Chapter VIII. The Presanella and Val di Genova.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRESANELLA AND VAL DI GENOVA.

All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels;
Clouds overcome it.—R. Browning.

ENGLISH AND GERMAN MOUNTAINEERS—THE LOMBARD ALPS FROM MONTE ROSA—NOMENCLATURE—GAVIA PASS—PONTE DI LEGNO—TONALE PASS—VERMIGLIO—VAL PRESANELLA—THE PRESANELLA—PASSO DI CERCEN—VAL DI GENOVA.

The races of English and German mountaineers, after making due allowance for the exceptions which there are to every rule, will be found respectively to embody many of the characteristics of the two nations. Our Alpine Clubman affords while in the Alps an example of almost perpetual motion. His motto is taken from Clough—

Each day has got its sight to see,
Each day must put to profit be.

Provided with a congenial friend, and secure in the company of at least one first-rate guide possessed of the skill and knowledge necessary to encounter every obstacle of the snowy Alps, the English mountaineer runs a tilt at half the mountain-tops which lie in his erratic course, meeting on the whole with wonderfully few falls or failures on the way. He dashes from peak to peak, from group to group, even from one end of the Alps to

the other, in the course of a short summer holiday. Exercise in the best of air, a dash of adventure, and a love of nature, not felt the less because it is not always on his tongue, are his chief motives. A little botany, geology, or chartography, may come into his plans, but only by the way and in a secondary place. He is out on a holiday and in a holiday humour. You must not be surprised, therefore, if the instruments with which one of the party has burdened himself give rise to more bad jokes than valuable observations. For the climbers are in capital training, and can afford to laugh uphill—a power which is freely used, even at moments when the peasant who carries the provision sack is appealing audibly to his saints.

On their return home it is with some secret pleasure, though much grumbling, that the leader of the party hurries off in the intervals of other business a ten-page paper for the 'Alpine Journal'—an account probably of the most adventurous of a dozen 'grandes courses,' full of misspellings of local names, and of the patois he talks to his guides, and, as his Teutonic rival would add, 'utterly devoid of serious aim or importance.'

Far different is the scheme and mode of operation of the German mountaineer. To him his summer journey is no holiday, but part of the business of life. He either deliberately selects his 'Excursions-gebiet' in the early spring with a view to do some good work in geology or mapping, or more probably has it selected for him by a committee of his club. About August you will find him seriously at work. While on the march he shows in many little ways his sense of the importance of his task. His coat is decorated with a ribbon bearing on it the badge or decoration of his club. He

carries in his pockets a notebook, ruled in columns, for observations of every conceivable kind, and a supply of printed cards ready to deposit on the heights he aims at. His orbit, however, is a limited one, and he continues to revolve like a satellite, throwing considerable light on the mass to which he is attached, round the Orteler or Marmolata; while his English rival dashes comet-wise, doing little that is immediately useful, from Grindelwald, the sun and centre of the Alpine system, to the Uranian distances of the Terglou. His velocity also is relatively small; 'a German,' as Hawthorne somewhere says, 'requires to refresh nature ten times to any other person's once,' and to accommodate this sluggishness he requires to pass the night on the highest and most uncomfortable spot possible. Yet having slept or frozen—as you may prefer to call it—scarcely 3,000 feet below his peak, he manages somehow to get benighted before reaching the village on its further side. It must in fairness be admitted that this slow rate of motion is often, partially at least, owing to his dependence on the local chamois-hunter. On rocks this worthy may be, and sometimes is, all that fancy paints him; but on snow or ice the terror inherited from unroped generations possesses him. At the first ice-rift an inch wide, or at a gentle snow-slope of forty-five, he shies obstinately. The foreign mountaineer deserves well of after-comers for the pains with which at his own expense he trains this raw material, and thus founds in every valley a school of native guides. But those who carry about one Almer as an apostle, and associate with him the best local talent, do probably greater good at a less sacrifice to themselves. The party who bring with them a whole train from Zermatt

or Grindelwald are of course wholly selfish, and can lay no claim to have assisted in the progress of Alpine education.

But it is not until our 'klubist' comes home after having spent a third summer in one valley that we realise the full seriousness of his pursuit. No ridiculous mouse of a flippant article is born of his mountains. We have first a solid monograph, properly divided into heads, 'orographical, geological, botanical, and touristical,' and published in the leading geographical magazine of Germany. This is soon followed by a thick volume, printed in luxurious type, and adorned with highly coloured illustrations and a prodigious map, most valuable doubtless, but, alas! to weak English appetites somewhat indigestible.

The foregoing reflections will appear fully justified after any researches into the literature of the Tyrolese Alps in general. But with regard to the Lombard Alps in particular they may seem unfounded. The papers of Lieutenant Payer, their principal German-writing explorer, are as terse as they are full of matter, and several pleasant articles have appeared in the 'Jahrbücher' of the foreign Alpine Clubs on a region which has been strangely neglected by our own countrymen.

The exertions of our German fellow-climbers can, however, scarcely justify the annexation of the district calmly carried out by one of their writers. 'In all our German Alps,' says a learned doctor, 'there is hardly a more forsaken or unknown corner than the Adamello.' 'In unseren Deutschen Alpen!' There is not in the whole Alps a region which is more thoroughly Italian than the mountain-mass of which the Presanella is the highest, the Adamello the most famous, summit. But

it is only fair to the doctor to state his excuse, for the better half of the group lies in Austria, and in 1864 Austria had not yet been pushed out of Germany. The mountains of the Trentino may be still, politically speaking, Austro-Italian Alps; in every other respect they belong entirely to the southern peninsula.

What was written of their deserted condition in 1864 remains true, however, ten years later, at least as far as the mass of English and German travellers is concerned. The splendid gorges which give access from Lago di Garda and Trent to Val Rendena, the roads of the Tonale and the Aprica, are undisturbed by the 'voiturier;' the snow-fields of the Adamello are trampled but once a season by the mountaineer.[1]

To most English frequenters of the Swiss Alps the Lombard snow-peaks are known but as spots on the horizon of the extended view of some mountain-top. It was thus that I first made acquaintance with them.

The full midday glow of a July sun was falling from the dark vapourless vault overhead on to the topmost crags of Monte Rosa. A delicate breeze, or rather air-ripple, lapping softly round the mountain-crest, scarcely tempered the scorching force with which the rays fell through the thin atmosphere. Round us on three sides the thousand-crested Alps swept in a vast semicircle of snow and ice, clustering in bright companies or rang-

[1] A change seems, however, imminent. In 1873 some of the leading inhabitants of Trent and Arco formed themselves into an Alpine Society. Its object is at once to excite in the youth of the Trentino the taste for healthful exercise, and to increase the material prosperity of the mountain valleys by drawing to them some of the abundance of foreign gold which flows so freely into Eastern Switzerland. One of the first consequences of this step has been the establishment of Alpine Inns at Campiglio and San Martino di Castrozza.

ing their snowy heads in sun-tipped lines against the horizon. But we turned our faces mostly to the south, where, beyond the foreshortened foot-hills, and as it seemed at little more than a stone's-throw distance, lay the broad plains of Piedmont and Lombardy. Through a Coan drapery of thin golden haze the great rivers could be seen coursing like veins over the bosom of fair Italy, open to where it was clasped round by the girdle of the far-off Apennine.

As from our tower we watched the lower world, a small cumulus cloud here and there grew into being, some 7,000 feet beneath us, and cast a blue shadow on the distant plain. These cloud-ships would from time to time join company, and, under the favouring influence of some local breeze, set sail for the distant Alps. A few stranded on the lower slopes of Val Sesia, others floated as in a landlocked bay above the deep basin of Macugnaga. A whole fleet sailed away, across the lakes, beyond the village-sprinkled slopes of Val Vigezzo and the crest of Monte Generoso, to find a port in the recesses of a distant range, the first in the east where 'Alp met heaven in snow.'

Where and what, we asked, are these 'silver spear-heads?' The answer given has both before and since satisfied and deluded many enquirers—the Orteler Spitze. But to have named these peaks might, in 1864, have puzzled a better geographer than a Zermatt guide.

Mountains are not born with names; most of them live for ages without them. It is at last often a mere matter of chance and the caprice of an engineer, to what syllables, soft or hideous, they are finally linked. The herdsmen who feed their flocks on the highest pasturages are the authorities to whom the officer in

charge of the Ordnance survey most frequently appeals. These worthy peasants seldom speak anything but a patois scarcely intelligible to their educated fellow-countrymen. Very often, as in the Italian provinces of Austria, they are of a totally different race and speech to their questioners, and confusion of tongues and national antipathy are joined to the fixed notion of every peasant, that all enquiries are connected with taxes, as obstacles to any clear understanding between the parties.

Moreover, the herdsmen have often never thought before of what lies beyond their utmost goat-track. Sometimes driven to despair by cross-questions, they invent, on the spur of the moment, a name drawn from the most obvious characteristic of the peak; hence the crowd and confusion of Corno Rossos and Corno Neros, of Weisshörner and Schwarzhörner. Or they say nothing at all, and leave the map-maker to exercise his own ingenuity.

Again, every mountain has at least two sides, and it is open to the arbitrary discretion of the engineers to prefer the name given on one or the other, which is seldom, if ever, found to be the same.

Until quite recently the two highest peaks of the Lombard Alps were unnamed, and their names are still unknown to many of the people who live beneath them. Two parish priests of Val Camonica, from which the crest of the Adamello is seen for miles closing the distance, had in 1865 never heard of such a mountain. All that they knew was that there was a 'vedretta' somewhere above the summer alps. To them it was quite as remote and inaccessible as any other white cloud, and they had never thought of naming, far less

of approaching, it. The word 'Adamello' is doubtless a creation of the Ordnance survey, derived from Val d'Adame, one of the glens which penetrate nearest to the base of the mountain. The people of Val di Sole called the whole mass of snow and ice—the unattainable ground—on their south, 'Vedretta Presanella.' Strangers are now teaching them to confine the title to the highest peak, and foreign custom is leading to the gradual disuse of the name Cima di Nardis, by which the peak was alone known a few years ago in Val Rendena. The kingship of the Lombard Alps was in 1864 still unconferred between these two rival claimants, the Adamello and Presanella.

On August 23, four weeks after our day on Monte Rosa, we left the Baths of Santa Catarina for the Gavia Pass. The unsettled weather coupled with the reaction after an ascent of the Königsspitze, stolen in a gleam of sunshine on the previous day, would probably in any case have made us ready to take this easy road in place of trying our fortunes over one of the snowy gaps behind the Tresero. But we had a better reason for our want of venturesomeness. It was necessary for us to ascertain the exact position and means of approach to our mountain. For this purpose our maps helped us little, if at all. We had in fact nothing to trust to but the little sheet in the 'Alpine Guide,' compiled on inaccurate authorities, and hiding ignorance under a specious, but to travellers very inconvenient, vagueness.

We knew, it is true, that the Presanella lay on the ridge south of the Tonale Pass, the carriage-road crossing the deep gap which severs the Orteler and Adamello Alps. But whether the path to it opened from the top of that pass or from some point in the

upper Val di Sole we had no means to decide. To cross the Tonale with our eyes open seemed, therefore, the only prudent course.

The Gavia is but a gloomy portal to the beauties of Santa Catarina. The summit is a wild desolate plain, not cheerful even in fine weather, and deadly enough in winter snowstorms. Three rude crosses under a rock mark the spot where as many peasants overtaken by storm sought shelter in vain, and where their bodies were found and buried. Further on the path becomes a street of tombs—a 'Via Appia' of the mountains. Cross succeeds cross, each carved with rude initials and date, varied here and there by a stone pyramid, in the recesses of which, in the place of the usual picture of a virgin or saint, you find a skull and a collection of bones, open to the air and bleached by long exposure. For riders this is the only escape south-eastwards from Santa Catarina; but moderate walkers—ladies even, who do not mind snow—may find a better and brighter path by turning away to the left over the broad shoulders of the Pizzo della Mare, and descending through Val del Monte, and past the dirty bath-houses of Pejo to the upper Val di Sole.[1]

Ponte di Legno is a shabby village, and in 1864 its inn was in character. Since then, however, there has been an improvement, and a very fair country inn now offers a convenient starting-point for travellers who wish to cross the Pisgana Pass, the easiest of those leading to the head of Val di Genova and Pinzolo. During our meal—a banquet of hot water flavoured by pepper, followed by sodden veal,—we were disturbed by the entrance of a venerable personage who seemed

[1] See Appendix C for two routes from Santa Catarina to Val di Sole.

anxious to render us assistance. As he spoke a patois Italian, and was as deaf as he was talkative, his attentions soon became embarrassing. Having listened to a long harangue on the excellence of the road and the inns between us and Trent, we ventured mildly to hint a dislike for roads and to enquire with solicitude about the Presanella. But our protest and enquiries were put aside with equal indifference. Even on the only topic of immediate interest to us, what sort of a place was the inn near the top of the Tonale, we could get no certain information. If age despised the innovating spirit of youth, youth, I am afraid, grew impatient of the resolve 'stare super antiquas vias' of age. When we found that we might as well enquire about the mountains of the moon as the Presanella, we also became deaf, and turned to our veal with such affectation of enthusiasm as that immature viand can command.

Soon after leaving Ponte di Legno the road, a rough cart-track, climbs a wooded hillside by the steepest possible zigzags. The air was hot and steamy, and dark clouds were creeping up Val Camonica. The mists soon enveloped us, all further view was lost, and the rain began to pour as it only can pour among the mountains. Thunder boomed away behind us like heavy artillery, each report followed by a sharp fire of musketry, as the echoes ran along the crags.

The top of the pass is a wide tract of pasture, in the absence of distant view more Scotch than Alpine. At last the road, which, to avoid a swamp, rises higher than the actual gap, began to descend, and tall black and yellow posts, crowned by two-headed eagles, announced the Austrian frontier. The country road of the Italian side suddenly came to an end, and a mili-

tary highway, marked by a long line of granite curb-stones, wound down before us. A deep hollow, the head of Val Vermiglio, presently opened at our feet, and the road, swerving to the left, approached the Tonale Hospice, a massive, modern, whitewashed house. Unfortunately for our comfort it was crowded with labourers, employed on the new fort which the Austrians were then erecting to protect themselves against their neighbours.

The kitchen fire lighted up a picturesque scene. Over the flames hung a huge caldron of polenta, into which two dark-haired girls dashed from time to time some new ingredient, while a hungry crowd of men, young and old, sat round, watching eagerly the progress of their supper. Room was made for us in the chimney-seats, where we steamed in our damp clothes until the crowd had been fed, and some one could find time to give us our meal of potatoes and butter. By the time this was over it was already late, and we were ready to distribute ourselves between the two spare beds which the house afforded, while François went off to join the workmen in the barn. The inmates retired into an inner room, and all was still by nine o'clock, save for the ceaseless patter of the rain. Before five next morning the women came out of their chamber, and from that time there was a constant flow of company backwards and forwards through our room. Seizing on propitious intervals, we dressed in spasms, and, seeing the weather still hopeless, made up our minds to set out at once for the nearest village in Val di Sole, where we might hope to obtain better fare and possibly some further information; for at the Hospice our endeavours to learn anything of the Presanella

had again been fruitless. No one had ever heard of such a mountain. One fact alone was ascertained before leaving. The stream which waters Val di Sole has its highest source in a wild glen at the back of Monte Piscanno, named in the Lombard map Val Presena. This I had believed would lead us up to the Presanella, but through the glimpses of the storm no conspicuous snow-peak appeared in that direction, and it was plain we must look further for our mysterious mountain.

On a projecting knoll, about half way to Vermiglio,[1] stands an Austrian blockhouse, mounting seven guns. It is commanded by many neighbouring heights, but would be of use against a Garibaldian inroad. As we passed it a momentary break revealed a lofty snow-peak at the head of a glen opening immediately opposite.

There at last was the Presanella. A fir-forest clothed the lower slopes; higher up a large glacier spread out its icy skirts. The vision, though sufficient for our purpose, lasted only a few moments. In clear weather the view from this spot must be one of the most picturesque glimpses of a great snow-peak anywhere to be seen from a carriage-pass. Clinging still to the northern slopes of the valley, the road presently entered Pizzano. The first house was the Austrian douane; the second, the inn. We of course gave up our passports, but François, being unprovided, handed the officers his 'livre des voyageurs,' containing his certificate as guide.[2] The Austrian, with much show

[1] Vermiglio, like Primiero, is the name of a group of villages, of which the highest is Pizzano.

[2] This refers to eleven years ago. Proofs of nationality are no longer asked for anywhere in the Alps unless, perhaps, in France, where even a Republican Government finds itself forced to gratify the peculiar passion of the nation for restrictions on liberty of travel by retaining passports for

of sternness, pushed it away contemptuously, and delivered himself in this wise:—'You have no passport. You must go back to your country. At any rate you can enter no further into the Imperial and Royal dominions.' Here was a serious crisis. We felt our only chance was to temporise. 'Very well,' we replied, 'if you must refuse our servant permission to enter Austria, at least there can be no objection to his getting something to eat next door before he returns.' This concession the officers did not deny; and entering the inn we ordered breakfast, and prepared to wait for better weather. A scout was posted outside by the douaniers to prevent François from giving them the slip. In the meantime we of course again enquired after the Presanella, and, almost to our surprise, everyone in Pizzano was acquainted with the name. 'Oh, yes!' said our host, 'a German Herr Professor from Vienna tried the mountain a year or two ago, and found it quite impracticable. The final peak is like the stove in this room, and all ice.' 'Well,' said I, 'but the stove is easy,' and climbed to the top. Staggered by this argument, he offered to bring the man who had accompanied the Viennese Professor in his attempt. In due time a native made his appearance, who satisfied us that he really knew where the mountain was, and could lead us to its foot; which was all we wanted.

The name of our predecessor was at the time unknown to us, but I learnt afterwards[1] that he was Dr.

Frenchmen only. So long as this distinction is maintained, members of other nations are liable to be occasionally required to prove their disqualification for the privilege of carrying about one of the minute descriptions of their own persons, which seem to give our neighbours so much pleasure.

[1] From an article, *Die grosseren Expeditionen in den Oesterreichischen*

von Ruthner, then the Vice-President of the Austrian Alpine Club. From the account given of his attempt it is clear that he followed the same route as ourselves; our Italian in fact led us in his footsteps, up to the saddle at the north-west base of the mountain. His failure to get further was entirely owing to his guides, who, unused to such expeditions, and appalled by the sight of a broken and somewhat steep snow-slope, refused to proceed. The Italian, as our experience proved, was a poor creature, his second guide, Kuenz, though, as we are told, renowned as a keen chamois and bear-hunter, declared to Dr. von Ruthner 'that he had once in his youth descended amongst the wild chasms of the glacier which pours steeply over into Val Cercen, and that he would never do it again.' This descent we subsequently found an admirable spot for a glissade!

Watching from our window the rain, which after a deceitful lull now fell again in torrents, we saw the scout, who was still on duty, in deep converse with a friend. In a few minutes the friend sauntered casually into our room, and enquired our plans with an air of indifference. I assured him that our intention was to climb the Presanella, without thinking it necessary to add—and find a way down the other side of it. His object thus satisfactorily attained, the man soon left us, and no doubt imparted the valuable information to his brother officials, for their demeanour suddenly changed, and one of them told us that they should not object to our guide's accompanying us to the Presanella. We of course expressed ourselves duly thankful for their

Alpen aus dem Jahre 1864, von Dr. Anton von Ruthner, published in Petermann's *Mittheilungen* for 1865.

small mercies, and in fact felt much relieved at this happy issue of a dilemma which might easily have become serious. Soon after three o'clock the clouds grew gradually lighter, the sun struggled through, and patches of blue broke the leaden monotony of the sky. No more watery storms swept down from the Tonale, but a steady northern breeze carried away the vapours, except one or two unfortunates which had sunk so deep into the valley that they could not find the way out again. We hurried our dinner, got together our provisions, and sent the porter to look for a rope—a necessary which we were too young in Alpine travel to have brought with us from England, according to the custom of experienced mountaineers. Vermiglio did not possess a cord more than thirty feet long; but after a good deal of delay some leather thongs were procured, and about 5 P.M. we finally got off, leaving the douaniers to look out at their leisure for our expected return.

Instead of remounting the Tonale road we kept by the side of the river for half-an-hour, until it was joined by the torrent from the lateral glen which we had passed in the morning. A well-made path led up a steep hillside covered with bilberries and Alpine strawberries, and turned some precipitous rocks by picturesque wooden galleries.

After passing a group of charcoal-burners' huts the ascent ceased, and winding round a wooded brow we entered a secluded basin shut in by steep ridges, where the stream rested for a while in its troubled course before plunging into the valley. Far above gleamed the object of our expedition—the long-talked-of, and at last almost-despaired-of Presanella, no longer shrouded

in mist, but sharp cut against the darkening sky. It presented an apparently level wall, turreted at either end; the western tower was of rugged rock, the eastern more massive and snow-clad, rising in the centre to a sharp shining point, evidently the true 'cima' of the mountain.

A flock of Bergamasque sheep were huddled together in our way; disregarding the protests of the shaggy sheep-dog we forced a passage through them, and reached the hut—a rough shelter, half open on one side to the sky.

Pushing back the rude door, we entered a small cabin, looking at first sight like a butcher's shop, for several carcases of departed sheep were hung up to smoke over the smouldering fire. Its occupants were three shepherds, who received us most hospitably, packed away the drying meat, and made room by the fireside. Presently one of them went out with the dog. On enquiring where the man was going so late, we were told that they were obliged to patrol by turns at night to keep off the bears; several were known to be prowling about the mountains, and one had been seen only the previous day. Our hosts took needless pains to assure us that the animals would not enter the châlet, and that there was no occasion for alarm at their vicinity.

As fresh logs were piled on, and the blaze rose higher, a horned monster with a pair of gleaming eyes was seen gazing at us from the upper gloom. It was only a patriarchal goat, stabled in a loft opening on one side into the châlet. Two of us spent the night in a bed of hay, built up on pine-logs; the third lay down with the shepherds among the skins and logs by the

fireside. François scrambled into the loft, where he was welcomed by the old goat, which settled itself beside him. Later in the night the rest of the flock became boisterous, quarrelled with the biped intruder, and expelled him from their abode.

At 3 A.M. the waning moon was still bright enough to guide our steps along the zigzags of a well-marked track leading to the rocky waste, furrowed and polished by glacier action, which lies above the head of the glen. Our porter was very anxious to take us round by the spur on our right dividing Val Presanella and Val Presena, but we preferred a much more direct course over the ice. Although the valley at our feet was already bathed in golden light, the early rays still left cold the snows we were about to enter. The rain of the previous day had frozen over the glacier in a slippery crust, and made every slope into a sort of 'Montagne Russe.' We crept catwise as best we could along cracks, cutting steps when these failed us, until the more level and upper snows were safely if not quickly gained.

We were now at the very foot of the Presanella, and could judge of the nature of the work immediately before us. From the western extremity of the wall which we had seen from below, a ridge receded from us ending towards Val di Genova in a snow-dome. This secondary peak (Monte Gabbiol) with the rock turret at the angle (the Piccola Presanella) and the sharp eastern crest, probably make up the three summits to which the mass owes a local name, 'Il Triplice.' The only route open to us seemed to be to cross the lowest point in the ridge between the Monte Gabbiol and the Piccola Presanella, and then gain the eastern or highest peak by

the back of the snow-wall. Dr. von Ruthner's Italian scouted the idea. 'Then,' said François, 'we must cut steps up the face of the wall.' This proposal struck our native with horror, and he protested against it as 'Molto molto impossibile!' His idea of the impossible was evidently somewhat vague, and not founded on experience. We stuck therefore to our first plan, and, walking briskly up the glacier, reached in half-an-hour a gap at its head overlooking the ice-fields which enclose Val di Genova. At this point the real attack on the mountain began. Hitherto we had only been making for a pass.

The ascent now led us over steep slopes of snow, broken by great rifts and icicle-fringed vaults, none of which, however, were continuous enough to cause any difficulty. Often a few steps had to be cut, but the delay was pleasantly spent in studying the glorious view already spread out behind us. In the foreground lay the unknown glacier-fields of the Adamello; the Orteler and Bernina ranges rose in the middle distance; on the horizon glowed Monte Rosa and the Saasgrat. Even these were not the furthest objects in view, for I distinctly recognised the Graian peaks melting into the saffron sky.

The deep moat crossed, a dozen steps had to be cut up an ice-bank; then, after climbing over an awkward boulder, we reached the ridge. Great was the anxiety as to what would be seen on the other side, for on the steepness of the back of the wall between us and the final peak our success hung. Great in proportion was the satisfaction of those below, when, as his head rose above the rocks, François shouted, 'Bien; tout est facile!'

The semicircle enclosed between the three summits of the Presanella was filled by the snow-fields of an extensive glacier which flowed away to the south-east. The snow rose nearly to the level of the lowest point of the crest connecting the Piccola Presanella and the highest peak. We quickly passed under the former, and found ourselves standing on the summit of the wall we had gazed up at the previous evening.

We now looked down upon the shepherds' hut and the Tonale road, where the Austrian blockhouse and its constructors seen through the glasses appeared like a diminutive beehive. A coping of fresh snow overhung the edge of the wall; this we dislodged with our alpenstocks, sending it whirling down 1,000 feet upon the glacier beneath.

Our hopes of immediate success now met with one of those checks, so frequent in the Alps, which test most severely the moral endurance needed, much more than physical strength, in a good mountaineer. The crest suddenly turned into hard ice; each step had to be won patiently by the axe. Careless or inefficient work might have led to an awkward tumble; an attempt such as a tyro would probably have made to make use of the snow coping would have inevitably resulted in sudden disaster. In such positions amateurs without guides most often fail. It is rare to find a party of whom some member will not utter an impatient exclamation, or suggest some tempting, but unwise, expedient to gain time; it is rarer still to find a leader who will act as a good guide invariably does—refuse to pay the slightest heed to such murmurs in his rear. Yet if he listens to them he will learn sooner

or later the truth of a line which ought to be emblazoned as a text over every A. C.'s mantelpiece, 'Hasty climbers oft do fall.'

We advanced but slowly along our laboured way. Once the porter was sent to the front, but after cutting some half-dozen steps he retired again of his own accord to the rear, informing us, in passing, that 'he could do no more.' He accordingly reserved all his strength for frequent ejaculations respecting the impossibility of attaining the top under at least eight hours! François had all the work to do, and for the next two hours and a half he did it manfully. Hack! hack! went the axe, till a step was hewn out; then with a final flourish the loose ice was cleared off, and the process began again. At last the wearisome task was done, and we all stepped gladly on to a little snow-platform, about half of which was occupied by a huge cup-shaped crevasse. The final peak alone now remained to be conquered. 'Encore dix pas seulement,' said François, and he hacked away as if it was his first step. We cut across a steep ice-slope, and in five minutes stood upon some broken rocks which ran up the southern face of the mountain. Here we had to wriggle across an awkward boulder; and our porter, who had insisted on throwing off the rope, was fain to be re-attached. By a vigorous haul we cut short his hesitation and drew him halfway over, but there he stuck clinging on to the rock with all his limbs spread out in different directions, like a distressed starfish. At last some one went back and stretched out a helping hand; then, aggravated by the delay, we made a rush at the last rocks, and in a few moments were treading down the virgin snows at which we had so long and wistfully

looked up. The actual top was a snow-crest lying as a cap on the brow of the cliff which faces Val di Sole. The ascent from the hut had taken us eight hours—a long time for a mountain of only 11,688 feet.

As soon as the first excitement of victory was over we began to look with interest at the new mountain region spread at our feet. The central mass of the Adamello was for the first time before me in such nearness and completeness as to allow of a ready insight into, and understanding of, its character. It is a huge block, large enough to supply materials for half-a-dozen fine mountains. But it is in fact only one. For a length and breadth of many miles the ground never falls below 9,500 feet. The vast central snow-field feeds glaciers pouring to every point of the compass. The highest peaks, such as the Carè Alto and Adamello, are merely slight elevations of the rim of this uplifted plain. Seen from within they are mere hummocks; from without they are very noble mountains falling in great precipices towards the wild glacier-closed glens which run up to their feet.

Imagine an enormous white cloth unevenly laid upon a table, and its shining skirts hanging over here and there between the dark massive supports. The reader, if he will excuse so humble a comparison, may thereby form a better idea of the general aspect of the snow-plains, the rocky buttresses, and overhanging glaciers of the Adamello as they now met our view.

It was clear that the descent of the Nardis Glacier, leading in a direct line to Pinzolo, was perfectly easy, and we half regretted having left our goods on the pass.

Returning a few paces to the highest rocks we spent an hour of pleasant idleness, only broken by

the duty of building a cairn in which to ensconce a gigantic water-bottle charged with our cards. About three weeks later our representative received a visitor. Lieut. Julius Payer,[1] an Austrian officer whose name has since become familiar to the English public as the leader of a North Pole expedition, had, unknown to us, been spending the summer in exploring the peaks round Val di Genova. The Presanella, owing partly to the difficulties he found with his native guides, was left to the last, and consequently, when its summit was at length reached, the astonished mountaineers were greeted, not by a maiden peak, but by a fine stoneman.

The staircase which had taken three hours and a half to hew was readily run down in forty-five minutes. On the pass, hereafter to be known as the Passo di Cercen, we dismissed our hunter, with materials for many a long story, and our kindest regards to the douaniers.

A steep, short glacier fell away from our feet into Val di Genova. The ice was at first much fissured, but by bearing towards the rocks on the right we found a slope clear from crevasses and favourable to a long glissade. Soon afterwards we left the glacier, and descended through a gully and over some rough ground till, reaching a lower range of cliffs, we bore well to the left, and discovered a faint track which led us down through underwood to the side of the stream and the first hut. From this point there is a noble view of the Adamello, with the Mandron and Lobbia glaciers[2]

[1] Lieut. Payer's pamphlet *Die Adamello-Presanella Alpen*, Petermann's *Mittheilungen, Erganzungsheft*, No. 17, Gotha, J. Perthes, 1865, is a very valuable contribution to the orography of the group he describes.

[2] I follow Lieutenant Payer's nomenclature, as it has been adopted in

shooting out their icy tongues over the rocks at the head of the valley. Hence we dropped down by a good path into the bottom of Val di Genova, which was reached in two hours from the pass.

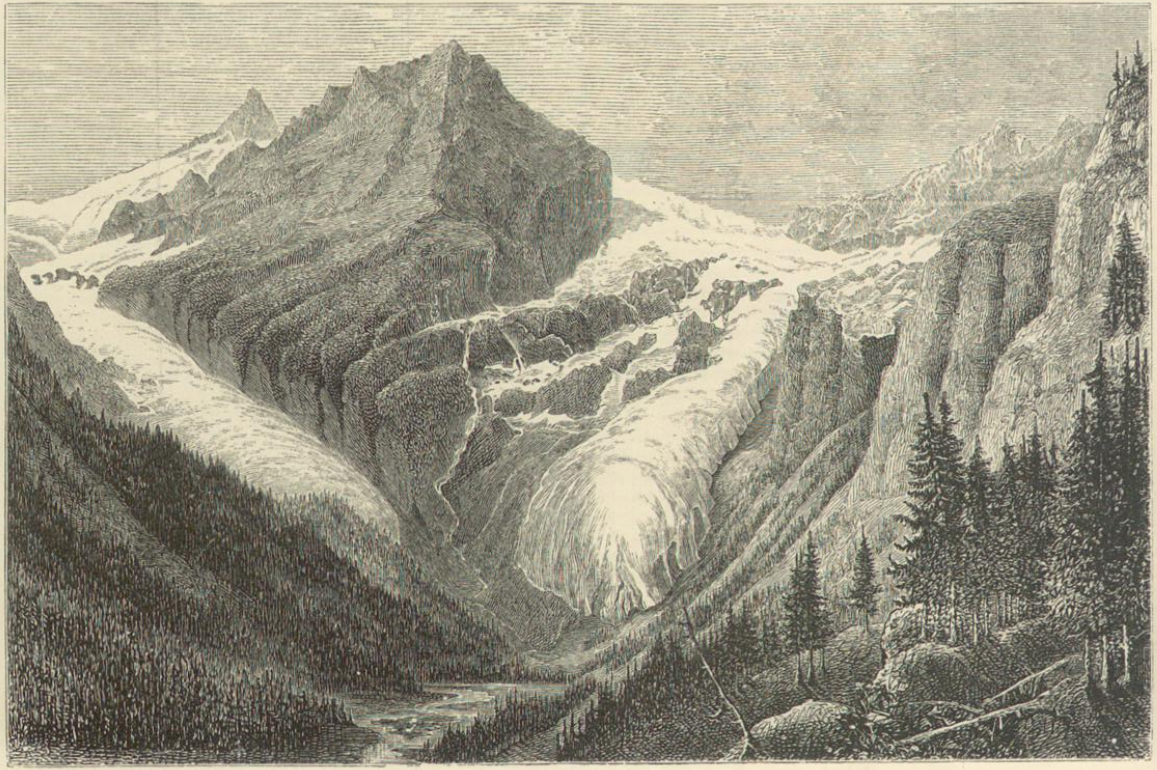
Although the description of Mr. Ball relieves me from the responsibility of standing sponsor for this wonderful valley, I cannot pass over without a tribute the long, yet though now four times trodden, never wearisome twelve miles which separate the sources of the Sarca above the Bedole Alp from Pinzolo, the first village on its banks.

The Val di Genova leaves behind it an impression as vivid and lasting as any of the more famous scenes of the Alps or the Pyrenees. It is in one aspect a trench cut 8,000 feet deep between the opposite masses of the Adamello and Presanella. From another and perhaps truer point of view it is a winding staircase leading by a succession of abrupt flights and level landings from the low-lying Val Rendena to the crowning heights of the Adamello itself. In the valley there are four such flights or steps, locally called 'scale,' each the cause of a noble waterfall; the fifth step closes the valley proper, and the fall that pours over it is of ice, the flashing tongue of the great Mandron Glacier. The last step divides the glacier from the snow region, and is partially smoothed out by the vast frozen masses which slide over it, as a rapid is concealed by a swollen flood. Besides the falls of the Sarca in the bottom of the valley, the meltings of two great ice-fields have to find a way down its precipitous sides.

Hence Nature has here a great opportunity for a

the Alpine Club map. Mr. Ball prefers the name of Bedole Glacier for the Mandron Glacier, and of Matarotto Glacier for the Lobbia Glacier.

Lobbia Alta. Lobbia Bassa Mte. Mandron.



Lobbia Gl. Mandron Gl

THE HEAD OF VAL DI GENOVA.

display of waterfalls, a branch of landscape gardening in which as a rule she seems strangely chary of exerting her powers. The skill with which a large body of water manages to descend a mountain side at an extremely high angle without dashing itself anywhere to pieces is, I fancy, often extremely provoking to the tourist in search of a sensation.

In the Adamello country, however, the greediest sightseer will be satisfied. For 'grandes eaux' Val di Genova is the Versailles of North Italy. Besides three first-rate falls of the Sarca itself, there are two more of the torrents draining the glaciers of Nardis and Lares. But I am in danger of falling into a numerical, or auctioneer's catalogue, style of description, by which no justice can be done to the manifold charms of rock, wood, and water, which await the wanderer in this forgotten valley. We must return to the Bedole Alp and endeavour to sketch some two or three of the splendid surprises of the path to Pinzolo.

We entered the valley above its highest step on the level where the Sarca first gathers up its new-born strength. A smooth meadow-foreground, alive with cattle, spread between low pine-clad knolls from under the shelter of which issued a thin column of smoke, showing the whereabouts of the châlets. Close at hand two great glaciers poured their icy ruin into the pastoral scene, which was encompassed on all sides by bare or wooded cliffs, most savage in the direction of the river's course, where the vast outworks of the Presanella, keen granite ridges, saw the sky with their solid pinnacles.

After a few hundred yards of level we came to the brink of what we could hardly tell. The grey water which had been flowing at our side dropped suddenly out

of sight amidst a mighty roar. A slender and hazardous bridge of a single log crossed the stream on the brink of the precipice.

From it, if your head is steady enough, you may watch the waters as they leap in solid sheets into the air and disappear amidst the foam-cloud, until a growing impulse to join in their mad motion warns you to regain the bank. It is as well to remain content with this impression. But those who wish to see more may easily push their way through a tangle of pine and thick undergrowth by tracks best known to the cattle who come here to bathe themselves in the cool spray. From below the fall is still noble, but it is no longer a mystery. The plunge into the infinite has become only the first step in life.

A second plain is covered with lawn-like turf or bilberry-carpeted woodland; here and there stand shepherds' huts, locally known as 'malghe,' built of ruddy unsmoothed fir-logs. Overhead tower the sheer buttresses of the Presanella, so lofty that it seemed incredible how a few hours ago we had been higher than the highest of these soaring cliffs. At the next 'scala' the foot traveller should cross by a bridge to the right bank in order to pass in front of the second Sarca fall, where the river, caught midway by a bluff of rock, is shivered into a wide-spreading veil, in which the bright waterdrops chase one another in recurrent waves over the bosses of the crag.

The succeeding plain is shorter and more broken. At its lower end are some saw-mills and a group of huts, the summer residence of a worthy called Fantoma, once employed as a guide by Lieut. Payer, a great talker, and, by his own account, still greater Nimrod, having slain to his own gun seventeen bears and over

three hundred chamois. Here we came on another fall of the Sarca, or rather a succession of leaps imbedded in a deep cleft crossed by bold bridges, and lit up by the scarlet berries of the mountain ash. High upon the right an unchanging cloud hangs on the mountain side where the Lares torrent hurries down to the valley. A cart-road made for the saw-mills now traverses a flat stony tract where the river for the first time breaks loose and devastates the meadows, and huge blocks, fallen from scars in the cliff-faces above, lie beside the track. Sheltered from the spray-shower between two of these we paused to admire the last great cascade, that of the Nardis, which comes shooting and shivering out of the sky down almost upon our heads in a double column. Seen once in June, when the snows were melting, it seemed to me the most beautiful of Alpine water-showers.

Some distance further, on the verge of the last descent into Val Rendena, we reached, as evening fell, the old church of Charlemagne, and looked down for the first time over the softer landscape and sylvan slopes of the lower valley. The fading light below brought out on the hillsides the delicate shades of green lost in the full blaze of the noonday sun, while high up in air the red cliffs of the Brenta, glowing with the last rays of sunset, seemed unearthly enough to form part of the poet's palace of Hyperion which,

> Bastion'd with pyramids of glowing gold
> And touch'd with shade of bronzèd obélisques,
> Glared a blood red through all its thousand courts,
> Arches and domes and fiery galleries.