



THE AIGUILLE DU DRU
FROM THE SOUTH

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THE HISTORY OF AN ASCENT OF THE AIGUILLE DU DRU.
By C. T. DENT. Read before the Alpine Club on Feb. 4,
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EVEN in a thoroughly well acted play, a perceptible shudder runs through the audience when two actors draw their chairs down to the footlights, and one of them announces, 'Tis now some fourteen years ago.' Some element of uncertainty is required to keep up the interest—the development of an unknown chain of events. The feeling that, however thrilling the tale to be told, the climax is known, and the heroes sit before us, is apt to make the whole recital fall somewhat flat. To some extent I find myself in the position of the actors, but at least will promise not to follow their example to any great extent. On the history of attempts to ascend the Aiguille du Dru I will touch only so far as it seems desirable that they should be placed upon record.

Nearly five years ago the 'Alpine Journal'* contained what I fear was an unduly prolix narrative of two assaults on the mountain. Striking out a different line to the Messrs. Pendlebury, Kennedy, and Marshall, we made for the south-western or left-hand peak. At that time we were not positive as to which was the higher of the two summits.

In 1874, with two guides, of whom Alexander Burgener was one, we reached the col between the Aiguille du Dru and the Verte, and remained there some time examining the mountain. We looked down over the edge of the ridge on to the Glacier du Nant Blanc, and did not like it. We looked upwards and liked it less. The day was fine, and the rocks in thoroughly good order. I can recall now how our eyes must have wandered over the very route that years after proved to

* No. 46.

be the right one, without any impression of its feasibility being made on our minds. Formidable from this point of view the peak certainly is, and doubly so when seen for the first time. Few, I think, would blame us for questioning the possibility of climbing it.

Between this date and 1878 numerous attempts* were made, so far as I can learn, one and all on the S.W. or lower peak. A gradual conviction seems to have grown up in the minds of those who tried it that this would prove to be the true line of ascent. So thought Mr. E. R. Whitwell; so again Mr. J. Birkbeck, jun., both of whom reached probably a much higher point than we did in 1873. To the subject of this lower peak I shall return again later on, but before leaving it must mention briefly the most remarkable ascent yet made. I speak advisedly—an ascent. Some may perhaps be astonished on learning that the highest point had apparently been reached before we climbed it. Astonishment will give way to admiration when I mention that this successful ascent was effected by a single individual. No word will adequately describe the feelings when it is stated that such is the modesty of this hero that he himself disclaims the honour of having actually attained the summit. From the published accounts (for the record is before the world) we may learn that the climb was effected in this wise.

Starting with no other companions than a trusty rope and an equally reliable axe, our hero ascended by that part of the Glacier de Charpoua which is the most unfavourable, on account of multitudinous intersecting crevasses. Possibly, however, his description, owing to an absence of detail, misleads. Certainly, the narrative is to some degree ambiguous, and it is hard for those who know the appearance of the rocks to understand the line of ascent intended to be described. There may be excellent reasons for this ambiguity: I cannot but think they could be easily supplied. It seems that after a time this second Jacques Balmat left the glacier, got on to the rocks at an impossible spot, and climbed them by an impracticable route. Overcoming astounding obstacles, yet ascending as rapidly and unerringly as if he had been in New Guinea instead of Savoy, he attained (in about half a page) a point whence, he tells us, further ascent was impossible. A vertical wall of rock arrested further progress. But I feel sure that this is only the author's delicate way of putting it. Further ascent was impossible, simply because he was, as shown by the illustra-

* I know of at least six.

tion accompanying his description, on the summit.* To remove any doubt on the subject, he planted a stick and a flag. Incredulity at Chamonix was crushed. 'There,' he said on his return, 'look at my mark, there, on the little step just to the right of the summit.' They gazed through the telescope, and were convinced. Only one, an incredulous artist, of some Alpine repute and experience, stared, like the little child at the Emperor's new clothes, and saw nothing save a dark line of rock and a patch of snow some 20 ft. square. But what of that? How he descended alone; how he fixed his rope in difficult places to a rock and let himself down; how he repeated this performance on other difficult places without previously going up to disengage the cord; how he slipped and fell in such a way that anyone but Zazel—or Mons. Charlet-Stratton—would inevitably have perished—all this and some more is recorded, I say with infinite regret, in the pages of the French '*Annuaire*' for 1878. Seriously, such an account may legitimately be questioned and criticised. Apocryphal narratives of this nature tend to bring discredit on our pastime, and are ill reading in so admirable and usually sound a volume as the '*Annuaire*.'

Our work on the peak in 1875 may be dismissed very briefly. We tried the north face, and found it impossible, from the Glacier du Nant Blanc, to reach even the ridge between the Dru and the Verte. No other route offers on this side. For the two following years I was unable to visit the Alps.

In July last year, J. Oakley Maund and I arrived at Chamonix with one fixed determination. Either we would climb

* Professor Forbes—as the Editor points out to me—with his usual accuracy distinguished and also measured the two summits, giving their heights respectively as 12,178 and 12,245 feet. ('*Travels in the Alps*,' p. 119.) Viewed from Chamonix, the lower or S.W. peak appears much the higher of the two summits. From the Montanvert only the lower peak is visible. I only learnt this year that the higher peak can be distinguished from Chamonix, looking like a mere step or inequality in the ridge forming the right-hand outline of the other. The two great upstanding rocks and the arch close to them, described further on, preclude the possibility of a mistake as to the true position of the actual summit. It is perhaps singular that most of the Chamonix guides are unaware of these facts. It is also worthy of notice that the asterisk in the illustration referred to above appears to denote this spot. But even if this were not so, the whole account of this expedition would hardly be worthy of credence on other grounds. If the asterisk is intended to indicate a spot on the lower peak, it is possible to get from there to the top of that peak.

the Dru, or, at the worst, would, as far as in us lay, prove its inaccessibility. By my wish our first attempts were to be made by the old route leading towards the lower peak. And here let me state, lest I forget it, that the weather was on nearly all occasions of such a description that no parliamentary expressions can possibly do justice to it. Time after time we were baulked by snow, wind, or rain. Day after day we sat waiting in vain for the favourable moment, till hope deferred, and a long course of table d'hôte dinners, without exercise, combined to make the heart sick. A couple of fine days would occur, and a start be effected. Then came the rain again, and we had to return, soaked and despondent. What time we were not being rained upon on the Montanvert, we were steaming and drying over Couttet's kitchen fire. On hydropathic principles we found this state of the elements an excellent cure for the mountain fever. Enough! Let me record what we did achieve in the rare intervals of decent weather.

Our first attempt was made with Johann Jaun and Andreas Maurer as guides. A lank-visaged porter, somewhat weak in the joints, who must have echoed Hamlet's interrogation as to the necessity of bearing fardels, carried our tent up to the grass slopes by the Charpoua Glacier. Here are many and excellent camping places. Dried dwarf rhododendron bushes abound, and water is plentiful, especially on the Moine side of the slopes. Leaving the porter at 2 A.M. still in a prostrate condition, we wended our way up the glacier, which was in first-rate order. All were in high spirits at the prospect of, at least, a good climb. Not a bit of it. The rock face over which access to the lower peak is alone possible was covered with snow in the most treacherous condition imaginable. The guides most properly refused to go on, pointing out that to descend in the afternoon, with the snow soft and loosely bound to the rocks would be unwarrantably dangerous. Back we went, therefore, and met the sniggers and sneers of the worthy Chamoniards with an imperturbability bred of long experience.

Twice again within the next fortnight we tried, with the same guides. Result the same, except that we didn't go so far and got more wet. The excellent Jaun now left us, and Alexander Burgener came on as chief guide. Following his advice, a complete change of tactics was adopted. We decided to abandon all idea of attacking the lower peak, and made up our minds to try the higher east summit by our old '74 route.

And now let me digress for a moment and give credit where

credit is due. It is due to the Messrs. Pendlebury's guides, especially, I believe, to Peter Baumann, who, in 1873, on his first inspection, marked out the true line of ascent as far as it was visible. Again, and above all, the whole of our success is due to Burgener's sagacity and great guiding qualities. I knew that any guide was immeasurably superior to an amateur in the knack of finding the way. I was aware that in quickness on rocks the two could hardly be compared. But I had always thought that the amateur excelled in one great requisite—pluck. This record will, I hope, show that in one instance at least this was an error. But for Burgener's indomitable obstinate pluck we should never have climbed the Dru.

Leaving the Montanvert about 1 A.M. we reached the rocks below the col somewhat late, for our route up the glacier was bad. There was a great deal of reconnoitring, and a considerable amount of talking. However we had a good climb, and settled the best route up some part of the couloir leading to the ridge. There was still too much snow on the rocks. A fancied insufficiency of guiding power—a decidedly insufficient supply of rope—and a strong idea that a new route was not to be worked out at a first attempt—combined to drive us back to Chamonix the same evening.

Après cela le déluge—and for a long time all mountaineering was impossible. Desperate were our attempts to amuse ourselves. Lawn tennis, with parti-coloured balls and wooden bats, in front of Couttet's was the fashion for a while. Then we went a cray fishing, Maund driving us to Chatelard in Couttet's basket carriage, and chirruping pleasantly to an ancient spotted grey steed. Then I chirruped him back again—and next day the spotted grey was 'très malade,' and my right arm very stiff. Under Maund's able tuition, and following his experienced directions at the fishing ground, we caught nothing.

Then I fell a musing and studied human nature, and wondered at the various imperfections of development the muscle, known to anatomists as the gastrocnemius,* could exhibit in the legs of our countrymen, and marvelled why they took such pains in their costume to display its usually unsymmetrical proportions; and wondered why Couttet's barometer kept on rising, and pondered over——. Suffice it that at last Maund, to my infinite regret, left, from motives of fraternal duty,

* Described in anatomical text-books as forming the swelling of the calf.

coupled with the rooted conviction that the rain would probably go on till the winter snows came.

And so it came to pass that with J. W. Hartley, and Alexander Burgener, and Andreas Maurer, as guides, I found myself one August day at a new and improved camping place, a good deal higher than our old bivouac. We left it at 3.45 A.M. and got early on to the rocks. A tremendous day we had. Bit by bit the best routes were worked out. Snow still lay thick everywhere. The rocks themselves were fearfully cold, and glazed with thin layers of slippery ice. It was a day of exploration. First the guides climbed to the col. Then Burgener and I climbed ropeless to the same spot. To those in search of excitement I recommend above everything these rocks when glazed. But for a growing conviction that the upper crags were not so bad as they looked, we should never have persevered that day. We reached at last a great knob of rock close to the col, and for a time Burgener and I sat alone, silently staring at the precipices of the upper peak. This was the turning-point of our year's climbing. Up to that moment I had only felt doubts as to the inaccessibility of the mountain. Now a certain feeling of confident elation began to creep over me. The aspect of a mountain varies marvellously according to the beholder's frame of mind. These same crags had been, at one time or another, deliberately pronounced impossible by each of us severally. Good judges had ridiculed the idea of getting up them. Yet, somehow, they looked different that day. Here and there we fancied we could trace short bits of practicable rock. Gradually, uniting and communicating passages developed themselves. At last we turned and looked at each other; the same train of ideas had been independently coursing through our minds. Burgener's face flushed, and we rose almost together, exclaiming 'Es muss möglich sein.' The rest of the day was devoted to bringing down our ladder from the col to a point much lower and nearer the main peak. Then followed one of the nastiest descents I ever experienced. We had made our way over the great snow patches, for the stones fell too freely in the couloir to render that safe. At one time we had 150 feet of rope paid out between one position of comparative security and the one next below it. One step, and the snow would crunch up healthily and give good hold. The next, and the leg plunged in as far as it could reach. Yet another, and a layer of snow, a foot deep, would slide hissing off, and expose bare black ice beneath, or treacherous loose stones. Not till 9 P.M. did we reach Chamonix. But I had seen all I wanted, and now I

would have staked my best hat on the possibility of climbing the mountain. The usual atrocious weather which kept us back after this attempt was in consequence doubly vexatious.

Perhaps the monotonous repetition of failures on our peak influences my recollection of what took place subsequently. Perhaps—as I sometimes think, even now—an intense desire to accomplish our ambition, ripened into a realisation of actual occurrences, which really were only efforts of imagination. Anyhow when, on September 7, we once more sat before the camp fire, I could hardly persuade myself that so much had taken place since the attempt last mentioned. It seemed but a dream, whose reality could be disproved by an effort, that we had gone to Zermatt in a storm, and hurried back again in a drizzle; that we had left Chamonix and tried the peak again in a tempest; that I had returned to England utterly dispirited and downcast; that I had posted back after forty-eight hours' sojourn in my native land, on receiving by telegraph the welcome intimation that the weather at last looked promising. A confused jumble and whirl of thoughts crowded the brain. I heard the parting farewell from our pleasant party as the diligence lumbered away from Chamonix; this was chased away by the slow heavy clank of the railway carriages entering the station. I rubbed my eyes and looked up. Was that the Dru clear and bright above? The outline seemed strangely familiar. Surely that was Hartley there, occupied in the congenial employment of greasing his face with the contents of a little squeeze-bottle—and there was Burgener. But what was this shapeless sleeping mass? Gradually it dawned on me that I was but inverting a psychological process and trying to make a dream out of a reality. Hartley was there; Burgener was there; and the uncomely bundle was the outward form of the most incompetent guide in the Alps. Not till after did we learn that our friend had previously distinguished himself with Maund on the north face of the Breithorn. Not till the next day did we fully realise how bad a guide might be. We kicked him and he awoke. Then he made the one true remark I heard him utter. He said he had been drunk the day before. Then he relapsed; and during the remainder of the time he was with us enunciated nothing but falsehoods.

From four in the morning the next day till seven in the evening when we reached our bivouac again, we worked incessantly. Not so the Driveller—for so we christened our new guide appropriately. Hartley dragged him up the glacier. Twice we pointed out to him half-hidden crevasses, and twice

he acknowledged our courtesy by disappearing into them. Finally on the rocks we unroped and let him be. For seven hours he crouched under a little rock, not daring to move up or down, or even to take his knapsack off his back.

For the first time on this occasion we climbed above the col and bore off to the left on to the real rock peak. At first it was easy, but progress was distressingly slow, with only one guide and a short rope, for the Driveller far below had most of that commodity encircling his person. Hartley must have enjoyed his day. Unfortunately for him he was by far the lightest member of the party. Accordingly, we argued, he was less likely to break the rickety old ladder than we were. He was the lightest, so he was most conveniently lowered over nasty places when they occurred.

In the good old times if you wanted your chimneys swept you summoned a master sweep. This worthy would come attended by a satellite, in the shape of a boy. The boy was of such size and shape that he fitted tolerably tightly into your chimney. He then clambered up and did the work, while the master sweep remained below to encourage, preside over, and subsequently to profit by his apprentice's exertions. On much the same principle did we climb this part of the mountain. Hartley was the boy, while Burgener and I, however unworthily, enacted the rôle of the master sweep. Gallantly did our friend fulfil his duties. Whether climbing up a ladder slightly out of the perpendicular, leaning against nothing, and with overhanging places above; whether let down by a rope tied round his waist so that he dangled like the sign of the Golden Fleece outside a haberdasher's shop; or hauled up before he was ready, with his raiment in an untidy mass round his neck; in each and all of these exercises he was equally at home; and would be let down or would come up, smiling. Over one place, where Burgener and I exerted ourselves to the utmost to hold the ladder against a slightly overhanging rock-face, with an ugly-looking bunch of great icicles above, we must have spent an hour. On a later occasion by a deviation of about fifteen or twenty feet we climbed to the same spot in a few minutes with perfect safety, without using any ladder.

Once more, on September 11, and for the last time, we sat on the rocks just above the camping place. Never had we been so confident of success. Instructions had been given to our friends below to look out for our appearance on the summit between 12 and 2 P.M., the next day. Hartley had brought a weakly little stick which, it was arranged, was to

crown our labours, and decorate the summit, on the morrow. But the old source of disquietude harassed us. Our eyes turned anxiously to the west. There, a single huge belt of cloud hung heavily right across the sky—livid in colour above, but tinged of a crimson red below. Hartley was despondent at the prospect it suggested. But perhaps its very watery look hinted to my mind that it might be a Band of Hope. From below the smell of savoury soup was wafted gently up,

‘Stealing and giving odour.’

We took courage, then descended and took sustenance.

At 4 A.M. on September 12 we left. Kaspar Maurer, younger brother of Andreas before mentioned, now accompanied us, for our old enemy the Driveller had been sent away with a flea in his ear—an almost unnecessary adjunct, as anyone who had slept in the same tent with him could testify. Notwithstanding that Maurer was ill, we mounted rapidly, for the way was tolerably familiar, and we all meant business. Our position now was this. By our exploration of September 8 we knew that from the col it was possible to ascend to a considerable height on the main mass. Again, from telescopic observations and the slope of the rocks we were certain that the final arête was easy. Immediately above the col the only choice was to cross over rather on to the south-east face while ascending. A projecting buttress of rock, some two or three hundred feet in height, cuts off the view on to the face from the col. We hoped by turning straight up behind this to hit off the arête just above the point where it merges into the precipitous N.E. wall. The rocks behind this buttress are visible only from near the head of the Charpoua Glacier, but we had never properly examined them.

We followed the couloir running up from the head of the glacier, keeping well to the left to a little below the col. At this point it became necessary to cross the couloir, and for that purpose we employed the long ladder, which we had placed in position the day before. Right glad were we to see the rickety old structure, albeit it creaked and groaned dismally under our weight, and ran its splinters into our persons at all points of contact. Yet there was a certain companionship about this same weather-beaten ladder, and I felt as if it was almost a hardship that it could not share more in our promising success. Next we fastened a double rope, about 20 ft. in length, and swung ourselves down a rough cleft as if we were barrels of split peas going into a ship's hold. Up again, and the excitement waxed stronger as we neared the doubtful part. Then

Alexander lay flat on his stomach, and wriggled round a projecting rock, disappearing suddenly from view. We followed, progressing like the skates down the panes of glass in an aquarium tank, and found ourselves huddled together on a little ledge. An overhanging rock above compelled us to assume the anomalous attitudes enforced on the occupant of a little-ease dungeon. What next? An eager look up, and part of the doubt was solved. There was a way—but such a way. A narrow flat couloir, its angle plastered with ice from top to bottom, invited, or forbade, further progress. Above, a pendulous mass of great icicles, black and long like a bunch of elephants' trunks, crowned the gully. We tucked ourselves away on one side, and the guides performed the best feat of rock climbing I can imagine possible. Unroped they worked up, hacking out the ice, their backs and elbows against one sloping wall and their feet against the other. The masses of ice dashing down, harder and harder as they ascended, showed how they were working. Suddenly a slip above—a shout—a crash of falling ice. Then a brief pause, broken after a few minutes by a triumphant yell from above, and the end of a rope dangled down close to us. Using this latter aid considerably, we mounted and found the top of the couloir blocked up by a great overhanging boulder, dripping still where the icicles had just been broken off. 'Come on,' said voices from above. 'Up you go,' said a voice from below. I leaned as far back as I could, and felt for a hand-hold. There was none. Then right, then left—still none. So I smiled feebly, and said, 'Wait a minute.' Thereupon, of course, they pulled with a will, and struggling and kicking like a spider irritated with tobacco smoke, I topped the rock gracefully. How the first man did it, is, and always will be, a mystery to me. Then we learned that a great mass of ice had broken away under Maurer's feet while in the couloir, and that he must have fallen had not Alexander pinned him to the rock with one hand. From the number of times that this escape was described to me during the next day or two I am inclined to think it was a near thing. 'The worst is over,' said Alexander. I was glad to hear it, but, looking upwards, had my doubts. The higher we went the bigger the rocks seemed to be. Still there was a way, and it was not so unlike what I had often pictured.

Another tough scramble, and we stood on a comparatively extensive ledge. Already we had climbed more than half of the only part of the mountain as to the nature of which we were uncertain. A few steps on, and Burgener grasped me suddenly by the arm. 'Do you see the great red rock up yonder?'

he whispered, hoarse with excitement; 'in ten minutes we shall be there, and on the arête—and then——' I felt that nothing could stop us now; but a feverish anxiety to see what was beyond, to look on to the last slope, which we knew must be easy, impelled us on, and we worked harder than ever to overcome the last few obstacles. The ten minutes expanded into something like thirty before we really reached the rock. Of a sudden the mountain seemed to change its form. For hours we had been climbing the hard dry rocks. Now these appeared to vanish, and—blessed sight—snow lay thick, half hiding, half revealing the last slope of the arête. A glance showed that we had not misjudged. Even the cautious Maurer admitted that as far as we could see all was well; but he added, 'Up above there, possibly——' And now, with the prize almost within our grasp, a strange desire to halt and hang back came on. Alexander tapped the rock with his axe, and let out his pent-up excitement in a comprehensive anathema of Chamonix guides. Already we could anticipate the half-sad feeling with which we should touch the top itself. The feeling soon gave way. 'Forwards' we cried, and the axe crashed through the layers of snow into hard blue ice beneath. A dozen steps, and then a bit of rock scrambling; then more steps along the south side of the ridge—some more rock, and we topped the first eminence. Better and better it looked as we went on. 'See there!' cried Alexander, suddenly; 'the actual top.' There was no mistaking the two huge stones we had so often looked at from below. A few feet below them, and on our left, was one of those strange arches formed by a great transverse boulder, and through the hole we saw blue sky. Nothing could lie beyond, and, still better, nothing could be above. On again, while I could hardly stand still in the great steps the leader hacked out. A short troublesome bit of snow-work followed, where the heaped-up cornice had fallen back from the final rock. Then Hartley courteously allowed me to unrope and pass him, and in a second I clutched at the last broken rocks, and hauled myself up on to the flat sloping summit. There for a moment I stood alone, gazing down on Chamonix. The dream of five years was accomplished. The Dru was climbed.

Our first care was to level the telescope in the direction of Couttet's hotel. There was not much excitement there, but in front of the Imperial we were pleased to think we saw somebody gazing in our direction. Accordingly with much pomp and ceremony the stick (which I may here state was borrowed without leave), was fixed up. Then to my horror Alexander

produced from a concealed pocket a piece of scarlet flannel, like unto a baby's undergarment, and tied it on. I protested in vain. In a moment the objectionable rag was floating proudly in the breeze. Determined that our ascent should not be questioned by any subsequent visitors, we left the following articles: One half-pint bottle containing our names, preserved by a paper stopper from the inclemency of the weather; two wooden wedges (use unknown), two ends of string, three burnt fusees, divers chips, one stone-man, the tenpenny staff and the infant's petticoat.

Of the view I can say but little. I remember that Chamonix looked very nice from this distance. I remember that the Aiguille Verte seemed much less above us, and the lower peak much more below us (at least 80 ft.), than we had expected. Anyhow, I know that the comparative meagreness of the panorama did not affect our spirits, nor detract from the completeness of the expedition. The Dru is essentially a mountain to be climbed for its own sake. After three-quarters of an hour, i.e., at 1.15 P.M., we turned to descend, and very difficult the descent proved. In three places we fixed ropes to assist. Two of these still hang on the rocks, are securely fastened, are new club ropes, and will be found very serviceable in indicating the right route. We followed precisely the same line of rocks as in the morning, and noticed few, if any, places where this route was capable of improvement or even alteration. Not till nearly five o'clock did we reach our abandoned store of provisions, and very short work we made of them. Since ten in the morning we had partaken of nothing but one crushed sandwich. Ignoring the probability of being benighted on the rocks we caroused merrily on tinned meat and seltzer water. The sun was sinking low behind the Brevent range, and the rocks were all darkened in the grey shadows ere we packed up and resumed our journey. Very little time was lost in descending. But before we had reached the breakfast place at 7 P.M. darkness had overtaken us. When within a few feet of the glacier the mist, which had been long threatening, swept up from below and cut off all view. The crevasses just by the top of the glacier were so complicated, and the snow bridges so fragile, that we decided not to go on. So we sat down under an overhanging rock, and made believe that we enjoyed the fun. Hartley somewhat transparently imitated the action of a man going to sleep. The guides, as was their wont when inactive, wrangled over the dimensions of the different chamois they had shot, each of course outvying the other. Meanwhile I considered what I

would have for breakfast next day, and finally stirred up Hartley. For two hours or so we discussed with some warmth the relative merits of kidneys and 'ferras' as articles of diet. Meanwhile the temperature sank, and slowly and gradually we became exceedingly chilly and uncomfortable. The end came sooner than we expected. By the time that Alexander had, in imagination, shot a chamois about the size of an elephant, and I had nearly carried my point about the kidneys, and was passing on to the subject of fried eggs, the mist lifted and disclosed the glacier feebly lit up by the rising moon. Instantly we sprang to our feet, and fondly imagined that an hour or so would see us back at the camp. Not so, however. The snow was all hard frozen, and in the dim light it was found necessary to cut steps nearly the whole way down the glacier. From 9 P.M. till 2.30 A.M. on the morning of the 13th, were we thus occupied. Charmingly comfortable was the tent that night. From the circumstance that the invariable struggle for the best pillow was unusually brief, and that Hartley did not dispute my final proposition that kidneys, if not cooked à la brochette, were to all intents and purposes wasted, I am inclined to think that we were not long in dropping off to sleep. By nine o'clock, however, we were at the Montanvert, where my old friend the landlord received us with more than his usual affability. Champagne was produced, for our success had already been reported, and notwithstanding that the summit is invisible from the inn, mine host was pleased to give us credit for telling the truth. Not so, however, the other Chamonix guides, many of whom maintained that we had merely reached a point on the south-east face of the lower peak. In spite of, or perhaps in consequence of, these early libations, we skipped down with more than our wonted nimbleness, and by 10 o'clock we were at Chamonix. There, I am pleased to record, the first man to congratulate us was M. Loppé, without whose kindly sympathy and constant encouragement I doubt if we should have ever persevered to our successful end.

Those who follow us, and I think there will be many, will perhaps be glad of a few hints about this peak. Taken altogether, it affords the most continuously interesting rock climb with which I am acquainted. There is no wearisome tramp over moraine, no great extent of snow fields to traverse. Sleeping out where we did, it would be possible to ascend and return to Chamonix in about 16 to 18 hrs. But the mountain is never safe when much snow lies on the rocks, and at such times stones fall freely down the couloir leading up from the head of the glacier. The best time for the expedition would

be, in ordinary seasons, in the month of August. The rocks are sound, and are peculiarly unlike those on other mountains. From the moment the glacier is left, hard climbing begins, and the hands as well as the feet are constantly employed. The difficulties are therefore enormously increased if the rocks be glazed or cold, and in bad weather I should think the crags of the Dru would be as pretty a place for an accident as can well be imagined.

The lower peak I am certain can be climbed, but not by the tempting couloir which runs up between the two points. This may be followed for some distance, but then it will, I believe, be found best to bear off to the left. I know this way has been repeatedly tried, but then so had our line of ascent. Every bit of the mountain must be explored before any final conclusion as to its inaccessibility from this side is come to. It would be feasible to lower oneself down by a long rope from the higher on to the lower peak, and very probably the way down from this latter might prove easier than the way up. Let anyone in search of excitement insure his life and try. I am not sure that I should care to do so. If there be much snow on these lower rocks, as there was during the greater part of this last season, their ascent will be unjustifiably dangerous.

One remark in a former paper on this mountain should be here corrected. There, I stated (and it was my belief till last year), that we, in our second attempt, were very near the summit of the lower peak. I must plead guilty to an egregious mistake. We were probably not very much above the level of the col.

Ideas as to what is fair in mountain climbing are somewhat peculiar. I have been asked repeatedly whether we used 'artificial aid' in the Dru. Now by artificial aid seems to be meant driving in pegs into rocks where there is no hand or foot hold. Such a proceeding is considered highly improper. To cut a step in ice is right, but to do anything of the sort on rock is in the highest degree immoral. Again, a ladder to bridge a crevasse may be used without animadversion, but its employment over a rock cleft is tabooed. In fact, anything but hobnails, rope, axes, and a ladder for a bergschrund is 'artificial aid.' Rockets and target practice in general at rock peaks is usually only mentioned to be condemned, while grapnels, chains, and crampons are the inventions of the fiend. Why this should be so is hard to see. Perhaps we must not consider too curiously. For my own part if it could be proved that by no possible means could a given bad passage be tra-

versed without some such aid, nor turned by another route, I should not hesitate to adopt one of these expedients. At the same time I believe that no such place exists. Emphatically I say that this is the case on the Aiguille du Dru. We used our ladders repeatedly and frequently, but only to shorten our way up, while exploring the mountain. When we actually climbed it we used one ladder in one place, and this particular place could have easily been turned by descending some little way and remounting by another route. We saved perhaps an hour by the use of the ladder; an hour late in the season is invaluable. Those who follow will find for themselves the truth of what I state; and if they can climb the peak without 'artificial aid,' they will at least give us the credit for being able to do likewise. We have only shown one way up. There may be a dozen others, though I doubt it. In descending we noticed only a few places where the route would be easier. Still in a first ascent late in the season there is little time for deliberation. Promptness is essential, and the line chosen has often to be followed when the climbers are conscious that it is far from the easiest.

My task is nearly done. Space, and consideration for my readers, alike forbid any account of the festivities that took place at Couttet's in the evening. I believe there were fireworks; I rather think some cannon were let off. I am under the impression that a good many bottles were uncorked. Perhaps this last may be connected with a hazy recollection of all that actually took place. Yet visions as of dancing forms in the salon rise up, with the villagers and guides crowding at the windows to witness the graceful exercise of valse in thick boots; and there, in the midst of the throng, I seem to see Maurer, resplendent in a shirt the front of which was like unto a petrified bath towel, a coat many sizes too large, his face beaming with smiles, and shining from the effects of drinks offered hospitably on all sides; close by, Alexander, displaying similar physiognomical phenomena, his natural free movements hampered by the excessive tightness of some garments with which an admirer of smaller girth had presented him, yet withal exceedingly well pleased with himself. Let us leave them there. They did their work well, and may be pardoned for a little swagger.

The days grow shorter apace; the sun has barely time to make the ice-fields glisten ere the cold shadows creep over again. Snow lies thick on ledge and cranny, and only the steepest mountain faces show dark through the powdery veil. Bleak night winds whistle around the crags, and whirl and chevy the

wreathing snow-clouds, making weird music in these desolate fastnesses. The clear satiating air, the delicate purity of the Alpine tints, have given way to fog, mist, slush, and smoke-laden atmosphere. Would you recall these mountain pictures? Draw close the curtains, stir the coals into an indignant crackling blaze, and fashion in the rising smoke the mountain vista. How these scenes crowd back into the mind, with a revivability proportionate to the impression originally made! What keener charm than to pass in review the memories of these simple, wholesome pleasures; to see again, as clear as in the reality, every ledge, every hand and foot hold; to feel the fingers tingle and the muscles instinctively contract at the recollection of some tough scramble on rock or glacier?

I have endeavoured to give the impressions made by our expedition. I only wish that anyone could derive a hundredth part of the pleasure in reading that I have had in writing them.

AN ASCENT OF THE TÄSCHHORN FROM THE FÉE GLACIER.

By the REV. F. T. WETHERED. Read before the Alpine Club on March 4, 1879.

THE Saas Grat, which within the memory of Professor Forbes was scarcely known to mountaineers, remains even now insufficiently explored, and yet there is no district which includes a greater number of first-rate glacier expeditions than that extending from Monte Rosa to the Balferin.

It is not the object of a paper like this to usurp the function of a local guide-book; but, as I am anxious to draw special notice to the varied attractions of this glorious range, as well as to the neighbourhood of Saas in general, I trust that I may be pardoned if I dwell very briefly—before starting on my climb—upon the general configuration of its peaks and passes, and if I touch upon some other interesting particulars connected with the Saas Thal. Take, in the first place, its passes (the heights are reduced from the mètres of the Federal map into English feet). The Dom Joch, estimated at 14,062 ft., is the highest purely *Swiss* pass; and is only inferior in height to the Sesia Joch, the Lys Joch, and the Col de la Brenva, in the whole Alps.

The Nadel Joch, set down by the same authority at 13,672 feet, would, as Mr. Foster says, be a 'grand pass if it were not dwarfed by its rival.' The Mischabel Joch (from whose summit I enjoyed one of the most splendid double views I ever