

AMONG the MOUNTAINS of COGNE



PINNACLE OF THE AGUILLE DRO



TOURISTS in general know little of the considerable stretch of country that extends northward from Turin to the southern slopes of Mont Blanc. Apart from its interest to mountaineers in containing the two highest peaks in Italy, there

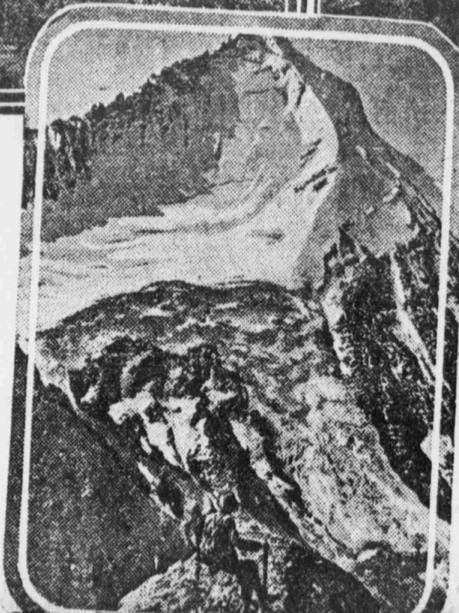
are few of its hundreds of valleys that do not possess relics in the shape of giant aqueducts and arches half sunken amid the vegetation of centuries, which testify to their importance in Roman times. The district around Cogne, the center of the mountainous region, is strictly preserved as a hunting ground for the king of Italy. Numerous keepers traverse the mountains, and heavy penalties are enforced against any person disturbing

game. As a consequence, chamois have greatly multiplied, and it is now the only locality in the whole Alps where the noble bouquetin or ibex may be seen in its native wilds.

It was, however, mainly to photograph, if not to climb, the Grand Paradis and the Grivola that the writer and a friend made a recent visit to this country. We had journeyed in easy stages by way of Chamoni and the St. Bernard, occupying several days, although the district itself is within 24 hours of Charing Cross, and reached the village at dusk, when its inhabitants had already retired with their cocks and hens. While in Aosta we had heard much of the habits and manners of the natives of Cogne. The Aostans, who consider themselves to be in the front rank of European civilization, were never tired of pouring ridicule on the doings of the simple villagers. "They had no use for beds, but slept in cupboards on shelves, one above the other. The women made up for a scarcity of linen by a superabundance of cloth, which they wound round their waists in many layers under their skirts, swelling themselves out to an unnatural size. They were childishly fond of wearing medals and beads, and wore aprons, which they carefully tied up on six days of the week, only letting them down on the seventh."

The day following our arrival was the occasion of a festival. The village church was the center of the celebrations. At various times the villagers issued forth in procession, preceded by white-gowned bearers of banners and images, making the circuit of the adjacent cemetery and giving vent to a mournful dirge as they marched. It was difficult to approach the natives; a sight of the camera I carried sufficed to send them scurrying to an immense distance. A few half-breed, however, judiciously distributed their wares; the news quickly circulated through the village, and I forthwith had no lack of models. Their attentions, indeed, became wearisome. We were continually met by damsels arrayed in voluminous garments who appeared unexpectedly from corners or chased each other with conscious laughter and elephantine grace across our path. Two even waylaid us, stating that in consequence of waiting for an appointment (which, however, they had not kept) they had lost time. We compromised this matter, but began to think that the natives were less simple than had been described, and that the statement regarding their Jewish descent might not be wholly without truth.

A beautiful vista of snow peaks and glaciers at the head of the Val Non-



THE GRIVOLA (13,022 FT.)

tey, facing Cogne, marks the commencement of the great ridge that culminates in the Grand Paradis, the loftiest peak in Italy. We toiled up this valley the following morning, passing numerous wayside shrines, very gay within, with painted images of saints and Madonnas, but picturesque and dilapidated externally. A peasant in devotional attitude at one of them, with the mountains rising grandly above, completed a picture that was very unlike any met with on an English countryside. A three hours' tramp up steep paths took us to the chalets of Monel, which owing to the lateness of the season, were untenanted by man or beast. They stood in full view of the grand Tribulation glacier, assuredly well named, for its many-mile expanse presents a continuous series of icefalls and huge seracs. The plight of a climber lost amid this desolation would be desperate indeed, and every gaping crevasse would remind him of a quicker route to the other world than that afforded by the slopes of the Grand Paradis rising above. The next few days were chiefly spent in abortive attempts to photograph the Grivola. Like the Weisshorn at Zermatt, it is a mountain that cannot be seen from the valley; one has to climb to a considerable height to judge its position, and owing to the badness of the local maps and the ignorance of the natives concerning their own mountains, we had to find the best viewpoint by the process of climbing each of the neighboring summits in turn. We quickly found that the Pointe de Pousset, which has been termed the Gornegrat of Cogne, was certainly the best position, and directed our efforts to a more northerly and lofty summit.

On the last occasion we started out at 4 a. m., for we had to descend several miles to the village of Epinal before starting on the real additional climb of 6,000 feet. By nine o'clock we were clear of the forest region and entered a savage but sublime desolation. To the north the snow-flecked summits of the Mont Emellus and the Becca di Nona towered grandly into the cloudless sky, while the rocky ridges around mounted into towers and spires of infinite variety.

At the pass we were saluted by an icy gale from the north, which increased in intensity as we scrambled up the shattered rocks that formed the last 800 feet of the ascent. The wind fairly whistled among the crags, and my friend Camosso filled the lucid intervals with his cries. He had often told me that no Italian could under-

stand what it was that induced Englishmen to climb mountains, and he now repeated the statement with several variations. I suggested that the atmosphere of Aosta restaurants and glaze shops was hardly the right sort of preparation. The mention of these luxuries seemed to touch a responsive cord, for he replied, with emotion, "Ah, if I ever get down, I will never climb a mountain again. Oh, what a wind! Oh, what a wind!" As we rose the Grivola grew more

majestic. The beautiful curving snow ridge, which is the mountain's chief distinction, was seen throughout its length from the summit to the glacier, which latter, from its steep inclination, was broken throughout by numerous ice-falls and gaping crevasses. We were at a height of over ten thousand feet and less than four miles from the mountain, and could see in a moment that we occupied the finest possible point of view and the only near position from which its grand northern face could be seen. The view towards the north was indescribably imposing. The whole of the central Pennines from Mont Blanc to the Matterhorn were free from cloud. Seen from a southern view point there is never any doubt as to the absolute predominance of the Great White mountain, and from here her height and bulk fairly dwarfed all others. Now, while scores of mountains separated by intervals of hundreds of miles were clear, the one for which the ascent was made was not. In Alpine photography this is almost invariably the case. Faint mists formed in the vicinity were driven against the summit and speedily developed to enormous dimensions; these disappeared and others took their place. Patience, however, was ultimately rewarded, and for a few minutes the welcome sun rays poured over the ridge, striking the tops of the seracs and filling the crevasses with a thousand shadows. The foreground had already been chosen, and the exposures were made just in time to escape a mass of cloud that covered the summit for the rest of the day. All this consumed much time, and it was late afternoon before we left the summit. We were scrambling over these rocks in semi-darkness when the figure of a man suddenly materialized on a neighboring ridge. He carried a gun slung bandolier fashion across his back, and further astonished us by calling upon us to stop and demanded to know what we were about. Explanations that we climbed the mountain for the pleasure derived from the exercise seemed only half satisfactory. "But tourists never come here, you are too late, besides which you carry a gun." I held up my ice-ax. "Ah, ma foi, I took you for poachers, and thought you were after the chamois." He expressed himself as bitterly disappointed. He had seen us from a distant summit four hours before.

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