. The snowy Alps, raised now, not merely head, but head

and shoulders above the crowd, range themselves before the eyes in well-ordered companies.

In one direction only—where the intricate Bergamasque mountains scarcely leave space for some disconnected glimpses of the Orteler snows or the bold front of the Carè Alto—is the panorama interfered with in the ordinary manner.

Perfect peace and radiance filled the heaven. The morning breeze had died away, no cloud had lifted itself from the valleys; all was calm and sunny, from the lake at our feet to the pale shadowy cone scarcely defined on the glowing horizon, which was Monte Viso. For hours we lay wrapt in the divine air, now watching Monte Rosa as it changed from a golden light to a shadow, now gazing over the plain as the slant sunbeams falling on white walls and towers gave detail and reality to the dreamlike vision of noon.

The two peaks of the Great and Little Grigna or Campione are cut off from the surrounding ranges by a deep semicircular trough extending from Lecco to Bellano. Near the centre of the bow stands Introbbio on the Bellano side of a low watershed. The easiest way down the back of the Grigna seems to be to follow its north-east ridge, and then descend a steep grassy hillside to some homesteads grouped about a pond.

The lower slopes are a charming surprise to eyes accustomed to the severer scenery of a Swiss alp. They share the beauties of the pasturages of Bern and add to them something of a softer grace. Although, owing to the porous nature of the limestone, water is scarce enough to make it worth while to collect it in circular ponds like those of our own South Downs, the ground,

even in September, is covered with a close carpet of the greenest turf, broken, not by rocks, but copses of laburnum. In May it must be a garden of the exquisite wild flowers which climb, a fairy procession, in endless variety of form and colour and perfume, every southern hillside.<sup>1</sup> In the place of brown châteaux we have whitewashed cottages roofed with red tiles, which harmonise well with the general cheerful brightness of the landscape. A steep track through a thick chestnut wood leads down to Pasturo, a large village whence there is a good road to Introbbio.

Pasturo lies in a broad and smiling basin, the head of Val Sassina. But half a mile further on the opposite ranges are almost joined by two huge masses of porphyry, between which the stream finds a way through a narrow and once fortified natural gate. Beyond the barrier lies Introbbio half hidden amongst its chestnuts, and looking across to the bold crags of the precipitous face of the Grigna.

There are few things less favourable to Stoicism than disappointed hopes in an inn. Where nothing is expected much can be borne. But of the 'Albergo delle Miniere' the guide-books encouraged the most rosy anticipations, and the appearance of the house bore out at first sight its good name. It stood, as all inns should, outside the town and the first house as we approached it; on the wall was written in bold letters 'Grand Hotel of the Mines.' The front door stood hospitably open, and closed shutters are too usual in sunny Italy to excite misgiving. But it was in vain we searched the empty passages, tried the locked doors, or

<sup>1</sup> See Mr. J. A. Symonds' charming description of the Italian foothills in spring, in *Sketches from Italy and Greece*.

sniffed for any possible odour of kitchen. In vain one of my friends, phrase-book in hand, shouted out every call for waiter in use between Turin and Palermo. There was not even a cat left in the house; the owner had become bankrupt, and no one had had the courage to take his place. So we retired disconsolate to an 'Osteria Antica' in the heart of the town, where we found François already arrived.

If we were discomfited, our host was little less so. The fall of its rival had brought no second youth to the 'Osteria Antica.' It was kept by a haughty and, except as regards payment, indifferent landlord, whose household consisted of a vague and dilatory wife, a loutish and generally-in-the-way son, and a good-natured wench whose carrying qualities were for the most part thrown away, owing to there never being anything ready for her to carry. For hours François sat by the kitchen fire, with a resignation only smokers can attain, answering all enquiries in the monotonous refrain, 'On prépare, messieurs—on prépare toujours.'

It was 9 P.M. before the serving-girl entered with a bowl of liquid sufficient, in quantity at least, to have fed a regiment, and the torpid son broke for a moment into a smile as he placed on the table a huge carafe of 'Vino Vecchio.' Its age may have been owing to its repellent effect on previous toppers, and so far as we were concerned it was at liberty to grow older still. Half-an-hour later, with unsatisfied appetites and injured digestions, we retired to two dingy and dubious bedrooms. Next morning the bill which awaited us was a triumph of caligraphy, extending to at least a column and a half of items. In the country inns of this part of Italy it is the usual custom to charge each loaf and

dish separately. But here the general taxes of great hotels formed a supplement to special charges for the very services in respect of which such taxes are generally supposed to be levied. Thus, after paying a sum for 'zucchero' and 'candele' which showed the high value set by the Introbbians on 'sweetness and light,' we were expected not only to make a further disbursement in consideration of boot-blackening and warm water, but also to remember the 'servizio' and 'portiere.' We were almost ashamed to disturb the result of so much labour and ingenuity by such a rough-and-ready proceeding as the tender of the lump sum which seemed to us more than adequate to the occasion.

Beyond Introbbio we plunged into the Bergamasque ranges, perhaps to Englishmen the least known fragment of the central Alps. Owing to the absence at their head of any peaks high or inaccessible enough to attract ardent climbers, the two great trenches which open on to the plain near Bergamo have not, like the valleys of Monte Rosa, come in the way of the Alpine Club. And it is to its members that we owe almost entirely our introduction to out-of-the-way corners. Yet an Italian valley, among mountains rising at its head to nearly 10,000 feet, is at least worth looking at. Val Brembana and Val Seriana might prove rivals to Val Mastalone and Val Sesia. At last, in 1874, I determined to carry out, at any rate in part, a long-formed intention, and see something of what lay within and behind the jagged line of peaks so long familiar to me from the high summits of the Engadine.

The Forcella di Cedrino, which forms the entrance from Introbbio to the upper branches of Val Brembana, is on the whole decidedly dull—a long steep ascent, a

broad undulating top, only remarkable for its laburnum thickets, and a commonplace glen on the other side. Near the first hamlet, Val Torta, the scenery improves. The old frescoed church and white houses hang on the steep side of a green basin among woods and shapely hills.

Thenceforth the path is charming. Descending at once to the clear slender stream it threads a tortuous defile, where at every corner the landscape changes. On the right rise the spurs of the many-crested Monte Aralalta, clad almost to their tops in wood. Above the broken glens the limestone plays a hundred freaks, here cutting the sky with twisted spires and perforated towers, there throwing down a knife-edge buttress between the greenery. Opposite a broad opening on the left the stream is reinforced by three great fountains gushing directly out of the living rock.

A mile or two further, at Cassiglio, the glen opens and a carriage-road begins. Several of the old houses here are frescoed, one with a whimsical selection of old-world figures, another with a Dance of Death. In this 'Earthly Paradise,' as it appears to the northern wanderer, the mystery of death seems, as in Mr. Morris's poem, to be constantly present. The great reaper with his sickle is painted on the walls of dwelling-houses as well as churches. 'Morituro satis' writes the wealthy farmer over his threshold, the bones of his ancestors—nay, sometimes even their ghastly withered mummies—stare out at him through the iron grating of the deadhouse as he goes out to his work in the fields. And for the true son of the Church there is no such peace in prospect as for his foregoers, no 'Nox perpetua una dormienda,' or shadowy Hades.

His future is put before him in the most positive manner, by the care of priests and painters, on every wayside chapel. Whatever his life, he must when he dies take his place amongst that wretched throng of sufferers packed as closely as cattle in a truck, and plunged to a point perhaps determined by prudery in tongues of flame. His deliverance from this hideous place will, he is told, depend in great part on the importunity with which his surviving relatives address the saints on his behalf, and the sums they can afford to pay for masses to the priest. Roman Christianity for the peasantry represents the rule of the universe as a malevolent despotism tempered by influence and bribery. Fortunately, whatever they may profess, men seldom at heart accept a creed which makes the universe subject to Beings or a Being of worse passions than themselves.

Cassiglio stands above a watersmeet where a new face of the beautiful Monte Aralalta shuts in a wooded glen, through which a tempting path leads to the hamlets of Taleggio. All the hill-country between Val Brembana and the Bergamo-Lecco railway gives promise of the richest and most romantic scenery, and I can imagine nothing more delightful than to wander through its recesses in the long May days. My fancy seems, however, to be singular, for, so far as I know, not one out of the number of our countrymen who haunt Lago di Como in spring has taken advantage of his opportunity.

Below Cassiglio, Val Torta for the first time expands into a wide basin full of maize and walnuts. Presently it contracts again into a narrow funnel, which on a dull day, when the higher crests are in cloud, might be

fancied a Devonshire combe. At the junction of a considerable side-valley clusters of houses brighten the hill-sides, and, where two roads meet, a clean country inn, with a terraced bowling-ground above the stream, invites to a halt.

The second road leads towards the Passo di San Marco, the lowest and easiest track from Bergamo to the Val Tellina.

Here, perhaps for the only time in these valleys, we come upon a track already described by an English traveller. The title of his volume at least is sufficiently attractive. I quote it in full:—

‘Coryats Crudities Hastily gobbled up in five moneths travells in France Savoy Italy Rhetia commonly called the Grisions country Helvetia alias Switzerland some parts of High Germany and the Netherlands: Newly digested in the hungry aire of Odcombe in ye county of Somerset and now dispersed to the nourishment of the travelling members of this kingdom.’ London, 1611.

Readers, sated for the moment with the solid information to be gathered from our modern books of travel, may spend a refreshing half-hour in the company of this old traveller, who assumed in his public the same taste he had so strongly in himself, and was content to display undisguised a boyish delight in novelties, wonders, and adventure. He has, moreover, a special title to the respect of the modern Alpine traveller, for ‘footmanship’ was his great boast, and he delighted to be celebrated by his familiars as the ‘Odcombian Leggestretcher.’ I shall not apologise therefore for pausing for a moment—

——— To catechise  
My picked man of countries

of the days of King James I., and to learn what he may have to say—

—— Of the Alps and Apennines,  
The Pyrenean and the River Po.

In listening to Tom Coryat's gossip we realise as far as is now possible such an evening's entertainment as may have suggested these lines to Shakspeare. We can almost fancy ourselves seated in the Mermaid Tavern, while our traveller, swollen with his own importance, told his tales, and the wits laughed over some of the earliest 'Alpine shop.' The address of one of Coryat's letters 'to the Right Worshipfull Society of Sirenaical Gentlemen that meet the first Fridaie of every moneth at the signe of the Mermaide in Bread Street' shows him a frequent guest at the famous inn. His friends have drawn his character with force and perfect freedom. He was one of those wits who are more often laughed at than with. 'He is,' writes Ben Jonson, 'always Tongue-Major of the Company, and if ever perpetual motion be to be hoped it is from thence. He is frequent at all sorts of Free-Tables, where though he might sit as a guest he would rather be served in as a dish, and is loth to have anything of himself kept cold against the next day.' In conversation as well as writing he was an euphuist, 'a great carpenter of words.' Travel was so far his engrossing passion that he would give up any company to talk with even a carrier. 'The mere superscription of a letter from Zurich set him up like a top; Basel or Heidelberg made him spin.'

The prominent mention in the title of his book of Alpine regions naturally suggests that we may have here lit on an early appreciator of the Alps; and in

the first few pages this hope receives some confirmation. Mr. Stephen has told us that the Gothic cathedral and the granite cliffs have many properties in common, and that 'one might venture to predict from a man's taste in human buildings whether he preferred the delicate grace of lowland scenery or the more startling effects only to be seen in the heart of the mountains.' Coryat's avowal therefore that Amiens Cathedral is 'the Queen of all the churches in France and the fairest that ever I saw till then,' seems to promise well for his taste in mountains.

We get the first Alpine adventure just before reaching Chambery. Coryat was apparently a nervous horseman, and would not with his companions ride over the 'Montagne Aiguebelette.' Consequently he was led 'to compound for a cardakew, which is eighteen pence English,' with 'certain poore fellowes which get their living especially by carrying men in chairs to the toppe of the mountain.' 'This,' he says, 'was the manner of their carrying of me. They did put two slender poles through certaine wooden rings which were at the foure corners of the chaire, and so carried me on their shoulders, sitting in the chaire, one before and another behinde; but such was the miserable paines that the poore slaves willingly undertooke for the gaine of that cardakew, that I would not have done the like for five hundred.' 'The worst wayes that ever I travelled in all my life in the summer were those betwixt Chamberie and Aiguebelle, which were as bad as the worst I ever rode in England in the midst of winter;' but still Coryat says, 'I commended Savoy a pretty while for the best place that ever I saw in my life for abundance of pleasant springs descending from the mountaines, till

at the last I considered the cause of those springs, for they are not fresh springs, as I conjectured at the first, but only little torrents of snow-water.' Why snow-water should be held of no value is explained afterwards. It is the cause of the bunches, 'almost as great as an ordinary football with us in England,' on the necks of the Savoyards. The swiftness of the Isère, the great blocks fallen from the mountain-side, of course strike Coryat, but he has also his eyes open for the snow-mountains; he mentions one 'wondrous high mountain at the top whereof there is an exceeding high rock,' and another 'covered with snow, and of a most excessive and stupendious height.' From Lanslebourg he sets out for the Cenis. 'The waies were exceeding uneasie, wonderfull hard, all stony, and full of windings and intricate turnings.' Coryat therefore had to walk down the mountain, passing on the way 'many people ascending, mules laden with carriage, and a great company of dunne kine driven up the hill with collars about their necks.'

The 'Roch Melow' (Roche Melon) was said to be 'the highest mountain of all the Alpes, saving one of those that part Italy and Germany.' We learn afterwards that this was the 'Mountaine Goddard, commonly esteemed the highest of all the Alpine mountains.'<sup>1</sup> Monte Viso Coryat knew only by name. Otherwise he has no information as to peaks, and he believes that the Alps 'consiste of two ranges sunderd by the space of many

<sup>1</sup> In this statement Coryat is supported by the best Swiss authorities of the time. The belief in the pre-eminence of this part of the chain was probably grounded on the plausible argument that, as the two greatest rivers of the Alps rise in this group, and all rivers flow down hill, the region containing their sources must be the most elevated.

miles,' and dividing respectively Italy from France and Germany. As to passes, he mentions besides the Cenis, the Brenner, the St. Gothard and the Splugen; he knows that the Rhone springs from 'the Rhetical Alps out of a certain high mountaine called Furca;' that the Rhine has two sources from 'the mountain Adula,' between which and the springs of the Rhone 'there is interjected no longer space than of 3 heures journey.' So much for his Alpine geography.

I wish I had space to follow Coryat into Italy, where he discovers forks and umbrellas, and describes them with the minuteness appropriate to such important novelties. Venice was the goal of his journey, and there he 'swam in a gondola' for six weeks—the sweetest time (I must needs confesse) that ever I spent in my life.' He saw and describes all the sights we know so well, filled with the crowd which for us lives only in pictures, visited the Arsenal in its glory, was shown the Titians and Tintoretts in their fresh beauty, and bursts out into an enthusiasm which might satisfy Mr. Ruskin for that 'peerlesse place' the Piazza di San Marco.

Coryat's homeward journey through the Alps began at Bergamo. On reaching that town his route was altered by the news given him by a friendly Dominican monk, who warned him that a castle near the head of the Lago di Como was held by Spaniards,<sup>1</sup> who would have little scruple in submitting a heretic to the tortures of the Inquisition. He consequently gave up the lake for Val Brembana and the Passo di San Marco.

<sup>1</sup> On the rocky knoll in the centre of the delta of the Adda, I find printed on the Lombard map the Spanish word 'Fuentes.' This was doubtless the site of the castle.

In Val Brembana he saw exposed the bodies of some bandits, members of a party of thirty who had been recently captured while lying in wait for passengers to the great fair of Bergamo. The Passo di San Marco was then the limit of Venetian rule, and the frontier was marked by an inn bearing on its front the golden-winged lion. The house still exists.

In descending towards the Val Tellina Coryat saw the Bergamasque flocks being driven home from their summer pasturages. Near Chiavenna the 'very sharp and rough stones' were 'very offensive to foot travellers;' on the other hand, the security of the country was such that a priest told him no robbery had ever been heard of. The passage of the Splügen is passed over very slightly. The cataracts of the Rofna defile attracted Coryat's notice, but the old path of course did not penetrate the crack of the Via Mala.

The inveterate Swiss habit of reckoning distance by hours rather than miles is justly criticised as yielding 'a very uncertain satisfaction to a traveller, because the speed of all is not alike in travelling; for some can travel further in one hour than others in three.'

At Ragatz he leaves 'Rhetia' for 'Helvetia,' and at Walenstadt Val Tellina wine, of which he has a good opinion, for Rhenish. Swiss diet he finds 'passing good in most places,' and 'the charge something reasonable,' varying from a Spanish shilling to 15*d.* of English money. Duvets are novelties observed for the first time in Swiss inns, and much appreciated.

In Zurich Coryat was taken to see the sword of William Tell and told his history, on which he very pertinently suggested that 'it would have been much better to have preserved the arrow.' At the Swiss

Baden he was shown and properly shocked at the sociable manner of bathing, which seems not to have differed much, except in the quantity of clothing worn, from that now in use at Leukerbad. At Basel Switzerland is left, with the unexpected remark that the bridge, the established favourite of modern sketch-books, is 'a base and mean thing.' But our traveller has already led us too far from the high-road of Val Brembana—and here we must leave him to find his way home.

After all, what impression did the mountains make on Coryat? I think we must answer, about the same as on a commonplace tourist of our own day who has sufficient sturdiness of mind to be independent of fashion in his likes and dislikes. Horror of them he has none, and their dangers he is little disposed to exaggerate.<sup>1</sup>

He is struck by a bold peak; he notes a waterfall; he is amused to find himself above the clouds; he likes to be able to see a good many things at once, as from St. Mark's tower, whence he admires 'The Alpes, the Apennines, the pleasant Euganean hills, with a little

<sup>1</sup> Unless indeed we take him to task for a passage found, of all odd places, in an answer to a Chancery Bill filed by a certain 'vilipendious linendraper,' to restrain him from common law proceedings for the recovery of a debt. His 'versute adversarie,' amongst other impertinent matters, seems to have inserted allegations as to the 'smallnesse and commonnesse' of Coryat's voyage. The enraged traveller retorts, with an eloquence seldom reached by modern pleaders, 'has he not walked above the clouds over hills that are at least 7 miles high? For indeed so high is the mountaine Cenys, the danger of which is such, that if in some places the traveller should but trip aside in certaine narrow wayes that are scarcely a yard broade, he is precipitated into a very Stygian barathrum, or Tartarean lake, six times deeper than Paul's tower is high.' Has he not 'continually stood in feare of the Alpine cut-throats called the Bandits?'

world of other most delectable objects.' But he has not an imaginative mind, and a few days is a short time in which to develop an intelligent taste for mountain scenery. He is at a loss in the Alps from want of familiarity. His feeling towards them may be fairly illustrated by his attitude in matters of art. He is equally embarrassed by the glorious Tintoretto of the ducal palace. These he can only note down, he cannot appreciate. What he really could understand and admire comes out naïvely elsewhere. He saw in a 'painter's shop,' near San Marco, two things which 'I did not a little admire, a picture of a hinder quarter of veal—the rarest invention that ever I saw before,' and 'the picture of a Gentlewoman whose eyes were contrived that they moved up and down of themselves, not after a seeming manner but truly and indeed.'

The neighbouring village of Olmo produced a carriage. A short drive through an open valley brought us to Piazza, the market-town and centre of the upper valley, placed on a low flat-topped brow, the last spur of the range dividing the stream of Val Torta from the Brembo. Throughout these valleys the villages, although in number of inhabitants only villages, take the air of towns. Italians, as contrasted with Swiss, are essentially a town-loving race; north of the Alps it is mere matter of chance whether the brown cottages are scattered widely over the hillsides or clustered together; the southerner is more sociable and more ambitious, having ever before his eyes the nearest large town as a model. Even in the mountains he likes his native place to boast a 'piazza,' and perhaps even a 'Corso,' a name which can be easily stuck on to the first quarter

of a mile of road. He builds lofty white houses and ranges them along the sides of a narrow street, which, with its barred windows, gloomy little shops, and bright fruitstalls, might be in a back quarter of Bergamo or even Milan.

The ambition of Piazza is leading it to erect a vast church with columns and porticoes, incongruous enough in a mountain landscape. Beneath the uncompleted edifice a car-road turns off to the upper Val Brembana and Branzi. The high-road goes away to the south through a narrow rift in the hills in company with the united streams. I longed to follow it and see something more of the Bergamasque valleys than their heads. Amongst these bold hills rising so near the plain there must be a crowd of landscapes of romantic beauty, and from every brow the most exquisite views. Moreover if Herr Iwan von Tschudi's 'Schweizerführer' is as trustworthy in matters of art as with respect to mountains this region is rich indeed. In every village church there are said to be good pictures.<sup>1</sup> The great names of Tintoretto and Paul Veronese are coupled in the list with a host of local painters, such as Cavagna and G. B. Morone, many of them natives of the upland villages in which their works are found. But it must be remembered that hidden gems are rare, and that in remote hamlets great names are readily bestowed and seldom disputed. The real worth of these art-remains is a matter to be determined by further research. Objects of architectural interest are less open to doubt.<sup>1</sup> At Almenno San Salvatore is

<sup>1</sup> Since writing the above, I have been favoured by Signor Curo, President of the Bergamasque Section of the Italian Alpine Club, with a list of some of the most remarkable works of art in this region. It is printed as Appendix B.

a small Rotunda of the fifth century dedicated to St. Thomas : at Almè an old and very remarkable chapel attributed by popular legend to the Gothic queen Theodolinda. In the church of Leprenno, itself of the twelfth century, is to be seen 'a costly altar brought out of England at the time of the schism under Henry VIII.'

Convenient resting-places are not wanting. At Zogno, in Val Brembana, there is said to be a 'delightful' inn ; at San Pellegrino, higher in the valley, and at San Omobuono, in Val Imagna, bathing establishments described as 'comfortable and much frequented.' For the present, however, I had to turn my back on these varied attractions. Athletic companions, a Chamonix guide, and four ice-axes, all pointed towards the rocks and snows, and were only prevented from rushing straight to the Bernina or the Adamello by my assertion, somewhat recklessly made, that there were glaciers in the next valley.

Our course lay up the eastern stream by a country road rougher than that we had left, but still passable for spring-carriages. In the morning the variety of Val Torta had come up to our hopes, the scenery of the main valley for the next two hours surpassed them. The rocky defile leading to Branzi fairly rivals any of the similar scenes amongst the branches of Val Sesia. If less noble and majestic than Val Bavona or Val di Genova, it could scarcely be more fascinating. The track climbs steeply amidst ruddy boulders and cliff faces stained a deep purple. Against these the chestnuts stretch their green branches or spread out at their feet in banks where the deep green of the leaves is shot with the lighter hue of the unripe fruitpod. Side-glens break through the opposing walls and give variety to the

gorge, peaks bold in form and rich in colour fill the gaps, the water is blue and sparkling, the foliage fresh and varied. Churches and villages, with the usual accompaniments of frescoed campaniles and high-pitched bridges, are always ready in the right place to give variety to each sunny picture.

Nature presents herself in Val Brembana in a bright fantastic mood, full of life and vigour, yet not so earnest and severe as to strain our comprehension or our sympathy, or so large as to be beyond—more than, in its many-sidedness, all nature is beyond—the grasp of even an unambitious art. To employ a much-abused yet useful phrase, the scenery is essentially picturesque.

The valley when it opens again is more Alpine, although we are still only at the moderate height of 2,200 feet. A village, Trabuchetto, stands on the edge of the first meadows of a long steep-sided basin fringed with pines. For the next mile or two the road runs at a level over fields of the greenest turf broken by mossy boulders. A very slight ascent leads up to the first houses of Branzi, the chief place of the upper valley, locally famous for a great cheese-fair held in September, before the departure of the herds for the plain.

Steep hills hem in on all sides the verdant meadows amongst which the village stands. Two streams and paths, issuing out of deep-cut clefts, descend from the chain dividing us from the Val Tellina. A third torrent pours down from the top of the eastern hillside, some 3,000 feet above, in a scarcely broken fall which only wants volume, and must be superb after any heavy rains.

Driving under a dark archway we entered the little

piazza, and, following a priest's directions, passed one not ill-looking 'osteria,' and sought another standing back from the high-road at the top of the village. Here again we were fated to be disappointed in our inn. Our arrival was doubly ill-timed. In the first place the house was under repair, and the upstairs rooms—if in their present condition they could be called rooms—showed ribs as bare as a ship in the first stage of construction. Secondly the culinary and conversational resources of the establishment were alike engrossed on behalf of two Italian 'Alpinisti' who had preceded us.

The 'Alpinista' is a novelty in Italy, and seems to bid fair to become a fashionable one. His creation is due to the assiduous zeal of the promoters of the Italian Alpine Club. That institution has ends far broader and deeper than those proposed by the founders of our own merely social club. Among its many objects are the strengthening of good-fellowship between the different provinces of United Italy, the advancement of science by the multiplication of observatories and other means, and the promotion of the welfare of the mountain districts by turning attention to the preservation of their forests and the embankment of their streams, and also by attracting to them some of the foreign gold which flows so freely into the pockets of their Swiss neighbours. Such a body demands of course no climbing qualification. Yet there are in Italy some proved and first-rate mountaineers, and, if the outward appearance of the novices is sometimes amusing to an Englishman, it is only owing to the apparent incongruity between a southern face and figure and an equipment so completely British, from the knapsack down to the boots, that one is tempted to believe the

Italian Club must have given a wholesale order in Oxford Street for a regulation dress. But these young mountaineers are, as a rule, very pleasant fellows, and though exceedingly vague on mountain matters in general walk well. On the present occasion I fear we wished our fellow-guests elsewhere, for their claim to precedence turned our dinner into one of those hopes deferred which make the heart—or something very near it—sick.

There are on the map two obvious passes from Branzi to Val Seriana, one following the main valley to its principal head, the other climbing beside the waterfall and then traversing a wide stretch of lofty lakelet-dotted table-land. We chose the latter. The first ascent seemed endless; the houses of Branzi were always but a stone's throw in lateral distance, while the bells of its church tower rang out successive quarters of an hour enough to have put us ten miles off in any reasonable country. At last a green hillock was turned and the upper region discovered; a long green valley with shelving sides surrounded by bold scattered peaks. A terrace-path led along the hillside past an opening within which lies a large lake, the object of the day's walk of the 'Alpinisti.' We passed presently another tarn of clear blue water, the Lago di Gornigo, hidden away among the hills. The scenery was pleasing though not of a high order, but near the lake an exquisite touch of beauty was given to it by the apparition of Monte Rosa, a frail opal vision floating on the tops of the nearer ranges.

Grassy banks lead to the apparent pass. On reaching it, however, it is, in clear weather, easy to see that the glen on the further side is another feeder of Val Brem-

bana. A short level traverse to the right, or the ascent of the rocky knoll in the same direction, leads to a point overlooking the true valley of descent. But the Y-shaped ridges may well perplex a stranger, and the pass, though absolutely free from difficulty, is one where most people will find a native indicator useful. From the knoll where the two ridges join Monte Rosa is still seen, together with several of the Bernina peaks and a wide view to the eastward.

The entire descent was for a pass of this nature exceedingly fine and varied. First we plunged under purple cliffs and past a *châlet* into a wilderness of stone blocks, a rough setting for a cluster of gem-like pools; some blue, some the colour of the Bluebeard when, to quote the latest version of an old story, 'it writhed in an indigo blackness.' Then a steep rocky stair or '*scala*' amongst waterfalls, and a stride over juniper bushes brought us to a path, level, green, shaded by tall pines, with bright glimpses of distant hills and once of the golden floor of Lago d' Iseo between the moss-grown columns. We came out on to a mountain of hayfields, whence the Presolana, an isolated limestone mass between us and the Val di Scalve, tried with some success to look like the Pelmo.

When we turned downwards the path was a stony impossibility, and trespassing on the new-mown turf a delicious and harmless necessity. Beyond a picturesque, warm-looking village we were caught between maize-fields by a most penitential *pavé*, which led to a corner where a handsome young priest advanced book in hand before a fountain and a vista, as complete a picture as any composed for Burlington House.

Gromo and the '*Strada Provinciale*' were now below

us, and in five minutes more we passed under the church tower and the one unfallen feudal keep which still overshadows the village, and found ourselves at the doorway of the inn. This time there was no disappointment. We entered a large, handsome house, with a kitchen and a store-room, such as the painters of Bassano so often chose for subjects, dark and cool, yet lit with the reflected gleams of copper and the bright hues of southern fruit and vegetables.

Food here was as ready and good as it had been lately hard to obtain and indifferent; and but for the distance from the head of the valley and our next mountain we should have gladly stayed the night. Forewarned, but we felt also forearmed, against the kitchen of Bondione, we mounted the carriage which had been without difficulty procured for us.

Val Seriana, at any rate in its upper portion, is wider and straighter than Val Brembana, and the mountains, although lofty, do not make up in sublimity for what they lose in variety. As far as Fiumenero the drive is in fact a trifle monotonous. At this point the river turns round a sharp corner, and its last reach, backed by the horseshoe cliffs closing the valley, comes into view.

The Monte Redorta (9,975 feet), the highest summit between Lago di Como and the Aprica Pass, rises in rough tiers of precipice on the left. Near Bondione large iron mines are worked, and the leading industry gives the place the air of hopeless grime peculiar to underground pursuits. Dirt nowhere looks so dirty as on the pure mountains, and the village is the last place one would care to make a stay in. Moreover nothing can be less tempting than the inn, although a neigh-

bouring house provides the unexpected luxury of two decent bedrooms and clean beds.

The houses are built among the huge ruins of a fallen buttress of the Redorta; and the natural cavities under the boulders, which are rather bigger than the houses, serve the inhabitants for store-rooms, cellars, and other purposes. The population of Bondione seem to hold firmly to the theory expounded to Peter Simple that a second cannon-ball never comes through the hole made by the first, and to look on these, to strangers somewhat unpleasantly suggestive neighbours, as among the 'amenities' of their situation.

Next morning we crossed the river by a bridge, beyond which was an 'osteria' with a rhyming sign, suggesting to the wayfarer bound for the Barbellino the need of refreshing himself first with the 'buon vino' of the host. Leaving on the right a glen through which an easy track crosses to the remote villages of Val di Scalve, a steady ascent through beech copses led us to a narrow platform at the foot of a great rock wall, like that which bars the Schachenthal in Canton Uri. It is difficult to see where the path will find passage; at the left-hand corner the Serio flings itself off the brow, crashing on the rocks, and throwing itself out again with fresh energy into space. As we mounted the steep zigzags of the path the first arrows of sunlight, shooting over the hills and striking obliquely across the rock-face, caught the most outward-flung part of the fall, leaving the crags behind still in shadow. Seldom had we witnessed so fantastic and fairylike a play of the elements as that now exhibited before our eyes. The water-rockets, thrown out in regular succes-

sion from the first rude contact of stream and rock, leapt forth masses of pure cold white. In a moment, as they entered the illumined space, they were transfigured in a glory of reflected light. The comparison to a bursting firework is inevitable but unworthy. At first they shone with the colours of the rainbow, then with a hundred other indescribably delicate and unexpected shades, from a brilliant green-blue to a rich purple. A minute or two later and the cloud of foam below caught the illumination, and the whole cascade was one mass of radiant colour thrown out against a dark background.

When the coat of many colours was stripped from it the fall, though a fine one, did not seem full enough to rank in the very first class of Alpine cascades. But its comparative merits can hardly be decided without a nearer approach than we made.

A slight gap in the rocky crest lets the path through to the Barbellino Alp, a flat meadow, hemmed in by rugged slopes. Near the huts we halted for breakfast and to decide on our future course. We were bound to Val Camónica, and time not allowing us to explore Val di Scalve, had determined to cross the ridge separating the head of Val Seriana from Val Belviso, a side-glen of the Val Tellina, by which the Aprica posthouse could be gained without a preliminary plunge into the great valley. The straightest and easiest course was doubtless to strike the ridge due east of Lago Barbellino, where, although no track is shown on the map, it is certainly easy to pass. But the day was fine enough for a peak, and Monte Gleno lying at the angle of the chain where it turns northward round the sources of

the Serio, seemed capable of being combined with a pass into Val Belviso.

Seen from the Barbellino Alp, the Pizzo di Cocca and its neighbours are a bold group of rock-peaks, but they do not show any ice. My friends did not fail to point out this unfortunate deficiency, and to remind me that I had only a few hours left within which to produce the promised glacier which was to justify the intrusion of rope and ice-axes into Bergamasque valleys.

My own confidence in my assertions, never very strong, was now at its lowest ebb, and I could only repeat them with renewed vigour. Fortunately, unexpected assistance was afforded me by the stream which joins the Serio at the upper end of the level pasturage. Its waters were milky white, a strong indication that it was iceborn.

We followed the sides of this torrent, climbing by steep sheep-paths, until we were almost on a level with the base of the surrounding peaks. A rocky bluff cut off the view of what lay beyond. The head of the glen was evidently a broad basin, but how was it filled? Suddenly we saw before us a sheet of ice at least two miles long by one broad—the glacier of Val Seriana.

The broken pinnacles of the Corno dei Tre Confini shot up opposite us on the right, and between two broad snowy depressions rose the comb of Monte Gleno. To reach it we must ascend the glacier. The ice, though in places steep, was not rent by any wide fissures, and an hour's quick walking brought us to the gap at the north-east base of the mountain. Below us, as we had hoped, lay Val Belviso.

Fifteen minutes of rapid scrambling finished the peak, the highest between the Barbellino and Aprica

Passes.<sup>1</sup> There was no sign on the summit of any earlier visitor.

The distance was for the most part in cloud, but the Adamello group was excellently seen, and the rock-wall above Val Miller, by which I had once descended, appeared as impossible as any easy climb well could. Val di Scalve was at our feet, and looked inviting, as did the carriage-road winding away from it towards Clusone over the spurs of the fortress-like Presolana.

Two clefts or chimneys offered themselves for the descent. We were I think right in choosing the northernmost or furthest from the peak. The other, as seen afterwards from below, seemed steep for a greater distance. The first few hundred feet required considerable care. The centre of the cleft was swept bare and smooth by spring avalanches, and cut in many places by low cliffs. We made therefore frequent use of the more broken crags on our right, where there was plenty of hold both for legs and arms. We did not meet with any serious difficulties, although we suffered now and then from a momentary embarrassment consequent on having put the wrong foot foremost, a mistake which the practised climber is always ready to retract.

Had it not been for the course of action pursued by one of my companions we might perhaps have got down in shorter time. Having some old grudge, as what Alpine Clubman has not, against a loose stone, he had this year constituted himself the foe of the race, and the chief adjutant of Time in his attack on the mountains. Did an unlucky rock show the smallest tendency

<sup>1</sup> The height may be roughly estimated at 9,300 feet.

to looseness, down it went. Resistance was useless, for my friend's perseverance and patience are proverbial; the rock might retain roots which would have held it for a century, but an ice-axe will serve also as a crow-bar, and sooner or later,—down it went.

The process was necessarily sometimes tedious, and those behind watching it from a constrained perch, even if not susceptible enough to see in the downward roar and shiver of the released rock what might happen to themselves if they did not hold on, were liable to become impatient and to protest against the violence of the attack on a peak which had really done nothing to provoke such treatment, and might possibly take to reprisals. A volley from the upper ledges would have been anything but pleasant.

After creeping round the edges of some snow-beds, too short and steep to glissade, the angle of the slope diminished and banks of loose stones fell away to a brow overlooking the highest pasturage. This consists of two shelves, divided by a low cliff and cut off by a much deeper one from the valley. At the *châlets* on the lower shelf the herdsmen recommended us a long circuit round the head of the glen. With some hesitation we decided to trust the map, and took to the left, keeping at a level for twenty minutes as far as another group of huts. Thence we descended rapidly a trackless hillside, until on drawing near the forest we found a shady path to take us to the bottom.

The upper half of Val Belviso is smooth, green, and pleasant, with fine backward views of Monte Gleno and its gullies, and near at hand a clear, copious stream always dashing in and out of still, deep-coloured pools.

Lower down the path becomes steep, stony, and tiresome, and everyone was glad when the last bridge—a bold arch near some ruined mills—seemed to put us within a definite distance of the end. I have seldom known a warmer or more beautiful half hour's walk than the climb of a thousand feet round a projecting hillside to the village of Aprica.

But the high-road to the Adamello marks the close of the Bergamasque valleys.