

close. This is my last appearance as your president at a meeting of the club, and I feel that I ought, like the merry monarch, to apologise for being such an unconscionable time in dying. The fact is that I am sorry to go. Those who know me best are aware that it was with genuine reluctance that I accepted the honour which you were good enough to confer upon me three years ago. My *nolo episcopari* did not mean, as Mr. Mathews once translated it, *Barkis is willin'*. And now, gentlemen, that my term has expired, I am just as sorry, I confess, to lay down my office. That I should look back upon the last three years with unqualified pleasure is due entirely to your kindness, for which I return you my most sincere thanks.

AN ASCENT OF THE WESTERN AIGUILLE DU DEU.

BY J. WALKER HARTLEY.

(Read before the Alpine Club, April 1, 1884.)

VISITORS to the Zoo will probably have noticed how the inmates of the monkey-house divide themselves into two sets. While the stouter and more sedate remain comfortably on the floor, intent on stray nuts and biscuits, and disdainful of the frivolities of the more agile, the latter prefer to scramble to the highest spars and branches they can find. A parallel may not inaptly be drawn between the monkey-house and this Club. Some of our members are content to revel in the Capua of subalpine hotels, and if they visit the mountains at all, go no further than to stroll up some slight acclivity in company with an umbrella, and a guide whose day is past. They look with wonder on the unquenched ardour of their younger friends, who still believe that the *raison d'être* of the Club is to encourage climbing, and who are never so happy as when they have conquered, if not a new peak, then an old peak by a new route. With the latter my sympathies will always be; and though I am conscious that my wind grows short and my knees stiff, yet I hope the day is far distant when I shall cease to enjoy a good rock climb, if not in person, at least in the account of some more agile mountaineer.

I do not mean to imply that all new climbs are necessarily admirable; far from it. There are many already accomplished that nothing would induce me to repeat, and of which, had I been one of the original party, I would be

thoroughly ashamed. For the distinction between the mountaineer and the climber is clearly defined; and though, as we grow older, our gymnastic powers decline, yet, year after year, we acquire more of that craft which makes the true mountaineer—the knowledge of what is dangerous.

One of the chief charms of the Aiguille du Dru lies in the very slight amount of danger which besets the climber. Though I have been on the mountain some four or five times, on one occasion alone have I seen a falling stone, and other danger there is none. Ever since I had the good fortune to accompany Dent in his ascent of the eastern summit of the Dru, I have felt a great desire to climb its western peak. The years passed on, and the longing

To sit upon an Alp as on a throne

grew stronger, but I was unable to set foot upon the mountain, though many weeks were passed at the luxurious hotel on the Montanvert, while the weather forbade any thought of an attempt. As day after day I gazed on the two peaks, the one of which I had already climbed, and the other it seemed I never should ascend, I was reminded of an old tale, how a farmer, prevented by the weather from reaping his last piece of wheat, answered a friend, who told him that he ought to be thankful for having got in the rest, by saying, ‘Ay, the rest, *it’s* all safe enough; but that piece, *it’s* in the hands of the Lord still!’

The season of 1883 was called a good one. It is true that in August we had three weeks of unbroken fine weather, but the early part of the year was as bad as could be wished; so much so that, although I had for some weeks the call of two first-rate guides, we were able to make no ascent of importance but that of the Aiguille du Géant. I may, perhaps, be pardoned for saying a few words about this peak. Although it is now festooned with ropes from the upper point to the lower, and thence to the foot (most of which are unnecessary), it must always rank as one of the most severe rock climbs in the Alps, and certainly the most precipitous. Upon first getting on the mountain you ascend while traversing in a northerly direction, and are struck by the easy nature of the climbing. This continues for perhaps 50 feet beyond the point reached by Burgener, and marked by his cairn. The work changes as you arrive at the foot of the Grande Plaque, a smooth slab some 18 feet high, which can only be ascended by the aid of a rope; or, considering the extreme scantness of foothold at its base, by the perilous feat of three persons stand-

ing on one another's shoulders. The latter was the method employed by the Maquignaz. Having surmounted this, you begin to double back till you arrive almost above the point where the mountain was first struck, and hence you follow the north-western arête, which, though difficult at first, eases off to a more gentle slope just before arriving at the first peak. Once there, your troubles are over; it is impossible to mistake the easy descent into the notch; and although we found the connecting ridge crested with ice, it presents no difficulty, and a few steps land you on the higher tooth. Our view was somewhat peculiar, and bore a strong resemblance to that seen from the Monument in a London fog.

On July 13 we reached the Montanvert, and spent some weeks of broken weather in studying the habits of the various nationalities who swarm in all weathers to cross the terrible Mer de Glace. One specimen I shall not readily forget. Clad in the perfection of London costumes, and accompanied, in addition to a guide, by a boy to carry his overcoat and opera-glass, he descended to the glacier, but whether the ice looked too difficult, or he was afraid of wetting his feet, I know not—anyhow he funk'd it. After a bottle of Chamonix port he was so far recovered as to tell us that the whole thing was a 'take-in,' and finally producing a cigar, he asked for the '*fumier*,' and was duly shown to it.

The time passed quickly to our small and pleasant party. Much of it was spent in scrambles round the hotel; and I do not know any other place from which, in so short a time, you can get utterly pounded on difficult rocks. The séracs on the glacier, too, always afford sufficient amusement for an afternoon. Towards the beginning of August the weather showed signs of arranging itself, and then came the question of guides. This was solved in the most generous manner by Cunningham, who, with a kindness I shall not soon forget, insisted on placing Emile Rey at my disposal until such time as the Dru was done. It was a job after Emile's heart. The charming Chamoniard, with the courtesy he is famous for employing towards foreign guides, had called him 'blagueur,' and had told him that he could not follow where Charlet had led. Emile determined to have the laugh of Chamonix. To be doubly sure, he caused six enormous iron stanchions to be made in case the ascent proved harder than we expected. I may here say we left five of them on the top and one at the camp, having found no need of them whatever. We telegraphed to Courmayeur for Joseph Rey, of Col des Grandes Jorasses fame, and our party was com-

plete. August 5th was a glorious day, and having packed our provisions, we were ready for an attempt on the 6th.

Starting at 2.30 A.M. in cloudless weather, we formed an imposing party of five, for we were encumbered with two porters to carry the sleeping-bags and a supply of wood. Since these worthies were usually employed at the edge of the Mer de Glace in capturing the facile franc—the one by firing cannons, and the other by posing himself with a pick-axe at the foot of an ancient flight of ice-steps—our progress was slow, and we did not reach the Glacier de Charpoua till 5. Winding round the great ice-cliff between the upper and lower branch of the glacier, we struck the mountain where an almost horizontal streak of snow runs some way into the rocks from just below the large schrund of the Charpoua. Keeping almost at a level, we soon got into the basin at the foot of the great couloir running up between the two peaks. It would, I think, be easy to ascend by this couloir to the arête, and would doubtless save some time, but we were afraid of stones, so crossed it into the next gully to the west. We climbed slowly up easy rocks and snow patches to the arête at the western foot of the sharp tooth of rock, well seen in Mr. Donkin's photograph taken from the Aiguille du Moine. Crossing the ridge in order to round the tooth on its northern side, we struck a gully running down to the Glacier du Dru perhaps 20 feet below the arête. A scramble brought us back to the ridge at 8.30, but the porters, who had for some time been demanding aid of the whole Roman calendar (and, I remember, apostrophised some unknown saint as 'Saint Cochon'), refused to follow, and we were forced to haul up their packs and let them return. Descending a few feet on the southern side we found a small ledge, off which we set to clearing the snow and preparing it for the night. This turned out a lengthy performance, and by the time we had finished and had had some food it was 11 o'clock. The guides were unwilling to try the ascent so late in the day, and it was not until after a deal of persuasion that they were prevailed upon at least to find out the way for the morrow, but in my own mind I determined we would not stop until compelled.

Keeping a short distance below and on the southern side of the ridge, we found the rocks fairly easy until reaching the tower, well seen from our camp just above the point where the arête loses itself in the peak. Here we found a bottle and the remains of a woollen flag, presumably left by

Charlet on his first attempt.* The view of the peak, as seen from this point, is most impressive : downwards, the tremendous and slightly convex cliff, so well known from the Mer de Glace, the like of which, for sheerness and absence of break, I have never seen ; and upwards, terrace after terrace of forbidding rocks, through which we knew the way must lie. Now the climb began in earnest. A horizontal and contracted ledge—in the middle of which an enormous icicle had to be swarmed round—brought us to a narrow cleft leading up to the first terrace, and, that I may not be wearisome, the climbing of this may be taken as an example of all that followed. First, Emile got on my shoulders, being pinned by Joseph against the rock with his axe, that he should not fall outwards. He then wedged the head of his axe into a cranny as high as he could stretch, and, by some means known only to a first-rate guide, got his feet on it. With a scramble he reached the top of the gully, and then I, getting on Joseph's back, and, needless to say, greatly aided by the rope, struggled up beside him. A few easy steps along this terrace brought us to the foot of a chimney running up to the next, and the performance above alluded to had to be repeated. And so on. Gradually we worked our way upwards, finding some chimneys longer and some

* My reasons for thinking that this is the point at which Charlet turned on his first attempt to climb the peak (in addition to finding his bottle and flag) are as follows :—In 1877, when alone, he took 13 hours from Chamouni to reach his farthest point, without allowing for halts (*Annuaire*, C.A.F. 1877, p. 136). In 1879, when he was successful, he occupied—without allowing for halts—at least as much time (? 13½ hours) in attaining his camp on the arête (*Annuaire*, C.A.F. 1879, p. 120). His former point would, therefore, be only slightly farther. This is borne out by his own account, that from his camp he reached his former point in 2 hours, but that it took him 6¾ thence to the summit. In the account of his first attempt he says he was brought up by a wall of rock. This is exactly what he would see before him if he stopped where we found the bottle, which is just at the foot of the wall up which it is necessary to climb to reach the first terrace. That Charlet alone did not get up this first wall I am convinced, because I do not believe that any man could climb it single-handed, and also because, when assisted by two other guides, he found it necessary to insert two stanchions before he could ascend it. It is absurd to suppose he reached the point marked by the asterisk in the engraving on p. 138 of the *Annuaire*, 1877. If he got there, he had done with difficulty. He would then be on the small ice-slope leading to the ridge, and thence could not have taken half an hour, much less 6¾, to gain the summit.

more difficult than others, but all, in time, yielded to Emile's perseverance. At first we were forced slightly to the left by reason of the chimneys lying towards that end of the terraces, but gradually we worked our way back. We passed, *en route*, many of Charlet's iron spikes, and a fragment or two of his rope, none of which, I may say, did we find it necessary to use. Finally, we found ourselves at a point close to and directly below the summit; a very steep ice-covered gully led up towards the peak, but after several attempts Emile could not manage it, though we helped him all we could with shoulders and axe-head. To be beaten so near the goal was not to be thought of, and at last we found a way by crossing in a gallery towards the eastern peak, and getting on to a small ice-slope. While in this gallery a snow avalanche fell over us, but we were perfectly protected, only a flake or two reaching us. The work was now done, and in another minute we were—I was going to say on the top, but this peak has none. Instead, there is a narrow and almost level ridge, freely ornamented on every excrescence with red paint, and having at its western end a small cairn. It was now 4.30, and we had taken $5\frac{1}{2}$ hours from the camp and $4\frac{3}{4}$ from Charlet's bottle. As we had only stopped once to take a draught of wine, and as the actual height climbed must be small, the time occupied may be taken as a fair test of the difficulty.

Above us towered the eastern peak, its precipitous wall completely barring all ascent from the little col between us. Another route *might* perhaps be successful by crossing the great couloir lower down. I think Dent has under-estimated the difference in height between the two peaks at 80 feet. We were all glad of a rest, though we had but a short one. A light mist was already flying about the peak, and the hour warned us that, if we would use our sleeping-bags, we must be moving. Accordingly, after a glass of wine apiece, and leaving five iron nails in the cairn, together with a card bearing our names, and having boisted a counterpart of the tenpenny staff and the infant's petticoat planted five years before on the higher peak, we began at five o'clock to descend. On firm rocks the descent is easier than the ascent, and by reason of knowing the way and of going as fast as possible we managed to get to Charlet's bottle just as a thick fog and darkness came on. And here I cannot refrain from alluding to Emile's descent of the piece, the ascent of which I have before mentioned. Not that it is more difficult than the rest of the upper part of the peak, but because the light was not sufficient

to show him, as he came down last, the small handholds in the cleft. He therefore kept along the terrace above us, and to my amazement chose to swarm down the enormous icicle I have mentioned. It was the most surprising 'tour de force' I have ever seen, and we fairly held our breath till he rejoined us, for the smallest mistake on his part and we should soon have been on the Glacier du Dru. From this point to the camp my recollection is vague, for we went by touch and not by sight, darkness having come on so quickly that it was difficult to tell rock from snow until upon it. Luckily the rocks here are not difficult, and at nine o'clock we were again at the camp, but it was not till ten that we had got some Liebig cooked, and very acceptable it was, as we had not eaten for eleven hours.

We were quickly in our sleeping-bags, but the ledge was so narrow that when sitting upright our feet hung over the outside. Still Emile snored composedly, and by his oft-repeated assertion that 'il est bien mis dans le trou,' was evidently re-climbing the peak in his dreams. At four next morning we were up, and after cooking and arranging packs started at 5.15. The weather was wretched, and I was glad that we had done our work when we had the chance. We were all heavily laden, the snow was soft, and our progress slow in consequence. At 7.30 we reached the foot of the peak, and waited there till 8.10, while Emile went to recover my axe, which had fallen a great distance, and had finally stopped in some difficult rocks just above the glacier. The snow on the Charpoua was abominable, and it hailed and rained merrily. At 10.45 we reached the Montanvert, having expended near 'Les Ponts' much time and string in a vain attempt to render decent Joseph's nether garments, which hung in ribbons about his legs.

This paper has, I fear, passed all reasonable limits, but perhaps you will forgive me for a moment while I mention the only ascent prior to ours. I will say nothing of the impossibilities claimed to have been performed by Charlet alone in '76, but he deserves the greatest credit for his ascent in '79. He led his party to victory with ability and descended last, after lowering his unnerved and weeping companions down all the bad places. No doubt he employed numerous iron stanchions, and left two fixed ropes, besides gliding down all difficulties by doubling another round projecting rocks. Still he climbed a peak many times assailed by first-rate guides, all of whom failed when still very far from the summit.

Of the merits of my own guides I cannot speak too highly. Joseph's face wore a grin of happiness in the most difficult places; indeed, so content was he, that it was not till next morning he remembered that he had forgotten to smoke all the preceding day. But it is to Emile that the whole credit belongs. His leading was faultless. He worked out the route among perplexing rocks without a mistake, and displayed the combined qualities of limpet and caterpillar to an extent I had never before seen applied to rock climbing. He has now been present in every ascent of the two peaks, except that made by Dent and myself, and his opinion will probably be accepted that the lower is much more difficult of access than the higher. The latter is fast going down the usual scale of mountains, each party finding it less difficult than the last. It has already become 'a short day from the Montanvert,' and doubtless next season will be found 'an easy day for a lady.' That the western summit will not quickly follow suit it would be rash to prophesy, still the work is so infinitely harder than that on the eastern, that some time will probably elapse before it does so—unless, indeed, some one festoons it with ropes. The race of mountaineers may greatly improve as time goes on, and laugh our puny efforts to scorn; yet I believe the ascent of the upper portion of the Western Aiguille du Dru will always rank high amongst the most difficult rock climbs in the Alps.

BYE-PATHS IN THE PYRENEES.

BY CHARLES PACKE.

SWITZERLAND is now so overrun with tourists that in whatever direction the start is made for a ramble from one of the mountain inns, it is scarcely possible to avoid the regular beaten paths; and the ground has been so trodden and explored in all directions that the flowers, with the exception of a few of the very commonest, are exterminated within a radius of several hours' walk. In the Pyrenees, on the other hand, when once at an upland station you are immediately struck by the freshness of the surrounding ground. Except possibly in a single direction leading to some well-known point, there is no trace of the ravaging hand or foot of the tourist; and, notwithstanding the impulse to Pyrenean exploration which the French Alpine Club have lately given, within six or eight hours one may reach a region practically unvisited by the foot of man.