

Photo by Dr. Tempest Anderson.] [*Swan Electric Engraving Co.*

A BERGSCHRUND ON THE GEANT GLACIER.

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The Ascent of La Noire.

By THE EDITOR.

(Read before the Alpine Club, May 6, 1902.)

OUR late President, in his address last December, suggested that it was time that a new account was written of the passage of the Col du Géant, and when we remember that there is reported to be nothing new under the sun, it seems as profitable a subject as another. Yet I do not propose to undertake it to-night further than to point out that my friend Tempest Anderson and I did see on the Col du Géant route various new things. To begin with, there was a charming lady, agile as Calverley's young opossum, whose demi-male attire failed to disfeature her shapely limbs. Again, there was an old guide, who, having nothing to learn, and therefore needing not to use his wits, walked straight into the little pool (it was more than up to his waist) at the usual breakfast place. There was, too, a porter, who, having crossed the pass alone the previous year, fallen into a crevasse, and been rescued with difficulty and at the expense of much personal suffering, was quite naturally repeating his enterprise. I am sure that you will not dismiss these details with the vigorous condemnation of Abel Pession, who, when a guide, having conducted a youthful party from Courmayeur to the Col du Géant, shouted 'Hurrah!' to show that he was making history, exclaimed, '*Quel tapage pour une chose comme ça!*'

The passing of a whole day in the Rifugio Torino with a '*tourmente*' raging sounds like a severe punishment; but it could not with truth be so described. To be able to see from a safe place what a *tourmente* means was worth a mild incarceration. Six inches of snow fell, and the icicles that hung from the roof were convincing witnesses to the lowness of the temperature. But how perilous were these thickly whirling flakes, this drifting whiteness, as soft, as spotless, as beautiful as the foam-born goddess, and even more treacherous! When I was a little boy I was once taken to see a travelling menagerie. I remember nothing of it except the Polar bear. This poor beast tramped backwards and forwards unceasingly in his few feet of cage, and so forcibly, though mutely, appealed for freedom that, unable to endure the sight of him, I fled. Little did I think that I should ever play the prisoned bear's part at 11,000 ft., but now I did so. Ever and again I gave an eye to the fire, and

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received the landlord's compliments for the way in which I economised the pine-wood.

Towards evening the *tourmente* ceased, and avalanches—not very large, it is true—began to fall on the Mont Maudit side of the Rifugio. I watched them with attention. I had before, as all of us have, seen object-lessons in avalanches—the fall of a terrific ice-flake from the Strahlhorn, a sundered cliff from the Lyskamm, a tempest of splintered blocks from the Tête de Valnontey—but here you could see the avalanches begin with an uncanny swishing noise, gather force as rocks and stones were churned together, rage furiously, and disappear with an angry roar into a curving gully far below, which, ever ready, with open jaws, waited like a wild beast in his lair for all that might come. Then with a dull echo it, Polyphemus-like, growled for more.

'I stood in the fight of mountain winds upon Bwlch-cwm-y-llan,'

sang one of the famous Triad of Pen-y-Gwryd, but the battle he saw, notwithstanding the horrific name of his battle-field, would hardly compare with what I saw at the Rifugio. Finally, the north wind prevailed. The sights ere night fell were memorable.

I must leave to your imagination the splendour of the views. To me, of course, the Grivola and Grand Paradis, those 'co-supremes' of the Graians, as they rose like sunlit islands from a magic ocean, specially appealed. Our President has said of the Pennine Alps, as seen from the Gemmi:* 'The view, I suppose, is wonderful, but it did not move me, and I asked myself why. The answer seems to be that I was too familiar with every detail in them. There was scarcely a peak in sight, great or small, that I had not climbed; not a valley that I had not penetrated. Every object was swathed in reminiscences. There may be a charm in this kind of retrospect, but it is not the charm of beauty.' Now, I have been brought up to be obedient. I am a believer in obedience not only *a priori*, but on altruistically fundamental principles, but on this one point I cannot follow our President. I think it *is* the charm of beauty which attracts me. 'Ay, there is the heavenly assenting smile that first gave soul and spirit to my hopes.' Like one whose beauty never can be wholly known, each of those Graian peaks claims me a grateful subject with bonds dearer than freedom.

One day, accompanied by Silvain and Abel Pession (François was, to our great regret, ill, and unable to leave

* 'The Alps from End to End.' 1st ed., p. 156.

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Photo by Dr. Tempest Anderson.

MONT BLANC FROM THE GRAND MULETS.

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Val Tournanche), we devoted to the south-western corner of the Glacier du Géant. This part of the glacier seems to be very seldom visited, but the scenery can hardly be surpassed. Anderson secured many excellent photographs. Mont Blanc, with the splendid ridge which bounds the Brenva glacier on the north, was perhaps the finest picture. There rises a great rock out of the icy barrier like the portal of some faery-land, where wonder, awe, and beauty dwell together. Here the giant icicles depend in myriads over the sheer cliff, as though they formed a traitor's gate for such as by ignorance or fool-hardiness betray the good name of mountaineering to acrid criticism. The couloir between Mont Maudit and Mont Blanc du Tacul looked perilous in the extreme, though the glacier swept up to it, level, spotless, enticing. We did not wonder that it had cost Messrs. Stafford Anderson and Bowlby much time and toil in their plucky ascent of Mont Blanc from the Col du Géant in 1888.* Nor ought I to forget the Tour Ronde, which towered above us like the Cathedral of Durham or Lincoln, a masterpiece of architecture, not so supreme in size as perfect in form.

Another day we spent in a lazy journey to the Vallée Blanche, the Col du Midi, and the Midi hut. A Devil's Bridge in snow and ice first claimed our gaze. No pains had been spared upon it; it is possible the icy character of the work may have given it the nature of a relaxation to the fiends who constructed it. Neither the demons who spanned the Ystwyth, nor those who threw that famous arch across the Reuss, could have surpassed this icy structure. Then, while Anderson photographed, Sylvain and I regarded the massive Mont Blanc du Tacul. We discussed a route to its southern ridge. Mark

> 'how the sun delights
> To glance and shift about her slippery sides,'

and you may be allured, but those piles of avalanche débris and those polished gullies warn you that you might have at any moment to 'fly with the utmost felicity to prevent mischief.' Success may be possible, but it will not be easily won. On few glaciers do you get a better idea of the ice-world than on the Géant.

> 'The ice was here, the ice was there,
> The ice was all around;
> It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
> Like noises in a swound.'

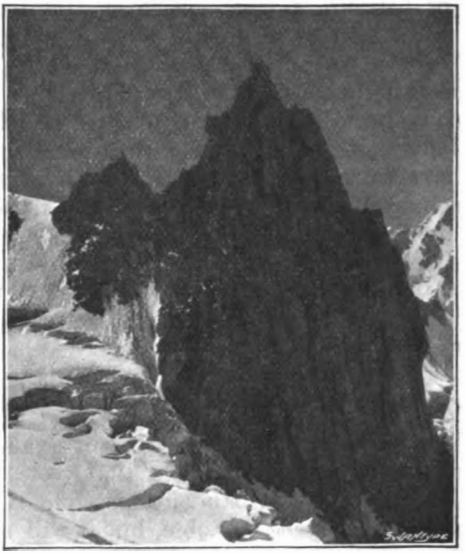
* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xiv. p. 151.

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Delete the roaring and howling, and you have the picture as we saw it.

Our day was perfect, so, too, was the view from the rocks above the Midi hut. Smiling fields and sleeping hamlets, alder copses by torrent sides, mighty forests—all the delightful sights; but what—what is that slowly crawling serpent? Have the days of the mediæval drakontologists returned with a vengeance? May I expect to see on returning to Chamonix that terrible beast, the glory of the third volume of this Journal?—that volume we so seldom allow to be taken down from its shelf, lest we be bereaved of it. Is the huge reptile a dragon of the prime? No! It is Romance bringing up the nine-fifteen. For those who wish to see the train, the Midi hut provides good quarters. For climbers? No!

On August 14, with Sylvain and Abel, I had an enjoyable little scramble up La Vierge—the conspicuous rock in the



La Vierge.

midst of the Géant icefield, about which the 'Climber's Guide' says, 'No information.' We found three stones on the topmost crag in such a position as to indicate that someone had previously visited the mountain, though no ascent seems to have been recorded. I have since heard from Mrs.

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Le Blond that she probably climbed it in 1883. The Vierge, on that occasion, was chosen, as the weather was threatening. Curiously enough this was the reason we devoted ourselves to it; in fact the weather grew rapidly worse, and we encountered a hailstorm before reaching the Col du Géant on our way back.

It is quite true that ascents of La Vierge or the Aiguille Vierge are frequently recorded in the visitors' book at the Rifugio—but the point meant is that marked 3,435 mètres, and bearing the name Petit Flambeau on Kurz's map. On that Flambeau you may see the child, the nymph of willowy form and keen ambition, the bearded *intrépide* seeking the bubble reputation even in the crevasse's mouth, and him of middle age—in every sense of the word *teres atque rotundus*, with plenty of pluck too; sometimes you may even notice the rounded entrance to the schrund which has served as an oubliette to his portly form. Well did such umbrageous vault recall to me the escapades of which I was once guilty with my good old friend Anton Ritz on a certain gleeful passage of the Col d'Hérens in 1876.

We followed the ridge from point 3,435, a good deal of stepcutting being necessary. The last bit of rock-climbing was most enjoyable. A little below the summit we found a tuft of *Ranunculus glacialis* with twenty-four blooms on it. I have come to look on this little flower as quite a friend, having often met with it at considerable heights. The greater the altitude, the bleaker the exposure, the more exquisite is the blossom. The view gave us a clear appreciation of the size, variety, and splendours of the Géant Glacier.

Once on a time a young gentleman of tender years was taken to the Zoological Gardens. He was interested in birds. His friends pointed out to him a stork. The creature was standing, as is his frequent habit, on one leg. 'That's a stork, my boy.' 'Yes, yes. I see it's a stalk; but what's that bird on the top of it?' Now you are, I fear, beginning to mutter, 'Yes, this may be a climbing paper, but what's the climb?' Well, the climb is La Noire.

'She is not fair to outward view,
As many maidens be,
Her loveliness I never knew
Until she smiled on me.'

Yet how she failed to attract admirers before I know not, except that the Requin, the Charmoz, and the Grépon on the other side of that icy stair through the Géant icefall caught

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all eyes. For La Noire is no dwarf; she is higher than the Aiguille du Moine, and only 36 ft. lower than the Aiguille du Tacul.

On August 18, 1901, the guides and I left the Col du Géant at 5.20. Steadily we tramped across the snowfield. Presently a smothered cry from Abel arrested us. 'What is the matter?' we exclaimed. But Abel was too indignant for words. Was it blood at his feet? Had some spirit of the mountains sped an unseen shaft through his side, or had some John Amendall tried a shot from amongst the séracs? What could it mean? He turned round; we saw his back. Something had incarnadined it, making the grey one red. On his calves, too, there was the mark of blood—or was it wine? Harrow! alas, it was. A bottle had leaked full freely—I mean a full bottle had freely leaked. We looked back at our traces. There was the trail of red, like the trail of a wounded animal. 'Twas almost heart's blood to us. But to mourn for beverages past and gone is out of place, at any rate at this distance of time. Let us therefore proceed. When we had reached the foot of our peak we mounted by the rocks to the (true) right of the big couloir, which is a conspicuous feature in views of La Noire from the West. This couloir is well seen in the illustration, from one of Anderson's photographs. I should not describe the climb as altogether easy. We did once examine the great couloir, some time after leaving the glacier, but decided against trying it. It had an ugly 'heave-half-a-brick-at-'em' look. The one drawback to the climb was the number of loose stones and the rotten character of the rocks in places. Details of our work you will hardly expect; even when the climbing is really difficult I find it hard to furnish 'the accurate littlenesses' of our great pastime, and here, if furnished, they would be but commonplace.

We reached the foot of the S. pinnacle at 7.20. Close under it I found several little tufts of *Androsace*. It might be the highest of the five that constituted the top of La Noire. It must be climbed; so up scrambled Sylvain, and I hastily followed. No, it was not the top; the most distant of the other four was obviously the culminating point. So we climbed over the three intervening points, and then Sylvain, by dint of gymnastics, reached the desired spot. I again followed. Finally I sat astride a sharp edge of rock. 'You must jump,' said Sylvain. 'All right,' I replied. But how? There was but one way. I slid down on the side next Sylvain; there was no foothold, so, holding on with both hands, I jumped as well as I could, and reached Sylvain.

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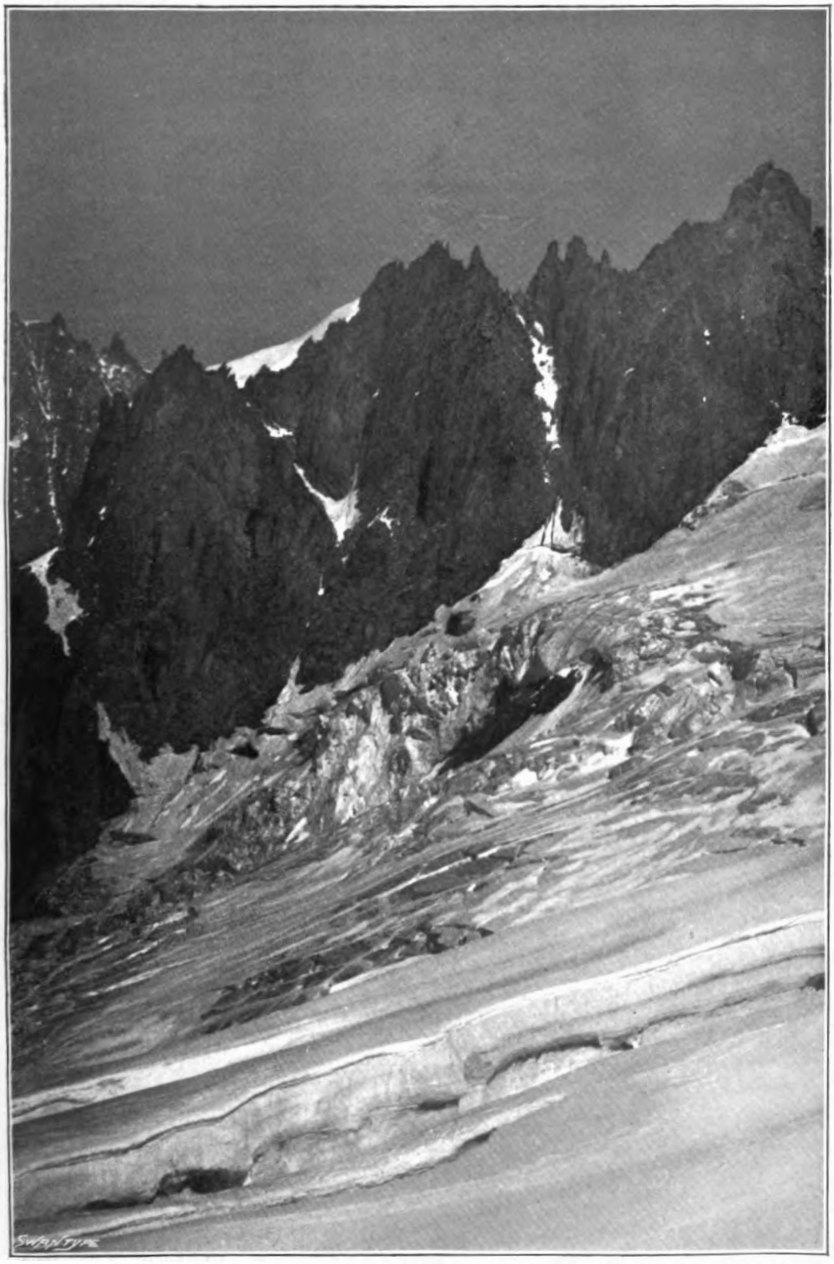


Photo by Dr. Tempest Anderson.] [*Swan Electric Engraving Co.*

LA NOIRE FROM THE WEST.

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By this time it was 8 o'clock. The only previous visitor had been the lightning, many traces of which the guides pointed out to me.

Our perch was narrow, but it offended us with no agglomerations of battered sardine boxes, no accumulations of riven meat tins, no derogations of broken glass and grease-defiled paper; in fact, would any fain there deposit such horrors he will find no room to do so.

The view, as might be expected, was superb. But who shall dare describe it when close at hand is the icefall of the Géant, which Professor Tyndall has immortalised, the Verte, for which Mr. Whymper, and the Dru, for which Mr. Clinton Dent, have done the same, while at about the same level as our perch is the Requin, which Mr. Mummery has so admirably limned for us? All these narratives are Alpine classics—

'Studies intense of strong and stern delight.'

To recall them is to bring before you most of what we saw. We built a little cairn below the southern pinnacle. My chief recollections of the descent are the struggle it cost me to lift myself astride the sharp edge from which I had jumped to reach Sylvain, and the finding of what I took to be *Saxifraga bryoides* in flower in many niches. Just before reaching the glacier we plunged at full speed into the big couloir, before spoken of, for a few steps, but the risk, which would have been great if the sun had been shining upon it, was minimised by the fact that the whole of the couloir was still in the shade. We then returned leisurely to the Rifugio.

In the arête between La Noire and the point where a massive snowclad ridge runs down to the Géant glacier are several rock towers without name on the maps. These are of red rock, and would seem to be appropriately called Les Rouges. The highest point, as we satisfied ourselves on the spot, is the little two-headed peak next to the junction of ridges above mentioned, though it is by no means the most conspicuous of these needles. On August 20 we mounted the ridge mentioned above as running down to the Géant glacier, at right angles to the Aiguille du Géant—La Noire arête—and reached the highest point between Les Rouges and the snow-dome immediately under the Aiguille du Géant without any difficulty. On this ridge we found traces of previous visitors in the shape of a sardine tin and a bottle. We came ere long to the foot of a little aiguille, the highest of Les Rouges. The rock facing us overhung and was quite impossible; to the

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right was a ghastly precipice. A brief pause ensued. Then thus Sylvain: 'We will descend a little to our left and see if we can get up to the cleft in the peak, and if we can then we shall be able to let down a rope to you.' So they went, leaving me in the chilly rift at the foot of the overhanging face. By and by I heard noises as the result of busy hands clearing a cliff of its loose stones—clatter, boom, and crash. This was several times repeated. Then came a stentorian shout, 'Are you all right?' 'Yes, have you got to the top?' 'No.' Then there was a period of silence broken now and again by the noise of a falling stone, like a minute gun. I began to envy the freebooter who sang 'Macpherson's time shall not be long beneath the gallows tree,' for I knew what awaited me, I perceived that I must swing for it. Moreover, the said marauder 'played a sprig and danced it round,' but I had no music, and dancing was impossible, though I was getting cold.

Suddenly I looked up and saw a laughing face. 'You've not had an easy task?' 'No, it has been difficult work.' Down came a rope; I tied myself on. Down came a second (we had two long ones with us as usual). 'By this you will pull yourself up.' There is much humour in my Val Tournanche friends. By this I should pull myself up truly, but by the other I should suffer haulage like a bag of corn. 'Are you ready?' I admit I felt 'real mean' as I said 'Yes.' So I pulled and they pulled, my fears lest I should swing round the corner proved causeless, and I topped the thirty feet. Then I scrambled to the summit of the little Red Maiden, of whom I may say as Helena did of Hermia—

'Though she be but little, she is fierce.'

The Géant towered above us majestically, but my admiration was drowned in pity. Those haughty cliffs hung with cords, roughly speaking, from base to summit, were all too like Samson bound for the sport of the Philistines.

I gazed with more pleasure across the wild fantastic spires and minarets of the ridge which runs from the Mont Mallet to the Aiguille du Tacul at the awesome precipices of the Grandes Jorasses. They still unfettered and untrodden darkly frown defiance.

We made a traverse to regain our route lower down, and, after a long halt for lunch, regained the Rifugio before midday. One of the satisfactions of such a little climb as this is that it allows plenty of time for further exercise in the afternoon. Thus Anderson and the guides had a pleasant

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expedition to the ridge of one of the Flambeaux for photography the same afternoon.

We had a delightful sojourn at the Rifugio Torino. Our fellow-guests were most courteous, nor will this be wondered at when I say that they were mostly Italians. We had much pleasant conversation with them, especially with SS. Mazucchi, Mondini, and Canzio, the first of whom had just ascended the Dent du Requin, while the two latter afterwards succeeded in ascending Mont Blanc from the Col du Géant by the Mont Maudit without guides and with one porter only. My old friend Alphonse Payot, with a ducal party for the Aiguille du Géant, was also a welcome visitor.

S. Lorenzo Bareux is an excellent host, 'a mellow master of the meats and drinks.' Has the White Capri come to an end? His sympathetic condolences are soothing—'Why not try Barolo?' It has a warmer look—celestial rosy red. Has the weather been playing Miss Lydia Languish? As we converse at the door and regard the sky and clouds, he takes a step or two forwards, gazes earnestly at the Géant, and then cries joyfully 'The North wind, the North wind! Fine weather is assured for to-morrow.'

Or, do we look down to the Mont Fréty and catch sight of ascending travellers? 'The old gentleman walks well, does he not?' Or 'How nimbly the signorina climbs!' 'But they will want a meal when they reach us.' So off he goes to the kitchen and leaves me to admire for the hundredth time

> 'The beauty and the wonder and the power,
> The shapes of things, their colours, lights, and shades.
> Changes, surprises.'

To gaze in full sunshine on Italy as it were on divinity disrobed, on the rose, amethyst, and gold of dawn, on the pageantry of the flame-winged sunset or the mysterious glamour of the moonlight!

The Rifugio is clean. It is no longer necessary

> 'To couch in litter of your stable planks.'

I have seen the landlord with a duster and a basin of water washing the pencilled names from the walls of the dining-room! No inquisitorial gangs of anthropophagous agilities here pace the coverlets as in the volcanic land which Anderson and I visited later in the season. You may enjoy the unfailing sardine, the ever-ready risotto, the macaroni red with the tomato's blood. Nor will the reckoning be inflamed should you express your satisfaction with the viands, as has been known to happen elsewhere. Our best thanks are due and are

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hereby heartily offered to the Italian Alpine Club for their kindness in providing so excellent a resting-place. As an anonymous poet says—

> 'We return our thanks to the C.A.I.,
> Whose prices are low though their inn is high;
> *Bis dat* you know— but to sell us food
> At such fair prices is just as good.'

Unwillingly we retraced our steps across the Col du Géant on a glorious day, inspected the *grand moulin* and his rainbow splendour, and after several pleasant days at Chamonix were driven by bad weather to the sylvan solitude of Neyracles-Bains and the basalt cliffs of Jaujac, which my companion has so well described and illustrated in this Journal for November last.

IN MEMORIAM.

RICHARD PENDLEBURY.

THE Alpine record of the late Mr. Richard Pendlebury is of such a remarkable nature (although it only extended from 1870 to 1877) that something more than a mere passing reference to the loss that the Club has sustained by his death is due to his memory. Any careful student of the annals of mountain exploration must be struck by the frequency with which his name is connected with important expeditions made between 1870 and 1877 in almost all parts of the Alps. The Tirol, the Dolomites, the mountains of Dauphiné, the Monte Rosa district, the Bernese Oberland, the Graians, and the Mont Blanc group were all laid under contribution, and he made splendid expeditions in each, as volumes vi., vii., and viii. of the 'Alpine Journal' bear record. He contributed three papers to the 'Alpine Journal,' viz. 'The Schreckhorn from the Lauteraarsattel,' * 'The Thurnerkamp, Zillerthaler Ferner,' † and 'Gleanings from Cogne, the Grivola, and Tour de St. Pierre.' ‡ His name, however, will always be best remembered in connection with the famous first ascent of Monte Rosa from Macugnaga in 1872, an expedition recorded in detail by one of his companions (Rev. C. Taylor, 'Monte Rosa from Macugnaga'),§ but in my opinion the finest expedition he ever made was the ascent of the Schreckhorn from the Lauteraarsattel. In the Alpine Club Edition of Ball's 'Western Alps' Mr. Coolidge specially mentions Mr. Richard Pendlebury as one of a 'small band of mountaineers' who

* Vol. vii. p. 34.
† Vol. vii. p. 232.
‡ Vol. ix. p. 72.
§ Vol. vi. p. 232.

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