

**FRESHFIELD**

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ITALIAN ALPS

Douglas Freshfield

**Italian Alps**

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# **Douglas William Freshfield**

## **Italian Alps Sketches in the Mountains of Ticino, Lombardy, the Trentino, and Venetia**

### **NOTE**

The First Chapter is reprinted with corrections and additions from 'Fraser's Magazine.' The Thirteenth and fragments of one or two others have previously appeared in the 'Alpine Journal,' from which three of the illustrations have also been borrowed. The remaining seven have been engraved for this work under the care of Mr. G. Pearson.

The heights throughout the book and in all the maps are given in English feet.

## PREFACE

I owe a double apology for the publication of this volume; in the first place to the public, secondly to my friends.

'Mountaineering' has been by this time fully described by very competent writers. No new book is likely to have any chance of rivalling the popularity of the first series of 'Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers,' or of the dramatic story of the Matterhorn, as told and illustrated by Mr. E. Whymper. There is no longer the least novelty in the small feats of gymnastics annually performed, or supposed to be performed, by members of the Alpine Club. Few readers, I think, outside that body of enthusiasts, are eager to hear anything more of guides and glaciers, arêtes and séracs, cols, couloirs and crevasses. Such subjects recur more often than I could wish in the following pages. But in attempting to give any adequate picture of a mountain region it is impossible to leave out the snow mountains. My object has been to keep them as far as possible in their proper place in the landscape. I could not, like some tourists, ignore everything above the snow-level, but I have not, I trust, written as if the world began only at that point and everything beneath it was also beneath notice.

The sketches here brought together are a patchwork from the journals of seven summers. Their chief claim to interest lies in the fact that they deal with portions of the Alpine chain, about which English readers have hitherto found no information in their own language except in guide-books. General experience proves that the British mind – the remark does not, I believe, hold equally good of the German – will not readily take in a new lesson through this medium. Few of our fellow-countrymen turn their steps towards an unknown region unless directed thither either by the report of friends or by some book less technical and abstruse than a Dictionary of Peaks and Passes. Such a book, I venture to hope, the present volume may be found.

The gap which it is intended to fill has long remained one of the broadest in our English Alpine literature.

We have already two works of permanent value dealing with the southern side of the Alps. But Val Formazza was the eastern limit of the late Mr. King's 'Italian Valleys of the Pennine Alps.' The authors of 'The Dolomites' did not go west of the Adige. The exquisite valleys round the head of Lago Maggiore, so easily accessible from the lake or the St. Gothard road, have been completely passed over. The mountains of Val Masino and Val Livigno, distant respectively only a day's journey west and east of the crowded Upper Engadine, are still left to their bears and Bergamasque shepherds. The Punta Trubinesca, a noble peak, which, seen from Monte Generoso, heads the army of the Rhætian Alps, has been but once ascended, although it is accessible to anybody who can cross the Diavolezza Pass or climb the Titlis. In the highlands of Lombardy and the Trentino – speaking roughly, the country between Lago di Como and Trent – Italy and Switzerland seem to join hands. There, under an Italian sky and girt round by southern flowers and foliage, the fantastic rock-ridges and mighty towers of the Brenta stand opposite the broad snow-plains of the Adamello. Yet the beauties of this region, one of the most fascinating in the Alps, have, but for a stray mountaineer or a scanty notice in the 'Alpine Journal,' remained unsought and unsung.

The few friends and companions who have hitherto shared with me its enjoyment may here ask, 'And why could not you let them remain so?' I will at any rate offer none but honest excuses. I can make no pretence to having been overcome by any benevolent feeling towards the public at large. Had there seemed the smallest reasonable hope of our haunts remaining undisturbed I should have been disposed still to keep the secret I have already guarded for some years. But unfortunately, at least from our point of view, a spirit of enterprise has sprung up amongst the people of the country, roads are being made, new inns opened, old ones refurbished up, and as a result English visitors are becoming less and less rare. In the ordinary course of events it was hardly possible for another year to pass by without some monthly tourist, with a facility in bookmaking, penetrating the Lombard Alps.

If it was inevitable that these mountains should be brought before the world, it seemed better that they should be introduced by one who had with them a friendship of some years' standing rather than by a new acquaintance. Moreover there was a very obvious advantage in making the revelation myself. I have outgrown the rash enthusiasm which leads discoverers to overrate all the merits and understate half the disadvantages of their last new discovery. I have, so far as I know my own mind, no desire to deceive anybody. I am prepared, as new-comers seldom are, to attach at least their due importance to all difficulties of climate or of transport, from want of accommodation or from want of guides. In short, I mean to frame a friendly invitation to those who know how to travel which yet shall not allure the crowd who tour. As an eclectic wanderer I can afford to state, with perfect frankness, my conviction that, if you can put up with the crowd, there is no place where great snow-peaks are so well seen as in the Bernese Oberland – that there is no climbing which equals that to be had within twenty miles of Zermatt – that the ice scenery on Mont Blanc is unsurpassable in Europe, and the climate of the Upper Engadine the most bracing south of the Arctic circle. And I can heartily agree in the conclusion that everyone who, wishing for nothing more, crosses the frontier of Italy, commits an act of folly. I write only for those who do wish for something more – who, like myself, feel at times in a mood for less austere society. The Swiss peaks sit erect in a solemn white-robed row of Monks and Virgins, most noble and inspiring to contemplate. The Italian Alps I may venture to compare to a gay and gracious company robed in blue, red, and purple pomp, and setting off the costume by that most becoming artifice, well-powdered heads.

I have only to add a few words on matters of detail. The first eleven chapters deal with ground new <sup>1</sup> to English readers. The twelfth contains information not given elsewhere, and likely to be useful now that a large inn is opened at San Martino di Castrozza, in the most beautiful situation of any stopping-place in Italian Tyrol.<sup>2</sup> The Pelmo, as in many respects a unique mountain, has a certain novelty. The last chapter is an expostulation for which the present moment seems particularly opportune.

In order to meet a difficulty which most authors must have felt, I have ventured in one respect on an innovation on the ordinary form of books of Swiss travel. The details as to inns, ascents or paths, necessary on the spot, are tiresome when a book is read at home; on the other hand, when travelling it is often difficult at a moment's notice to extract from the body of the work the exact fact wanted. Such new remarks therefore as I had to offer on these matters, I have embodied in an appendix where, without being obtrusive, they will be readily accessible.

The list of illustrations and maps will explain itself, and show that by Messrs. Longman's liberality the volume is in these respects unusually well provided.

My best thanks are due to my friends Mr. J. Gilbert and Mr. F. F. Tuckett for the use of the accurate sketches which have furnished most of the illustrations.

Two of the district maps and part of the third are extracts from the as yet unpublished south-eastern sheet of the Alpine Club map of the Central Alps. The hill-engraving being still incomplete, the mountains have been put in from a stone.

The Brenta group is now laid down for the first time with any approach to accuracy, and some pains have been taken to render this addition as far as possible worthy of the map of which it forms a natural extension. For assistance in my endeavours to ascertain the correct nomenclature I have to thank the Trentine Alpine Society, who appointed a special committee to make enquiries on the spot,<sup>3</sup> and Mr. M. Holzmann. I regret to be obliged to add that owing to the churlishness of the Viennese

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<sup>1</sup> The Livigno district has been touched on in two works, *A Summer Tour in the Grisons*, by Mrs. H. Freshfield, and *Here and There in the Alps*, by the Hon. F. Plunket, but the route here described was not previously known. There is a pleasant description of Val di Sole, in *On Foot through Tyrol*, by Walter White. Chapman and Hall, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> See [Appendix F](#) on 'Tyrol v. Tirol.'

<sup>3</sup> See [Appendix E](#) for further details on this subject.

authorities I have been unable to profit in any way by the results of the great Survey of the Trentino and South Tyrol lately executed by the Austrian engineers.

## CHAPTER I. VAL MAGGIA

Huge mountains of immeasurable height  
Encompass'd all the level valley round  
With mighty slabs of rock that sloped upright,  
An insurmountable enormous bound; —  
That vale was so sequester'd and secluded,  
All search for ages past it had eluded.

*Hookham Frere.*

### VAL MAGGIA – BIGNASCO – VAL LAVIZZARA – THE BASODINE – VAL BAVONA – PIZ CAMPO TENCCA – VAL DI PRATO

The typical Alpine Clubman has been somewhere described by Mr. Anthony Trollope as cherishing in his bosom, through the ten months of each year in which the business of life debars him from his favourite pursuit, an ever-gnawing desire for the beloved mountains.

For myself, whenever, as I often do, I vent

– an inward groan  
To sit upon an Alp as on a throne

it is accompanied, as in Keats' sonnet, by 'a languishment for skies Italian.' The bright recollections which at once console and harass me during the fogs and snows of our Cimmerian winters owe their existence as much to Italian valleys as to snowy peaks. After a week of hard mountaineering at Zermatt or in the Oberland, the keen colourless air of the Riffel or Bell Alp begins to pall upon my senses; the pine-woods and châteaux to remind me, against my will, of a German box of toys. I sigh for the opal-coloured waves of atmosphere which are beating up against the southern slopes of the mountains, for the soft and varied foliage, the frescoed walls and far-gleaming campaniles of Italy. In such a mood, after a morning spent upon the snows of Monte Rosa or the Adamello, I plunge with the keenest delight amongst the vines of Val Sesia or Val Camonica.

For this morbid tendency, as it is considered by some vigorous friends, I do not propose to offer either defence or apology. Still less do I wish to become a public benefactor by leading on a mob to take possession of my pleasure grounds. But there is ample room for a few congenial spirits, and towards these I would not be selfish.

In truth the unequivocal warmth of the valleys of the southern Alps in August, the English travelling season, will serve to check the incursions of cockneydom; for the modern British tourist professes himself incapable of enjoying life, much less exercise, under even a moderate degree of heat. Everybody knows how the three warm days which make up an English summer are received with more groans than gratitude, and the thunderstorm which invariably ends them is saluted by a chorus of thanksgiving adequate for a delivery from some Egyptian plague. The sun so dreaded at home we naturally shun abroad. Italy and the Levant are already deserted at the season when they become most enjoyable. An Italian valley suggests to the too solid Englishman not the glorious glow of summer and a profusion of 'purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries,' but fever, cholera, and sundry kinds of dissolution.

Lago Maggiore is a name well known to thousands, but I doubt whether, even in the Alpine Club, ten could be found ready to point out off-hand the whereabouts of Val Maggia. Yet the valley offers a type of beauty as rare and worth knowing as the lake into which its waters flow.<sup>4</sup>

Behind Locarno, at the head of Lago Maggiore, is the outlet of a network of valleys, forming the veins of the mountain mass, Italian by nature, though Swiss by circumstance, which divides the Gries and the St. Gothard. The longest and deepest of these valleys is that of the Maggia. Yet, despite its length, it leads to no pass over the main Alpine chain. The gaps at its head open only on the high pasturages of Val Bedretto. It has been thus cut off by nature from any share in the traffic which has flowed for centuries on one or the other side of it.

I must now ask the reader to imagine himself seated beside me on the box of the country omnibus which plies daily through this valley. Some three miles from Locarno in the picturesque defile of Ponte Brolla our eyes, accustomed to the murky grey of most glacier streams, are first greeted by the marvellous waters of the Maggia, shining with intensity of blue out of deep caves and hollows in the heart of the smooth white granite. But for many miles to come the scenery of Val Maggia does not rise above the ordinary boldness of a granite district, here graced by a slender cascade, there marred by a stony waste.

About sixteen miles, or three hours, from Locarno the road crosses for the first time to the right bank of the stream, and passes through Cevio, the political centre of the neighbouring valleys, standing on the confines of the three districts of Val Maggia, Val Lavizzara and Val Rovana. We drive across an open space, like an English village green, surrounded by houses more pretentious than are commonly seen in the mountains.

It was on this spot that De Saussure, while taking an observation to ascertain the height of the place above the sea, was greeted and invited to enter by the baillie or chief magistrate of the valley. I cannot resist quoting the amusing account of the interview which followed.

'It being some time,' writes De Saussure, 'since I had had any news from the civilized world, I accepted the invitation, hoping to learn some. What was my surprise when the baillie told me that though it was long since he had had any letter from the other side of the Alps, he should be happy to give an answer to any inquiry I might wish to make. At the same time he showed me an old black seal, and this was the oracle which answered all his questions. He held in his hand a string, to the end of which this seal was attached, and he dangled the seal thus fastened in the centre of a drinking-glass. Little by little the trembling of the hand communicated to the thread and seal a motion which made the latter strike against the sides of the glass. The number of these blows indicated the answer to the question which the person who held the string had in his mind. He assured me with the seriousness of profound conviction that he knew by this means not only everything that was going on at home, but also the elections for the Council of Bale and the number of votes each candidate had obtained. He questioned me on the object of my travels, and after having learnt it, showed me on his almanac the age which common chronology gives the world, and asked me what I thought about it. I told him that my observations of mountains had led me to look on the world as somewhat older. "Ah," he answered with an air of triumph, "my seal had already told me so, because the other day I had the patience to count the blows while reflecting on the world's age, and I found it was four years older than it is set down in this almanac."'

Near Cevio the landscape takes a more romantic character. The valley-walls close in and bend, and huge knobs of ruddy-grey rock thrust themselves forward. The river, confined to a narrow bed, alternately lies still in pools, whose depth of blue no comparison can express, or rushes off over the white boulders in a clear sparkling dance. Chestnut-trees hang from the crags overhead; higher on the hills every ledge is a stripe of verdure fringed with the delicate shapes of the birch and larch. In

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<sup>4</sup> I have not succeeded in discovering any connection between the word, Maggia and Maggiore.

the far distance a snow-peak in the range above Val Leventina gleams behind the folds of the nearer mountains.

But up to the last moment nothing foreshadows the wonderful surprise in store. As we draw near the first scattered houses of Bignasco, the mountains suddenly break open, and reveal a vision of the most exquisite and harmonious beauty, one of those master-pieces of nature which defy the efforts of the subtlest word-painters, and are perhaps best left alone by a dull topographer. Yet I cannot refrain, useless as the effort may be, from at least cataloguing some of the details which come together in this noble landscape. The waters at our feet are transparent depths of a colour, half sapphire and half emerald, indescribable, and, the moment the eye is taken away, inconceivable, so that every glance becomes a fresh surprise. In the foreground on either bank of the stream are frescoed walls and mossy house-roofs; beyond is a summerhouse supported by pillars, and a heavily laden peach-orchard lit with a blaze of sunflowers. At the gate of Val Bavona a white village glistens from amidst its vineyards. Sheer above it two bold granite walls rise out of the verdure, and form the entrance to a long avenue of great mountain shapes. Behind these foremost masses the hills fall valleywards in noble and perfectly harmonious lines. Each upper cliff flows down into a slope of chestnut-muffled boulders in a curve, the classical beauty of which is repeated by the vine-tendrils at its feet. In the distance the snows of the Basodine seen through the sunny haze gleam, like a golden halo, on the far-off head of the mountain.

Is human interest wanted to give completeness and a motive to the picture? As daylight faded I have watched the swinging torches and low chaunt of those who carried the Host to some passing soul. In the morning-glow I have seen a white-robed procession pour slowly with banners and noise of bells from the yet dark village, then suddenly issuing into the sunshine, surge, a living wave of brightness, over the high-arched bridges.

Bignasco lives in my memory as one of the loveliest spots in the Italian Alps. Planted at the meeting-place of three valleys, the view up Val Bavona is only the fairest of the fair scenes which surround it. In every direction paths strike off through the woods. Across the river rises a bold bluff of rock; behind it the hillside curves in, and forms an ample bay filled with chestnut forest; at intervals a sunny spot has been cleared and planted as a vineyard, the unstubbed ground is covered by a carpet of Alpine rhododendron, here tempted down to its lowest limit in the chain.<sup>5</sup> Little tracks, wandering in alternate 'forthrights and meanders' from one haybarn to another, lead at last to a white chapel placed on a conspicuous brow. By its side stands an older and humbler edifice. The gates of both are bolted, but the bolt is held fast only by a withered nosegay, and it is easy to make an entrance into the smaller chapel and examine its frescoes. They have been atrociously daubed over; but the pattern of the child's dress in the central picture, and a certain strength in the figures and faces on the side walls, still bear witness to a time when the great wave of Italian art spread even into Val Maggia. A date in the first twenty years of the sixteenth century may be read above the altar.

We are here on the verge of the chestnuts; a few hundred feet above us the woods change into beech and ash groves; higher still birch and larch feather the mountain spurs. The valleys meet at our feet. On the left, sloping lawns fall away abruptly into a deep torrent-worn ravine; far beneath are the white houses of Cevio. Val Bavona with its mountain curves and crowning snows lies immediately opposite.

Why, we ask, as we sit on the chapel steps, does this combination of rocks and trees touch our senses with so rare and subtle a pleasure? On the lakes we have left landscapes more 'softly sublime, profusely fair.' But those belonged to the class of hill-scenery; even the waving crests were to their tops clothed in green and the whole landscape pleased and contented us by its aspect of unbroken domestic repose and richness. Here the bold dark outlines of the granite precipices hanging over the luxuriant yet untamed loveliness of the valley appeal to our emotions with the strong power of

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<sup>5</sup> Bignasco is only 1,400 feet above the sea.

contrast. The majesty of the central ranges wedded to the beauty of Italy excites in us that enthusiasm beyond tranquil admiration which is our tribute to the highest expression of the Romantic whether in Art or Nature. We can contemplate calmly a rich lake-scene or an Umbrian Madonna; we feel disposed to cry out with delight before a figure of Michael Angelo or this view in Val Maggia.

For in this valley the strength of granite is clothed in the grace of southern foliage, in a rich mantle of chestnuts and beeches, fringed with maize and vines, and embroidered about the skirts with delicate tracteries of ferns and cyclamen. Nature seems here to have hit the mark she so often misses – to speak boldly but truly – in her higher efforts: she has avoided alike the trough-like uniformity which renders hideous much of the upper Engadine and diminishes even the splendours of Chamoni, the naked sternness of Mattmark or the Grimsel, the rough scales of muddy moraine and torrent-spread ruin which deface Monte Rosa herself, where she sinks towards Macugnaga and Italy.

It is easy to return more directly down the face of the rocks. In these valleys the industry of centuries, by building up stone staircases from shelf to shelf, has made paths in the least likely spots. Even the narrowest ledge between two cliffs is turned to profit. Across the bridge behind the inn rises an abrupt crag, up the face of which a dwarf wall runs at a very high angle. This wall, at first sight purposeless, proved to be in fact a stone ladder, the flakes of gneiss which projected along its top serving as steps for the active peasantry. The ascent to some of the alps lies up stone staircases, three hours – to measure distance in the local manner – in length. To these the wiry little cows of Canton Ticino speedily accustom themselves. Indeed, so expert do they become in getting up stairs that the broad flights of steps leading to the church doors have to be barricaded by posts placed at narrow intervals to prevent the parting herd from yielding to a sudden impulse to join in a body in morning mass, or a stray cow from wandering in unawares to browse on the tinsel vegetation of the high altar.

The greater part of the population of Bignasco cluster closely under the hillside, where a long dull village street squeezed in between two rows of stone walls opens out here and there into a tiny square or 'piazzetta,' with a stone bench and a stone fountain overshadowed by a stone-propped vine. These houses resemble in nothing those of a Swiss hamlet. The abandonment of the use of wood in favour of an equally handy and more solid material, joined to something in the external construction of the houses, carried my thoughts, on our last visit, far away to the stone towns of central Syria. Here, as there, I noted that the principal entrance to each tenement was by a gateway eight to ten feet high, and proportionately broad. Remembering how in my youth I had been taken to task by a worthy missionary for not recognising in such doors the work of giants, I enquired eagerly for traditions of some local Og, perhaps a link between the giant of the Mettenberg and the present Swiss. But such was the ignorance of the country folk that I could obtain no further answer than that the gateways were a convenient size for a laden mule.

The well-to-do people of Val Maggia seem to be sensible of the charms of the spot where the waters of Val Bavona and the main valley meet.

On the promontory between the two rivers, each crossed just above the junction by a bold arch, stands a suburb of what would be described by an auctioneer as 'detached villas,' houses gay with painted shutters and arched loggias, where grapes cluster and oleanders flush. One of these, commanding from its upper windows the perfect view up Val Bavona, is the 'Posta,' the home of Signor Patocchi, who entertains the rare strangers who visit the village. Our host is a man of high standing and substance in his own country. For three generations the office of President of the United Districts of Val Maggia has remained in his family. He has represented Ticino on public occasions and is a member of the Cantonal Council and of the Swiss Alpine Club. The energy of the race is represented also by a vivacious active sister who dwells with family pride on her brother's successes in life, and most of all on a bridge for the new St. Gothard railway, for which he had accepted the contract; a 'cosa stupenda,' a 'vera opera Romana.'

The example of their foregoers has assuredly not been lost on the modern Italians. Not only in great works such as the Mont Cenis tunnel or the coast railway from Nice to Spezzia, but also in the

country roads of remote valleys the traveller finds frequent evidences of the survival of the Roman tradition and genius for road-making. The industry and skill displayed in opening and improving means of communication by the most obscure communes – frequently, it is true, when they expend themselves in the laborious construction of pavés, misdirected – contrast very favourably with the sloth in the same matter of many northern 'Boards' apt to pride themselves on their energy.

Sometimes, however, this inherited zeal outruns discretion, witness the following story taken from a local newspaper. Caspoggio is a hamlet perched high on a green hillside in Val Malenco, at the back of the Bernina. The lower communes had in 1874 just completed a new road to which Caspoggio naturally desired to link itself. There were two ways of effecting this, one estimated to cost 40,000 lire (£1,600), the other 15,000 (£600); the cheapest road was, however, twenty-two minutes the longer. The bold patriarchs of Caspoggio were all for saving time as against money. Whereon the 'Corriere Valtellinese' solemnly protested against the intended extravagance, and pointed out its inconsistency with the facts that the annual income of the commune was not more than £80 a year, and that it could only afford its schoolmaster and mistress annual pittances of £6 apiece. 'My good sirs of Caspoggio,' said this sensible adviser, 'is it worth while to create a communal debt in order to bring your butter and cheese a few minutes earlier to market?' How Caspoggio decided I have yet to learn.

To return to Val Maggia and its President. Signor Patocchi is a man of position among his neighbours, and his house shows it. But he is also a Southerner, and his floors show it. Having confessed this, however, the worst is said, and for the rest English people accustomed to travel will find little to complain of. The beds are clean, fish and fowl the neighbourhood supplies, and a few hours' notice will collect ample provisions for the carnivorous climber.

But it is time for us to leave Bignasco and follow the road up the main valley henceforth known as Val Lavizzara.

For four or five miles we mount through a picturesque ravine, where the mountains rise in rugged walls tier above tier overhead. Yet every cranny is filled with glossy foliage, and the intervening ledges are no monstrous deformities, only fit to be 'left to slope,' but each a meadow closely mown, and dotted with stone haybarns. If some gash is noticed in the cliffs it is only as a brighter streak of colour; the ruin wrought below has long been buried out of sight, cottages grow against the fallen rocks, and vines fling themselves over their roughnesses. The river, no murky grey monster – like those fitly transformed into dragons by the legends of the northern Alps – runs through a narrow cleft, in the depths of which we catch alternate glimpses of deep blue pools or creamlike falls.

A little farther the defile opens, the stream flows more peaceably, and we shall see fishermen armed with huge jointless rods strolling along its banks. Though still early morning, some are already returning, amongst them a curé with a well-filled basket for his Friday dinner.

Several clusters of houses hang on the hillside, but the first village is Broglio, shaded by groves of gigantic walnuts; a mile beyond the valley bends, the shoulders of the hills sink sufficiently to allow their rugged heads to come into view, and a glen opens on the right backed by the jagged snow-streaked range of the Campo Tencca. The first sunbeams which have reached us stream through the gap, and bathe the forest in a golden flood of light. A great pulpit-shaped boulder rises beside the road, and is seized on as a post by the telegraph wire. Soon after we cross the stream and enter two adjoining villages. Beyond them is a small cemetery, decorated with paintings in somewhat better taste than those usually found in the mountains. There is further evidence of culture in the couplet from Dante, which under one of the frescoes takes the place of the usual Latin text.

Amidst a rocky waste, where the torrent from Val Peccia joins the larger stream, stands the dirty hamlet of Peccia. The glen to which it gives a name seems here the true head of the valley, but the entrance to the longest branch is by a steep ascent up the right-hand hillside. Above the first level, a grassy dell occupied by some saw-mills, the river has cut its way through a rock-barrier. Here on my first visit the air resounded with the hammering and sawing of a large company of labourers, some clinging on the rocks and boring, others wheeling away the rubbish, whilst another party were

building up the piers of a lofty bridge. The excellent and boldly engineered road then in construction is now completed, and leads as far as Fusio.

We are now at the limit of the romantic Italian valley, and are leaving behind us not only the vine and the chestnut, but also the granite. The mountains as we approach them seem to sink before us. The precipices of the lower valley give place to smooth lawns shadowed by spreading beeches. The gentle hillsides which surround the headwaters of the Maggia rise up into low rounded crests, and the scenery is only redeemed from monotony by the rich variety of the foliage and verdure.

The highest village, Fusio, is a cluster of houses crowded round a church, and clinging to a steep slope, at the foot of which flows the blue torrent in a deep bridge-spanned cleft. The inn ten years ago was of the most primitive kind. It was kept by a worthy couple whose shrewd puckered faces recalled some portrait of an early German master. But they were as lively as they were old, and no emergency, not even the arrival of three hungry Englishmen, found them without resources. On the occasion in question they boldly proceeded to sacrilege on our behalf. The village knew that the curé was going to have a fowl for dinner; the good dame hurried off to the parsonage, and like David robbed the tables of the priest.

The old inn and its owners are no longer to be found. A new hotel has lately been built, and is said to be frequented by Italians seeking refuge from the summer heat of the Lombard plain.

Thus far we have simply followed the main valley. Of its numerous tributary glens, Val Bavona and Val di Prato are the most likely to be visited by mountaineers, for they lead to the two highest summits of the neighbouring ranges, the Basodine and Piz Campo Tencca. But their beauties ought to attract others besides those who may wish to use them as means to a higher end – in a literal and Alpine Club sense.

The finest entrance to Val Maggia is through Val Bavona. The traveller descending from the cold heights and bleak pasturages of the Gries finds a warm welcome from the storm in the little inn opened some years ago on the very edge of the cliff over which the Tosa rushes in the most imposing cataract of the central Alps.<sup>6</sup> An afternoon is well spent in resting on the rocks beside the tearing, foaming flood, and watching the endless variety of the forms taken by the broken waves in their wild downward rush. Waterfalls are too seldom studied at leisure. Such a view is far more impressive than the hurried glance ordinarily taken from some point whence the cascade is seen in face, and all detail is sacrificed to a general effect, which often fails to be either imposing or picturesque.

The host of the inn will with pleasure undertake to place you next morning in from three to four hours on the top of the Basodine. The ascent is simple, and not at all tedious; a steep path up a moist flower-sprinkled cliff, rolling alps commanding views of the red mountains of the Gries, then steep banks of frozen snow, and a short exciting scramble up the highest rocks.

The mountain is a natural belvedere for the Bernese Oberland and Monte Rosa, and rising a good head above its fellows, must give a glorious view towards Italy. But to me the mountains of Val Maggia are unfriendly. Here as on Piz Campo Tencca I saw only a stoneman and a world of seething mists.

The night before our ascent had been black and wild. The wind had roared against the waterfall, and the thunder had rocked the house as though it had a mind to shake it bodily over the cliff. But the grey sad sunrise was not without hope; the scarves of mist which still clung about the mountains seemed remnants of an outworn grief; the upper sky, pale and tremulous, rather spoke of a storm past than threatened further ills to come. But the crisis had been more violent than we dreamt at the time, and twenty-four hours of reparation were needed before the face of heaven could again shine in its full summer fairness.

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<sup>6</sup> The falls of Krimml in Tyrol are probably on the whole the Alpine cataract in which height of fall, force of water, and picturesque surroundings are most thoroughly united. There are many falls in the Adamello group which a painter would prefer to the cascade of the Tosa.

The loss of the view was not our only disappointment. It had been determined to find a new and more direct way down to San Carlo through Val Antabbia. But in a blind fog it is best to avoid precipices, and we knew there were plenty in that direction, so we quietly returned to the gap between our peak and the Kastelhorn, and put on the rope preparatory to descending the Caverigno Glacier.

The slopes of snow, cut here and there by deep rifts, offered easy passage until hardening into blue ice they curled over steeply. Some rocks stuck out on our left, and at their base, at a depth of several hundred feet, abysses innumerable gaped through the mists. This was an unexpected difficulty, and we should have been perplexed what to do had not the wind slightly shifted the cloud-curtain, and shown enough to enable us to understand our exact position.

The glacier is divided into two terraces by a wall of rock, which towards the base of the Kastelhorn is covered over by an icefall, passable no doubt with ease near that peak. We had descended too directly, and were to the right, or south, of the fall. We must either remount and go round, or else get down the rocks. With a little trouble we found a passage, and François, boldly taking advantage of a narrow bridge between two ice-pits, led us safely on to the lower branch of the glacier.

Its surface was broken only by contemptible crevices, and we ran down without interruption to the huge terminal moraine. Sitting amongst its blocks, we looked back at the great shining slope, on which the sun was already shining. High up under the Basodine long shadows fell from an isolated group of snow-towers or 'séracs,' amongst the most prodigious I had seen in the Alps; a glacier Karnac of ponderous columns and huge propylons. The smoothness of the surrounding ice, like the flatness of the Egyptian plain, added to the effect of this mountain temple.

We wished we had missed our way a little more and passed through its midst. Had we done so we might have followed out the upper or southern branch of the glacier, and found our way into the glen below the meeting of waterfalls afterwards mentioned. Close to the ice, in a sheltered basin, spread with a carpet of verdure, and watered by a smooth-flowing stream, we found the highest châteaux. Great was our surprise when our eager enquiries for milk were answered in broken English. The herdsman had worked as a miner in Cornwall, and had now returned in good circumstances to his native valley.

The narrowness of their granite walls drives the Val Maggians far afield in search of subsistence.<sup>7</sup> A wayside chapel in Val Bavona has been recently erected, as its inscription narrates, with Australian gold, and the driver of the Locarno omnibus in 1873 had learnt English in the Antipodes. Most of these wanderers come back, some rich, to build large, white, cheerful houses – 'palazzi' their friends call them – amongst the familiar chestnut-groves; others, like our friend, less successful, but still not wholly unrewarded, to revert contentedly to the old solitary life on the hills with the cows and goats. There can be no stronger proof of the real fascination of mountains over minds which have grown amongst them than the fidelity of these peasants, who hurry back from all the excitements of the Antipodes to the monotony of the alp in summer and the hamlet in winter.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond the huts, path and stream make a sudden plunge into a deep hollow, the meeting-place of the waters which, springing from the tarns and snows that lie on the upper shelves, rush over the granite precipices in a succession of noble falls. The shadeless glen is closed at its lower end by a buttress projecting from the eastern mountain. On climbing the spur we saw deep below us a trough-like valley. Steep mountains encircled the basin, and its floor was strewn with huge masses torn from their rugged sides. High overhead rose the southern bulwarks of the Basodine, gigantic cliffs, on whose topmost verge sparkled a glittering ice-cornice. At our feet San Carlo, the highest village in Val Bavona, peeped out from amidst rich foliage. Many women were scattered over the meadows,

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<sup>7</sup> Between the years 1850-56, one-eighth of the whole population, and one-fourth of the male population, left their homes. Amongst the emigrants were 324 married men, only two of whom took their wives with them!

<sup>8</sup> The herdsmen of these châteaux have a way to the Val Formazza without crossing the Basodine. The 'Bocchetta di Val Maggia,' a gap in the rocky ridge at the north-eastern corner of the Caverigno glacier, brings them on to the pasturages near the San Giacomo Pass, whence either Airolo or the Tosa Falls can be gained without further ascent.

cutting and gathering in their hay; and, as we rested, a boy came up from them, and told us that to reach the valley we must return and cross the stream. A rough path on the right bank led us through beautiful copses, where the beech and birch mingled their branches with the pines, and tall ferns and bright-berried bushes wove a luxuriant undergrowth. Chestnuts and walnuts greeted us for the first time as we approached the high-arched bridge leading to San Carlo.

The path, now a good cart-track carried on a causeway between purple boulders and gnarled old chestnuts, passed by the way a brightly coloured chapel and two villages. Near the second, a cluster of poor huts hemmed in by enormous blocks of granite, a pretty jet of water shoots out of the western cliff, the valley bends, and the sunlit mountains behind Bignasco close the distance.

A short plain, ruined by a torrent which has recently carried away half a hamlet, is now passed. To such disasters Val Bavona is always exposed, and a law formerly forbid any one to live in it through the winter.

Henceforth, keeping beside the clear blue waters, we descended with them, through a tangle of white stream-smoothed boulders, and under the shadow of the prodigious cliffs from which they have fallen. One of the blocks bears this simple record: 'Qui fu bella Campagna,' and the date 1594. Yet despite the ruin and destruction of which the defile, within an even historically modern epoch, has been the scene, its beauty is in no way of a stern or savage nature. If the mountain shapes are as majestic as those of Giotto's Duomo, their walls are also decorated with the most lavish hand; and even where the granite is bare time and weather have tinted it with the mellow hues of an old Florentine façade.

No more typical passage from the Alps to Italy can possibly be found than that we had chosen. A few hours ago we had been in the frigid zone among the eternal snows, and above the level of all but the hardiest plants. Now the green pastures and the pines were already past, the chestnut had become our companion, and the first vine threw its long branches over the rude woodwork of a sheltered hut. Soon three or four were found in company under the sunny side of a heat-reflecting rock, until as we drew near Caveragno the whole slope became a vineyard, and the path an overarched alley between a double row of tall granite pillars, from which the ripe clusters hung down into our faces in too tempting luxuriance.

A straight line drawn from Faido, on the St. Gothard road, to Bignasco nearly passes through Piz Campo Tencca, the three-domed snow-crest which dominates the eastern range, and, like its loftier rival, the Basodine, peers down on that charming halting-place. The pass between the two highest of these summits was, therefore, clearly the proper path for two mountaineers coming from the east to Val Maggia.

To the driving public Faido is known for an excellent inn and a waterfall, the latter the outflow of the glacier we proposed to cross. A much-used track climbs in a long zigzag to the cultivated tableland which lies above the steep slope overshadowing the village. Beyond the large upland hamlet of Dalpe, our path pursued the stream into the hills, mounting steeply by its side to an upper plain, whence several tracks, some for goats and some for cows, led over broken ground to the Crozolina Alp, a broad pasturage at the base of a wall of rocks, over which the streams falling from the upper glaciers shiver themselves into spray. A few yards south of a boldly projecting crag, and by the side of one of the cascades, we found it easy to scramble up the broken rock-faces until the level of the ice was reached; then it seemed best to bear to the right, and follow a long ridge connecting the buttress and the highest peak.

The morning had been uncertain, and now the clouds, which we had hoped were only local and passing, fell upon us with a determination which promised little chance of deliverance.

What is the duty of a traveller and his guides overtaken on the mountains by bad weather is a question which the sad death on the Mer de Glace brought not long ago prominently before the public, and which will be argued as often as some fatal accident calls attention to the subject. It is one which does not admit of any offhand answer. Climbers are of various constitutions, there are

mountains and mountains, and divers kinds of bad weather. Still it may be useful to endeavour to lay down such leading principles as will probably meet with general consent.

Where the travellers are new to high mountains, and uncertain of their own powers of endurance, the guide, in every case where going on involves long exposure to storm, should suggest, and his employers agree to, a retreat. The moral courage necessary for this is one of the requisites of a guide's calling; and if by its exercise he may sometimes expose himself to the hasty ridicule of an ignorant tourist, he will not suffer in his profession or in the estimation of real climbers.

Again, an attempt on one of the more difficult peaks, such as the Schreckhorn or the Weisshorn, ought not to be persevered with in doubtful weather; that is, by perseverance in such a case the risk to life becomes so serious that, whatever the travellers' own value of themselves may be, they have no right to ask guides to share it. For it should always be remembered that it is where difficulties prevent rapid movement that the bitter cold grasps its victim. Except, perhaps, in the very worst, and fortunately rare, *tourmentes* circulation can always be maintained by constant motion.

Thirdly, exposure to this worst kind of storm, which comes on with an insupportable icy blast, should be as far as possible shunned even on a mule-pass. The simple monuments which line the track of the Col de Bonhomme and the Gavia Pass, near Santa Catarina, bear witness to the dangers of such weather, even on a comparatively frequented route.

There remain, however, a large class of cases where more or less seasoned climbers are overtaken by clouds, rain, or snow, in each of which the decision must depend on the circumstances, and for which no general rule can be laid down. A wet day in the valley is often far from intolerable above the snow-level, where the gently falling flakes sink slowly through an air of moderate temperature. In such weather many high passes may be safely accomplished by men of sufficient experience, who understand how to apply their local knowledge, or to use a good map and compass.

Of course, it will be asked, *Cui bono?*— why wander amidst the mists when you might be comfortable below them? The answer is, that when the day changes the traveller is often far on his way. It is a case, perhaps, of going back four hours or going on five; there is, besides the natural disinclination to return and to have had one's walk for nothing, the hope, often justified, that the change for the worse may be only temporary. These are motives which must strongly influence everyone in such a position.

Besides, the inside of a cloud is not quite so dismal a place as might be thought, and the snow-region, even when the distant view is hidden, offers attractions for those who have learnt to appreciate it. The fretted ice-chasms, the toppling towers and fragile arches of the upper glacier, the keen white pyramid seen suddenly through a wreath of mist, or the snow-wave caught in the act of breaking over the highest crest, have a loveliness of their own as delicate as, and from its strangeness to inhabitants of a temperate zone sometimes even more fascinating than, the charm of streams and forests. It is not, it is true, visible to all eyes. A Reverend Principal lately instructed his audience that 'a more hideous spectacle than a yawning crevasse, with its cold, blue, glassy sides, can scarcely be conceived.' But Mons. Loppé and the Alpine Club know better than this. Most of us can probably remember, in the Regent's Park Colosseum, a sham Switzerland: what that in a sorry enough way attempted to be to the reality, the reality is to the Polar regions – a specimen near home of Arctic scenery. Much of this beauty can be seen even in a partial fog. But there is also the chance of that most glorious of transfigurations of earth and sky, when towards evening some breath of air sweeps away the local storm, and through the melting cloud-wreaths we see the wide landscape glittering with fresh rain, and the new snows shining opposite the setting sun – a scene the full splendour of which can scarcely be recalled even in the memory of those who have often witnessed it.

In the present instance two hours would, we knew, put us well on the other side of the mountain, where our friends were waiting for us; and, though neither my guide nor I knew anything of the ground, we could trust to General Dufour's map. The Swiss traveller has here an enormous advantage over his brother in Great Britain. If anyone is rash enough, in Wales for instance, to put his faith in

the English Ordnance Survey, and to seek a passage where light shading seems to indicate an absence of precipices, he will soon find himself brought to a standstill. The present state of our national maps is far from creditable to our Government and our engineers.

For the moment all we had to do was to stick to the ridge, which must and did lead us straight to the stoneman, in such weather the only indication of the summit. A short halt for the chance of a break in the clouds and to settle clearly our route on the map, and we started on the unknown descent. The first point was to strike the gap south of the peak. A few minutes sufficed for this, then we had only to descend with a constant bearing to the left. The ground was steep and rough, and there were cliffs in every direction, but we managed to avoid them. In half an hour we had reached the lower skirts of the cloud, and passed out of gentle snow into pitiless rain.

Cattle tracks now led us past the highest huts to a cabin from the chimney of which smoke issued. The solitary herdsman welcomed us with a courtesy and coffee worthy of an Eastern sheikh. The pouring rain, perhaps, flavoured the beverage, but François Devouassoud and I both fancied that, west of Constantinople, we had never tasted so aromatic a draught.

The head of the valley seemed to be a basin surrounded on all sides by rugged cliffs; in the present weather it was nothing but a caldron of mist. How should we escape from it? The hill-shoulders pressed us in on all sides; yet the shepherd promised a *strada buona*. In a quarter of an hour we were at the meeting-place of the mountain-torrents, where from their union sprang a stream, the bluest of all the blue waters of Val Maggia, full of a life now bright and dashing, now calm and deep, such as might fitly be personified in a Naiad. This was the fairy who would unbar the gates of our prison. We followed the guidance of the waters into the jaws of the mountain, where they had seized on some flaw or fissure to work for themselves a passage. But the stream had thought only for itself. No room was provided for a path, and the ingenuity of a road-making population had evidently been taxed to the utmost to render the ravine passable for cows as well as water. A causeway was built up on every natural shelf, and, where the level could no longer be kept, the hanging terraces were connected by regularly-built stone staircases. A rough balustrade formed a protection on the outside, and prevented a hasty plunge into the gulf, where the brilliant waters wrestled with the stiff crags which every now and then thrust out a knee to stop their flow, and gave them a tumble from which they collected themselves at leisure in a deep still pool before dancing off again to fresh struggles and fresh victories. From the shelves above the bright-berried mountain ash and delicate birch stretched out their arms to the stream, which, as if impatient for the vines, hurried past them and at last broke away with a bold leap, flying down over the rock-faces to the lower valley in a shower of foam and water-rockets.

Near the junction of a glen through which the track of the Passo di Redorta climbs over to Val Verzasca, a steep descent beside the fall leads to the hamlet of San Carlo. The path here crosses a bridge and keeps henceforth along a broken, richly wooded hill-side until, having swerved to the right, it joins at Prato the main valley.

And so down the moist high-road under the dripping walnuts of Broglio, and again, after ten years, back to Bignasco, beautiful even under the grey cloud-pall with its hill-shapes only suggested between the mists. Most beautiful when with the sunset a northern breeze gathered up the vapour-wreaths and a full moon shone down into Val Bavona marking with clearest lights and shadows all its buttresses, and drawing a responsive gleam from the pure snows at its head. A change too sudden to last. For while sitting on the bridge we watched the moonbeams strike over the southward hill, and fall full on the eddying water at our feet and the flowery balconies on either hand, a white drapery stretched slowly round the Cevio corner, and, as in the immortal Chorus of Aristophanes, a gleaming company of clouds sailed up on their way from the deep hollows of the lake to the wood-crowned heights of the mountain. The leader advanced but slowly with misty folds clinging to each crag; but it had scarcely passed when the whole body was upon us, and the bright upper heaven was obscured by their fleecy forms.

After midnight we were awakened by the rush of mountain rain and the crash of thunder, while in the white blaze we saw the Maggia blue no longer, but turbid with the grey granite atoms which it was hurrying down to swell the delta of Locarno. The storm spirits were in earnest, and in the morning every cliff had its cascade, bridges had been swept away, and great heaps of mud and stones, washed out of the overhanging crags, blocked even the high-road which offers the only escape from the mountain world.

## CHAPTER II. VAL VERZASCA AND VAL CANOBBINA

On our other side is the straight-up rock,  
And a path is kept 'twixt the gorge and it  
By boulderstones, where lichens mock  
The marks on a moth, and small ferns fit  
Their teeth to the polished block.

*R. Browning.*

### PASSO DI REDORTA – VAL VERZASCA – A BROKEN ROAD – LOCARNO – VAL CANOBBINA – VAL VIGEZZO

Val Maggia is not the only unknown valley which opens on the famous lake. Close beside it, and hemmed in between its mountains and those on the west of Val Leventina, lies a still narrower and more obscure recess, Val Verzasca. In olden days the natives of this glen bore a bad name. In 1490 a writer speaks of them as 'homines sylvestres sparsim ferarum ritu degentes';<sup>9</sup> and the reputation for wildness so early acquired still sticks to them. Knives are said to be more frequently drawn among them, and with worse consequences, than in any other district of Ticino. But there is no record of a stranger ever having suffered from this tendency to blood-letting, and the ill-repute of the valley can hardly be held accountable for its neglect by travellers.

So great has been this neglect that the Federal map was to us the chief and almost the only source of information. Thus studied, the peculiarities of Val Verzasca are seen to be the shortness of the side glens which branch off the main stem, and the uniformly great elevation of the surrounding ridges. From Bignasco a tolerably direct path leads over to Brione by Val d'Ossola, and from what we saw I recommend the next visitor to try this way in preference to the longer circuit which we were induced to take by a conscientious desire to see the head of the main Val Verzasca and an unfounded fancy that a carriage road implied vehicles of some sort.

From San Carlo in Val di Prato a track leaving the path to Piz Campo Tencca circles round the westward-facing hillside, and, above a waterfall, traverses beside the torrent a narrow glen. Beyond some châteaux we penetrated a sombre funnel, choked with avalanches. It expanded at its upper end into a basin floored with snow and hemmed in by cliffs picturesquely broken and green with underwood. The stream which poured down them was received at the bottom under a snow-arch, bold in its span as an old Italian bridge. A few yards east of the water-channel a goat track, sometimes difficult to follow, climbs the steep slope and the rocks above it, where the easiest course is only marked by the goats' droppings. Hands as well as feet are useful, but there is no difficulty for anyone accustomed to mountains.

Above the cliff we found a wide sloping meadow covered with cows. At first sight their presence seemed only to be accounted for by magic or a medium-like faculty in the herd for self-elevation. But I believe due enquiry would have established the existence of a rationalistic explanation in the shape of a roundabout staircase not beyond the powers of an Italian heifer.

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<sup>9</sup> Domenico Macaneo, in his *Verbani lacus locorumque adjacentium chorographica descriptio*, quoted by Studer, *Physische Geographie der Schweiz*. These notices suggest that the Val Verzasicans may be a relic of some primitive tribe, but I have no authority for imputing to them ethnological importance.

The lowest saddle in the high ridge before us was the Passo di Redorta. Despite the beauty of the day there was little distant view and no peak near enough at hand to tempt to further exertion. Val Maggia itself was almost hidden by the vertical lines of a bold, many-headed buttress, and the eye ranged over the wilderness of its mountain-ridges, a savage expanse of ruined gneiss naked of snow and void of prominent peaks or bristling ridges. The rock cannot, like the firmer granites of Val Masino or the Adamello, offer any stubborn resistance to the action of the atmosphere. Hence the mountain-tops are one mass of comparatively level ruin. Those who have looked down from some Syrian hilltop on an ancient city, of which the ponderous materials cumber the ground, while not a column is left standing, may exactly picture to themselves the scene of desolation now offered on a vastly larger scale to our eyes by the ranges of Val Maggia. In contrast the head of Val Verzasca, lying as it were at our feet, was green, bright, and inviting.

We were joined on the pass by a young Verzascan, returning from a visit to relatives at Peccia, laden with a store of simple delicacies, such as white bread, honey and cheese. The pains he was at to transport such a burden suggested comparative poverty in the land we were entering. We descended together, but there was no need of any guide, as the valley lay always straight before us, and the ground, though excessively steep, was not precipitous. Near the foot of the descent a pretty fall tumbles off the right-hand hillside.

A mile further, at a waters-meet, stands Sonogno, a deserted savage-looking cluster of dingy stone houses, which, but for the whitewashed church, might be in Ossetia. There were no inhabitants in the streets, and those indoors, with the first instinct of savages and wild animals, hurriedly thrust their heads back again through their little square windows when we asked questions. It was with difficulty we succeeded in getting one word, a simple negative, in reply to our demand for a carriage.

For to this extreme corner of the mountains civilisation advances in the shape of a road which has been carried up from the lake at an expense of over £15,000, shared between the cantonal government and the communes. Its engineers would seem to have determined to make no needless ascent, and at the cost of cuttings, embankments, and lofty bridges, they have carried out their purpose in the most thorough manner. The workmanship of this remote track would bear comparison with most of the highways of Europe. But the proverb of the ass taken to the water's brink seems to apply to Val Verzasca. No force seems capable of inducing the upper villages to use the boon intended for them. As in the East a few years ago the old camel-track over Lebanon was still trodden bare, while the grass grew on the new road made by French enterprise, so here no wheels seemed ever to have worn in the fresh stones. The nine miles to Lavertezzo must be walked.

The upper branch of the valley, although hemmed in by bold mountains, is somewhat monotonous, and the foreground is too often defaced by a broad torrent-bed. At the village of Brione Val Verzasca displays the first landscape which is likely to leave any lasting impression. The range on the right suddenly breaks off in a perpendicular crag of singular boldness; and as the road, raised on a lofty embankment, crosses a tributary stream a long vista of receding lines of cliff and chestnut trees is seen for some minutes. This is Val d'Ossola, through which runs the shortest and probably the most beautiful path to Bignasco.

From this point to the lake for some fifteen miles the bed of the Verzasca is simply a narrow cleft in the mountains, sinking deeper and deeper, until at last it opens upon Lago Maggiore, at the village of Gordola, opposite Magadino. Below Brione a great barrier, probably a mountain-fall, is thrown right across the valley, which at the same time drops considerably. The road makes a zigzag amidst the wildest tangle of boulders and chestnut-trees, then leaps boldly on to the opposite rocks, and creeps along a shelf blasted beside the blue tumbling stream.

As far as Lavertezzo the trench is wide enough at the bottom to give room for a few fields and houses. But this is not an agricultural district. The natives we met, a strong, wild-looking race, were all stone-quarriers, woodmen, or charcoal-burners. Many of them were employed where a timber

slide, built on an unusual scale, falls over the cliffs from the mouth of a side-glen in the western range, through which a hill-path leads over to Maggia.

For the next few miles the valley bends constantly, and Lavertezzo seems to be always round the next corner. As at last we approach the village the river, sliding out from amidst huge grey boulders, two of them joined by a slender arch, is suddenly checked. The water rests motionless in a chain of the most delicious pools – deep-green, transparent bubbling crystals – contained in basins of the whitest granite, smooth and polished as if made for a Roman bath. Henceforth it glistens no more in the sunshine, but roars or rests deep in a hidden cleft until it flows out to the fever-stricken plain of Gordola.

Lavertezzo itself consists of a campanile, a church, and a few white houses, crowded into a green corner above the meeting of two streams. Its name is adorned in maps with one of those curly horns which indicate a post-station. Here at least we reckoned on finding something on wheels. But a difficulty hitherto only dimly foreshadowed now met us full in the face with stunning force. Our hopes were crushed by a universal outcry of 'strada rotta.' But we still did not comprehend the full force of the emphasis laid on the last word, and while accepting the fact that our legs must carry us over the remaining eighteen kilometres to Locarno, looked for nothing more than the ordinary amount of breakage caused by a mountain-storm – one bridge gone, or at most two. What we had seen in the upper valley was not of a character to prepare us for any very serious damage.

But the whole force of the great thunderstorm three nights before had concentrated itself on the ridges round the head of Lago Maggiore. The rain-torrents rushing with unrestrained fury from these lofty crests (7,000 to 8,000 feet) down the barren hillsides, and gathering impetus with every foot of fall, had filled and overflowed all the channels, tearing as they went huge rocks out of either bank, mixing themselves with the soil till they became as much earth as water, and sweeping away every obstruction which lay across their path.

Everywhere the steep slopes, saturated by the terrible deluge, had given way. The road might be said to be effaced rather than broken. For mile after mile two-thirds of its breadth was buried in mud washed down from the upper hillsides.

The post-house of Vogorno, a solitary farm by the roadside, was in a lamentable plight. The stables had been carried away, and the whole front of the house was blocked with mud. At every few yards we came on immense barricades, the work of some puny trickle which now wandered almost invisible amongst the ruin it had wrought. In the least exposed spots stones as big as a hat-box were lying in the middle of the road. The larger torrents, thought worthy of bridges, had carried away the arches set over them, leaving deep gaps to be clambered round. Even a magnificent bridge, standing at a height at least 200 feet over a lateral ravine, had been undermined and swept bodily away. It was necessary to descend into the torrent-bed and scramble up the opposite bank. Another still loftier arch, one of the most striking works of its kind in the Alps, had alone escaped the general destruction, owing to its piers being built into the solid rock about 150 feet above the ordinary water-level.

Yet, though the road was destroyed and the hillside scored in many places by the terrible paths of the rocks and torrents, the general aspect of the landscape was hardly affected. The left bank, round the deep ravines of which the road, or what was left of it, circled incessantly, was always steep and broken. But across the river the chestnuts and rocks yielded, as the hills rose, to vineyards and fields of maize. The valley was all ravine, but high on the mountains were sunny bays and promontories, shining with villages bright and festal as only Italian villages are. A horizontal streak drawn across the face of a range of mural cliffs was the road linking these communes to Locarno. In the variety and boldness of its scenery this portion of Val Verzasca seemed to us equal to any of the southern defiles of the Alps.

At last the gorge expanded, and the broad surface of the most beautiful of the Italian lakes spread across the centre of the landscape. The most beautiful, for to me it seems that spaciousness of shining surface – the quality which made Thrasimene so dear to Perugino – is an essential in lake

scenery. In narrow, many-winding lakes the multitude of straight shore lines is apt to cut off harshly all the mountain shapes, and to be an offence to the eye, which would be better contented by the accidents of a green valley than with the smooth water-floor. The landscapes of Como, fascinating in their rapid changes – now picturesque and gay, now wild and severe – are too confined and crowded for perfect beauty. Garda is noble in its sealike expanse, but the shapes of its hills cannot compare with the stately Greek charm of the mountains round Baveno.

Above Gordola a whole hillside had given way, and the great earthslip had spread desolation amongst the lower vineyards. The brown ruin made a sad foreground to the exquisite view over the pale evening lake and the glowing hills. We took a short cut through the broken-down terraces to the bridge over the Verzasca, where we joined the high-road from Bellinzona to Locarno. Between us and the lake ran, in all the ugliness of unfinished novelty, a railway embankment.

Still three miles to Locarno, and no carriage on the road or boat on the water. In the morning we had walked over a seven hours' pass, including an ascent of 6,000 feet; since midday we had covered some eighteen miles of road. Yet, although all more or less way-weary, we accepted the further march without much murmur. At a certain stage in the day the muscles become dogged and go on with machine-like energy, and to maintain the power of enjoyment it is only necessary to keep the mind from worrying itself with idle speculations as to details of time and distance. It is the old story. The sad or the impatient heart collapses, while the contented one 'goes all the day;' and in an Italian dusk on the shores of Maggiore it is easy to be contented.

Locarno itself had suffered severely from the storm. The channel of the small stream which divides the town had been overfilled by a deluge of horrible black mud, which, bursting out like a lava flood into the streets, had flowed down them, breaking into the shops on the ground floor, and finally spreading itself out in a pool several feet deep over the wide open space in front of the Albergo della Corona.

Locarno is pretty well accustomed to violent catastrophes. A few years ago the roof of the principal church gave way under a heavy fall of snow, and, crashing in during mass, killed or wounded half the congregation. Inundations are almost as frequent as earthquakes at Torre del Greco, and here, as on the Bay of Naples, familiarity with the outrages of nature seems to breed indifference, if not contempt. The population of Locarno took the damage done as much as a matter of course as the 'Times' reader in September a shocking railway accident. The men in their broad felts and the women with their fans were, as we entered, all abroad for the evening stroll, chatting and looking on cheerfully at the labourers still at work removing the rubbish. Shopkeepers had already reopened their stores, and were endeavouring to remove from their wares the traces of the recent mud-bath.

No lives had been lost here, but across the water at Magadino the storm had been more fatal. Several houses had been carried into the lake, and so suddenly that in one case the inhabitants were drowned.

Next to Val Maggia, Val Centovalli is the largest of the valleys which open on the fertile plain behind Locarno.<sup>10</sup> It is, in fact, not so much a valley as a broad line of depression through the hill-region separating the basin of Domo d'Ossola from the lake. The opening thus offered by nature has, owing probably to political jealousy, never been taken advantage of. The lower Val Centovalli is Italian, the upper basin of the Melezza and the short eastern Val Vigezzo Swiss, and no road passable for wheeled vehicles crosses the frontier. On the whole, however, lovers of nature gain. But for political exigencies Val Canobbina might never have been pierced.

This glen, as its name implies, opens behind Canobbio, a town reached in two hours from Locarno, by a most beautiful road along the western shore of the lake. On the hillside facing north,

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<sup>10</sup> Between the two valleys mentioned above is Val Onsernone (see *Alpine Guide*, p. 315, and Appendix) penetrated for some distance by a carriage-road. In a lively article in the fifth Jahrbuch of the Swiss Alpine Club, Herr Hoffmann Burkhardt describes the scenery as most varied and charming, and the road 'as a magnificent example of a mountain-road, and a most striking evidence of the talent of the Tessiners in this department of human industry.'

and a mile inland, is a large bathing establishment or summer health-resort known as 'La Salute,' and chiefly frequented by Italians. The situation is charming, high enough to command over a green foreground the whole upper bay of the lake closed by the bold mountains of Val Verzasca.

Val Canobbina is rather a tangle of glens than a valley. The road climbs at once into a deep dell, refreshed by perpetual waters and green with verdure only broken where the jagged rocks close in on the stream to form a gorge, or 'orrido' in the local phrase. Oak thickets and chestnut copses clothe the slopes; cyclamens, common as daisies at home, bend their graceful heads on every sunny bank.

At one spot four valleys join, and it is impossible to guess which will be chosen. The road plunges into the narrowest, and forces its way near the torrent, until, suddenly turning in steep zigzags to scale the hillside, it breaks off altogether.<sup>11</sup> The carriage halts, the driver shouts, and tall, handsome girls drop down the stairs from the neighbouring village of Orasso, and eagerly grasp the luggage. The ascent is continued by a rough path, which circles terrace-like for several miles between white hamlets and green hills. Nature shows herself here very friendly, but also very southern, and full of a delicate subdued beauty quite apart from the more homely charm of northern scenery.

The glen again twists round on itself, and we almost fancy ourselves in an issueless labyrinth, when the road suddenly reappears at our feet, and boldly rushes into a tunnel which might not be much on a railroad, but is a great work for a country byway.

On the further side the road, blasted out of the face of the rock, makes its entrance into an upland basin, still part of Val Canobbina. On a brow in its centre rises the village of Finero. The festival of the patron saint of the church had collected thither all the neighbourhood, and given occasion for a very tournament of bowls, a game which in the lives of Northern Italians fills the place occupied by croquet in those of some of our curates and officers.

Beyond Finero a broad low ridge sends down a stream northward into the Italian head of Val Centovalli, and the road rapidly descends through pine forests. We are no longer in a mountain-maze, the hills stand back and leave in their midst a happy oasis crowded with cultivation and life, and blest with the gifts alike of mountain and of plain, the fresh Alpine breeze and water, and the sun and fertility of Lombardy. In the midst of maize-fields lie spacious well-built towns; on the slopes, shaded by their walnut and chestnut groves, a score of brilliant whitewashed villages.

What a living brightness in southern lands is the white which in the north, among our duller colours and opaque atmospheres, is only a dead chill! Beyond the Alps it seems the appropriate colour for men's homes. We in England can ill afford to dispense with the suggestion of warmth and dryness given by red brick and tiles. But domestic architecture is a subject too painful for the victims of ninety-nine years' leases and speculative builders to think about. Few Londoners can bear to look without a shudder on the outside of what they call 'home.' If the old fashion of white paint was chilly, it was at least better than the new stucco squares and streets, the exact colour of our native fogs and roadways. Why should we live in a monotone of mud, as if we were some species of snail whose only chance in the struggle for existence lies in making itself and its shell undistinguishable from the surroundings?

The plain in which stand the prosperous towns of Malesco and Santa Maria Maggiore, though called Val Vigizzo, sends down its torrent to Locarno. Such an imperceptible bank of heather as divides the Drave from the Pusterthal still severs us from the western Val Vigizzo. In clear weather Monte Rosa must shine upon this upland basin; in the pouring rain all I saw of the drive to Domo d'Ossola was a narrow picturesque river-bed and a wide sodden plain, at the end of which a ferry close to the town gates carried us and our carriage across the swollen waters of the Tosa.

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<sup>11</sup> The carriage-road was expected to be finished throughout in 1875.

## **CHAPTER III.** ***WEST OF THE BERNINA***

### **THE PEAKS AND PASSES OF VAL MASINO.<sup>12</sup>**

Il montera, descendra, traversera, remontera, redescendra, retraversera,  
etcetera. —*French Play.*

And when I most go here and there,  
I then do most go right.

*Shakespeare.*

### **THE MOUNTAINS OF VAL MASINO – THE AVERSTHAL – MADRISER PASS – VAL BREGAGLIA – ZOCCA PASS – PROMONTOGNO – VAL BONDASCA – PASSO DI FERRO – BAGNI DEL MASINO – PASSO DI MONTE SISSONE – THE FORNO GLACIER**

To the crowd, which having sat down in a draught on the roof of Europe spends its time mostly in bemoaning the cold, to the water-drinkers of St. Moritz or the pensioners of Pontresina, the mountains of Val Masino are unknown. Yet had they eyes to see they might often be attracted by the vision of two square towers rising far beyond the blue lakes and the green ridge of the Maloya, and shining like an enchanted keep through the warm haze of Italy.<sup>13</sup> They are indeed the ramparts of Paradise, for on the further side they look down upon the gardens of Lago di Como.

Even to climbers this western wing of the Bernina has remained little known. So long ago as 1862 Messrs. Kennedy and Stephen carried at the second assault its proudest peak, the Monte della Disgrazia. But I could count on my fingers the names of all the Englishmen who have since penetrated Val Masino. Foreign Alpine Clubs have for the most part held aloof. The Swiss have found enough to do elsewhere, and have not as yet chosen Val Bregaglia – politically a Swiss valley – as the 'gebiet' of one of the summer 'excursions' in which they contrive to combine so happily the features of a prolonged picnic and a mountain-battue. That practical, and in some respects energetic, body, the Italian Alpine Club, is only beginning to turn its attention to a district containing one of the few wholly Italian peaks of over 12,000 feet.

Those who have been already somewhat disappointed in the Upper Engadine and the heart of the Bernina will perhaps argue that there cannot be much worth seeing in its extremities, where the peaks are lower and the ice-fields as a whole less extensive. Such an assumption, however, would be ill-founded. For scenic effects, every one will allow, the measurement of a mountain must be taken, not from the sea level, but from its actual base. Moreover the lower the base the richer and more varied will be the contrast in vegetation. On applying this test we find that the Punta Trubinesca<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This and the following chapter were originally written as a paper to be read before the Alpine Club.

<sup>13</sup> See Vignette.

<sup>14</sup> Herr Theobald states that the villagers of Bondo give the name of Trubinesca to the Cima di Tschingel of the Federal map. Herr Ziegler, the author of a new and very beautifully executed map of this portion of the Alps, confirms this statement, adding that 'Turbinisca' is the correct spelling, and he has accordingly changed the names of the two peaks. As a rule, local usage should, no doubt, be followed. But in the present instance, the mistake is of such long standing, that an endeavour to correct it would only lead

towers 8,500 feet above the chestnut trees of Promontogno, while Piz Bernina itself rises 1,000 feet less, and far more gradually, above Pontresina. The icy ridges of the Disgrazia soar 11,000 feet above the vineyards of the Val Tellina, or as much as Mont Blanc above Courmayeur.

The peaks, moreover, are of a durable granite. They have, therefore, that combined boldness of outline and solidity which often belongs to this hardy rock. Other mountains have the air of having been built up; granite peaks seem rather to have been rough-hewn like a sculptor's block out of a larger mass. In glaciers the group possesses almost every known variety. The Bondasca and the eastern glaciers of the Disgrazia worthily represent the frozen cataract type, tumbling in broken billows from cope to base of the mountain; the Albigna is an ice-lake fed by huge snow-basins; the Forno a stately stream surpassing in length the Morteratsch.

Here, however, I gladly break off from the conventional tone of recommendation in which discoverers are apt to assert their own merits.

For the people who either cannot or will not walk, the large class which, taking advantage of the shade of contempt already attached to the epithet by Vatican infallibility, I may venture to call the 'Subalpine Club,' Val Masino has few attractions. Inaccessible on three sides except to pedestrians, this valley will probably remain for long a sure refuge for the misanthropic climber driven away from the peaks of the central Bernina by the demands of the guides or the clatter of his fellow-countrymen.

In the summer of 1864 I set out from Splügen with two companions and François Devouassoud for the Bernina. Our route led us through the Avers Thal, a cross-road of travel still but little frequented, though no better reason than fashion can be assigned for its neglect. For mile after mile the Averser Rhein, a strong blue-grey torrent, leaps and roars between masses of marble crag tinted with lichens, and clasped about by huge pine-roots. Tributary streams rush down from the rugged precipices towering on either side the gorge, and shoot with a creamy rush into the deep cleft which holds the larger flood.

Above the long defile lies a broad grassy upland dotted with some of the highest villages in Europe, and encompassed by green slopes which divide the waters of three seas. The landscape is, it is true, tame to the eye; but on a sunny August morning, when the vast hayfield is alive with mowers and the air fragrant with the smell of ripe grasses, it contains much to tickle other senses than sight.

We turned up a side branch of the valley, the Madriser Thal. Near its head a white line seamed the slopes we had yet to surmount. On nearer approach this resolved itself into a laboriously-built stone staircase, showing that we were on what was once a frequented passage for beasts of burden. Judging from the solidity and care with which it had originally been put together the 'pavé' might have been Roman. I do not venture to say it is. More probably in the middle ages this was an alternative route for the Septimer. Perhaps the indefatigable explorer and describer of his native Alps, Herr Theobald, or some other curious enquirer, has told the date and story. If so I have failed to fall on the passage.

It was from the ridge which divides the Rhine from the Maira that I gained my first general view of the mountains of Val Masino. Opposite, and separated from our stand-point, the Madriser Pass, only by the deep but narrow trench of Val Bregaglia, a great mountain-mass glowed in the afternoon sunshine. Its base was wrapped in chestnut woods, its middle girt with a belt of pines, above spread a mantle of the eternal snow. The sky-line was formed by a coronet of domes and massive pinnacles carved out of grey rocks, whose jagged yet stubborn forms revealed the presence of granite. Full in front the curving glacier of Val Bondasca filled the space beneath the smooth cliff-faces, and at one spot a gap between them irresistibly suggested a new pass for the morrow.

The descent on the southern side of the Madriser Pass, long, rough, and extremely steep, leads to the village of Soglio, which rests on a terrace high above the valley, and commands a noble view of the granite peaks. Here stands a deserted villa belonging to the old Grisons family of De Salis, surrounded

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to confusion, and I have adhered to the nomenclature of the Federal map. It is much to be regretted that Herr Ziegler's map is wholly inaccurate with regard to the glaciers of Val Masino, and the position of many of the ridges dividing its lateral glens.

by ruinous gardens and tall poplars, an Italian intrusion on a landscape otherwise Alpine. Mossy banks shaded by old Spanish chestnuts slope down to the high-road and the river. On the opposite side, near the tunnel from which it takes its name, we found the 'Albergo della Galleria,' which provides clean rooms and moderate fare for those who are bent on penetrating the Val Bondasca, the most beautiful of the side glens of Val Bregaglia.

It was not my first visit to this valley. Long before Mr. Ball had written his handbook I had found in Professor Theobald's excellent little volume on Canton Graubunden<sup>15</sup> a most exciting description of the waterfalls and ice-tables of the Albigna Glacier and the rocky splendours of Val Bondasca. At the same time the appearance on maps of the Forno Glacier as a long ice-stream equal to the Morteratsch had excited in me keen curiosity. But my companions in 1862, although induced to halt a day at Vico Soprano, and to venture as far as the level of the Albigna Glacier, could not be persuaded that the Zocca was 'fit for ladies,' and my explorations were reduced to an ineffectual race against time to reach a point overlooking the Forno.

The Upper Bregaglia, seen from a carriage, is a green Alpine valley showing, except in such additions as man has made to the landscape, little trace of the approach to Italy. Pines are still the prevailing trees; near at hand the mountains are green; higher up naked grey pinnacles saw the sky or cut through the vapour-wreaths.

A mile or two above Vico Soprano clouds of sunbeam-painted foam shoot up round the base of a white column, and the tourist, driven by the first cold days of September from the hill-barracks of the Engadine to the lake-palaces, takes out his 'Guide' and his notebook and ticks off as 'visited' another waterfall.

This is the fall of the Albigna, and close at hand the track to the Zocca branches off through the woods. It is a forest-path known only to smugglers and shepherds (and, I may add, chamois, for I once met two here within a mile of the high-road). Every passer-by, who has a real love of nature, and can endure for it a night in a clean country inn, is strongly recommended to leave the road and climb at least as far as the foot of the glacier.

The scenery is best seen as a descent. From the wild bare crags of the inmost recesses of Val Masino and from the cold snows and savage ice-peaks of the Albigna, the traveller suddenly plunges over the edge of the uplands into a region of mountain-sides broken up by deep chasms fringed with pines and broad-leaved trees, and resonant with the roar of the great glacier torrent, which, scarcely released from its icy cradle, 'leaps in glory' down a stupendous cliff.

The Zocca Pass itself I have never crossed, but the omission can be supplied by the experience of friends. In ordinary years it is a simple glacier pass. But that it is not to be attempted without a guide or a rope the following history shows.

Two young converts to mountaineering set out from Val Masino for the pass, guideless, ropeless, axeless. The top was easily reached, but only a few yards below, on the northern side, a huge ice-moat, or 'bergschund,' as a German guide would have called it, yawned suddenly at their feet. My friends hesitated, but clouds were rapidly gathering round the peaks, and a snowstorm impended. There was no time to be lost. The upper lip of the chasm was too steep to stand on until, by dabbling with the points of their alpenstocks, they had succeeded in making some sort of a staircase down to the brink at the point where it seemed best to take off for the jump. How they jumped or tumbled over they have never been able clearly to explain, but each maintains he did it in the best possible way, and both agree it was very uncomfortable. In many seasons this moat is entirely closed, but it is evidently an obstacle not to be altogether disregarded, and unseen might be more dangerous than when gaping for its prey.

To return to Promontogno and 1864. Although the political frontier lies beyond Castasegna, several miles further down, the rocky spur which here closes the valley is the natural gate of Italy,

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<sup>15</sup> *Naturbilder aus den Rhätischen Alpen*: Chur, 1861.

the barrier between the pines and the chestnuts. The afternoon hours lingered pleasantly away as, stretched on the knoll behind the inn, we gazed up at the impending cliffs of the granitic range or fed our eyes with the rich woods of the lower valley and the purple hills beyond Chiavenna.

François meantime had gone off to the neighbouring village of Bondo to look for a porter who would consent to accompany us over a pass utterly unknown to the people of the country. For the 'Passo di Bondo' of the map became more mythical at every step. To cross the Bondasca Glacier to Val Masino was at least in the estimation of all Bregaglians to make a new pass; and this was to us Alpine novices a matter of no small contentment; for beginners ten years ago were not so audacious as those of the present day, who are satisfied with nothing short of the Weisshorn and Schreckhorn. Yet I cannot help thinking that by venturing only into moderate difficulties, where one guide among three could help us through, we learnt as much as by tying ourselves to two or three first-rate men and daring everything through the strength of our guides.

We knew pretty well what was before us, for from the Madriser Pass the whole route had been displayed. François, remembering that an unknown icefall had to be dealt with, was anxious to be off early, and our own enthusiasm was sufficient to carry us through the ordeal of a night breakfast with less than the usual moroseness. By two A.M. the provisions were packed and we were on the march.

There was no moon, but the heaven was throbbing with large white stars, and coronets sparkled on the heads of the dim giants of the southern range. Leaving behind us the sleeping hamlet of Bondo, the path climbed steeply through a fir-wood until it reached the short stretch of level ground, which is called Val Bondasca. An expanse of grass and wood is here spread out as a carpet at the very base of the granite cliffs. Scarcely in the Alps are there finer precipices than those that lead up the eye to the far-off brows of the Cima di Tschingel and Trubinesca. In front the glen is closed by steep rocks, over which the glacier pours in a long cascade.

As we strolled over the dewy lawns we had full leisure to watch the first signs of the coming day. A faint gleam spread over the eastern sky, and was reflected on the pinnacles above us, gradually drawing forth their forms out of the shadow, until at last a rosy blush played for a few moments on their crags; then the clear light of daybreak was shed upon peak and valley, and ice and rock alike were bathed in the universal sunshine.

Near another group of chalets we crossed the stream a second time. A well-contrived path, winding up by steep zigzags amidst underwood and creeping pines, lifted us from the glen to the upper alp, a sloping shelf of pasturage on the east of the glacier. Bearing to the right we made for the edge of a level portion of the ice, where it rests for a space between the upper and lower falls. Our porter had halted at the highest hut to get some milk from the solitary man who tended the goats and pigs. The herdsman, who now saw us turn our backs upon the only pass he knew, the gap leading over to the Albigna Glacier, hurried after us, *jödelling* at the top of his voice, and pointing violently in the direction opposite to that we were taking.

He was too far below for words, and signs he would not comprehend, so, after some fruitless endeavours to quiet his mind, we went on our way, causing 'le bon garçon' (as François called him) to give vent to a last expostulatory chaunt before he returned to his goats to meditate upon our probable fate.

The usual rough borderland between earth and ice scrambled over, we halted for breakfast on a smooth piece of ice conveniently furnished with stone stools and tables. Over our heads towered a range of pinnacles, one of which is known as Piz Cacciabella. In form and grouping they closely resemble, on a smaller scale, the Chamonix Aiguilles, as seen from the 'Plan.' Divided from them by a snowy bay, the source of the glacier, rose the splendid peak of the Punta Trubinesca. Only granite could show such a tremendous block, free from flaw or joint, and hopeless to the most fly-like climber. Its broad grey precipices looked as smooth as if they had been planed; and, Mr. Ball having pronounced the summit inaccessible on the other side, it seemed to us at the time a pretty problem for rising Alpine Clubmen.

Our ambition, however, had never soared to such a conquest, and we were content to discuss a matter nearer at hand, the upper ice-fall which separated us from the supposed pass. Opinions differed; François prophesied difficulties and five hours' work to the top; a sanguine spirit set it down as half an hour's walk. The rope was soon put on, and we prepared to face the unknown.

I presume everyone who cares to take up these sketches has already felt sufficient interest in the Alps to endeavour to realise, even if he has not seen, the nature of an ice-fall. If he has not, he had better go and look at Mons. Loppé's pictures. No word-painting can give an idea of anything so unlike the usual phenomena of our temperate zone. A cream-cheese at once squeezed and drawn out, so that the surface split and isolated blocks stood up, might, if viewed through a magnifying glass, slightly resemble in form, though not in colour, the contorted ice. But the imagination would have to look on from the point of view of the smallest mite.

The lower ice-falls differ considerably from the highest. In one case the material is hard ice; in the other, closely compacted snow. In the ice the rifts are longer, narrower and more frequent, and fewer towers rise above the general level; the snow or névé opens in wider but less continuous chasms, sinks in great holes like disused chalk-pits, and throws up huge blocks and towers, which the sun slowly melts into the most fantastic shapes. The higher fall is generally both the most imposing and formidable to look at, and the easiest to get through. The maze here is less intricate, and the very size of its features makes it easier to choose a path. But it is unsafe to shout before you are well out of the wood. At the very top, where the strain caused by the steepening slope first cracks the glacier, one huge rent often stretches across from edge to edge, and unless Providence throws a light causeway or a slender arch across the gulf, there will be work for the ice-axe before you stand on the upper edge. Some crack in the pit's wall must be dug into steps, the huge disorderly blocks which make a floor must be got through, and then escape must be found in the same way that entrance was made, by a ladder of your own contriving. Such a passage may often cost an hour's hard work.

The Bondasca Glacier above where we struck it was riven by a network of small crevasses. Some could be jumped, and the larger clefts were generally bridged, and thanks to a sharp night's frost the arches were in good bearing order. With occasional step-cutting and frequent zigzags we got clear of the thickest labyrinth and stood victorious on the upper snow-fields. They rose before us in a succession of frozen banks to a well-defined gap flanked by two snow hummocks. The western was connected by a long curtain of rock with the Punta Trubinesca. After skirting the highest snow-bowl, we crossed the deep moat which marks the point where the true mountain-form rises out of the folds of its snowy vestment, and in a moment more stood on the crest of a curling wave, fringed with icicles for spray.

Where we had expected to see only the rock-surrounded basin of the Val dei Bagni, we looked down on a deep, long valley, running southwards towards the Val Tellina.

At the second glance our eyes were caught by an enormous object lying in the centre of a grassy meadow. We were at once assured as to the identity of the valley. The block could be nothing else than the 'natural curiosity' of Val Masino, the biggest boulder in the Alps. Its dimensions are given by Mr. Ball as – 'Length, 250 feet; breadth, 120 feet; height, 140 feet;' or as tall as an average church tower, and large enough to fill up many a London square. Legend has nothing to tell about this monstrous block, and we are left to determine as we like, whether it fell from some neighbouring mountain going to ruin in the course of nature, or was dropped by the devil, on one of those errands of mischief which are always so fortunately interrupted by the opportune appearance of the pious peasant.

We had only been two hours from our last resting-place, and the day was still young, so that we could well afford a halt. As there are some tourists whose chief object is to get to the end of their tours, so there are climbers who throughout the day seem to long only to arrive in as few hours as possible at the end of it. But peaks and passes and not inns were our goal, and we had no desire to hurry on. We chose a warm corner in the sun-facing rocks, whence by lifting our heads we looked

over intervening ridges to the Alps of Glarus, and raked the Punta Trubinesca and its neighbours, now viewed end on, as weird a pile of granite as I have seen in many a long day's wanderings.

From the snow-dome on our right a lofty and extraordinarily jagged ridge stretched out at right angles to the main chain, the barrier, probably, between the two branches of Val Masino.<sup>16</sup> I wanted to climb the dome and reconnoitre, but clouds had partially covered the blue sky, and were whisking, now one way now the other, as the gust took them, as if playing a wild game of hide-and-seek amongst the granite towers. A storm seemed probable, and François thought it foolish to waste time.

We were clearly not on the legendary Passo di Bondo,<sup>17</sup> but on another 'Col' of our own contriving, leading somewhere into the Val di Mello, the eastern branch of Val Masino. The descent looked practicable. Why not attempt it and complete the pass? The distance to be retraced along the valley to our sleeping quarters, the 'Bagni,' could scarcely be worth considering. So after erecting a solid stoneman, and trusting him with the usual card-filled bottle, we set out.

The last man had not set foot on the ice when François disappeared to his shoulders beneath the surface. Looking through the hole he had made we could appreciate the use of the rope. A dark green chasm, some thirty feet wide, yawned beneath us, its depths scarcely visible in the light thus suddenly let in upon them. The glacier we were descending fell away steeply, and became so broken and troublesome that we tried the rocks on the left. The change was for the worse, and we soon came back and cut our way through the difficulties.

As soon as the rocks ceased to be precipitous we took to them again. But they were not pleasant footing. We found ourselves committed to a slope of boulders so shockingly loose that the slightest provocation sent half-a-dozen rolling from under our feet, and piled at so high an angle that when once started they bounded away at a pace which promised to take them straight to the valley. In such places an impetuous companion always insists on stopping to take off his gaiters and then following at a run. You have scarcely missed him before his return is announced by a whole volley of grape rattling about your ears, while a playful shout warns you to make way for a 100-pounder boulder which is ricocheting down on your heels with the force of a cannon-ball. Then your friend comes up with a pleased air, as much as to say, 'Didn't I come down that well?' and it is hard not to remonstrate with him in language the use of which should be restricted to divines.

Halting beside some water which filtered out at the foot of the boulders, we enjoyed a beautiful view of the Disgrazia and the wild range behind us. On our right was a long comb, whose teeth had been tortured by time and weather into all sorts of quaint shapes; one rock bent over like a crooked finger, in another place a window was pierced through the crest. At a hasty glance one might have compared the fantastic shapes to those assumed so frequently by dolomitic limestone, but closer observation showed the tendency to curving outlines and to sharpness of edge peculiar to crystalline rock. In the dolomite districts the separate crags, cut up as they may be by flaws at right angles to the lie of the strata, have not, except from considerable distances, the same flamelike outlines. In any near view the layers of which they are built up become conspicuous, and often, as in the Brenta chain, have all the appearance of courses of masonry.

Bearing to the left from the first huts on the Alpe di Ferro, we crossed a stream just below a tempting pool, in which five minutes later we were all plunging. At the next step in the descent our path re-crossed the water, and zigzagged steeply down the hillside, which was covered with broom and Scotch heather. Passing a succession of pretty cascades, we entered the Val di Mello, near a group of châteaux, whence a stony mule-road led us in half an hour to San Martino, the village situated at the

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<sup>16</sup> The junction of this spur, the Cima Sciascia, with the principal ridge, has been placed too far east in all maps previous to the Alpine Club Map of Switzerland.

<sup>17</sup> I am disposed to doubt whether a direct pass from the Bondasca Glacier to the western branch of Val Masino was ever effected before 1865. It is true there is a tradition embodied in the Swiss Federal map of such a pass. It is possible, however, that smugglers may have gone up to the Passo di Ferro, and then scrambled westward over the rocks into the basin of the Porcellizza Alp.

fork of the valley. It is a cluster of untidy stone houses, with nothing to delay the passer-by except a douanier's bureau and a tobacco store.

We now met a car-road running up the Val dei Bagni – the western fork of the valley. The floor of the glen soon rises suddenly – a granite valley, like the national prosperity, always advances by leaps and starts – and the road indulges in a couple of short zigzags. We are again in the heart of the mountains, hemmed in by pine-clad slopes and cliffs too steep to allow any view even of the summits behind them. In this *cul-de-sac* there are no signs of a village. It is a spot where one would expect to find no one but a Bergamasque shepherd with his longtailed sheep. But shepherds do not make roads, nor do they often receive visitors such as the portly dame who advances towards us, supported by a scarcely perceptible donkey, and herself overshadowed by a vast crimson umbrella resembling the mushroom of a pantomime. Shepherds, moreover, are not in the habit of constructing little paths like those, too faltering and purposeless for any practical use, which wander off here and there into the woods; nor do they employ their leisure hours in planting stems of fir-trees in a futile manner along the sides of the road, and covering their branches, as the foliage withers away, with tricolour flags.

The meaning of these attempts to fasten a little paltry embroidery on nature's robes is explained when as we turn a corner and enter the bowl-shaped hollow which forms the head of the glen we discover under the hillside a long, low building – the Bagni del Masino. The presence of a sulphur spring has caused this remote spot to be chosen as one of the summer retreats of Northern Italian society.

The bath-houses in the Lombard Alps do not in any way add to the beauty of the landscape. The consistent regard for economy shown in the simplicity of their architecture and the roughness of their construction may possibly delight the heart of some shareholder, and would perhaps have commended them to the favourable notice of a late First Commissioner of Works. But to the common eye the result is not attractive. Outside we see a long two-storied barrack built with unshaped stones and abundance of mortar, the surface of which, never having been finished in any way, has a dusky-brown hue and ruinous aspect; unpainted woodwork; balconies unbalustraded, and to the last degree perilous. Internally and on the ground floor a long range of dingy fly-spotted rooms, devoted respectively to smoke, billiards, literature, and eating, and decorated with portraits of the reigning family of Italy and full-blown lithographic beauties. Above, equally long passages, and nests of scantily furnished, but tolerable and, so far as beds are concerned, clean cabins.

Our first enquiry, whether the house contained baths – at many so-called bath-houses the waters are only taken internally – called up a triumphant smile on the countenance of the waiter who had welcomed us. As he ushered us along the passages a strong smell of sulphur raised a suspicion that we might find ourselves in hot water. In another moment this fear was converted into a certainty. The beaming waiter ushered us into a little room, or rather large stove-heated oven, surrounded by four wells, each some five feet deep, and full to the brim of sulphureous waters. On the one hand we had gone too far to retreat with credit, on the other we were incapable of any prolonged endurance of the purgatorial temperature. So having made but a hasty plunge we dashed on our clothes and fled back to our rooms, ignoring the stove on which we ought to have sat and submitted to a process of slow baking. This ordeal and a good dinner completed, we had leisure to study the patients, for the most part Milanese, with a sprinkling of local Val Tellina priests and farmers. The mineral waters of the place are, no need to say, like all mineral waters, invincible enemies to every disease to which humanity, male or female, is exposed. Such being the case, it was a subject for reasonable regret that with few exceptions the visitors appeared to suffer from no more serious complaint than a difficulty in composing their minds to any mental exertion beyond a game at bowls or a shot at a popinjay.

Let us sit down for a few moments on the bench before the door and observe the pastimes going on around. Three leading spirits, the doctor, a curé with his skirts tucked up to his knees, and a Milanese visitor clad in a suit of the large yellow check so often affected by Italians, are in the middle of a contest with bowls, the progress of which is watched by a deeply interested circle of cigarette-

smokers. The Milanese is nowhere, but the struggle between the priest and doctor becomes terribly exciting, and the 'bravas' attract even a group of Bergamasque shepherds, honest fellows despite their bandit style of dress, who have been lounging in the background. The rest of the patients are burning powder at a mark set up in the wood a few paces off, or hanging over a game of billiards, which seems to us a good deal more like a sort of Lilliputian ninepins.

We have scarcely withdrawn to our rooms satiated with the sight of so much innocent happiness when a loud ringing of the bell which welcomes new arrivals assures us that Victor Emmanuel must be appearing in person to pursue the chamois of the neighbourhood. Hurrying to the window we see an excited crowd gazing and gesticulating at the sky in a manner which suggests that they have been visited either by a heavenly vision or temporary insanity. In fact a small fire-balloon has been sent up. After a time another peal of the bell announces its descent, the Bergamasque shepherd boys set off up the hillside to secure the fragments, and night closes upon the scene.

To most of us there comes a time when the pleasures of infancy pall. But these water-drinkers seem to have found the true fountain of youth and oblivion, where

– they lie reclined  
On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind,  
For they lie beside their nectar —

and, far removed from the politics and stock-exchanges of a lower world, can treat even the leading articles which occasionally creep up to them at the bottom of a fruit-cart

Like a tale of little meaning tho' the words are strong.

Happy Milanese! for is not Val Masino better than Margate?

It is difficult, perhaps, to recommend the Baths as a stopping-place for any length of time to the ordinary traveller. Though so high (3,750 feet) they are too much in a hole for beauty. But the situation, if it would not satisfy an artist, is not in the least commonplace, and has even a curious fascination of its own. On every side the eyes are met at once by almost perpendicular rocks capped here and there by sharp spires of granite. These cliffs are not bare and harsh like those of Val di Mello, but green with forest and bright with falling waters. They seem friendly protectors to the smooth oasis of grass and pines. The suggestion of savage wildness close at hand added by the few glimpses of the upper peaks heightens the sense of peace and seclusion in which the charm of the spot is to be found.

The little plain is quite large enough to suffice for the very moderate demands of the Italian visitors, but it will hardly satisfy the average British craving for exercise. You must, however, either stop where you are or climb a staircase; these upright hills will not easily lend themselves, like the slopes of the Upper Engadine, to short breaths and untrained limbs. To enjoy Val Masino you must be either sick or sound; it is not a place for invalids or idlers.

To the mountaineer the bathing establishment is invaluable. It is true that as a passing guest he pays a bill large when compared to the charges made to the 'pensionnaires,' and that his guide will probably have still greater reason to complain. But he obtains in exchange the boon of a good bed and an excellent dinner in a situation admirably chosen for glacier expeditions. Moreover, owing to the general custom of the patients of keeping up impromptu dances till midnight, a waiter can generally be persuaded to provide breakfast before he goes to bed; and not only is the customary difficulty in an early start entirely absent, but it is sometimes hard to avoid being sped too soon by a host whose night begins only when yours ends.

At half-past twelve the voice of the inexorable François was heard at the doors: 'Bonjour, messieurs, il fait encore beau temps.' One of us who had gone to sleep in the middle of a thunderstorm gave a deep groan of disappointment at the auspicious news. But in half-an-hour we were all gathered round the table at a meal which we had ordered, and now affected to treat in the light of a late supper.

I need scarcely say the pretence was a miserable failure. Though the stars shone brightly in the narrow strip of sky visible between the steep mountain-crests, the night was so black that some precaution was considered necessary to prevent our falling off the edge of the road, and prematurely ending our Alpine investigations. The obliging waiter dexterously screwed up in paper a tallow candle after the model of a safety bedroom candlestick. But soon, as was to be expected, the shield caught fire, and our impromptu lantern disappeared in a blaze.

François then beguiled the dark hours by an account of the cross-examination he had undergone the evening before. 'What was our illness? Should we take the waters? Where had we come from? How long should we stay? Where were we going?' Such were the enquiries of the guests; and when they heard that we had come over one glacier and were departing next day by another with the intention of sleeping at a place two days' drive off by the only road they knew, they were fairly at their wits' end.

The road which had seemed so long the day before was soon traversed, and leaving our old track to scale the hillside, we continued in the trough of Val di Mello, until just as dawn was breaking behind the Disgrazia we reached the châteaux of La Rasica. The incident which now followed, interesting to me as the origin of a valued friendship, must find a place here on account of the influence it had on all my further wanderings.

People were heard stirring inside one of the barns, and lights seen moving – a very unusual phenomenon at such an hour. For a moment we imagined we had caught a party of smugglers starting for the Zocca. But, conspicuous even in the darkness, a pair of white flannel trousers, such as no smuggler ever wore, issued from the door. Before we had time to speak they were followed by another and still more startling apparition. All we could at first make out was a large lantern, surrounded on all sides by long yellow spikes like conventional sunbeams or the edges of a saint's glory. A moment later the human being who carried the light became distinguishable, the rays resolved themselves into the bright leather cases of scientific instruments, and a voice announced that we were in the presence of Mr. Tuckett and his guides.

Still young and inexperienced as a mountain-climber, and knowing only by hearsay of the Alpine Club, I was at this time penetrated by a profound respect for that body. Its rank and file I believed to be as little hampered by the laws of gravity as the angels of the Talmud, of whom three could balance themselves upon a single pinnacle of the Temple. To its greater heroes I looked up as to the equals of those spirits whom their leader reminded —

That in our proper motion we ascend  
Up towards our native seat; descent and fall  
To us are adverse.

For me, therefore, it was an awful moment when I found myself thus unexpectedly in the presence of the leader himself – the being whose activity, ubiquity, and persistence in assault have made, at least in the lips of wearied guides, 'der Tuckett' almost equivalent to 'der Teufel.' Conscious, moreover, of intentions on the new pass of the country – the one possible link by which Val Masino could be brought within a day's walk of the Upper Engadine – I felt an inward presentiment that this great mountain-slayer must be there on a similar errand, and a fear that he might punish our poaching in some very serious manner.

Perhaps it was partly the guilty expression of our countenances which caused our suspicions to be returned and our party also to be taken for a band of smugglers whose acquaintance Mr. Tuckett had made on the Albigna Glacier the previous day. The mutual misapprehension having been speedily removed, our further fears were set at rest. The Disgrazia was the immediate object of Mr. Tuckett's ambition; and though he did intend to cross next day to the Engadine, his quiver was already so full of new peaks and passes that he could well afford to leave some small game for others.

It would have been pleasant to have united our parties, but we had an appointment to keep at St. Moritz, and could not venture to risk a detention by bad weather on the wrong side of the chain.

A steep ascent led to a miserable shelter where Mr. Tuckett and his friend left us, and to which they subsequently returned to spend an uncomfortable night. We were now on the upper pasturages, a wide desolate tract merging into the rocky heaps which fringe several small glaciers descending from the highest summits.

Three ice-streams flowed towards us – one from immediately under the Pico della Speranza; the second from the angle in the chain under Monte Sissone; the third lay far more to the left, and was barred at its head by steep cliffs extending to the Monte Sissone, and broken only near that peak by a narrow snow-trough. The head of the central ice-stream was a broad saddle, and for this we determined to steer. I had a presentiment that it would overlook Val Malenco. But that point gained, it would be easy to reach the ridge of Monte Sissone, and probably without losing much time by the circuit.

We ascended for a long way over the boulders on the south of the central glacier. They offered villainous foothold, but the ice was so slippery that we gave them the preference, and were rewarded for our pains by finding some remarkably fine crystals. Leaving solid ground only a few hundred yards below the crest, we soon found ourselves on its summit. Beneath us, only at a much lower level, and cut off by an apparently impracticable cliff, was the glacier-field which encircles the head of Val Malenco. Beyond it rose the massive forms of the Bernina group. We lost no time here in looking at the view, but turned again upwards, following the ridge for some distance; then, at François' instance, we crossed a treacherous snow-slope to the left, and, after losing some of the height we had gained, reached the rocks. We and the porter took a pretty straight course up the peak of the Sissone, leaving François to make more to the left for the head of the snow-trough. Towards the summit the rocks became steep, and afforded an exciting scramble. As we worked up a gully the first man put his arm round a large and apparently firmly-wedged stone, which tottered with his weight. Had it fallen, we should have had a sensation something like that of jumping out of the way of a cannon-ball. When our heads rose above the level of the ridge, we were glad to see snow-slopes on the other side, falling away steeply to a great glacier basin. Now we felt our pass was secured. A pile of broken crags still rose above us; a short race, and we were seated on the highest boulder, one of the corner-stones of the Bernina chain.

The Monte Sissone, although insignificant in height compared with the giants which encircle the Morteratsch, claims an important place in the orography of the group. It stands at the angle of the range, where the main ridge is met by the spur which connects the Disgrazia with the rest of the chain. This mighty outlier was the one object which riveted our eyes, quite eclipsing the more distant glories of the Bernina. The noble mass (scarcely three miles from us as the crow flies) rose tier above tier out of the great glacier which extended to our feet; its rocky ribs protruded sternly out of their shimmering ice-mail, and the cloud-banner which was now flung out from the crowning ridge augured no good to its assailants. Deep below lay Chiareggio and the Muretto path, so that the mountain was visible from top to bottom. For massive grandeur united with grace of form, the Disgrazia has few rivals in the Alps. Between us and the Muretto stood the fine snow-peak of the Cima di Rosso, and then the eye swept along the red cliffs which lie at the back of Piz Guz and the Fedoz Glacier to the giants of the Bernina, crowded too closely round their queen for individual effect. In the west were the Cima del Largo, and the more distant peaks surrounding the Bondasca Glacier.

Immediately from our feet on the north broken snow-slopes fall steeply on to a wide level basin, the head of the Forno Glacier. Yawning chasms forbade a direct descent, and when we left the peak, the higher by several feet for our visit, we followed for a little distance its eastern ridge. There were a legion of enormous pitfalls, but no continuous moat, so that after some circle-sailing we were able to slide swiftly down to the snow-plain. A circular hollow formed the reservoir into which cascades of névé tumbled from the enclosing ridges. These, like the walls of an amphitheatre, stretched round

from the Cima di Rosso to the Cima del Largo; to the west of Monte Sissone they became almost perpendicular, and it seems doubtful whether a more direct pass can profitably be forced in this direction. A large block of ice had detached itself from the upper séracs and now lay at their base – a bright mass of cobalt amidst the pervading greys and whites.

I have nowhere seen a more perfect 'cirque,' and we could fancy that our feet were the first which had ever penetrated it, for the Forno, though the second glacier of the Bernina group, and within an easy walk of the Maloya Inn, has never been the fashion with tourists, and no record of its earlier exploration exists.

Looking downwards a green mound close to Maloya was visible. It can scarcely be half-an-hour from the road, and must command the whole length of the glacier. Our course lay straight before us; we had nothing to do but to follow the great valley of ice. Two fine masses of secondary glacier poured in from the eastern range, over which the Cima di Rosso rose pre-eminent, a noble peak sheeted in snow and ice. Since leaving the Pennines we had seen no such glacier scenery.

The crevasses were frequent, but generally small, – the right size for jumping over. At one place, however, it was easier to leave the ice and to pick our way through the hollow between the moraine and the mountain-side. A few sheep, which must have been driven at least a mile over the ice, were cropping the scanty herbage. The herdboys seemed simply stupefied at seeing five people drop suddenly on him from heaven knows where, and could scarcely answer our questions except with a prolonged stare.

Clouds had now risen over the sky, and a fine sleet began to fall. The mists, however, did not descend on the mountains, and looking back we enjoyed the peculiar effect of the upper peaks seen through a watery veil and lit by fitful gleams of sunshine. Having returned to the ice we followed it to the end, – a fine ice-cave, whence the Ordlegna, the stream of Val Bregaglia, rushes out in an impetuous torrent. In a few minutes we passed the Piancaning châlets and made our junction with the dull but well-established path of the Muretto Pass. An hour more brought us to the Maloya Inn and the high road; and after a pleasant stroll along the Silser-See our walk came to an end at the one picturesque village in the Upper Engadine, Sils Maria.

## **CHAPTER IV.**

### **THE PEAKS AND PASSES OF VAL MASINO (*continued*)**

Hee's a foole who basely dallies  
Where each peasant mates with him;  
Shall I haunt the thronged vallies  
Whilst ther's noble hils to climbe?

*George Withers.*

#### **CHIAREGGIO – PASSO DI MELLO – PASSO DI BONDO – CIMA DEL LARGO – VAL MASINO – PUNTA TRUBINESCA – MONTE DELLA DISGRAZIA – THE APPROACH TO SONDRIO – A REPLY**

The following year found me in company with Mr. Tuckett, at the head of the western branch of Val Malenco, the valley on the south of the central mass of the Bernina. Our original companions in a campaign, one of the most rapid and brilliant ever planned by our indefatigable leader, had gradually left us to seek the inglorious repose of England or Italy. Their place, however, had been partially filled by H. Buxton, a recruit, but not a raw one; and for guides we were amply provided with François, Peter Michel, and Walther of Pontresina.

The dingy house next the chapel serves as the inn of Chiareggio. Its sole tenant in 1865 was a universal old man, who was a sort of epitomised 'service;' cook, waiter, chambermaid, and host all in one. The resources of his establishment were limited, the cutlery was of the Bronze, and the bread of the Stone period; but the kitchen produced a sort of 'soupe maigre' which sufficed, with the aid of our provisions, to ward off starvation.

Before us stretched a wide semicircle of rock and ice extending from the Muretto Pass on the north to the Monte della Disgrazia on the south. In the centre of the bay stood Monte Sissone. Above the glaciers which poured down valleywards in two principal streams, rose a continuous rock-rampart, impassable so far as we could judge to the right of Monte Sissone, and formidable everywhere. The glacier difficulties we were not afraid of; the question to be decided was whether this final wall could be scaled.

At the point where the valley forks we left the Muretto path, and turned towards the west. A bright ice-stream, having its source under the highest crest of the Disgrazia, as splendid a mountain as any in the Swiss Alps, poured down to our feet. On our right the glacier from Monte Sissone stopped short at the top of a slope of loose rubbish. We soon reached the foot of the long broken staircase. The chasms and towers on either hand were on a noble scale, but, as is often the case, it was possible to turn each in succession by a course of judicious zigzags. After threading our way through the steepest labyrinth we came to the upper region of half-formed ice, where deep continuous trenches cease, and huge icicle-fringed pits – gaping monsters easily avoided – take their place. Mounting steadily toward the Disgrazia and along the base of the rock-wall, we drew near the point of attack already selected. Here a steep snow-bed lay to a certain height against the rocks. Immediately above they were perpendicular, but across their face a ledge, slanting upwards, promised to give access to a part of the cliff on our left where the crags were more broken and practicable. Our pathway soon grew narrow. There was, however, only one troublesome corner, but this happened to be exactly where the meltings of an upper snow-bed poured over on us in an icy stream. The shower-bath did not cool our impatience during the moments we had to wait for one another. This corner turned,

a short steep slope of snow and rock led to the crest, a pile of enormous boulders, whence on the further side we looked down on a gently sloping snow-field falling towards the Val di Mello. Over our heads towered a monstrous wall of granite, suddenly breaking off above the pass. Immense wedge-like blocks, supported only at one end, jutting out into the air like the stones of some ruined temple, ever it would seem on the point to fall, yet enduring for centuries.<sup>18</sup> When we set out to descend the snow-field was soon crossed, to a point where it fell away in a steep bank. We cut a few steps, and then glissaded down to a moraine. While unbuckling belts a sudden crash made us look back. A huge boulder was dancing down the slope in our footsteps, pursued by a bevy of smaller followers. The very few stones that were lying at the bottom proved this to be an unusual channel for such missiles. We were just out of range, but a delay of five minutes would have exposed us to a serious risk in a place to all appearance absolutely safe.

Our path now lay across the stony tract which encircles the small glaciers of Val di Mello until we gained the edge of the upper alp, where the collected streams make a deep plunge into the glen below. Here we all separated, Buxton and I descending at once with the water, and Tuckett following the proper path away to the right; Buxton luckily hit a track, and got down without difficulty, but I, less fortunate, took a course on the left side of the waterfall. Swinging myself down the steep hillside by the strong arms of the creeping pines, I was little more than 200 feet above the floor of the glen, when I was suddenly brought to a standstill by an abrupt crag. It was fortunately possible to scramble down to the lowest ledge, and then drop down the last few feet on to the elastic bed of dwarf pines below. The little bag which contained all my wardrobe was an impediment to the close union of my body and the rock which seemed expedient, and I flung it down before me. When I had more slowly followed, the bag was nowhere to be seen; half-an-hour's search was fruitless, and I began to fear lest my companions should become alarmed at my delay. I was now within 250 feet of the valley, and, seeing my way for more than half the short space, had no thought of a further difficulty. But after a few steps I found myself on the brink of a cliff, not very lofty, but still high enough to break one's neck over, and too smooth to allow any hope of a direct descent. For a moment return, which meant a circuit of two hours, seemed inevitable. But a careful study of the rocks on my left showed a sort of slanting groove or gallery running across their face, of which it might be possible to take advantage.

In order to reach this loophole of escape a crag of awkwardly smooth surface had to be crossed, and it was clearly desirable to use every natural means of adhesion. I dropped my ice-axe, and the force with which it rebounded from its first contact with the ground, gave its owner a serious warning to follow in some less abrupt manner. Foothold soon failed, but not before I was within reach of the groove, or flaw in the cliff-structure, just mentioned. How best to profit by its advantages was now the question. Wedging myself into it as far as might be, I pressed with my back and elbows against the lower rock, and with my hands against the overhanging upper lip. My knees and heels formed a second point of support, and by retaining one part of my body always fixed I wormed myself along slowly, but with perfect security. At last the smooth cliff was turned, and it was easy to descend into the glen.

A copious spring burst out of the rocks just where I first touched level ground. I quenched at it the intense thirst produced by the excitement of the solitary climb, picked up my axe, and then hastened onwards, desirous as soon as possible to rejoin my companions, and relieve whatever anxiety they might feel on my behalf. A needless exertion, for on approaching the *châlets* of La Rasica I saw a cluster of grey forms prostrate in various attitudes on the turf, while a pile of emptied bowls beside them showed the nature of the beverage by which the *Circe* of the *châlet* had wrapt them in forgetfulness.

Beyond La Rasica I was treading in my last year's footsteps. Val di Mello, the name by which the eastern head of Val Masino is distinguished, is one of the most savage mountain recesses in this part of the Alps. The highest peaks of the district do not themselves rise immediately out of it, but

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<sup>18</sup> The pass was at first named the *Disgrazia Joch*; but *Passo di Mello*, suggested by Mr. Ball, seems the most appropriate title.

their granite buttresses are so bold that grandeur is the last element the scenery could be accused of wanting. It does, to me at least, want something, and on contrasting it with two other valleys of similar formation the missing element is easily recognisable. Utter wildness fails to satisfy, and savage crags lose half their beauty when they no longer tower above grassy lawns and out of rich woods of pine, or better still, of glossy chestnuts. Val Bondasca, the Val di Genova under the Presanella, and Val Bavona may be taken as good examples of granite scenery in its highest perfection.

We found but little change in the Bagni and their visitors. The doctor and the priest were still playing bowls, the bell was still ringing, and the same waiter was ready to do for us exactly the same things as he had done ten months before. By his aid we succeeded in repeating a good dinner, and, much more remarkable, an early start.

Our object this year was to effect if possible the traditional pass from the Porcellizza Alp to Val Bondasca, which we had missed at the first attempt.

The stream which flows before the door of the bath-house rushes down the cliff a few yards higher up in a noble fall. A steep zigzag of well-made pavé, better to mount than descend, climbs beside the water. Two hours of steady uphill work lead to a grassy basin, in the centre of which stand the châteaux of the Porcellizza Alp. A ring of granite peaks hems in the pasturage, and ice fills the gaps between them. The summits themselves are precipitous, but the ground below them is less broken, and the slopes are gentler and greener, than at the head of the other glens in this group. Hence cows take the place of Bergamasque sheep, and the châtlet, known as the Alp Mazza, is one of the largest in the neighbourhood.

We fancied our pass must lie at the eastern foot of the Punta Trubinesca. The glacier was smooth and solid, and we had no difficulty in reaching the gap at its head. But the descent on the other side was far from eligible. We found ourselves at the top of an ice-slope at least 1,000 feet high, very steep, and swept by constant discharges of stones. We naturally resolved to look further along the ridge. Turning our backs on the still unconquered and formidable cliffs of the Trubinesca, we at once climbed the snow-slope on our right, and, crossing a rocky spur, gained the head of the glacier adjacent to the one by which we had ascended. Again we inspected the northern slopes, but with like result. The Bondasca Glacier still lay far – very far – below, at the base of a most repulsive gully, down which stones rattled constantly at a pace likely soon to put a stop to all trespassing on their private pathway. Unwilling to face such a cannonade, we again right-faced. It was fortunately possible, and that without much difficulty, to follow the crest of the chain by keeping a little below it on its southern side. In time we reached the spur dividing the second from yet another ice-stream, the largest and most easterly of those that descend towards the Porcellizza Alp. We saw with disgust that we had yet some distance to go, and that over very rough ground, involving a considerable descent, and the passage of a steep ridge, to reach the Passo di Ferro, the point where we had crossed the previous year.

Suddenly Peter Michel, who had unlinked himself, and was exploring above, shouted to us to follow, and in a few minutes we were all standing in a natural doorway in the ridge, some twenty feet deep by five in breadth. The ice of the Bondasca Glacier was here only 250 feet below us, and the cliff looked broken enough to be practicable, so, the guides being in favour of an immediate descent rather than a long and uncertain circuit, we decided we had reached our pass, and behaved accordingly – that is, made ourselves comfortable in niches and enjoyed the view and iced Asti, a beverage which can only be appreciated at over 10,000 feet. While we were roping, Michel grew oracular, and to a question on the easiness of our route, replied in a formula we had learnt by experience to dread as much as Cleopatra the 'but yet' of the messenger from Antony – 'Es geht, – aber.'

The descent of a partially ice-coated cliff is one of the most ticklish parts of a climber's work. But so long as there is any good hold on rock, and the party can proceed directly downwards, there is no danger if the rope is properly used. When it becomes necessary to move diagonally across the face of the mountain the difficulty is much increased, and the rope is not so easily kept taut. Yet

there are few places where with sufficient care a slip of any one man may not be checked before it becomes a fall.

In the present instance it was some time before we met with anything to justify Michel's reservation. But about half-way down the rib which had helped us came to an end, and the rocks grew smooth and mixed with ice. To have descended in a straight line would have brought us to the edge of a gaping crevasse; we tended, therefore, continually to the right, where the glacier rose higher against the cliff, and snow bridged the obstructive chasm. Here a long step down, there a longer straddle round was required, and our progress became of the slowest, as prudence often required a majority of the party to be stationary.

After passing one very obnoxious corner, which each pulled himself round, partly by an imperceptible grasp on an invisible handhold, but principally trusting to the support of the rope, we got on easier ground, and, by cutting a few steps, reached at last (in two hours from the pass) the snow-bridged moat. Once on the ice, François was aided by old experience, and steered us through the labyrinth of the Bondasca Glacier without either delay or difficulty.

After leaving the ice we followed the steep path which leads down amongst the creeping pines and underwood on the right side of the valley, to the lower level of Val Bondasca.

Another plunge, this time through chestnuts, brought us to the maize-fields and vine-trellised villages of Val Bregaglia. Neither at Promontogno nor Castasegna was any carriage to be obtained. In order to arrive at Chiavenna we were compelled, ice-axes in hand, to storm the roof of a diligence, where, intrenched among the luggage, we formed a garrison far too formidable for any guard or postillion to dislodge.

In the summer of 1866 I again found myself with my friend Tucker and François Devouassoud, in eastern Switzerland. The passes of Val Masino were accomplished, but its peaks still remained maiden and unassailed. Having added Fluri to our party, we started one afternoon from Pontresina for the old hospice on the top of the Maloya, then a humble inn, now a familiar house of call for the fashionable society of St. Moritz.

The Cima del Largo, the highest peak in the range between Val Bregaglia and Val Masino, was our aim for the morrow. I spare the reader the long and somewhat tedious march over familiar ground to the head of the Forno Glacier. We had started under a cloudless sky, but before we reached the foot of the Largo no 'Cima' was to be seen, only snow-slopes stretching up into the mists. Fortunately we already knew how to attack our peak. From the N. or E. the Cima del Largo presents itself as a bold round tower rising sheerly above the wall on which it stands. As far as its northern base there could, we believed, be little difficulty. Our expectations were fulfilled: steep snow-banks and easy rocks lifted us to the rim of the snowy basin of the Forno. The ridge which divides it from the Albigna Glacier is a narrow comb of granite; we moved along it in the chink between the rocks and snow. A wall of ice suddenly loomed before us through the mist. We had reached the foot of the tower, and the trial of strength was about to begin. The ice was very hard and the slope very steep, and steps seemed to take a long time. At last a patch of rock was gained. We now followed a ridge, sometimes rock, sometimes ice; steps had still to be cut, and we progressed but slowly. Suddenly our leader said, 'C'est assez,' reversed his axe, and stepped out freely for a few paces. We were on the snow-dome which forms the summit of the Cima del Largo.

View there was none; we could see we were on the top, and that was all. But even in the worst of weather the newness of his plaything offers some consolation to the childlike simplicity of the true climber. Comforting ourselves, like Touchstone, with the reflection that the Largo, if, under the circumstances, but 'a poor virgin, an ill-favoured thing,' was at least 'our own,' we adjourned to a sheltered niche in the rocks a few feet below the summit. The atmosphere was tolerably warm and windless, and in our bivouac under the overhanging eaves of the great rocks we were sheltered from the soft, thickly-falling veil of snow which cut us off from the lower world.

If our surroundings might have seemed cheerless, our feelings were by no means so. I never assisted at a more festive meal than that which celebrated the birth of our stoneman.

Fluri was determined to do his best to compensate for the want of view; he was in his highest spirits, pleased with the mountain, the food, the wine-bag, the 'herrschaft,' and last, but not least, with himself. Now Fluri, whether in good or bad spirits, used in any case to be careful to let you know his mental condition. On this occasion he exploded in a series of small but elaborate jokes. First he got into a hole and played marmot. Then he scrambled after a solitary ranunculus (which, strange to say, was blooming at this great height), and pretended not to be able to get back again, wriggling his body absurdly over the easiest rock in the neighbourhood. Nearly an hour must have thus passed, and yet no break in the mist offered to reward us for revisiting the summit. So about 1 P.M. we set out to return. The descent of the ice-wall called for considerable care, as it was necessary to be prepared for a slip, although such an accident might not be very likely to happen. François, who was leading, had to clear out the fresh-fallen snow from our old steps, which were quite effaced. Here Fluri, who in his early period, before he had learnt snowcraft from English mountaineers and foreign guides, showed a morbid dislike to the commonest and most necessary precautions, raised himself greatly in our esteem. Though screaming and howling every variety of jödel the whole time, I never saw him once without the rope taut and his axe firmly anchored in the ice. The rest of the descent was easy enough, and it does not take long to get down snow-slopes. From the foot of the peak we had a long and heavy walk back to the inn on the Maloya. The snow on the glacier was soft and ridgy, and the path beyond sloppy and slippery, and the light snow-flakes changed into heavy rain when we got down again into the lower world. At Maloya we found the car ordered from Silvaplana to meet us. Our day's journey was yet far from its end. There was much still before us that would be wearisome to relate, and was still more wearisome to endure.

How the postmaster at Silvaplana tried to impose on us, how we relaced our sodden boots and tramped through the rain to St. Moritz, how there Badrutt gave us a car which carried us moist and sleepy to Zutz, this is not the place to tell. Enough that we arrived at Zutz in a state of depression which even the scene of revelry by night offered by the 'Schweizerbund,' where we found Swiss warriors absorbed in the task of conducting village maidens through the solemn revolutions of a national variation of the waltz, failed to cheer. It was the last of our trials that no inducement would persuade a Swiss maiden to make our beds.

In the same summer we visited for the third time the Bagni del Masino. We were forced by weather to enter the valley by its proper gate instead of by one of the irregular but more tempting modes of access open to mountaineers.

For the first hour the car-road between the Val Tellina and the Baths runs through a steep and narrow defile. It is not until the village of Cattaeggio, picturesquely imbedded amongst rocks and foliage, and the mouth of Val Sasso Bisolo have been passed, that the valley opens, and the jagged range near the Passo di Ferro comes into sight. Before reaching San Martino the stupendous boulder, known to the peasants as the Sasso di Remeno, is encountered. On near approach it quite maintains its reputation as the largest fallen block in the Alps. Beside the monster lie several more boulders of extraordinary size. On the top of one of them is a kitchen garden approached by a ladder. The snows melt sooner on such an exposed plot, and the goats cannot get at the vegetables.

The object of our return to so recently visited a region was to complete in peaks the work we had already carried out in passes. The problem which on the whole we looked to with most interest was now immediately before us. Mr. Ball had pronounced the Punta Trubinesca, the highest peak west of the Cima del Largo, and the prince of the rocky summits overlooking Val Bondasca, absolutely inaccessible from this side. But from what we had seen the previous year we were inclined to believe that the prophet had for once spoken hastily. The rocks on the southern face of the peak (both south and west faces overlook the Porcellizza Alp) had then seemed to us difficult certainly, but not impossible.

We arrived in good time at the Baths, and soon went to bed, determined to be prepared for the very early start which should give us a fair chance of success in our venture. My disgust may be imagined, therefore, when I awoke next morning to see the sun already shining brightly in at my window, and my watch conspicuously pointing to 6 A.M. What had become of François? Had our guide for the first time in his life fallen a victim to the potent wines of the Val Tellina, or, more unlikely still, deliberately arranged to shirk the formidable Trubinesca?

I hurried at once to seek the defaulter, who was found in a deep slumber, which he justified by the statement that it had rained at 3 A.M. It is difficult to remedy a bad beginning, and our old friend the nocturnal waiter was now of course in his first sleep. Breakfast was not over until past seven, at which unseemly hour we set out with comparatively slender hopes of success. For three hours we followed our old tracks of the Passo di Bondo. As we mounted the green hillsides above the Porcellizza Alp a new plan was suggested – to try the western instead of the southern face of the Trubinesca. This we had never examined, because it was the side seen and pronounced against by Mr. Ball from the Pizzo Porcellizzo.

A smooth cliff some 200 feet high ran round the entire base of the peak, and there was no breach visible. But there was still one spot which we could not clearly see, the head of the glacier we were about to tread. As we mounted the easy banks of ice the secret of the mountain was suddenly revealed. A snow-gully of very moderate slope led up to the ridge between our peak and the Cima di Tschingel. In half-an-hour more the cliff was outflanked, and we were on the crest of the chain looking down an awful precipice into Val Bondasca.

The final ridge alone remained. It rose beside us in a broad slab of granite. But a convenient crack destroyed the difficulty suggested by a first glance. We were now at the foot of the turret so clearly seen from St. Moritz; we turned it by its southern side, and then with our hands in our pockets walked quietly up a broad terrace of mingled rock and snow. The neighbouring peaks had already sunk below us – a smooth shining surface shone between them. One of us exclaimed 'Voilà Como.' François replied, 'Voici le sommet.' It was just midday. Four hours and a half had disposed of the terrible Trubinesca, and added one more to the very lengthy list of Alpine impostors.

The distant panorama was marred by clouds; in its main features it must be a repetition of the lovely western view gained from every high summit of the Bernina group. It is the near prospect, however, which distinguishes the Punta Trubinesca. It can show two sights not to be seen, perhaps, from any other snowy peak, a large portion of Lago di Como, that coyest of Alpine lakes, and what is still more remarkable, the whole course, I may say literally every inch, of both sides of an Alpine carriage-road – Italy and Switzerland in the same glance.

At our very feet lay the forests and villages of Val Bregaglia, Italian chestnuts and white campaniles; amongst them we caught sight of the thin streak of the high-road, which we followed as it climbed corkscrew-fashion above the woods and waterfalls and up to the bleak wind-swept down of the Maloya. Then our eyes accompanied it past the pine-fringed lakes of Sils and Silvaplana, and up again to the bracing heights of St. Moritz, every house in which was distinguishable through the glasses. Lost sight of for a few miles beneath the dip to Samaden, the road reappeared together with a companion thread, the river Inn, and both finally vanished from our view somewhere between Zutz and Zernetz.

The Baths were regained without adventure. And thus this maiden peak, although capable of deceiving the most experienced judges, yielded without a struggle to the first assault. Its reputation has survived its fall, and I saw it lately catalogued in some foreign publication as 'non ancora scalato.'

The very fact, however, which makes my story short and dull, the surprising easiness of the peak, gives it the greater interest for the ordinary traveller. If some of the native hunters will be at the trouble of making themselves familiar with the route, there is no reason whatever why the ascent should not become a frequent excursion from the Baths. The walk is even within the powers of many ladies, and they might ride to within at most three hours of the top. Any one who can appreciate quality

as well as quantity in a panorama will be well repaid; those who do not should confine themselves to Piz Languard.

Our descent had been delayed by the state of my friend's knee, which had been suffering from an old sprain, and now refused plainly to do duty for some days to come. It was vexatious enough, for on the next night we were to have slept out for the Disgrazia. But necessity knows nothing of plans, and he resigned himself to return as he had come to Sondrio, while I resolved to make a push for the same place over the mountains, and if possible to climb the Disgrazia by the way.

Soon after midnight François and I set out under a cloudy sky, which gave no sure token as to the day to follow. The now well-known path up Val di Mello was quickly traversed. As we reached La Rasica thin rain began to fall, and François, prophesying evil, suggested a return to San Martino. But the first gleams of day showed the thinness of the clouds, and our faces were again set against the steep hillside which leads to the upper pasturages. Before these were reached the blue face of heaven was everywhere breaking through the mist-veil, and a fine day was assured. Our spirits, hitherto gloomy, rose rapidly. The Passo di Mello was soon left below on the left, and we pressed rapidly up the steep glacier which fills the corner under the Pico della Speranza.<sup>19</sup> The last bank up to the spur dividing us from Val Sasso Bisolo was steep enough to need step-cutting; but we succeeded in avoiding altogether the difficulty described by Mr. Kennedy.<sup>20</sup> We walked across an ordinary snow-slope on to the crest of the Disgrazia at a point somewhat to the south of the lowest gap between the loftier mountain and the Pico della Speranza. My hopes now ran high. The rocks were singularly easy until we came to a broad ice-trough. Steps were cut across this; then we climbed up a steeper rock-rib and over a tooth. Beyond this we came to a second and wider sheet of hard black ice falling away steeply towards the Sasso Bisolo Glacier. François at once set to work cutting steps; when thirty-two had been cut, and three-quarters of an hour had elapsed, we were less than halfway across the ice. All this time a very strong wind was blowing over the ridge; still the steps were good, and the position an ordinary one to mountaineers. It did not even occur to me to feel doubt as to our final success until François turned round for the first time and remarked on the violence of the wind. A few steps further a second observation showed me that my guide entertained doubts in his own mind as to the prudence of persevering in our attempt.

I replied, however, that I was quite happy, and that the steps were excellent. A few more were cut, and then came a third suggestion of retreat. For once in my life I acted on principle, and I have regretted it ever since. François' doubts were not to be wondered at when the moral strain of his unusual position is considered, alone with a 'monsieur' on a cathedral roof of ice. My old friend has a great deal too much imagination to be merely animally brave, and like all the best guides feels acutely the responsibility of his situation. He knew that if I made a false step he might not be able to hold me. This was a good reason for our retreat. He could not feel, as I did, that I had not the slightest disposition to slip; for indeed his work was so good that no one accustomed to ice-steps could possibly have fallen out of the foothold provided.

We decided, therefore, with a sharp pang to give up the peak, which was about half-an-hour distant, and looked ten minutes.

Despite my defeat, I cannot pretend that the Disgrazia is in any way a difficult mountain for any properly constituted party of mountaineers. I have not as yet revenged myself on the peak, but François some years afterwards took two of my friends to the top, and has given me his report. The slope, which we found hard black ice, was then snow, and was very soon disposed of. Twenty minutes more of rough scrambling brought them to the lower tooth reached by Herr Syber-Gysi. The gap between this and the highest peak cost another ten minutes of stiff, but not in the least dangerous,

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<sup>19</sup> So named by Messrs. Stephen and Kennedy, who apparently considered the gloominess of the surrounding names required some relief. The Monte della Disgrazia is supported on the other side by the Monte della Cassandra.

<sup>20</sup> Judging from the map appended to Mr. Kennedy's paper in the first vol. of the *Alpine Journal*, he crossed the spur at a much lower point than we did.

rock climbing. They started from the lower châteaux in Val Sasso Bisolo and took six hours in the ascent. I was eight hours (halts included) from the Baths to where I stopped. It is clear, therefore, that active walkers are under no necessity to sleep out for this mountain, but may do it in the day between two comfortable beds. The reputation of difficulty which the Disgrazia has certainly acquired is due partly to its splendid appearance from the Bernina group, still more to the interested exertions of the Pontresina guides, who have not been ashamed to charge the peak in their tariff at 170 francs; 70, as they explain, for the four days' journey, 100 for the dangers of the climb. Now that Italians from Sondrio and hunters of Val Malenco have found their way up together, it is scarcely likely that any traveller in his senses will seek the services of the gentlemen of the Engadine.

The superb view spread out before us might well have diverted our minds even under a more serious disappointment. It was one of the days, frequent in the Alps after unsettled weather, when the air has a brilliancy and transparency so extraordinary that an Englishman rather fancies himself in another planet than within a day or two's journey of his own misty island. It is difficult to believe that you, who now breathe under an enormous arch of sky rising from pillars four hundred miles apart, are the same being whose vision was bounded but last week by a smoke-canopy resting on the chimney-pots of the other side of the square, and who, in home walks, was rather proud of distinguishing a landmark twenty miles off.

Two vertical miles below lay the broad Val Tellina with its towns and fields, nearer was the bare trench of Val Sasso Bisolo; between the two a broad-backed ridge, covered with green pasturage, seemed to offer a delightful path for anyone descending towards Morbegno.

The higher crest cut off only an insignificant portion of the Bergamasque hills. Beyond the nearer ranges, beyond the tossing hill waves of Como and the wide plain, the long level line of the Apennine melted into the glowing sky. The Disgrazia shares the advantage of all the outstanding Italian Alps, of being well within the great semicircle formed by the chain, instead of like the summits of the Bernese Oberland on its outer ring. From Dauphiné to the Bernina every peak was in sight, the whole array of the central Alps raised their silver spears through the inconceivably pure air.

From the foot of the ridge we turned to the left down the broad Sasso Bisolo Glacier, descending caverned slopes the concealed treachery of which was, in truth, far more dangerous than the open terrors of the upper crest. Two climbers may safely attack many peaks, but it is undoubtedly wrong for so small a party to venture on any snow-covered glacier. By *wrong* in matters of mountain-climbing I mean anything which excludes the element of skill in that noble sport, and tends to convert it into mere gambling with hidden forms of death such as the ice-pit or the avalanche. Immediately under the face of the peak we struck the base of the high rocky spur which runs out from it to the south-west. A steep scramble (twenty minutes) brought us to a gap, where we rested awhile to admire the exquisite view of the Zermatt range.<sup>21</sup> On the further side we slid down a hard snow-bed which had very nearly succeeded in developing itself into a glacier, and found ourselves in a desolate hollow, the stream of which forces a way out into Val Torreggio, one of the lower branches of Val Malenco.

The descent lies at first through a narrow funnel between richly-coloured cliffs. The granite has now come to an end, and sharp edges of slate and serpentine crop up against it. A green and level upland valley soon opens before the eyes, watered by an abundance of sparkling fountains which spring up beneath every stone. Here a path gradually asserts itself and leads to a group of châteaux. The descent into the depths of Val Malenco is long, but pleasant. Although the high peaks of the Bernina are concealed by lower spurs, the way abounds in charming vignettes of wood and water and warm hillsides.

At Torre we had to wait some time for the carriage sent up to meet us from Sondrio. As we sat by the wayside the village priest joined us. When he learnt that we had come straight over the

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<sup>21</sup> This gap is probably the Passo della Preda Rossa of an Italian party who in 1874 ascended the Disgrazia from the Alp Rali in Val Torreggio.

mountains from the 'Bagni' his astonishment knew no bounds, and he seemed to doubt whether we were not something more or less than natural and wingless human beings.

Our evening drive was swift and exciting. An impetuous horse whirled us down a steep vine-clad hill, rounding the zigzags at a pace which made perils by mountains sink into insignificance compared to the perils by road. Near a beautiful waterfall tumbling from the opposite hills, the Malero was leapt by a bold arch, and for some time we ran along a terrace, high above the strong glacier torrent.

From the last brow overlooking the Val Tellina the eye rests on one of those wonderful landscapes which tell the southward-bound traveller that he has reached his goal and is at last in Italy.

The great barrier is crossed, and the North is all behind us. The face of the earth, nay the very nature of the air, has changed, colours have a new depth, shadows a new sharpness. From the deep-green carpet of the smooth valley to the crowns of the sunset-flushed hills, all is wealth and luxuriance. No more pines stand stiff in regimental ranks to resist the assaults of winter and rough weather. No mountain rhododendrons collect all their strength in a few tough short shoots, and push themselves forward like hardy skirmishers of the vegetable world into the very abode of snow. Here the 'green things of the earth' are all at home and at peace, not as in some high Graubunden valley waging unequal war in an enemy's country. The beeches cluster in friendly companies on the hills. The chestnut-forest rejoicing in a green old age spreads out into the kindly air broad, glossy branches, the vines toss their long arms here and there in sheer exuberance of life. Even on the roadside wall the lizards run in and out amongst beds of cyclamen and tenderest ferns and mosses. The hills seem to stand back and leave room for the sunshine; and the broad, shining town of Sondrio, girt by towers and villas, wears, after the poor hamlets of the mountains, a stately air, as if humanity too shared in the general well-being.

It is one of the peculiar privileges of the Alpine traveller to enjoy, if he pleases, the choicest luxury of travel, a descent into Italy, half-a-dozen times in the space of one short summer holiday.

We drove down through vineyards and past a large villa and church, and through a narrow Via Garibaldi into a Piazza Vittorio Emmanuele. The south side of the square was formed by the hotel, an imposing building which contains within its walls the post and diligence offices. The windows command a view up Val Malenco, terminated by the twin peaks of the Schwestern, which appear from this side as two rocky teeth, hardly to be recognised as the pure snow-cones which look in at every window at Pontresina.

I have now, I hope, given an account of the mountains of Val Masino, which, though far from complete, may suffice to aid mountaineers who wish to visit them, and to direct attention to some of the most enjoyable expeditions within their limits. But, as I put aside the various pamphlets from which I have tried to add to my own information on this group, I notice that a worthy Herr Professor has remarked on the first ascent of the Disgrazia, that it was 'wholly devoid of scientific interest and results.' I fancy my learned friend preparing to lay down this holiday chronicle with a similar shrug of the shoulders; and I feel indisposed to allow him his criticism until he has first submitted it to be examined in detail, and listened to what may be urged on the other side.

'The Alps,' that shrug seems to say, 'are not a playground for idle boys, but a store-room full of puzzles; and it is only on the understanding that you will set to work to dissect one of these that you can be allowed to enter. You have free leave to look on them, according to your taste, as an herbarium, or as a geological, or even an entomological museum, but they must be treated, and treated only, as a laboratory. The belief that the noblest use of mountains is to serve as a refectory at once mental and physical for an overworked generation, that —

Men in these crags a medicine find  
To stem corruption of the mind,

is a poetical delusion unworthy of the philosopher who penned the lines. You must not come here to climb for mere health, or to indulge a sensual love of the beautiful, or, still worse, that brutelike physical energy which may be more harmlessly exhausted in persecuting foxes or trampling turnips. Μηδεις ἀγεωμέτρητος εἰσίτω. Come with a measuring rod or not at all.'

So far our critic. In his anxiety to claim on behalf of science exclusive dominion over the mountains, he forgets that all great works of nature are not only monuments of past changes but also living influences. The physical history of our globe is a study the importance of which no one at the present day is likely to disallow. Because we refuse to look on mountains simply as so much historical evidence, we of the Alpine Club do not by any means, as has been frequently suggested, range ourselves amongst the Philistines. We listen with the greatest interest to the men of genius whose mission it is to interpret the hieroglyphics of the temple in which we only worship. But we do not all of us recognise it as our duty to try to imitate their researches. Nor would the wiser of them wish for imitation from an incompetent herd of dabblers, who, however much they might gratify individual vanity, would advance the general sum of knowledge about as much as an ordinary amateur sketchbook does art.

Is it always better for a man, when acres of red rhododendron are in full bloom around him, and the insects are filling the air with a delicious murmur, to be engrossed body and soul in poking about for some rare plant or impaling an unfortunate beetle? When two hundred miles of mountain and plain, lake and river, cornland and forest, are spread out before the eyes, ought one to be remembering that 'justification' depends on ascertaining whether the back is resting on granite or feldspathic gneiss?

The preposterous pretension that no one is 'justified' (it is the favourite word) in drinking in mountain glory in its highest forms unless he brings as a passport a profession of research, cannot be too strongly denounced. To require from every Alpine climber some show of a scientific object would be to preoccupy men's minds at the moment when they should, and would otherwise, be most open to enlarging influences; it would in many cases be to throw away moral advantages and to encourage egotism, vanity, and humbug.

An obvious comparison may perhaps render more clear the relative positions of the simple lover of the Alps and the scientific dabbler. Rome is almost as universal a goal of modern travel as Switzerland. There also is a great history to be studied, on many of the problems of which investigation of the ground we tread may throw light.

The world listens with eager attention to anyone who has the requisite training to study such problems with profit, who can tell us what rude remains may be of the time of the Kings, can distinguish between the work of the Republic and the Empire. And amongst the galleries we are glad to meet those who can trace the progress of art and analyse a great picture so as to show the elements drawn from earlier masters which have been crowned and immortalised by the genius of Raphael or Michael Angelo.

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