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THE AIGUILLE VERTE FROM THE ARGENTIÈRE GLACIER
By OAKLEY MAUND. Read before the Alpine Club, December 1876.

FOR at least three seasons Jaun's pet project had been to climb the Aiguille Verte from the Argentière Glacier. Any traveller who has examined the mountain from the Col de Chardonnet cannot fail to have been struck by its impressive grandeur and the abrupt rapidity with which its walls of ice rise from the glacier below. In '75 Mr. Middlemore and Lord Wentworth made an attempt with Jaun, but the condition of the snow stopped them early in the day. During the same season Mr. Pratt Barlow, with Christian Almer and Taugwalder, tried it by the arête, but they, too, were stopped by the insecure state of the snow. Determined to make another attempt this year, Mr. Middlemore gave me rendezvous at Chamonix for July 29. Here we met by appointment Monsieur Cordier, and joining forces, we mustered as strong a combination of guides as any party could sigh for—Jacob Anderegg, Johann Jaun, and Andreas Maurer—experience, intelligence, and strength! Besides these we had a fourth man, whose chief characteristics were an extreme length of limb and a more than gloomy temperament. But as his digestive organs went wrong the first night we were out, he hasn't much to do with the story. The next day, Sunday, July 30, we left Couttets at 1.45, one of the hottest days I remember, and hot Sundays always seem to me hotter than any other day in the week. There was the usual nondescript gathering of guides and loafers at the Diligence bureau, who received us with the stony stare usual with Chamoniards when German guides are poaching on their preserves; but for answer Jacob yelled, Maurer jodelled, and Jaun sat grinning from ear to ear, as our cavalcade of two carriages dashed down the narrow street at a hand gallop, regardless alike of placards,

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heat, and dust. On leaving the vehicles a two hours' walk in scorching heat up the steep grass slopes on the left bank of the Argentière Glacier brought us to the Châlets de la Lognant, where our suggestion to push on for another hour to be nearer our work in the morning was instantly negated by the guides. So after a bathe we whiled away the time by practising what we were pleased to think were athletic feats, in which the long and gloomy one distinguished himself by breaking his ice-axe in a futile effort to clear it while holding the ends. Then an excellent dinner prepared by Jaun as chef, and served in the chalêt, from which we were only too glad to escape again into the fresh air.

There is a certain class of persons who, never having climbed anything more difficult and dangerous than the Rigi, look upon us who seek our pleasure in the higher and wilder regions of the Alps as so many idiots who sacrifice our comfort and risk our necks in the hope of excelling others, for swagger purposes only; and that *if* we find, we certainly do not appreciate the grand scenery we talk about. I admit for myself that in fine weather I *do* prefer a bivouac on the mountain side to a bed in the valley, and that risking my neck in climbing the rocks and ice-walls of a mountain like the Aiguille Verte, gives me infinitely more pleasure than being carted up the Rigi in a tram-car. But I fail to see why (because our tastes differ) I should not be able to appreciate the beauties of scenery as much as our critics, who, with a crowd of Cook's tourists, shuffle out of bed drowsy and be-blanketed to watch the sunrise from the Rigi Kulm. From our point of view one of the greatest charms of mountaineering is camping out in fine weather, and this evening was made for it—delightfully cool after the oppressive heat of the day, but not cold enough to prevent one stretching at full length on a perfectly-sloped slab of rock, and absorbing through every pore the beauty of the scene.

The moon was rising behind the Dru and the rock face of the Chardonnet, where the bright light touched it, was silver-grey topped with the brilliant white of the snow. The glacier below us was swallowed in the deep shadow of the Dru itself. Opposite even the sterile, shadeless rocks of the Aiguilles Rouges looked beautiful to-night, and far away to the left the lights of the Flegère and Brévent were intermittently twinkling out of the hazy gloom. There was that perfect quiet, that impressive stillness, which on nights like these adds so much to the grandeur of the scene, broken only by the soothing monotone of running water, or the noise of some falling stone,

startlingly loud at first, but gradually dying off into hollow echoes, as it reached its bed in the glacier beneath.

Meanwhile the guides have been brewing us chocolate, and before we lie down for the night the prospects of the next day are discussed, without, as usual, the weather element entering into the discussion; there is no doubt about that!

Before I was well asleep we were up again, and after more chocolate we started from the châteaux at 1.15 A.M. The night was still beautiful, but the moon had set, leaving everything in utter darkness. Jacob, however, who is a man of resource, produced a couple of torches which he had manufactured over night, and by their light we managed to flounder along the moraine for an hour, when a halt was called. Here the long man whom I have mentioned before discovered that he had got a stomach-ache. I think Couttet's brandy must have caused it, as the guides between them had consumed about a bottle and a half during the evening. After giving him ten minutes to pull himself together, Jaun said he thought it would be better for him to return; a solution he seemed to snap at with such avidity that we went without him. I may mention incidentally that directly we got back to Chamonix I discharged him, having a strong antipathy to men who get stomach-ache at starting. We reached the glacier at 3.15, after keeping along the upper part of the moraine. The day was just breaking and the yellow light of dawn was colouring the highest points. By the time the rope was arranged the summits to our west were pink, the yellow light had crept nearly down to the glacier, and we struck straight across for the Verte, as the sun rose upon a cloudless, windless day.

Most of us have admired, but comparatively few of us have explored, the Argentière Glacier above the upper ice-fall, yet it will well repay a visit, as it cannot be properly appreciated when seen from above. It forms probably one of the grandest ice amphitheatres to be found in the Alps. Its base is an almost level and unbroken expanse of snow, its walls are continuous and steep, and the whole possesses that perfect harmony of proportion which shows to fullest advantage the grand sweep of the glacier and the majestic height of the mountains that surround it.

The western wall is formed by the Aiguille Verte, Les Droites, and Les Courtes, and it is a curious fact that, situated as they are within easy reach of a great mountaineering centre like Chamonix, none of them had been ascended from the Argentière Glacier; while two of them, Les Droites and Les

Courtes, had not been climbed at all. Of course I refer to the highest points.

We were an hour and a half crossing the glacier to the foot of the Verte, owing principally to a large crevasse which took us nearly one-third of the time in circumventing. It was about five o'clock when we arrived at the foot of the couloir, by which we hoped to reach the upper snow-fields. After a long and careful survey, Jaun, who is generally by no means sanguine, said, 'Ich glaube es geht, aber ich bin nicht sicher.' Jacob clinched him with his usual 'Ich glaube es muss gehen!'

It is extremely difficult without the aid of a drawing to describe accurately our line of ascent. Those of my readers who have examined the mountain from the Col de Chardonnet may remember a buttress of rocks which, starting from the glacier itself, ascends almost perpendicularly to (apparently) within a short distance of the summit of the Verte—though in point of fact nearly 2 hours of steep snow slopes separate the two points. To the right (looking west) of this there is what appears from below to be an almost perpendicular ice-wall; to the right, again, come rocks, then a narrow couloir and rocks again. It was by this couloir, and by the rocks flanking it, that we were to make our attempt, though this route looked at first sight much more formidable than the buttress I have spoken of, the rocks of which, however, on close examination, proved far too big to give any chance of success. Having in the meanwhile breakfasted, it was 5.45 before we started for the couloir. Twenty minutes of steep snow, pretty freely sprinkled with stones from above brought us to the bergschrund. I may here mention that Jacob and M. Cordier were on one rope, Middlemore, myself, Jaun, and Maurer on the other. I mention this fact as there are one or two slight inaccuracies in the hurried account sent to the French 'Bulletin,' which, to do thorough justice to the guides, I shall notice and correct as I go on. Well Jacob and Cordier led across the schrund. Once on its upper lip the step-cutting commenced, as the slope above turned out to be hard ice and very steep. These two being firmly planted, Maurer, who was first on our rope, was about to follow, when a stone whizzed past his head, and in a moment another followed, nearly striking Middlemore. As it was quite useless exposing the whole party to this sort of cannonade we remained crouched in the crevasse, while Jacob cut laterally across the slope to get out of the line of fire as quickly as possible. We remained thus some 20 min., I, as being by far the heaviest of the party, having altogether the worst of the position, planted

up to my waist in snow in the only insecure part of the bridge. Early as it was, the sun was excessively hot, and the water from the melting snow trickled uncomfortably down my neck. Miserable as my position was I did not dare to alter it, for I was conscious, from the way in which Jaun, perched comfortably above, hung on to the rope, that any movement might end disastrously. So I gave myself up to reflections on the probable depth of my fall should the bridge break, whether Jaun could hold me, or whether the jerk of $13\frac{1}{2}$ stone falling would not break the rope. I remembered reading somewhere in the 'Alpine Journal' somebody's opinion that no one man could withstand the jerk of another falling; but for the life of me I could not remember under what conditions.

I would gladly have faced any amount of stones rather than undergo the mental effort of trying to think out these problems, and I looked upon the signal to advance as a reprieve from certain annihilation. Very few minutes sufficed us to join Jacob, who, now that we were clear of the falling stones, was cutting straight up the ice-slope in order to reach the rocks forming the right boundary of the couloir. The inclination of the slope was so great (I should say about 60°) and the ice so hard that it was 7.30 before we reached them, although their height above the 'schrund' could not have been more than 300 ft.

The French 'Bulletin,' speaking of the Aiguille Verte 'ascension bien souvent essayée sans succès,' goes on to say: 'Without the superb audacity of Jacob the inclination would have been too great and the showers of stones too dangerous for one to have any reasonable hope of climbing this couloir.' From this it might be gathered that the success of the expedition was due entirely to Jacob Anderegg, which was not the case; and I have only thought it fair, therefore, to the other guides to record their share of the day's work, leaving it to my readers to apportion to each his fair share of praise, feeling sure that Jacob himself would be the last man to claim all the honours of the day. Jaun was the suggester, I may almost say the discoverer, of the route we followed. Maurer led us, directed by Jaun, from the foot of the couloir (the rocks I have just mentioned) to its top from 7.30 to 11.30, and led us, too, with rare judgment and skill; and from there Jaun was our leader to the top.

After a few minutes' rest we started again, keeping to the rocks on the right of the couloir, Maurer, as I said before, leading. Our progress was slow, owing to their extreme difficulty, and to the fact that every few minutes footsteps had to be cut in the hard ice that separated and often covered them.

We proceeded thus for about an hour, until our way was barred by an impracticable slab offering neither hand nor foothold. So nothing remained for us but to cut across the couloir and try the rocks on the left. Luckily the ice in it was not as hard as we expected, and in a few minutes we were safe on the opposite side. The climbing here was most exciting, and but for the fact that the rocks were hard frozen would have been quite impossible. Every foot we gained, however, the difficulties increased, and we were again forced to cross the couloir. It was here no more than 40 or 50 ft. wide, but it was terrifically steep, the ice was black and hard, and its width necessitated our all being in it together. While crossing I was struck by a small stone on the knee, which, though cutting it and producing great pain for a few minutes, did not even oblige us to halt. I mention this incident as corroborative of what has before been stated in this Journal, that small falling stones *look* and *sound* far more dangerous than in fact they are. Another passed between two of the party without doing any harm. Keeping steadily onwards, we had the satisfaction of seeing the distance to the top of the couloir visibly decreasing. Once or twice it struck me that if we were stopped we should have some difficulty in retracing our steps; and on asking Jacob's opinion afterwards, he told me it would have been 'ganz schlecht.' As a matter of fact our route was followed afterwards by Lord Wentworth's party, and the very thing I had foreseen happened, for, finding they could not get on, they tried to retrace their steps, but had to pass the night on the rocks, and eventually, I am informed, reached the Argentière Glacier with the utmost difficulty, and severely frostbitten. Nothing could surpass the admirable way in which we were led, Maurer and Jaun working together like well-broken hounds. If the first were at fault the other could always take up the scent. If there was a way, Maurer could always follow it, and he that day displayed climbing powers of the highest order. Nearing the top of the couloir, which we had had to cross once more, the rocks became less continuous, being separated by patches of snow, which, though very steep, was in first-rate condition, and our progress became comparatively rapid. In a very short time we had reached the last isolated patch of rocks—time 10.20—and a very steep slope now alone separated us from the arête which connects this buttress of the mountain with the upper snow-fields. The first few steps turned out to be hard ice, and Maurer, expecting a long job, passed his knapsack back to me and took my ice-axe, which was a very much better and sharper one than his own; but neither my carrying powers nor my axe were

severely tested, as after a few feet we got into deep firm snow, and in an hour we were standing on the arête.

This arête which we had reached was, I must admit, to me a complete surprise. Looking up from below you would never have guessed its existence. Though but two or three hundred yards in length, it is extremely sharp, and overlooks on the other side one of the grandest ice-falls it is possible to conceive, whether considered in respect of the inextricable confusion and huge size of its seracs or of the dizzy rapidity with which it descends on to the glacier below. We had struck this arête a short distance from its outer or northern extremity, and a few steps brought us to a safe anchorage under the shade of some rocks. It was now 11.20, and, with the exception of a few minutes' rest, we had been nearly five hours circumventing the couloir! In my experience of the Alps I have seen nothing that will compare with the sustained splendour of this climb, either for sheer ice-work or difficult rocks; and I feel convinced that without the combination of good weather, good guides, and good state of snow, it would be madness to attempt it. Mr. Middlemore has thus enthusiastically described it: 'If we imagine three Momings interspersed with rockwork on a par with the best bits of the Gabelhorn, we get a fair notion of the treat that kind heaven vouchsafed us.'

Our way now seemed clear, and during our mid-day meal we speculated on the probable time it would take us to reach the summit, and whether we should get there before Mr. Mathews, who, with his guides, Melchior and Peter Anderegg, was ascending the mountain from the other side. At 12 o'clock we started again, and it took us exactly an hour of almost continuous step-cutting in hard ice to cross the arête, then a little serac-dodging, and we were fairly landed on the upper snow-slopes, which, though extremely steep, presented no difficulties, the state of the snow being simply perfect. At a few minutes past three we stepped on to the summit of the mountain, and after the usual shouting and drinking we looked about for traces of Mr. Mathews and his guides, but there were none to be seen. Far below, however, Jacob made out the party descending, and on the snow-slopes above the Jardin I could with my telescope plainly make out my brother, who had come up from Chamonix with some champagne, which, if he saw us arrive at the summit of the Verte, he was to leave in a small cairn built just outside the highest point of the Jardin. While I am on this subject I may as well mention that we never got any of this champagne, for one bottle was drunk by Mr. Mathews and my brother to our very good health, the rest

probably by some wily Chamoniard, who had watched with thirsty interest its deposit in the cairn. Suffice it to say that it was no longer there when we got down.

The earlier part of the day had been cloudless, and during our climb in the couloir a scorching sun had beaten down upon us without a breath of air to mitigate its severity; but during the last hour's climb clouds had been working up from the NW., enveloping us more than once in thick mist. The wind that we met on the summit was not only strong but icy cold, so that after ten minutes' rest and a pull at the brandy flask, we were only too glad to commence the descent. The fact of Mr. Mathews not having reached the summit was a severe disappointment to us, inasmuch as we could not, as we had expected, utilise his footsteps in our descent; and any one who has cut up the couloir on the Talèfre side can imagine the prospect of cutting down it. Led by Jacob, we kept along the arête, exposed to the cutting wind, to where a ridge of deep snow led down to the rocks, forming the right boundary of the couloir. Luckily this snow was deep and firm, and in an hour from the summit we had gained the rocks, we keeping to these for some distance, Jacob hunting right and left for some traces of Mr. Mathews.

Meanwhile a storm was gradually working up, and we could hear the thunder muttering sulkily among the mountains to our right, while the hail that was falling made the rocks slippery and difficult. We cut across the couloir when we could no longer make progress on the rocks, and were lucky enough to hit off Mr. Mathews' tracks. It was now 6 o'clock, and it became just a question of time whether or not we should spend the night on the mountain. Jacob, with visions of rheumatism, made the running at his best pace, and we slithered after him as hard as we could go. The excitement of the race made us quite callous to the torrents of rain that were now falling, and the blinding flashes of lightning which lit up the rocks in the fast-increasing gloom. We won in the end by a short head, and crossed the bergschrund almost in the dark. Then on through the storm, drenched but cheery, with a mighty thirst and visions of champagne! We reached the Jardin at 10 o'clock, and after an ineffectual search and smothered imprecations on the head of the canny gentleman who had robbed us, went on dispirited and sulky to the Pierre à Beranger. It was just 11 o'clock when we reached that primitive structure, so that our expedition had occupied us 22 hrs., and since leaving the top of the couloir on the other side of the mountain at 12 in the day we had only stopped twice, once for ten minutes on the summit,

and once again for a few minutes at the Jardin while searching for the champagne.

We managed to make a fire at the hut with the help of some planking that the guides tore off the roof, and after some toasted cheese (about all we had left) we lay down in our wet clothes to wait for morning. It was not particularly comfortable, but it might have been worse, as I know from experience. However, dawn came at last, and, after another dose of toasted cheese for breakfast, we started for Chamonix, where we arrived before 9 o'clock in the morning. On talking over our expedition with Loppé that evening, he suggested our trying to make a pass between the Argentière and the Talèfre Glaciers, a feat that had not hitherto been accomplished. He himself had been on to the depression in the ridge between Les Courtes and Les Droites, but the descent on the Argentière side was so precipitous that he did not try it. He strongly advised us, however, to make the attempt from that side. The next day, therefore, we set out again for Châlets de la Lognant, and having slept there, started at 1.45 A.M. On this occasion we followed the main stream of the Argentière Glacier, instead of the upper portion above the lateral moraine; and I think of the two it is the better route, as you avoid the crevasses that detained us before. On arriving at the foot of the depression I spoke of, both Jacob and Jaun declared it at once to be impracticable; so we advanced further up the glacier, prospecting the whole way in search of an embryo col, but we could see nothing that promised the remotest chance of success. After a consultation and breakfast, we came to the conclusion that as the weather was so fine we would try to ascend the highest point of the jagged teeth (called 'les Courtes' on the French map), which go to form the most southerly mountain in the wall which bounds the Argentière Glacier to the west. By a short but awkward couloir we reached the rocks which lead almost direct to the summit, and followed these till 11.30, and then by a steep snow-slope reached the highest point at 12.30. These times will give you no correct indication of how long the mountain takes to climb, as the guides loitered away nearly two hours in search of crystals, and found some very good specimens. We remained one hour at the top, and then, keeping to the rocks, instead of following the arête, for a short distance, and descending by a couloir in which we found later on the snow was deep and firm, we reached the Jardin at 6, and Chamonix at 10.30, making in all nearly 21 hrs.

In speaking of the descent of the Courtes, M. Cordier describes the rocks as 'assez faciles,' a conclusion with which I

beg to differ, as in all my experience I have never been on more offensively loose ones. The whole mountain on this side seems splintered into fragments possessing neither stability nor cohesion; a state of things which perhaps more than any other makes a mountain difficult, as it is nearly impossible to avoid starting some rock or other, to the great detriment of the heads which may happen to be next below you on the rope. The next day we rested, and whiled away the afternoon fishing for crayfish in the basin round Couttet's fountain. Don't let me mislead readers by any suggestion that the crayfish were indigenous to the fountain! Not a bit of it; they hated the place, and were pining for the rippling brook at St. Gervais, from which Mr. Reilly and Mr. Mathews had fished them. No power on earth could persuade them to take the simple bait with which these gentlemen had been so successful—the homely bit of beef tied to an ordinary bit of string; and one of our number, denuded of everything but a pair of flannel knickers for decency's sake, was at last reduced to seek them in their native element. That night we had a supper (eight of us, six of the eight members of the Alpine Club) which none of us will easily forget. For Couttet's chef produced a 'bisque à l'écrevisse' that the Café Anglais need not have blushed for.

We had determined if possible to complete the exploration of the western wall of the Argentière Glacier by climbing Les Droites, the mountain lying next south of the Verte, and marked on Mieulet's map as 4,030 mètres, or 13,097 ft. Eng. Mr. Coolidge and Christian Almer had failed to reach the summit three weeks previously, so we expected to find our work cut out for us.

The next day Jacob was ill with rheumatism, the result of our exposure the night we descended the Verte, and could not come with us. So we started with Jaun and Maurer, hiring a porter to carry provisions and blankets to the Pierre à Beranger, where we were to sleep. Owing to a late start we did not reach the hut till dusk, having left the guides at the Montanvert to follow more slowly. After waiting about an hour we heard them coming along the glacier below, Maurer's voice very loud, and every now and then a yell from the porter. When they arrived we found the latter was speechlessly drunk, and having struck work, Maurer had helped him along with two or three well-administered kicks behind, hence the yells. We started next morning at 2, but had to remain at the Jardin till 4.30 for daylight; then crossing the slopes directly above it, we reached by a short couloir the ridge of rocks leading apparently to the summit. We experienced no sort of difficulty

until nearly on a level with the well-marked snow depression in the ridge I have mentioned before. Here our way was barred, and we determined to try to the right along the top of the ice-slope where it abuts on the rocks, and then by a steep couloir which seemed to lead to the highest point. Jaun unroped and explored the way, and Maurer and I had just got on to the ice when a big stone, and then another, whistled past our heads from above. We instantly beat a retreat, and I declined absolutely to follow that route. After some discussion we determined to turn to the left over the ridge we had climbed, and try the rocks there. We thought at first we should be beaten, as we were met by an almost perpendicular wall; this, however, we managed to outflank, and then by a series of slabs, luckily perfectly firm, which tried to the full our gymnastic powers, we reached a long and very steep slope of snow, which brought us to the arête, then a little patch of extremely difficult rock, and at 12.30 we stood on the summit. We saw at once that if the couloir that turned us had been followed we should have reached a point considerably lower than the one we were on, which proved to be undoubtedly the true summit of the mountain. We, with some difficulty, collected sufficient stones to build a cairn, and having deposited our names, basked away an hour in the hot sun. In our descent we had to return to where we had hesitated in the morning, as the knapsacks had been left there, and Jaun, expecting to save time, determined to descend by the broad snow couloir which lies to the right of the ridge we had ascended. The snow proved deep and firm, and we had reached the lower part of the couloir where it narrows considerably, when we heard a roar far above and on looking up saw two enormous rocks coming with great bounds straight for us. We made a rush across the couloir as fast as we could go, as one touch from such blocks would have been instant annihilation. Cordier slipped and fell, dragging Middlemore down with him. I anchored and went flat on my face, as did Maurer, who was next in front of me. There was a rush of wind followed by a shower of snow, and the rocks were past! One mass, which must have weighed a ton, struck just above where Cordier slipped from, and passed close over his head. On looking round I saw Jaun lying spread-eagled on his back, while his hat was flying down the couloir. I thought he was killed, and Maurer told me afterwards that he had thought so too. But in a moment, to my great relief, he looked round, and picking himself up, cried to Maurer, 'Schnell zu den Felsen.' I need not tell you that very little time was lost in acting upon his advice, and in

a few minutes we were safe on the rocks on the opposite (or right hand in looking up) side of the couloir. Once on them we had the greatest difficulty in getting off again, as they turned out very bad. We, however, succeeded at length in reaching the bergschrund at their base, which we crossed without difficulty, and were safe.

GLEANINGS FROM COGNE. I. THE POINTE DE SENGIES.
By the EDITOR.

AOSTA has been generally held the natural starting point for a paper on the Graians. But if any one objects to my preamble as out of place, I have excellent reasons to offer to show that Chamonix is equally appropriate as a starting point. Many recent writers have dealt with the Graians. But I do not know that any one of them has been at the pains to define their historical limits. There is the best reason to believe that in ancient times Mont Blanc was thought of, if it was ever thought of at all, as a Graian Alp. The Col de la Seigne was as decidedly in the Graians as the Great St. Bernard in the Pennines. It is even uncertain whether the Greek hero Hercules, who, as all the mediæval authors agree,* gave to this part of the Alps their name, may not have passed by Chapui. So far as there was any boundary fixed between the Pennine and the Graian Alps, the boundary lay probably about the Col de Géant. The mountains on your right at Curia Major or Courmayeur were Pennine, those on your left Graian.

I had, however, a special reason for starting from Chamonix. I was reminded some time ago, by a severely Alpine correspondent, that my peaks had not for some years 'had much height.' Of course I might have replied that the criticism was empty and absurd, that the height of a peak depends entirely on the depth of the valley at its base, and that many of the Swiss giants are only dwarfs mounted on high pedestals. I might have backed up my argument by the authority of a writer who, as Mons. Durier† has well said, is the spiritual ancestor of the unscientific and enthusiastic mountain lover. M. Bourrit, in a vindication of the Alps as compared with Transatlantic ranges, has boldly stated, 'Sur les Alpes on est

* Modern authorities are satisfied with the explanation that 'gran' is a Celtic word meaning white, and refer to its appearance in other Alpine names.

† 'Le Mont Blanc.'